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ANNIVERSARY  
SPECIAL

NESSIE AT 80 CELEBRATING THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS MONSTER  
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THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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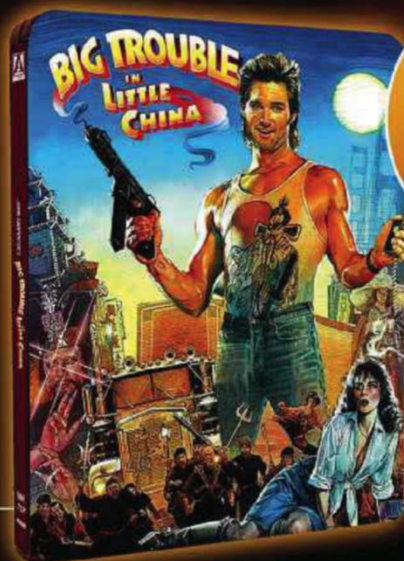
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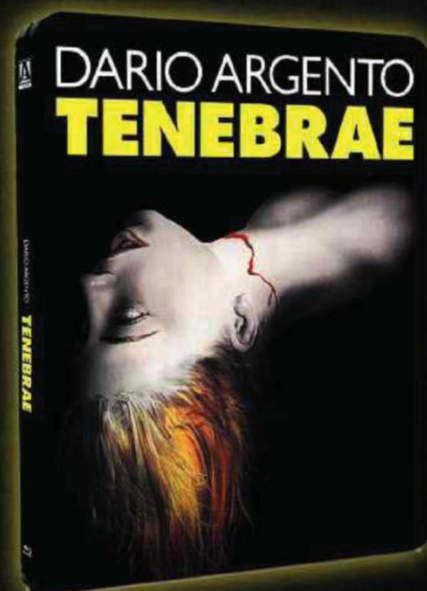
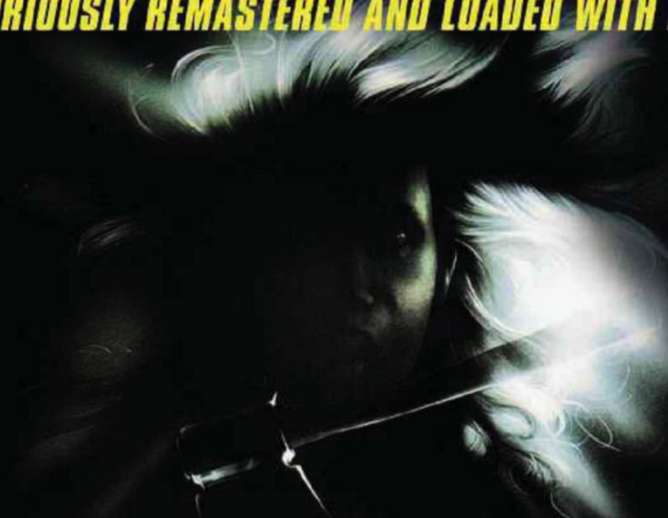
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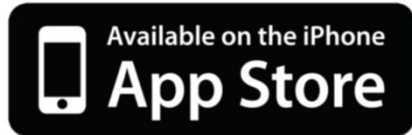
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## strange days

Spy birds busted; world's oldest oldies; Nebraska sprites; demonic baby; snakes on a plane (and other unexpected places); Bigfoot bulletin; Ig Nobel Awards and much more.

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# editorial

## Forty years on...

Well, here we are – 40 years on and 308 issues under our belt; it's an accomplishment that surprises and delights us as much, we hope, as it does you, our dear readers. It's an even stranger thrill to realise that many of you weren't even born when Bob Rickard put out those first photocopied pages, all those years ago...

To help us celebrate, we asked FT alumni past and present to pick their all-time favourite FT stories. It wasn't an easy task (one panellist opined that "this is like *Sophie's Choice*; admittedly, without the Nazis and death...") but we hope their selection brings back fond memories of stories past and sends you scurrying up to the attic to rifle through your collection of back issues. We also present a nostalgic 'Phenomenomix' from Hunt Emerson and the first part of Bob Rickard's new series 'The First Fortean'. It seems an appropriate opportunity to thank all our readers – the present and hopefully future fortians – for four decades of involvement and support, inspiring us to keep going. We wouldn't have made it without you!

DAVID R SUTTON

PAUL SIEVEKING

### BOB RICKARD'S MILESTONES

I'd like to offer a personal selection of milestones. On the production side, we had our first full colour cover with FT29 (Summer 1979), which was also fully typeset and trialled in WH Smiths; first home-DTP production (FT55, Autumn 1990); first John Brown issue (FT58, July 1991), first full colour issue (FT85, Feb/Mar 1996), and going monthly from the next issue onwards.

On the commissioning side, we had early covers by the likes of Hunt Emerson, Gilbert Shelton, Robert Crumb, and Una Woodruff; our first real research study (by Paul Devereux and Andrew York, in FT11); our first long serious interview (with Rupert Sheldrake in FT37); the issues on the 'faked moon landings' debate, pro (FT94) and con (FT97); and too many other features to mention here.

Along the way, we grew a small editorial team including Hunt, Steve Moore, Ion Will, Richard Adams, Mike Dash, Ian Simmons and Paul Sieveking (who co-edited with me starting with FT42, Autumn 1984). Thanks to all the above, and not least, of course, to our loyal readers.

There is another important FT milestone we shouldn't overlook: it's now been over a decade since David Redvers Sutton began editing the magazine (yes, that's what the R stands for). We interviewed him for the post of FT picture researcher back in April 1999, but he was not



THE BIG FORT O

credited as such in FT until FT128 (Nov 1999). David was born in Canterbury, Kent, on 28 Feb 1966. After gaining a BA (Hons) in English and American Literature (1st class) at the University of East Anglia (1984-1987) and an MA in Anglo-American Literary Relations (Distinction) at University College London (1988-1989) he completed a PhD in Film Studies, at BFI/ Birkbeck College (1992-1996) before going on to work for the British Film Institute, writing, teaching and working on projects celebrating the centenary of British cinema in 1996 and the birth of Alfred Hitchcock in 1999. In the field

of cinema history, he published *Still Moving After 100 Years* (BFI, 1996), and *A Chorus of Raspberries: British Film Comedy 1929-1939* (University of Exeter Press, 1999). He has continued to keep his hand in reviewing films for FT, and recently was one of the contributors to *Offbeat: British Cinema's Curiosities, Obscurities and Forgotten Gems* (Headpress, 2012).

David took over as Managing Editor with FT137 (Aug 2000) and as the actual Editor with FT166 (Jan 2003). Since then, he has steered FT through a major move from IFG to Dennis Publishing; and also through a publishing environment that is adapting to declining sales, changing demographics, and new technologies. But David has also shouldered the more difficult task of keeping up the quality – no mean feat when you consider that each issue averages around 52,000 words; added to which, we now publish 13 issues a year. As you can imagine, this gobbles up material at a relentless pace, and yet, thanks to David's diligence there has been no lapse in the quality of FT ... something we can all be very proud of.

This is a great opportunity, then, to express our sincere appreciation to David – and also to our very talented art director Etienne Gilfillan, who has maintained the graphical quality of FT since first working on FT82 (Sept 1995) 18 years ago and created so many memorable covers. Thank you, guys; FT could not have become the much-loved journal it is today without your devotion, genius and hard work.

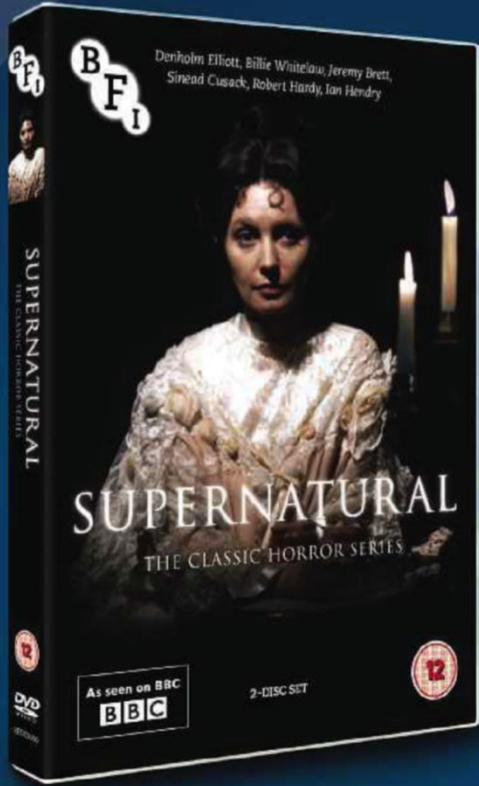
BOB RICKARD

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

**SEE PAGE 75**

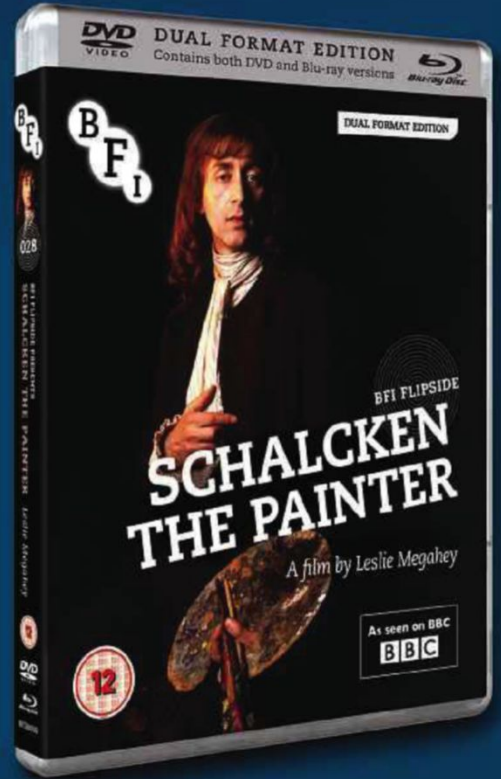
MARTIN ROSS

# CHILLING VIEWING FOR DARK NIGHTS



**18 NOVEMBER**

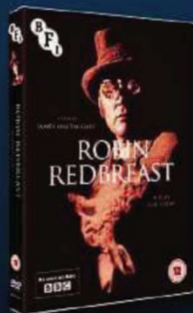
Werewolves, vampires and ghosts haunt the living in this long-awaited release of the much sought-after BBC horror anthology.



**18 NOVEMBER**

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# strangedays

## Avian secret agents

Birds have been arrested across the Middle East on charges of spying

On the weekend of 12/13 October, hunters in Lebanon captured a Bonelli's eagle in the town of Achout, and alerted the authorities after noticing a ring attached to its leg inscribed with the words 'Israel' and 'Tel Aviv University'. The Hezbollah-affiliated Al-Manar TV claimed that the eagle was one of many birds sent by Israel to spy and gather information via GPS transmitters across the Middle East. The report pointed to the "arrest of birds carrying similar devices" in Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt. [AP] *jewishpress.com*, 16 Oct 2013.

• Sometime in May 2012, villagers found the corpse of a migratory European bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*) on land near the city of Gaziantep in southern Turkey. When they saw a metal band with the word 'Israel' on the bird's leg and noticed that it had an enlarged nostril big enough to conceal a microchip or listening device, they alerted the authorities. The Turkish Agriculture Ministry handed the small corpse to Ankara's security services for further investigation. Dissection revealed no Israeli surveillance equipment. When the news spread to Israel, the Israeli Society for the Protection of Nature said the bee-eater had been ringed in about 2008 for research purposes and the serial number was legitimate. Relations between Turkey and Israel had been tense since 2010, when Israeli commandoes killed nine Turks aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, a ship in a Turkish-led convoy trying to break a naval blockade of Gaza. *Times of Israel*, 15 May; *D.Mirror*, *D.Mail*, 18 May 2012.



### The vulture had prompted fears of a "Zionist plot"

• In 2010, an Egyptian governor said it was "not out of the question" that Mossad, Israel's intelligence service, was behind a series of deadly shark attacks off Sharm el-Sheikh, suggesting Israel had put "GPS-controlled sharks" in the Red Sea to hit Egypt's tourist trade. And Iran accused Israel of using pigeons and squirrels to spy on its nuclear facilities. There was also a suggestion by the head of Turkey's Higher Education Board (YOK) that genetically modified tomato seeds bought from Israel could be 'programmed' to

harm Turks, if not destroy the whole Turkish nation. *MX News (Sydney)*, 17 May 2012.

We recall that the main reason family planning failed in south-eastern Turkey in 1990 was propaganda by the Kurdish Workers' Party that inter-uterine coils were spying devices. Just what would be the nature of any information gleaned by this method is not explained [FT57:27]. In this context we should mention a rumour that circulated in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East in the 1990s that women were being driven to sexual frenzy after chewing gum laced with aphrodisiacs by Mossad [FT91:14, 97:15, 103:12].

• On 1 December 2012, an electronically tagged griffon vulture was captured near the town of Kereinek (or Krinkh) in the Darfur region

of western Sudan. Sudanese officials concluded that the bird, codenamed PP0277, was an Israeli secret agent after finding it was fitted with GPS and solar-powered equipment capable of broadcasting images via satellite – according to the Egyptian website El Balad, anyway, which also said a tag inscribed "Israel Nature Service" and "Hebrew University, Jerusalem" was attached to its leg. Ohad Hatzofe (or Hazofe), an avian ecologist in Israel, said the bird, which can fly up to 600km (373 miles) a day, was one of 100 vultures fitted in October with a GPS system to take distance and altitude readings but not surveillance images. "That's the only way we knew something had happened to the bird – all of a sudden it stopped flying and started travelling on the ground," he said.

Saudi Arabia detained one of PP0277's fellow vultures in 2011, prompting fears of an airborne "Zionist plot" against the kingdom. Mr Hatzofe has tagged more than 1,000 migratory birds in the past 20 years, as part of a major international project to track and preserve rare species among the billion-plus birds that fly north, then south, over Israel every year. Like all such creatures, PP0277 wore tags clearly marking it in English as part of the academic research, asking anyone who found it to contact Mr Hatzofe. "It's not very secret," he said, "marking a supposed spy with the words 'Tel Aviv University' and my email address... If I wanted to send a spy to Sudan I'd send one less interested in dead camels and goats. That tends to distract them." What's more, the reconnaissance information is not confidential. The birds are fitted with tiny boxes containing GPS and GSM transmitters with a solar energy panel and three small antennae. The data are uploaded to Movebank, an



## MORE YOGI THAN YETI?

DNA suggests abominable snowman is a mystery bear

PAGE 8



## VERDI FOR VERMIN

Opera-loving mice and other Ig Nobel-winning scientific gems

PAGE 16



## THE SNAKE ESCAPE

Errant boas and pythons gone AWOL equal much mayhem

PAGE 20

accessible international database linked to Google Earth.

The report of the captured vulture followed allegations by Sudan that Israel had bombed a munitions depot near Khartoum in October 2012 after jamming the country's radar defences. Israel made no comment on the raid. The depot was said to be supplying weapons to Hamas in Gaza. Israel is also believed to have launched air strikes on Sudanese targets in 2009 and 2011. *Independent*, 8 Dec; *D.Telegraph*, 11 Dec 2012.

• In July 2013, residents of Altinavya, a village in Elazig province, eastern Turkey, found a kestrel wearing a metal ring stamped with the words "24311 Tel Avivunia Israel", and took it to the local governor's office. Medical personnel at Elazig's Firat University initially identified the kestrel as "Israeli



Spy" in their registration documents – though it is not known whether the label was tongue-in-cheek. X-rays showed no embedded microchips or bugging devices and the bird was allowed to fly off. [R] 26 July; *Independent*, *D.Telegraph*, 27 July; *The Blaze*, 28 July 2013.

• On 30 August, a man took a swan to a police station in the Qena governorate, some 280 miles (450km) southeast of Cairo, fearing it was a spy because it carried an electronic device. Mohammed Kamel, head of security in Qena, said the device was neither an explosive nor any spying equipment, but was probably a wildlife tracker. Well, fancy that! With turmoil gripping Egypt, there is widespread suspicion of anything foreign. Earlier this year, a security guard filed a police report after capturing a pigeon he said carried microfilm. [AP] 31 Aug 2013.

• Not long afterwards, a man fishing in the Nile in Qena spotted a stork with "an electronic device attached to

its feathers". Thinking the bird was an undercover agent, he captured it and took it to a police station. Puzzled officers examined the bird, fearing the gadget was a bomb or spying equipment, and then called in veterinary experts – who determined it was a wildlife tracker fitted by French scientists. Ayman Abdallah, head of veterinary services in Qena, said the device stopped working when the bird crossed the French border, absolving it of being a spy. It was released on 6 September, but the following day was found dead on an island in the Nile, south of Aswan. Nature Conservation Egypt, a wildlife organisation, said on its Facebook page that the bird was "eaten by local villagers"; a claim denied by Mahmoud Hassib, head of Egypt's southern protected areas, although he didn't know the cause of death. *Sky News*, 1 Sept; *Irish Examiner*, *MX News (Sydney)*, 9 Sept 2013.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

# EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

## 3 people a year 'come back from the dead'

*D. Mail*, 3 June 2013.

## Big rig carrying fruit crashes on 210 Freeway, creates jam

*Los Angeles Times*, 20 May 2013.

## Experimental space lizards return to Earth

*Guardian*, 20 May 2013.

## Boat taking city around the world

*Hull Daily Mail*, 17 May 2013.

## Stadium is safe despite collapse, say organisers

(*London*) *Eve. Standard*, 28 May 2013.

## Tomato is back from the dead

*Sunday Mirror*, 19 May 2013.

## Boy's family glued to his bedside

*Queensland Times*, 22 May 2013.

## COUNTY LIMERICK CEMETERY 'A DEATH TRAP'

*Limerick Leader*, – June 2013.

## Canadian body parts accused in court

*BBC News*, 11 Mar 2013.

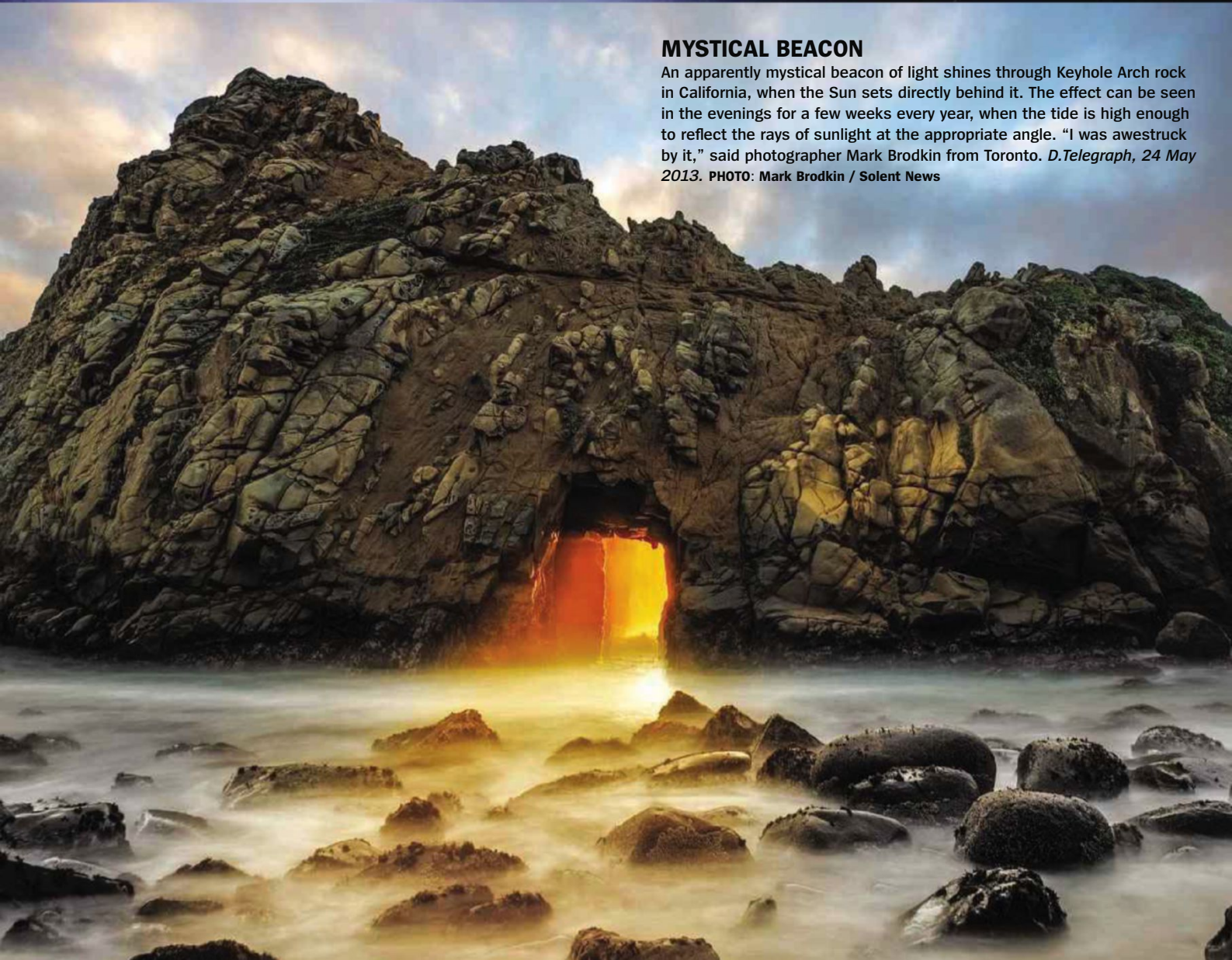
# SEEING THE LIGHT



## NEBRASKA FLASHES

Sprites – strange flashes coming out of the tops of thunderstorms, typically lasting no more than a few milliseconds – were first reported in 1886, but their existence was in doubt until 1989, when one was video-recorded from the ground. In 1993, 19 were photographed over the American Midwest [FT73:12]; both their basic physics and their effect on the surrounding atmosphere remain a mystery.

On 12 August 2013, Jason Ahrens of the University of Alaska Fairbanks and a team of researchers were flying over Nebraska photographing a thunderstorm when these sprites appeared, red on top and purple on the bottom. “I really can’t explain the colour change,” says Ahrens. “Sprites clearly represent some kind of transfer of energy, but is it on a scale that has a significant effect on the weather and climate? We can’t answer that without studying them.” More photographs may be found in Ahrens’s personal blog <http://musubk.blogspot.com/2013/08/sprites-2013-update-5.html>. *spaceweather.com*, 16 Aug 2013.

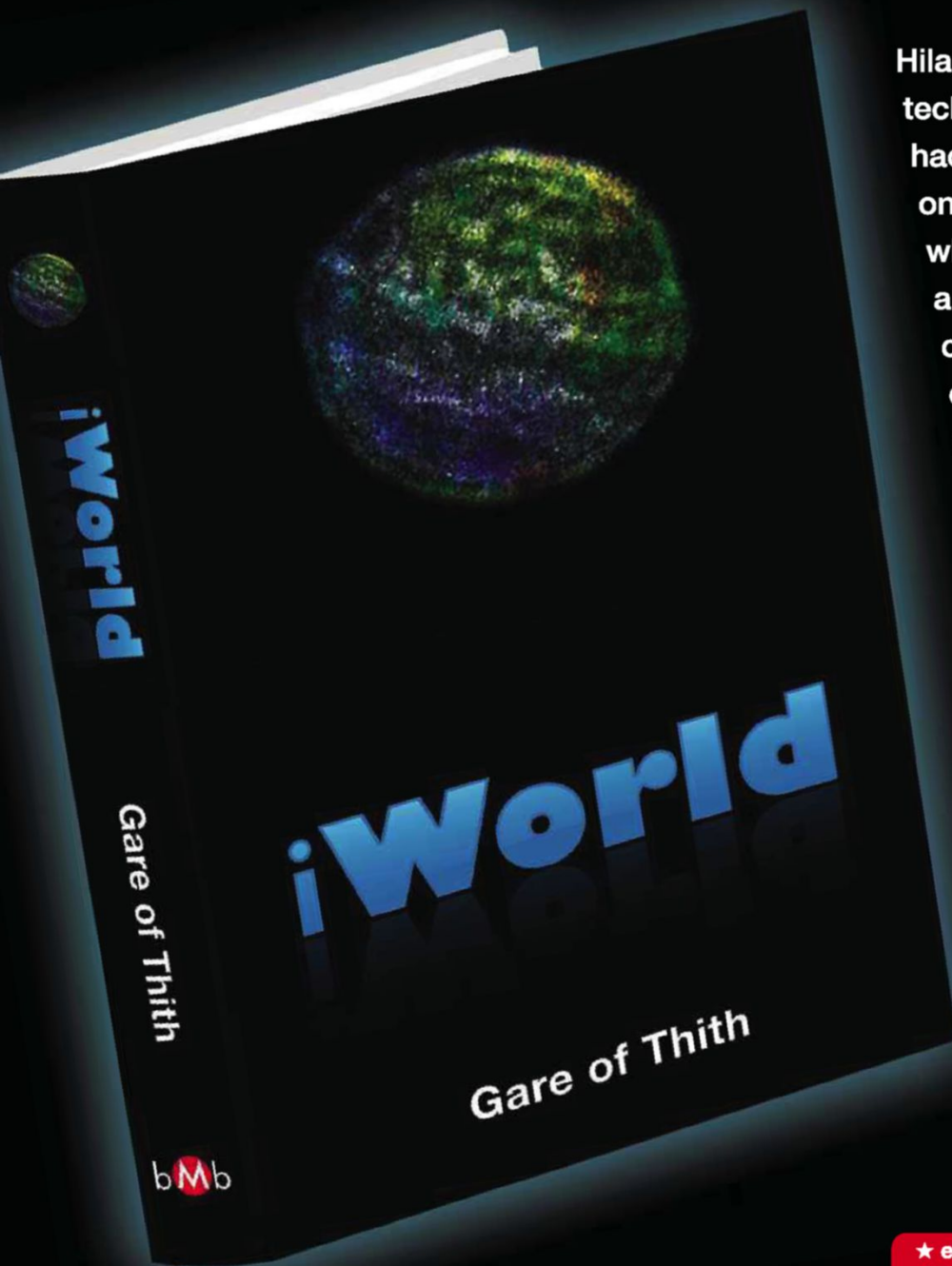


## MYSTICAL BEACON

An apparently mystical beacon of light shines through Keyhole Arch rock in California, when the Sun sets directly behind it. The effect can be seen in the evenings for a few weeks every year, when the tide is high enough to reflect the rays of sunlight at the appropriate angle. “I was awestruck by it,” said photographer Mark Brodtkin from Toronto. *D.Telegraph*, 24 May 2013. PHOTO: Mark Brodtkin / Solent News



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## SIDELINES...

### ST PANCRAS WALRUS

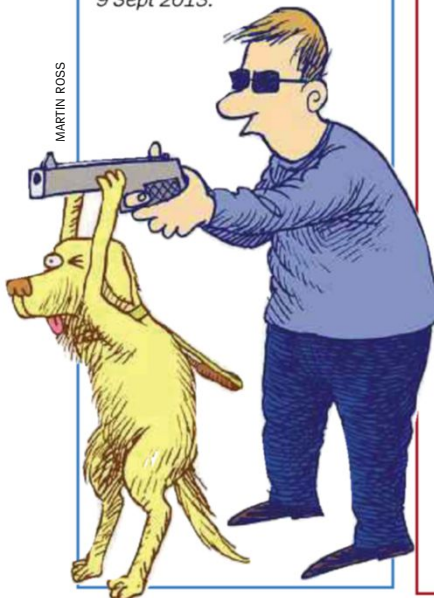
Building work at St Pancras Station, London, in 2003, turning it into the Eurostar terminal, involved the removal and reburial of 1,500 human bodies from the graveyard of St Pancras church on the northern side of the station. The bones of a 13ft (4m) long walrus were discovered in a coffin with eight sets of human remains, thought to have been used for medical research some time after 1822. No record of such a bizarre burial has been found. [R] 23 July 2013.

### BONE COLLECTOR

A 47-year-old Austrian was charged with disturbing the peace of the dead after police in the province of Burgenland found 56 skulls and 55 other bones at a museum he had created in his home. The bones were returned to the church cemetery from which they had been taken. The man came to the attention of the police when he tried to sell three skulls and two femurs at a flea market. See FT283:4. [R] 16 July 2013.

### SPICING UP LIFE

Lawmakers in Iowa plan to issue licences to blind people to carry guns in public; officials say failing to do so would contravene anti-discrimination rules over disabilities. How about blind bus drivers to add to the excitement? *Metro, Sun, 9 Sept 2013.*



## Bigfoot Bulletin

IS THE HIRSUTE MYSTERY A HUMAN HYBRID, AN ANCIENT POLAR BEAR HYBRID OR EVEN AN ANGEL?



ABOVE: Keen hiker John Stoneman photographed this mysterious creature near the road in Kinzua State Park, Pennsylvania.

### HAIRY COUSINS?

Dr Melba T Ketchum, a former veterinarian from Texas and leader of a research group called the Sasquatch Genome Project, has been working for the last five years on a \$500,000 analysis of DNA samples from what she claims is an unknown hominid species. Her study concludes that the Sasquatch exists in North America and is a human relative that arose around 15,000 years ago [see FT298:35]. "They're a type of people, they're a human hybrid, we believe," she said. "All of the DNA evidence points to that. And they can elude us, so if you get [footage] at all, it can be fleeting."

Ketchum claims to have seen the man-beasts herself. She says she implemented strict protocols as DNA was extracted from the collected samples. In total, 111 specimens of purported Sasquatch hair, blood, skin and other tissue types were analysed. We are told that the samples were submitted to 34 different hominid research sites in 14 US states and two Canadian provinces. "We soon discovered that certain hair samples – which we would later identify as purported Sasquatch samples – had unique morphology distinguishing them from typical

human and animal samples," said Ketchum. "Those hair samples that could not be identified as known animal or human were subsequently screened using DNA testing, beginning with sequencing of mitochondrial DNA followed by sequencing nuclear DNA to determine where these individuals fit in the 'tree of life'." As Ketchum's team interpreted their findings, the Sasquatch is a human hybrid with mitochondrial DNA identical to human mitochondrial DNA and nuclear DNA that is of "novel," or non-human, sequence. In other words, Sasquatch's parents were a human female and some unknown third species, a "novel non-human" male. According to Bigfoot enthusiast Robert Lindsay, earlier drafts of Ketchum's study claimed this third species were angels. Yale neurologist Steven Novella wrote at Neurologica Blog: "The bottom line is this – human DNA plus some anomalies or unknowns does not equal an impossible human-ape hybrid. It equals human DNA plus some anomalies."

Ketchum's study has not been peer reviewed and she has refused to release her data, explain her methodology or say where she got the "Sasquatch DNA samples" in the first place. Also, according

to *Houston Chronicle* science writer Eric Berger, Ketchum has credibility issues of her own: her company, DNA Diagnostics, has received more than two dozen customer complaints and gets an F from the Better Business Bureau.

Todd R Disotell, a professor at the Department of Anthropology at New York University, pours scorn on Ketchum's research. "It's just a joke," he said. "It's complete junk science, and then she misinterprets it." Disotell himself has debunked eight supposed Sasquatch bodily samples, but points out: "You can't prove something doesn't exist. You can prove that every sample you're brought isn't what they're claiming. But you can't disprove this. It will go on forever."

At the Sasquatch Genome Project press conference in Dallas, Texas, on 1 October, project manager Dennis Pfohl showed footage of footprints of what he believes belongs to a Sasquatch in the snow in Colorado. Photographs of apparent 7ft (2m) 'manimals' wandering through woodland were also shown. John Stoneman, 57, and his girlfriend spotted two of them in Kinzua State Park, Pennsylvania, and caught one on film. "This was not a bear and you can see fur on it,"

said Mr Stoneman. "It's wider at the shoulders and tapers down, whereas a bear is bigger in the middle and stands with its paws out. This was standing like a man. Some people have said it's just a root ball, but I've been back to the exact spot and there is no root ball there."

The research team also released several short clips, taken by the Erickson Project (led by Adrian Erickson), that purported to show human-like hairy figures in wooded areas of Kentucky, hundreds of miles to the south. Funding for the Sasquatch Genome Project comes from Erickson and entrepreneur Wally Hersom. The Erickson Project has in the past released footage of supposed Sasquatch sightings, notably in a November 2012 trailer for *Sasquatch: The Quest*. For alleged Sasquatch sightings in northern Quebec and Utah in September–October 2012, see FT296:4. *Time*, 29 Nov 2012; *ABC News Blogs*, *Metro*, *D.Mirror*, 3 Oct 2013.

### MORE YOGI THAN YETI?

There have been scores of sightings of a long-haired 'yeti' roaming the Shoriya Mountains in the Kemerovo region of Siberia, and the creature appears to have shed its unusual black and grey coarse coat in clumps in various caves. Prof Bryan Sykes, Professor of Human Genetics at Oxford, analysed three hairs from different locations in the region. One long, thick hair was found to come from a type of black bear from North America – *Ursus americanus*.

These bears can grow up to 7ft (2m), just like the beasts sighted in Siberia. The other two hairs turned out to be from a raccoon and a horse. Experts were baffled as *U. americanus* is never found native outside the US. The hair is not from an Asiatic black bear, which *can* be found in Siberia. Prof Sykes said: "An explanation could be an animal escaped from a circus, zoo or private collection, but it is extraordinary." For more on Russia's hairy hominids, see FT282:9, 298:31-34. *Sun*, 3 Feb 2013.

More recently, Prof Sykes has analysed hairs from two unknown animals, one found in the Western Himalayan region of Ladakh and the other in Bhutan, 800 miles (1,300km) to the east. The Ladakh sample came from mummified remains of a creature shot by a hunter around 40 years ago. He considered the animal so unusual, and so alarming, that he kept some of its remains. The second sample was a single hair, found in a bamboo forest by an expedition of film-makers about 10 years ago. Both hairs were brownish in colour and the remains suggested a creature about 5ft (1.5m) tall – shorter than the towering figure in some reports.

After subjecting the hairs to the most advanced DNA tests available and comparing the results to other animals' genomes stored on the GenBank database, Prof Sykes found that he had a 100 per cent match with a sample from an ancient polar bear jawbone found in Svalbard, Norway, that dates back at least 40,000 years – and

probably around 120,000 years – a time when the polar bear and closely related brown bear were separating as different species. He believes that the most likely explanation is that the animals are hybrids – crosses between polar bears and brown bears; the species are known to interbreed where their territories overlap. "This is an exciting and completely unexpected result," he said. "It could mean there is a subspecies of brown bear in the High Himalayas descended from the bear that was the ancestor of the polar bear. Or it could mean there has been more recent hybridisation between the brown bear and the descendent of the ancient polar bear."

At present, science recognises only three bear species in the Himalayas: sloth bears, brown bears, and the Asiatic black bears. Research by mountaineer Reinhold Messner, who had a terrifying encounter with a mysterious hairy creature in Tibet in 1986, backs Prof Sykes's theory. He uncovered an image in a 300-year-old Tibetan manuscript of a *chemo* (a local name for the yeti) with accompanying text that read (in translation): "The yeti is a variety of bear living in inhospitable mountainous areas."

Prof Sykes's investigations featured in a three-part Channel 4 documentary series, *Bigfoot Files*, which begins on 20 October. His book *The Yeti Enigma: A DNA Detective Story*, will be published next spring. *D.Telegraph*, *Independent*, *D.Mail*, [PA] 17 Oct 2013.

## SIDELINES...

### WILD BEAVER

England's first wild beaver since Tudor times has been spotted and photographed in the River Otter in Devon. The witness was Lorna Douglas, 35, walking her dogs near her home in Budleigh Salterton. The animals have been reintroduced in captivity in recent years at various UK locations, but the River Otter beaver is the only one unaccounted for. *D.Telegraph*, 18 July 2013.

### THE VINYL CURTAIN

UK company 'And Vinyl' puts dead people's ashes into raw vinyl and presses the mix into records. If you can't decide on a song, predetermined tracks are available. See andvinyl.com. *MX News (Sydney)*, 31 July 2013.

### PERILS OF PHILOSOPHY

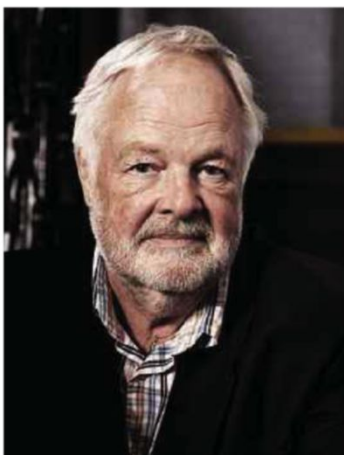
Two men in their 20s were discussing Immanuel Kant, author of *Critique of Pure Reason*, as they queued to buy beer in Rostov-on-Don, southern Russia, on 15 September. The discussion deteriorated into a fistfight and one man shot the other repeatedly with rubber bullets from a small pistol. The victim was hospitalised with non life-threatening injuries. [AP/R] 16 Sept 2013.

### BALLS UP

The village of Lunjevica in Serbia is hosting its 10th unofficial testicle-cooking "world championships". This year, more than 20 competitors will take part in the event to prepare "balls goulash" – a take on the classic central European dish. <i>7 Sept 2013.

### VISA FOR UNICORN

Nine-year-old Emily Harris from Cwmbran, South Wales, managed to pass through Turkish customs with a passport identifying her as a purple unicorn. At Antalya airport, her mother Nicky accidentally handed over the document Emily had made for her stuffed toy when they arrived for a holiday. The faux passport had even been stamped with a visa. *Metro*, 13 June 2013.



ABOVE: Prof Brian Sykes found one hair came from a black bear (centre), two others from a polar/brown bear hybrid (right).



## SIDELINES...

### PHANTOM HANDS

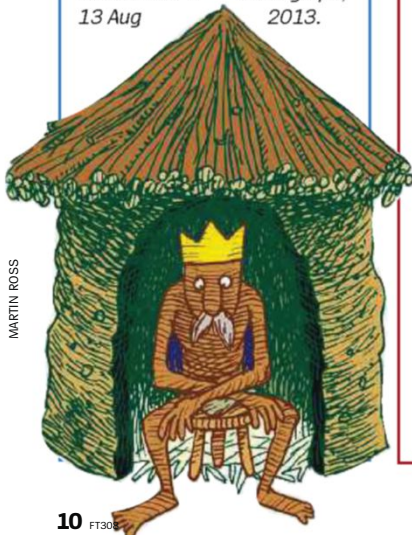
Self-styled Christian healer George Boak, 70, who groped three women patients at his home in Halifax, West Yorkshire, was jailed for two years on 28 June after claiming his victims had merely felt 'phantom hands', a phenomenon he claimed to have heard about in which patents imagine they are being touched. *D.Mail, 11+12+29 June 2013.*

### ODD COUPLE

A two-week-old marmalade kitten was found abandoned in a church and taken to Avonia Vets in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire. Trainee veterinary nurse Clare Evans took the kitten, named Tigger, home where her bulldog Harley, who is unable to have pups, adopted the role of surrogate mother. "She washes him and lets him cuddle up, and now she's producing milk and feeding him," said Ms Evans. *D.Mail, 11 July 2013.*

### FALLEN KING

Raja Brajraj Kshatriya Birbar Chamupati Singh, Mahapatra of Tigrira, the last surviving former ruler of Orissa, once kept a fleet of 25 vintage luxury cars, lived in a place with 30 servants and was known throughout India for his prowess as a big game hunter. Today, aged 92, he lives in a mud hut with a leaking roof and a curtain of cobwebs, deserted by his wife and six children. Villagers bring him rice and lentils. In an interview he said: "I have no regrets whatsoever". *D.Telegraph, 13 Aug 2013.*



## Senior seniors

SKUNK MEAT (BUT NO PASTA), LOTS OF FRUIT AND VEG, EXERCISE AND FAITH HAVE HELPED SUPER-CENTENARIANS

### FEROZ-UD-DIN MIR, 141+

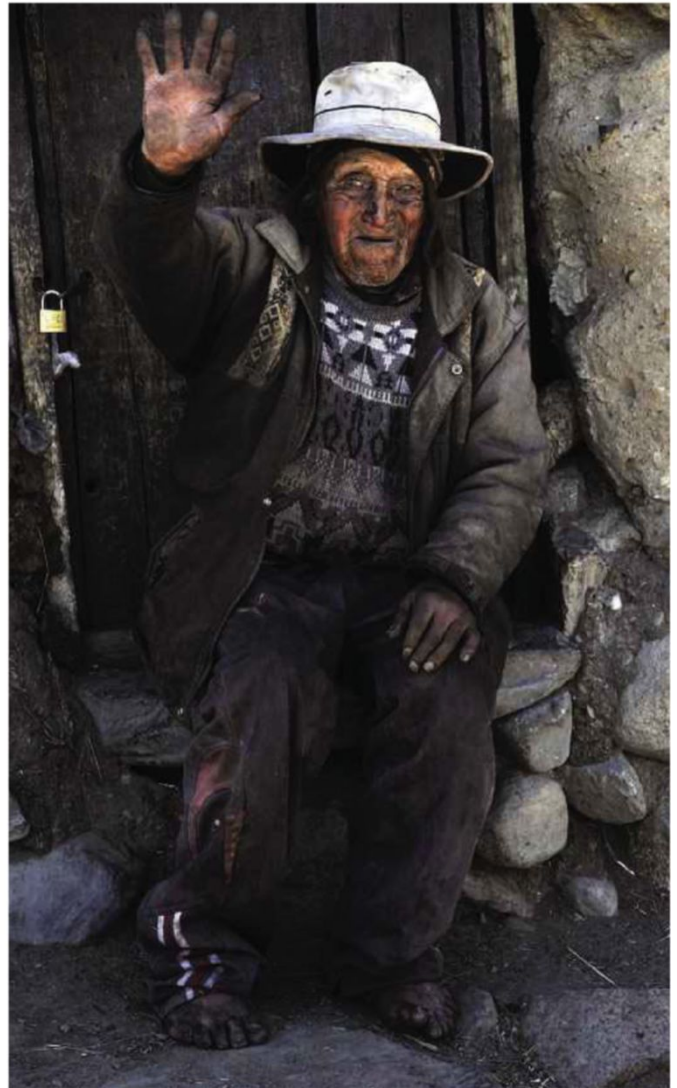
This Indian fruit and nut trader, a father of 10, allegedly has a government-issued birth certificate showing he was born on 10 March 1872, which would make him 141. It seems unlikely that his astonishing longevity will be endorsed by Guinness. He claims to recall the earthquake of 29/30 May 1885, which devastated the Sopore and Pattan regions of north Kashmir. He said he was in Karachi at the time and, returning home, was relieved to discover his family had survived. He has outlived four wives. He can still walk, but rarely ventures from his home in the mountains of north Kashmir's Uri district. *Sunday Mirror, 21 July 2013.*

### ALIMIHAN SEYITI, 127+

In June 2013, the Geriatric Society of China (GSC) named Alimihan Seyiti from Kashgar in the far western Chinese region of Xinjiang as the world's oldest woman. She was allegedly born on 25 June 1886, making her 127, but corroborating documentation is not specified and she awaits global recognition of her longevity. "She's in good health and can still do housework like making dumplings, looking after children and weaving grass mattress," said the website Ts.cn. She prides herself on being able to shop at the local bazaar in the largely Muslim area. She also enjoys telling jokes and singing traditional Uighur love songs. She lives with her adopted daughter. *Irish Times, 16 Aug; Irish Examiner, 29 Aug 2013.*

### CARMELO FLORES LAURA 123+

This indigenous Bolivian herdsman lives in the isolated hamlet of Frasquia near Lake Titicaca. His straw roof hut with a dirt floor is at an altitude of 4,000m (13,120ft). He attributes his longevity to avoiding sugar and pasta, eating a traditional Andean diet of cañahua, riverside mushrooms, and around-the-clock chewing of coca leaves. "Potatoes with cañahua are delicious," said Mr Flores in Aymara, the only



ABOVE: Carmelo Flores Laura attributes his longevity to quinoa and coca leaves.

language the illiterate and nearly deaf man speaks. (Cañahua is a wild species of quinoa, a grain-like crop rich in amino acids.) Mr Flores's wife died about 10 years ago. "I've never been lazy," he said. "I always shared the cooking with my wife. We would eat what we could find growing wild. We ate mostly skunk meat. I still go on long walks every day." He wears shoes made of recycled tires, walks without a cane, has no teeth and doesn't wear glasses. Nowadays, he spends most of his time lying on a blanket watching village life go by.

Mr Flores has no birth

certificate, as Bolivia didn't issue these until 1940; however, his baptism certificate held by Bolivia's Civil Registry Office lists his birthday as 16 July 1890 and he has national identity documents based on this. Guinness has yet to pronounce on the validity of the documents, but many in Bolivia accept he is 123 and are celebrating him as the world's oldest person. He said he fought in the brutal 1932-35 Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay, and briefly lived in La Paz, 50 miles (80km) away, but never took to the bustling capital. He has never been any further

ALZAR RALDES / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



than La Paz, and has never been seriously ill. He has three children, 16 grandchildren and 39 great grandchildren. [R, AP] *D.Telegraph, Metro, Independent, 16 Aug 2013.*

**JOHANNA MAZIBUKO, 119+**  
Ms Mazibuko was born on 11 May 1894, according to her South African identity papers, and has outlived five of her seven children. She shares her house in Klerksdorp, about 100 miles (160km) south-west of Johannesburg, with her 77-year-old son, Tseko Mazibuko. The oldest of 10 siblings, she cooks, dresses herself, and does the laundry. *BBC News 26 July 2013.*

**SANT KAUR BAJWA, 115YRS 199 DAYS**

Sant Kaur Bajwa, from Southall, west London, was born in Sialkot, Punjab, on 1 January 1898, and died on 19 July 2013, making her the oldest woman in the world (if gerontology adjudicators accept her passport as proof of her birth date). She had lived in the UK since 1969. The family put her longevity down to a healthy diet of fresh fruit and vegetables as well as her Sikh faith. Her children died before her, but she is survived by 12 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren and two great-great grandchildren. When her daughter Surjit died in 1972, Mrs Bajwa, then 74, took on the care of Surjit's four children, including six-year-old twins. *BBC News, Guardian, Independent, 24 July 2013.*

**SALUSTIANO SANCHEZ-BLAZQUEZ, 112YRS 97 DAYS**

Guinness named Salustiano 'Shorty' Sanchez-Blazquez as 'officially' the oldest man on the planet on 12 June, following the death of Jiroemon Kimura [FT305:10]. He was born in a Spanish village on 8 June 1901; aged 17 he moved to Cuba, where he worked on sugar plantations, before arriving in the US via Ellis Island in 1920. He was an avid gardener and gin rummy aficionado, and was accomplished on the dulzania, a Spanish double-reed wind instrument. He made extra money by playing at village celebrations and weddings. After working as a coal miner in

Kentucky, he eventually settled in the Niagara Falls area of New York and married Pearl, the love of his life, in 1934. He said he believed he had lived to such an age thanks to a daily dose of a banana and six tablets of Anacin, a branded analgesic that includes aspirin and caffeine. He died in Grand Island, New York, on 13 September, leaving two children, seven grandchildren, 15 great-grandchildren and five great-great-grandchildren. The current 'official' oldest man is Arturo Licata, 111, from Italy. [AFP] 27 July; [CNN] 15 Sept; *D.Mail, 16 Sept 2013.*

**SHIGECHIYO IZUMI, ONLY 105?**

In the last round-up of super-centenarians [FT305:10-11], we mentioned the Japanese farmer

Shigechiyo Izumi as the Guinness-approved oldest man who ever lived (120 years and 237 days). Reader Bill Robinson has drawn our attention to the following paragraph on the Guinness website: "New evidence has come to light that casts doubt on the long-standing longevity record held by Shigechiyo Izumi (Japan). The birth certificate submitted as evidence might actually belong to his older brother, who died at a young age; if the family used Izumi as a 'necronym' - that is, gave him his dead brother's name, as the new research suggests - this means his final age was 105 years old, not 120." See *Gerontology Research Group* <[www.grg.org/Adams/E.HTM](http://www.grg.org/Adams/E.HTM)> and *Guinness World Records* <[www.guinnessworldrecords.com/](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/)>



ABOVE: Alimihan Seyiti - possibly aged 127 - at her home in China's Xinjiang region.

## SIDELINES...

### FEAR OF (A) GOD

A burglar who fainted when he saw a statue at a shop he was raiding 'come to life' was arrested after a security guard found him collapsed on the floor. Marcone Alves da Silva, 24, caused the statue of African cult deity Old Black to move by brushing against a rope at the store in Luziania, Brazil. *Metro, 22 July 2013*

### UNEXPECTED HITCH

A funeral procession in Uckfield, Sussex, was halted on 22 May when a horse pulling the hearse collapsed and died. The high street was closed for 50 minutes. "The horse was fit, only seven, and had been checked out" said an undertaker. A back-up hearse was called in so the funeral could proceed. *Sussex Express, 24 May; Sun, 26 May 2013.*

### SPOOKY PARROT

Joanna Steffan was desperate to get her beloved African Parrot Kiwi returned to her in Manlius, New York State, after it flew off. When Mrs Steffan's husband Patrick died three years earlier, the 11-year-old bird had taken on his voice and mannerisms. "For some reason the bird took on his voice to perfection," she said. *CNYCentral.com, 4 July 2013*

### INDENT TO KILL

Angela Williams, 44, faces a murder charge after killing her boyfriend Douglas Kelly by hitting him over the head 16 times with a pickaxe in Indented Head, a small coastal town in Victoria, Australia. *The Age (Melbourne), 11 July 2013.*

### RHUBARB CRUMBLE

Margaret Goodwin, 66, was woken by an explosion in her flat in Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, on 2 July; the kitchen ceiling had been lifted and the fridge door blown off. Food was strewn among shards of broken glass. The cause was a jar of homemade rhubarb chutney given her by a neighbour, which had exploded in the fridge after fermenting for five days and giving off methane. *D.Mail, Sun, 6 July 2013.*

AFP / BETTY IMAGES

# THE SCIENCE OF FAKING IT

What can a hoax in which over 300 fake scientific papers were submitted to online journals tell us about the peer review process? **DAVID HANBLING** investigates.

**T**he media loves to see science journals hoaxed, and a recent case involving a fake cancer treatment received plenty of attention. But what's the real lesson, and what can it tell us about how science deals with unexplained phenomena?

The hoax tested some of the new 'open access' journals that are challenging the established channels of scientific communication. A researcher pays a small fee to publish, and their paper can be read for free on the Internet. This is in contrast with traditional journals where publication is free but readers pay a subscription. Open access means that many more papers can be published and made freely available, but there are doubts over their quality control. Any genuine science journal will carry out a peer-review process in which a paper is checked by experts in the appropriate field.

Enter "Ocorrafoo Cobange", a fictional biologist at the imaginary "Wassee Institute of Medicine in Asmara" and dozens of other randomly generated doppelgängers. John Bohannon used them to submit over 300 papers to open-access journals<sup>1</sup>. The papers varied slightly, each claiming that a random chemical extracted from a random lichen could treat a random type of cancer.

The papers were carefully engineered to contain mistakes obvious to anyone with university-level knowledge of biochemistry. They were translated into French and back using Google Translate to create the feel of a paper written by a non-English speaker. The hoax paper was accepted for publication by 157 journals; 98 rejected it, and only 36 of these pointed out errors (the others were still in process.) If a paper was accepted, Bohannon told the journal that an error had been found and withdrew it, so none was actually published.

Bohannon concluded that some 60 per cent of the new journals didn't have a valid review process. The responses from editors focused on the format,



## The scientific papers were engineered to contain mistakes

layout and language of the paper, ensuring that it looked good while ignoring its scientific content. This reinforces the impression that some such journals are simply an easy way of making money from researchers. Even their titles, resembling those of existing journals, can be misleading – the *American Journal of Medical and Dental Sciences* is not published in America. Alarming, many of them are owned by respected scientific publishers like Elsevier and Sage.

Inevitably, the exercise has been compared to "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity", a 1996 spoof by physicist Alan Sokal published in the postmodern journal *Social Text* in 1996.<sup>2</sup> Sokal aimed to ridicule postmodern analysis by submitting gibberish, but his paper is more sensible than this suggests. His conclusion, that "there will arise new trunks and

branches – entire new theoretical frameworks – of which we, with our present ideological blinders, cannot yet even conceive," is not so outlandish, even if the physics behind it is wrong.

*Social Text* did not have a peer-review process at the time, as they believed that it would inhibit academic freedom. No physicist looked at the paper before publication. *Social Text* now has peer-review.

Bohannon's results indicate the inadequacy of some open-access journals. But he was not an unbiased observer. He carried out the hoax on behalf of *Science* magazine – a traditional, subscriber-based journal threatened by the open-access revolution. And while there are several thousand open-access journals, Bohannon only targeted a few hundred, including 121 from a list of known 'predatory' journals compiled by library scientist Jeffrey Beall, of the University of Colorado, Denver.

Critics have also pointed out that Bohannon did not try submitting the paper to traditional scientific journals. *Science* magazine responded by saying that Bohannon's piece was a news article and not a scientific study – but perhaps it shows the need

for a proper peer-reviewed study of how open-access science journals compare to traditional ones.

While Bohannon's piece is essentially about sloppy science, in China the situation is more extreme: the market in fake science papers is estimated to be worth \$150m a year. This is because research grants, promotion and academic status all depend on the number of papers you publish, regardless of quality.

The volume of scientific papers published in China has been rising steadily, and it is now second only to the US. The growth has been accompanied by a boom in journals that publish, for a generous fee, research that has been faked or plagiarised. A third of researchers admitted to plagiarising or falsifying results in a 2010 government survey.<sup>3</sup>

Science is in principle self-correcting, so any paper with false conclusions should be superseded by later research proving it is wrong. It remains to be seen whether this still applies in a climate of widespread corruption.

Stories like Bohannon's makes it difficult for anyone wishing to challenge the concept of peer-review itself. Any radical young scientist will find that, thanks to peer-review, their paper overturning existing ideas on time-travel, telepathy or sea-serpents will be critiqued by the exact establishment they are challenging. Rejection without explanation is the usual result (see **FT207:12**).

Peer-review is inherently conservative, making it hard for new thinking, especially on topics like strange phenomena, to get through. Hence Max Planck's joke that "Science advances one funeral at a time," with new ideas only being accepted as older scientists die off. Peer-review means that some ideas can be completely shut out by the senior academics of the time. It's not a good situation – but it is still preferable to the alternative of an endless deluge of bad science from Ocorrafoo Cobanges clones.

### NOTES

**1** [www.sciencemag.org/content/342/6154/60.full](http://www.sciencemag.org/content/342/6154/60.full)

**2** Mike Jay: "L'Affaire Sokal" (**FT116:46-47**); <http://compbio.biosci.uq.edu.au/mediawiki/upload/f/f9/Sokal-transgressing-boundaries.pdf>

**3** [www.economist.com/news/china/21586845-flawed-system-judging-research-leading-academic-fraud-looks-good-paper](http://www.economist.com/news/china/21586845-flawed-system-judging-research-leading-academic-fraud-looks-good-paper)

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# GHOSTWATCH

**ALAN MURDIE** examines reports of poltergeist activity from Jamaica and Colombia

As is well known, Charles Fort spent years patiently collecting press reports of poltergeists and other strange phenomena from around the world. Nowadays, amid the interconnected global village of the modern world, you never need wait very long before there's a new story of a poltergeist or a possessed baby popping up somewhere in the media.

In the spring and summer of this year, a series of reports came from Jamaica detailing the developing tricks and manifestations of what in traditional Caribbean folklore is termed a 'duppy' besieging the Hanson family at St Elizabeth. A 'duppy' is a variety of malevolent spirit that may appear in either human or animal form, but as a perceptive local reporter swiftly pointed out: "It's not your regular duppy story: there are grave concerns being expressed this evening by a St Elizabeth family which says it is being plagued by evil spirits, possibly poltergeists which are those that throw items." The Hansons were reported to be living in poor conditions and eventually their home burned down. The poltergeist angle of this intriguing case is explored in an article elsewhere in this issue [pp40-41] by Paul Cropper, but it is worth noting how adaptable the poltergeist can be to local beliefs.

The late Scott Rogo stated in his book *The Poltergeist Experience* (1979): "All through the study of the poltergeist we have seen how fickle it is. If it is called a demon it readily assumes the role. If it is treated as an intelligent entity, it will rap coherently in answer to questions. Treat it as a witch, and it will give you animal familiars. Apparently, the poltergeist is extremely sensitive to

attitudes and beliefs of those witnessing it." Rogo's point is that the poltergeist as a real phenomenon is actually shaped by the time in which it occurs and the beliefs of the humans around it.

Prior to the current 'duppy' outbreak, it may be noted that the Rose Hall district itself already enjoyed a reputation for ghosts and supernatural events. Rose Hall is celebrated in Jamaican legend and ghostlore as being the home of the 'White Witch' Annie Palmer who lived there in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Originally from France, she was the wife of John Palmer, a brutal 18<sup>th</sup> century slave owner. She is said to have murdered her husband and then to have taken male slaves as her lovers, murdering them in turn as soon as she had finished with them. She is said to have practised witchcraft, extracting voodoo secrets from her slaves and using magic spells to enhance her power.

Jamaican-born Jacqueline Crooks, author of *Obeah Blue* and *Fire Rush* (Granta and Virago anthologies, 2009 & 2011), confirms the profound atmosphere of the area where the latest outbreak has occurred. She told me: "I visited Rose Hall many times and there was definitely a dark energy there. It's a fascinating place." She says her work has

## SHE IS SAID TO HAVE MURDERED HER HUSBAND AND THEN TAKEN MALE SLAVES AS HER LOVERS

been influenced by these visits, finding there a "resonance in the shadowy afternoon, a feeling of sounds and spirits from the past". These impressions have been a stimulus to her writing, and commenting on the latest story she says: "The White Witch, duppies, fires – it is a maelstrom of psychic possibilities".

Back in 2008 there were reports of another duppy haunting a community at Tivoli in West Kingston, Jamaica, and even a claim that it was photographed in the form of a black cloud. The video clip begins showing a handful of dancers on the top of a high-rise building in the community during one of their entertainment events. At about 12 seconds into the clip, a black mass is suddenly seen floating through a window in a section of the building. According to some local residents, the 'black mass' represents the spirit of one of three men residing at Tivoli Gardens who were shot and killed after they allegedly fired at a joint police/military team that raided the area on 13 January 2008.

Following the deaths, there were reports of strange noises coming from sections of the area where no one lived, and an apparition shaped like a man, though his face was never seen as his back was always turned to observers. This tendency of apparitions to conceal their faces or have facial features that are indistinct has often been noted in apparitional literature. Even more curious, there have been claims of mysterious black shapes in stories such as a case in Cambridgeshire in 1907, the Runcorn poltergeist in 1953 and the flying black ball reported at Humpty Doo, Australia, in 1998 [FT112:21, 116:34-39].

### SOURCES

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### A DEMONIC BABY IN COLOMBIA

Meanwhile in March, a reporter decided to risk a night in the presence of a family with a demonic baby, inside a wooden hut in a shantytown in northern Colombia. Oscar Palencia Lopez and his wife Ana had become international news in October 2012 when garbled accounts of their allegedly possessed child first appeared, following a serious fire at their home in which the family nearly died. Ana told journalists that strange events and fires happened in the vicinity of her 16-day-old baby. This set in circulation a series of wild but eagerly repeated rumours that the baby boy, also called Oscar, was already standing up, walking and chuckling



ABOVE: A 2008 photo of what is said to be a duppy leaving a Kingston building in the form of a black cloud.





LEFT AND BELOW LEFT : Ana Palencia Lopez and her son Oscar, in whose vicinity poltergeist-like phenomena were said to have taken place.

malevolently. All these were boosted by Ana herself, seemingly to get attention, and the story became worldwide via the Internet.

The sensational coverage attracted the attention of the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF), a national family welfare organisation, whose members were concerned for the safety of the baby and feared he might be being maltreated. However, after an investigation by professionals, they decided not to take any action. Their investigation brought an end to the alleged manifestations, but claims of poltergeist-like activity continued after a fresh outbreak in January 2013.

The case has been followed by journalist Andrés Gaitán García from the *El Meridiano de Cordoba* newspaper, who decided to spend a night in the property to observe what might happen. The family home was situated in Nueva Estrella, a poor urban district in Loricá, Purisma, Colombia.

He found that, as with the Hansons in Jamaica, the living conditions endured by the family were very poor. The parents and baby and Ana's sons from a previous relationship were sleeping on an earth floor, their mattresses having been destroyed in the fires along with most of their belongings. They reported mysterious falls of pebbles on the zinc roof of their home, along with falls of earth and dust inside. Despite living on the equivalent of £3 a day, the family were not looking to make money from their story; but a sad indication of their poverty came when Gaitán heard the father complaining about the promise of a visiting journalist to bring them food which had not been kept. The couple were at pains to stress they loved each other and their children but appeared to be the only witnesses to the extraordinary phenomena. They no longer considered the baby possessed, having had him baptised. They blamed the manifestations on an old man who practised witchcraft locally.

Sitting in a chair, Gaitán planned to keep watch through the night until dawn. During his vigil he witnessed nothing conclusive. At one point Ana cried out that the demon was back and exclaimed that a pebble had



fallen on her bed. The stone had supposedly penetrated the roof without making any sound. Gaitán did not witness this directly and could not rule out that the mother had staged the incident. Ana also claimed the demon was on the baby's back, whereupon the father applied holy water to the child. Thereafter, the family all went back to sleep. The baby slept peacefully on his mother's stomach and nothing occurred until 4am when Gaitán was attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes. At this he abandoned his vigil, concluding the family were not suffering attacks from a demon from the Pit but were rather enduring a living hell of poverty, which had exacerbated pre-existing mental illness on the part of the child's mother.

Making enquiries into her background, he learned that seven years before Ana had been driven from the town of Los Andes where she had lived with her parents and brothers, allegedly on account of her nuisance behaviour. According to three claims received by reporters, Ana had a reputation for setting alight thatched roofs and burning clothes, fouling water tanks and sending strange threatening notes to people, signed in the name of another woman, who incidentally enjoyed a reputation as a local witch herself.

I contacted Gaitán in August 2013 to see if there had been any further developments. Confirming his experience, he stated that no further disturbances had been reported and he felt that psychological problems exacerbated by poverty remained the best explanation.

Such a background shows how the social circumstances and psychopathology of the residents of a haunted house may often be of greater significance in a case than the alleged details of the manifestations. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of unconscious fraud was introduced to explain the poltergeist in certain instances, originally derived from the literature of mesmerism and cases where mediums were caught cheating when apparently in trance conditions. James Hyslop produced a number of studies for the American Society for Psychical Research advocating this halfway house between spirits and outright fraud.

In criminal law, such unconscious actions eventually received recognition in the defence of 'non-insane automatism', where it is accepted that a person might act violently and damage property whilst in a trance state. In psychical research, the unconscious fraud concept was later expanded to encompass unconscious projection by way of psychokinesis as an explanation for many poltergeist phenomena. But all too often in poltergeist cases, both sceptics and believers insist on taking an "all-or-nothing" approach to poltergeist manifestations of either deliberate fraud or paranormal activity. The possibility that some cases might be a mixture of both fraud and genuinely paranormal phenomena is one that many researchers still find hard to conceptualise. However, it may be noted that Hyslop ultimately reverted to an acceptance of the possibility of spirits, according to Carl Jung, who wrote:

"He [Hyslop] admitted that, all things considered, all these metapsychic phenomena could be explained better by the hypothesis of spirits than by the qualities and peculiarities of the unconscious. And here, on the basis of my own experience, I am bound to concede he is right. In each individual case I must of necessity be sceptical, but in the long run I have to admit that the spirit hypothesis yields better results in practice than any other."

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## IG NOBEL PRIZE 2013

A round-up of the appealingly odd academic research recognised at this year's ceremony



AFP / GETTY IMAGES



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Lost dung beetles find their way home by looking at the Milky Way. ABOVE RIGHT: Violetta apparently soothes the savage breast of heart op mice better than Enya.

The 23rd Ig Nobel Prize ceremony was held in Harvard's Sanders Theatre on 12 September. These prizes, as most *FT* readers will know, are to "first make people laugh and then make them think". The ceremony was webcast on [www.improbable.com](http://www.improbable.com). For the first time, winners received cash prizes – 10 trillion Zimbabwe dollars... around two pounds.

The joint prize in biology and astronomy went to five scientists at Lund University, Sweden, the University of Witwatersrand, and the University of Pretoria, both in South Africa. This was

for discovering that when dung beetles get lost, they can navigate their way home by looking at the Milky Way. Their summary (in *Current Biology*, 24 Jan 2013) is worth quoting:

"When the moon is absent from the night sky, stars remain as celestial visual cues. Nonetheless, only birds, seals, and humans are known to use stars for orientation. African ball-rolling dung beetles exploit the sun, the moon, and the celestial polarisation pattern to move along straight paths, away from the intense competition at the dung pile. Even on clear moonless nights,

many beetles still manage to orientate along straight paths. This led us to hypothesize that dung beetles exploit the starry sky for orientation, a feat that has, to our knowledge, never been demonstrated in an insect. Here, we show that dung beetles transport their dung balls along straight paths under a starlit sky but lose this ability under overcast conditions. In a planetarium, the beetles orientate equally well when rolling under a full starlit sky as when only the Milky Way is present. The use of this bidirectional celestial cue for

orientation has been proposed for vertebrates, spiders, and insects, but never proven. This finding represents the first convincing demonstration for the use of the starry sky for orientation in insects and provides the first documented use of the Milky Way for orientation in the animal kingdom."

The prize for medicine went to a group of Japanese scientists for assessing the effect of listening to different types of music on mice with heart transplants. Whereas mice normally survived an average of seven days, those who listened to Verdi's *La Traviata*

### ALIENS UP NORTH...

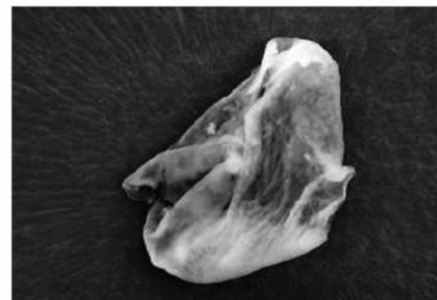
A scientific team from the University of Sheffield, led by Prof Milton Wainwright, believe they have found evidence of life arriving to Earth from space, which could "completely change our view of biology and evolution". To gather samples in the stratosphere during the Perseid meteor shower, they launched a balloon near Chester on 31 July. It carried microscopic studs in a drawer that opened for 17 minutes in the stratosphere so that particulate material would attach to them. Samples were taken at altitudes of between 14 and 17 miles (22–27km). The frustules (cell walls) of single-celled algae known as diatoms were gathered, retrieved near Wakefield, and studied under an electron microscope. The researchers insist they took precautions against contamination.

"Most people will assume that these

biological particles must have just drifted up to the stratosphere," said Prof Wainwright. "But it is generally accepted that a particle of the size found cannot be lifted from Earth to heights of, for example, 27km [16.5 miles]. The only known exception is by a violent volcanic eruption, none of which occurred within three years of the trip." The findings are published in the *Journal of Cosmology*, a controversial organ that champions the panspermia hypothesis – that micro-organisms are constantly carried between planets by asteroids, comets, and meteors.

Prof Chandra Wickramasinghe and other panspermia advocates are naturally delighted; many scientists, however, remain sceptical. "If they were able to show that [the diatom frustules] was composed of all D amino acids – proteins in Earth life are made of L amino acids – that would be pretty convincing to me," said

Chris McKay, an astrobiologist at NASA's Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California. "So some sort of biochemical indication that it does not share Earth biochemistry. If it does indeed share Earth biochemistry, proving that it is of alien origin is probably impossible." *medicaldaily.com*, 10 Sept; *space.com*, *D.Telegraph*, 20 Sept 2013.



UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

survived 27 days. Those who listened to the Irish singer Enya lasted 11 days. Another group of Japanese scientists picked up the chemistry prize for discovering that the biochemical process by which onions make people cry is even more complicated than was previously realised.

A report in the *British Journal of Psychology* – “Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder: people who think they are drunk also think they are attractive” – won the authors (mostly from France) the psychology prize. Alberto Minetti and his colleagues won the physics prize for discovering that some people would be physically capable of running across the surface of a pond – provided it was on the Moon.

Brian Crandall of the US and Peter Stahl of Canada won the archaeology prize for parboiling a dead shrew, swallowing it without chewing, and then carefully examining everything excreted – in order to see which bones would dissolve inside the human digestive system and which would not. Did both scientists swallow shrews? Read their paper to find out.

The peace prize went to Alexander Lukashenko, President of Belarus, for making it illegal to applaud in public; the charming old despot had to share it with his country's state police, who arrested a one-armed man for applauding. (Readers insert their own zen joke here.)

Five intrepid researchers were awarded the probability prize for discovering that the longer a cow

has been lying down, the more likely it will soon stand up; and secondly, that once a cow stands up, you can't easily predict how soon it will lie down again.

The safety engineering prize went to the late Gustavo Pizzo of the US, for inventing an electro-mechanical system to trap airplane hijackers – the system drops a hijacker through trap doors, seals him into a package, then drops the encapsulated hijacker through the airplane's specially installed bomb bay doors, whence he parachutes to Earth, where police, having been alerted by radio, await his arrival. Pizzo's US Patent (#3811643) was issued way back in 1972; we don't know why it took the Improbable Research folk so long to recognise his achievement.

The winners of the prize for public health had to wait 30 years, but presumably are still alive. They are Kasian Bhanganada, Tu Chayavatana, Chumporn Pongnumkul, Anunt Tonmukayakul, Piyasakol Sakolsatayadorn, Krit Komaratal – and Henry Wilde. Their achievement was the description of medical techniques in their 1983 report “Surgical Management of an Epidemic of Penile Amputations in Siam” – techniques which they recommend, except in cases where the amputated penis had been partially eaten by a duck.

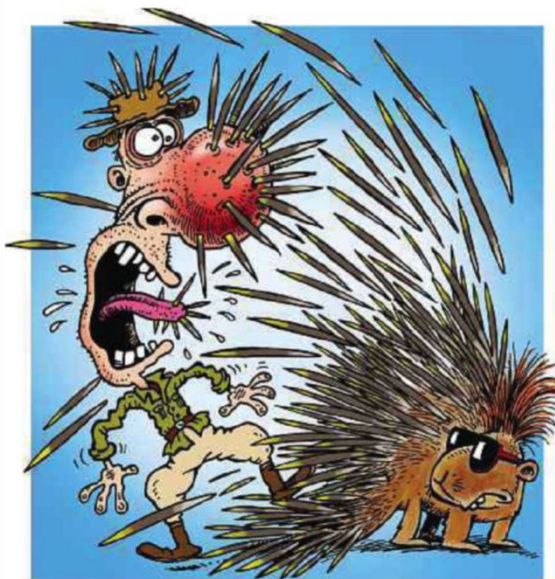
For the 2012 awards, see **FT295:20**. For more information, see <http://www.improbable.com/ig/>



# Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

## 170. PORCUPINE PROJECTILES



### The myth

Porcupines defend themselves by hurling their quills at their attackers.

### The “truth”

Porcupines can't shoot their quills like missiles, but the quills do detach quite easily on contact, and are barbed. This often results in attackers retreating with a face full of the spears (which in some species can be up to a foot long) – and that image, presumably, is the origin of the old belief. Despite the name (translating as “spiny pig”) porcupines are rodents. There are about two dozen species, all of which have quills. These sharp hairs usually lie flat until the animal is agitated, when they are erected to provide the herbivorous porcupine with both physical defence and visual deterrence. Not only visual, in fact; the quills of an angry porcupine give off a hormonal smell, and a rattling noise, as fair warning to would-be predators. It's only erect quills that come away on impact; relaxed ones stay put, thus preventing the weapon being accidentally discharged into its owner. Any quills lost in battle will grow back within a few months.

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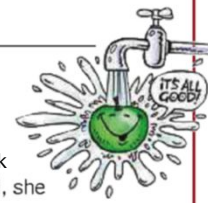
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### Disclaimer

As ever, this column's facts, interpretations and assertions are open to dispute, debate and clarification by readers. Please feel free to raise your points on the letters pages.

### Mythchaser

Following last month's Mythchaser, which wondered whether it's true that the nutritional value of fruit and veg lives mostly in the peel, a reader wants me to ask you another fruit-skin question. When she was a child, she recalls, it was considered important to wash apples thoroughly before eating them in order to “get rid of the sprays”. What she wants to know is – was there then, or is there now, any point to this ritual? Are pesticide residues, like “goodness,” only skin deep?



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# ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING presents this issue's round-up of archaeological discoveries and curiosities



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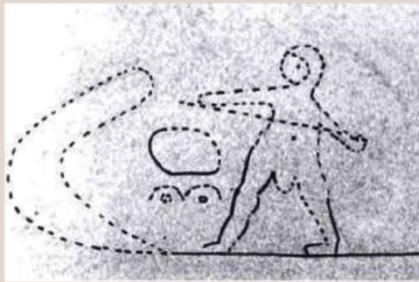
ABOVE: Archaeologists unearthing the unique processional pathway on Bodmin Moor. BELOW: The faint image of a now damaged chalk hill figure of a spear-thrower

## THE CRYSTAL PATH

The Hurlers is a set of three roughly aligned stone circles on Bodmin Moor, Cornwall, dating to the Early Bronze Age or Late Neolithic era. Nearby is Rillaton Barrow, famous for a gold cup found within it in a context dating to c.2,300 BC. Visible on the northern horizon from the Hurlers is Stowe's Hill, topped by the weirdly weathered natural rocky tor known as the Cheesewring, and which has the remnants of a surrounding Neolithic enclosure. In all, it is an enigmatic prehistoric complex. Its aura of ancient mystery has recently been enhanced: archaeologists and volunteers from a local community project (the Caradon Hill Area Heritage Project) have unearthed a 4,000-year-old quartz pathway 4ft (1.2m) wide linking two of the stone circles. It is in fact a re-discovery because it was originally uncovered 70 years ago during conservation work there. It was then forgotten about until Cornish archaeologist Jacky Nowakowski found a reference to it in an unpublished report from the Ministry of Works. *BBC News, etc, 24 Sept 2013.*

## LOST GIANTS

Here is another, but less happy, lost-and-found story. Several decades ago, an important discovery came to light at the village of Wanborough, near Swindon, Wiltshire – two previously unknown chalk hill figures to rival



famous ones like the prehistoric Uffington White Horse. They showed up on aerial photographs in 1966, but the negatives were not printed until nearly a decade later, when archaeologist Bryn Walters started studying them. He was astonished to see the faint images of two giant chalk geoglyphs (ground images). One figure, almost 200ft (60m) tall, depicts a spear thrower, the other, about 280ft (85m) tall, is horned. Unfortunately, during World War II, they had suffered from intensive

farming. As Walters ruefully points out, for the features to have survived possibly thousands of years only to be virtually destroyed in modern times is "maddening". Still, it is worthwhile knowing they were there and that we have some idea of what they looked like. *Swindon Advertiser, 6 Aug 2013.*



ABOVE: Recently excavated wall willies, probably dedicated to Priapus

## COCKS AT DAWN

Archaeologists excavating around the base of the Balivi Tower in Aosta, northwest Italy, found a corner stone, which would have been clearly visible until covered with alluvial deposits during flooding in the Middle Ages. The 2,000-year-old stone, still in its original position

# CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 169: CHEEP THRILLS

on the southeast corner of the tower, has carvings depicting two phalli among other images, including a plough and spade, plus an indistinct carving that appears to be the sign for Capricorn.

The settlement that became Aosta was captured from the Salassi people in 25 BC, and has several monuments dedicated to the Roman Emperor Augustus. "The newly discovered stone tells even more about Aosta's connection with the Roman emperor," Giulio Magli, professor of archaeoastronomy at Milan's Polytechnic University, told *Discovery News*. "It reveals the city was built under Augustus's sign during the Winter Solstice."

Magli (an occasional contributor to *Time & Mind*) argues that the plough and spade relate to the ceremonial trench (the *sulcus primigenius*) ploughed to mark the boundary of a new, Roman-founded town at the location. The phalli probably represented the god Priapus, and served as apotropaic symbols. According to Magli's calculations, which allowed for the jagged Alpine skyline, the tips of the two phalli point to the position of the Winter Solstice sunrise. Furthermore, Magli states, back at that time the Winter Solstice was hosted by the sign of Capricorn. Although Augustus's astrological sign was Libra, he chose Capricorn as his emblem, possibly because it was the sign of his conception. *Discovery News*, 3 Oct 2013.

### HELPING HANDS

Archaeologists have long assumed that Palaeolithic cave paintings were created by men, but recent research challenges that assumption. A decade ago, archaeologist Dean Snow of Pennsylvania State University began a study based on the work of John Manning, a British biologist who had found that men and women's fingers have different relative lengths. Specifically, Manning noted that men tend to have longer ring fingers than index fingers for example, while the reverse is the case with women. Snow became aware that much cave art – whether the 12,000-40,000-year-old Palaeolithic cave paintings in France and Spain or prehistoric examples elsewhere in the world – is often accompanied by stencils. These were presumably made by the artists placing their hands on the rock surface and spraying pigment by mouth or straw over them, leaving a hand-shaped image. Looking at these, Snow thought he could perceive that, according to Manning's findings, many of these hand prints were those of women. After many tests, he developed an algorithm apparently able to distinguish the gender of handprints. His results so far indicate that approximately 75 per cent of such markings was likely made by women. *D.Mail*, 9 Oct; *phys.org*, 11 Oct 2013.

"Bird, Bird, Bird, Bird Is The Word" – The Trashmen

Talking birds shall here be silent, having had their due in **FT140:18**.

Too many sources to annotate. Aristotle predominates. Aelian's *History of Animals* (Greek) and Pliny's *Natural History* (Latin) – English translations in Loeb Classical Library series – are cornucopiae. Classically-minded twitchers and twitching classicists will find the full story in: WG Arnott, *Birds in the Ancient World from A to Z* (Routledge, London, 2007); J Pollard, *Birds in Greek Life and Myth* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1977); D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1897, repr. 1936 & 2009).

If your bird's not dead and you're lucky enough to be doing a bird rather than doing bird, you are in semi-classical mode. Catullus's poetic lament for the death of his girlfriend's pet sparrow is taken by some as a slangy reference to his own cock (normally, he had no need of Viagra); others disagree.

Either way, it is piquant to juxtapose this with the following information from Aelian on the purple gallinule: "It is extremely jealous and keeps an eye on married women. If it discovers that the lady of the house is adulterous, it promptly hangs itself."

Dionysius (*On Birds*) offers a variant: "The gallinule is so chaste that it refuses to mate in public and cannot even bear the sight of a bridegroom."

Aristophanes's *Birds* (an ornithological treasure house) proclaims not "Come into the garden, Maud" but "Come quickly into the bushes and wake the nightingale" – a double-entendre for female orgasm.

'Coot' was slang for penis, 'Pigeon' for

prostitute (cf. French 'Poule').

If Catullus really was suffering from what TV ads primly call 'erectile dysfunction', he should have had a meal of cranes' brains, reputedly a powerful aphrodisiac. Or kept a look-out for a swallow, the sight of which acted as a love philtre – albeit, as some wag

remarked years ago on the then famous Hyde Park 'Kiss-in-the-Car' case where a bobby saw fellatio in action, "One swallow doesn't make a summons."

Cranes' brains were equally useful for bashful boys, being (Aelian) "endowed with some kind of charm that turns women into

pushovers."

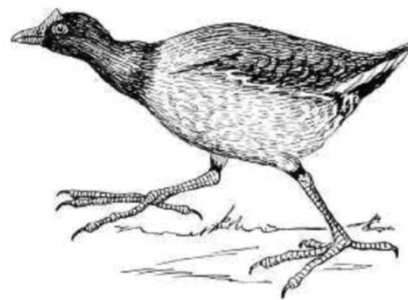
And, if you get your bird up the spout, one of many ancient remedies (long before gin and hot baths) was the ingesting of vulture's excrement. This shitty advice comes from a Roman army doctor (Dioscorides), who probably had many squaddies queuing up to ask his advice – for "a friend", of course.

Time for a change of emphasis. A biblical echo does the trick. We all know the tale of Abraham, Isaac and the ram in the thicket. Plutarch comes up with a parallel of sorts. Helen of Troy (the face that launched a thousand clichés) was being led to an altar for sacrifice to stop a plague. On cue, down swooped an eagle to snatch the dagger from priestly hand.

Must end with the best story of all.

Playwright Aeschylus was killed in Sicily by a lammergeyer dropping a tortoise on his bald head to break it, mistaking dramaturge's pate for a rock – think what Joe Orton could have made of this...

"I have industriously sought data for an expression upon birds, but the prospecting has not been very quasi-satisfactory" – Fort, *Books*, p251.



## GREAT SNAKES!

Snakes on a plane (and in other unexpected places) and others that are placid (except when they're not). Just don't bite their heads off...

- A mother woken by her cat hissing at 3.30am on 5 January 2013 found a python wrapped around her sleeping two-year-old. Tess Guthrie, 22, grabbed the 6ft (1.8m) snake by the head to try and get it off daughter Zara, who was in bed beside her. The reptile, which was wrapped three times around the toddler's arm, responded by biting the girl three times on her left hand. Snake expert Tex Tillis, who removed the python from the house in Lismore, New South Wales, said it was not trying to hurt the child, but merely seeking somewhere warm. Zara was discharged from hospital after having her wounds dressed. *D.Mail*, 7 Jan 2013.

- A 19ft (5.8m) python, weighing 37lb (17kg), fell through a ceiling panel of the St Vincent de Paul charity shop in Ingham, Queensland, and vomited on the floor. It might have entered through the roof, which was damaged by Cyclone Yasi in 2011. When police were initially called to the property on 8 July, they believed a person had fallen through the ceiling because the roof panel had been cut in half. Crockery, clothes and other goods were scattered all over the floor. Police were called back to the shop the following day when a large crowd formed outside. Sgt Don Auld said the snake must have been hiding when police went there the first time. "Its head was the size of a small dog," he said. It was released in nearby wetlands. *BBC News*, 10 July 2013.

- Connor Barthe, seven, and his brother Noah, five, were strangled by an African rock python that escaped from its enclosure, slithered through a ventilation system and fell through the ceiling where the brothers were sleeping in the Canadian city of Campbellton, New Brunswick. They had been visiting the flat of a friend whose father, Jean-Claude Savoie, owned an exotic pet store on the floor below. The 14ft (4.3m), 98lb (44kg) snake was being kept inside the



### "Its head was the size of a small dog," said Sgt Auld

flat in a large glass enclosure that reached the ceiling. It escaped through a small hole in the ceiling connected to the ventilation system, then made its way through the pipework towards the living room, where the boys were sleeping. The pipe collapsed and the snake fell. The bodies were found on 5 August by Mr Savoie. His own son was sleeping in another room and was unharmed. The snake, which he had owned for about 10 years, was coiled up in a hole nearby. It was euthanised by a vet. The last known killing by an African rock python was in November 2002, when one swallowed a 12-year-old boy in Durban, South Africa [FT170:29]. Some experts speculated that the snake in Canada might have picked up a scent of food near the boys. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 7 Aug 2013.

- A man sitting on the lavatory on 12 July felt a burning sensation before realising he had been bitten on the penis by a snake that

had emerged from the waste pipe. The 35-year-old, who was visiting his parents' house in Haifa, Israel, was rushed to hospital, but the snake was not venomous and the bite was minor. *YourJewishNews.com*, 16 July 2013.

- A four-year-old, 5ft (1.5m) boa constrictor was on the loose on 3 July after escaping from its home in the Huyton area of Liverpool. A Merseyside police spokesman said: "While the snake is non-venomous and described as normally very placid, it may become aggressive if it feels threatened." *Guardian*, 5 July 2013.

- A 6ft (1.8m) boa constrictor called Bo escaped from a garden in Rotherham, Yorkshire, on 9 August. Corrine Swan, Bo's owner, said the snake was generally non-threatening, but it was hungry and she urged her neighbours to be on their guard as Bo might snack on their pets. *D.Mail*, 10 Aug 2013.

- A man with a boa constrictor wrapped around his neck hailed a minicab in Furze Lane, Milton, Portsmouth, Hampshire, on 25 July. The driver refused to allow the reptile in his cab, so the man flung it into a hedge. News of the missing snake sparked fear in the

city; police, fire crews and the RSPCA hunted for it in vain. Over three weeks later, it had still not been found, even with the help of a thermal imaging camera. *The News (Portsmouth)*, 10+19 Aug; *D.Mail*, 12 Aug 2013.

- A tiny exotic snake was found on a Qantas Boeing 747 airliner, leading to 370 passengers being grounded overnight on 23 September. Staff found the 8in (20cm) Mandarin Rat Snake in the passenger cabin near the door before passengers were due to board the flight bound for Tokyo. *D.Mail*, 24 Sept 2013.

- A couple were terrified to see a snake appear out of a drain in their back garden. As the Mexican king constrictor slithered around, Geoff and Linda Peck fled inside their house in Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire. They called their son Simon, a fireman, who managed to trap the black snake in a recycling box, and it was taken to a nearby reptile store. Experts said it might have hatched in the sewers. Mexican king snakes can grow up to 4ft (1.2m), with the average length being about 2ft 6in (76cm). *D.Telegraph*, 4 Sept 2013.

- At the end of August, a man out walking his dog came upon a 3ft (90cm) royal python on the banks

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

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

of a canal in Doncaster. The non-venomous snake is normally found in Africa. *Sunday Mirror*, 1 Sept 2013.

- A 3ft (90cm) albino desert king snake frightened Annie Cox, 53, and her sons when it slithered down the chimney into their living room in Abbey Wood, south-east London, and hissed at them. Police trapped it and took it to Willow Wildlife Rescue in Chislehurst. The species, which crushes its prey to death, can grow up to 7ft (2m) long. *Sunday Express*, 11 Aug 2013.

- A farmer who grabbed a snake and chewed its head off after it bit him risked facing wildlife charges in central India. *Sun*, 30 July 2013.

- A man who heard foxes “barking like mad” found a 20ft (6m) python yards from a primary school in Croydon, south London. Fortunately for the pupils, it was dead. *D.Telegraph*, 18 May 2013.

- Sue Cull, 47, was walking from a pub to a curry house in Swansea, South Wales, after an evening with friends when she felt a sharp pain in her ankle as she cut across a grass verge. Assuming it was a nettle sting, she went home, only to find that she was bleeding profusely from puncture wounds in both legs. Doctors at Morriston Hospital said she appeared to have been bitten by a snake, and calls to the police revealed that a 10ft (3m) Burmese python had escaped from a nearby house. “My right leg went black and I was shaking and couldn’t get warm,” said Ms Cull. “My face started to swell up. They had to give me X-rays to make sure there were no fangs stuck in my legs.” As python bites are non-venomous, experts believed she had had an allergic reaction. She recovered after 14 hours in hospital. The escaped python was later found in a pipe and recaptured. It was not certain that it was the same snake that had bitten Ms Cull, but it seemed a reasonable assumption. *D.Mail*, *Sun*, *D.Mirror*, 10 Sept 2013.



## OVERLOOKING THE OLINGUITO

The olingos are a genus of neotropical mammalian carnivore related to the similar-looking kinkajou and also to the raccoons. Four species are currently recognised, but one of these, the olinguito or little olingo *Bassaricyon neblina*, remained formally unnamed and undescribed until this year. Yet far from being some highly elusive, totally obscure form, it transpires that the olinguito was well known to the locals in its Andean homeland (‘olinguito’ is its native name). Moreover, this small, orange-brown, teddy bear-like creature with big eyes, woolly fur, and long tail had also been unknowingly represented for over a century by preserved specimens in a number of major museums around the world, and even by a living individual in various USA zoos during the 1960s and 1970s.

DNA testing of museum specimens by a team of olingo researchers from the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History (led by its Curator of Mammals Dr Kristofer Helgen) confirmed the olinguito’s status as a valid species. It was also successfully sought for – and found to be quite abundant – in the cloud forests of Colombia and Ecuador by the research team, thereby making the olinguito the first new species of carnivore to be officially discovered in the Americas for 35 years. It is also a classic cryptozoological success story – featuring a species long known to its human neighbours (ethnoknown) but remaining unknown to science until formally investigated following the examination of physical evidence. <http://smithsonianscience.org/2013/08/olinguito/> 15 Aug 2013.

## CRYPTOZOOLOGICAL SABAH

There may well be some cryptozoological surprises awaiting discovery in Sabah too. One of two Malaysian states (Sarawak being the other) located on the island of Borneo and formerly known as North Borneo, Sabah was visited in March 2013 by Carl Marshall and Andrew Jackson from the Stratford-upon-Avon Butterfly Farm in order to undertake some biodiversity and ecology research relating to their work. While there, Carl, a longstanding cryptozoological enthusiast, also took the opportunity to enquire about any mystery animals that the local people may be familiar with, and was startled to discover that they spoke of several different cryptids. One of the most intriguing of these was a giant black-furred form of orang utan – all known forms of orang utan, both on Borneo and

on Sumatra, are of course orange-furred.

Equally interesting were reports of large, allegedly luminous or glowing, birds that reputedly exist in the deep forests of Ulu Kamanis, and which Carl speculates may conceivably represent an unknown species with iridescent plumage related to New Guinea’s spectacular birds of paradise. Also of note was a soldier’s report of a gigantic saltwater crocodile he had observed close to Lok Batik and which he estimated to be around 35ft (11m) long; plus the claimed existence of giant reticulated pythons said by Carl’s local guide from Ulu Kamanis to be in excess of 30ft (9m) long. Carl plans to return to Sabah in 2014, when he will pursue these and other cryptid reports further. *Flying Snake*, July 2013; Carl Marshall, pers. comms, 5 and 7 Sept 2013.

## A CRYPTID AT THE CAR-BOOT SALE?

On 5 September 2013, I visited Carl Marshall at his home in Bidford-on-Avon, where he gave me a wonderful taxiderm specimen of a horned hare whose preparation he had very kindly arranged – thanks, Carl! While there, we chatted about the Bornean cryptids that he’d been investigating, and he showed me a very intriguing taxiderm specimen of his own. It was a stuffed marten, whose fur was very sun-faded, but was otherwise in decent condition and could readily be restored by Carl’s taxidermist father and some family friends in this same profession. Carl had seen it a couple of months earlier, priced at £10 on a stall at a car-boot sale in Stratford. When the seller told him that it had come from Dorset, he snapped it up, aware that as recently as the 19th century there had been various reports from Dorset and elsewhere in the West Country of martens claimed by local naturalists, gamekeepers and others with knowledge of wildlife not to be pine martens *Martes martes* (the only officially recognised marten species in Britain) but beech martens, *M. foina*.

This latter species is common in continental Europe and can be readily distinguished from the pine marten by its white throat patch (the pine marten’s is usually yellow), but mainstream zoology has long discounted its existence in Britain. However, as noted by Carl, the stocky nature of his taxiderm marten is reminiscent of a beech marten. To determine whether it may indeed belong to the latter species and thence potentially be a bona fide British beech marten, Carl has sent hair samples from several different regions of its body to zoologist and fellow cryptozoological enthusiast Lars Thomas at Copenhagen Zoological Museum for analysis. I’ll keep you posted. *Carl Marshall, pers. comm.*, 5 Sept 2013.





## NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to an assassinated Indian rationalist, a military surgeon and Roswell witness, an exotic regular in the Russ Meyer canon and a feminist astrophysicist



### NARENDRA DABHOLKAR

This prominent Indian rationalist was assassinated on 20 August while walking across the bridge by the Omkareshwar temple in the western Indian city of Pune. Two men on a motorbike fired four bullets from close range. In 1989, Dabholkar founded the Maharashtra Committee for Eradication of Blind Faith (MANS in its Marathi acronym), which now has 180 branches in the state of Maharashtra. In village after village he and his activists would confront the babas, sadhus, tantriks and other 'god-men' who preyed on the poor and simple, challenging their claims and reporting them to the police. Many such 'god-men' conjure up objects, provide talismans for curing ailments, walk on fire and pierce their tongues with steel skewers.

Dabholkar investigated and demystified cases of black magic and possession by ghosts; he campaigned against animal sacrifice, the prodigious waste of drinking water and good food during religious festivities, and the pollution of local rivers during Ganesha's birthday festival by the immersion of thousands of idols made of plaster of paris. He offered 21 lakh rupees (about £20,700) to any sorcerer who, under strict scientific conditions, could stay on fire for a minute without moving, duplicate a currency note, grow a severed limb 2cm (0.78in) by the application of powder, or turn water into petrol.

The sum remains unclaimed.

Dabholkar also rejected the caste system. He himself was Brahmin, educated in elite schools, but with progressive parents. He qualified as a medical doctor and practised medicine for 12 years before becoming a social worker in the 1980s and campaigning to make villages have a single well for everyone, Dalits (then "untouchables") and others alike. He continued in that vein by urging tolerance and protection for intercaste marriages.

For 18 years, Dabholkar urged the Maharashtra state government to pass anti-black-magic legislation to curb the god-men, but his bill was allowed to lapse until, four days after his murder, a severely trimmed version was passed. Babas and politicians remain hand-in-glove (or in cahoots, if you prefer).

Dabholkar's friend and fellow activist, Deepak Girme, said Dabholkar had received many death threats since 1983, but had declined police protection. Once he was doused in kerosene and almost set on fire. "He wanted to expose the people who cheat the poor in the name of gods, who promise false cures for cancer or do black magic to perform so-called miracles," said Girme. "Half of India is hungry, half is uneducated. These babas and gurus who preach all this humbug, it doesn't translate into betterment of society. It's like the Dark Ages in Europe."

Dabholkar was a teetotal vegetarian. His office, from which he ran the Marathi weekly newspaper *Sadhana* as well as MANS, was bare except for a quotation from Gandhi on the wall. His reverence for the Mahatma underlined the fact that, though an atheist himself, his organisation was neutral on the subject of God's existence. He valued the highest reaches of Indian spirituality; it was exploitation by con men that he condemned.

For more on Dabholkar, see

**FT287:36-37.**

*Narendra Dabholkar, rationalist, born Maharashtra 1 Nov 1945; died Pune 20 Aug 2013, aged 67.*

### JESSE MARCEL JR

was a military surgeon who insisted until his dying day that as a child he had handled debris from a flying saucer. He was nearly 11 when rancher 'Mac' Brazel found some metallic debris littering a sheep pasture in a remote area of New Mexico. On 6 July 1947 he took some of the debris to Roswell, the nearest big town, and presented it to the local sheriff, who turned it over to officials at the Roswell Army Air Force base. The next day, Brazel led two officers, including Marcel's father, Major Jesse Marcel (pictured below), an intelligence officer with the 509th Bomb Group, to the field where the debris was scattered. They spent all day picking up pieces and then returned to Roswell. On the way back to base, Marcel stopped at his house to show the debris to his wife and young son. Jesse Jr recalled his father waking him late at night so that he could see pieces of a "flying saucer": metal foil, chunks of what looked like Bakelite plastic, and a lightweight beam inscribed with mysterious purplish hieroglyphs.

Marcel gave the debris to the Roswell base commander Colonel William Blanchard, who instructed his public relations officer Walter Haut to issue a press release announcing that they had parts of a flying saucer. The next day's headline in the local paper – "RAAF Captures Flying Saucer On Ranch In Roswell Region" – brought phone calls from round the world and the authorities quickly back-tracked, claiming the debris came from a weather balloon. The incident



was more or less forgotten until physicist and ufologist Stanton Friedman interviewed Major Marcel in 1978, followed by the publication *The Roswell Incident* by Charles Berlitz and William Moore in 1980; worldwide and lasting fame followed the *National Enquirer* interview with Marcel that same year.

Many other supposed witnesses came forward, and dozens of books have been written on the Roswell mystery. We won't revisit all the claims, denials and elaborations here; suffice to say that in 1995 the US government modified its weather balloon explanation to claim that the debris came from Project Mogul – a 700ft (200m) string of weather balloons, radar reflectors and acoustic sensors that had been launched on 4 June 1947 as part of a top-secret experiment to eavesdrop on Soviet nuclear weapons tests. As for the hieroglyphs Marcel Jr remembered, they bore a striking resemblance to purple symbols on the tape that was used to reinforce the Project Mogul radar reflectors. These had been made by a toy company that, because of wartime materials shortages, used novelty tape they had in stock. Marcel Jr, however, was not won over, and continued to insist that the debris was "something that came from another civilisation". *Jesse Marcel Jr, Roswell witness, born Houston, Texas 30 Aug 1936; died Helena, Montana 23 Aug 2013, aged 76.*

### HAJI

was part of the on- and off-screen coterie of the high camp film director Russ Meyer, taking a lead role in his cult classic *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* (1966). Claiming Filipino and British parentage, she had oriental eyes and spoke in a curious continental accent, sometime accompanied by stereotypical Italianate gestures. Her accent led to a misunderstanding during the making of her second film for Meyer, *Good Morning... And Goodbye!* (1967), in which she played The Sorceress, clad in the





type of cave girl bikini Raquel Welch had recently popularised. Asking what she had in what appeared to be a box of cookies, the assistant director George Costello misheard her reply as a "snack", and put his hand inside – only to find a live snake. Terrified, Costello hurled it away, and in Haji's words: "The snake landed on the benches and was slithering on the seats. Everybody cleared out." When interviewed, she announced: "I came visiting here with my family from another galaxy, and we landed in Quebec," adding: "You Earthlings are very strange people."

**Barbarella Catton ('Haji'), exotic dancer and film actress, born Quebec 24 Jan 1946; died California 9 Aug 2013, aged 67.**

## MARGHERITA HACK

A leading Italian astrophysicist known as the "Lady of the Stars", Hack contributed to the fields of stellar spectroscopy and radio astronomy; the asteroid 8558 Hack is named after her. The author of more than 200 scientific papers, in 1964 she became director of the Trieste observatory – the first woman to hold such a position in Italy. She was equally well known as an atheist, feminist and vegetarian who helped fight a successful campaign to legalise abortion and championed gay rights, animal rights, stem-cell research and the right to euthanasia. To her the only God worth the name was the Higgs boson. "When I pass away," she liked to say, "if I meet God, I will tell Him I was wrong."

In 2005 she declared that the blood of San Gennaro, held in a phial in Naples Cathedral where it 'miraculously' liquefies in regular ceremonies watched by thousands of the faithful, was a hoax. The substance, she decided, was hydrated iron oxide or FeO (OH), which has the characteristics of blood, forming a dark brown gel that liquefies when shaken – a property known as thixotropic. (See "Seeing Red: The Blood Miracles of Naples" by Bob Rickard, **FT65:36-41**). In fact, the thixotropic explanation was first offered in 1906, and as the Church authorities forbid chemical analysis, it remains no more than a hypothesis.  
**Margherita Hack, astrophysicist, born Florence 12 June 1922; died 29 June 2013, aged 91.**

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



Twenty-eight people have died and hundreds were injured in a wave of attacks by giant hornets in central China. Victims described being chased for hundreds of metres and stung as many as 200 times. The insects can grow up to 2in (5cm). Most of the recent attacks were in remote rural wooded areas in southern Shaanxi. In the city of Ankang alone, 18 people died from the stings, and people in the cities of Hanzhong and Shangluo were also injured. The insects' highly toxic stings can lead to anaphylactic shock and renal failure. The attacks are a recurring problem in the area from May to as late as November. According to Ankang police, 36 people died in the city between 2002 and 2005. The issue has been particularly severe this year, possibly because of weather changes. *Guardian, Metro, 27 Sept 2013.*

**A cannabis farmer accidentally killed himself with a booby trap he had set up to protect his plants. Daniel Ricketts, 50, was killed on 1 September after drunkenly driving his quad bike into piano wire strung around his plantation in Albany County, New York State. He was thrown from his Honda Foreman, his head almost entirely severed. Hikers stumbled on his corpse. Police later found barbed wire and a leg trap used to catch coyotes surrounding the plants. A couple of weeks later, a dope dealer being chased by police in southern Brazil was fatally crushed by half a ton of cannabis when he braked sharply. *MX News (Sydney) 4 Sept; Sun, 17 Sept 2013.***

A gardener suffocated after becoming wedged between hay bales as he tried to retrieve his hat. The body of Gary Williams, 47, was found in an outbuilding in Gorran, Cornwall, in August 2012. He was vertical and upside down, jammed in the crevice between two piles of hay bales. A hat and belt were at the bottom of the gap. A toxicology report showed his blood alcohol was nearly twice the legal drink-drive limit. Inquest verdict: accident. *D.Telegraph, 25 July 2013.*

**An eight-year-old Russian girl was orphaned after her family was killed by gases emanating from rotting potatoes. Maria Chelysheva's father, mother, brother and grandmother died after entering a cellar where they had stored spuds for the winter. This was in Laishevo, in the Russian republic of Tatarstan, on the Volga River. Relatives are caring for the girl, who is**

**inconsolable after her loss. Her father, law professor Mikhail Chelyshev, 42, was the first to enter the cellar, where he fainted and died from the noxious fumes. His worried wife Anastasia, 38, went to look for him in the dark and was also overcome. Next, the couple's 18-year-old son Georgy investigated and suffered the same fate. Anastasia's mother Iraida, 68, called a neighbour to say there was something suspicious and to seek help; but before assistance arrived, she also went into the cellar, where she collapsed and died. As she went in, she left the door open, allowing the fumes (presumably carbon dioxide) to disperse. *MX News (Sydney), D.Mail, 4 Sept 2013.***

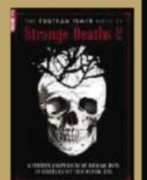
Seven workers died on 7 April 2013 after being trapped inside a cistern at a brewery in Mexico City while doing maintenance work. Investigators were looking into whether the Grupo Modelo workers had died from inhaling toxic fumes. *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 9 April 2013.*

**Andy Batty, 48, was helping his daughter Catherine, 17, ride her pony in a field near Brixham, Devon, on 21 July when he was bitten by a horse fly. The 6ft (1.8m) engineer and rugby player went into anaphylactic shock and died before paramedics arrived. An allergy consultant said: "Death from a horse fly bite is incredibly rare." *D.Mail, 26 July 2013.***

Paul Inman, 30, a care home resident in Haworth, West Yorkshire, consumed three litres (5.3 pints) of cola a day and drank himself to death in March 2012. He suffered from Asperger's syndrome and walked to shops to buy cola many times a day. He would also down glasses of water to quench his apparent thirst. The huge quantities of fluid caused his lungs to swell to four times their normal weight, and he died in his sleep. He had a large pulmonary oedema, which meant the fluid in his lungs greatly restricted his breath. An even greater coke habit (10 litres/17.6 pints a day) killed Natasha Harris in New Zealand in 2010 **[FT300:27]**. *D.Telegraph, Metro, 30 May 2013.*

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### RUN FOR THE HILLS!

In Bob Rickard's summary of the alien invasion panic that followed Orson Welles radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* in 1938 (FT120:40-43) sociologist Robert Bartholomew says: "It's not a question of if there will be another scare [like *WoW*] but when". The power of radio to trigger the imagination and generate rumours about threats from aliens or terrorists was apparent in August when an innocent broadcast in northern Alabama triggered off a minor scare. In a play to introduce a new format, Star 94.9 appeared to have been taken over by extraterrestrials who wanted to know what type of music appealed to their listeners. In a series of adverts, the station in Tuscombina was interrupted by a stream of static and robotic voices. Then a voice with a faint British accent identified itself as an alien commander and began a conversation with an underling who offered information about the residents of Alabama and Tennessee. Although the stunt lacked the menace of the 1938 broadcast and the aliens said they had 'come in peace', it triggered off a series of calls to the police, schools and to the station itself from worried residents. And as the anxiety migrated onto social media, the alien invasion story morphed into a rumour about a bomb threat to local schools, leading some parents to keep their children at home. In the aftermath, Sheriff Ronnie May filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission that regulates radio broadcasts, but the station's programme director, Brian Rickman, apologised, saying "we had no intention to create any problems or to create concerns about schools; we could not have foreseen this happening".

*Daily Mail*, 1 Sep; *Times*, 4 Sep 2013.

### INTERCEPT UFO!

News that the CIA has finally acknowledged the existence of Area 51 near Groom Lake and its role in the development and testing of Black Project aircraft (FT306:4) has thrown new light on the enduring secrecy that continues to surround some Cold War UFO scares. The newly declassified sections of the CIA's official history covering the deployment of the U2 to RAF Lakenheath in Suffolk contains a surprise that throws new light on the political background to the famous radar UFO incident



at the USAF-tenanted base in August 1956 (see FT123:28-32). Four of the spyplanes were shipped to the East Anglian airbase in April that year, but the project was so secret that even Prime Minister Anthony Eden was kept in the dark – he was told there was only one of the planes on British soil. Eden lost his nerve as the Suez crisis loomed on the horizon and in June the U2 was moved to a base in West Germany. But before that could happen, the declassified history reveals, a previously unknown UFO panic helped to bring matters to a head. On 18 May 1956, one of the U2s, on a training flight from Lakenheath, "inadvertently penetrated the British radar network", leading the RAF to scramble fighters. We have interviewed a former national serviceman who was present at RAF Neatishead when this tense stand-off occurred. He said because the U2 was a classified project the RAF fighter crews were ordered to intercept and shoot down the intruder 'UFO'. This order was rescinded only at the very last moment. These new revelations help to explain not only the secrecy surrounding the UFO incident that occurred at Lakenheath later that summer, but also other 'shoot down' stories such as that of USAF Sabre pilot Milton Torres, who was given similar orders by a RAF ground controller later in the same year (see FT242:34-5). Quite simply, as aviation journalist Chris Pocock put it, at the height of the Cold War the U2 was "absolutely top secret [and] they had to hide everything about it".

<http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB434/>

### DRONING ON

Our summary of the final set of UFO files released by The National Archives in July

(FT304:29) reported how a retired British scientist had confessed his role as the source of a number of 'sightings'. Speaking exclusively to FlyingSaucery, Professor Ronald Austin, former chief project engineer for Westland helicopters, has revealed how his team designed a prototype 'stealthy unmanned copter' for use by the British Army in the 1970s. The Sprite – Surveillance Patrol Reconnaissance Intelligence Target Designation Electronic Warfare – began flying at night in 1982. It was test-flown in secret from its

base in Berkshire and at night over Salisbury Plain, which borders the UFO haunted town of Warminster. The UAV carried a high tech payload including a thermal imaging system, cameras and lasers that were designed for use in a variety of security roles, including surveillance and remote detection of landmines. "Because we were flying at night the Civil Aviation Authority required us to carry navigation lights – two green and two red – that reflected on the circular body," Professor Austin explained. "It could fly backwards and forwards and hover close to the ground so it gave rise to several UFO sightings... but when it was flying at night we always let the police and air traffic control know where we were going to be operating in advance". Austin says the Sprite took part in successful trials both in the UK and in the USA and Sweden, before the project was cancelled in 1991. At one stage, it was used by a private company to inspect electricity power lines – a common location for UFO sightings. Today, the single surviving prototype can be seen on display in the Museum of Berkshire Aviation near Reading. <http://home.comcast.net/~aero51/html/exhibits/sprite.htm>



PROFESSOR RONALD AUSTIN

## THE REAL DEAL 3: EASTERN DELIVERY

As reported last month, on 19 April 1984 a UFO made a landing on the runway of an East Anglian airfield before 'streaking' towards a landing Cessna on an intersecting runway, a near-miss drama witnessed by three air traffic controllers in their tower.

The MoD filed the report without investigating, but we had the names of all three witnesses via the senior controller (Andy), who immediately contacted Peter Johnson about the sighting. However, from the start it was clear that the other two witnesses – Stan – the ATC who was controlling the landing Cessna – and Carol – the assistant ATC who became distressed after witnessing the near disaster through binoculars – were less willing to go public as they feared ridicule and a negative impact on their careers.

Stan never replied to requests for his version of events. Carol broke her silence in 1987 and wrote to Johnson saying that she now thought she hadn't been in the control tower – although Andy named her specifically straight after the event. Moreover, she further adds to the puzzle by saying that she *did* have a sighting from the tower at the same airfield – also alongside Andy. But he does not recall that sighting, just as she denies memory of the 1984 one!

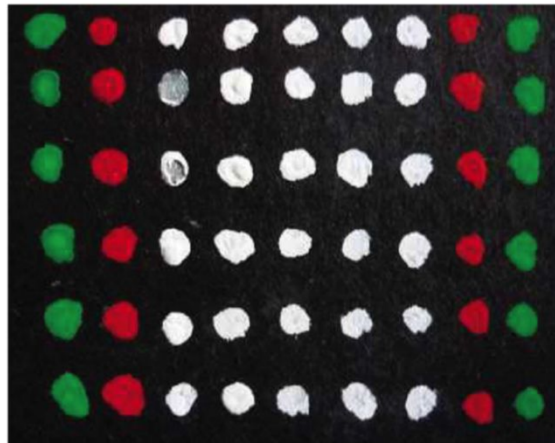
Carol's other sighting occurred in the mid-to-late 1970s, and was of "a round object that appeared as if hovering above the taxiway in front of the control tower. It moved along the taxiway (above it) towards the east where it suddenly disappeared. The object was round with lights coming out at different angles all over it... the size of a football and bronze in colour."

There are some similarities with the 1984 case, but obvious differences. However, Carol politely declined to go any further or fill in a report form, saying: "I can't explain what I saw. I definitely saw it, but it is so long ago now that I can't even remember the time of year let alone which year it was."

I worked with an air traffic control officer who had manned civil and military airfields in the UK (including Heathrow). He had also been involved in his own radar/visual sighting and I hoped that he might put these ATC at ease given his lengthy experience. He eventually made a tentative suggestion that the UFO might have been a Sun flare reflecting off the canopy of the incoming Cessna as it curved its path onto the landing runway.

He also told me how he had witnessed an incident "when a DC-3 turned left after take off – a streak of sunlight ran along the polished wing giving the impression of a bright light moving rapidly to the right – and within minutes we received several calls in the tower asking if we had seen the brilliant object pacing the aircraft – most callers being insistent that they had seen *both* the object and the aircraft and they were 'well apart'."

He expected his idea to be shot down once Andy read his hypothesis and added that he



## Sandra said it was lit up like a fairground in the sky

was in no way questioning the judgement or integrity of those involved. Though the lengthy duration of the sighting and wide degree of motion reported for the UFO might argue against this possibility, we submitted this analysis to the witnesses. Despite a couple of reminders, we heard no more.

Another option I explored was that of a toy balloon. During June 1991 there was a case involving a Britannia Airways Boeing 737 descending through 8,000ft (2,400m) over Berkshire. The crew reported a "yellow/orange" object with a "wrinkled" surface that "rushed past" the jet in close proximity. CAA investigations considered the possibility of a "toy balloon" like those purchased at fairgrounds. These have been known to reach several thousand feet but are no more than a foot or so across. It is less clear whether such balloons could execute a 'touch and go' on a runway, as reported in 1984; or, indeed, be so well observed from a distance of half a mile.

However, our most plausible hypothesis was for an accidental intrusion by military hardware. East Anglia was awash with RAF and USAF air bases and one possibility was that a military aircraft had mistakenly attempted to land at what it thought was its home base before realising the error and taking off. Of course, the witnesses saw no aircraft via binoculars and had called a nearby RAF base immediately afterwards. However, the ATC did not contact USAF bases.

Examples of aircraft making attempted landings at the wrong airport are known – particularly in a country like the UK, where several can be grouped into a relatively small area. Moreover, there is evidence that this period in April 1984 featured military exercises on the east coast, with reports from various locations between 14-25 April describing the presence of low-flying jets with unidentified

objects nearby.

Perhaps the most interesting of these sightings was reported to me from less than 18 hours before the airport landing case. It came from two witnesses who could not then have known about that unpublicised incident. Their sighting was made alongside a different air base in the same region – USAF Lakenheath.

Sandra (a science graduate) was the main witness (her husband was driving and missed most of it). They were heading towards Thetford and Norwich for an Easter weekend stay. It was dark as they passed Lakenheath,

and they heard no sounds of any active aircraft. They initially reported seeing "a pair of lights like a car's headlights" in the "11 o'clock position" that looked as if "they were travelling downhill". Given their location on the A1065 just past the airfield, I believe this was a landing aircraft (possibly an F-111) on the runway. However, as they moved further north-north-east beyond the airfield perimeter things became stranger.

Sandra reports that as they drove through a wooded area on both sides of the road she saw "a square formation" at twice the height of the trees. It was very large, yet completely silent. Her sketch (above) reveals that there were lines of green and red lights on both edges and rows of white lights in the middle. She said it was lit up like a fairground in the sky. This large 'object' passed them by slowly and crossed the road behind as they drove away. They saw it, or an identical object, shortly after as they continued. Moments after they lost sight, they entered the village of Brandon. It was now 9.40pm and the sighting had lasted 5-10 minutes.

On Saturday 21 April, they drove past the site in daylight. The airfield was deserted and there were no structures that they might have misidentified if lit up at night. Returning home the day after Easter they saw the base now alive with activity, and even from within the car these aircraft were very noisy.

What they saw that night is unclear, but their testimony confirms two things – the winding down of military activity over that Easter and the level of activity before and after. Sandra did say that her UFO most resembled a gigantic airship covered in lights but it would have been "too low for comfort over the woods".

A few years later I visited Lakenheath (for other reasons) and asked if they had ever used airships. With a smile I was told, off the record, that – "we had one that caused a UFO flap a few years ago". I was informed that an illuminated, remotely piloted target drone went out of control on a test and flew far beyond the base perimeter.

Was this what Sandra witnessed that night? And is it coincidence that the following afternoon, not far away, something made an unexpected visit to another airfield? Either way this case remains intriguing.

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# FORTEAN TOP 40

To celebrate four decades of **FORTEAN TIMES**, we asked a panel of contributors past and present to dust off their back issues and pick their all time favourite stories. **PLUS:** surprising celebrity endorsements, great covers and an extra-special instalment of **HUNT EMERSON'S** Phenomenomix recalling the birth of *FT* in the heady 1970s...

## 1. GEF THE TALKING MONGOOSE (FT269, 2010)



There are so many candidates, but the one that came to mind was Christopher Josiffe's piece on Gef the Talking

Mongoose, a remarkable animal apparently at loose on the Isle of Man in the 1930s. I would be tempted to call it a meditation on the elusive nature of reality and the strangeness of human experience, but, like Gef himself, it treads too lightly for that. A perfect fortean piece.

SIMON WILSON

Because I've been reading *FT* since it was still called *The News* back in the mid-1970s, amnesia claims articles from the distant

past. The latest in recent memory, however, would be Christopher Josiffe's "Gef the Talking Mongoose". His revelatory inquiry seems to validate a story mind-boggling enough to rattle the hardest fortean's sense of the possible. If it was a truly anomalistic episode, it is one that fits no category – then or now.

JEROME CLARK

Choosing a favourite *FT* story is nearly impossible... So many years of amazing work! David Clarke's investigation of the curse of the 'Crying Boy' paintings (July 2008) was brilliant. Adam Davies's piece on the Mongolian Death Worm (April 2004) was a classic. Karl Shuker's 2011 piece on the archangel Gabriel's feather left me gobsmacked with intrigue. Jan Bondeson never fails to inform and fascinate. On and on I could

go, but if forced to pick my all-time favourite it would have to be Chris Josiffe's piece on Gef the Talking Mongoose. I'd read a few accounts of this bizarre talking mongoose/poltergeist/mass hysteria/hoax/whatever-the-hell-it-was, but this was by far the best and most interesting. Well written, well researched and funny as well, it's a fortean classic. Whenever I'm asked about the case, I always refer people to this article.

BEN RADFORD

## 2. SHROUD IN MYSTERY (FT51, 1988)

Brimful with goodies though *FT* always is, to us there was no contest when it came to our most inspirational article. It has to be Mike Dash's 'Shrouded in Mystery' in the 15th Anniversary edition, which came out at the time we first met. Beginning "So, it's a fake..." it reports on

the then recent results of the carbon dating tests on the Turin Shroud. Dash made the highly pertinent comment, "From the fortean point of view, the verdict of "fake" is a beginning, not an end," going on to quote Fort himself: "When I see that a thing has been explained, I go on investigating." It was an axiom that we took very much to heart. While to many the alleged holy relic was now of no further interest, it spurred us to ask: "Who could possibly have created this extraordinary fake? And how?" These questions led to our first book, in which we argued that the faker was none other than Leonardo da Vinci, kickstarting our joint writing career, now in its 24th year. And although we had many helping hands along the way, we owe our biggest and most enduring debt to *FT*.

LYNN PICKNETT & CLIVE PRINCE

ILLUSTRATION: GÉRARD GOFFAUX

### 3. GHOSTWATCH (FT67, 1993)



“What Possessed Parkinson? BBC’s ‘Ghostwatch’ Hoax Unravelling” exclaimed the cover under a typically iconic and colourful Hunt Emerson representation of said presenter and TV show. Still bi-monthly and only recently upgraded to its current size, here was (for me, anyway) *FT*’s first flirtation with a mainstream popular representation of the paranormal. Mainstream maybe, but the article in question still kept the magazine’s integrity, balance of view, depth of analysis and sense of the irreverent which has always been its staple. The issue itself was full to the brim with everything we’ve come to love from the joys of harvesting Damned Data – a teenager miraculously surviving being impaled through the jaw by a fence spike, a rapist with two penises, cryptids, rumoured discoveries of Hitler and Romanov remains.

STU FERROL

### 4. ANGELS OF THE BATTLEFIELD (FT170, 2003)



The Angels of Mons investigation by David Clarke took a classic and much-loved national myth and subjected it to serious research and the right dose of fortean scepticism.

TED HARRISON

### 5. BIRDMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE (FT17, 1976)

Written by Bob Rickard, this was the article that turned me on to Owlman, and basically set the whole crazy world of the Centre for Fortean Zoology a-going.

JONATHAN DOWNES

Thumbing through my runs of *FT* there’s so much that is excellent, thought-provoking and inviting to re-read. My favourite article? Why one? I could easily list over a dozen or more. But then, flicking through the pages of old issues, I ran across ‘Birdmen Of The Apocalypse’ by Bob Rickard. It perfectly captures what forteana was for me back then, as a novice: a sense of wonder and a creeping feeling that the world was far stranger than I could ever imagine. All in

typewriter font and kitchen table layout; this was how forteana came to me in the pre-Internet days – as urgent telex messages from the great Sargasso Sea in the sky.

THEO PAIJMANS

### 6. AMERICA MYSTICA

(FT32-41, 1980-83)

I first got into *FT* around 1983, when I discovered a pile in Free-wheel, an alternative bookshop in Norwich where I was helping put together a fanzine. One of the things that really caught my attention was the ‘America Mystica’ column by Michael Hoffman. Full of lexilinking serial killers, deep, sprawling conspiracies, weird rumour and twilight language, it was written in an almost unreadably compacted, crepuscular, paranoid prose style that made it bizarre, creepy and alluring at the same time. It was one of the key things that got me hooked and I still look back fondly on it, at least partly because it epitomises the early small press incarnation of *FT* and is the sort of thing that would be too weird for people these days.

IAN SIMMONS

### 7. THE RED DRAGON STAMPS

(FT48, 1987)

A tale involving a Welsh book collector who disappeared from Swansea in 1928 only to turn up days later in Cardiff with no explanation of his absence, as well as some penny ha’penny stamps bearing overprinted red dragons and a mysterious secret society called ‘The Natives of the Red Dragon’. I still find the story so surreal and so magical, in its combination of the gentle, the mundane and the extraordinary, that for me each reading is like immersing myself in a warm bath. I eventually had the chance to investigate and add a couple of extra details and a small correction. All right, it’s pretty hard to credit that it’s literally ‘true’. The best thing to do is simply to sit back and enjoy. I would add that the *most important* thing we’ve covered was the great Satanic Ritual Abuse panic of 1989-1991.

MIKE DASH

### 8. GREAT MOMENTS IN SCIENCE #18 (FT91, 1996)

The whole series by Hunt Emerson and Bob Rickard was brilliant, but this instalment was a personal highlight, all about the scaremongering pseudoscience surrounding the subject of “self-pollution” in Victorian Britain. The piece had a special nostalgic significance for me, as it manages to combine

the three great enthusiasms of my teenage years: comics, science and masturbation!

ANDREW MAY

### 9. KOESTLER’S LEGACY

(FT201, 2005)



An article that particularly impressed me was ‘Koestler’s Legacy’ by Paul Devereux. A thoroughly-researched look at the state of parapsychology research in the UK by a writer who really knows his stuff on this elusive and much misunderstood subject. I’m not too modest to mention that his piece inspired me to write a sequel (“One of Our Professors is Missing” in FT224, 2007) that opened a fair-sized can of worms in the letters pages; just as *FT* should do now and then.

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR

### 10. A SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS (FT228, 2007)

As one of those who initially encouraged Bob Rickard in launching *FT*, it should come as no surprise that I’ve chosen an article describing a classic era: flower-power and John Michell playing Pied Piper to the hippie generation, whose cross-fertilisation of flying saucers, leys and drugs sent shockwaves from the counterculture through conventional thinking that are still being felt today. To mark that exciting period, I nominate Andy Roberts’s perceptive article.

PAUL SCREETON

### 11. THE WOLLATON PARK GNOMES (FT31, 1980)

A group of children had reported to their head teacher the sighting of some small elf-like beings driving around a park near Nottingham in miniature bubble-cars. This is a typically quirky *Fortean Times* tale that resonated because I had just recorded a similar case from the same location. I started mapping window areas where odd events seemed to clump together and pondering the interface between absurdity and reality – pretty much the purpose of *FT*, of course. I was soon investigating an equally ridiculous episode, just a mile from my own home, which linked a group of youths, Agatha Christie and some Ninja dwarves. As this story reminds us, our world is full of extraordinary things hiding in plain sight if we bother to look. The impossible hap-

pens – often – and the apparently ridiculous is just an everyday occurrence in forteana.

JENNY RANGLES

In so far as I can pick one item from the vast cornucopia that is *FT*, I have to choose the 1979 case of the gnomes of Wollaton Park, Nottingham. Have to nominate this one, since I once dallied with a girl there and would have been put off my stride had these little fellows appeared at a critical moment. Did they speak? If so, presumably in gnomish utterances.

BARRY BALDWIN

### 12. FOOD FOR THOUGHT

(FT30, 1979)

My favourite fortean phenomenon is the ridiculous coincidence. In the very first entry in the ‘Dictionary of the Damned’ we read this: “...(see FT30:28). On the Santa Anna Freeway, Los Angeles, a truck carrying carrots collided with one carrying olive oil to produce what the Highway Patrol called ‘the biggest carrot salad ever’. Not long afterward, a three-course dinner was served on the George Washington Bridge in New York, when a truck loaded with dressed chickens crashed into another carrying barbeque sauce. In the resulting pile-up were wagons containing preserved fruit and coffee. But where was the brewer’s dray?”

THE HIEROPHANT’S APPRENTICE

### 13. KIDNEY DEVILS

(FT138, 2002)



It’s almost impossible to choose a favourite *FT* story. I recall buying a copy when I was 11 or so and being amazed and probably somewhat confused by the contents; but this was the end of the Seventies and the great era of fortean pop culture – werewolves on *Nationwide* and so on – and I was immediately hooked. I still get that excitement when I pick up the magazine today. I’m reluctant to choose a single story, but if I have to, and off the top of my head, I remember Ben Radford’s ‘Kidney Devils’, an excellent piece on organ thieves; also, anything by Jan Bondeson is going to be great; and, of course, the letters pages.

JACK SARGEANT

### 14. ALEISTER CROWLEY

(FT231, 2008)

I’ve gone back to the special Aleister Crowley issue more than



once for ideas and information (not for the purposes of emulation, you understand!) I'm not a Crowleyite in

any way, but I must admit that his story makes so many fascinating connections that this issue sparked all sorts of "where shall I look next?" ideas. I particularly relished Ian Simmons's piece on Crowley's drinking habits at the Fitzroy Tavern (an old stamping ground of my own), though I have never mixed the cocktail or "seen God". Perhaps my favourite was Paul Newman's longer article on Ka Cox, "The Tregertan Horror". It has all the elements of a really gripping period drama plus added nastiness of various kinds. Why has nobody filmed this?

GAIL-NINA ANDERSON

## 15. CLASSICAL CORNER

(FT133-, 2000-PRESENT)

I think it'd be impossible for me to pick out a single favourite story when we've published so many wonderful ones, particularly with an awful memory like mine! So I'd have to nominate a series, which would be Barry Baldwin's 'Classical Corner'. His erudition is astonishing, his style entertaining, his humour often outrageous. And it's amazing that he's managed to keep it fresh over so many episodes. I've loved every single instalment, and hope to read many more.

STEVE MOORE

## 16. MOTHER NATURE'S JUMBO JET



One of the *FT* stories that really sticks in my mind dates back to the 1980s when I was just starting to subscribe.

It was a piece by Doc Shiels on his elephant squid theory of the Loch Ness monster. I remember thinking it was the most ridiculous thing I had ever heard, so I started writing my very first letter to *FT* with a (to my mind, very elegant and erudite) demolition of his idea. Apparently, *FT*'s editors had shown a copy of my letter to Doc Shiels, and he was going to write an answer to it, but when the time came for publication, they couldn't find my letter. As I was still using a typewriter back then, neither could I, as I'd never

bothered to make a copy! And so my career in cryptozoology was off to a rather shaky start.

LARS THOMAS

## 17. THE CARPET SALESMAN

(FT32, 1980)

I'd choose the letter called 'The Carpet Salesman' (reprinted in *IHTM* vol 1, p145), from Ron Parker. It's about a family who bump into a stranger in a graveyard. The stranger seems genuinely upset because he's discovered a tombstone with his exact name, place and date of birth, only one century earlier. The date of death was exactly that day, too, but also one century earlier. Part of the reason why I love this story is because of the suggestion of a dead doppelgänger – even more ominous than a living or a ghostly one. That foreboding aspect is terrifying, and reminds me of one of my favourite tales, 'She Was Afraid of Upstairs' by Joan Aiken. But if this wasn't enough, there's also a twist: the family return to the graveyard, but despite their efforts they can't find the grave. So is it about doppelgängers and omens of death, or about ghosts or parallel dimensions?

MARIA JESÚS PÉREZ CUERO

## 18. ANIMAL MACHINES

(FT186, 2004)

I particularly liked the article by Ian Simmons about 'Animal Machines'. He notes BF Skinner's research into using pigeons to guide missiles. Not too surprisingly, the US military preferred to develop radar systems instead. Makes you wonder what things would look like today if we used animals to operate missiles and transport systems rather than electronics.

NIGEL WATSON

## 19. GREAT MOMENTS IN SCIENCE #12

(FT85, 1996)

Pioneering chemist Lavoisier explaining why meteorites cannot exist: "No stones can fall from the sky, because there ARE no stones in the sky". A piece of scientific fact that was known by everyone except those who saw meteorites fall. An example of speaking without bothering to check the evidence; and when you follow the evidence it opens up new worlds. Investigating claims (no matter how unorthodox) and seeing where the evidence leads. This one cartoon strip sums up for me the problems *fortean*s have when battling against those convinced of their version of the truth.

GORDON RUTTER

## 20. PHANTOM ATTACKERS

(FT45, 1985)



*FT* is the place that, as a child, I first learned about such entertaining things as the Texas Smurf panic and David Icke's

entirely reasonable belief that the Queen is a giant lizard, so it's hard to choose a favourite article – but a pair of pieces about the obscure topic of phantom attackers and sieges by Bob Rickard and Ron Westrum stand out for me. Westrum's article detailed two bizarre incidents in which the occupants of isolated houses came under siege from what appeared to be gangs of uncatchable and unkillable FBI agents and armed drug-dealers, whilst Bob Rickard's companion piece drew parallels with other isolated homesteads being supposedly attacked by apparent 'entities' as strange and unlikely as Bigfoot, the famous Hopkinsville 'goblins' and even a giant black horse! I also really liked the letter in *FT*177 in which one reader very politely asked the editor if he would mind writing him a complete list of every single instance of strange phenomena that had ever happened throughout all of recorded history. I'd rather like one of those too – but, in its continuing absence, *FT* is surely the next best source of weirdness legally available."

SD TUCKER

## 21. KEEL'S THUNDERBIRD PHOTO

(FT65, 1992)

There are so many wonderful things in *FT*. Not just serious cultural history (David Sutton's 'How the Nazis Stole Christmas' in *FT*218) but staggeringly beautiful things (gigantic Vietnam cave with a whole forest in it in *FT*280). And crazy things: psychiatrist convinces patient she was a cannibal satanic priestess and has to pay \$10 million damages in *FT*116. And loveable crazy things (stone in bucket worshipped in New Guinea in *FT*224). And coincidences and pygmies and airships and frogs and baroque osuaries and terrific book reviews.

But for reasons I barely understand, there's a personal favourite moment in an interview with John Keel when he talks about a lost photograph of a giant bird. Even though I think he's unreliable, I like it, perhaps because I've got half-lost stuff like this in my own head, and just for the

atmosphere of the description: "...many people remember seeing it, and yet no one has been able to find it. I don't remember the source. My feeling is that it was in a men's magazine like *Saga* or *True*... in my mind I can see the entire photograph. A group of men standing in front of a barn door. The caption said they were college professors, but they were all dressed like cowboys. They were seedy types. Some wearing top hats. Nailed to the barn was a huge winged creature – looked like a pterodactyl or a giant eagle or something..."

PHIL BAKER

## 22. MOTHMAN SPECIAL

(FT156, 2002)



My favourite 'story' was the "Mothman Prophecies" special in March 2002 that tied in with the release of

Mark Pellington's movie based on John Keel's classic 1975 book. Fortunately, I could rely on *FT*'s inspired mix of features, background pieces, Rick Moran's visit to Point Pleasant, interviews with Keel (who sadly died in 2009) to make up for the disappointment I felt on seeing the movie. Keel's book remains a classic and it introduced me to *fortean*a and ufology as a teenager, so I have a lot to thank him for.

DAVID CLARKE

## 23. IDI AMIN & THE TALKING TORTOISE

(FT27, 1978)

I think my favourite story must be the small news item on the talking tortoise in the Uganda of Idi Amin: it predicted an end to Amin's regime, so he sent out troops to kill it. This sums up everything – sheer wonder, impossibility, social importance – that *fortean* research means to me. And you can go on speculating about whether this was an alien, an intelligent aquatic being or a Bigfoot in armour. And the story never fails to make people giggle when you tell it to them!

ULRICH MAGIN

## 24. A NEW SCIENCE OF LIFE

(FT37, 1982)

My favourite article goes back to 1982, when Bob Rickard interviewed Rupert Sheldrake about his book *A New Science of Life*. Rupert's theories and iconoclastic approach, challenging the contemporary scientific paradigm

## We love FT!

"I discovered *FT* in its earliest incarnation, and watched, sometimes proudly, sometimes bemusedly, as it grew from being a little black and white collection of clippings of the odd into the foremost... whatever it is today. Full-colour, well-researched, gullible-sceptical-glorious assemblage of the facts and otherwise that Charles Fort described as the damned. Happy Birthday! May your fish continue ever to fall from the heavens."

NEIL GAIMAN, WRITER

"That quirky chronicle of the unknown"

DAILY TELEGRAPH

"The only magazine for news on aliens, ghosts and hairy kids"

KARL PILKINGTON, COMEDIAN

"Possibly the most entertaining publication on the planet"

WIRED

"My very favourite magazine in the world, material or otherwise"

ALAN MOORE, WRITER

"To describe it as probably the most remarkable magazine in the English speaking world is to be needlessly restrained"

EDINBURGH REVIEW

"I read the *Fortean Times* because it's a catalyst, not a portal."

RAT SCABIES, MUSICIAN

"No *FT*, no comment." I-D

"When I discovered this magazine 25 years ago it was nothing short of a revelation, and that sense of mind-expanding, heart-swelling joy has only increased with every single issue. I am eternally grateful to the brilliant, lovely folks who created and have sustained *FT* for the past 40 years: it has sustained me."

PAUL GIAMATTI, ACTOR

"A feast of the fascinating"

FINANCIAL TIMES

"I love *Fortean Times*. It's an objective but passionate journey into our strangest corners."

JON RONSON, WRITER

"Crackpot nutrag" VIZ

"My *Fortean Times* travels with me around the world. I read it from cover to cover and I love it."

URI GELLER, LEGEND

and related interests, were genuine eye-openers (for me, at least) which served to highlight why you should always keep an open mind and not simply accept everything you are told.

ROB GANDY

### 25. THE EXPEDITIONIST (FT70, 1993)

Off the top of my head, it would be Col John Blashford-Snell's discovery of massive elephants with domed heads in Royal Bardia National Park, northern India, with (black and white, in those days) photos – purely in terms of its capacity for engendering slack-jawed amazement, even among friends who liked to take the piss out of *FT* at the time.

MATT SALUSBURY

### 26. TESLA: MASTER OF LIGHTNING (FT217, 2006)



It's a tough choice, but the one which floats my boat is Mark Pilkington's "Tesla: Master of Lightning". Tesla straddles two camps; one

of genuine scientific innovation, contributing to the way we experience energy; yet there's much we still don't know about him – a true conundrum. And seeing David Bowie play him in a movie... well, there's fame for you!

ROY BAINTON

### 27. STOAT PACKS (FT214, 2006)

So many to choose from, but one that stands out for me is Merrily Harpur's 'Stoat Packs' piece from September 2006. "The triumphal capture dance; the funerary hiding of killed stoats; and the swarming of huge stoat armies." An article dealing in seemingly-fantastical natural phenomena, backed up by first-person accounts, and with scholarly citations for further research. This was for me a near-perfect *fortean* story, informing me of something deeply weird yet well-attested that I had hitherto been unaware of. Suitably complemented by Sibylle Delacroix's wonderfully sinister illustration, reminiscent of an eerie 1970s children's book, with hordes of snakey, Gef-like stoats rushing across the snow in pursuit of their human prey.

CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE

### 28. WILLIE NELSON JESUS (FT49, 1987)

My favourite story is the one about the face of Jesus appearing

on the wall of a church in Guatemala City. People worshipped it for two weeks before someone discovered it was an old Willie Nelson tour poster with a layer of whitewash over it.

HUNT EMERSON

### 29. THE MYSTERY OF GLOZEL (FT139, 2000)

This story about a mysterious underground Templar treasure trove (discovered, accidentally, by a cow) was perhaps the article we most enjoyed writing for *FT*. We've never forgotten our visit there to investigate.

LIONEL & PATRICIA FANTHORPE

### 30. THE FAKE, THE SNAKE & THE SCEPTIC (FT276, 2011)

As an avid collector of wildlife postage stamps, many years ago I purchased two different Romanian stamps depicting the statue of a bizarre horse-headed snake called Glycon. Ever since, I've wanted to uncover the story of this mystifying entity, which was not mentioned in any of the books on monsters and mythological creatures that I'd consulted. Then, a couple of years ago, opening the June 2011 issue of *FT*, all was revealed, courtesy of a fascinating article by that peerless investigator of historical esoterica, Steve Moore, in which Glycon was exposed as a talking serpent deity from the Roman Empire; or not, as the case may be!

KARL SHUKER

### 31. THE PLUMBER FROM LLASA (FT63, 1992)



As one who grew up (for want of a better phrase) reading and believing Lobsang Rampa's thrilling first-hand accounts of life as a Tibetan high mystic, Bob Rickard's 1992 article 'The Plumber From Llasa' hit me like a brick. So Rampa hadn't really had his third eye opened with a skewer. Or astrally-travelled from a secret chamber beneath the Potala to read the Akashic Records. He was actually Cyril Henry Hoskins, a plumber from Plympton in Devon, and he made it all up. Or did he? Despite being outed by the press after his first book in 1959, Hoskins wrote 13 more bestsellers and kick-started New Age literature. He still inspires the open-minded. Recently, after writing a less than favourable book review, I was lam-

basted by the author's disciples on the Internet. The *coup-de-grace* was a telling quote from Lobsang Rampa: "A journalist is someone who does not have the wits to write a good book."

STEVE MARSHALL

### 32. THE GHOST OF ARTHUR KEITH (FT41, 1983)

It appeared in the 10th anniversary of the mag and was by Peter Costello, but all the other facts about it are impossibly hazy. Broadly, it was about the fact that the very man who put in a lot of effort poo-pooing the Loch Ness monster was himself duped by the Piltown hoax. It seemed an exquisitely *fortean* paradox to me at the time.

MERRILY HARPUR

### 33. WHEN THE LIGHTS WENT OUT (FT293, 2012)



Alan Murdie's feature about the 'Black Monk of Pontefract' poltergeist case in 1960s Britain actually sent chills down my spine when I curled up to read it.

REV PETER LAWS

### 34. LAKE CHANY MONSTER (FT267, 2010)

My all time favourite story is the man-eating monster of Lake Chany in Siberia, which sounds like the plot of a B-movie horror. The large lake in southern Siberia is said to be the home of a dangerous serpentine creature that has killed and eaten 14 people in the last seven years alone, ramming and overturning boats and devouring those who fall into the water. People from the surrounding villages demanded a government investigation but were brushed aside. The authorities dismissed the deaths as drownings, despite eyewitness accounts of attacks and chewed human limbs washing ashore. So far there has been no proper investigation. I'd love to get out there and investigate!

RICHARD FREEMAN

### 35. FATEFUL FAYETTE (FT25, 1978)

I tend to view reading *FT* like being in a rainstorm of frogs from the heavens: how can we pick one frog over another by which to know our existence? They all contain clues to the harmony of living a *fortean* life. From Bob Rickard's brilliant insights on the



fortean view of the world in the first pages of *The News*, to Hunt Emerson's cartoons, to Jerry Clark's snippets about ufology, I have delighted in reading every issue. I've learned much from all the cryptozoology articles I've read in *FT*, and in writing my own contributions I've had some of my best intellectual fun. A favourite? I've always enjoyed the thoughtful mix of the fortean name-game, geodynamic thinking, crypto-tidbits, and phenomenal events in William Grimstad's (aka Jim Brandon's) "Fateful Fayette," in FT25. It directly stimulated my 'twilight language' thinking and my 1979 piece "Devil Names and Fortean Places".

LOREN COLEMAN

### 36. THE SKY IS ALIVE

(FT291, 2012)



Scott Deschaine's piece about giant amoebas living in the sky thrilled me in just the same way that paperbacks

about ESP and out-of-body experiences used to thrill me when I read them under the desk at school in my pre-teen, proto-fortean days. I've been subscribing to *FT* for about 30 years, and have read all the back issues, and still, now and then, it publishes something that gives me that wonderful, rushing sense of exhilaration. The magazine performs many jobs: it's a journal of weird record, a source of humour, a refuge for valuable and vulnerable eccentrics, a platform for controversy and debate, and occasionally, as in the series on Bogus Social Workers, an organ for investigating important matters which the mainstream, hampered by the paralysing fear of embarrassment that is a chief motor of conformity, is unable to investigate. But *FT* also makes your head go whoosh, and that's the bit I like best.

MAT COWARD

### 37. HUNT EMERSON'S HEADINGS (FT8, 1975)

After much deliberation, I have chosen Hunt Emerson's decades of artistic contributions as my favourite feature of *FT*. His first appearance was in *The News* #8. The editorial page stated: "From this issue on, you will note a new ingredient. Our Christmas present to you all is a set of about 30 headings illustrated by the

incomparable Hunt Emerson, to whom our thanks. The rest will appear as the data dictates." Several examples of his unique style of surrealistic cartoon appeared in this issue. They added just the right touch of levity and weirdness. Since then there has probably not been a single issue of *FT* that has not had his distinct art in it. Long may this association continue!

PETER HASSALL

### 38. ANOMALISTICS: A NEW FIELD OF INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY (FT36, 1982)

An article that grabbed me at the time was Roger W Westcott's *Anomalistics*, which could be said to have laid the groundwork for a Unified Field Theory of Forteana.

RICHARD SEARY

### 39. THE GHOSTS OF VERSAILLES (FT278, 2011)



The classic time-slip story of the ghosts of Versailles appears in just about every compendium of strange and un-

explained tales, usually without any questioning or analysis. Tom Heywood's account succinctly reminds us of the standard version of the story, runs through the historical background and looks at changes in the story over the years. It looks at both positive and negative reaction to the story, singling out the most useful critique before presenting his own conclusion in a fair and non-antagonistic manner: "Indeed, it's my belief that the research they enthusiastically embarked upon led them to unintentionally retrofit their experiences into the given historical backdrop." And then the delightful codicil: "In spite of my conclusions, I have a fond desire to be proved wrong." A perfectly-formed *FT* article!

DAVID V BARRETT

### 40. LOST IN SPACE (FT233, 2008)



The stories I remember most vividly are the ones I've illustrated, mainly because I'd have to read and reread them so many times while working out the composition. One that always sticks in my mind is Kris Hollington's 'Lost

In Space. What really happened to Russia's missing cosmonauts?', the cover feature from March 2008. It was an exemplary piece, well researched and written with such empathy that it ought to have come with a warning: You may have to spend an hour looking at kitten pictures on the Interweb to cheer yourself up afterwards. A chillingly sad story and the only *FT* feature to give me the willies.

ALEXANDER TOMLINSON

### AND FINALLY... THE MYSTERY STORIES

*As with most aspects of forteana, mysteries remain. Three of our esteemed panellists came up with stories that we just couldn't find in the FT archives, no matter how hard we searched. Did they dream them? Or can any readers shed some light and help locate these tantalising tidbits of weirdness?*

It was a small item that ran 10 or 15 years ago. The witness claimed to have visited an abandoned industrial site where he saw small, squid-like, creatures swimming around inside barrels of toxic waste. I think it was illustrated by an artist's conception of the pseudo-squids and the story probably contains an allusion to Cthulhu. The idea of little monsters evolving to fill the toxic waste niche appealed to my B-movie sensibilities.

ROBERT DAMON SCHNECK

There was something a few years ago that was so absurd that I still think about it all the time. It might have been in 'Strange Deaths'. It was an item about a man – I think it was in China, for some reason – who rode his bicycle so fast that his trousers caught fire. It was the essence of forteana – concise, highly improbable but not actually implausible, and makes the universe suddenly seem full of all kinds of previously unimagined accidents.

MIKITA BROTTMAN

There's so many to choose from, but the one that sticks in my mind is a news story about a haunted house in Lambeth. The ghost appeared as a glowing foetus floating in the kitchen and another time as a demonic Elvis Presley. It's a fine reminder that the paranormal is far more bizarre and absurd than a lot of people think it is.

SCOTT WOOD

## We love FT!

"I consider myself a fortean, and *Fortean Times* really is my favourite magazine."

WILLIAM GIBSON, WRITER

"Bringing wit and erudition to outlandish subject matter"

NEW YORK TIMES

"A veritable national institution, *FT* is a treasure trove of the unusual and unexplained and as a writer who likes odd and unfathomable things I look forward to every issue. What's more, it catalogues these things without the necessity of an overriding theorem, content to let its contents stand as a record of human contradictions, bafflement, wonder and silliness, delivered with a healthy tongue in its cheek and a scepticism balanced with an openness that's refreshing – and unique."

STEPHEN VOLK, WRITER

"The only thing predictable about *FT* is that it will be unpredictable"

BOSTON GLOBE

"When I was editor of the *Today* programme I cancelled our subscription to *Jane's Defence Weekly* and replaced it with *Fortean Times*."

ROD LIDDLE, JOURNALIST

"Concerned with the cosmic farts of a dyspeptic universe"

OBSERVER

"I really NEED *Fortean Times*. It's almost a comfort read for me, a monthly reassurance that the world is way stranger than most people think... and that I'm never going to run out of plots. Happy Birthday!"

PHIL RICKMAN, WRITER

"A model of elegant English... Its style cannot be faulted"

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY

"My husband [musician/composer Michael Penn] is a fucking maniac for the *Fortean Times* – we subscribe to it!"

AIMEE MANN, MUSICIAN

"The Old Curiosity Shop of journalism"

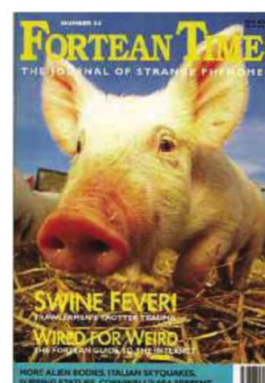
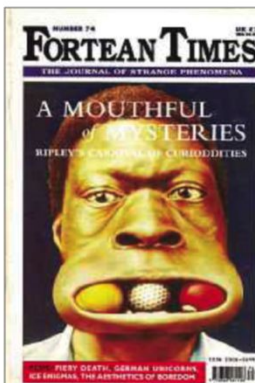
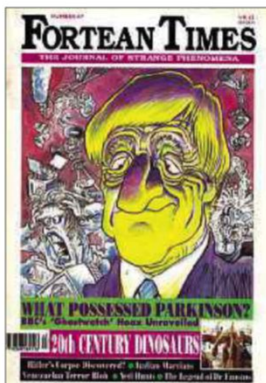
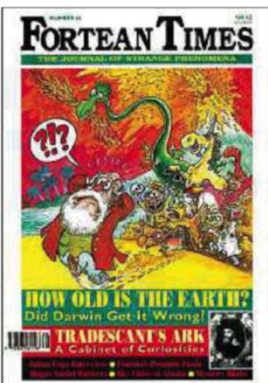
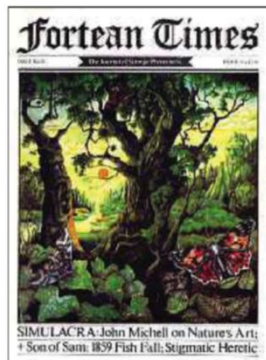
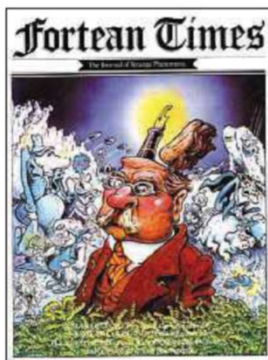
SPECTATOR

"A continual and amusing reminder of the strangeness of the world."

RUPERT SHELDRAKE, BIOLOGIST

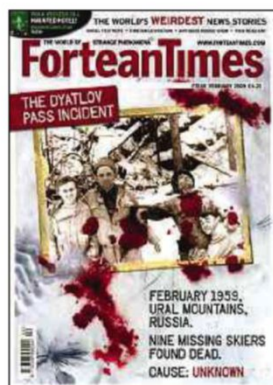
# ForteanTimes

The journey of **Fortean Times** from photocopied fanzine sold in local head shops to glossy newsstand magazine available across the globe has seen its visual style change dramatically over the years, but the challenge posed by each issue's cover has remained largely the same: how do you represent the mysterious, mythical, mystical, miraculous or monstrous? Alien big cats, falls of fish, Mongolian Death Worms or alien love children are not the stuff of



# through the years

your average publication, so we have always relied on the imagination and creativity of our cover artists. Over the years, many luminaries have graced our covers with their work, including Una Woodruff, Gilbert Shelton, Hunt Emerson, Alex Howe, Owen Richardson, Jamie Hewlett, Glyn Dillon, Mick Brownfield, Gérard Goffaux, John Sibbick, Quinton Winter, Jonathan Burton, Chris Smith and most of all Alex Tomlinson. Here are just a few of our favourites...



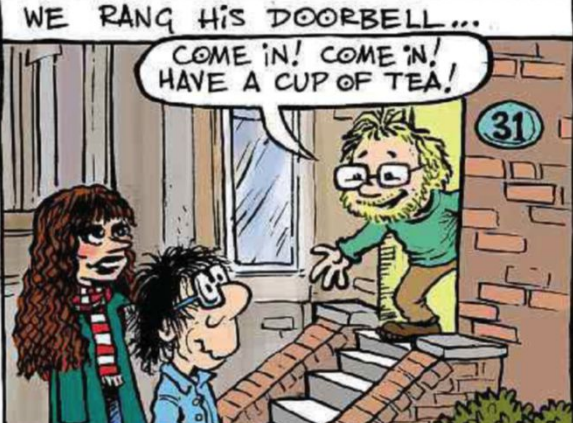
IN 1974 I WAS A SCRUFFY, IMPOVERISHED HIPPIE IN BIRMINGHAM, ENGLAND. I WAS 22, AND TENTATIVELY EMBARKING ON A LIFE AS AN UNDERGROUND CARTOONIST ... ASSISTED AND ENHANCED BY ALL THAT THE TIME COULD OFFER...



BIRMINGHAM, THEN, HAD A GROOVY HIPPIE BOOKSHOP CALLED JAPETUS, AND IT WAS THERE THAT I MET BOB RICKARD. I'D NEVER BEFORE MET ANYONE WHO PUBLISHED A MAGAZINE, AND I'D NEVER COME ACROSS THE SORT OF WEIRD STUFF THIS MAN WAS TALKING ABOUT... FLYING SAUCERS? FISH FALLS FROM THE SKIES?? LEY LINES??? WOOOOOW! THIS WAS OUTSIGHT!



MR. RICKARD INVITED ME TO VISIT HIM IN HIS FLAT IN MOSELEY - BIRMINGHAM'S STUDENT AND HIPPIE QUARTER. I LIVED NOT FAR AWAY IN BALSALL HEATH - BIRMINGHAM'S RED LIGHT SLEAZE DISTRICT - WITH MY GIRLFRIEND HERMIONE. HERE'S A DRAWING OF US I DID AROUND THAT TIME...



BOB HAD A VERY NICE ATTIC ROOM. THE STAIRS CAME OUT OF THE FLOOR, AND THE WOOD-SLATTED CEILING MADE IT LIKE AN UPTURNED BOAT... HE SAT US DOWN WITH MUGS OF TEA...

I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE MAGAZINE... HAVEN'T SEEN ANYONE FOR 6 DAYS... THERE'S SOME AMAZING MATERIAL...

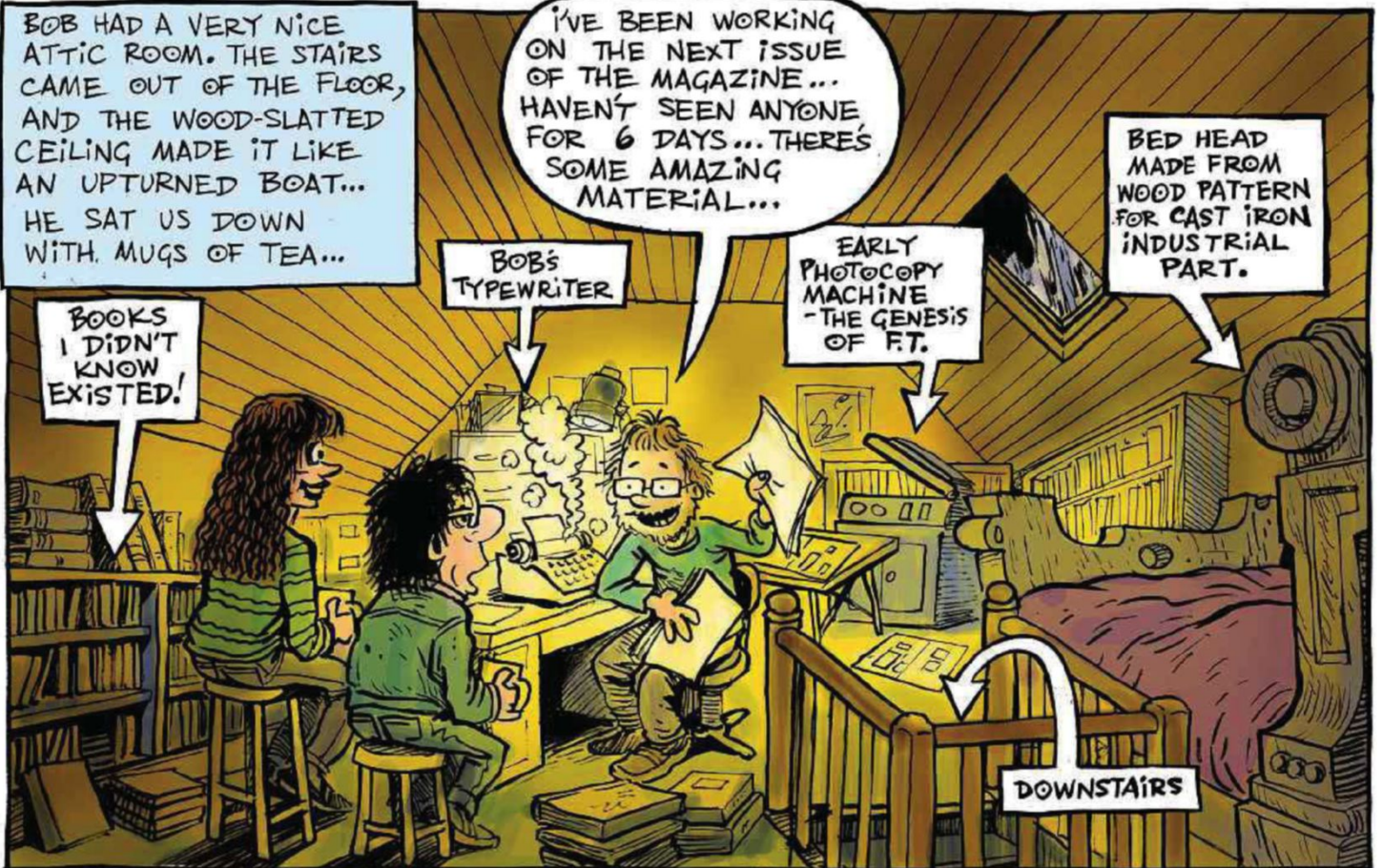
BED HEAD MADE FROM WOOD PATTERN FOR CAST IRON INDUSTRIAL PART.

BOOKS I DIDN'T KNOW EXISTED!

BOB'S TYPEWRITER

EARLY PHOTOCOPY MACHINE - THE GENESIS OF F.T.

DOWNSTAIRS



AND HE TOLD US ABOUT IT FOR THE NEXT THREE HOURS...



I WAS BAZONKA'D! AT SOME POINT BOB SUGGESTED I SHOULD DO SOME DRAWINGS FOR THE NEWS, AS THE MAGAZINE WAS CALLED AT THE TIME... WOULD I!!!!?

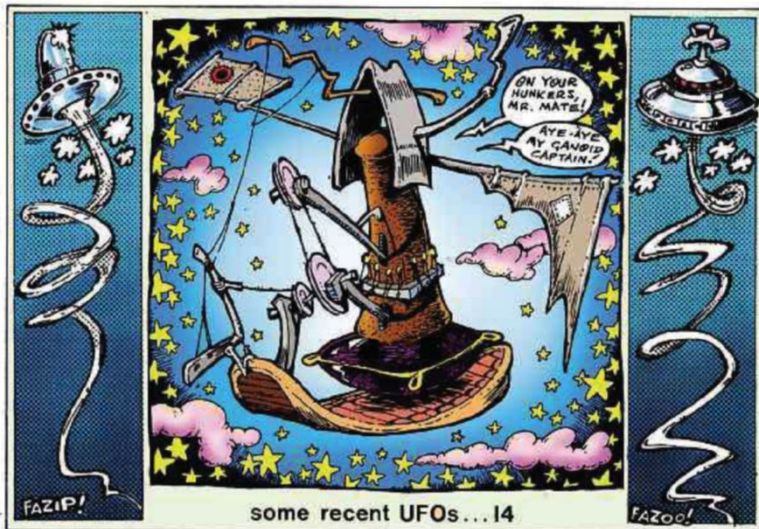
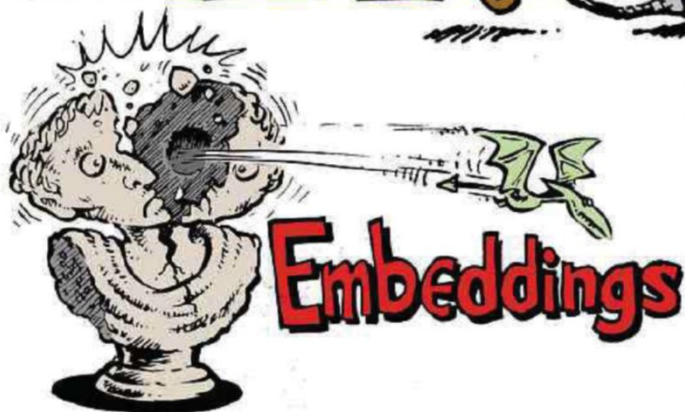
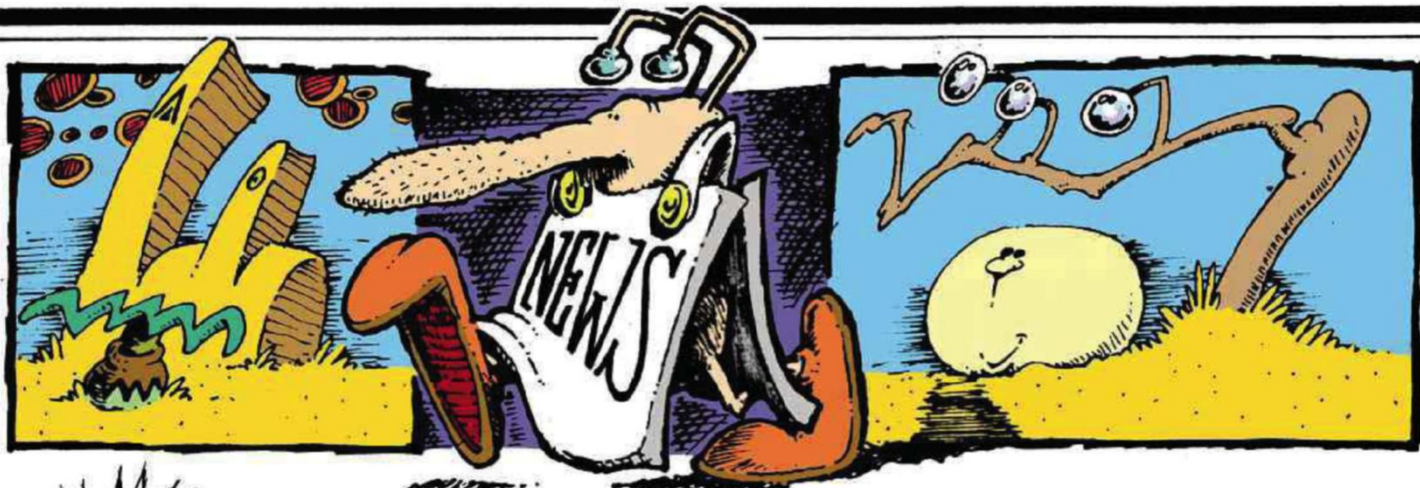


SO I MADE MY DEBUT IN ISSUE 8 OF THE NEWS, FEBRUARY 1975, WITH A SET OF ABOUT 30 "SUBJECT HEADINGS" TO GO WITH BOB'S COLUMNS... HERE ARE A FEW! THEY WERE ORIGINALLY IN BLACK AND WHITE BUT THEY LOOK BETTER COLOURED...



STRANGE ENCOUNTERS+





I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW EXCITED I WAS TO BE INVOLVED WITH THIS WAY-OUT, WEIRD MAGAZINE! I WAS DOING MORE DRAWINGS FOR BOB THAN HE NEEDED, AND SEEING MY WORK IN PRINT GAVE ME A REAL BUZZ...

I DREW MY FIRST FORTEAN COMIC FOR ISSUE 11 (AUGUST 1975). FORTEAN FUNNIES WAS WRITTEN BY BOB RICKARD, AND IS MORE OR LESS INCOMPREHENSIBLE! I HAD A LOT TO LEARN ABOUT DRAWING COMICS!

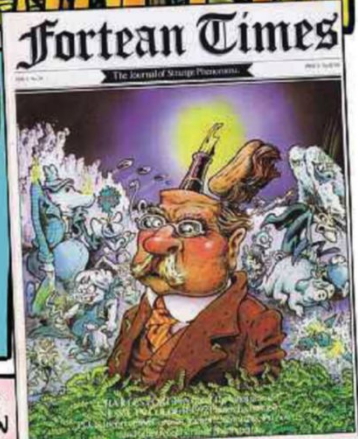
A FEW ISSUES LATER I DREW A 3-PAGE COMIC WRITTEN BY THE AFFABLE AND MYSTERIOUS STEVE MOORE. THAT WAS ON PAGE 23 OF ISSUE 23 (AUTUMN 1977), AND A YEAR LATER WE DID ANOTHER IN FT 27. MEANWHILE MY DRAWINGS WERE ALL OVER THE MAGAZINE!

BETWEEN ISSUES 8 AND 9 OF THE NEWS, BOB MOVED AWAY FROM BIRMINGHAM, AND HERMIONE AND I TOOK OVER HIS FLAT IN MOSELEY. WE HAD THAT LOVELY ATTIC ROOM! A COUPLE OF YEARS OF MID-70S FUN AND GAMES WERE PLAYED OUT THERE, AND I WAS BY NOW CHURNING OUT MY COMICS - CALCULUS CAT, BILL THE BUNNY, MAX ZILLION, AND OF COURSE PHENOMENOMIX!

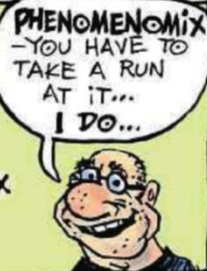


WE EVEN HAD A MINOR FORTEAN EVENT IN OUR ROOM! ONE NIGHT THERE WAS A GREAT STORM, AND THE SKYLIGHT WINDOW WAS CRACKED BY A SUPER-HAILSTONE THE SIZE OF A PIGEON EGG! NOT MUCH, BUT SUITABLE...

FOR FT 29 I PAINTED AN ACRYLIC PORTRAIT OF CHARLES FORT. IT BELONGS TO BOB RICKARD, BUT I'VE STILL GOT IT...



AND FT 30 (SEPT. 1979) FEATURED THE FIRST PHENOMENOMIX STRIP!



SOME TIMES I DON'T KNOW WHEN TO STOP!



SO - HERE WE ARE - 40 YEARS LATER ... 38 YEARS IN MY CASE... AND WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?



Y'KNOW WHAT? I'LL TELL YOU! THE WORLD'S A FUNNY PLACE!



# THE FIRST FORTEANS

## 1. THE LIGHT OF OTHER DAYS

Who were the first forteans? British fortean lineage began in the early 1930s, when Charles Fort was still alive and his books quite rare in these isles. **BOB RICKARD** goes in search of our fortean roots.

**F**orty years have passed since I put together the first issue of what became *Fortean Times*.

It seemed appropriate to write something in this issue to mark the occasion, but I soon realised that I knew very little about the British forteans who came before me. The science fiction (SF) writers Sir Arthur C Clarke and Eric Frank Russell are well known, but what about Sid Birchby and Harold Chibbett, whom I'd heard described as early forteans? In good fortean tradition, I did a bit of time travelling to find out and this modest series will illuminate some forgotten stories and people who deserve to be better known.

The first British forteans were forged during a period that spans the years leading up to World War II – when many of them were still in their teens – through to the 1950s. Against a backdrop of social change, political tension and intellectual excitement, our story is bound up with the origins of SF fandom and the early interest in rocketry and spaceflight.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly there were forteans before this period. For example, sometime in the mid-1970s I met *FT* reader Judith Gee and her brother in London, who told me that they remembered going to 'Speaker's Corner' at Hyde Park and hearing Charles Fort bemusing a small crowd with his ideas about space travel and other worlds. This would have been sometime between 1921-1924, when Fort was residing in Bloomsbury so he could trawl old newspapers in the British Museum Library.

Since Fort's first book – *The Book of the Damned* – appeared in 1919, he had an international following, but they tended to be individual readers, not organised in any kind of fannish network or with any dedicated periodicals. The only avenues for their fortean interests would



LEFT: A young Bob Rickard on a river cruise during the 1971 Eastercon at Worcester with (l-r) Pauline Dungate, Eileen Weston and (behind) Gigi, daughter of Anne McCaffrey

THEY REMEMBERED GOING TO 'SPEAKER'S CORNER' AND HEARING CHARLES FORT BEMUSING A SMALL CROWD WITH HIS IDEAS ABOUT SPACE TRAVEL AND OTHER WORLDS.

have been through other fields, such as psychical research, spiritualism, astronomy and the many popular science and mechanics magazines. I'm hoping to show how the rise of SF fandom in the 1930s – bound up as it was with the growing interest in rockets and their promise of spaceflight – helped the forteans to coalesce sufficiently to form their first community and periodicals.

But before we set out in earnest – and I beg your indulgence for this – I'd like to explain why this is also a poignant journey for me. I know the moment I became a fortean; it was at the 1971 'Eastercon' – the science fiction convention held that April, at the Giffard Hotel in Worcester – organised by the fanzine editor Peter Weston, a veteran of the

genre, and his 'Gang of Four'.

In my teens, I read science fiction<sup>2</sup> voraciously and treasured the monthly arrival of the American magazine *Astounding* – which my parents had arranged as a birthday present – and the more intermittent sendings of the Science Fiction Book Club. I had heard of Charles Fort because *Astounding's* editor, John W Campbell, frequently mentioned him and some of his writers extrapolated Fort's data into plots. I'd also read Eric Frank Russell's *Great World Mysteries* (1957), which, while not great in retrospect, was my first encounter with actual discussion of Fort and his phenomena. It also made me realise that reports of anomalous events were still being published

and launched my own habit of clipping newspapers.

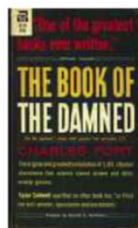
I first met Peter Weston in the late 1960s, during my days as a design student at Birmingham Art School – then newly relocated to the University of Birmingham at its Aston campus. I was soon drafted into helping produce his fanzine *Speculation*.<sup>3</sup> He encouraged me to attend that Eastercon, where I was amazed to find a set of the Ace paperbacks of Fort's four books. Spending all my cash, I dived in for a few pages, became enthralled enough to read on, and missed most of the con.

I emerged a bright-eyed fortean, yet unaware that the threads of my destiny were being woven together with some curious conjunctions and coincidences. For example, at the same convention, I met James Blish – one of *Astounding's* stable of writers, who had been writing SF since the late 1930s, much of it touching upon fortean themes. I was thrilled when he who told me that he had once been the youngest member of Tiffany Thayer's Fortean Society (founded in 1931).

The Ace books were sold to me by Derek 'Bram' Stokes, whose bookshop 'Dark They Were And Golden Eyed' – in St Anne's Court, in London's Soho – would years later become a meeting place for the *FT* editorial group. Another coincidence: Richard Adams, for many years *FT's* graphics consultant, had, unknown to me, also trained at Birmingham Art School, but had left the year before I joined. I only discovered this years

later when I met him in London.

As I began researching this little history, I realised that I'd had many opportunities to ask people like Peter Weston and others about the early forteans,





for many of them had direct links back to the days of the first and post-WWII groups. But, in the 1970s, I was starting out and didn't have the gumption to think about our intellectual genealogy. By the turn of the century, when it dawned on me that my links with the past were fading, many of the key people were no longer with us. In particular, Harold Chibbett, credited with the UK's first fortean publication, and Sid Birchby, who took over its distribution when Hal's health failed. Both of these first forteans were alumni of the early SF fan groups and I'll deal with them later.

Thank heavens, then, for the Internet archives of SF fandom, built up by modern fans such as David Langford, Rob Hansen, Greg Pickersgill and Peter Weston. They have devoted a huge amount of time to locating, scanning and cataloguing online the myriads of fanzines produced since the 1930s; and just as importantly, collected memoirs (including convention reports) and photos of those times. Certainly my research would have very difficult without the resources they have created.

It is important to point out that the history of SF fandom is one of constant flux. While fans yearned for some kind of permanence in their many groups and governing organisations, it never happened, as groups fragmented or disbanded and re-formed, and memberships of larger organisations dwindled or administration became unmanageable. What they excelled at, however, were informal meetings, conventions and publishing fanzines – many of which ran for years – all



ABOVE: John W Campbell shaking hands with writer H Beam Piper, who drew on Fort in stories like 'He Walked Around the Horses', about the vanishing of the British Napoleonic diplomat Benjamin Bathurst in 1809 (see **FT54:40-44**).



ABOVE: From the left: Maurice K Hanson, Arthur C Clarke, Walter Gillings, Les Johnson, Ted Carnell, Eric Frank Russell, Herbert Warnes (chairman), George Airey, A Miller, DWF Mayer, and J. Michael Rosenblum at the Leeds convention in 1937.

forming a vital cultural milieu. We won't have the space in this series for the detailed accounts I'd hoped to provide. As much of it – in the early years, at least – concerns SF fandom, I recommend, to those interested, that they explore the archive links below.

One of the most important events, though, took place at the beginning of 1937, and it is worth mentioning here as a way of introducing some of our key players. This was the first ever science fiction convention, anywhere, which led to the creation of Britain's first 'official' SF organisation, the Science Fiction Association. The convention was organised by Doug Mayer's group in Leeds, and held at the town's Theosophical Hall, on Sunday, 3 January 1937.

Some 20 SF fans attended – you can see from the line-up photo just how young many of them were. They included Ted

Carnell (who became an editor credited with launching the careers of such writers as Brian Aldiss, JG Ballard, and Michael Moorcock); Arthur C Clarke and Walter Gillings (a writer and publisher who founded the very first fan group in 1930, in Ilford, London); Leslie Johnson (a writer and co-founder of the British Interplanetary Society) and Eric Frank Russell, who both travelled from Liverpool; and Maurice Hanson (founder of the Nuneaton group). Invitations had been sent to the broadcaster and SF enthusiast Professor Archibald Low, and the writers Olaf Stapledon and HG Wells; they could not attend but sent congratulatory letters in their place.

I shall be dealing with some of these people in subsequent instalments, which will cover the synergy between the SF fans and the rocketry groups, including the founding of the British Interplanetary Society; the many SF fans who became pacifists and conscientious objectors during WWII; what happened to the many fans who were called up to National Service; the role of Harold Chibbett who pioneered investigations and a newsletter system from which the first fortean publication evolved; fortean pioneers of alternative archaeology, psychical research and cryptozoology among these early groups; the young Arthur C Clarke; and an attempt at assessing the interest in fortean phenomena over this period and the influences upon the generation that came after the war. The complex character of

Eric Frank Russell, who wrote the first fortean novel, *Sinister Barrier*, in 1939, may need a couple of instalments as we account for his active promotion of Fort's writings and the mystery of his feud with Aleister Crowley. **FT**

#### NOTES

- 1 For the best start on the fan history of science fiction I recommend Rob Hansen's massive **Then** archive [www.ansible.co.uk/Then/](http://www.ansible.co.uk/Then/)
- 2 I abhor the modern term 'sci-fi', and have no wish to perpetuate Hugo Gernsback's clumsy coining 'scientifiction', much preferring the succinct 'SF' that I grew up with.
- 3 An account of my early exploits in SF fandom can be found in Peter Weston's biography *With Stars in my Eyes: My Adventures in British Fandom* (NESFA Press, Framingham, 2004).

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their generous help, my thanks go to the SF fan historians and archivists who went out of their way to preserve the correspondence, images, fanzines and reports of the day. Chief among those are ...

Rob Hansen's **FIAWOL** archive: [www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/](http://www.fiawol.org.uk/FanStuff/)

Dave Langford for his **Ansible** archive: <http://news.ansible.co.uk/>

Greg Pickersgill for his **Gostak** archive: [www.gostak.demon.co.uk/](http://www.gostak.demon.co.uk/)

Peter Weston for permission to use images from Mike Rosenblum in his collection, and for his *Relapse*: <http://efanzines.com/Prolapse/>

Philip Turner for permission to use images from Harry Turner's **Footnotes to Fandom** archive: [www.htspweb.co.uk/fandf/romart/het/footnotes.htm](http://www.htspweb.co.uk/fandf/romart/het/footnotes.htm)

Jill Godfrey for permission to use Harold Gottliffe's photos from the above sites.

NB: For ease of reading, I omit many references here – but a fully referenced and linked version will follow on my CFI blogsite: <http://blogs.fortean.org/bob>

# DESNA AND THE DUPPY

As part of his continuing research into current poltergeist cases, **PAUL CROPPER** heads to Jamaica to investigate the Fire Demon of St Elizabeth and to find out more about the fearsome duppy of local lore.

**O**n 20 April this year, when household objects suddenly burst into flames and stones rained from the ceiling of her residence in Rose Hall, St Elizabeth, Jamaica, 85-year-old Desna Hanson had no doubt as to the identity of her mysterious persecutor. She and her family were, she knew, being targeted by one of Jamaica's most feared spooks: a *duppy*. The term *duppy* is of African origin and, while it appears to have several related meanings,<sup>1</sup> it is commonly applied to an order of supernatural beings whose activities appear identical to those of the Islamic *djinn* or Western poltergeist (for more on the links between *djinn* and polts, see FT281:16-17).

Desna shared her house with her husband, two daughters and 12-year-old granddaughter, and had lived there for all of 70 years without previously experiencing anything strange. But now, seemingly inexplicable fires broke out throughout the house, sometimes several times a day. As well as clothing and bedding, a dressing table, refrigerator, bed, sofa, and chairs were destroyed. Objects were thrown around or smashed. Stones seemed to materialise out of thin air and fall from near the ceiling. The pesky polt then turned pugilistic, raining blows on family members, who later displayed bruises as evidence of the paranormal pummelling.

The Hansons became convinced that the *duppy* – or *duppies* – was acting on behalf of other mortals who meant them harm. One local man they accused of throwing stones was taken into custody, but the attacks continued without let-up.

Desna's son, Cebert, expressed their exasperation to reporter Donna Hussey-Whyte of the *Jamaica Observer*: "You don't see who stoning the house; the house is burnt and you don't see who burning it. That is what is going on. It throw bottle, it throw crockery, anything it can catch and you don't see who is throwing it or where it is coming from. Anytime a day, anytime a night. Anytime it feel to do it, it do it. I'm here 24/7 so I see what is going on. It's a puzzle, and if we knew what is the puzzle then we would solve the problem."<sup>2</sup>

Word of the attacks spread across the island, and soon charter buses were transporting spectators eager to see the

supernatural show. Crowds of up to 200 people passed the time between attacks enjoying food and rum offered by local entrepreneurs. Undoubtedly, bored or inebriated individuals contributed to some of the stone throwing around that time.

In my article about the 2013 Siirt, Turkey, case (FT302:42-45), I stated that particularly malicious fire-polts sometimes raze their victims' houses to the ground. Sadly, one year later and half a world away, those words proved prophetic when on 5 June the Hansons' house was completely destroyed by fire.

Homeless, with nothing but the clothes on their backs, the family moved into an unfinished house next door – and the attacks started afresh. A Fire Department team that responded to one outbreak found

**"YOU DON'T SEE WHO STONING THE HOUSE AND YOU DON'T SEE WHO BURNING IT"**

smouldering and blackened items, including a bed frame, sheets and blankets. Relatives in nearby St Marys then invited the family to stay, but quickly revoked the offer when faced with the *duppy's* devilry. They then moved in with Desna's son Cebert, but once again the stones and fires were hot on their heels. At their wits' end, and desperate to rid themselves of the incendiary imp, the family turned their eyes to Heaven. Hoping for divine intervention, Cebert and another family member converted to Christianity. Good move: someone up there was listening, and the attacks promptly ceased. After two months, peace had finally come to the shell-shocked family.

But sadly, while the *duppy's* assault had ended, the family's suffering continued. On 16 July, Desna, the matriarch of the family, died. Cebert told reporters that her death was the direct result of injuries she sustained while trying to dodge one of the polt's flying stones. A small scrape had become gangrenous, leading to her losing a leg, and eventually her life.

I spoke at length to reporter Donna Hussey-Whyte, who'd visited the original Hanson residence on several occasions. While she didn't personally witness any paranormal phenomena, she did observe widespread damage and spoke to many neighbours whose testimony convinced her the episode was genuinely supernatural.



ABOVE: Crowds gather around the Hansen house in Rose Hall, St Elizabeth, Jamaica.

GARFIELD ROBINSON



ALL PHOTOGRAPHS: GARFIELD ROBINSON

ABOVE: Damage to the Hanson family home and items destroyed by the alleged duppy. BELOW: A bystander injured by the mysterious stone-throwing.

### REVEREND EMERICK INVESTIGATES

Mysterious showers of stones have long been linked, in Jamaican tradition, to *duppies*. Reverend Abraham J Emerick, who undertook missionary work on the island from 1895 to 1905, explained to Jesuit ethnologist Joseph Williams that stone-throwing was one of the *duppy's* favourite pastimes.<sup>3</sup>

Emerick described one case he had personally investigated at the Alva Mission in the Dry Harbour Mountains. Mysterious stone-throwing had occurred for a week prior to his arrival, baffling the Mission school's teacher and other locals: "What mystified the people most and made them believe and say, as did the teacher and the most intelligent store-keeper in the district, that the stones were thrown not by human hands but by spirits, was that those who were hit by the stones were not injured, and that some of the stones which came from the bushy declivity, after smashing through the window, turned at a right angle and broke the teacher's clock, glasses, etc., on a sideboard."

The teacher and several others were subjected to a particularly intense attack one evening while searching the school: "They were not long in the school building before stones began to fall here and there in different rooms, at first one by one but gradually very plentifully. They ran away in fright with the stones pelting after them as they ran..."

The stones followed them to a house nearly a quarter-mile away: "Stones were fired into this house and broke a number of things on the sideboard, but no one could tell from where the stones were coming.

Some of them seemed to come in the open door, turn around and fall at the teacher's feet. One of the persons marked a stone and threw it out saying: 'If him be a true *duppy*, him will throw this stone back'.

This marked stone was said to have been thrown back, proving that the stone-thrower was a true *duppy*."



### DUPPIES GALORE

Stone-throwing *duppies* appear regularly in the Jamaican media. In June 1931, the *Daily Gleaner* featured an article on the "Stone Throwing Ghost of Mount Horeb", detailing weird events at the house of 14-year-old Muriel McDonald, who appeared to be the focus of a variety of strange phenomena.<sup>4</sup> Stones were hurled by unseen hands or fell from the ceiling, while household objects rose and moved of their own accord. As at the Hanson residence in 2013, witnesses also claimed to have been pumelled by invisible fists.

In 1964, residents of Buff Bay crowded into the yard of a small house in St George to wonder at stones, some weighing up to 5lb (2.3kg), falling inside a house, smashing furniture and equipment. Another girl, in this case 15 years old, seemed to be the centre of the polt's attention, as the stones never fell when she was away.<sup>5</sup> In February 1987, large crowds travelled to the Aboukir district to witness similar stonings at an apartment building.<sup>6</sup> Other episodes were reported in Spanish Town, St. Catherine, in November 2010.<sup>7</sup>

There's no denying that Jamaican beliefs about *duppies*, like those that surround their creepy cousins the *djinn* in Muslim

societies, contain some folkloric elements that derive from local cultural traditions. But the striking similarities between phenomena reported during Jamaican *duppy* episodes and those that have been reported during poltergeist infestations throughout the centuries, in different parts of the world, support the view that something paranormal, yet very real, periodically pesters the good folk of that beautiful and generally very happy Caribbean land.

For many decades now, while sceptics have denigrated and denied, researchers and true believers have combed through case files, and sometimes the charred remains of family belongings, striving to discover the true nature of poltergeists, *duppies* and *djinn* and to understand their strange proclivity for stone-throwing and fire-starting. I can't see any end in sight: baffled believers, scathing sceptics and dastardly *duppies* will probably still be at it a century from now.

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PAUL CROPPER has investigated all manner of strange phenomena since the mid-1970s. With co-author Tony Healy he is currently completing a book on Australian poltergeist cases.

# NESSIE AT 80

We're not the only ones celebrating a birthday in this issue: the modern Loch Ness Monster phenomenon started in 1933 with dramatic sightings and photographs making headlines in the press. Longtime Nessie-fancier **GORDON RUTTER** was one of the organisers of this year's conference celebrating the world's most famous monster...

In April of this year, a rather special lady celebrated her birthday. The Loch Ness Monster, or Nessie to her friends, turned 80. Nessie was born in 1933 – on 14 April to be precise.

Some of you are probably remembering the stories of St Columba who, in the sixth century, had a run-in with a water beast. The story goes that Columba was walking by the River Ness when he came across a party of men burying someone they said had been killed by a Water Horse. St Columba immediately dispatched one of his followers into the river and, sure enough, the monster surfaced and made a beeline for the intrepid Christian. Columba made the sign of the cross and the monster fled the scene. The story is told in Adomnán of Iona's *Life of Columba*, the oldest known copy of which dates from the early eighth century. For those wishing to see it themselves, the Reichenau-St Gall Virtual Library hosts a beautiful copy.

Yes, you might argue that Nessie is 1,500 years old, but for our celebrations we started with the first sighting recorded at the time it supposedly took place. Adomnán didn't write about Columba until some 150 years after the event. The honour of the first *contemporaneously reported* sighting of Nessie goes to Mrs Aldie Mackay on 14 April 1933. Mackay, manageress of the Drumnadrochit Hotel,

## "THE NEAREST APPROACH TO A DRAGON THAT I'VE EVER SEEN IN MY LIFE"

reported seeing a whale-like fish in the Loch. Water bailiff and part time journalist for the *Inverness Courier* Alex Campbell wrote it up and the report appeared in the paper on 2 May 1933.

After this, others came forward to say that they too – or their parents or grandparents – had seen something in the Loch. With diligent research, many reports prior to 1933 (not to mention folkloric references) can be turned up; but for the purposes of Nessie's birthday, it was the Mackay sighting that put her on the map – and kicked off an industry.

### THE NESSIE PHENOMENON

On 22 July 1933, Londoner George Spicer, taking advantage of the newly completed road at the side of the Loch, saw what he reported as "a most extraordinary form of animal". From 200 yards (180m) away, he saw crossing the road in front of him, "the nearest approach to a dragon or pre-historic animal that I have ever seen in my life". Drawings produced at the time seem to show something that most resembles a 25ft (7.6m) long tadpole, presumably about to drop into the Loch. Trees obscured the Loch at this point, and when Spicer reached the spot there was no further sign of the creature – although there was a gap in the vegetation it could have moved through.

Soon, the first photograph of Nessie appeared; Hugh Gray claimed he had taken it on 12 November 1933.

Interpretations of this photograph vary from a golden labrador (Gray indeed owned one) to an eel-like object vaguely resembling the Spicer creature. In December, the

*Daily Mail* hired big game Hunter Marmaduke Wetherell to investigate. And he came up with the goods – or at least circumstantial evidence in the form of footprints on the side of the Loch. Plaster casts were sent off to the British Museum, Natural History, which concluded they were the footprints of a hippopotamus; the biologists further reported that all the tracks were of a single left foot as well! It was eventually shown that the prints were made using a hunting souvenir – a hippo foot converted into an ashtray. Marmaduke Wetherell's grandson Peter later presented this historic object to Adrian Shine and the Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition, where it is still on display.

On 21 April 1934, the *Daily Mail* featured on its cover the most famous Nessie image of all – the so called 'Surgeon's Photograph', claimed to have



ABOVE: The famous 'Surgeon's Photo' of 1934. TOP: The hippo foot ashtray used to fake Nessie prints.



ABOVE: Members of the Loch Ness Monster Investigation Team scan the waters of the loch for signs of the monster in August 1968.

been taken by London gynaecologist Robert Kenneth Wilson. To the satisfaction of most, the photograph has been exposed as a hoax (courtesy of Wetherell, his son and son-in-law) carried out using a clockwork toy submarine and some plastic wood.

Many more sightings have followed over the years. A wealth of photographs has been produced, some of very dubious provenance, and films showing Nessie in the Loch are allegedly held in bank vaults waiting for the right financial inducement for them to be shown. Countless documentaries have been made, both pro- and anti-monster; a library-full of books has been written; and who knows how many hours have been spent by innumerable people scanning the Loch?

There have been a number of expeditions in search of the monster. Of these, the largest must surely be The Loch Ness Phenomena Investigation Bureau, which ran from 1962 to 1972. Over this period, self-funded volunteers would arrive at the Loch and use cine cameras with telephoto lenses to try to capture an image of the elusive beast. Then

there was Operation Deepscan, organised by Adrian Shine and using a flotilla of 24 boats operating side-scanning sonar. Interesting pings were marked with a buoy for another boat to investigate. Most pings were believed to be ground debris or have other such natural explanations. Three contacts, however, were of something moving; Shine believes them to have been seals that had come into the Loch through the River Ness. Darrell Lowrance (of Lowrance Electronics, who donated the sonar for the expedition) after examining a contact from a depth of 600ft (180m) in Urquhart Bay told the BBC: "There's something here that we don't understand, and there's something here that's larger than a fish – maybe some species that hasn't been detected before. I don't know".

### THE CONFERENCE

Nessie has had her own conferences too. The first was co-organised by the International Society of Cryptozoology and the Society for the History of Natural History in Edinburgh on 26-27 July 1987, focusing on Nessie on the

first day and Alien Big Cats on the second. Held in the Royal Museum of Edinburgh, it was a prestigious event, and most of the talks were subsequently published in a special two-part issue of *The Scottish Naturalist*. The next conference was the first to be hosted at Loch Ness itself, on 10 July 1999. It was organised by Gary Campbell of the Loch Ness Monster Fan Club and took place in the Drumnadrochit Hotel.

The next, and most recent, event took place on 6 April 2013 as part of the Edinburgh International Science Festival, and was co-organised by two *FT* contributors – Charles Paxton and myself.

Seven speakers presented all manner of material to the 100 or so attendees, although because of a speaker falling ill it ended up being a panel top-heavy with Nessie sceptics. Adding a nice bit of continuity, we had one speaker from each of the two previous conferences – Adrian Shine from 1987 and me from 1999.

The day's first speaker was Adrian, whose monster-hunting exploits had begun in 1973



ABOVE: Roland Watson speaking at the 80th anniversary conference. BELOW: The Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition Centre, formerly Mrs Aldie Mackay's hotel.

on (or more precisely in) Loch Morar, when he built a submersible in which he had himself lowered into the waters. Having seen the craft in question, I can only admire his bravery. Adrian organised the 1987 Operation Deepscan and has been responsible for over 1,000 students and volunteers taking part in various expeditions at Loch Ness. Since the 1990s, he has been heavily involved with the Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition, one of two Nessie-themed exhibitions near the Loch (the other is the rather commercialised Nessieland).

In all honesty, this is the better of the two – you are led through several rooms featuring artefacts and Nessie ephemera and presented with evidence – for and against – and left

## THE WATER HORSE DROWNS AND DEVOURS ITS VICTIMS

to make up your own mind. Toward the end (before the inevitable gift shop), there is a new presentation with videos of witnesses telling what they saw in their own words and

mounted newspaper reports.

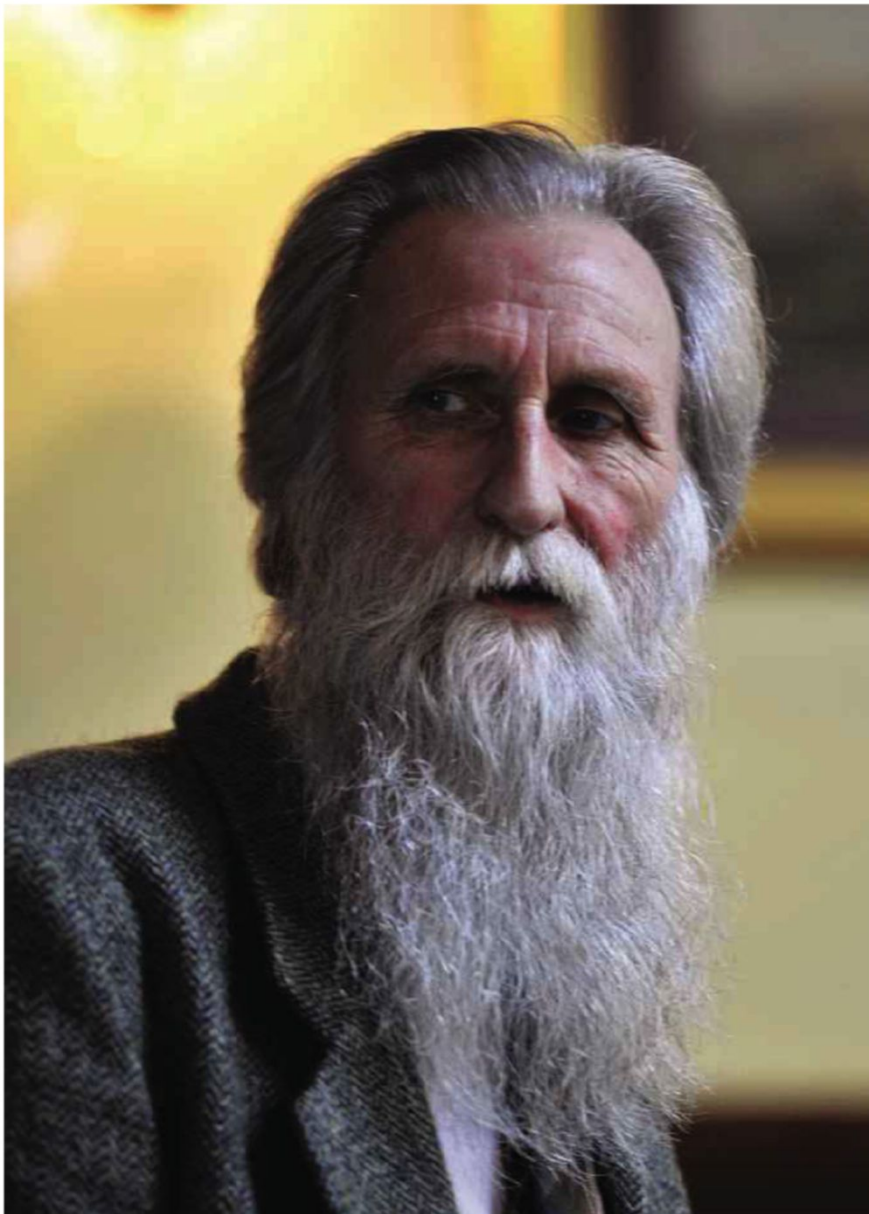
Adrian's talk was a no-nonsense scientific introduction to the biology and geography of Loch Ness. One of the fringe benefits of all the monster-hunting that has taken place is that many large scientific studies have been carried out. For example, in 1940 a Wellington bomber crashed into the Loch; it was eventually recovered in 1985 and is now on display at Brooklands Museum (one of only two intact Wellingtons in the world). Naturally, the team that located the bomber weren't looking for it – they were looking for Nessie! This was on one of the investigations led by American inventor and lawyer Robert Rines, most famous for the 1972 flipper photograph and the 1974 photos showing the head and neck and a close-up underwater portrait. These three photographs were the evidence Sir Peter Scott used to give the monster a Linnæan tag: *Nessiteras rhombopteryx*. One wag pointed out that this was an anagram of 'Monster hoax by Sir Peter S'. Rines countered that it was also an anagram of 'Yes, both pix are monsters R'.

Adrian also spoke about the ecology of the Loch – in particular the feeding dynamics – again, an area well researched on Loch Ness. Basically, because Loch Ness is so devoid of life, relatively speaking, there isn't enough food to support a family of Nessies – and unless we're talking about a family, then these must be very long-lived beasts. On the other hand, Loch Ness is very big – some 20 miles (32km) long and 1.7 miles (2.7km) across at its widest point – and contains more water than all the lakes in England and Wales combined. At the Loch's deepest point, London's Telecom tower would vanish beneath the surface. Because it's full of peat from surrounding waterways and run-offs, visibility in the Loch is very poor, but due to its size it doesn't freeze in even the hardest winters.





ABOVE: The first Nessie photo, taken by Hugh Gray in November 1933. Does it show the monster or, as has been suggested, a golden labrador?



GORDON RUTTER

ABOVE: Adrian Shine, a veteran hunter of the Loch Ness Monster since 1973.

## FOLKLORE, PHOTOS AND FILMS

Having set the scene, we moved on to the first talk featuring the birthday beastie herself. Roland Watson, a long-term Nessie fan and blogger ([lochnessmystery.blogspot.co.uk](http://lochnessmystery.blogspot.co.uk)) spoke about pre-1933 sightings from St Columba onwards. At short notice, he had extended his talk to cover some of the areas our absent speaker would have included. This section covered the folkloric tales of the Water Horse – a shape-shifter, and reputedly one of the most dangerous animals in the British Isles. In its horse form, it can be safely ridden until it smells or glimpses water; at which point it dives into the deepest part, drowns and devours its victim... leaving only the liver, which floats to the surface of the Loch.

Roland didn't confine himself to folklore but also included stories originally passed down orally and in family legends. Such material was collected post-1933, when people started talking about the monster, but predates the year of Nessie's modern 'birth'. Contrary to the denials of some researchers, there are still a number of written records from before the ensuing monster-mania (despite the claims of some authors that the legend does not go back further than 1933 and is down to a few faulty memories of that year's *King Kong* film!).

Tony Harmsworth talked about Nessie from 1972 to the present. Tony is the author of *Loch Ness Understood* and former owner of a successful Loch Ness tour business, which saw him spend much of his recent working life on the Loch. He co-founded the original version of the Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition, as well as being the administrative coordinator of Operation Deepscan. Much of his talk focused on the mechanics and misunderstandings of the work of Robert Rines. In particular, there was a demolition of the flipper photograph showing the extensive retouching that renders it more an artwork than a piece of evidence and an in-depth look at the 'gargoyle head' and head and



ABOVE: Charles Paxton raises a glass to the birthday girl, at the spot where Mrs Aldie Mackay's saw the Loch Ness Monster, 80 years to the day and the time (give or take a few minutes).

neck photographs from 1974. Locations of the photographs were discussed, along with problems associated with the use of the sonar and camera system – one of which was the inability to keep the rig relatively stationary, leaving the whole thing swinging like a pendulum at times and making it almost impossible to use. Rines remained a firm believer and continued to visit the Loch almost up to his death.

The next talk looked at visual material of a very different kind, as David Martin-Jones, Professor of Film Studies at Glasgow University, examined Nessie's celluloid adventures. David showed how recently Nessie had been rebranded by cinema. In early films, Nessie was a monster – something to be initially disbelieved and then ultimately feared, whereas now (in the 1996 film *Loch Ness* and *The Water Horse* from 2006, for example) the beast is virtually an environmentally friendly tree-hugger. The first film version, 1934's *The Secret of the Loch*, was very different. Here, the locals are all superstitious and monster-fearing, and the rational approach is provided by the London journalists who are able to get to Loch Ness remarkably quickly due to the improved rail and road networks of that time, as the film – coming across like a tourist board presentation – is at pains to point out. David's thesis was that Loch Ness films have always been a strong reflection of the times in which they are made and are perhaps more useful as social history than explorations of monster-hunting.

Charles Paxton, co-organiser of the event and St Andrews University-based statistician, spoke on the statistical analysis of eyewitness reports. There are in excess of 1,000 data points (eyewitness reports) to work with, and Charles is interested in the patterns reflected in this data: for example, do distant sightings yield more information than nearby ones because we see examples of witnesses filling in the gaps themselves? Is there a consistency in descriptions, and

## WE WERE TO BE FOUND TOASTING THE MONSTER WITH WHISKY AND KRAKEN RUM

what actually do the descriptions mean? For example, if you were to describe something as “the colour of an elephant”, would everyone know what you meant? After all, a wet elephant can appear almost black, whereas a dry one appears light grey. When someone describes Nessie as having a mane, do they mean like that of a lion or a horse? So much data – and yet so much potential confusion.

The final talk of the day was given by one Gordon Rutter, a lifelong fortean who is still upset about a family holiday when his parents drove past Loch Ness and didn't bother waking him from his slumbers on the back seat of the car.

I brought nearly 40 years of experience in photography to my talk and looked at the history of claimed images of Nessie. This included known hoaxes – using tyres, bails of hay and driftwood – misidentifications, and pictures on which the jury is still out. In a field like this, not everyone is likely to agree on interpretation, and where competing theories existed I tried to give a balanced approach, giving the audience both sides of the argument. In truth, a lot of photographic rubbish has come out of Loch Ness, but we should be careful we don't throw the baby Nessie out with the Loch water. No one photograph makes or breaks the case for or against Nessie.

The final part of the day was a panel discussion featuring Roland Watson, Adrian Shine, Gordon Steuart Campbell and the author. All of the others had presented during the day, but Steuart was new to the audience. He's a sceptic who has debunked the Nessie evidence. It had been anticipated that the panel would be half-and-half believers and sceptics, but due to loss of a speaker this was not to be the case. Roland is a believer in a physical monster being present – specifically an amphibious fish-like animal; Adrian favours a visiting sturgeon; Steuart believes there is nothing there; and I am of the opinion that there is a Loch Ness Monster phenomenon, but not a monster. Questions covered included the lack of physical evidence and the future for Nessie research.

### WHAT NEXT FOR NESSIE?

After this 80<sup>th</sup> birthday symposium, what's next for Nessie? Well, we conference speakers popped up to Loch Ness for the anniversary and were to be found toasting the monster with both whisky and Kraken rum! Despite the temptation, we didn't pour a libation into the Loch for Nessie herself.

Otherwise, things have continued as normal at Loch Ness. There's been a spat at the local Drumnadrochit Chamber of Commerce. George Edwards complained that many were using science to explain the monster away as nothing more than a myth. The counter claim was that Edwards was faking photographs to sell to tourists as postcards. Resignations happened. An arrest happened too: the owner of Nessieland had illegally removed a sign for the Loch Ness Exhibition Centre, for which he was charged. Oh, and there have been some sightings of the monster as well – most noticeably an excellent film of a wave at the Fort Augustus end of Loch Ness.

So things go on as they have for years and will no doubt continue to do for many years to come: visitors will still come, the tourist board will be happy, believers will believe, sceptics will debunk and everyone will have a good time in a lovely part of the world; and there's always the chance you'll see something yourself, isn't there? **FT**

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**GORDON RUTTER** is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of *Paranormal Edinburgh*. He founded and still runs the Edinburgh Fortean Society and is Chair of the Charles Fort Institute.



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# SHOOTING BIGFOOT

For his new film *Shooting Bigfoot*, British documentary filmmaker Morgan Matthews followed several American Bigfoot hunters into the wilderness...

He survived to tell his tale to **BRIAN J ROBB**

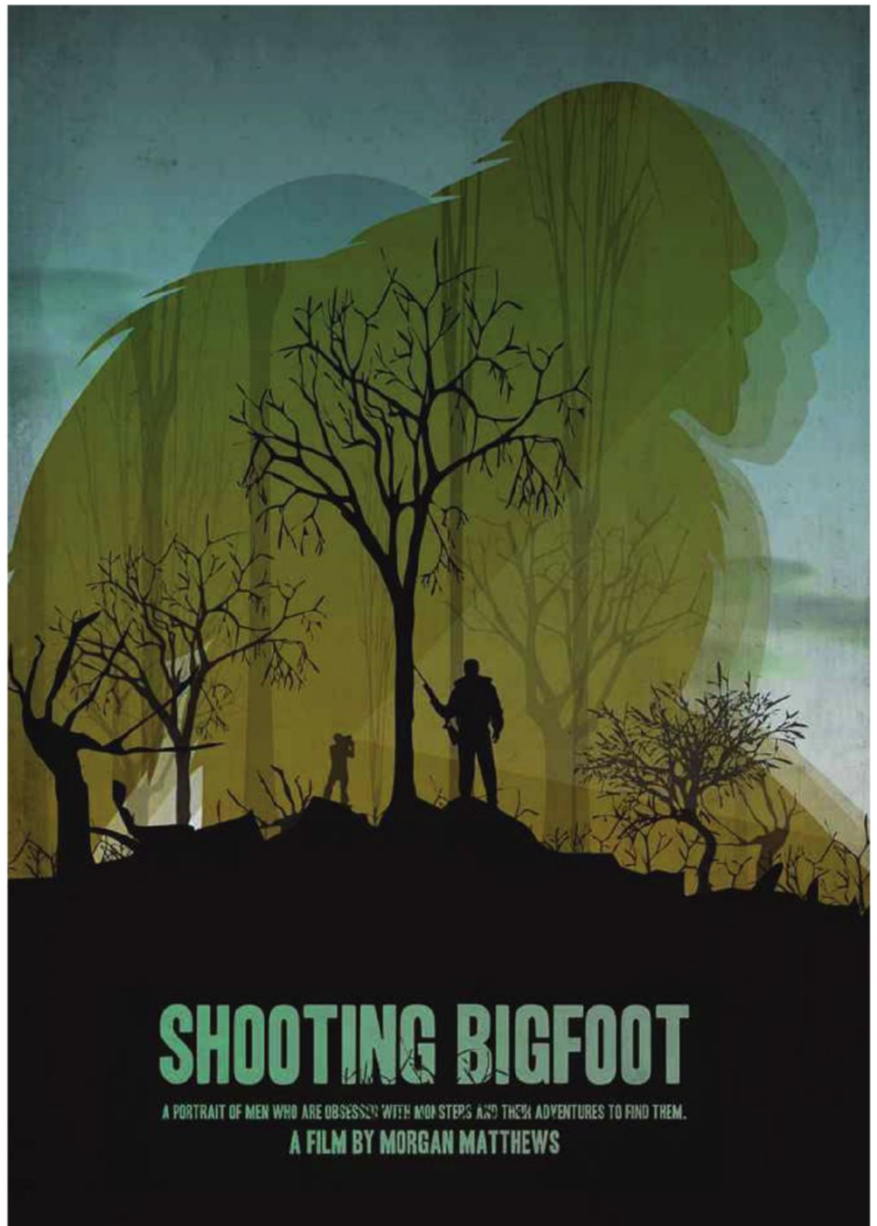
**B**igfoot. Sasquatch. Yeti. Yowie. Yeren. Hibagon. Whatever name he goes by, the giant ape-man of legend and myth has been long-lived. Following a period of relative obscurity after his last burst of mainstream fame in the mid-1970s, Bigfoot made a sensational comeback in 2013, with claims and counter-claims surrounding the now notorious documentary *Shooting Bigfoot*. The film would – according to some in the Bigfoot ‘community’ – finally blow the lid off all things Sasquatch. The true story was a little less sensational and somewhat more complicated...

## HUNTERS AND HOAXERS

*Shooting Bigfoot*, directed by Morgan Matthews, did the rounds of film festivals during the summer of 2013, including a debut at the Hot Docs documentary festival in Toronto and a showcase screening at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Whatever your perspective on Bigfoot, it’s an interesting movie and a departure from the normal subjects tackled by this BAFTA award winner. Matthews’s previous documentary subjects have included the three-hour epic *The Fallen* (2008), commemorating every British serviceman and woman killed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, *Scenes from a Teenage Killing* (2011), on the tricky subject of teen suicide, and *Britain in a Day* (2012), the crowd-sourced portrait of the nation.

Given that body of work, a documentary charting the misadventures of American Bigfoot hunters was a change of direction. “I suppose,” Matthews quickly agreed, “but then I’ve made films about the world taxidermy championships [*Taxidermy: Stuff the World*, 2005] and about a million-dollar pigeon race [*Million Dollar Pigeon*, 2007]. I’ve made a few films about people and their connections with animals. I was potentially going to be a natural history documentary maker [but] at some point that shifted onto making films about people, often those who have an obsession with animals or wildlife.”

Wildlife is certainly what Matthews found when he embarked upon *Shooting Bigfoot*, and we’re not talking about the title creature. The real subjects of Matthews’s film are those searching for Bigfoot, the



eccentrics, egoists and hobbyists trying to track down the creature they firmly believe is at large in the wilds of America. The innocent enthusiasts in the documentary are the oddball pairing of Dallas and Wayne, who spend their copious spare time

bumbling about in the woods hoping to spot Bigfoot. At the other end of the scale, there’s self-confessed hoaxer Rick Dyer and ‘professional’ hunter Tom Biscardi, who runs tourist expeditions into Bigfoot territory.

Matthews claims a childhood interest



ABOVE: Thomas Biscardi and his fellow bigfoot hunters, ready for action. BELOW: *Shooting Bigfoot* director Morgan Matthews.

in ‘unnatural’ creatures, one he’s trying to exorcise through this film. “When I was younger, natural history and so-called ‘supernatural’ creatures were one and the same. I was more interested in monsters or cryptozoology than I was in aliens and UFOs. Perhaps I was interested in those worlds more than your average kid.”

Some might see the protagonists of *Shooting Bigfoot* as little more than overgrown kids themselves, given some of their antics. Going into the film, the director was blissfully ignorant of the world he’d find. “I didn’t know a great deal. I was introduced to the world of Bigfoot-hunting when I met some British cryptozoologists. I spent quite a bit of time with Jon Downes [of the Centre for Fortean Zoology]. Jon was getting abuse online and he said ‘The worst are the Bigfoot people’. I became aware of this world of Bigfoot hunters in the United States, and also of the hoax in 2008.”

The notorious Rick Dyer was behind the summer 2008 Georgia Bigfoot hoax, when the ex-used car salesman claimed to have in his possession the 7ft 7in(2.3m), 500lb (227kg) body of a dead Bigfoot. Not only that, but Dyer also claimed to have seen a Bigfoot ‘family’ in Georgia’s northern mountains. Dyer and co-hoaxer Matt Whitton embroiled fellow Bigfoot hunter Biscardi in their scheme when the trio fronted a press conference in Palo Alto, California, presenting inconclusive DNA as ‘proof’ that their find was Bigfoot. The unlikely threesome presented photographs they claimed were of the creature’s mouth and tongue, and Biscardi went so far as to

## MORGAN MATTHEWS WAS GETTING INVOLVED WITH TWO BIGFOOT HOAXERS

claim to have had physical contact with the corpse. Within a week, the trio fell out when Dyer and police officer Whitton admitted their ‘corpse’ was nothing more than an ape costume packed with animal remains. Biscardi maintained he’d been duped, just as he’d similarly claim to have been deceived in a 2005 incident surrounding some dubious Bigfoot film footage.

In selecting the ‘characters’ for his film, Matthews was only too aware he was getting involved with two notorious Bigfoot hoaxers. “That was also why I was interested in following those particular guys,” he admitted. “There is this sub-section within the world of Bigfoot-hunting surrounding the guys who were involved in that hoax. Not everyone in the film was, I should say; Dallas and Wayne weren’t, and Tom claims he wasn’t, but Rick certainly was. At the time I met Rick he was claiming he’d been reinvented as a serious Bigfoot hunter. He was almost evangelical about proving Bigfoot existed.”

## AN ALL-CONSUMING QUEST

There’s no doubting the amusement factor inherent in *Shooting Bigfoot*. Whether it’s the adorable Dallas and Wayne bickering like an old married couple as they identify every sound in the forest as evidence for Bigfoot, or the misadventures of Biscardi’s night-time patrol when one of his team falls into a river, there are laughs to be had. However, as the film goes on it takes a more serious turn: Dallas and Wayne begin to look a little sad, while Dyer appears weirdly deluded and Biscardi comes across as a tyrant.

“Within the Bigfoot community people have been saying, ‘Well it’s a film that laughs at the community’, laughs at their world,” noted Matthews. “Sometimes what they do is a bit crazy, but sometimes they’re being intentionally funny. Sometimes they’re taking the piss out of me. Being with Tom on a road trip is funny. He’s quite a charismatic guy. You go on a trip with Tom, you’re going to have some fun.”

But Matthews also had to navigate his way through the politics of American Bigfoot hunters. “People can be a bit more sensitive when they are in the Bigfoot community. Firstly, they might have issues with some of the people in the film: they might not like them. Secondly, they might think the film represents the community as a whole. I would say it doesn’t. I’m still fond of all the guys in the film, I still really like them...”

Despite his fondness for his subjects – you



# SELECTED YETI/BIGFOOT APPEARANCES IN FILM AND TELEVISION

## FICTION

### THE ABOMINABLE SNOWMAN

Just before becoming obsessed with Gothic horror, Britain's Hammer Films produced *The Abominable Snowman*, starring Peter Cushing, in 1957. Directed by Val Guest, it was based on *The Creature*, a 1955 BBC TV play by Quatermass creator Nigel Kneale. The film riffed on the genuine 1954 expedition to find the Yeti sponsored by the *Daily Mail*. Unusually, the creatures were depicted as members of an enlightened, wise and peaceful race.

### DOCTOR WHO



Patrick Troughton's Second Doctor encountered the Yeti twice, in 1967's *The Abominable Snowmen* and again in 1968's *The Web of Fear*. These 'snowmen' were in fact

robots controlled by alien spheres hidden within them that put them under the power of the disembodied Great Intelligence (an enemy who has returned in recent episodes to tangle with Matt Smith's Eleventh Doctor, but without the Yeti).

### SCOOPY-DOO

In *Scooby Doo* the Yeti is described as a 'distant cousin' of Bigfoot. He pops up in the final episode of the first season of *Scooby-Doo*, *Where Are You?* from January 1970, an episode called 'That's Snow Ghost'. In the later direct-to-video film *Chill Out, Scooby-Doo!* from 2007 Fred, Velma and Daphne set out in search of Scooby and Shaggy who have gone missing in the Himalayas where they encounter the 'abominable snowman'.

### THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN

'The Secret of Bigfoot' is an infamous two-part 1976 episode of the *The Six Million Dollar Man*, starring Lee Majors. Here the Sasquatch was in fact an alien cyborg built by the Shalon to frighten people away from their remote base. Initially the creature was played by Andre the Giant, but he was replaced by Ted Cassidy (Lurch in *The Addams Family*) for the following season's two-part re-match 'The Return of Bigfoot' and (for a final time) in 1977's 'Bigfoot V'.



ABOVE: Rick Dyer, the ex-used car salesman who in 2008 claimed to have a dead Bigfoot in his possession.

can see how that could easily apply to the feckless Dallas and Wayne, less so in the case of the self-promoting Dyer and Biscardi – one has to wonder what the participants thought they'd gain from taking part: after all, some of them don't come out of the piece particularly well. Regarding Dallas and Wayne, Matthews believes that "what they do gives them a purpose. They're lovely guys, whatever people think of what they do and what they believe in. Whether they believe in it or not, and whether it is real or not, they are good guys. If they hit a tree with a piece of wood and they hear a knock coming back, that has to be Bigfoot! They're both unemployed, living in a town where there isn't a great deal of work or industry, and this is something they enjoy doing. They don't make any money out of it. They're broke. They do get some attention now and then, from people like me. A couple of other people have been in and filmed them, and Tom [Biscardi] certainly had... They have their own YouTube channel and people follow them. They do like having people around them, filming them. They like that sort of attention."

## FOR DYER AND BISCARDI, SEEKING BIGFOOT IS AN ALL- CONSUMING QUEST

However, in the case of the notorious duo of Dyer and Biscardi, seeking Bigfoot is more than a mere hobby. It has become an all-consuming quest, perhaps for different reasons and maybe to different ends. As the film progresses, it becomes clear that Matthews's relationship with both of them breaks down – dramatically in the case of Rick Dyer.

"That's definitely as it happened, on both of those trips. Although I said it was fun on the road with Tom, we were sleeping in the back of Tom's truck. With Rick, I was in the tent next door getting very little sleep. It did,

I suppose, start getting a bit dark. When your role is to probe and push a little, perhaps from a sceptical or challenging point of view, then it's inevitable that some of these tensions develop. Also, the guys were very keen to prove what they believed in, or what they said they believed in. The situation became more tense as time went on."

## MAKING YOUR MIND UP

As Matthews spent time with these people, it would seem natural for him to have come to some kind of conclusion as to whether their belief in Bigfoot's existence was genuine. After all, documentary has a claim to depict the truth. "I didn't really know," admitted Matthews when asked if his subjects were being genuine. "It's weird. Sometimes I thought 'Yes'; sometimes I wasn't sure... There's a moment in the film where Tom gets frustrated with one of the Bigfoot eyewitnesses. Tom decides that this guy isn't genuine or is maybe deluded. He says 'You see a lot of this all the time. People who start to believe their own bullshit.' I didn't know if that was what was happening with them, that they wanted to believe in these things so much that they started believing in things that were perhaps not true... That was why I went on the journey with them, although I'm not sure I was any the wiser by the end of it!"

The biggest controversy surrounding *Shooting Bigfoot* has been that created by its ending, and whether the film genuinely captures evidence for the existence of such a creature. These rumours, fuelled by sensationalist statements from Dyer, caused several Bigfoot fans to travel to Toronto for the first public screening of Matthews's film. Accusations flew that not all the footage had been included in the final cut, and that Dyer and Matthews had conspired to hide the body of Bigfoot somewhere in the US. Matthews stands by the film as screened at both Toronto and Edinburgh, although he is careful not to add further fuel to the debate about the nature of his documentary.

"It was a shame Rick said a lot of stuff before anyone had seen the film. I didn't say any of that stuff. I purposely did not talk about the film beforehand. Rick wound quite a few people up, in the Bigfoot community particularly. [He claimed] he'd shot and killed a Bigfoot, that he – or 'we' – had the body. That was one story that came out: that we, the film crew, had the body! I heard that we'd apparently taken it to an institution in Nevada where it was being experimented on."

As a serious filmmaker, doesn't someone like Matthews have a duty to come to a firm conclusion about the existence of Bigfoot? Is it enough to simply further tease audiences by presenting the extraordinary final scenes as a mere record of events, with little in the way of editorial comment? "It is for people to come to their own conclusions about it," said Matthews. "I don't know that it is necessarily up to me to tell people what I believe. It is about what they believe and what they take from it. I'm not pushing my 'truth' down people's throats. I'm not discrediting the people in the film or even discrediting the idea that Bigfoot is out there. Whatever is in

my film, I don't think it changes the debate about whether Bigfoot is real or not. This is a film about three or four guys and their journey and my relationship with them. Whether it proves anything is debateable."

That's fine as far as it goes, but Matthews must've been worried about working with known hoaxers, and perhaps should be more concerned about how *Shooting Bigfoot* might affect his standing as a serious documentary filmmaker. Could he himself be the victim of a hoax, or – as some have claimed – actually be a hoaxter?

"If they think I've been hoaxed, that's fine by me. If they think I was involved in it, I don't really mind that either... It's for other people to make their minds up about it. I know people are talking a lot about it. I don't think that's a bad thing. In the end, [in the film] I say what I think might have happened, but I'm not validating it. I'm not saying 'This is Bigfoot'. If as a 'serious' filmmaker I was saying 'I believe this is Bigfoot', that'd be very different."

Rick Dyer continues to promise further revelations regarding Bigfoot, even though he has essentially lost all credibility within the Bigfoot community. Tom Biscardi continues to offer Bigfoot hunting excursions to paying travellers, as convinced as ever that the final proof of Bigfoot's existence is just around the next tree. Dallas and Wayne will no doubt see out their twilight years wandering the forests in the hope of discovering some truth greater than themselves. As for Morgan Matthews, he may not be altogether finished with extraordinary creatures.

"I have done quite a lot of filming with British cryptozoologists. At one point they were going to be in the same film, but it became clear to me that the British and the Americans were quite different characters. There was a more singular narrative with the Bigfoot film because they were all connected... With the Brits, there's still a really nice film to be made. It'd be a very different film. I'm possibly still going to do that, although the guys must be getting fed up with me as it's been such a long time."

Maybe the *Shooting Bigfoot* experience has all been worthwhile, as it allowed Matthews to recapture his childhood awe in the face of fabulous creatures. "I've made very heavy-duty films," he said, "but I've also made films about subjects that I'm just interested in and things that I was interested in when I was younger. I've scratched most of those itches now – I've made a film about whaling, I've made a film about taxidermy, I've made a film about pigeons... And now monsters, so I think I've 'worked out' my childhood interests in my films."

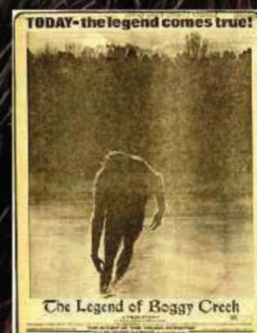
Perhaps he's not so different from the Dallas, Waynes, Ricks and Toms of this world, after all. **FT**

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**BRIAN J ROBB** is the author of books on silent film, Philip K Dick, Wes Craven and Laurel and Hardy. He is co-editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and lives in Edinburgh.

## THE LEGEND OF BOGGY CREEK



This based-on-fact 1972 'docudrama' relates the story of the Foule Monster, a Bigfoot-like creature seen in the Foule area of Arkansas since the 1950s. Staged interviews with 'residents' and recreations of 'encounters' make

up the bulk of this movie directed by Charles B Pierce. The style of the film was allegedly one of the influences on 'found footage' innovator *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). It gave rise to several variable follow-ups or connected films later in the 1970s, during the 1980s and into the 21st century.

## HARRY AND THE HENDERSONS

This 1987 comedy sees Bigfoot adopted by an all-American family after they run him down during a camping trip, little knowing that there's a Bigfoot hunter on their trail... The creature was played by Kevin Peter Hall (later to play the title role in *Predator*), and the film gave rise to a short-lived TV series in 1991-93.

## "FACT"

## THE PATTERSON-GIMLIN FILM

Arguably, the modern Bigfoot era was kick-started by the now-infamous Patterson-Gimlin film. Supposedly shot in October 1967, the clip appears to show a female Bigfoot captured on film in California by Robert Patterson and Robert Gimlin. While some still maintain its veracity, most observers have long declared the film to be a fake and the story surrounding it a hoax. The brief clip has been analysed almost as much as the Zapruder film of the JFK assassination, yet questions remain...

## THE LEGEND OF BIGFOOT

This 1976 'documentary' was written by, directed by, produced by and starred Harry Winer. It follows animal tracker Ivan Marx – who claims to have been the first person to have found hand prints of Bigfoot – as he travels the US investigating sightings, only to reach the inconclusive conclusion that the search must go on...

## BIGFOOT: THE MYSTERIOUS MONSTER

Clearly, the mid-1970s was something of a banner time for Bigfoot documentaries. This 1976 Sunn Classic Pictures release was narrated by *Mission: Impossible* star Peter Graves and featured dramatic recreations of sightings. It also showed witnesses undergoing a lie detector test and under hypnosis. It was the first documentary to include the Patterson-Gimlin film.

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# forum



## Life begins at 40...

TED HARRISON celebrates *FT*'s birthday by putting the 40 back in forteana...



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

**W**ithin a decimal culture, 40 is a number of some significance. It's not as important as 50 or 100, but worthy of celebration. To a society that counts and thinks in tens, it has a certain neatness to it, and 40th anniversaries are celebrated as special times of reflection on past achievements. Forty is seen as the appropriate length for an adult's working life; looking back on what an individual might have achieved over a 40-year period is thus celebrated in the Harrow School song 'Forty Years On'.

Perhaps because of its neatness, 40 is used for other purposes. The treasury fixes 40 per cent as a tax threshold, presumably for reasons of arbitrary tidiness and not exact fiscal prudence. And why is it so important for bands to get their records into the Top 40?

In the modern world, where the average life expectancy has risen from 70 to over 80, 40 has also taken on a role as a midway number. Life begins at 40, it is said, and the 'Big 4-0' is the gateway to middle age.

Although in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* the meaning of life was found to be 42, most of the major religions favour 40. Over and over again, in Christianity, Judaism and Islam, 40 crops up as a significant number.

All three of the major monotheistic religions agree that Noah got afloat after 40 days and nights of rain.

The Jews recall how their forebears wandered for 40 years in the desert. Moses spent three lots of 40 days up Mount Sinai. Goliath the Philistine giant challenged his opponents for 40 days before being stoned by David.

Christians tell of Jesus being tempted for 40 days and nights in the wilderness, and Jesus spent 40 days on Earth after the Resurrection and before ascending into Heaven. Catholics honour the 40



martyrs of the English Reformation and join with Orthodox and Protestant Christians to celebrate the 40 martyrs of Sebaste, who were killed by being frozen alive standing naked on a lake of ice in the 4th century.

Muslims learn that the Muhammad was 40 years old when he revealed his prophethood. He also prayed and fasted for 40 days in a cave and chose 40 followers to spread the word.

The number occurs in other faiths, but not with such central importance. Zoroastrians teach a ritual of prayer and fasting known as 'Chalisa', which lasts for 40 days. A very similar practice exists in Hinduism.

Forty crops up in various folk superstitions. Some Russians believe ghosts linger at the site of a death for 40 days before being released.

Scholars have argued that when a religion opts for the number 40 it's just another way of saying "lots" – it's a big number, without being huge. Nevertheless, 40 is taken literally and

mathematically by many believers. In Harold Camping's failed prophecy of the end of the world, he relied heavily on references to 40 in the Bible (*FT*:277:26-27; 285:34-37; 287:5; 300-34-35).

The significance of 40 may be rooted in astronomy. The Earth's near neighbour Venus appears in the night sky to move according to a set pattern through a 40-year cycle, and at the end of 40 years is back in the same position relative to an Earth-bound observer as it was 40 years earlier.

In former times, when numbers had magical qualities and were not simply used for making calculations, 40 was one of the select numbers (1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 13, 21, 40, 50, 70, 100) in the counting sequence thought to be of special worth. One was unique, seven holy, 13 unlucky or evil; 40 was seen as solid and dependable. Many societies believe that at 40 a person is at the height of his or her powers, when knowledge, experience and physical prowess blend to optimum effect. A 40th wedding is known as a ruby wedding and the stone traditionally represents the same qualities as the number 40: courage, insight, and mental power. Thus the old ideas behind numerology and gematria, the arts of ascribing qualities to numbers, still creep into modern life unawares.

Sometimes the number 40 has been given a modern significance by being attached by chance to something else. The UK government's UB40 form acquired a grim reputation, as it had to be completed by those out of work and wanting to claim benefits. UB40 was subsequently adopted, ironically, as a name by a highly successful band. The Austin A40 in the 1950s became synonymous with a small family car and the M40 is a motorway with its own inimitable image in contemporary motoring folklore.

The strange attraction of 40 accounts for some curious anomalies. Traffic planners prefer to set speed limits at 40 rather than a number indivisible by a neat 10. Consequently urban traffic moves at different speeds in different countries. The 40kph limit commonly found in continental Europe equates to 25mph, a limit seldom set in Britain.

Forty the mystical number and 40 the number beloved of tidy-minded bureaucrats can be seen to have strange overlaps in the modern world, if the subject is approached in a spirit of fortean enquiry. **FT**

# Meeting the Genius Lochi

In 2011, **JONATHAN BRIGHT** took a cruise on Loch Ness and snapped some photos; a year later, he found one of them had captured something strange...



**JONATHAN BRIGHT** has been a correspondent for the Greek magazines *Strange* and *Mystiki Ellada* and is a frequent guest on Greek television.

I'd been longing for years to visit Scotland – feeling some inexplicable, almost mystical pull – and in the autumn of 2011 finally made the trip from my home in Athens, Greece, to Edinburgh, the Athens of the North.

From here, we travelled to our first stop in the Highlands, the Clansman Hotel, on the North bank of Loch Ness; we had arrived late in the afternoon, so it wasn't until the following day that we took a cruise on the Loch aboard the *Jacobite Spirit*, which sailed out from the pier in the direction of Urquhart Castle. It was the low season, so there were only about a dozen passengers aboard, most of them sitting inside, keeping a watchful eye on the sonar screen and listening to the audio presentation. I grabbed my cameras and went out to the back of the boat to take some photos.

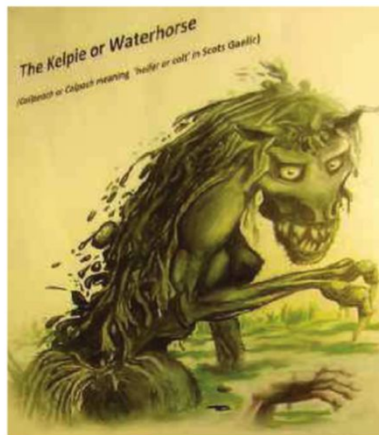
The day was windy and cloudy, but the clouds at least provided a suitable background for the picturesque ruins of Urquhart Castle. I remember standing at the stern, taking pictures of the surrounding waters and thinking how naive it was for a tourist to have any expectation of glimpsing the Loch's legendary inhabitant, considering the number of professional teams that, over the years, have systematically swept the Loch with sonar and underwater cameras, searching for the elusive 'monster' that only rarely turns up for a photo.

Still, I went on taking random shots from various angles, using all the cameras – two of them with special modifications to enable shooting in Infrared and full spectrum. It was a memorable day – but other than a sense of connecting with the environment, nothing remarkable happened.

On my return home, I was repeatedly asked if I had seen the monster. Each time, I smiled and said no. I'd read articles and books, watched documentaries and, the morning after our cruise, had paid a visit to the



ABOVE: Urquhart Castle on a cloudy November 2011.



LEFT: An illustration of the Kelpie or Water Horse.

Loch Ness Centre and Exhibition at Drumnadrochit. But I still didn't have the slightest clue whether the monster existed or not. I *suspected* it did – but in what sense? Was it something physical? An elusive creature travelling in and out of the lake through some hidden underwater cave systems? Or something of an entirely different nature?

The months went by and occasionally I'd read an update on the ongoing quest for the monster. Then, in August 2012, a friend showed me a picture taken by George Edwards, a skipper operating lake cruises from Drumnadrochit. On the image (soon taken up by media worldwide) appeared a dark object, supposedly the 'hump' of the monster, breaking the relatively calm surface of the lake, and in the far background, Urquhart Castle. However, the surprise for me was not the photo itself, but the fact that it was allegedly taken at 9am, on 2 November 2011 – the same day I had spent at Loch Ness!

Had Nessie decided to put in an

appearance on the very day we'd been cruising the waters of the Loch? Had we passed close to the famous 'monster' – or whatever the object in Edwards's photo was?

I started going through all the photos and videos I'd shot that day, this time looking more carefully, examining every detail. I couldn't really understand how I'd missed it before, but there it was: something unnoticed until that moment, a strange-looking shade in the grey waterscape of waves that caught my attention and prompted me to zoom in.

The detail disguised among the waves now looked like an object... a head coming out of the water! In fact, it even appeared to possess the basic characteristics of the traditional Nessie – a straight neck, the dinosaur-like shape of the head and on the top, what looked like a pair of small horns or ears, bringing to mind the Kelpie or Water Horse of Celtic mythology.

As a certain friend had suggested to me, a sceptic might see just the work of the waves, and perhaps that's what it is – a large wave at the apex of two separate crests, one coming in from the right and another from the foreground to the left, crashing together and creating an outsized wave. That, and an amazing simulacrum, which happens to look like Nessie...

I certainly can't dismiss that possibility, yet, I'm still somehow puzzled. Assuming that there is a Nessie-like 'monster' that from time to time makes its appearance in the waters of Loch Ness, then (using Occam's Razor) what would be the simplest explanation for my photo? That: a) while capturing random pictures in a lake known worldwide for a legendary creature, I took a photo showing something matching the reported characteristics of said creature's head coming out of the water; or b) two waves moving in an opposite direction collapsed into each other, thereby creating a momentary, yet spectacular, Nessie-simulacrum at the exact instant that my finger happened to press the button on the camera, during a brief cruise on the Loch?

We are not discussing some type of pareidolia here; it's not the imagination that fills in some random lines to form the traditional 'Nessie' image. People to whom I have shown the picture without providing any clue have all seen some kind of creature, describing it as a 'dragon' or even a hippopotamus (strangely enough, the word derives from the ancient Greek 'river-horse').



To me the shape is well defined and, despite the shooting distance, some details are obvious. We can safely rule out explanations such as a sturgeon or a log. But does this really tell us anything about the nature of the creature? After all, this photo was shot in the Infrared spectrum, and however solid a shape may appear, it's theoretically possible that it was not visible to the naked eye at the time.

On a personal level, I might accept the image as a stunning simulacrum sculpted from the waves by the wind's invisible hands. And if the camera didn't capture a physical beast, then we're dealing with something stranger still. What are the odds that such a well defined, three-dimensional morph, with the looks and characteristics of the legendary Nessie, was randomly created by two clashing waves on *this specific Loch* to be captured by the random click of a camera in *that single instant* in which it existed?

The strange properties of simulacra are generally underestimated and poorly understood. There has been little progress in their study since the late John Michell proposed some kind of genetic mechanism through which we have been programmed to respond to certain forms and symbols that nature is also programmed to repeatedly manifest. Unlike things seen as a result of pareidolia, genuine simulacra possess a certain dynamic, a feeling that they have been created through some mystical power. At times one is even tempted to perceive them as expressions of a collective unconscious or sublime symbolism; but then who can be certain of the mechanisms in which Nature manifests or imprints pictures or ideas into a material form?

But what if the other accounts and photos of the monster are of a similar nature? What if the creature is not something material, but a kind of a spiritual manifestation or water 'elemental' (like the Kelpie, or the *Each Uisge*, the traditional Celtic shape-shifting Water Horse), a protective spirit of place with the ability to form shapes and perhaps even momentarily materialise through its relation with the observer – the *genius loc(h)i* of the Lake?

The observer must somehow be involved in this process, otherwise we'd have mass sightings and not just reports and photos of brief, almost ghostly, appearances. But to what extent? And exactly how does this happen?

At the time that he wrote his study on Simulacra (*Natural Likeness: Faces and Figures in Nature*, 1979), Michell



## The observer must somehow be involved in the process

spoke of several contemporary examples of photographs showing faces or figures that were not present when the photograph was taken, in which the photographer recognised some personal meaning, showing that these were probably 'involuntary products' of the photographer's (or someone else's) mind. Michell had remarked that the "strong evidence that the appearance of photographs may be influenced by human thoughts or desires reopens the old question of the extent to which these same thoughts and desires may influence appearances in the world at large."

My view is less anthropocentric, more of a dynamic universe, in which man and his environment somehow communicate. This idea is by no means new, in fact all pagan religions had such a belief, with the various deities seen as representations or manifestations of natural elements,

energies and forces with which man could communicate. In this view, both the observer and the particular place (locus) observed, interact, which results in the formation of the image, the observer's mind perhaps being not so much a projector as a screen.

Returning to George Edwards's photo, efforts to debunk it started soon after its publication. In a TV report, Steve Feltham, who has dedicated much of his life in the Nessie study, demonstrated that a very similar fibreglass 'hump' model had been used for a *National Geographic* documentary a couple of years earlier – a documentary in which Edwards had participated.

In the last few days, the 61-year-old George Edwards has himself come forward to admit that his photo was indeed a hoax – "a bit of fun" – created using the aforementioned fibreglass hump.<sup>1</sup> From my point of view, though, this makes my own photograph seem even weirder: by what strange coincidence is a fake 'Loch Ness monster' supposedly shot on the one and only morning that I spent on the Loch, thus prompting me to scrutinise my records only to discover my own Nessie photo, which otherwise would have remained unnoticed? Was it fate? Perhaps...

I know, at least, that my photo is definitely not a fake, although I'm less sure what it tells us about 'Nessie'. Yes, the head looks quite solid, and one can even argue that the waves around the base of the neck appear to be breaking against a solid mass, splitting and even bouncing back. So perhaps the photo is of a physical form (which would be a strong indication that Nessie exists); or it could be an exceptional simulacrum, some sort of manifestation of nature (which would be an indication that other powers are at work).

I don't know if I, or someone else present at the Loch that morning played some role (either consciously, or subconsciously) and acted as a 'provocateur' for the manifestation of the elusive monster.

If it was me, then I'd feel fine about my involvement. As John Michell once said: "The eye that detects simulacra in all nature's patterns is the primæval eye, the use of which is still enjoyed by children, tribesmen, mystics, madmen and dreamers."

I'm no longer a child, and certainly not a tribesman, so I guess capturing and then seeing the image on the photo leaves me with the possibilities of being either a mystic, a madman or a dreamer. **FT**

ABOVE: The author's photograph of 2 November 2011, and a detail of the 'Nessie' head.

### NOTES

1 [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/04/loch-ness-monster-picture-scottish-skipper-george-edwards-fake-\\_n\\_4043412.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/10/04/loch-ness-monster-picture-scottish-skipper-george-edwards-fake-_n_4043412.html)

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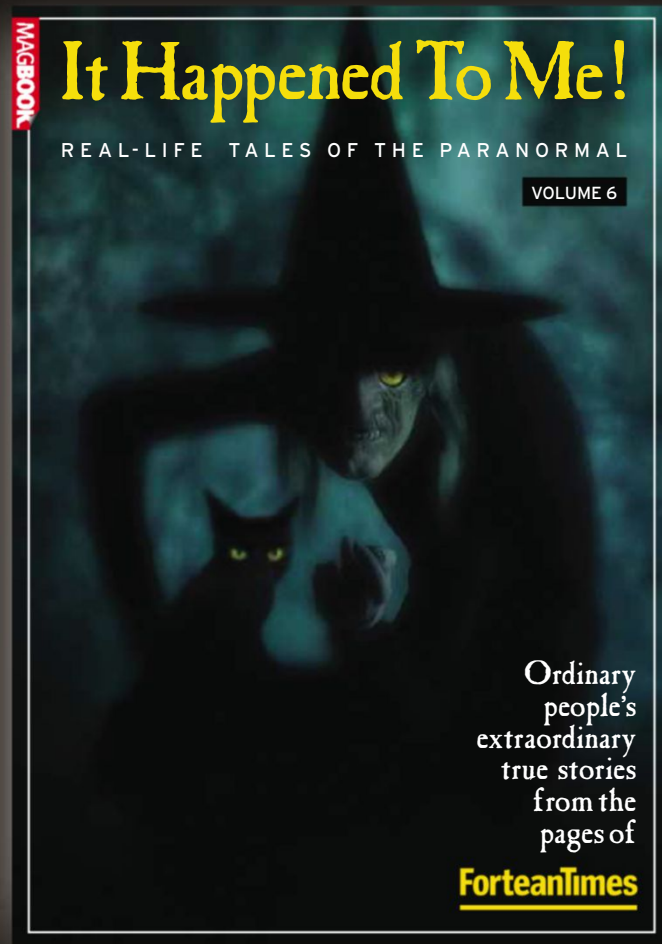
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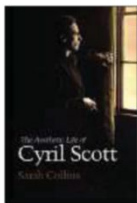
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### Music and Its Secret Influence throughout the Ages

Cyril Scott

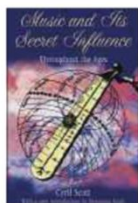
Inner Traditions International 2013

Pb, 213pp, notes, bib, index, £14.99, ISBN 9781594774874

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

One of the questions exercising the musically inclined during Wagner's centenary year has been that old chestnut about the man and the music: how come the guy who wrote the sublime *Lohengrin*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Parsifal* was such a little shit? And an anti-Semitic little shit to boot? For most, the answers are to be found in close study of the texts themselves and of the artistic-psycho-social context in which the composer lived and worked.

In 1933, though, the English composer Cyril Scott (1879–1970) proposed a different solution: greater occult forces were working through Wagner – having spotted his potential as the best available instrument to serve their purpose – even if he remained quite unaware of them. Some of these forces were directly attributable to the Hidden



Masters of Blavatsky's Theosophy; others originated with the Devas, those "incorporeal denizens existing concurrently with the physical" and "ranging from smallest nature-spirit to loftiest cosmic archangel".

The words come from Scott's *Music: Its Secret Influence Throughout the Ages* (republished in its revised 1959 edition under a slightly different title), one of the oddest books of musical history ever published. Basically, it reverses the usual argument that music reflects its historical context to suggest that, instead, it actually *creates* it. And not at random, but as part of a larger process in which humankind's evolution is guided by cosmic forces concerned with its spiritual advancement. For example, Scott argues, the formal qualities of Handel's music gave birth to a culture of conventionalism that became, in time, the Victorian age – a necessary corrective to the licentious 18th-century in which Handel had himself lived. Later, the music of Beethoven offered a sort of pre-Freudian mode of psychoanalysis that, as it was played in salons throughout the 19th century, allowed women to express the pent-up social and sexual frustrations that Victorian society – as the pendulum swung too much in the direction of repression – had created. Hysteria, says Scott, became less widespread as Beethoven's music became more widely diffused. And so on; even the 'ultra-discordants' (as Scott calls Schoenberg and other contemporaries) are actually performing a useful function, destroying an accumulation of negative thought forms ("Looked at clairvoyantly, [these] often

### "He believed that the information in *Secret Influence* came direct from Master Koot Hoomi"

appear as a dense miasmatic vapour with tentacles reaching out in all directions, ready at any moment to pounce on the unwary...")

Fascinating stuff, and even if it does sound bonkers it makes a stronger case for the importance of music than Simon Cowell on the one hand or the Arts Council on the other; and it's reassuring to know that a good blast of Varèse will oust any Cthulhoid nastiness left in the vicinity by neighbours listening to One Direction.

Scott, though, wasn't just a left-field theorist. He may have believed that much of the information in *Secret Influence* was received clairaudiently by his friend Nelsa Chaplin direct from Master Koot Hoomi (and that Master KH planned to reincarnate in Scott's own daughter), but he was also a working composer. A product of the same Frankfurt conservatory as that other great eccentric Percy Grainger, he enjoyed early critical success (hobnobbing with Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky) before becoming a man out of time whose lush, impressionistic harmonic language and Romantic outlook fell out of favour during the inter-war period. Major works lay unperformed and more of his energies were diverted to his occult activities and writings. These included his anonymously published 'Initiate' trilogy of semi-autobiographical

occult novels, works devoted to rescuing Christ for the Hermetic tradition and pamphlets on health, such as *Crude Black Molasses*, the *Natural 'Wonder-Food'* (1946) and *Constipation and Commonsense* (1956).

Making sense of such a multi-faceted life – and making the links between Scott's musical and occult practices – is no easy task, but Sarah Collins's very welcome new book goes a good way towards doing so. She's at pains to point out that it is "not a biography... rather it is intended as a contribution to the history of the idea of music, and an exploration of a historical category of living through and thinking about music that can expand our knowledge of the response to the historical conditions associated with modernity". If you can get past prose like this, Collins does two important things very well: one is to situate Scott squarely within the fin de siècle aesthetic milieu of Symbolism (he knew personally and translated Stefan George), and to trace the ways in which such early anti-rationalist influences intersected with his later engagement with occultism; the other is to tease out the continuities between Scott's numerous unattributed works and his actual biography. The book is thus full of fascinating material from fields usually studied quite independently, and many of its insights are fresh ones, if not always expressed with clarity. David Sutton

#### Fortean Times Verdict

SCOTT: VALUABLE REISSUE FOR HIS OCCULT MUSICAL THEORIES

8

COLLINS: NOT A GREAT READ, BUT CONTAINS MANY FRESH INSIGHTS

7

# Space debris

Two argument-free alien hypothesis rehashes fail to convince on any level



## From Ancient Aliens to the Shift

The Grand Unified Theory

Daniel D Davies

Poetic Matrix Press 2012

Pb, 244pp, bib, notes online, £12.50, SBN 9780985288372

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.50

## We Are the Children of the Stars

Otto O Binder & Max H Flindt

Hampton Roads Publishing Co 2013

Pb, 244pp, bib, \$18.95, ISBN 9781571746962

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.99

In an uncritical re-hash of ancient astronaut lore and UFO traditions, *From Ancient Aliens* views the 2012 Maya prophecy as a shift in consciousness rather than some actual tangible disaster for which you'd need some physical evidence. Skull deformation in the archaeology of South America isn't down to the well-documented, widespread practice of attaching boards to babies' heads, but the legacy of "aliens". Roswell was all true, apparently, as was everything to do with the Rendlesham incident, and all Belgian flying triangle sightings. The 1952 Washington DC UFO flap was definitely an alien invasion, and so on. There's no attempt to unpack the supposed proof of any of this, or to anticipate the detractors with counter-arguments.

Then there's a pointless digression into Davies's stint teaching in the American School in Kinshasa, why there aren't electric cars everywhere and suppressed technology cover-ups. Oh, and the '2012 Doomsday' had something to do with a miniature black hole created by the Large Hadron Collider, as prophesied in

Revelation 17:8. And Leonardo da Vinci went missing for two years because he was on an "interstellar sabbatical".

*We Are the Children of the Stars* might have met with wide-eyed wonder when it first appeared in 1974. It's the better written of the two, compiled with more thoroughness and consistency of internal logic than *From Ancient Astronauts*, even though everything it says is almost certainly factually very wrong.

We've had nearly 40 years more evolutionary biology research since 1974 with which to test the hypothesis that we must have been a species bred by aliens who colonised the planet long ago. I can't see the point of producing in 2013 a facsimile of a book making such extraordinary claims without adding any comment that brings these up to date – or at least puts them in a historical context.

For example, *We Are the Children* admits that the canals on Mars were an optical illusion, that the "black and white photos and TV transmissions (the only kind there are so far) show no canals... Yet the authors wish to state firmly that we believe the canal controversy cannot be resolved until color photos are transmitted from Mars." Post Mars Curiosity Rover and almost four decades on, this is laughable.

It would be nice if titles like this didn't breathlessly namecheck every wingnut "alien" hypothesis, but instead selected some ideas to defend with properly-built supporting arguments, whilst enhancing their credibility by rejecting other alleged "aliens" evidence as rubbish. Don't expect this to happen any time soon, though. **Matt Salusbury**

### Fortean Times Verdict

DAVIES: ALL OVER THE PLACE – TREES DIED FOR THIS? **2**

BINDER & FLINDT: SLIGHTLY MORE ENGAGING – JUST ALL WRONG **4**

## Dissection on Display

Cadavers, Anatomists and Public Spectacle

Christine Quigley

McFarland 2013

Pb, 216pp, illus, bib, ind, \$35.00, ISBN9780786444298

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £30.50



Bodysnatching, books bound in human skin, a foetus holding its own heart: this is no horror movie; welcome to the annals of anatomy.

Christine Quigley – who has written books on conjoined twins, human bone collections, and death – guides readers through the social history of opening the dearly departed. Dissection is messy, philosophically speaking, and each era must decide how to relate to its dead. Should a corpse be an object of reverence or a source of information? Can it be both?

Quigley highlights the simultaneous attraction and repulsion that dissection provokes. It was a public phenomenon for centuries, a spectacle which doctors, medical students and a curious public could attend. "Public dissection was a tradition, rich in ritual and ceremony, that had been carried on for generations," she explains. The anatomist was part scientist, part showman. He would anatomise criminals or corpses procured by bodysnatchers. This association with criminality did little for the profession's PR. By the 19th century, public dissection was viewed as brutal and unnecessary. The corpse left the public square as death itself became medicalised.

The human want to look inside does not leave us, however. And perhaps autopsy-as-entertainment provides the kind of psychological distance needed to confront our own vulnerable and finite biology. Today, the displayed corpse is alive and well on police procedurals or in the work of Body Worlds creator Günther von Hagens. Quigley ends her book with the German anatomist, deftly exploring the controversies that surround him.

While his plastination process is innovative, the most important thing about von Hagens is that

he embodies a long tradition of anatomical theatricality, both in terms of public persona and in the stylised arrangements of his subjects. In identifying tensions between science and sensationalism, Quigley gives us much to ponder.

Mike Pursley

### Fortean Times Verdict

A NOTEWORTHY LOOK AT THE PUBLIC CORPSE **7**

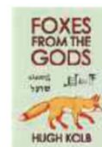
## Foxes from the Gods

Hugh Kolb

Fox Star Books 2013

Hb, 288pp, illus, notes, index, £12.99, ISBN 9780957564404

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99



While there have been recent scholarly books on Chinese and Japanese fox lore, the Western tradition seems to have been

largely neglected, so Hugh Kolb's excellent survey is very welcome.

Bracketed by introductory and concluding chapters which make some extremely pertinent remarks about current explanatory theories of symbolism and mythology itself, Kolb begins tracing the lore of the fox 5,000 years ago with Sumerian wisdom literature and continues through later Mesopotamian and Persian material, Greek myths and fables, the early Christian and mediæval traditions, and arrives at the present day with pub signs and current slang. The discussion of early astronomical constellations relating to the fox and its stories is fascinating and largely compelling, backed up by numerous excellent illustrations.

Kolb's erudition may be specialised but is obviously enormous and ranges across vast swathes of the ancient world; but the learning is lightly borne and he writes in an easy and frequently entertaining style. Even if foxes may not be your special area of interest, this is a splendid work for anyone fascinated by symbolism, myth and the history of ideas.

Highly recommended.

Steve Moore

### Fortean Times Verdict

A WONDERFUL WORK OF VULPINE FASCINATION **9**

## Sad Monsters

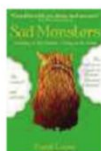
Growing on the Outside, Crying on the Inside

Frank Lesser

Souvenir Press 2013

Pb, 176pp, illus, £6.99, ISBN 9780285642324

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.64



*Sad Monsters* should be a natural for the fortean Christmas stocking: it's by an Emmy Award-winning writer for the *Colbert*

*Report*, it's illustrated by Willie Real, a Google doodler, and the subject matter is fairly well up our street.

Unfortunately, reading it from cover to cover in one sitting does the book few favours. It's a perfect loo book, with quite a few laugh-out-loud moments (often poking fun at the Tea Party end of the American political spectrum, though the *bien pensants* get some flack too) but also with a certain amount of padding and some of the stories don't have staying power.

Still, the drawings are splendid, especially the Groom of Frankenstein, one of the sparkier tales. "If you can't accept that a man could be deeply in love with a man made with the body parts of other men, then maybe you're the one with the twisted brain of a criminal." Frankenstein, says the narrator, didn't choose to be the way he is – he was made that way ("and I have the



diagrams to prove it"). This and a few other tales compensate for the less successful conceits.

The monsters include werewolves ("you haven't lost a friend, you've gained an amazing pet"), chupacabras (accused by Bigfoot, pictured as a beer-swilling redneck, of streaming *en masse* over the border and taking valuable sightings away from American legendary creatures) and vampires.

Val Stevenson

### Fortean Times Verdict

VERY, VERY GOOD IN PARTS, BUT STILL A CURATE'S EGG

6

# Death across time

A dense cross-cultural study of near-death experiences and afterlife beliefs identifies underlying and consistent mythemes



## Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations

Universalism, Constructivism and Near-Death Experience

Gregory Shushan

Continuum 2009

Pb, 238pp, bib, ind, £31.50, ISBN 9781441130884

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £31.50

*Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations* takes on the ambitious project of comparing beliefs about the afterlife in a wide range of historic civilisations and comparing them in order to determine what, if anything, they have in common – and not only that, but then to use those commonalities to try and identify what type of experience might have inspired those beliefs.

Shushan believes that the phenomenon of the "near-death experience" (NDE), a series of sensations or visions which are often reported by individuals who have been unconscious and near death, inspires elements of the afterlife beliefs in many cultures. In order to demonstrate this point, he takes the reader on a tour of afterlife beliefs in five parts of the world: Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt, Mesopotamia during the Sumerian and Babylonian periods, Vedic India, China before the introduction of Buddhism and the Aztec and Maya cultures of Central America.

These five samples are separated by thousands of miles and thousands of years; for Shushan, this is part of the point. Each culture is sufficiently far from the others that the likelihood of cultural influence is almost nil. If, therefore, the beliefs of these cultures are similar, they are more

likely to reflect some kind of cross-cultural universal human experience than the influence of one culture on another.

This type of universal comparative study, Shushan claims, is out of favour in the study of religion at present, and he spends some time defending the theoretical grounds of his work. Although previous comparative studies have often been carried out in the service of universalising agendas, he argues, they need not be – the goal of some previous studies doesn't invalidate the method.

What follows is a brief but detailed view of the afterlife beliefs of Shushan's chosen cultures, focusing on their views of the fate of the soul or spirit after death. In some cases, as in Egypt, this comes from texts which explicitly describe the fate of the soul. In other cases, Shushan draws some or all of his information from myths which describe the journeys of heroes into the underworld; these tales are interpreted as allegories of the soul's progress after death.

By comparing these beliefs, Shushan identifies a number of underlying recurring "mythemes" which appear in most or all of them. Examples of mythemes include the soul leaving the body, an encounter with deceased relatives, the idea that the fate of the soul in the afterlife depends on the deceased's conduct during life, and other similar broad concepts. Although the mytheme is consistent, it will have different expressions based on the culture relating the myth – thus, for instance, while Egyptian, Indian

and Aztec beliefs all share the idea that the soul's fate is based on conduct during life, exactly what that conduct should be and how the soul is judged vary between these cultures.

Shushan links these mythemes to elements of NDE, which contains many but not all of the same concepts in many of its modern manifestations. Possible explanations for NDE, according to Shushan, include neurological phenomena and even the possibility of an actual afterlife.

The one area that may give readers pause is Shushan's interpretation of the religious and mythological material he covers in each chapter. Some of his conclusions rest on readings of the material which he freely confesses are not the only possible ones. Do Assyriologists in general agree with Shushan's interpretation of Assyrian myth? The text leaves you with an urge to double-check – which is, of course, no bad thing.

*Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations* is a dense, rich, thought-provoking work that points at some interesting questions while making a good stab at proving the value of this type of comparative study. Even readers who don't agree with all of Shushan's conclusions will have to admire his willingness to mount a full-scale attack on some of the big questions, not only of the anthropology of religion, but of human existence in general.

James Holloway

### Fortean Times Verdict

TACKLES SOME OF THE REALLY BIG QUESTIONS – THOUGHT-PROVOKING

9

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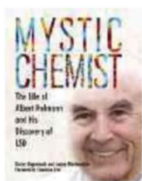
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## The acid test

A fine biography of the inventor of LSD, who disapproved of its use by hippies



### Mystic Chemist

The Life of Albert Hofmann and His Discovery of LSD

Dieter Hagenbach & Lucius Werthmüller

Synergetic Press 2013

Hb, 400pp, illus, £34.00, ISBN: 978 0907791 44 7

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £34.00

Hofmann's discovery of LSD in 1943 is the stuff of legend; after an initial experience from an accidental splash of the drug to the skin, he took a controlled dose followed by a wonky bicycle ride home and several hours in a whirl of phantasmagoric experience. Unknowingly he had discovered a drug which would have a dramatic impact on Western culture over the next 70 years. We all know the legend, but until recently little has been known about Hofmann. *Mystic Chemist* – essential an uncritical celebration of his life and work – peels back the layers to reveal a sensitive, compassionate human being who was extremely concerned about his 'problem child', as he called LSD until the day he died in 2008.

Far from being just a staid, empirical, scientist who plodded away at his work without considering the significance of what he created, Hofmann had many mystical experiences before he discovered what is possibly the most fortan substance known to humankind. As a child, he underwent several experiences in woods which filled him with bliss and oneness with nature – not unlike those reported by many who later took LSD.

He first synthesised LSD-25 in 1938, during a search for a cardiovascular stimulant, but didn't pursue it when the drug appeared to have little effect

on laboratory animals. Yet in a fortan prescience of its potency, five years later he had "a strange premonition that this drug might have additional effects to those exhibited during the first trial", so he synthesised it again and the rest is history.

Hofmann disapproved of LSD's widespread use by 'hippies', not least because the political and media furore led to its medical and psychotherapeutic use being outlawed. But he still believed it was a powerful force for spiritual and planetary change. When he retired from Sandoz in 1972, he began to be more open in his beliefs about LSD and began to engage with many in the psychedelic culture such as Tim Leary, with whom he was good friends, John Lilly, Aldous Huxley and Ernst Jünger. Hofmann frequently appeared at psychedelic conferences, right up to his death, and freely admitted he still, occasionally, used LSD.

*Mystic Chemist* would have merited 10/10 were it not for the fact that it uncritically repeats the canard that Francis Crick was using LSD when he discovered DNA. Much as the psychedelic community would love Crick to be a poster boy for the psychedelic renaissance, there isn't a scrap of verifiable evidence to suggest this assertion is true. That said, *Mystic Chemist* is a thorough piece of biographical research, with hundreds of photographs, most of which the reader will not have seen before. Couple that with an absolute mine of new facts about LSD and the new light it sheds on an unassuming man whose discovery has had a major impact on Western civilisation, and you have a book anyone remotely interested in psychedelic drugs should have on their shelves.

Andy Roberts

### Fortean Times Verdict

THOROUGHLY GOOD BIOGRAPHY OF THE DADDY OF PSYCHEDELIA

9

### Mirabilis

A Carnival of Cryptozoology and Unnatural History

Karl P N Shuker

Anomalist Books 2013

Pb, 185pp, illus, bib \$15.95, ISBN 9781938398056

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £11.50



Though everything else that follows consists of praise, let us address the criticism first.

Excluding quoted material, I count 75 exclamation marks in a scant 163 pages of text, only one of which (a shout-out to a colleague) is justified. Shuker ought to know better, as should his copy editor. (Exclamation marks in my own writings, including a book title, were inserted without my counsel.) The effect is to provide an impression, however unfairly, of an excitable or even borderline-hysterical soul.

Shuker is neither of these, as readers of *FT* and his 'Alien Zoo' column are aware. Even so, he might profit from some advice which other chroniclers of the anomalous might also take to heart: if you're writing about something that may seem improbable or fantastic, you don't need to shout as much.

Otherwise, the news concerning *Mirabilis* is all blissful. Once again, the startlingly prolific and well-versed Shuker – who, unlike most cryptozoologists, has a doctorate in zoology – expounds with insight on mysteries of the animal realm. Much of the material seems unfamiliar even to those of us who know something of cryptozoology. It's likely to be so to anyone apart from the most dedicated specialist. Shuker, a generalist, appears to have mastered a mountain of specialist literature.

Practically no standard stuff fills these pages: no Nessie-like lake monsters, no Sasquatch-like hairy bipeds and no relic dinosaurs, though they are mentioned tangentially. *Mirabilis* concerns giant spiders and snails, dwarf hippos, tiny squirrels, oversized crocodiles and beavers, uncatalogued lemurs, and (occasionally) comic or folkloric critters of the jackalope ilk. Except to the seriously pinch-

mouthed, these are more unusual than extraordinary claims. Shuker studies these questions with a zoologist's, not a fortan's, eye. If he's more open-minded than many of his colleagues (perhaps why he publishes mostly in *FT* and comparable non-academic outlets), he is no radical either.

The creatures he surveys are not the otherworldly ones that star in high-strangeness experience anomalies. Either they (possibly) exist in the conventional sense of the verb, or they once did, or they're the products of misidentifications and hoaxes. Shuker painstakingly sorts out these categories, drawing well-argued and plausible conclusions and never racing past the available evidence. He is free of the presumptions of the ideologically-based debunker who knowing that such things cannot be, freely disregards contradictory witness testimony. Sometimes by taking that testimony into consideration, Shuker is able, ironically, to identify the ostensibly mysterious animal at the centre of the report.

I took special delight in his deconstruction of an episode I first encountered in Fort which has since made the rounds of "true mystery" literature. Observers told of what looked like a fierce struggle between two whales on one side and an enigmatic giant bear-like mammal on the other. Shuker refuses to go down the easy route – simply to declare that eyewitnesses don't know what they're talking about – and follows the testimony and attendant clues to a brilliant and (I think) definitive solution, which you can read for yourself.

As always, Shuker's breadth of arcane knowledge prompts an amazed and admiring shaking of the head. His writing is clear and precise which means, among other things, that it can do without exclamation points. An always amiable guide, Shuker will leave you smarter about a host of curiosities of nature. The man's full of it, and I mean that as the highest of compliments.

Jerome Clark

### Fortean Times Verdict

AN AMIABLE GUIDE TO NATURE'S ENORMOUS AND TEENY ODDITIES

9

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### Arrow Season 1

Dir various, US 2012

Warner Home Video, £39.99 (Blu-ray), £29.99 (DVD)

Arrow, aka Oliver Queen (Stephen Amell), is the playboy son of a billionaire who has been stranded on an island for five years after his yacht was lost at sea and he was presumed dead. Now, he's returned to fulfill his dying father's wish: that he clean up the corruption in the city his dad helped create. As a vigilante known as 'The Hood', he begins his task... only to discover that all is not as it seems and that members of his own family appear to be closely intertwined with the widespread corruption and exploitation of the populace.

Using DC's Green Arrow character as raw material, rather than slavishly following the original comics, has resulted in a cracking superhero series. If you're looking for something dark, angsty and with no clear distinction between superhero and psycho (like *The Dark Knight Rises*), then *Arrow* might not be for you. The creators have thrown many things into the mix: love triangles, a revenge arc and copious combat. The largely nocturnal setting is not short on atmosphere and John Barrowman's villainous Malcolm Merlyn, erst-while business partner of Oliver's late father, is almost as loathsome as David Morrissey's Governor in *The Walking Dead*.

Along with romance, intrigue and ongoing bow-and-arrow/mar-

tial arts action, police detective Quentin Lance's pursuit of the vigilante as a menace to society adds another dimension to the mix, compounded by his lawyer daughter Laurel being the two-timed girlfriend of playboy Oliver. Both Laurel and her father consider Oliver responsible for the death of Laurel's sister on that fateful yacht trip. This provides the series with an ace up its sleeve: the ongoing story of Oliver's survival on the island and his genesis as a superhero, evolving from rich wimp to workout wonder; an arc which stretches over not one episode but the entirety of Season 1 and involves a shadowy military force with nefarious intentions that only become clearer towards the end of the season.

The other ace is Emily Bett Rickard's Felicity Smoak, a computer geek working for Queen Industries. Hired for one episode, Rickard's performance was so outstanding and the chemistry between her and Amell so palpable that she became a series regular. She injects some of the humour and overt sexual tension the show somewhat lacked, despite the love triangle between Oliver, Laurel and Oliver's best friend, Tommy Merlyn (son of baddie Malcolm). Felicity litters every other sentence with unintentional sexual innuendos and delivers a clichéd, bespectacled repressed librarian routine that really shouldn't work, but does. It's hard to think of the series without

her now.

*Arrow* has been a big hit for the CW network and Season 2 is already airing, with appearances by The Flash and Black Canary in the offing. The extras on the BD/DVD release include deleted scenes, highlights from a festival panel involving members of the cast, a fight/stunt school featurette and a feature called *Arrow Comes Alive* in which the creators talk about the choices they made in updating DC's *Green Arrow*. On the evidence of Season 1, those choices have hit the mark.

Nick Cirkovic

#### Fortean Times Verdict

THIS UPDATED SUPERHERO  
OUTING SCORES A BULLSEYE

8

### The Conspiracy

Dir Christopher McBride, Canada 2013

Arrow Films, £19.99 (DVD)

Two film-makers (actors Aaron Poole and James Gilbert, under their own names) start making a documentary about a hardcore conspiracy theorist, Terrance G (Alan C Peterson), who collects press cuttings revealing the hidden involvement of the State in our lives, and takes his message out on the sidewalks with a megaphone: "That's the genius of these rulers, that they've created a society that's conditioned to deny what's right in front of its eyes... that we're slaves."

After a few weeks, Terrance disappears – or was he disappeared

because he knew too much? Delving deeper into Terrance's theories Aaron comes to believe them while Jim remains sceptical. They discover a secret society of influential people, the Tarsus Club, which bases its symbolism on Mithraism (FT307:50-1).

Although it's presented as at least a semi-documentary, with interviews, talking heads and news footage, it's clear from very early on that this is a work of fiction, a mockumentary. The question is, how much is it presenting the beliefs of conspiracy theorists and how much is it challenging them? There's plenty of standard conspiracy fodder – JFK's assassination, 9/11, chem-trails, the New World Order, even the sinking of the *Lusitania* – and once you get past the ranting, Terrance G is actually more believable and more rational in his arguments than his real-life equivalents like Alex Jones. But then conspiracy theories are challenged as being "assumptions built on other assumptions". "He had every major conspiracy on there. If you stare at it long enough you're going to see whatever you want to see." And so there's doubt, questioning, ambiguity.

The most clear-cut dismissal comes from a talking head (who, like nearly everyone in the film, is fictional) saying that the plethora of conspiracy theories is "a fascinating societal phenomenon. And it's one that we have to try to understand in order to dispel it."

She goes on: "The thing about the belief in conspiracy theories is that you can't disprove them. You can't prove that there aren't secret masters trying to control and manipulate us. Paranoid schizophrenics will often subconsciously create delusions that can't be disproved. This allows them to have the delusion go on indefinitely. Now I'm not saying that all people that believe in conspiracy theories are schizophrenics. However, if the delusion goes unchecked, the result can lead, sometimes, to very dangerous consequences."

But, reinforcing the ambiguity in the film, there's a delightful twist when we discover who this speaker actually is; maybe her comments were misinformation...

After the conspiracy theorists themselves the film's greatest debt – conscious or unconscious – is to Jon Ronson's book *Them*. Jim asks



who "They" are (the answer being the Bilderberg Group, the Illuminati, Bohemian Grove, the Council on Foreign Relations, the military industrial complex, the Rothschilds, the World Bank...); Aaron and Jim are followed by a black car, much as Ronson described; and they infiltrate the (fictional) Tarsus Club, just as Ronson infiltrated (the real) Bohemian Grove. This leads, though, to a far-too-long sequence of shaky handheld camera as the film-makers get caught up, frighteningly, in its initiation ritual.

Like many mockumentaries, especially those using "found footage", *The Conspiracy* – despite its interesting engagement with contemporary conspiracy – is a bit of a mess in places.

David V Barrett

### Fortean Times Verdict

A SLIGHTLY MESSY TAKE ON CONTEMPORARY CONSPIRACY **6**

## Sleepwalker

Dir Saxon Logan, UK 1984  
BFI, £19.99 (Dual Format)

Thought lost for many years, *Sleepwalker* is one of those semi-legendary British films you've more likely read about than actually seen, but it's now been unearthed by the BFI. Saxon Logan's bizarre politico-horror spoof sees a pair of middle-class Londoners (super-yuppie Nikolas Grace and snobby Joanna David) visit the crumbling country home ('Albion') of weird brother and sister Bill Douglas (definitely on the wrong side of the camera) and Heather Page. Logan was a protégé of Lindsay Anderson, and this is a *Britannia Hospital*-style state-of-the-nation piece that riffs on Whale's *The Old Dark House* to stage a dinner-party-from-Hell battle between the effete old Left and the thrusting forces of Thatcherism. It's both predictable and compellingly odd, and struck me as a strangely authentic, and oddly moving, time-capsule of its era. The set contains a Logan interview and shorts, but the other gem is Rodney Giesler's *The Insomniac*, an accomplished little fantasy-cum-nightmare.

David Sutton

### Fortean Times Verdict

POLITICS AS HORROR IN 'LOST' EIGHTIES CURIOSITY **7**

## 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))

### MY AMITYVILLE HORROR

Dir Eric Walter, US 2012  
Arrow Video, £15.99 (Blu-ray)

### THE CASEBOOK OF EDDIE BREWER

Dir Andrew Spencer, UK 2012  
[www.thecasebookofeddiebrewer.com](http://www.thecasebookofeddiebrewer.com),  
£10.99 (DVD)

Just when I thought every facet of the Amityville case had been exhumed, dissected and analysed, film-maker and Amityville 'enthusiast' Eric Walter offers a documentary with a fresh and intriguing perspective. Daniel Lutz was 10 years old when he and his family fled the supposedly haunted house on 112 Ocean Drive. Now, almost 40 years later, he's ready to tell his side of the story; and, according to him, there really were demonic pigs, ghostly figures and legions of flies! Sceptics are likely to roll their eyes at how Daniel's recollections so clearly fit some of the iconic images from the subsequent 1979 movie. However, to write the film off is rather to miss the point. Don't watch this as some tract on the whether Amityville was real or not – think of it more as a fascinating character study of someone who went through an utterly unique and life-defining

experience. After all, whether or not there really were spooks at work hardly changes the fact that a 10-year-old boy and his siblings were moved into a murder house and then thrown into a supernatural media circus that plays on to this day. Is it any wonder the guy has issues?

Daniel offers some controversial angles, insisting that it was his hated (and apparently telekinetic) stepfather George Lutz who really triggered the horror of the house. George comes out of this so badly that the filmmakers might well have been sued had he not been dead already. Director Eric Walter keeps things creepy but subtle (don't expect the night-vision camera scares of those TV documentaries). It also feels balanced, with a decent amount of time given to each side of the argument. In the end, you'll likely still be undecided as to whether the case was genuine or not, but I'd say the Lutz family really was haunted; whether by ghosts, demons, psychology or popular culture, I guess we'll never know. *My Amityville Horror* is rich with chills, as well as sadness.

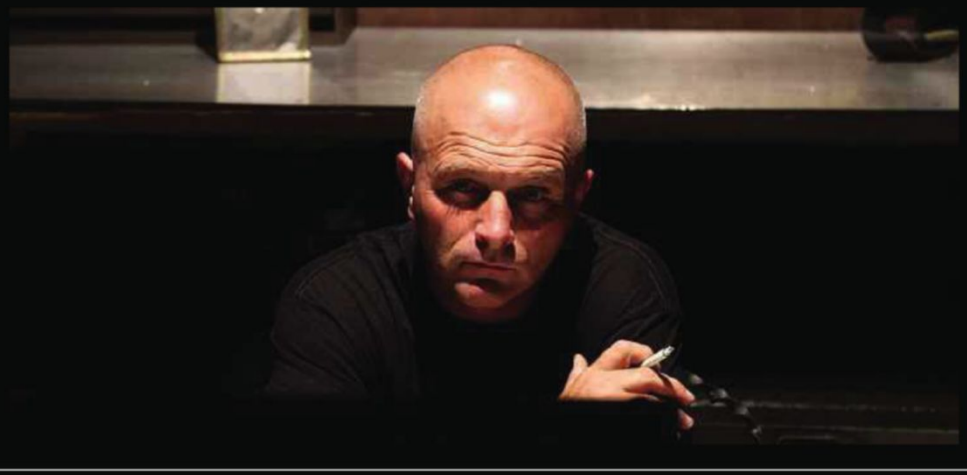
Hauntings of a rather different flavour turn up in the enjoyable indie flick *The Casebook of Eddie Brewer*. It's an odd



found-footage/mockumentary/horror hybrid about an old-school Scottish investigator of the paranormal. It's got some cringeworthy acting and a few hokey, home-movie style scares, but what elevates it above the seemingly constant run of hand-held horrors these days, is a well-judged, humorous script with some laugh-out-loud moments. Think *The Office* meets *Paranormal Activity*. There are thoughtful asides on the supernatural too. At one point Eddie remarks: "The paranormal is like the stock market up in the ether. We don't see it, but when it falls it makes a tremendous impact". A point on which both Eddie Brewer and Daniel Lutz appear to be in total agreement.

### Fortean Times Verdict

PARANORMAL ACTIVITIES, REAL AND IMAGINED **7/6**





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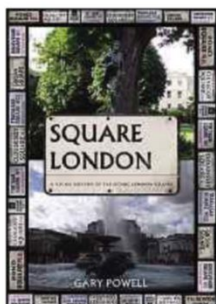
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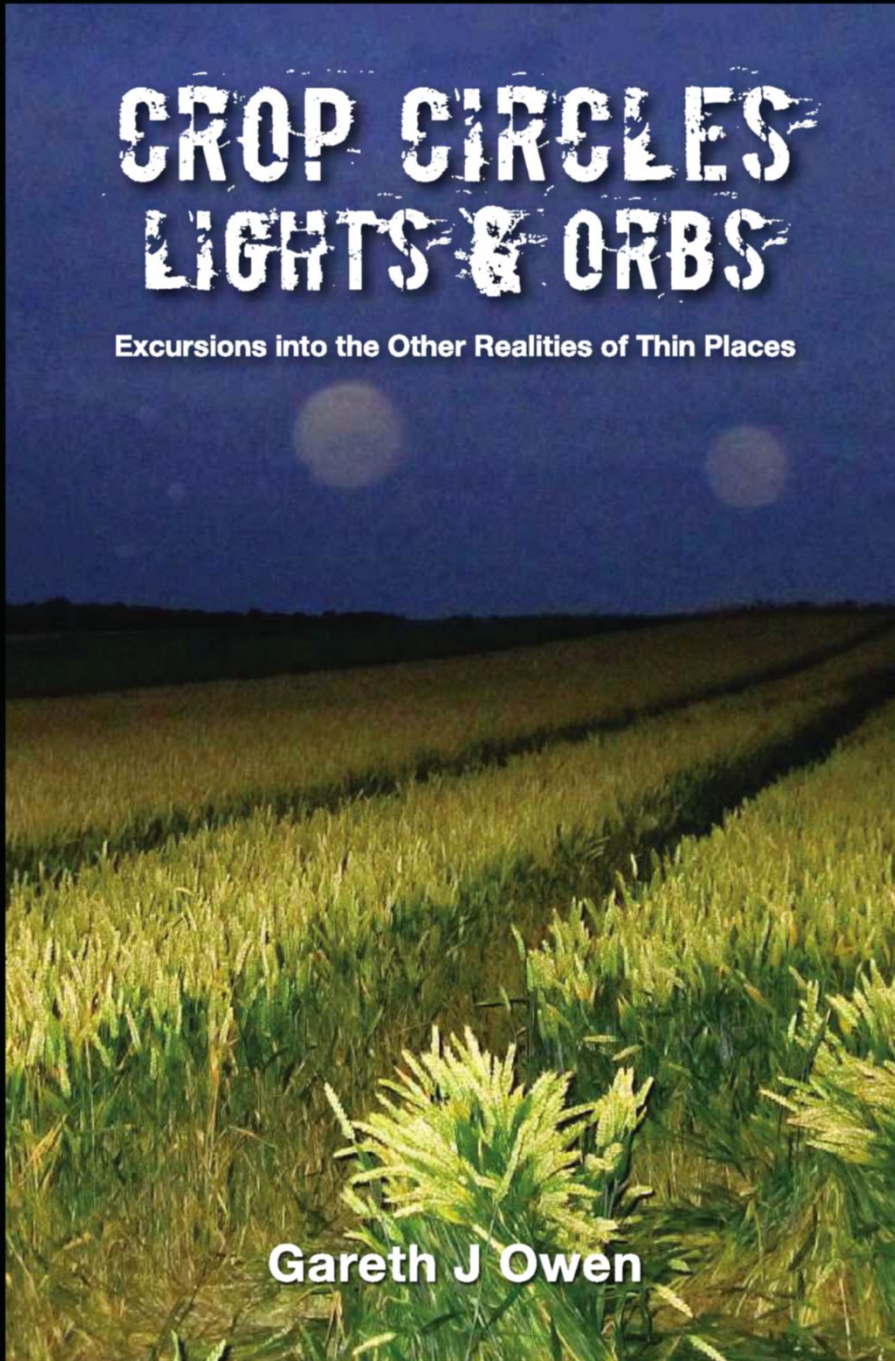
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Dear FT...

# letters



## Pots & kettles

Jerome Clark states that he knew the late John Keel personally over several decades, and so has every right to publish his thoughts and feelings about Keel and his work [FT305:56-57]. Why didn't Clark publish this piece while Keel was still living, and give Keel a fair chance to reply? I contend that a man who co-authored a book titled *Creatures of the Outer Edge* (1978) has no business mocking the 'mystification' Keel brought to his own work. Isn't this a case of the kettle calling the pot black? I don't think it's unreasonable to expect Clark to repudiate his own rather outré early work here, in print, before savaging Keel's for its 'mystification'.

Clark also states "to Keel and those who believed him, ufology failed because ufologists are stunted people temperamentally unable to comprehend the sinister, manipulative, supernatural character of the phenomenon. Keel also voiced this view in a near-deafening rhetorical volume..." – suggesting here and elsewhere in the article that Keel figuratively 'demonised' those who disagreed with or opposed him, and yet Clark snidely and non-too-subtly completely dismisses the "international network" of those who were "enchanted" by Keel's books, who, in the present, Clark refers to as "the remaining faithful".

So Clark says Keel dismissed everyone who disagreed with him, but Clark dismisses everyone who appreciates Keel's books? That's not a very sophisticated approach to framing an argument.

By the way, I recently received an email from Anomalist Books stating that they will be reprinting Keel's *The Eighth Tower* later this year or in early 2014.

**Joseph Barnes**  
By email

## The unquiet dead

Leo Hickman suggested in the *Guardian* (16 July 2013) that some of the recent "vampire graves"

## Simulacra corner



Tania Hill noticed this tree stump in the garden of the Sheraton Hotel Toronto, Canada, in February 2010. It reminded her of the molten T1000 Terminator in Terminator 2, after taking a shot to the face. We intended to publish this

photo in the previous issue, but due to a mix-up the "fairy door" photo (see p69) was published in its place.

*We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and*

*figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to [siek@forteantimes.com](mailto:siek@forteantimes.com) – and please tell us your postal address.*

found in Eastern Europe might have "a less spooky explanation": that the skeletons were actually those of executed criminals rather than vampires [FT305:14]. I made much the same point back in the March FT, speculating that the graves could be evidence of mob-style killings rather than preventative ritual ['Ancient Villainy', FT298:67].

**Alec Barney Page**  
*Chellaston, Derby*

## Wurdulak

Jim Price mentions *Isle of the Dead* (1945), set on a Greek island during the Balkan war, in which Boris Karloff may or may not be a vrykolake [FT304:73]. When I first read his letter, I thought he must be confusing *Isle of the Dead* with the second segment of Mario Bava's *Black Sabbath* (1963)

which, I recalled, also deals with vrykolakes. But when I watched *Black Sabbath* again, I realised it takes place in 19th century Russia, and the creature Boris Karloff may or may not be is not a vrykolake, but a wurdulak. The man certainly had an impressive range.

**Mikita Brottman**  
*Maryland Institute College of Art*

## Sitting by Malcolm X

Here's a 'singular experience' [FT306:68] from an author who could hardly be described as 'mainstream'. In *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Grove Press, New York, 1965, pp.186-7) the prominent Black Muslim and ex-convict describes something that followed an intense prayer session for relief from the confused state he was then in while serving a lengthy prison sentence for as-

sorted crimes committed prior to his conversion. It is the only such experience described in the book. "It was the next night, as I lay on my bed, I suddenly, with a start, became aware of a man sitting beside me in my chair. He had on a dark suit, I remember. I could see him as plainly as anyone I look at. He wasn't black, and he wasn't white. He was light-brown-skinned, an Asiatic cast of countenance, and he had oily black hair. I had no idea whatsoever who he was. He just sat there. Then, suddenly as he had come, he was gone."

**Guy Lyon Playfair**  
*London*

## The common thome

Nils Erik Grande states that James Thurber “never discussed *fortean* as such” [FT306:68]. In fact, in his 1949 collection *The Beast In Me And Other Animals*, Thurber touches on cryptozoology (although he might not have recognised the term) in his sketch “Extinct Animals Of Bermuda” (p.169ff). A flavour of his wit: “The common thome, so called because of his commonness – he cooled his soup with his hat and went to bed with his sox on – could only look in one direction, east. He fed on nubbins, grebe feathers, and the foxed pages of Ovid. In the winter he was cold but in the summer he was somewhat warmer. The thome’s nest consisted of a moyst upended over a straband. He is either extinct or somebody took him.”

**Richard George**

*St Albans, Hertfordshire*

## Peter Capaldi

Spookily, the Internet Movie Database lists Peter Capaldi’s character in the zombie movie *World War Z* as “W.H.O. Doctor”. The film predates his selection as the 12th incarnation of the famous Timelord.

<http://m.imdb.com/title/tt0816711/fullcredits/cast>

**Martyn P Jackson**

*Cramlington, Northumberland*

## Singapore guns

I was somewhat surprised by Mythconception 168 [FT306:17]. Of course the Singapore guns faced out to sea. Singapore is

an island (and a rather small one). How else do you defend an island? It makes total strategic sense to try to sink the invading force before it can reach land. As for the “impenetrable jungle” myth: the east coast of Malaya is jungle; the west coast is a broad plain, largely consisting of rubber plantations.

The British general staff worked out in 1937 that this was the only practicable way to attack Singapore; and the Japanese in 1942 followed this advice. The strategic concept for defending Singapore was absolutely sound. The British even managed to work out that it would be a good idea to blow up the causeway connecting Singapore with the mainland. The tactical execution was appallingly bad; and that is why Singapore fell.

A brief comment regarding Andy Roberts’s and David Clarke’s article on the Bulgarian UFO [FT306:22]. They query whether this was “a genuine UFO”; but as far as can be discerned from the evidence, it was an object, it was flying, and it remains unidentified: in other words, it was an Unidentified Flying Object. Yeah, yeah, I know by “genuine UFO” they meant extraterrestrial craft – but the term UFO is inherently open-ended.

**Martin Jenkins**

*London*

## Facial reconstruction

Regarding the facial reconstruction of *Homo floresiensis* reported by Paul Devereux [FT302:26]: I

have searched for any reports of blind studies of the accuracy of facial reconstructions. It would, for example, be easy to give a number of artists the same MRI scans of living people and see how accurately they are portrayed, but as far as I could ascertain nothing like this has ever been reported. So I wrote a question to *Focus* magazine asking whether the facial reconstruction of ancient skulls is

accurate. The reply (April 2013, p64) said that the reliability of the method is controversial. With modern skulls the method is only used as an aid to identification of a victim and is not admissible as evidence in court. The result is subjective and different artists will produce different results. The reconstructions that we are constantly given in “factual” TV programmes aren’t at all what they are frequently said to be.

Mr Devereux also mentioned the finding that in AD 774-5 the Earth was probably bombarded by gamma rays. Fortunately, the burst was short-lived and the source far away, so it didn’t cause any extinctions. Back in 2004 Melott et al. <arXiv:astro-ph/0309415> theorised that the late Ordovician mass extinction (c. 440 million years ago) could at least partly be the result of a local gamma ray burst (GRB). The energy produced by GRBs is such that they might result from certain supernova or the merging of two neutron stars, but they seem a bit common for this sort of event. In true *fortean* manner I have always secretly wondered if in fact we are seeing the exhaust from a *Star Trek* type stellar cruiser as it disappears into a wormhole.

**Ron Gardner**

*Ludlow, Shropshire*

## Last days

Those who lament the 2012 “Apocalypse not” [FT300:33-43] having joined the Y2K bug on the ash heap of failed doomsday prophecies could take comfort from Robert Brockway’s *Everything is Going to Kill Everybody* – especially if they are altruistic. That’s because Brockway spells out the many forms of mega-disaster that challenged humanity in prehistoric times and shall likely do so again. Super-volcanoes, like the one percolating under Yellowstone, are one example of what gloriously dire event some future generation may be privileged to endure. Thus, whoever regrets our missing the fun that did not happen at the end of 2012 can altruistically celebrate instead, that some of our descendants (or future incarnations) will surely witness, and undergo, whatever

sticky wicket may confront *Homo sapiens* in the future. In fact, as Brockway explains, we barely escaped far worse than anyone could wish for – a nuclear Armageddon aborted just in time by astute Soviet radar engineer Stanislav Petrov, who realised that an apparent US missile launch in September 1983 was simply a radar glitch caused by a rare alignment of sunlight, clouds and satellites.

Two alternate perspectives have somewhat reassured this doomsday worrier. The first appears in *The Beginning of Infinity* by David Deutsch, a philosopher and physicist in the arcane field of quantum computing. Deutsch argues that, essentially, progress feeds on itself and will keep doing that indefinitely – unless we wrongly choose the infinity of ignorance which can befall incorrigibly static societies (Deutsch cites Easter Island, a classic case of the “what were they thinking?” syndrome) that stifle “creativity and criticism”.

A differently hopeful view comes from Mother Meera, an authentically spiritual person (in my opinion) who says that “the end of the world is Man’s idea, not God’s idea”. If there is no God, that is certainly true. But if there is, that Deity might tell you that *when* the world ends depends upon *where* it ends. If that boundary is the confines of the Solar System, the final end will come when the Sun catching a cold gives us pneumonia. (A Solar sneeze like the Carrington Event of 1859 would be more troublesome today than it was then). By that time, however, escape for some could be possible because, according to NASA scientist Harold “Sonny” White, a “warp drive” is theoretically possible (*Popular Science*, April 2013).

But if the world is the Universe, the end happens when – as it says in the Bible, and cosmologists probably agree – “the heavens shall wear out like a garment,” in the most distant conceivable future. Yet if beyond the space-time dimension there dwell the “many mansions” referred to by Jesus (possibly glimpsed through OBEs, ESP, etc.), then Deutsch’s infinity becomes a subset of a larger one, even further beyond human understanding than are many mysteries of the physical Cosmos that still baffle current science.

My own favourite end-of-the-world remark was uttered by William Faulkner while accepting the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946: “When





## Another fairy door

Regarding tiny doors in trees [FT302:70, 305:73]: Here's one in Rushmere Country Park in Bedfordshire. There was no one in when I called.

**Terry Warburton MBE**, *Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire*

the last clang of doom has echoed off the last worthless rock, there will still be a puny human voice – still talking.”

**Richard Porter**

*Denver, Colorado*

## Crook Frightfulness

I note with concern that Lucy Pringle (photo caption FT306:28) is experiencing the initial stages of Crook Frightfulness. Not only have the tormentors used exactly the same words noted by Arthur Mills (FT305:36), but they've repeated the last three words to add extra emphasis. Somebody should do something about this sort of thing.

**Joe Blunden**

*By email*

## Denver Airport

The great airport conspiracy is even greater than Fortean Traveller Nick Parkins imagines [FT307:74-76]. The runways at Denver International when seen from the air may almost form a swastika. But the runways at Heathrow, when seen from above almost form a Star of David. Be afraid, be very afraid.

**John Rimmer**

*London*

## SF gem

Many years ago, probably in the late 1970s, I saw a truly wonderful British sci-fi film on Norwegian TV. It started off with several groups of people travelling to some kind of amateur ufologist meeting in the countryside. All were portrayed as mildly cranky, probably bored, and not too bright middle-class types. Upon arrival their host, an archetypal British eccentric, was busy erecting an antenna in his garden to make contact with an alien mothership. He explained that an alien child had been left behind by the ship, and he was trying to reunite it with its parents. This was a bit too much for his guests, who clearly indicated that this was taking their make-believe interest in UFOs too far. An interesting shift in attitude, brilliantly portrayed as I remember it, which lasted until he actually showed them the alien.

Now, I think that one of the most important (and rare) human emotions is the feeling you have when you see a *real* UFO or meet a *real* ghost. It's a feeling of total disorientation, of having your secure world-view comprehensively smashed. It's something that cannot be imagined. It must be experienced. This is what happens

to the characters in the film, and the wonderful part is how this is portrayed. Some just break down; others demand that the creature be killed at once; exactly what the others did, I don't remember. I can't recall any details after this point, but I think the film had a happy ending – the ship eventually came back for the kid. Does anybody know the name of this film? I've never heard it mentioned since I saw it.

**Nils Erik Grande**

*Oslo, Norway*

## Scrapfaggot Green

I was pleased to read Robert Halliday's article on 'The Witch of Scrapfaggot Green' [FT303:30-35], as I've been researching the same subject. The alleged 'phenomena' I dismissed long ago as a hoax, but it's good to learn that locals later admitted manufacturing them. My interest has been more in establishing the facts concerning the stone, the witch and the crossroads, from the point of view of research into 'landscape legends'.

The map reference given, TL726130, is incorrect. That is the location of a threeways at the junction of Drake's Lane and Leighs Road, not "at the end of Domsey Lane". Scrap Faggots Green (as it should properly be termed) is centred on the crossing of Domsey Lane and Cranham Road, at TL728126. Almshouses, which were destroyed by bombing during World War II, were once to be found in the southwest angle of the crossroads, whilst the local pest house (dating from 1765) was built on wasteland at the northern edge of the Green, and still exists as the kernel around which Poste House Cottage was built. The photo showing Mr Halliday at the Green is indeed the correct location, about three miles (4.8km) from Great Leighs, and in the parish of Little Waltham.

The witch at the centre of the story, and the supposed object of the hauntings at the St Anne's Castle Inn, is usually stated to be Anne Hewghes of Great Leighs, whom Mr Halliday mentions. However, she was tried on three counts of witchcraft in 1621, not 1626 as stated. And unfortunately for the tale of burning and burial, she was

in fact acquitted on all counts. (Ref: *Calendar of Essex Assize Records*, 12 Mar 1621.)

The idea that 'scrapfaggot' is corrupted from 'scratchfaggot', an old Suffolk word for a witch or hag, seems to have originated solely with Harry Price. Reinforcing Mr Halliday's citation of Gepp's *Essex Dialect Dictionary*, I would note that Moor's *Suffolk Words and Phrases* (1823) and Forby's *Vocabulary of East Anglia* (1830) both agree that 'scrapfaggot' means wood for kindling, with no other meaning or variant.

*Time* magazine's quotation of a Dr MacSweeney that the stone had been moved regularly without incident over the previous 20 years I find suspect. I can trace no such person in Great Leighs or the surrounding villages during the period in question. If such a rock in a prominent location, weighing two tons and having folklore attached, had actually existed prior to 1944, it would surely have featured in Salter's 'Sarsen, Basalt and Other Boulders in Essex', published in the *Essex Naturalist* in 1912. But he is quite silent on the matter – despite mentioning another boulder only 400m (1,312ft) to the west, at Power's Farm.

The stone currently at St Anne's Castle is clearly not the original 'witch's stone', as it can be lifted by one man. Like the whole story of Scrap Faggots Green, it seems to be part of a locally manufactured tale that has grown in the telling.

**Mike Burgess**

*By email*

I found the recent feature on "The Witch of Scrapfaggot Green" rather interesting, especially the idea that a witch's grave would be covered by a large boulder to prevent her spirit from escaping. This piece of folklore has parallels with the "Devil's Stone" in the Devonshire village of Shebbear. Village tradition has it that the large boulder outside Shebbear churchyard prevents the Devil from escaping into the village, and every Guy Fawkes night the stone is flipped to ensure that the Devil remains interred. Further info and pictures can be found on my blog: <http://unusual-encounters.blogspot.co.uk/>

**Paul "Tiny" Jackson**

*Salisbury, Wiltshire*

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

## Thatcher's haunted chairs

I am a police officer, and for a time was in the Diplomatic Protection Group. One of our responsibilities was Lady Margaret Thatcher, and the security of her house in Chester Square near Victoria station in London.

The house itself is a typical Georgian town house, and had all the security systems a protected person could want. In the basement accessed from the street was a secure police room, where the CCTV monitors could be watched by the officer. If Mrs T was away and the house unoccupied, a lone officer would spend several hours there until relieved. The whole place was "locked down" and alarmed; nobody could get in or out without being seen, or setting something off.

One typically atmospheric winter's night I was there alone sitting in the basement room. Above me on the ground floor was the dining room, which looked out onto the square itself. The floors in these buildings are exceptionally thick concrete.

At around midnight I distinctly heard movement from the floor above. Thinking I might have nodded off and imagined it, I went to have a look. As I turned back on myself to enter the dining room, I saw the long table and could also see out into the moonlit street. All the large dining chairs were pushed into the table neatly, except the first one on the left as I was looking at it. I convinced myself I had imagined this noise of movement, and absent-mindedly tidied the chair by pushing it back under the table like all the others.

About 10 minutes later, now wide awake, I definitely heard the noise of furniture being dragged across the floor above, as if someone sitting in a chair had been pulled backwards in it by another person.

I am open-minded about things paranormal, but didn't think of this as anything other than an incursion by persons unknown. I called my base for reinforcements and a car and two motorcyclists made their way to my location. I drew my glock pistol and began to make my way carefully towards the noise – I didn't fancy being trapped in the basement if there was to be a scrap. I took the same route as previously, and as I turned again into the dining room, this time with my pistol at the ready, *all* the chairs on the left-hand side of the table had been pushed right back against the wall.



POLIPHILLO / CREATIVE COMMONS

**"I kept turning round expecting to see someone, but the church was quite empty..."**

I ran hell for leather for the main front door onto the street and burst out just as my back-up arrived.

Even though it was rather a cushy posting on a cold winter night, I never went back to Maggie's again. I was later told that loads of other sightings and incidents had taken place over the years, including a ghostly figure on the stairs.

**Simon Crowley**  
*Kemsing, Kent*

### Hostile church

About 10 years ago I visited Pluckley in Kent, having heard that it was "the most haunted village in England". I have an open mind about ghosts and did not expect to experience anything much. When I arrived, I had a look at St Nicholas Church. I'm not a Christian but I like churches and cathedrals,

finding them calming and peaceful. However, this church was about the least calming building I've ever visited. The atmosphere was brooding and positively hostile; I had the unshakable feeling that I was being watched by someone who didn't want me to be there. I kept turning around expecting to see someone, but the church was quite empty. Spooked, but telling myself I had probably imagined it, I left and had a look around the village.

Just before I left Pluckley, I made myself go back inside the church. The feeling of being watched by hostile eyes was as strong as ever. Once again I looked around but was quite alone. Then someone spoke! The words sounded as though they had been partially snatched away as if by a strong wind, and the only word I could clearly hear in the sentence was "septimus". I later learned that this is Latin for "the seventh", and have also heard that Septimus would sometimes be used in Roman times for a seventh child (or perhaps a child born in the seventh month).

At this point I decided to leave. I saw that the heavy wooden door was now open. I had definitely closed it after me when I entered, and it required some effort to move it at all. It certainly wouldn't have been moved by a gust of

wind. I then walked around the outside of the church, and there was no one there either.

**Matt Kenway**  
*Pocklington, East Riding of Yorkshire*

### Final appearance

One day I strapped my two small children in their double buggy and walked over to my father's house in Little Rochester, Northamptonshire. As we walked along the embankment, I noticed a woman in a lilac cardigan just ahead of us who seemed to be looking for something – a dog perhaps? She nipped across the road and appeared to dodge the traffic. I lost sight of her, cursing the fact that I had left the bread for the swans on the kitchen table. Further along the embankment there was a small group of people looking at the mill on the other side of the river. As I approached, a policeman on the far side was hooking the body of a woman from the water. I stared in disbelief at the lilac cardigan. There was no attempt at resuscitation. But hadn't I just seen her? At that moment my father met us. We watched as a swan landed by the



body, then took off and flew high in the sky. We quickly got the children away from the scene. Dad said the very thing that I'd been thinking: "The swan's taken her soul to safety." I had seen her – or her ghost – and picked up the distress of a soul in anguish. We later found out that cancer had been the reason for her suicide.

**Linda Hardy**  
Wellingborough, Northants

## Tiny angel?

A taxi came to pick me up at 3.30am on 27 May 2012 to go to Heathrow. I knew the driver well as he does the airport runs for us – a sensible guy, in his mid to late 40s. We left my place in Roosevelt Way, Colchester, went to Mersea Road and turned to go into town – round the S bend, past the cemetery, then up the hill to the straight section after the Grapes pub. Standing in the middle of our lane into town was a bright white figure about 18in to 24in (45-60cm) high with a strangely vague outline that seemed to have shimmering light coming from it rather than being reflected from our headlights. It seemed to be looking towards us. As we slowed down it stayed in the middle of our lane, so – as there was no traffic – the driver went into the other lane. As we drove past I had a clear view of whatever it was and it didn't make any sense at all. It wasn't rubbish or a plastic bag because the air turbulence of the car didn't cause it to move at all.

"What the hell was that?" I said, to which he replied: "I came this way a few minutes ago to pick you up and there was nothing there then." He looked at me and added in a subdued voice, "It looked like a little angel."

"That's exactly what I thought!" I replied.

If I had been driving I would have turned round and gone back because there was probably a simple answer; however, we went past very slowly and I had a clear view, but couldn't make out a clear outline. Very strange.

**John Birch**  
Colchester, Essex

## Woken by a stare

By the summer of 1980 I had been on permanent night-shift for over a year and had no trouble in sleep-

ing soundly through the normal daytime disturbances in my parents' farmhouse in Buckinghamshire. However, it wasn't a noise or a sudden movement that gradually woke me one afternoon, but the persistent and unmistakable feeling that someone was watching me as I lay in bed. I'd never much liked the prickly sense of unease when being stared at by someone out of my direct line of sight (a fairly common protective instinct, I guess), but it was usually fleeting and the situation didn't arise often. But this occasion was different, for it must have taken a very deliberate and protracted scrutiny to wake me up in this particular way.

My bed was under the window and I lay facing the wall, so as I opened my eyes and looked up I could see the sky under the thin curtains. It was roughly four o'clock on a gloriously sunny day. I could hear woodpigeons and the muffled bark of a dog and the cries of its owners in the nearby woodland. Everything felt familiar and normal, but as I was closing my eyes again I was prompted by the discomfort in the back of my neck. It was as if someone was behind me and staring at me, so I rolled over.

She stood in silence about 6ft (1.8m) away in the corner of my room furthest from the door, between the wardrobe and the hi-fi unit. It was difficult to say how old she was, maybe 19 or 20. She wasn't wearing make-up and her simple bodice and skirt didn't look shop-bought. She wasn't pretty in any conventional sense; I remember uncombed fair hair and a large sore or birthmark on her lower lip, an expressionless face and large sullen eyes that were staring at me intently and unblinkingly. My first thought was that one of my mother's visitors had accidentally wandered into my room and any second there would be an embarrassed apology. Slightly annoyed but not wishing any fuss, I rolled back over to convey the message *don't worry you didn't disturb me* and closed my eyes.

There then followed a long awkward pause. The apology never came and the sensation of falling (literally) off to sleep was met by a rising panic on the way up. I could sense the girl was still standing there (she remained for quite a while) and my mind was starting to get rather unsettled over the oddness of the situation. For some reason I didn't want her to try to attract my

attention again, either by talking to me and certainly not by reaching out and touching me. I had to make a conscious decision on how to react and it was difficult. But I was tired, I had a shift that evening and I chose sleep. When I awoke, she was gone and my mother later confirmed there had been no visitor that day.

The house was not old; it had been built for the family 15 years earlier with no indication that anything had existed on the (agricultural) site before. I'm not a believer in ghosts as deceased spirits, although I am intrigued by the idea of sightings possibly being a passive replay of past events under special circumstances. What I experienced, though, was not passive but an interactive event, something my sleeping unconscious brain had perceived as a potential threat and woken me. If I'd known then that this was going to be probably the only fortan event in my life, I might have been tempted to ask her why she was staring at me so intently.

**Rob Wittwer**  
Chenies, Buckinghamshire

## Blue flash

One evening in November 1999, when I was 17, my best friend and I were returning from a afternoon shopping in Stoke on Trent town centre, making out way down Broad Street (the main road out of the shopping district) when a huge expanse of electric blue light appeared to explode over the town centre. It was not lightning. People came out from stores and cars stopped – one car even doing a U-turn in the road with its driver exclaiming, "A bomb has gone off!" before zooming towards the 'explosion'.

It didn't make the news. There seemingly was no event that night; yet what we all experienced was very real. What is stranger still, literally moments before the 'blast', both my friend and I had been gripped by a strange sense of fear and had begun running for no apparent reason, he actually gripping my arm at the moment of the light in the sky.

**Elijah Lycett**  
Macclesfield, Cheshire

## Night visitor

When I was about 13 years old, staying in Bonero Park, South Africa, I slept over at a friend's house one Saturday night. We went to bed about midnight, but after a while I had an urge to wake up. I sat up and saw a humanlike figure standing

in front of me. At first I thought it was my friend, who occasionally sleepwalks, but when I looked over at her side of the bedroom she was sound asleep. I looked back at the figure and found it staring at me as if it was trying to tell me something – and then it moved closer to me. I think I must have fainted, but when I sat up again, the figure was gone. I wish I knew why the strange figure came to me that night; now it often comes for a visit even though I've now moved to Sydney, Australia – but I'm not so freaked out about it as I was the first time.

**Stacy Watkins**  
By email

## Scouse Spirit

Around seven years ago when I was a student in Liverpool, I rented a typical student house with four of my friends in the area of Kensington. One night I had a very vivid dream of searching the dark house armed only with a torch with the overwhelming sense of dread that there was something present in the place. From what I remember, the dream didn't culminate in me finding anything, but I woke from it completely terrified and sat up in bed.

First of all I noticed that the hairs on the back of my neck and arms were standing on end. Then I sensed something was in the room with me. I turned to see a small girl in an old-fashioned dress fiddling around with something in the corner of the room. I calmly kept my eyes on her as I got up and switched the light on, at which point she immediately vanished. By that point I was terrified and kept the light on and watched very early morning TV until it was light enough to leave the house.

The following day I left the house to go to the library with a friend, who lived elsewhere. I told her what had happened but no one else. I did, however, text my housemate who had been in the house that night and asked him to meet me in the pub after his shift in the hospital (he was a student nurse), as I had something to tell him. When he arrived, without any prompting at all, he told me that he had had a terrible night and dreamt that the house was haunted.

I've spoken to both friends numerous times since and both have confirmed my version of events, insisting there was no communication between them. This, combined with what I saw, convinces me that there was something in the house that night. We never experienced anything like that again.

**Ben Goodrum**  
London



# FORTEAN TRAVELLER

## 89. Capel-y-ffin, Powys

Novelist **PHIL RICKMAN** searches the remote Black Mountains for the miracle-working Father Ignatius and the Lady of Llanthony. Photos by **JOHN MASON**.

**W**hen, on a late summer evening, the glowing figure appeared for the first time in the Abbot's meadow, four choirboys (or so the story goes) were playing cricket, using a stick as a bat.

Although the figure was a woman, veiled, with both hands raised as if in blessing, the words 'holy vision' did not, it seems, occur immediately to Thomas Foord, aged 11.

"If it comes near me," he's reported to have said, "I'll hit it with my stick."

At which point, the apparition slid away, vanishing eventually into a bush, which, on subsequent occasions, was seen to light up when the surrounding countryside was all in darkness.

There would be several more witnesses, none of whom would threaten her with a stick. Yet it's fair to say that the Virgin of the Black Mountains, or The Lady of Llanthony, as she's usually known, has never won the same level of veneration as her sisters



TOP: The Lady of Llanthony, commemorated in a statue. ABOVE: The ruins of the monastery church.

in Lourdes, Medjugorje or Knock.

There are several possible reasons for this, but most of them are connected to a man called Joseph Leycester

Lyne, who adopted the name Father Ignatius and established his own monastery on a wooded hillside above the isolated hamlet of Capel-y-ffin close to the most rugged part of the England-Wales border.

The last time I'd been here, it was as a reporter for BBC Wales at the end of a General Election campaign, when the monastery was serving as what was probably Britain's most remote polling station. This time, I was back to research part of a novel – a thriller, with elements of the paranormal, set mainly in the famous book town of Hay-on-Wye, from which Capel-y-ffin is a steep eight-mile drive up the Gospel Pass.

The monastery of Father Ignatius is best remembered these days as the home, for a few years in the 1920s, of the famous stone-carver and typographer Eric Gill, who left a lurid smear on the little farming community... but more of that later. More recently, it's been a centre for pony-trekking and adventure holidays. But when I returned, it was out of season, a low mist draped over the buildings and nobody at home except for an affable sheepdog who followed me around like a tour guide.

The monastery, neo-Gothic and slightly spooky, is not in bad condition, unlike the adjacent remains of a church nave, open to the sky, a grey memorial to Fr Ignatius whose own remains lie underneath it. On the monastery forecourt, some way in front of the church ruins, is the white statue of The Lady of Llanthony, raising damaged hands into the mist. It's not particularly old, and you feel Eric Gill would have done a better job. But the leper-like erosion of those supplicating fingers make it unexpectedly poignant, and you can't help recalling the words engraved on the east window of the tiny, ancient church of St Mary, down in Capel-y-ffin: *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help.*

The hills to which Fr Ignatius had first lifted his eyes are four miles (6.4km) south of here. They enclose the famous ruins of the mediaeval Llanthony Priory (see FT147:51), which I'd borrowed for one of my earliest novels, *December*. It had been his original plan to buy and restore the priory as a base for his new order of Benedictine monks.

But these were *Anglican* monks. Joseph Leycester Lyne wanted nothing to do with Rome. Born in London in 1837, he'd studied theology and been ordained as a Deacon in the Church of England, into which he'd become determined to introduce monastic life: "a dream of flowers, the throb of lights, the waft of incense," trills his uncritical



biographer, Beatrice, Baroness de Bertouch. Her 600-plus-page tome (now obtainable from [www.forgottenbooks.org](http://www.forgottenbooks.org)) needs to be read warily. It chronicles a host of supernatural and miraculous events, as Lyne tours the country, preaching to the masses, collecting supporters and cash. There are accounts of him healing the sick, restoring the dying – and even the dead – to active life. He has endless energy, is respected by the prominent atheist Charles Bradlaugh as a formidable debating opponent, and his oratory is admired by Gladstone.

Lyne set up a successful religious community in Suffolk, but it was a visit to the Welsh border country that really inspired him. The ruins of Llanthony Priory “appealed to him strangely”, according to de Bertouch, “and a desire which was almost a prayer took possession of his heart... to restore that priory and people it with devout monks.”

In the end, there were problems obtaining the Priory, and its restoration would almost certainly have been beyond his resources, so Lyne, now Fr Ignatius, compromised by obtaining land at Capel-y-ffin, in an even more remote and exposed area of the Black Mountains. Professional builders, assisted by his new order of Anglican Benedictine monks, set to work, with impressive results. De Bertouch describes how, during the operation, Fr Ignatius, armed with a bottle of Lourdes water, restored to life a builder crushed to a bloody pulp after a crate of stone unbalanced and shed its entire load on him.

And so the community of monks (and also nuns) with its own church took

## The glowing figure was a woman with hands raised

ABOVE: St Mary's church, Capel-y-ffin.

BELOW: Joseph Leycester Lyne, or Father Ignatius.



shape under the benign direction of the man de Bertouch calls The Monk of Llanthony and lasted for about 40 years, until his death. The Welsh Border diarist Francis Kilvert, who met him at Capel-y-ffin, wrote: “He struck me as being a man of gentle simple kind manners, excitable, and entirely possessed by the one idea”.

How Kilvert would have reacted to the manifestations of the Lady of Llanthony is hard to guess. He died the year before, at the end of August 1880.

After the incident with the choirboys and the stick, the dazzling figure was seen several times, often heralded by the glowing bush, although sometimes a little persuasion was required in the early stages, according to a monk in the community, Brother Dunstan: “We knelt opposite the bush but some distance from it and began to say prayers and sing hymns but no figure appeared. Presently, I suggested that if it was really the Blessed Virgin who had appeared to the boy, possibly if we sang the Ave Maria she might again appear. So we began to sing the Ave... and at once perceived the form of a woman surrounded by light at the top of the meadow by the gate.”

The apparitions were said to have continued for some time, varying from full, incandescent figures to starry lights in the bush, leaves from which would be detached, according to de Bertouch, to bring about more ‘miraculous cures’ all over the country.

A small chorus of dissent was led by Sister Marry Agnes who, as a nun at Capel, claimed to have been badly



TOP: St Mary's, Hay-on-Wye, where dogs are welcome.

Few visitors expect the atmosphere in Hay Church to be heavy with the scent of incense, or the candlelit altar to support a tabernacle and a collection of small statues. Across from the votive stand you'll see a Virgin and Child shrine. It's not the Eucharist here – it's the Mass, and evening prayers daily.

Anglo-Catholicism has been a triumph for Fr Richard who, in an age of falling congregations, has multiplied the turnout at St Mary's five-fold. In the tradition of eccentricity without which Hay (which still has its own King, pioneering bookseller Richard Booth) would be just another rural market town, Fr Richard's curate is his standard poodle, Jimmy, who attends services along with any other dogs that happen to turn up with their owners. The 'Mystery Worshipper' of the website Ship of Fools – a kind of Trip Advisor for Christians – left Hay with a persistent memory of Curate Jimmy "sleeping peacefully outside the sanctuary as the incense rose and the plainsong weaved its way into the darkness of the church."

Fr Richard insists his own Anglo-Catholicism was not inspired by Fr Ignatius, whom he describes as "an odd mixture of Anglo-Catholic and revivalist preacher – an unwitting hypnotist who might even have hypnotised himself." He's sceptical about some of the miracles reported by Beatrice de Bertouch but doesn't dismiss the sightings of the Lady of Llanthony. For him, the story is given a certain substance by the anecdote about the choirboy and the stick. "One is struck," he says, "by the authenticity of the response." Pointing out that the little church at Capel-y-ffin was said to have been built where a vision of the Virgin was witnessed by a woman in Norman times, he says, finally, of the 1880 events, "I'm quite convinced that the presence of Mary was sensed there."

Coincidentally, this autumn, the museum at Newport has given Fr Richard the original crucifix from the now-ruined church of Fr Ignatius. It's too big to stand in the little church at Capel and will probably end up at one of his other churches, at Llanigon at the foot of the Black Mountains.

They're all Anglo-Catholic now. They all admit dogs to the services. In these parts, eccentricity still rules. There does indeed seem to be something in the air. In a recent parish magazine, Fr Richard had this to say about Capel-y-ffin: "Artists, poets and visionaries have found this place a place where 'Prayer is valid'... where the veil between the visible world and the invisible has worn diaphanously thin." **FT**

bullied by a particular Mother Superior. Fr Ignatius, she said, had not intervened. In her book, *Nunnery Life in the Church of England*, she suggested that the visitations had been created by a magic lantern. While that does sound like a serious overestimation of the power of those early projectors, she had a point. A vision of the Virgin Mary would be seen as divine recognition of the aim of Fr Ignatius to pioneer Anglican monasticism. He had absolutely nothing to lose by fabricating a modern myth.

It's no surprise that the story has been buried. It would have been entirely distasteful to followers of the non-conformist faith which was scattering its bleak chapels all over south-east Wales.

Beatrice de Bertouch is probably right when she says that, in a Catholic country, these phenomena would have been commemorated by "some costly shrine". All we have at Capel is that touchingly frayed statue of the Virgin Mary, moved from the field where the vision was reported and now planted in front of a pony-trekking centre.

Ironically, Eric Gill, who acquired the monastery when the monks eventually left, was a devout Roman Catholic who set up his own artistic community there. Gill seems to have had no affection at all for the memory of his predecessor, yet established his own chapel inside the monastery and brought in Catholic priests to celebrate the Mass there.

Some of his stone carving can be seen in the churchyard of St Mary's down in the valley below the monastery. If local people were bemused by Fr Ignatius, they were scandalised by Gill, whose passionate faith was no deterrent to serial incest with his daughters.

There's no denying that this area of the Black Mountains has seen more than its share of eccentricity, and much of this is linked to its otherworldly history. The Gospel Pass is so-called because the road is said to have been used by saints Peter and Paul on missions to the area. Tales of ghostly and fairy phenomena abound, as do signs of Neolithic worship. A stone circle by the side of the road, near Hay

Bluff, was a gathering point for New Age travellers in the 1980s, who collected the magic mushrooms growing nearby.

Dismissed by many as a charlatan and exalted as an "untiring sower of the seed divine" by Beatrice de Bertouch, Fr Ignatius was nationally famous in his day but is now virtually forgotten, except on one day every August when a hardy band of about 50 pilgrims walk the four miles from Llanthony Priory to Capel-y-ffin in commemoration of his achievements. The ruined church below which he was buried is now considered too unstable for visitors to enter.

And yet... down in Hay-on-Wye, something odd has been happening.

The Black Mountains have a long history of mysterious worship – Christian and pagan, communities and hermits. Several churches in the area are dedicated to St Mary, including Hay's parish church, a solid, much-restored building unobtrusively anchoring the southern end of the town. Yew trees circling the churchyard, as they do at St Mary's, Capel-y-ffin and St Mary's at nearby Cusop, suggest an earlier worship. So does the proximity of so much water, all around. Powerful streams converge below St Mary's, there are springs in the rocks, a quite impressive waterfall and, across the lane from the church, a holy well – St Mary's Well, obviously – which legend says once saved the church by sending out a huge waterspout to extinguish a fire that had broken out in the tower. And, of course, just beyond the churchyard, screened by trees, is the River Wye, as close to St Mary's Church as is the River Honddu to St Mary's, Capel-y-ffin.

If you walk up from the river, following the footpath around Hay church, you emerge on the main road through an entry between 19th century almshouses almost opposite the turning into the lane that leads to the Gospel Pass. The next church you reach will be St Mary's, Capel-y-ffin, now part of the same parish. Its minister, Fr Richard Williams, is firmly – and, in this part of the world, uniquely – Anglo-Catholic.

Phil Rickman and John Mason's illustrated book *Merrily's Border* will be published in a new edition by Logaston Press in December.



PHIL RICKMAN was a full-time radio and TV journalist before switching to fiction. His bestselling novels mix crime with fortean themes. His latest book is *The Magus of Hay*.

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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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# POLICE

THE ILLUSTRATED  
LAW COURTS AND WEEK

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

## 26. LION WAGERS

A small file of cuttings from the *Illustrated Police News* and other newspapers, with the heading 'Lion Wagers', provides some curious information about a *fin-de-siècle* craze that has not yet found its historian: the performance of various foolhardy stunts inside cages full of lions.

In January 1890, the champion long-distance runner George Littlewood received



ABOVE: A narrow escape for the card-playing Frenchmen, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 30 November 1895.

a challenge from some of his friends: that he would not dare to enter the lion's cage at Wombwell's Menagerie. In front of an enormous crowd, the runner accomplished this feat with commendable intrepidity. Although he got separated from Orenzo the lion-tamer, and although the massive beasts were jumping around in a dangerous manner, Littlewood made it out of the cage unharmed, and the first recorded Lion Wager was won.

In August 1894, a Paris barber made a bet that he would dare to shave the lion tamer of the Juliano menagerie in a barber's chair situated inside the lion's cage itself. The lions looked on with interest throughout the procedure, which lasted 20 minutes. Once or twice, they came up to see what the barber was doing, but the lathered tamer shooed them away.

When the same stunt was repeated by another barber, in Vichy, he narrowly escaped being bitten by a lion named d'Artagnan. In June 1895, when a travelling menagerie visited Tullins in France, the local barber made a bet that he would shave one of his customers inside the lion's cage. Again, he won the Lion Wager: held in check by their tamer, the lions observed these bizarre proceedings with the greatest indifference.

In St Louis, the animal trainer Pauline Devere married the cowboy Harry Bishop inside the lion's cage at Wombwell's Circus, with six lions acting as best men and bridesmaids. This was the first recorded Lion



ABOVE: Shaved in a lion's den, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 8 June 1895.

ILLUSTRATED  
WEEKLY RECORD: NEWS



ABOVE: Married inside a lion's cage, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 15 June 1895.

Wedding, considered quite a curiosity at the time and featured in many newspapers including the *IPN*.

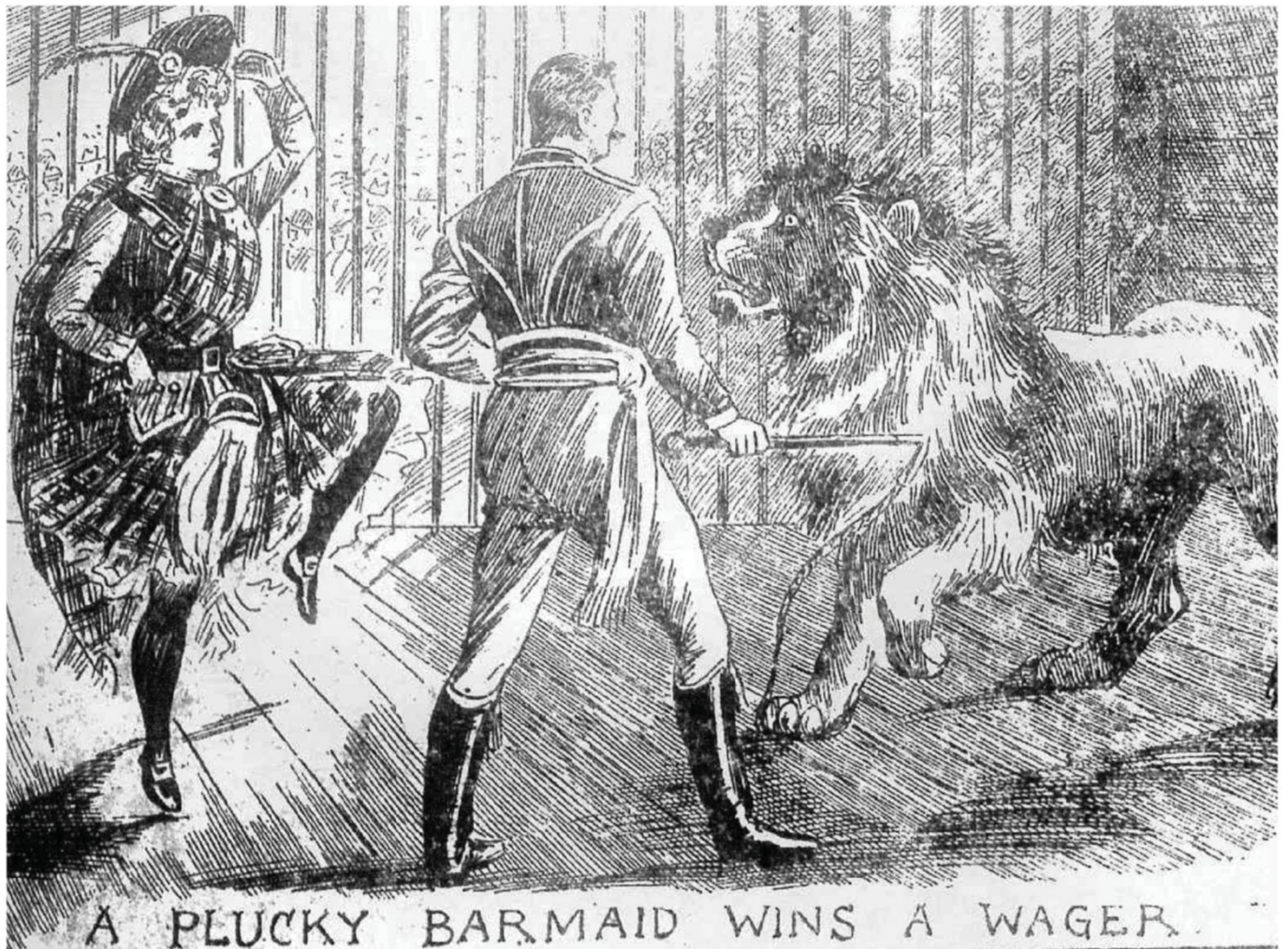
In September 1895, the Lyons railway porter Léon Eyssete made a bet that he would dare to have his photograph taken inside the lion's cage when Castanet & Pezon's Menagerie visited that city. Having read about the various barbers plying their trade in the same surroundings without any ill-effect, the foolish young Frenchman had become convinced that lions were placid and friendly animals, who would welcome his visit to their quarters. Eschewing the conventions of having a lion-tamer handy at the time of the Wager, and making sure the beasts were well fed beforehand, the

foolhardy young railwayman entered the lion's cage just when the animals were to be fed. Before the photograph could be taken, a large lion named Romulus leapt at him and literally tore his head off. Léon Eyssete lost his Lion Wager.

The sad outcome of the Lyons Lion Wager did not prevent three jolly Frenchmen from having a bet of their own when the Salvator Menagerie visited Bourg in November of the same year: this time, they would play a game of cards inside the lion's cage. To begin with, this Wager proceeded in good order: the three gentlemen sat down, set up their gaming-table, and began to play. But then a lion walked up to Monsieur Chaveau, one of the card-players, and sniffed at his

clothes. Wanting to display his courage, the Frenchman pushed the animal's head away. The lion immediately pounced, knocking him off his chair, and grabbing hold of his jacket. The other two card-players fled yelling, but the intrepid lion-tamer seized hold of the lion's tongue, and twisted this organ until the animal released its hold with a howl of pain. M Chaveau was unharmed, although his clothes were torn to pieces, and the Lion Wager lost.

In January 1898, a Bolton publican won a Lion Wager of £25 by entering a cage containing three lions. A year later, a cyclist won a Wager by pedalling his machine inside a lion's cage. In March 1902, two Brighton daredevils played a game of ping-pong inside



A PLUCKY BARMAID WINS A WAGER.

ABOVE: The lion looks on in amazement as the plucky barmaid wins her wager, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 1 February 1908.

a large cage full of lions, with several thousand spectators in attendance. Again the Lion Wager was won, although squeamish people blamed the Brighton authorities for allowing such a dangerous exhibition to take place.

At about the same time, two Welsh lasses from Merthyr Tydfil won a Wager for £20 by dancing the can-can inside a lion's cage. When two French girls tried to emulate them by performing a tightrope routine just above a lion's cage, the rope broke and they fell right on top of the lions. Although severely mauled, they both survived, but the Lion Wager was lost.

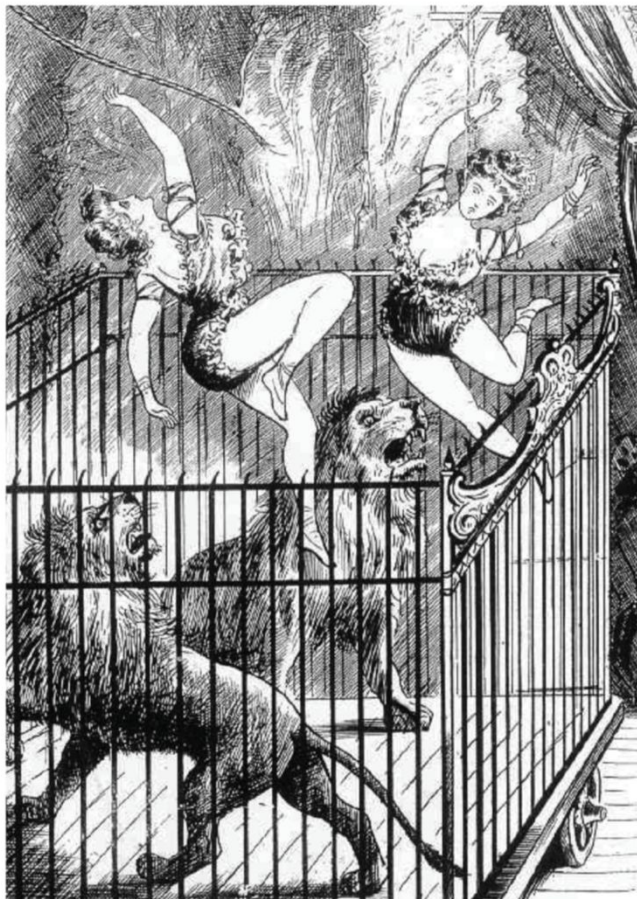
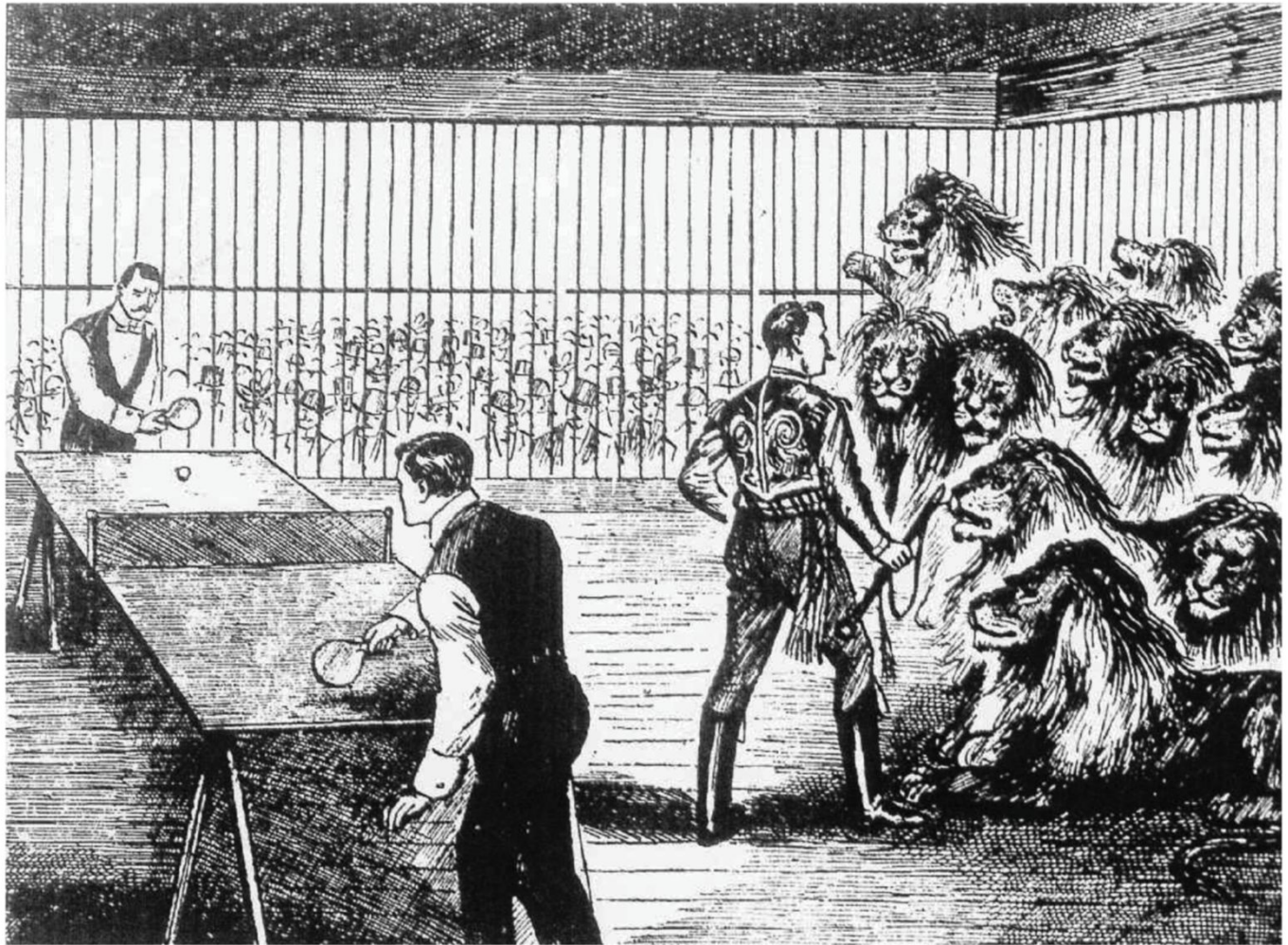
The final recorded Lion Wager occurred in 1908, when intrepid young barmaid Carrie Baker danced a hornpipe inside a lion's cage in Liverpool.

The final notice in the Lion Wagers dossier is that in 1910, Bostock's menagerie advertised a 'jungle wedding', with three lions acting the part of grooms and the same number of lionesses as bridesmaids.



ABOVE: A bicyclist inside a lion's cage, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 7 January 1899.





TOP: Ping-pong inside a lion's cage, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 15 March 1902. ABOVE: The French tightrope dancers come to grief, and the lions attack, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 11 May 1907.

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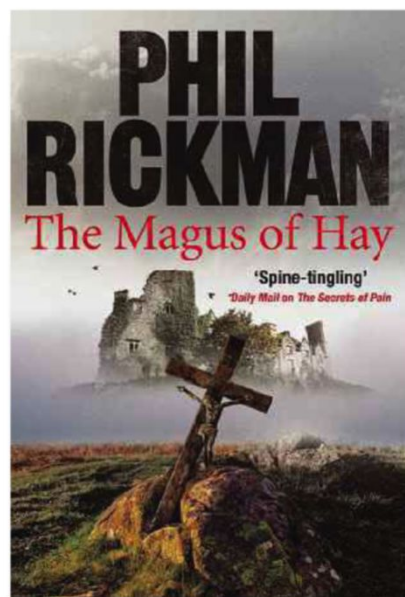
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