



# THE X-FILES

THEY'RE BACK: IS THE TRUTH STILL OUT THERE?

CAR-CRASH POLITICS JG BALLARD VERSUS RONALD REAGAN  
CAVE OF THE WITCHES SOUTH AMERICA'S MAGICAL MURDERS  
PHANTOM FARES JAPAN'S GHOSTLY CAB PASSENGERS

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THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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## SPACE ODDITY

FROM ALIENS TO THE OCCULT: THE STRANGE FASCINATIONS OF DAVID BOWIE



## BOGEY BEASTS

THE SHAPE-SHIFTING MONSTERS OF BRITISH FOLKLORE

## MYSTERY MOGGIES

ON THE TRAIL OF ALIEN BIG CATS IN DEEPEST SUFFOLK

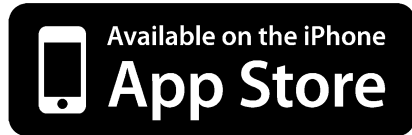
FORTEAN TIMES 338

THE SECRET HISTORY OF DAVID BOWIE • RETURN OF THE X-FILES • CAVE OF THE WITCHES • AUTOMATIC LEPRECHAUN • JAPAN'S GHOST FARES

MAR 2016







## strange days

Japan's phantom taxi fares, John Dee's lost library, Indian claims death by meteorite, cretinous criminals, curious cats, Harry Price traduced, ancient Greek laptop, Flat Earth rapper, ghostly photobombs, bogey beasts – and much more.

- 05 THE CONSPIRASPHERE
- 05 EXTRA! EXTRA!
- 15 ALIEN ZOO
- 16 GHOSTWATCH
- 23 MYTHCONCEPTIONS
- 24 NECROLOG
- 25 FAIRIES & FORTEANA
- 26 THE UFO FILES

## features

### COVER STORY

### 28 THE MAGE WHO SOLD THE WORLD

From an early interest in UFOs and Aleister Crowley to flirtations with Kabbalah and Nazi mysticism, David Bowie cultivated a number of esoteric interests over the years and embraced alien and occult imagery in his costumes, songs and videos. **DEAN BALLINGER** explores the fortean aspects and influences of the late musician's career.

### 34 THE RUNNING MAN

**CHRIS AUBECK** and **MARTIN SHOUGH** unearth a baffling proto-UFO incident, involving a fiery anthropomorphic figure, from the early 19th century, and explain the work of Magonia Exchange, an online group dedicated to bringing fortean research into the 21st....

### 40 IS THE TRUTH STILL OUT THERE?

**LOREN AND JENNY COLEMAN** welcome *The X-Files* back to our TV screens after a decade-and-a-half absence. What do Mulder and Scully have to say to us in a post-9/11 world?

### 44 THE CAVE OF THE WITCHES

According to local legend, a Chilean island was once home to a secret society of powerful warlocks who murdered their victims, kidnapped children, created terrifying monsters and were only brought to trial in the late 19th century. **MIKE DASH** uncovers a strange story...

## forum

**54** The Automatic leprechaun by Ryan Shirlow

**56** Suffolk's mystery mutant moggy by Matt Salusbury

## reports

### 50 STRANGE STATESMEN

No 9. American Psychos 2: Raping Ronald Reagan

### 76 STORIES FROM THE ILLUSTRATED POLICE NEWS

No 45. Succi, the fasting man

## regulars

02 EDITORIAL

59 REVIEWS

71 LETTERS

75 IT HAPPENED TO ME

79 PHENOMENOMIX

80 STRANGE DEATHS

# CONTENTS

the world of strange phenomena



**28 THE MAGE WHO SOLD THE WORLD**  
The strange fascinations of David Bowie



**40 IS THE TRUTH STILL OUT THERE?**  
The X-Files returns to our screens



**12 LOST LIBRARY**  
John Dee's books go on display



**4 JAPAN'S GHOST FARES**  
Taxi drivers report phantom passengers



**14 CURIOUS CATS**  
Chimæras and other feline freaks

WELCOME LIBRARY

DANIEL BEREHLAK / GETTY IMAGES

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# editorial

## Lazarus rising

**IMMERSED IN CROWLEY'S UNIFORM**

David Bowie died in January, aged 69, just days after the release of what turned to be his final album and last musical testament, *Blackstar* (although further recordings may emerge posthumously, as hints have been dropped that he had planned a further record). Amidst the outpourings of grief and tributes from the great and the good, more interesting chatter surfaced online about what it all meant: were Bowie's final album and the accompanying

videos for the songs 'Lazarus' and 'Blackstar' full of half-hidden clues to deeper occult meanings in the artist's work?

It's entirely possible that Bowie prankishly filled these final statements with esoteric Easter eggs he knew would send fans scurrying in search of hidden meanings after he was gone, being well aware of the degree of scrutiny to which his previous 'comeback' album had been subjected. And he was right:

esoterically inclined Bowie fans were all over *Blackstar* like a rash. It's interesting, though, that such occult-minded pop-pickers grant Bowie a degree of authorial agency denied the likes of lesser stars: most esoteric interpretation of recent pop songs, and especially music videos, has focused on the clues offered up by 'Illuminati mind-controlled' performers - Miley Cyrus, Rihanna, Lady Gaga and the like - who simultaneously encode and flaunt the hidden agendas of their shadowy or reptilian masters (see FT258:32-39) but have no real message of their own to impart.

Bowie, though, often cultivated the image of the alien messenger, most notably in his Ziggy Stardust guise, as well as that of the seeker after hermetic truths of *Hunky Dory* or *Station to Station*: as well as elevating raiding the dressing up box to a fine art (vouched for by a V&A exhibition, no less) Bowie perfected the image of pop star as otherworldly purveyor of gnomic utterances, his lyrics pored over for hidden meanings and his constantly changing appearance interrogated for the clues it might offer to our post-human future. A flick through Aleister Crowley's photo albums reveals a man similarly in love with his own evolving image and its visual representations, an interest in the external, showbiz aspects of the magical project that prefigures Bowie's own. Bowie made light of his early Crowley obsession, but while it might not have been deep, one suspects it was certainly meaningful for his own sense of the power of visuals in an age of mass media and of the idea of the ever-

changing self as an artistic product in its own right.

In this issue, Dean Ballinger surveys the fortean aspects of Bowie's career (pp28-33) while Hunt Emerson and Kevin Jackson provide their own pictorial history of the Starman's many changes (p79). Elsewhere, Loren Coleman ponders the return of that fortean fixture of the 1990s, *The X-Files* (pp40-42), and wonders whether it has managed, Bowie-like, to reinvent itself to address the changes we've seen in our post-9/11 world.

All this, plus South American sorcerers, curious cats, a Flat Earth rapper and the anal rape of Ronald Reagan. And next issue - laughing gnomes. Seriously.

**MEDIA/EVAL FT**

A number of listeners to Radio 4's *In Our Time* (28 Jan 2016) drew our attention to a not entirely flattering reference to FT on the programme from Professor Nicholas Vincent of the University of East Anglia. Discussing with Melvyn Bragg 12th contemporary stories

that Eleanor of Aquitaine had enjoyed an affair with Saladin or fought at the front in the Crusades, Prof Vincent described these products of the 12th century rumour mill with the words: "This is the *Fortean Times* of its day. This is nonsense." Since we have always been in the business of reporting and commenting on rumour and urban legend, rather than creating it, we can only assume that the absent-minded professor was really thinking of the *Weekly World News*.

**ERRATUM**

FT337:17. We hope you enjoyed Barry Baldwin's Classical Corner entry on classical insults and obscenities. There was a certain irony to the fact that the column's title mysteriously disappeared from the layout before it went to press. It should have read: "196. Expletives not deleted".

*David R Sutton*  
DAVID R SUTTON

*Bob Rickard*  
BOB RICKARD

*Paul Sieveking*  
PAUL SIEVEKING



**Why fortean?**

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

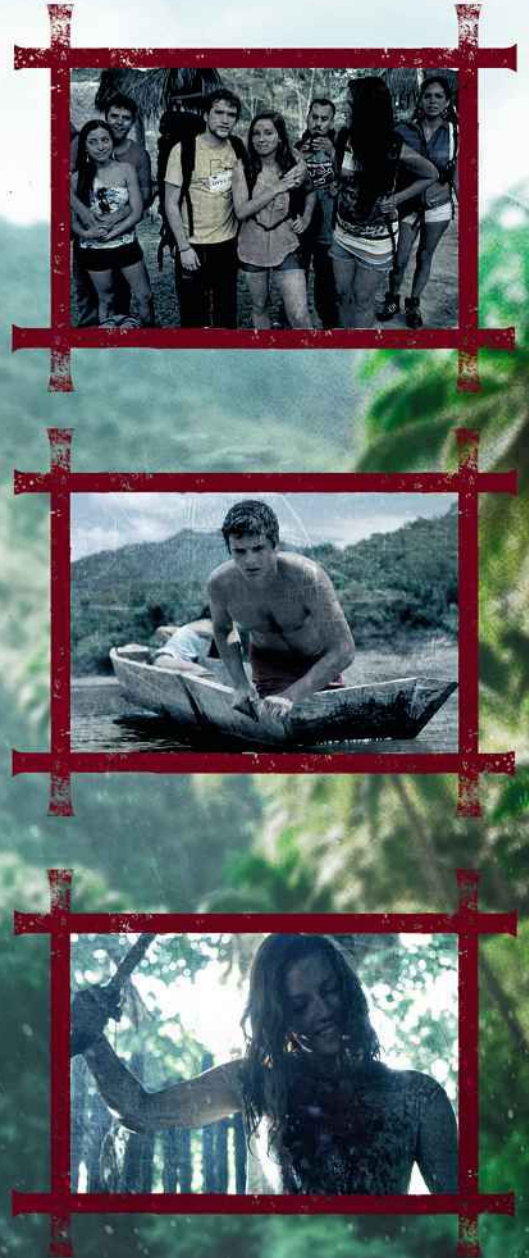
**SEE PAGE 78**

MARTIN ROSS



"A MARIO BAVA STYLE BLOODBATH  
WHICH BRINGS SOMETHING NEW  
TO THE TEENS-IN-PERIL GENRE"

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# strangedays

## Japan's ghost fares

Taxi drivers report phantom passengers in tsunami-devastated town

**A**t least seven taxi drivers in Ishinomaki, northeast Japan, have reported experiencing a 'phantom fare' in the wake of the devastating 2011 tsunami and earthquake, according to *The Asahi Shimbun* newspaper. The 9-magnitude quake – the most powerful ever recorded in Japan and the fourth most powerful in the world – lasted for six minutes and triggered a tsunami that in places reached 133ft (40m) high and travelled six miles (9.6km) inland, destroying thousands of homes and other buildings. Last March, an official report confirmed 15,893 people had been killed, more than 6,000 injured, while 2,572 remain missing. Ishinomaki, a coastal town in Miyagi Prefecture, was among the regions most seriously affected by the tsunami. More than 3,000 residents lost their lives, including 70 students and nine staff members at Ishinomaki Okawa Elementary School.

Speaking to Yuka Kudo, a student of sociology at Tohoku Gakuin University, one taxi driver in his fifties related how he may have encountered one of these dead residents just months after the disaster. He was working in the town when a young woman dressed in a coat climbed into his cab near Ishinomaki Station and told him: "Please go to the Minamihama [district]." He told her that the area was "almost empty" and asked her if she was sure she wished to go there. The woman replied in a trembling voice, "Have I died?". The driver said he then turned around and discovered that no one was there. Another driver said a man in his twenties climbed into his taxi. When he looked into the rear-view mirror, his passenger was



### The young woman asked the driver, "Have I died?"

pointing toward the front. The driver, who was in his forties, repeatedly asked the man for his destination, and eventually the latter said "Hiyoriyama" (mountain). The driver set off, but when he eventually pulled over, he found the passenger had disappeared.

These haunting accounts, and five similar ones, were collected by Kudo as part of her graduation thesis. She asked more than 100 drivers if they had experienced anything unusual in the wake of the earthquake. The question strangely sparked anger among some of the cabbies, while others pretended not to hear her – but a few were willing to talk. Kudo said that her research suggests that the seven drivers believed

they were picking up genuine passengers, because they each started their meters. As a result, the drivers were forced to pay their fares. Some jotted down their experiences in their logs. One showed his driver's report, which noted that there was a fare that went unpaid. Several noted that the 'ghosts' were young. "Young people feel strong chagrin [at their deaths] when they cannot meet the people they love," said Kudo. "As they want to convey their bitterness, they may have chosen taxis, which are like private rooms, as a medium to do so". What impressed Kudo was that the drivers had no fear of their spectral passengers, but held them in reverence. They regarded the encounters as important experiences to be cherished. One said that he had lost a family member in the disaster. Another said he would willingly accept a ghost as a customer again.

Taxi drivers are not the only ones to report seeing ghosts in the rubble of Tohoku's coastal communities. There have been

numerous reports of "spectral figures" in residential districts that have been scoured of all buildings and spirits lining up outside shops that no longer exist. Exorcists have reported helping people who claim to be seeing headless ghosts, bodies missing arms or legs and others who believe they have assumed the spirits of some of the dead. *Asahi Shimbun (Japan)*, *telegraph.co.uk*, 21 Jan; *D.Mirror online*, 2 Feb 2016.

- These tales of vanishing passengers remind us of historical tales of supernatural travelling companions, worldwide "phantom hitchhiker" folklore, and its apparent ostension, when legend manifests in the phenomenal world. Jan Harold Brunvand's classic 1981 study, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*, inaugurated the modern study of urban legends, although back in 1942/43 the folklorists Richard Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey analysed 79 stories of phantom passengers and contributed two important papers on the subject to the *California Folklore Quarterly*.

In the basic version, a driver picks up a hitchhiker on a lonely road and later looks around to find the hitchhiker gone. Most elaborations serve to indicate that the passenger was a ghost. "In one variant," writes David Hambling (FT298:14), "the driver continues to the address requested by the hitchhiker, and is told the hitchhiker died years before. Other versions have the driver finding on a gravestone a coat or scarf borrowed by the hitchhiker." We have returned to the subject many times since FT10:4-5 (1975), including features by Steve Moore (FT24:13-14), Michael Goss (FT34:14-16), Rob Gandy (FT56:52-53, 328:32-39), Sean Tudor (FT73:27-32, 104:36-40) and Alan Murdie (FT278:16). See also Michael Goss: *The Evidence for Phantom Hitch-hikers* (Aquarian Press, 1984).

DANIEL BEREHULAK / GETTY IMAGES





**CRETINOUS CRIMINALS**  
Our latest round-up of foolish felons from around the world  
**PAGE 8**



**WHISTLE AND I'LL COME...**  
The remarkable 'bird language' of a remote Turkish village  
**PAGE 10**



**THE PRICE ISN'T RIGHT**  
Facts and fallacies in ITV's new ghost hunting drama  
**PAGE 16**

# The Conspirasphere

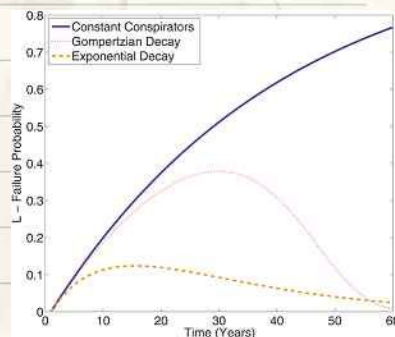
**NOEL ROONEY** is not entirely convinced by one scientist's attempts to quash conspiracy theories with the aid of a few graphs...

Is it possible to derive an algorithm that predicts the potential failure rate of a conspiracy? On the face of it, this is a quixotic endeavour at best, but David Robert Grimes, a physicist and cancer researcher at Oxford University, has taken up the challenge. His recently published paper is titled 'On the Viability of Conspiratorial Beliefs', but is actually about the theoretical viability of conspiracies themselves.

Using a range of modelling formulæ, including Gompertz ratios (used by the insurance industry to predict the death rate among its customers) and analyses based on the number of people potentially involved (more on that point below) he has arrived at a conclusion that – given a few minutes' thought – required very little mathematical acumen: if a conspiracy involves a large number of people, the probability that it will be exposed is correspondingly high.

Dr Grimes is primarily concerned with anti-scientific thinking; he is trying to find a model with sufficient explanatory power to persuade people reluctant to accept vaccines, global warming, or orthodox treatment for cancer that the scientific community is not out to get them. That's laudable in many respects; blanket mistrust of science and the people who do science is a very limited and limiting cognitive model. But Dr Grimes's endeavour is in many other respects a little dotty.

The Grimes model attempts to show a probability curve for exposure of a given conspiracy based on the number of people involved and their average life expectancy: thus he concludes that, for instance, the lunar landing hoax (if hoax it was) would have been exposed within three years and eight months. It also offers an estimate of the optimal number of conspirators required for a conspiracy to succeed. For a plot to survive five years in secrecy, a maximum of 2,521 people should be involved; for a decade of success, under a thousand conspirators are needed; and for a plot to survive unexposed for a full



century, the conspirators should number no more than 125.

Thereby hangs one of the principal (and comical) weaknesses in the Grimes model. For instance, he estimates the conspirator number for the Moon landing hoax as the total number of NASA employees in the late 1960s. So the tea lady gets the same weighting in the model as the chief architect of the landings (or non-landings in this case). Obviously it's not easy to estimate the number of conspirators based on actual involvement until the plot is exposed, but there ought to be a more subtle weighting formula available than everyone and everyone's auntie.

I'm not convinced we will see conspiracy theories regularly measured on the Grimes Index in the near future. First of all, the true believers are unlikely to turn face when presented with a mere graph; what's a graph compared to years of 'research' conducted from a million armchairs? Second, until Dr Grimes separates those who have a difference of opinion with a point of view (those who reject vaccination on the ground that it is crude herd medicine, for instance) from those who believe that it's all a Big Lie (those who think Bill Gates and co are planning eugenics by injection) his model is as crude as the extremities of the beliefs he wants to change.

<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0147905#pone.0147905.ref008>

## EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### Former Dolphin in ocean 10 hours

Palm Beach (FL) Post-Times, – Feb 2015

### Bigfoot stalks the stock market

Times, 24 Jan 2015.

### Nazi super cows slaughtered after they repeatedly tried to kill farm workers

Independent, 6 Jan 2015.

### Let's not lose BBC's invisible gorilla

Guardian, 2 Mar 2015.

### Army of huge rats heading for... Swindon

D.Mail, 7 Feb 2015.

### Showbusiness chickens turn the tables on casino punters

Times, 27 Dec 2014.

### Public urged to keep track of squirrels with mobiles

Aberdeen Press & Journal, 11 Mar 2015.



## SIDELINES...

### GETTING THEIR GOAT

In what has become a Yuletide tradition in Sweden, a giant straw goat was set ablaze on 27 December. The 42ft (12.8m) tall goat is a beloved Christmas symbol in the city of Gavle, central Sweden, but the attack was the 34th time in the last 49 years that it was destroyed. A drunken man covered in soot was arrested nearby. *D.Telegraph, 28 Dec 2015.*

### SLIMEY INTERLOPERS

The population of Mogocho, a remote town in Russia's Zabaykalsky Krai region, have recently found their tap water teeming with leeches. Town hall chief Dmitry Plyukhin told the 14,000 inhabitants to put filters on taps, but medics pointed out that this would only stop adult leeches, not their larvæ. *Metro, 27 Nov 2015.*

### HERO IN THE MAKING

Jaine Ferreira Figueira, 19, was shocked when her 17-month-old son Lorenzo ran in from the garden carrying a dead snake, with blood in his mouth and on his hands. This took place in Mostardas, Rio Grande do Sul state, southern Brazil, on 1 November. The snake turned out to be a pit viper (*Bothrops jararaca*) with a potentially lethal bite. Initially Lorenzo's parents thought their dog had killed it, but doctor Gilmar Carteri said the boy had evidently bitten the snake close to its head, immobilising it and preventing it from biting him. *[AFP] 3 Nov 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

## Ghostly photobombs

- Nurul Islam took this photograph of his young niece and nephew – Mayrian, 11, and Ryhan, seven – in front of the gateway of a 200-year-old folly in Roundhay Park, Leeds. Mr Islam, 37, claims there was no one lurking in the gateway at the time. The mysterious figure was only noticed when the family looked at the photograph later. *D.Mail, 8 May 2015.*



- Actress Rachel Mckeown performed in a production of *Queertet* at the Unity Theatre in Liverpool on 24 July 2015 and joined fellow cast members for drinks at the Lisbon bar afterwards, when a number of photographs were taken. It was not until the next day that she saw the ghostly face in one of them.

"There was about 20 of us from the theatre who went to The Lisbon," she said. "The picture was of a group of us who had been dancing. When I saw the face I didn't recognise it. At first I was trying to figure out if it was the light, but it doesn't look like a reflection and I don't think there was anyone behind when it was taken." *Liverpool Echo, 27 July 2015.*



MERCURY PRESS & MEDIA

LIVERPOOL ECHO

## STARMAN

A constellation has been named after David Bowie, who died on 10 January 2016 aged 69. Belgian astronomers chose seven stars near Mars that form the shape of a lightning bolt that marked his Aladdin Sane era. *D.Telegraph, 19 Jan 2016.*





# Ancient Greek laptop?

Is she checking her lippie or FB page, or is it a takeaway?



J PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

ABOVE: The “USB ports” are to attach an element of the original funerary statue, not a peripheral, says classicist and art historian.

This ancient Greek marble relief, “Grave Naiskos of an Enthroned Woman with an Attendant”, is in The J Paul Getty Museum in Malibu, California, and was used as a funeral marker around 100 BC. The museum bought it in 1972 from the collection of the eighth Marquess of Lansdowne. A little over 37in (94cm) tall, it depicts a woman sitting on a throne-like chair while reaching toward “the lid of a shallow chest held by a servant girl” according to the description on the Getty website. “The depiction of the deceased reaching out for an item held by a servant has a long history in Greek funerary art and probably alludes to the hope of continuing earthly pleasures in the afterlife,” the Museum adds.

In 2014, a video on the

## The object could be a small pizza, hinged mirror or cosmetic box

YouTube channel “Still Speaking Out,” claimed the object could be proof of time travel. In the YouTube video, the group says the object is too wide to be a jewellery box and notes that the woman is looking at the screen as one would with a laptop. “[The statue] depicts an astonishing object that bears a striking resemblance to a modern laptop or some handheld device,” the YouTube video says. What’s more,

it appears to have two USB ports.

Naysayers to the laptop theory assert that the object could be all sorts of things, including a small pizza, hinged mirror or cosmetic box. It also looks like a wax tablet that the Greeks used for writing with a stylus, according to bio-archaeologist Kristina Killgrove, but laptop advocates say it does not resemble any other wax tablets seen in ancient Greek art; and if it is a wax tablet, where is the stylus? And what about the USB ports? Jeff Hurwit, a professor of art history and classics at the University of Oregon, asserts these “are drill holes for the attachment of a bronze object, or perhaps a separate piece of marble.” *D.Mail (online)*, 3 Feb; *USA Today (online)*, 5 Feb 2016.

## SIDELINES...

### DIVINE DEMARKATION

Chicago’s Wheaton College (an Evangelical school) is seeking to fire Professor Larycia Hawkins for saying that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The academic, who wears a hijab in protest against anti-Muslim rhetoric, refused to take part in “clarifying conversations”. *Metro*, 7 Jan 2016.

### FAIRY REVENGE WARNING

West, a US pharmaceutical company, was warned off building its new factory on a fairy fort at Knockhouse in Waterford City, Ireland. “Friend of the fairies” Eddie Lenihan, from Crusheen, Co. Clare, urged the company to choose another site, warning that the Good People would otherwise take revenge against all involved. He cited the example of the Ferenka factory in Limerick, which was built on a fairy fort and closed suddenly in 1977 after six years and a series of setbacks – including the IRA kidnapping of its boss. *Irish Sun*, 3 Sept 2015.

### FASHION HAZARD

Squatting in skinny jeans can cut off the blood supply to muscles and compress a nerve behind the knee leading to a loss of feeling called compartment syndrome. Doctors issued a warning after a 35-year-old woman was found lying in an Adelaide street, unable to stand, after spending hours emptying cupboards and lifting boxes. Her calves were so swollen that her trousers had to be cut off, and she spent four days in hospital before she could walk. (Elio Fiorucci, was invented skinny jeans, died a month later, on 20 July, aged 80). *Adelaide Advertiser*, 23 June; *D.Telegraph*, 23 July 2015.

### MONKEY SABOTAGE

Baboons forced a Zimbabwe radio station off air for an hour by chewing through fibre optic cables in a mountainous area near the central town of Zvishavane. “I’m told there were more than five of them that ate into the cable,” said station head Munyaradzi Hwengwere. “When we got to the tower, we saw them scurrying away.” *BBC News*, 1 Oct 2015.

## SIDELINES...

### BISON MYSTERY

A herd of almost 100 bison has appeared near Tisdale in the Canadian prairie province of Saskatchewan, 150 years after they were hunted to the brink of extinction. Town authorities have no idea where they came from, or whether they are domesticated or wild. Police warned drivers to watch out for them. "They have very dark fur so they're not easy to spot and they're quite well built, weighing about 1,400lb [635kg]," said a police spokesman. Bison (aka 'buffalo') are raised on some Saskatchewan farms for meat, but no farmer has reported a missing herd. [AFP] 12 Dec 2015.

### DEADLY BRACELETS

On sale for £5 at Hampstead Art Fair in London on 27 June were red and black bead bracelets made from Jequirity seeds (*Abrus precatorius*), which contain abrin, a toxin more deadly than ricin. In Jamaica, the beads are believed to ward off evil spirits, while the Chinese celebrate them as "love beans". If chewed or rubbed into the skin, abrin can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and (in three recorded cases) immediate death. There is no known antidote. *Camden New Journal (London)*, 2 July 2015.

### GARDEN HAZARDS

Harley, a three-year-old border collie, spent 10 days in pain before dying of liver failure. He had eaten leaves from a sago palm, native to Japan, which contain cycasin, lethal for dogs, which the dog's owner had unwittingly introduced to her garden in Stroud, Gloucestershire.

Another victim of liver failure was a 14-month-old cat called Loris, which was stung by a bee in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Unfortunately, the insect's sting was covered with lily pollen – highly toxic to cats. *D.Telegraph*, 21 Aug; *D.Mail*, 27 Aug 2015.

## CRETINOUS CRIMS

CRIME REALLY DOESN'T PAY IF YOU'RE THESE KINDS OF STUPID

- After sobering up, two men from Ayr in Scotland couldn't remember what had happened. In 2013, railway worker Jamie Abernathy, 46, and jobless Brian Darrach, 35, joined Bannatyne's health club in Blackpool, 200 miles (320km) from home, where they stole credit card details from five lockers and splurged on meals, hotel rooms and heroic amounts of booze. They also spent £35,000 on fresh fish from a wholesaler in Fleetwood, Lancashire. By the time they came to trial in Burnley this January, it was still not clear what had happened to 80kg (176lb) of Dover sole, 80kg of halibut, 150kg (330lb) of lobster and 150kg of king scallops. The men also spent £3,600 on chartering a private jet from Blackpool to Elstree in Hertfordshire, home of the TV and film studios – and £4,000 on three stoves (perhaps to cook the fish). None of this made sense, and the defendants could shed no light on the matter. They were fined and given suspended prison sentences. *D.Mirror*; *D.Mail online*, 22 Jan 2016.

- On 18 December, Paul Wayne Terry, 27, forced his way into an apartment in Tulsa, Oklahoma, with ex-girlfriend Sonja Marie Moro, 29, and, brandishing a knife, demanded money from a resident. The victim handed over his wallet, realising that describing the robber to the police was going to be a doddle. Terry has devil-horn tattoos and "Fuck Cops" written on his forehead. His other tattoos include Nazi SS insignia below his eye and kissing lips on his cheek. He was arrested the next day. Turns out he was not a stranger to the criminal justice system. *nypost.com*, 21 Dec 2015.

- Rezwon Hussein, 29, panicked when police knocked on his parents' door in Rochdale,



LEFT: Describing Paul Wayne Terry was not the challenge it might have been – and the cops already knew him

So I was amazed when the police told me that Nicholas Allegretto had walked into Parkside police station next day, complaining that his human rights were being infringed by my media campaign against him. He was immediately interviewed by officers, and then arrested and prosecuted for theft... You've got to laugh really." *Cambridge News*, 1 Oct 2015.

- Paul Davies, 47, was trapped in the Asda garage in Basildon, Essex, after smashing his way into

### He dialled 999: "Basildon, near petrol garage. Help me!"

wanting to speak to his brother, who was out at the time. As the police walked back to their car, Hussein dashed upstairs and started throwing bags of heroin and cocaine out of an attic window. Seeing this, the officers returned to the house and discovered a £3 million drugs factory in the basement. Hussain was jailed for 11 years and six months. *Sunday Mirror*, 25 Oct 2015.

- Last February, Nicholas Allegretto, 23, was caught on security camera stealing a £23 magnet from a hardware store in Cambridge. "I put [the thief's] image on Facebook," said owner Neil Mackay, "and it was reproduced in a local newspaper. But it was indistinct, with lines across his face, and you couldn't identify who it was, so I didn't really expect him to be caught.

the building with a hammer and triggering a fast-moving security shutter, which pinned him to the ceiling. He dialled 999 on his mobile and shouted to police operators "Basildon, near petrol garage. Help me!" before the call cut out. Passers-by also called the emergency services after hearing his cries. Police and firemen arrived just before 5am on 10 October, and freed Davies, a persistent thief, using cutting equipment. He was jailed for six months. *D.Telegraph*, 13 Oct 2015.

- Michael Claude, 19, broke into a school in Delaware, got stuck in an elevator and was forced to call emergency services for help. He was found wearing a jacket that didn't belong to him and was charged with criminal mischief and theft. *The News (Portsmouth)*, 10 Sept 2015.

- A greedy burglar found himself stuck inside a house after getting locked inside the food cupboard. Marko Herz, 43, broke into the house in Bonn, Germany, to steal jewellery and electronics but couldn't resist grabbing a snack as well. He tried to get out, but after a while gave up and called police – who rescued and then





arrested him. The homeowner said the faulty cupboard could not be opened from the inside. *Metro*, 14 Oct 2015.

• A stoned David Smith, 31, spotted a wallet, iPad and car keys inside an unlocked Ford Focus at 4am, but as he grabbed the items in Barrow, Cumbria, he unwittingly touched a button on the key fob, which locked him in. Baffled, he panicked and eventually smashed a window to get out. He was caught when he tried to use a bank card from the wallet at a shop. *D.Mirror*, *D.Express*, 19 Sept 2015.

• Some felons make police work really easy. For instance, Paul Neaverson, 61, who wanted cash to fly to Corfu for a job interview as a golf coach. On 16 March 2015 he tried to rob a NatWest bank branch in Rainham, Kent. Holding a cashier at knifepoint, he told her to transfer £500 to his personal bank account. Before he could give his details, the cashier pressed the alarm and he fled, Maidstone Crown Court heard. Neaverson was jailed for two years. *D.Mail*, *D.Mirror*, 12 Sept 2015.

• Joshua Jording had “Josh” stencilled on his sweatshirt on 2 December, while breaking into a western Pennsylvania taxi company where he used to work, clearly seen on security video. Jording, 26, of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, faced a preliminary hearing 12 days later. *[AP]* 7 Dec 2015.

• Raymond Green, 34, dropped a business card with his name on it while burgling an elderly couple’s house in Swansea, South Wales. He had been given the card by his probation officer, who wrote the thief’s name on it. Green was jailed for seven years. *Sun*, 24 Dec 2015.

• John Stevens, 25, broke into Rumwood Cricket Club in Maidstone, Kent, in June, stealing three cricket balls and a handbag. Before leaving, he scrawled “Can’t catch me” on a wall. He was arrested after his fingerprints were found on the marker pen he left behind. He also left his prints on a glass he used to drink squash. He was fined and given a six-month community order. *Sun*, *Metro*, 6 Oct 2015.

• Leland Ayala-Doliente, 22, and Holland Sward, 23, driving from Las Vegas to Montana with 20lb (9kg) of weed on 23 January 2015, crossed the Idaho border while stoned and paranoid. They imagined undercover police were tailing them and were about to stop and arrest them. They decided to speed up the process of their arrest, so they pulled over near Rexburg and called Madison County police – politely requesting that they “just end it”. Ayala-Doliente told the police dispatcher: “It’s getting cold out here, man. I just want to get warm.” When police showed up, the men had their hands behind their heads, and Sward told an officer: “We’re surrendering”. The two were each charged with

a felony count of marijuana trafficking. *Guardian*, 22 Jan 2016.

• A burglar who left his phone at a crime scene returned his loot when his victim threatened to call his mother and grandmother. Tom Evans, 28, from Swansea, phoned numbers on the mobile to get the youth’s name and also threatened to put photos on Facebook. The burglar came back with the bike and tools he had taken from a shed and apologised. “I truly believe he was sorry,” said Mr Evans. *Sun*, 26 Dec 2015.

• Vanity is a cruel thing. Detectives in Swansea investigating a house raid issued a mugshot of the burglary suspect. Matthew Maynard, 24, complained to the local paper that the picture “wasn’t very flattering”, and sent an alternative shot of himself standing and smirking next to a police van. After it was published, he was spotted by a member of the public who recognised him from his new picture, and on 12 November 2009 he was arrested in Taffy’s barbershop in Morriston, Swansea, while having an £8 trim. “This just shows how stupid he is,” said an officer. “He had his own picture plastered around and then decides to go for a trim to keep up his image. Perhaps he wanted to look good when he appeared in court.” *D.Telegraph*, *Metro*, 13 Nov 2009.

• A burglar was found fast asleep and snoring loudly on his victim’s sofa. Serial offender Ian Carr was in the middle of raiding a student flat in Heaton, Newcastle, when he nodded off. Michael Kitchen, 25, woke at 2.15am and discovered the raider in his living room. Kitchen and his flatmate phoned police and waited in the hallway until they arrived. Carr was woken up and arrested. He was wearing Kitchen’s jacket and a wallet was among stolen items in the pocket. A laptop was found in a carrier bag on the balcony of the first-floor flat. Carr, 29, of Byker, told police he had taken 12 Valium tablets and methadone that day. He had 95 previous offences, including five house raids. He was jailed for two years and eight months. *D.Express*, 2 Dec 2015.

## SIDELINES...

### FELINE BENDER

Aljoshia, a Turkish Angora cat, was trapped for seven weeks in a neighbour’s wine cellar in Würselen, near Aachen, Germany, and got through three bottles of Riesling after smashing them open. He eventually staggered home to owner Claudia von Buren. Diagnosed with alcohol poisoning, he was put on a drip for three days and recovered – but was refusing water, in case it was alcoholic. *D.Express*, 22 Oct 2015.

### REBEL REBEL

An African grey parrot called Rebel has created much confusion at Brooke House care home in Norwich, Norfolk, after learning to mimic the panic alarm residents use to summon help. “It is all taken in good humour,” said his owner, Roy Hagley, 53. “The nurses like him, even if they do think his noises are the call bell.” Rebel has also mastered text message alerts and a range of mobile phone sounds. *Metro*, 23 Nov 2015.

### SHAVING ENIGMA

A two-year-old girl was found miles away from her home in Hamilton, Massachusetts – sitting naked by the side of a road with her head shaved. She had been reported missing the previous day, 20 November. *Sunday Post*, 22 Nov 2015.

### PHANTOM PEE

An incontinent ghost is said to haunt Dumfries House in Ayrshire, making it smell of urine. The stately pile was saved from ruin by Prince Charles in 2007. *Sun*, 9 Jan 2016.



MARTIN ROSS



ABOVE: Stoned, paranoid and arrested felons Leland Ayala-Doliente and Holland Sward.

IDAHO POLICE

**SHALL BE NAMELESS**

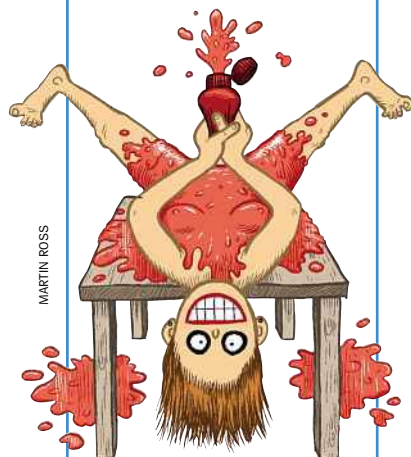
Dominic Greyer, selling mugs and tea towels at an (unnamed) English fair, was asked to cover up his merchandise after organisers deemed the genuine British place names on the items to be too rude. These included Sandy Balls, Wetwang, Cockermouth, Three Cocks, Twatt, Bell End, Slack Bottom, Furry Way and Rings End. (Sydney) *D.Telegraph, 12 Sept 2015.*

**IZZIE, NO!**

Keepers are considering tethering a mischievous, foul-mouthed raven to a wall at Knaresborough Castle in Yorkshire. The eight-year-old bird, Izzie, has stolen phones, cameras, golf balls and a baby's dummy – and torn up flowers. She also says “What you fucking looking at?” to tourists trying to photograph her. Igraine Hustwitt Skelton, Her Majesty's Keeper of Ravens, said that after Izzie stole one camera “she flew onto the museum roof and took a picture of herself”. *Sunday Post, 11 Oct 2015.*

**SAUCY DANCER**

A topless Angelic Valle turned over tables and chairs at Johnny Rockets, a diner in Miami Beach, Florida. She then removed her bikini bottom, climbed on a table, doused herself with tomato ketchup and performed a kind of dance while lying on the table. Customers called the police, but Valle, 23, had gone by the time they arrived. *Irish Independent, 3 Nov 2015.*



# Whistle down the wind

## ‘Bird language’ contradicts left-brain/right-brain theories



For 600 years, a whistle language has been used in La Gomera, one of the Canary Islands – a handy way of long-distance communication before telephones. Less well known is a similar language in Turkey. Nestled deep in the mountains of north-east Anatolia, harmonious echoes fill the air as a group of people whistle to each other across deep valleys and long distances to communicate. According to a recent report, the people who speak this musical ‘bird language’ are using their entire brain while whistling instead of only the left hemisphere, which contradicts the common notion that language is dominated by the left half of our brains. ‘Bird language’ can be heard from over three miles (4.8km) away. Scientists have known for years that the left half of our brains is responsible for speech and understanding language whereas the right half dominates how we process music, pitch, and tone.

Onur Güntürkün of Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany wondered which part of the brain would control a language based on music. To find out, Güntürkün and his colleagues studied 31 volunteers who lived in the small, mountain town of Kusköy (above).



ABOVE: ‘Bird language’ enabled long-distance communication before the advent of phones.

fed into their right ear, which suggests that their left brain was more active at the time. But when presented with two different whistled Turkish sounds, they heard the syllables equally well in both

the left and right ear. The results “tell us that the organisation of our brain, in terms of its asymmetrical structure, is not as fixed as we assume,” said Güntürkün. “The way information is given to us appears to change the architecture of our brain in a radical way.”

Güntürkün added: “As a native Turkish-speaking person, I was struck that I did not understand a single word when these guys started whistling. Not one word! After about a week, I started recognising a few words, but only if I knew the context.” He wonders whether people who suffer from speech impediments after a stroke – which can damage their brain’s left hemisphere – could learn to communicate in a whistle language. For a video of two people speaking in Turkish whistle, go to: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjcVLLdPCoU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjcVLLdPCoU) [AP] 19 Aug 2015.

All of the volunteers were fluent in Turkish whistling and ordinary Turkish. Each whistler completed a psychological listening test: while wearing headphones, they sometimes heard the same syllable in both ears while other times they heard one syllable in one ear and a different syllable in the other. The test sometimes played spoken Turkish and other times Turkish whistling, though only one type of language was played at a single time.

During each test, the listeners were asked to identify which syllable they had heard. Because the left half of our brain processes information that goes in our right ear (and vice versa), the researchers could determine which part of the brain was more active during the test by which syllable the listeners identified when the two sounds didn’t match up. More often than not, when the volunteers heard two syllables in spoken Turkish, they identified the one that was

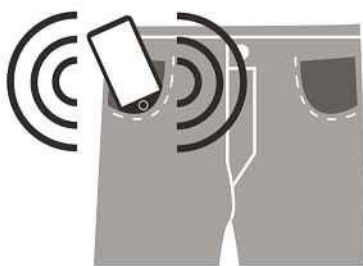


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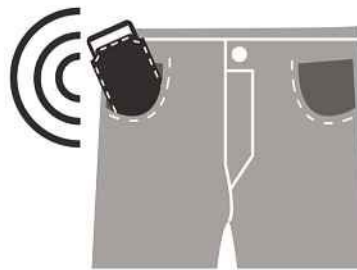


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SPECIAL REPORT

SCHOLAR, COURTIER, MAGICIAN: THE LOST LIBRARY OF JOHN DEE

JOHN CHASE / RCP

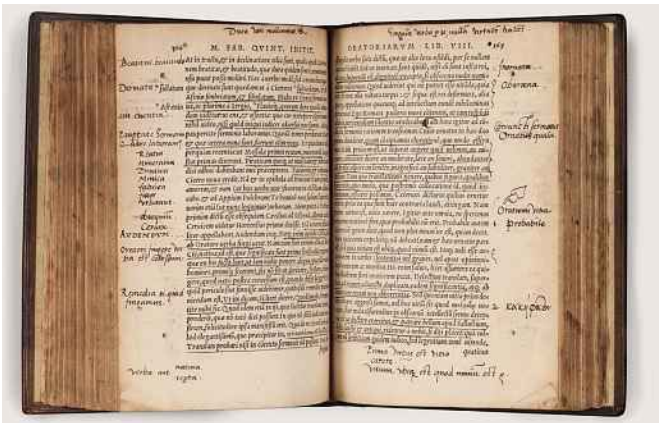


John Dee was a “Master of divers Secrets”, according to Elias Ashmole – and the classic portrait of the scholarly Dee, with gown, ruff and skullcap, on loan from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, greets you at the start of “Scholar, Courtier, Magician: The Lost Library of John Dee”.

In 1650 Ashmole wrote of “the excellent physician, Doctor John Dee”. But Dee was actually never a doctor. He was an exemplary student at St John’s College, Cambridge – he slept only four hours a night to leave more time for studying – but his main area of expertise was mathematics; he wasn’t a qualified or registered physician, and he never took a doctoral degree, though he was a founding Fellow of Trinity College.

John Dee (1527-1609) was a true polymath: a mathematician, a cartographer, a spy, a cryptographer, an astrologer, an alchemist and much more. This is the first ever exhibition of his books – some 50 of the 100+ that the Royal College of Physicians holds in its museum by Regent’s Park, London, the largest collection of his books anywhere.

The books came from Dee’s massive personal library. When he went travelling in central Europe in 1583 (see FT290:74-76) he left his home in Mortlake, London, with its 3,000 books and 1,000 manuscripts, in the care of his brother-in-law – who promptly flogged off much of the



TOP: A selection from John Dee’s library. CENTRE: Portrait of Dee by unknown artist c. 1594, now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. ABOVE: Dee’s copy of Quintillian’s *Institutionum oratoriarum* (1540), showing his marginal notes.

content. One of the recipients, Nicholas Saunder, bleached or scraped away Dee’s name in the books, writing his own on top; Saunder’s collection passed eventually to the Marquis of Dorchester, whose library was given to the RCP on his death in 1680 – complete with the overwritten name on some of the books.

Dee loved books. In 1556 he proposed to Queen Mary I that there should be a project to recover and preserve the countless volumes that had been scattered during her father’s dissolution of the monasteries and religious houses – a sort of national library. Mary turned him down.

He’d had a run-in with her the previous year; she’d had him arrested for casting horoscopes, including one for her half-sister Elizabeth. He spent some time under house arrest with the Bishop of London, Edmund Bonner, who investigated Dee’s religious beliefs. It was a lucky escape; in the three years following his arrest Mary had nearly 300 people executed for their beliefs.

But he’d been in trouble even before that. Whilst at Cambridge he’d created a prop for a theatrical production: a flying dung beetle that allowed an actor to ride up to the roof of the college hall. It was such a striking effect that some believed it could only have been achieved by magic.

What’s most fascinating about Dee’s books in this exhibition are his notes in the margins. He underlined passages, wrote comments, drew little pointing hands (called manicules), added horoscopes – and in his copy of the complete works of Cicero he drew a sailing ship in one corner of a page. His handwriting is clear and readable, offering insights into what he found significant in his reading, whether it was on mathematics, medicine or astrology. His comments show a sense of humour; in the margin of the *Trojan War* by Dictys Cretensis, who claimed to have witnessed it, Dee notes in Latin: “Nothing here on the Trojan Horse”. His

ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

MIKE FEAR / RCP



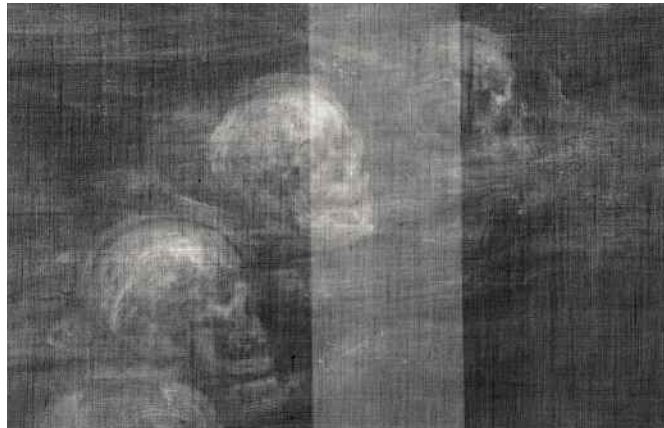
WELLCOME LIBRARY



long preface to Euclid's *The Elements of Geometrie* has little fold-up 3D diagrams.

The Royal College of Physicians isn't ideally designed for exhibitions, and it's easy to miss the fact that this one is on two floors. Upstairs concentrates on Dee the alchemist. There's a copy of his *Monas Hieroglyphica*, a slim book explaining his famous glyph, an esoteric symbol of the unity of the cosmos. There's Méric Casaubon's 1659 publication of *A true and faithful relation of what passed for many years between John Dee and some spirits*. Dee's search for the Enochian language of the angels was an attempt to find the original language of God, so that he could understand the Universe better. Dee loved knowledge; he would never have said, as Shakespeare's Prospero did: "I'll burn my books". And there's a too-short section on Dee's influence on popular culture. In Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Doctor Destiny is also known as John Dee; and Damon Albarn co-wrote a recent rock opera called *Dr Dee*. There could have been more.

As well as the RCP's own collection of books, the British Museum and British Library have loaned the exhibition Dee's magical mirrors, a small crystal ball and a mounted crystal that Dee's son Arthur gave to the



TOP: 'John Dee Performing an Experiment Before Elizabeth I' by Henry Gillard Glindoni. CENTRE: Skulls revealed when the painting was X-rayed. TOP RIGHT: The crystal given to Nicholas Culpepper. ABOVE: Dee's sketch of a ship in his copy of Cicero.



herbalist Nicholas Culpepper as a reward for healing his liver complaints. Culpepper tried using the crystal for healing but stopped, he said, when a demonic corrupt ghost appeared within it.

Dee still holds secrets. A huge painting by the 19th-century artist Henry Gillard Glindoni of Dee performing a demonstration before Queen Elizabeth, reveals when X-rayed that he originally stood within a circle of human skulls.

As for alchemy... it's actually a very modern concept. Novelist Jeannette Winterson, who spoke at the opening of the exhibition, put it beautifully. Alchemy is transmutation, relativity, connectiveness, interdependency. Alchemy is philosophy. The iron is us; the gold is us. Manchester, where Dee was sent as Warden of the Collegiate Church towards the end of his long life, was known as the Golden Sewer; it was the richest city in the world. Where there's muck there's brass. The Industrial Revolution, which really turned base metal into gold, was "alchemy on steroids", she said.

DAVID V BARRETT

Scholar, courtier, magician: the lost library of John Dee is at the Royal College of Physicians, London, to July 29; entry free.

SCIENCE MUSEUM LONDON / WELLCOME IMAGES

WELLCOME LIBRARY

JOHN CHASE / RCP

## FABULOUS FURRY FREAKS

Boss-eyed but happy, grumpy but rich and a pair of chimæra cats



ABOVE LEFT: Ozzy became permanently cross-eyed after falling from a windowsill; and he can lick his nose. ABOVE RIGHT: Pixie, Britain's answer to America's Grumpy Cat.

### HEADBANGER OZZY

Ozzy fell from a windowsill in Perth, Scotland, and ended up permanently boss-eyed. The eight-year-old tomcat was completely normal as a kitten, but got his new look after bashing his head in the tumble. Ian and Evelyn McDougall took him in after the accident. They reckon he looks like the *Jungle*

Book panther Bagheera after he was hypnotised by the snake Kaa. Despite a bit of tunnel vision, he leads a normal life – though he sometimes gets lost. *Sun*, 31 July 2015.

### PIXIE STRIKES IT RICH

Pixie, a two-year-old pedigree Persian living in Bristol, has been touted as Britain's answer

to America's Grumpy Cat, with sad eyes and turned-down mouth. Grumpy was born with dwarfism and an underbite, but her unusual appearance made her a star with a £60 million fortune (and that was many months ago). Pixie belongs to Sophie Batt, 24, who said the cat's appearance belies a cheerful soul. *Bristol Post*, 19 Aug 2014.

### IMPALED CATS

Impaled in the heraldic sense – juxtaposition of two coats of arms on a single vertically divided shield – not pierced by a pointed stick. Venus, a five-year-old tabby living in Florida, is a feline gynandromorph: jet-black with a green eye on one side and marmalade tabby with a blue eye on the other. By last December, Venus had 913,000 likes on her Facebook page, dozens of YouTube videos and her own website selling merchandise. She had been featured in *National Geographic* magazine and appeared on numerous US television shows. Her owners, Christina and Chris, got her in 2009 from a dairy farm in North Carolina, where she was a stray.

Tuppence is another feline gynandromorph, but with both eyes the same colour (orange). This impaled pussy is owned by Jim MacConnell, 73, of Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne and Wear. Venus and Tuppence are chimæras – creatures comprising two lots of genetically distinct cells. *D.Mail*, 12 Dec; *Sun*, 12+14 Dec 2015.



LEFT: Facebook star Venus, with a cuddly lookalike, and Tuppence, another feline gynandromorph.

KATIELEE ARROWSMITH / SWNS

JON ROWLEY / SWNS.COM

FACEBOOK

FACEBOOK



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

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE

## NESSIE'S HIDEAWAY?

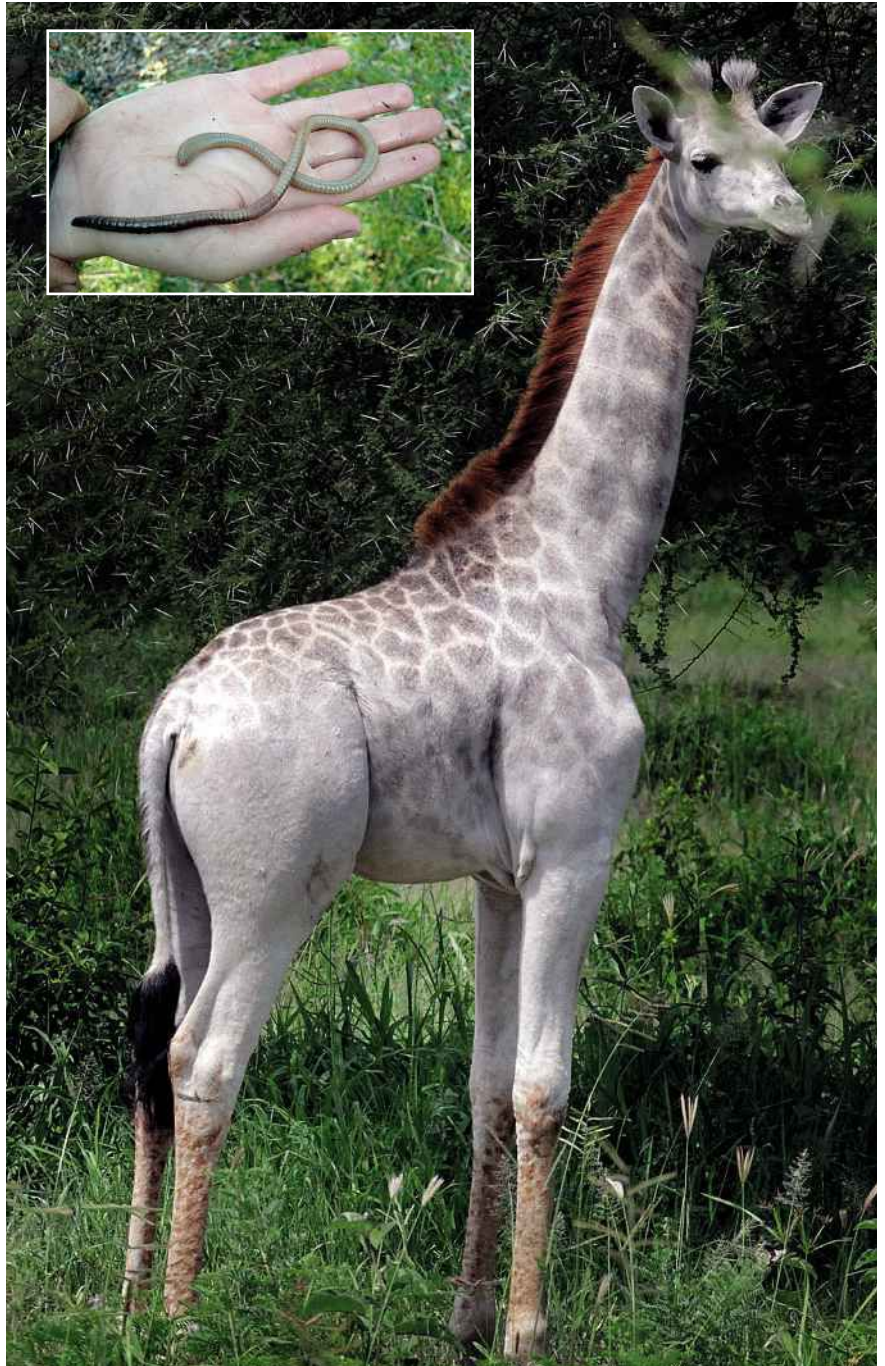
In January 2016, Keith Stewart, a 43-year-old Loch Ness tour-boat operator, announced that using state-of-the-art 3-D sonar equipment, he had obtained a sonar reading at the loch revealing that it was 889ft (271m) deep, thus surpassing the previous record of 813ft (248m) measured at a spot called Edwards' Deep, and that he had returned to this location several times and verified his reading. Moreover, the site of this reading – yet to be independently confirmed – was a hitherto undiscovered trench, situated about halfway between the Clansman Hotel and Drumnadrochit.

Not surprisingly, the media soon seized upon the possibility of this deep trench being a potential hideaway for Nessie, suggesting that during sonar scans of the loch in the past, the monster(s) may have hidden in it to avoid detection. Of course, one has to ask how – assuming that such creatures even exist – they would have known that the loch was being scanned during such procedures, unless they can detect sonar? After all, cetaceans utilise a sonar-like echolocation mechanism in navigation and locating prey – emitting sound waves and being guided by the precise nature of their echoes.

Also needing mention here is that any creature hiding in the trench for any length of time would either need to be able to hold its breath underwater for that period or be able to breathe directly in water. Stewart also claims that two weeks earlier, he had obtained a sonar image of what looked like a long object with a hump, lying on the loch bed, but which wasn't there when he scanned it again later. Should the trench's existence and depth be confirmed it will demonstrate that there are sizeable surprises still awaiting disclosure in the depths of this most mysterious of freshwater lakes. *dailyrecord.co.uk*, 19 Jan; *news.discovery.com*, 22 Jan 2016.

## WORMING OUT SOME MONSTERS

Also in January 2016 and also in Scotland, but this time focusing upon some very different monsters, the media carried many reports detailing a remarkable discovery made recently on the small, virtually uninhabited Inner Hebridean island of Rum (aka Rhum) by a research team from the University of Central Lancashire. In an abandoned settlement on Rum called Papadil, the team was astonished to discover some gigantic earthworms – the size of baby snakes and as heavy as small mice! And certainly, with the biggest specimens measuring up to 16in (40cm) long and weighing 0.4oz (12.5g), they are three to four times as large as average-sized earthworms, and are the largest on record from Britain. The team suspects that their huge growth is due to the absence of mammalian predators on Rum – no foxes, moles, hedgehogs, or badgers. And who knows? The sight of such monstrous worms may be sufficient to dissuade even the earliest



TOP: Britain's largest recorded earthworms, on the Island of Rum. TOP: Omo, Tanzania's white giraffe.

of birds from trying to catch one too! *telegraph.co.uk*, 16 Jan 2016.

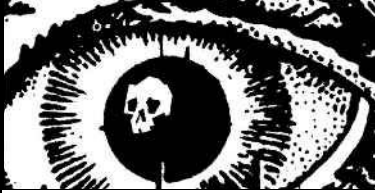
## A WHITER SHADE OF TALL

On account of their exceptional height, giraffes stand out from the crowd at the best of times, but a specimen observed and photographed in Tanzania's Tarangire National Park by ecologist Dr Derek Lee has a very special additional reason for doing so. Eschewing her species' very distinctive brown-and-white coat pattern, Omo is white – or at least so pale that her coat pattern is little more than a series of ashen blotches upon a pure-white background. In

contrast, her mane is deep reddish-orange, and both her tail tuft and her eyes are dark, as in normal giraffes, thereby revealing that she is not an albino. Instead, she appears to be leucistic, a genetically induced condition in which normal coloration is present but very dilute in most regions of the body, so that an individual exhibiting leucism generally looks washed-out in terms of its pigmentation. Currently 15 months old, Omo is fully accepted by her herd despite her unusual coloration, and this should aid her survival, as long as poachers do not view her as a special target. *dailymail.co.uk*, 24 Jan 2016.

DEREK LEE / CATERS NEWS





# GHOSTWATCH

**ALAN MURDIE** finds a new TV drama about Harry Price plays fast and loose with the facts



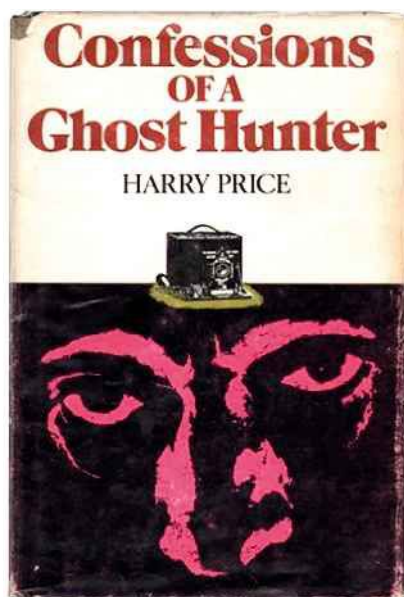
**ABOVE:** Rafe Spall played the celebrated psychic investigator in ITV's drama *Harry Price – Ghosthunter*. **OPPOSITE:** The real Harry Price, photographed in 1932.

## THE PRICE IS NOT RIGHT

That you can't libel the dead is well known. Similarly, there is no remedy available to disappointed ghost hunters or those TV viewers caring for historical accuracy who were offended by *Harry Price – Ghost Hunter*, a one-off drama broadcast on 27 December 2015. Inspired by the novel *The Ghost Hunters* (2013) by Neil Spring about Borley Rectory, it was billed as a "spine chilling mix of real history, fiction and the famous legend of Harry Price".<sup>1</sup> Regrettably, this drama presented an extremely misleading depiction of the personality of the man who was the best known psychical researcher of the 20th century, an internationally regarded figure, who produced an immense output of published work and was among the first to recognise the value of Charles Fort.<sup>2</sup> Were Price alive today he would have been more than justified in bringing defamation proceedings. Based on what I saw on screen within the first 10 minutes, I would have been happy to represent him.

Harry Price (1881-1948) has been both championed and vilified as a psychic investigator in the 70 years since his death. Sadly, the programme had virtually nothing to do with Price's real 20-year investigation of Borley Rectory, 'the most haunted house in England', the actual theme of Neil Spring's book. Instead, it based itself around a wholly invented tale which sends Price investigating an alleged

## HARRY PRICE HAS BEEN BOTH CHAMPIONED AND VILLIFIED



haunting in the country manor owned by a fictitious Liberal politician named Goodwin who was secretly trying to drive his wife

mad by poisoning her with barbiturates (a plot partly derived from the film *Gaslight*, 1944). Goodwin is jealously reacting to his adulterous wife having become pregnant by a former handyman, only to lose the baby later (events having a faint echo of allegations concerning Marianne Foyster, wife of the Revd Lionel Foyster, incumbent at Borley between 1930-35)<sup>3</sup>. Along the way, Price challenges a fraudulent medium revered by the mother of the Goodwins's housemaid who assists him.

From a legal angle, the most blatant perversion of fact for me – aside from falsely suggesting Price's wife was a mental patient – were opening scenes showing Price faking séance effects to extract money from a gullible family. Another scene featured a similarly duped soldier committing suicide on Price's front doorstep. Thus, Price was presented as the perpetrator of acts that would constitute criminal offences both then and now, and would amount to libels without further proof of damage if Price were living.<sup>4</sup> Aside from the fact neither event ever happened, it was a complete distortion to depict Price posing as a spiritualist. In fact, this was one thing even his harshest sceptical critics could never accuse him of doing.

The real Harry Price was initially a hard-baked sceptic, and throughout his life he considered that mediumistic effects were mostly fraudulent. He was a man no more likely to hold a phoney spiritualist séance

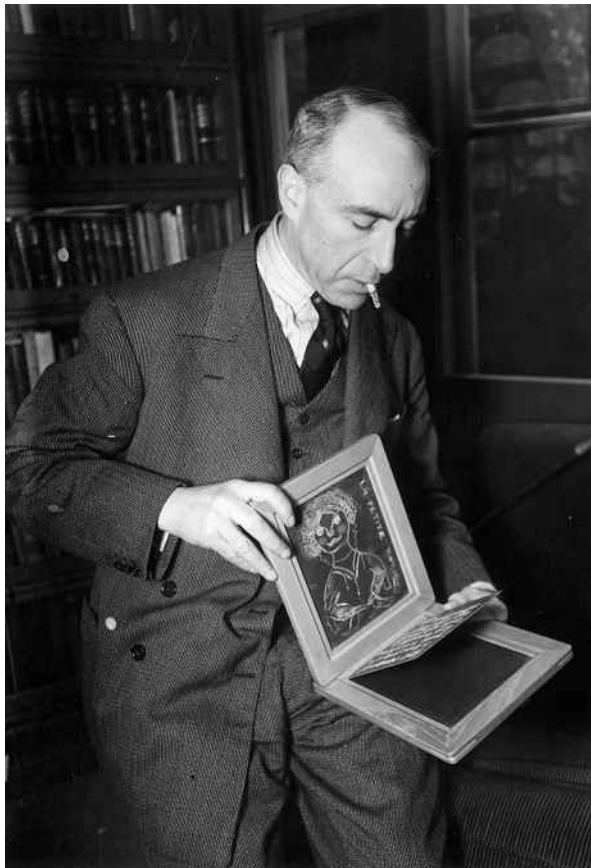


than Richard Dawkins would be likely to lead a prayer meeting. A committed member of the Church of England, he had a profound contempt for hosts of fraudulent mediums who exploited the grief of the bereaved after World War I. He exposed many frauds and was often very scathing towards gullible spiritualists, some of whom he categorised as 'Cheese-Cloth Worshipers'.<sup>5</sup> His biographer Paul Tabori styled him 'the whipping boy of spiritualism', stating: "The rites and trappings of spiritualist churches awakened a deep antipathy of which he never rid himself."<sup>6</sup> He had many critics amongst spiritualists and stirred up furious controversy, clashing often with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. But it was not until after Price's death in March 1948 that anyone was openly prepared to call his integrity and honesty into question in the way this television play presumed at the outset.

Attacks commenced nine months after his death. In December 1948 a *Daily Mail* journalist named Charles Sutton claimed he had apprehended Price with his pockets "full of bricks and pebbles" faking a stone-throwing poltergeist at Borley Rectory in 1929.<sup>7</sup> More serious was the sceptical *The Haunting of Borley Rectory* (1956) by Eric Dingwall and Kathleen Goldney, both of whom had worked with Price, and Trevor Hall, who never met him but displayed an extraordinary hostility towards his memory. Their book sought to demolish the case for ghosts at Borley, with Hall proving the most persistent critic, singlehandedly repeating his attacks in further books such as *New Light on Old Ghosts* (1966) and an entire critical biography, *The Search for Harry Price* (1978).

If you wish to see Price's faults exhaustively dissected, Hall's books provide or suggest them all. Price is condemned for distorting and disguising his working class background, for his lack of advanced education, for exploiting psychical research financially, of being careless with facts, for slips of memory, for borrowing library books and not returning them, for faking or allowing dubious or naturally occurring phenomena to be passed off as paranormal, together with suspicions of literal skull-duggery with an allegation of planting human remains in the burnt-out rectory cellar at Borley in 1943.<sup>8</sup>

That Hall was a man obsessed with the case is clear in his zealous pursuit of the aforementioned Marianne Foyster of Borley. But for those 18 months of alleged poltergeist activity, she would have been wholly forgotten; Price suspected much but certainly did not know all of her sexual antics when he published his first Borley book, *The Most Haunted House in England* (1940).



For Hall, Marianne to some extent replaced Price as a fixation, pursuing her across the Atlantic after she left Britain as a GI bride in 1945. In his spare time he compiled a 600-page dossier on her life and lovers, gloatingly presenting her as a scheming nymphomaniac, bigamously married several times over and even a potential murderess. However, a psychiatrist he enlisted in 1980 for his exposure pulled out of his pet project and in the end Hall was robbed of his triumph of publishing an exposé by dying in 1992, pre-deceasing Marianne, by then long-settled in Canada, by a year. Subsequently, an anæmic version of Hall's dossier was published by Robert Wood as *The Widow of Borley* in 1993, the year she died. Since then, the leading book devoted to attacking Price was *Harry Price – The Psychic Detective* (2006), which revisited many of the allegations, and corrected a number of Hall's errors.<sup>9</sup>

However, in my view the damage to Price's reputation was ultimately done not by any of these books – which have themselves been the subject of challenge, argument and rejoinder<sup>10</sup> – but repetition of the tide of abuse and exaggerated language they released among reviewers working for influential and highbrow publications. For example,

*The Economist* branded Price "a rogue, a falsifier and manufacturer of evidence" whilst *The Observer* declared of Price's Borley books: "Not one brick in the whole extraordinary fabric of suggestion, muddle-mindedness, gullibility and publicity-hunting remains on another".<sup>11</sup> Not only did these broad-brush smears damage the reputation of Price but they opened the door to subsequent waves of denigration of other psychical researchers,<sup>12</sup> and spanning the generations they have eventually filtered down to commercial television giving us *Harry Price – Ghost Hunter*.

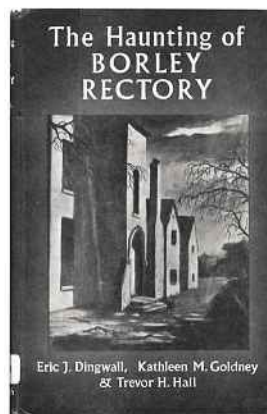
Amid such loaded language the person who has regard for the truth must tread most carefully. Price was no saint and certainly had his faults and flaws, but a more balanced view came from Robert Aickman who knew him for 30 years and declared him neither as good, nor as bad as people made out.<sup>13</sup>

To this extent the biggest mistake of the ITV dramatists and many who consider him today is to see Price primarily as a ghost hunter. What one can certainly say is that the case that has been presented against Price in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been curiously – indeed obsessively – one-sided, proceeding far more by way of innuendo than direct evidence, focusing on Borley and avoiding consideration of his laboratory work.

Admittedly, Price wrote an autobiographical work entitled *Confessions of A Ghost Hunter* (1936), but only a quarter of the book is dedicated to exploring haunted houses and poltergeists. In reality, Price spent far more time in séance rooms and laboratories – particularly in the 1920s and early 1930s – testing mediums under controlled conditions than visiting haunted houses. Price was primarily a gadgets man,<sup>14</sup> interested in practical ways of testing mediums; he was not in any sense a theoretician or interested in the psychological aspects of mediumship.<sup>15</sup> Despite mediums claiming communication with the dead, Price saw them as generating

a physical force unknown to science and craved recognition as a scientist.

Three series of experiments stand out. Price extensively tested the telekinetic powers of a young English woman, Stella Cranshaw, attracting much attention at the time but swiftly forgotten. His results were finally issued in book form in 1973, edited by James Turner (who had bought the site of Borley Rectory in 1946), but it attracted little attention.<sup>16</sup>



Price also joined in international research efforts into Eleonore Zugun, a Romanian teenager surrounded by poltergeist effects, conducting extensive tests with her in London in 1927.<sup>17</sup> Even more remarkable was his decade-long research into the Austrian Schneider brothers, a pair of teenage mediums, between 1922-1932. Price brought Rudi Schneider to London for 100 sittings attended by numerous independent observers, rushing out an entire book soon after,<sup>18</sup> similarly forgotten today.

Ultimately, it was Price himself who undermined his own work when in a fit of pique in 1933 he released a single photograph implying Rudi might have cheated at one session. This came after Rudi opted to go to Paris with other researchers whom Price saw as rivals.<sup>19</sup> Price's critics have avoided this research, merely alleging fraud without explaining how it was done, why dozens of other people involved themselves and, more crucially, why researchers reported similar experimental findings in independent tests.

The Rudi Schneider incident shows Price's great failing was his ego, being obsessed with publicity and showmanship, leading to numerous superficial stunts at haunted houses duly adored by the public. His greatest interest in phenomena outside the laboratory was not actually ghosts but poltergeists, one shared with Charles Fort because of their physical and potentially measurable aspects. In appreciating the labours of Fort, Price was an exception at the time. Like Fort, Price also assiduously collected newspaper stories – 25,000 of them about himself.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, it is minor and carping to point out that Rafe Spall was ludicrously miscast as the eponymous lead character. Price was neither slim nor good-looking, rather 'bald-headed, short and stocky'<sup>21</sup> as photographs confirm. Price was not isolated as depicted, though neither did he possess



ABOVE: Rafe Spall, "ludicrously miscast as the eponymous lead character", with Cara Theobald.

marked social charm or have the ability to mix well ("he had no small talk"<sup>22</sup>). Altogether Price was engrossed in his work to the point of obsession and "very sensitive to being found in error".<sup>23</sup> His friend Sidney Glanville further detailed this sensitivity: "[H]e was the last man to sit down under any criticism, especially if he had the slightest idea that it was unjustified – perhaps even if it was!"<sup>24</sup> whilst Paul Tabori recalled him "as a hot-tempered, impetuous man" and that "those of us who knew him could easily testify that he could and did lose his temper quickly and gloriously" – one who if he had ever been accused of fraud in life would have "reacted with a punch on the nose rather than some meek muttering".<sup>25</sup>

So much for Harry Price, but what can be pleaded for the fictional treatment of Price in the ITV show?

The introduction of real characters into wholly fictional stories can be an entertaining device and a way of exploring

new ideas and theories about the past. Equally, it can be symptomatic of mere laziness or a paucity of creative imagination on the part of writers. More pertinently, under the duress of feeding the demands of the modern entertainment economy, today's generation of dramatists no longer enjoy the luxuries of generous budgets or time to wade through numerous out-of-print books and archives to ensure their facts are right. Truth is swiftly sacrificed for entertainment purposes, as dramatists choose to freely invent whilst original authors relinquish control.<sup>26</sup> Besides, lengthy rounds of laboratory tests and experimental sittings don't make for prime-time drama.

2016 will also see the ITV Encore channel airing *Houdini and Doyle*, which has Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Harry Houdini teamed up for a set of adventures which never happened. If facts don't matter, why not throw in a few 'Lost World' dinosaurs as well?

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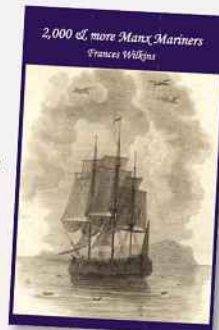
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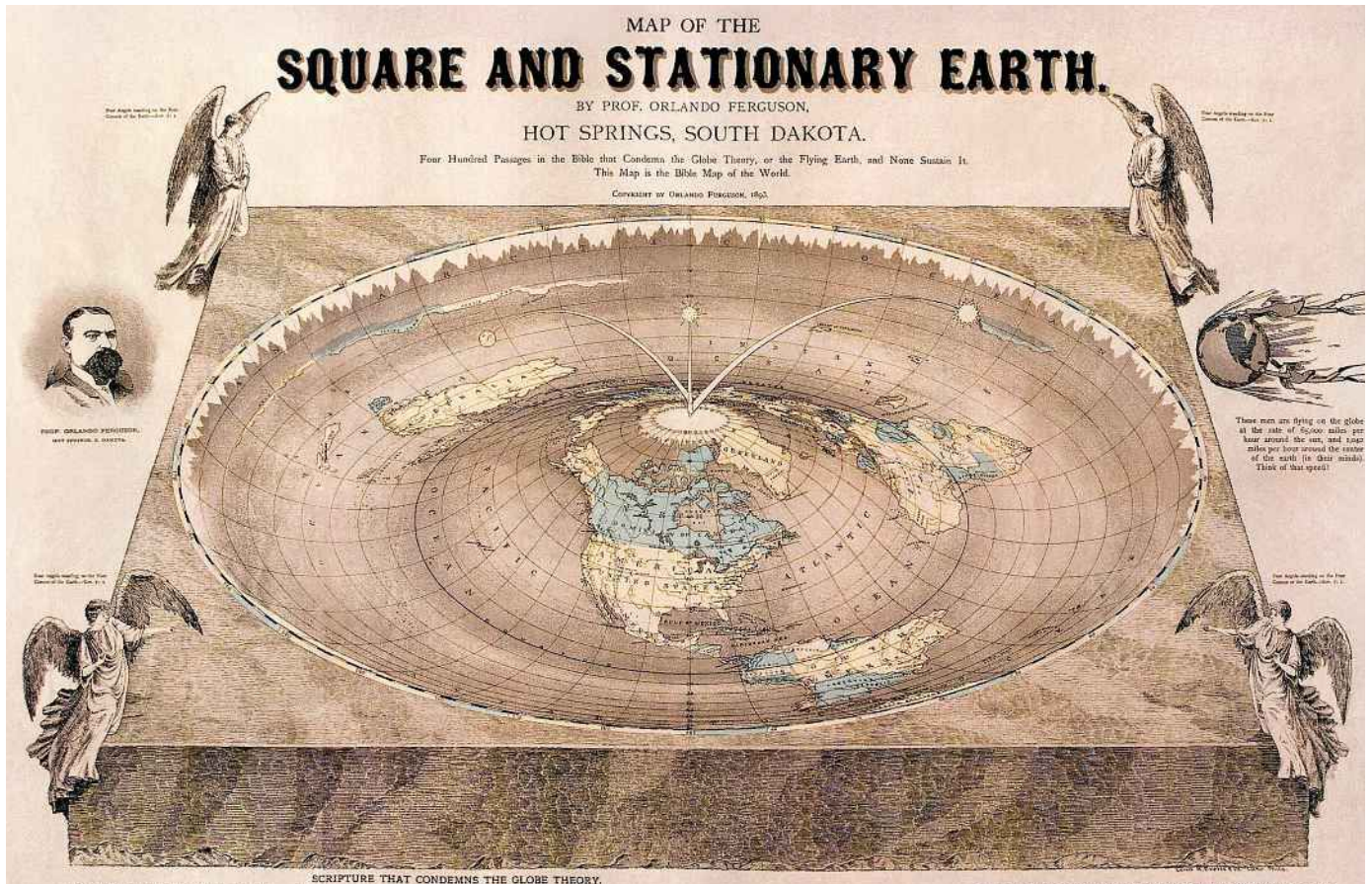


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# THE FLAT EARTH RAP

Rapper takes to Twitter to express his opposition to 'Globalism' and disses prominent astrophysicist



ABOVE: A Flat Earth map by Orlando Ferguson, 1893. BELOW: Bobby Ray Simmons, aka rapper B.o.B (left) was taken to task by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson.

Bobby Ray Simmons Jr, 27, better known as B.o.B, American rapper and music producer, believes that the Earth is flat, according to his tweets on 25 January. The rapper – who has released hits ‘Nothin’ on You’, ‘Airplanes’ and ‘Magic’ – presented a variety of arguments as to why modern science – and indeed very nearly all philosophers since Pythagoras in the sixth century BC – are wrong. He also claimed that NASA fooled the entire world in 1969 by faking the Moon landing. “A lot of people are turned off by the phrase ‘flat earth’”, he tweeted, “but there’s no way u can see all the evidence and not know... grow up.” He argued that if the Earth were indeed curved, evidence of that would be apparent when looking at the horizon in the distance and distant cities would be hidden from view because of curvature.

**“There’s no way u can see all the evidence and not know”**

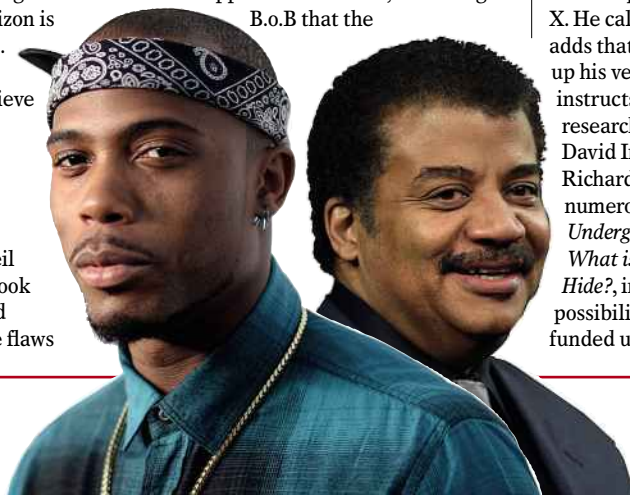
“No matter how high in elevation you are... the horizon is always eye level... sorry cadets... I didn’t wanna believe it either,” B.o.B tweeted.

While the general reaction was laughter, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson took him seriously and pointed out some flaws

in his logic. B.o.B claimed that the New York City skyline shouldn’t be visible from 60 miles (96km) away at Harriman State Park’s Bear Mountain. He said it would be hidden behind 170ft (52m) of curved Earth, if the planet were not flat. Tyson not only pointed out that most buildings in Manhattan are much taller than that, but also corrected the rapper’s calculations, informing B.o.B that the

Earth’s curve blocks 150ft (46m) of Manhattan, not 170ft.

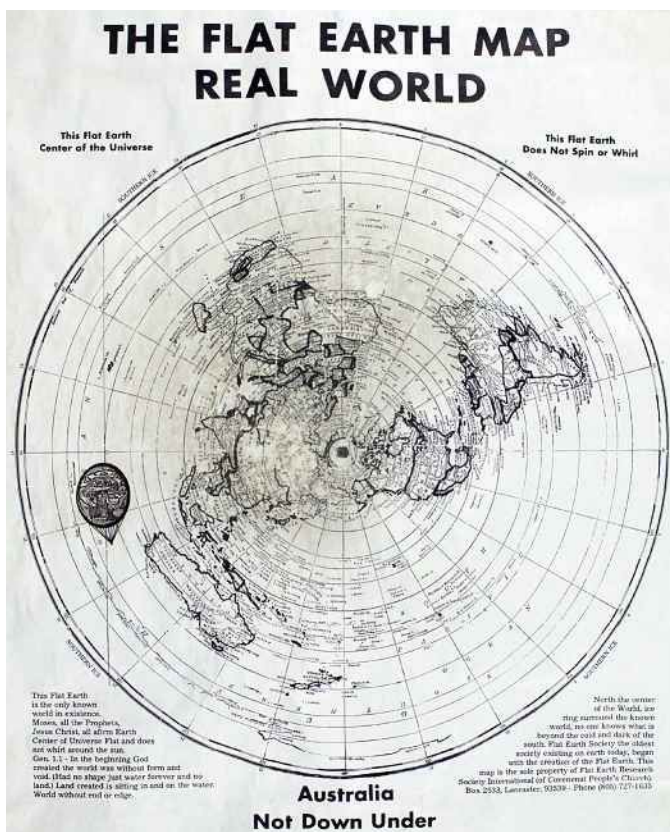
Seemingly displeased by the astrophysicist’s critiques, B.o.B then released a diss track titled ‘Flatline’, featuring numerous conspiracy theories and Tyson talking about the formation of the Earth. In the lyrics, B.o.B claims that “Globalists see me as a threat,” and compares himself to black power activist Malcolm X. He calls science a cult and adds that Tyson “needs to loosen up his vest”. The rapper also instructs listeners to “Do your research on [Holocaust denier] David Irving”, and refers to Dr Richard Sauder, who has written numerous books including *Underground Bases and Tunnels: What is the Government Trying to Hide?*, in which he explores the possibility of secret government funded underground bases.





The first book to proclaim belief in a flat Earth was the sixth century *Christian Topography* by Cosmas Indicopleustes, a well-travelled Greek monk from Alexandria. This ran counter to the general opinion of natural philosophers in the previous thousand years. Since the Bible refers to “four corners of the earth” (Revelation, ch7, v1), Indicopleustes maintained our world was a flat rectangle, Jerusalem at the centre, the firmament arching overhead, with Heaven above that. Around the Earth’s landmass lay the oceans, surrounded by Eden. The Sun revolved around a mountain at the North Pole. Seasonal changes were caused by the position of the Sun at the mountain – in the summer it revolved around the peak, in winter around the base. Although Cosmas’s flat Earth was welcomed by the Church and accepted for centuries, it was scorned by the scientifically inclined by the early Middle Ages. (Much later, Galileo got into trouble for denying the Earth was the hub of the Universe rather than for denying its flatness).

In the 1790s, the flat or planist doctrine was championed by Sir Richard Phillips (1767-1840) with no reference to Scripture. This patent medicine vendor and founder of the *Leicester Herald* was a radical republican, jailed for dealing in atheist literature. The mantle was next taken up by ‘Parallax’ (Samuel Birley Rowbotham), whose 1838 optical experiments along six miles of the Old Bedford Level (a canal in Cambridgeshire) disproved the curvature of the Earth – to his own satisfaction, at least. Parallax wrote *Earth Not a Globe and Zetetic Astronomy* (from the Greek *zeteo*, I find out for myself). He founded the Universal Zetetic Society in 1832. The zetetics maintain that the known world is a circular plane of indeterminate size floating in primordial waters, the North Pole at its centre, the South Pole at its circumference, marked by an impenetrable wall of ice 150ft (46m) high. The Sun and Moon, each 32 miles (51km) in diameter, circle the earthly disc at a steady height of 3,000 miles (4,830km), with the heavenly



dome 1,000 miles (1,600km) higher up. Sunrise and sunset are mere optical illusions.

“Delighting in controversy and dispute, Parallax could not resist the ultimate challenge of toppling orthodox ideas and a fact so established as the Earth’s rotundity... he had seen the passions that scientific and religious topics could evoke and, moreover, the money that

people would pay to listen to a feisty debate on these themes.”

(Christine Garwood’s *History of Flat Earthism*.) Parallax made many converts at his lectures. The Universal Zetetic Society (UZS) was founded in New York in 1873, and soon had branches round (across?) the world. Brief histories of the zetetic movement can be found in John Michell’s wonderful *Eccentric Lives and*

LEFT: Founder of the International Flat Earth Research Society (IFERS), Samuel Shenton, in 1967. BELOW: A map by Flat Earth proponent Charles K Johnson.

*Peculiar Notions* (Thames & Hudson, London, 1984) and in *Kooks: A Guide to the Outer Limits of Human Belief* by Donna Kossy (Feral House, Portland, 1994).

In 1956 Samuel and Lillian Shenton of Dover, England, formed a new zetetic organisation, The International Flat Earth Society. When Samuel died in 1971, Lillian decided that the Texan Charles Johnson (1924-2001) [FT147:26] should inherit his mantle. Johnson carried on the tradition of maverick metaphysics that battled ‘globularism’ and founded the International Flat Earth Research Society of America. He carried out his own zetetic experiments across Lake Tahoe and the Salton Sea, proving once again that the Earth was flat. He called himself a natural sceptic and seemed to delight in battling the scientific elites, exposing the secrets that They Don’t Want You To Know.

From his shack in the California desert, he could square off against the leading lights of science and government. “What everyone has been taught all their lives is complete foolishness,” said Johnson. “It’s nothing more than a joke. Scientists consist of the same old gang of witch doctors, sorcerers, tellers of tales, the ‘priest-entertainers’ for the common people. ‘Science’ consists of a weird, way-out occult concoction of gibberish theory-theology.”

B.o.B is probably playing the same game Samuel Rowbotham did 185 years ago, stirring up the public to boost sales. Flat Earthism works well for that purpose because it’s not really tied to any ideology, group identity, or economic interest, so it allows someone to stir up controversy without having to serve as a dog whistle. It signals some sort of vague, ill-informed anti-intellectualism/anti-elitism, and no one ever went broke selling that to the American public. *Guardian online*, 26 Jan; *Washington Post*, 2 Feb 2016.

## DEATH FROM ABOVE?

Contested reports from India claim that a man has been killed by a meteorite in Tamil Nadu...



ABOVE: Indian authorities inspect the site of a suspected meteorite impact in Vellore district, southern Tamil Nadu.

Indian scientists are investigating whether a man had been killed by a meteorite. Such deaths are rare – if indeed they have ever been truthfully recorded – because the rocks usually burn up when passing through the Earth’s atmosphere, or land in the ocean, or hit remote areas. While 100 to 300 tons of extraterrestrial material reaches Earth every day, almost all is fine cosmic dust.

At about 12.30pm on 6 February 2016, a mystery blast at Bharathidasan Engineering College in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu left a small crater, 2-3ft (60-90cm) deep, and broke windows up to 1,300ft (400m) away. The impact also shattered the windows of a number of buses on campus. G Baskar, the principal of the college in Natrampalli, Vellore district, was working in his cabin when he heard the explosion. “It was a sound like nothing I’ve ever heard before,” he said. “There was no smell at all, no fire, nothing... We felt a vibration in the building for nearly a minute. All the students and faculty members came outside and we saw a cloud of dust,” he said. V Kamraj, a 40-year-old bus driver who was

### Witnesses said they had seen an object fall from the sky

standing on a patch of grass near the college cafeteria, was thrown 10ft (3m) in the air, sustained serious facial injuries and died on the way to hospital; two gardeners and a student were also injured.

Initially, government officials suspected the blast was caused by explosives accidentally left after building work, but when no evidence of explosive material was found, investigators suggested that it might have been a meteorite. A dark blue jagged stone weighing about 11g and resembling a diamond was found at the scene, behind the college cafeteria – and witnesses said they had seen a mysterious object fall from the sky. This was the second such incident in 11 days in the district. On 26 January, villagers of Bethaveppampattu in Vaniyambadi claimed that they saw a burning object fall

from the sky on an agricultural field, leaving a 3ft (90cm)-deep pit. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa Jayaram issued a statement on Sunday, the day after the explosion at the engineering college, describing it as a meteorite strike and offering 100,000 rupees (£1,015) in compensation to Kamraj’s family.

At the time of the reports, the soil samples and stone were yet to be analysed by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, although the dean of the institute was sceptical of the meteorite hypothesis, stating that no meteorite shower had been observed. The possibility of man-made space debris was yet to be ruled out, though NASA announced that photographs posted online of the impact crater, (now said to be 5ft/1.5m deep and 2ft/60cm wide), were more consistent with a land-based explosion that with something from space. Also counting against the meteorite explanation were the absence of a sonic boom before impact, a lack of debris and the colour of the recovered stone. [R, CNN] *The Hindu*, *BBC News*, *rt.com*, 8 Feb; *nytimes.com*, *Discovery News*, 10 Feb 2016.

### METEORITE INJURIES

According to Valerius Maximus, Aeschylus was killed (456 BC) by an eagle dropping a tortoise on his head, mistaking it for a rock suitable for shattering the shell of the reptile – but maybe the eagle was invented and the tragedian was killed by a meteorite. Supposedly, tens of thousands of people were killed during the Ching-yang meteorite shower in China’s Shansi province between April and May 1490. Other reported deaths by meteorite include a Franciscan friar in 1633 and two sailors in the Indian Ocean in 1647. Over the years, there have been quite a few deaths and injuries attributed to meteorites, but many reports are buried in newspaper archives unseen by the academics who compile textbooks. Here are a few discovered by fortean researchers and posted to *Magonia Exchange* and *Fortean Exchange* (for which many thanks), together with incidents noted by *The International Comet Quarterly*, a sober publication from Harvard. No doubt, more delving will reveal further cases.

**16 Jan 1825:** man killed and woman injured by falling meteorite in Oriang, Malwate, India. Considered “possible” by L LaPaz (“The Effects of Meteorites Upon the Earth”, *Adv. in Geophys.* 4, pp.21.7ff, 1958.)

**11 Nov 1836:** cattle killed by meteorite shower, Macau, Brazil. Considered “possible” by LaPaz (1958).

**2 July 1839:** a young man named Smith, at work in a field near Wells, Somerset, killed by meteorite, “which, passing through his hat, carried away part of his skull-bone, entering his leg, and then passed into the earth.” *Exeter Flying Post*, via *Dublin Morning Register*, 4 July 1839.

**1 May 1860:** horse killed by meteorite, New Concord, Ohio.

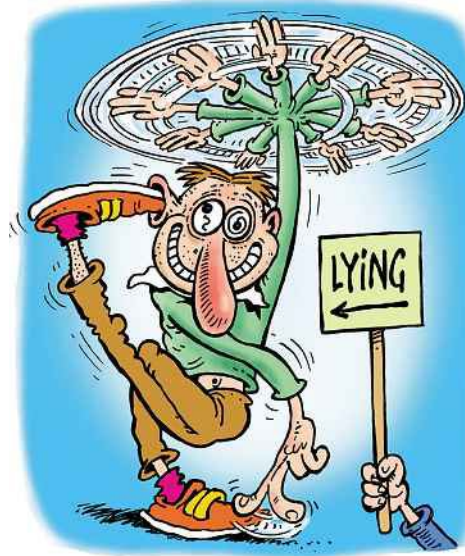
**13 Jan 1879:** the body of Leonidas Grover, “torn through as if by a cannon shot”, was found by his



## 98: LIES IN THEIR EYES

### The myth

If you're well versed in the study of body language you can spot whether someone's being truthful or not, because there are little unconscious tics and tells which we all do when we're lying.



### The "truth"

Not for want of trying, but no one has yet come up with a universal, consistent "tell". Not a single one. Despite what you've heard – or even been taught on training courses – there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that people look up and to their right when they're inventing answers, and up and to the left when they're remembering truths; or that we touch our mouths or eyes when lying; or wriggle in our chairs; or become flushed; avert our gaze; increase our rate of blinking; or wring our hands. Or anything. *Individuals* may of course have their own tells, but repeated research has shown that there are none which apply generally. In experiments, no correlation is found between body language and truthfulness, and attempts at using eye movement to predict truthfulness never achieve more success than random guessing. This myth – which seems to have originated in a 1970s self-help book – is so prevalent and potentially dangerous that the websites of the UK's Judiciary and the USA's FBI specifically warn investigators, magistrates and others against falling for it.

### Sources

[www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/cuthbert\\_myths-about-body-language.pdf](http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/cuthbert_myths-about-body-language.pdf); <https://leb.fbi.gov/2014/june/the-truth-about-lying-what-investigators-need-to-know>; <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/16/really-you-can-spot-a-lie-by-watching-a-persons-eyes>; [www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/myth-busted-looking-left-or-right-doesnt-indicate-if-youre-lying-1922058/?no-ist](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/myth-busted-looking-left-or-right-doesnt-indicate-if-youre-lying-1922058/?no-ist)

### Disclaimer

Probably the only way to know for sure that's someone's lying is to find out whether they're a government spokesman. But if you have evidence that the truth lies elsewhere, please confess to it on our letters page.

### Mythchaser

A reader notes that drivers often have to adjust their rearview mirrors first thing in the morning. He's been told this is because humans are slightly taller at breakfast-time than at bedtime. We, however, favour a more obvious explanation: that goblins break into your car overnight and mess with your stuff. Can anyone settle this argument?



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daughter on his bed in Covington, Indiana. There was a hole in the roof directly above the bed and through the bedding and floor. A "meteoric stone pyramidal in shape", weighing more than 20lb (9kg) and stained with blood, was unearthed from a crater nearly 5ft (1.5m) deep. *Indianapolis Journal, via Eve. Post (Wellington, NZ), 17 May 1879*. Like many sensational 19th century news reports, this is widely regarded with scepticism.

**25 Nov 1884:** farmer Julius Robb killed by meteorite descending through a tree in Hot Springs, Arkansas, "cutting a limb clean off," before passing through his body "from his shoulder obliquely" and burying itself. The missile was described as "an iron pyrite the size of a teacup". *Potsdam (NY) Herald, 28 Nov 1884*.

**13 Nov 1892:** FK Spowles, out hunting quail near Cloverdale, California, was knocked out for five minutes by shockwave from meteorite that landed within 20ft (6m) of him. There was a "deep hole" and many pieces of "meteoric metal" lying around. *Los Angeles Herald, 18 Nov 1892*.

**12 Oct 1898:** six meteorites, each weighing 500lb (227kg) or more, fell in and about a house, in Perry, Oklahoma, at night. One crashed through the roof, injuring members of the Henderson family, including two children who were crushed to death. Several fell in high grass and set it on fire. *Marble Head (IA) Weekly, 10 Nov 1898*.

**5 Sept 1907:** report of meteorite causing house to collapse, killing the entire family of Wan Teng-kuei in Hsin-p'ai-wei, Weng-li, China.

**30 June 1908:** Tunguska, Siberia, aerial explosion of meteor/comet/asteroid/spaceship/black hole (?) flattened around 80 million trees over 2,150km<sup>2</sup> (830 sq miles) and killed hundreds of reindeer – and two men, according to the *New York Times* (10 Feb 2016), though Wikipedia says "no known casualties". (Numerous FT Tunguska reports, starting with **FT1:12**, Nov 1973.)

**28 June 1911:** dog killed by

meteorite, part of a shower in Nakhla, Egypt. Total weight of stones gathered: 40kg (88lb).

**25 April 1915:** meteorite tore off woman's arm in Ta-yang, east of Mai-po, China.

**28 April 1927:** young girl suffered two injuries when struck by stony meteorite in Aba-mura, Inashiki-gun, Ibaragi-ken, Japan.

**Dec 1929:** wedding party in small Yugoslav town struck by meteorite, killing one. *New York Times, 8 Dec 1929, via Huffington Post, 31 July 2014*.

**24 June 1938:** cow killed by meteorite in Chicota, Pennsylvania. A farmer recovered "two stones" in his poultry yard. *[AP] Reading (PA) Eagle, 20 Dec 1938*.

**15 Aug 1951:** 62 houses in Tehran, Iran, destroyed by a meteorite shower; 12 killed, 19 injured, and 300 livestock killed. *Lowell (MA) Sun, no publication date given, via Huffington Post, 31 July 2014*.

**30 Nov 1954:** Ann Hodges, 34, hit on the thigh by 8lb (3.6kg) meteorite after it broke through her roof in Sylacauga, Alabama, and bounced off a radio. She was seriously bruised on her left hip, abdomen and arm. The meteorite is on display at the Smithsonian Institution. Hodges died in 1972 from kidney failure.

**14 Aug 1992:** in a meteorite shower, boy hit on head by 3.6g meteoric fragment after it hit tree in Mbale, Uganda.

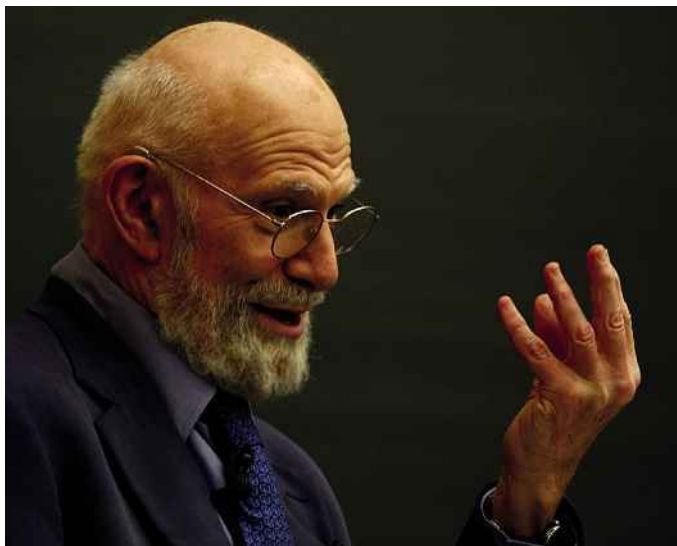
**21 June 1994:** 1.4kg (3lb) meteorite, 12cm (4.7in)-wide, broke windshield and bent steering wheel of moving car, breaking finger of driver; more than 50kg (110lb) of meteorites found within 200m (660ft) of accident near Getafe, Spain.

**15 Feb 2013:** the large meteor that exploded above Chelyabinsk, Siberia, left more than 1,200 people injured (including 200 children), mainly by flying glass. Of these casualties, 112 were hospitalised, two in serious condition [**FT300:7**].



## NECROLOG

We mark the passing of the genial explorer of the fortaen outliers of human neurology and of the Bletchley Park alumna-turned-archaeologist who popularised sea peoples.



ABOVE: Sacks – “the presiding genius of neurological drama”.

### OLIVER SACKS

Sacks has been called “the presiding genius of neurological drama”. He read medicine at Oxford, but spent most of his career in the United States. His subjects were people afflicted with fantastic perceptual and intellectual aberrations; people who had lost their memories and with them the greater part of their pasts; people unable to recognise common objects; Tourette’s syndrome sufferers stricken with violent tics and grimaces and unable to stop themselves shouting obscenities; and sufferers from Asperger’s syndrome who relate to other people with difficulty but often possess uncanny artistic or mathematical talents. For Sacks, the brain was “the most incredible thing in the Universe”.

Sacks’s case histories lack the meticulous measurements and experimental detail that contemporary science expects of its practitioners, who like to point out that “the sum of anecdote is not evidence”. While it’s true that personal experience often misleads, particularly in the context of medical treatment, one can imagine Sacks reflecting that anecdote is in fact precisely where evidence begins. Sacks does a wonderful job of summoning

up the human experiences and encounters that are the bedrock of medicine and everyday life.

In his best-known book, *Awakenings* (1971), he told the story of a group of patients at Beth Abraham Hospital in the Bronx where he worked as a consultant neurologist. The patients were survivors of the great epidemic of encephalitis lethargica (sleeping sickness) that had swept the world from 1916 to 1927, and had spent the subsequent decades in a comatose state, unable to initiate movement. Their cause had long been given up as hopeless, until 1969, when Sacks tried the new Parkinson’s disease drug L-dopa, which had an astonishing ‘awakening’ effect, transforming previously lifeless individuals into personable and intelligent human beings. Unfortunately, most of the patients eventually returned to their former frozen state as the drug ceased to have an effect. The book inspired the play *A Kind of Alaska* by Harold Pinter and a film starring Robin Williams as the dedicated doctor and Robert de Niro as a patient temporarily freed from years of catatonia.

Sacks’s second best known book was *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985), a series of case histories including that

of the titular man: Dr P, a music teacher whose visual agnosia made it impossible for him to recognise everyday objects and caused him to try and pick up his wife’s head and put it on his own as if it were a hat. “He saw faces where there were no faces to see: genially, Magoo-like, when in the street he might pat the heads of water hydrants and parking meters, taking these to be heads of children; he would amiably address carved knobs on the furniture and be astounded when they did not reply.” The story inspired an opera of the same name by Michael Nyman and *The Man Who*, a play by Peter Brook.

Several of Sacks’s patients became famous. There was Jimmie G, who in 1975 still lived in 1945, believing Truman to be president and himself to be a fresh-faced teenage submariner; Tony C, who became obsessed with piano music after being struck by lightning; and Christina, who no longer felt that any part of her body belonged, or would respond, to her. Sacks’s slightly bemused appearance in public may have been attributable to his striking, and apparently inherited, prosopagnosia – an inability to recognise faces. In a 2010 article for the *New Yorker*, he described the comedy of a rendezvous with a similarly prosopagnosic colleague. True to form, Sacks identified and befriended a prosopagnosic portrait painter, Chuck Close, whose gigantic portraits depended on his idiosyncratic attention to the details of the faces the painter failed to recognise.

In all, Sacks wrote 14 books, including: *Migraine* (1970); *A Leg to Stand On* (1984), detailing his recovery from a mountaineering accident; *Seeing Voices* (1989), which examined language perception among the deaf; *An Anthropologist on Mars* (1995), about autistic savants; and *The Island of the Colourblind* (1996). In 2001 Sacks was treated for an ocular melanoma, which he wrote about in *The Mind’s Eye* (2010). In early 2015 he announced that the cancer had spread to his liver and he had only months to live.

His compelling autobiography, *On the Move* (2015), tells of his early interest in gay sex and fascination with motorbikes, “staggering amounts of pharmacological experimentation” (as one reviewer noted), and his 35 years of celibacy until, in 2008, he became the partner of the writer Bill Hayes, who survives him.

Sacks’s obsession with teasing out medical tales might have come, he thought, from the way his parents – both doctors practising in north London – liked to tell such stories over dinner. It might have come from observing the psychosis of his brother Michael or his own homosexuality, which despite the prejudice of the time (and his mother’s despair) was no ‘condition’, simply who he was. His popular renown meant that he received about 10,000 letters a year. (“I invariably reply to people under 10, over 90 or in prison,” he once said.) His ability to combine scientific detachment with sympathetic understanding of the pathos of his patients’ predicaments and the astonishing resilience of human life, gave his books enormous poise and power. His writing inhabits the tension, constantly present in medicine, between art and science, the warmth of individual lives and the cooler strength of general principles. Talking to patients, shy as he was, opened a door into private inscapes that were magical, challenging and almost unfathomable. “Empiricism,” he wrote, “takes no account of the soul.”

*Oliver Wolf Sacks, CBE, neurologist and writer, born Cricklewood, north London 9 July 1933; died New York 30 Aug 2015, aged 82.*

### NANCY SANDARS

In 1939 Nancy Sandars joined Kathleen Kenyon’s excavation of an Iron Age hill fort on the Wrekin in Shropshire. WWII saw her as a motorcycle dispatch rider, and in 1942 she joined the Wrens and was assigned to the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park, eavesdropping on radio transmissions from German

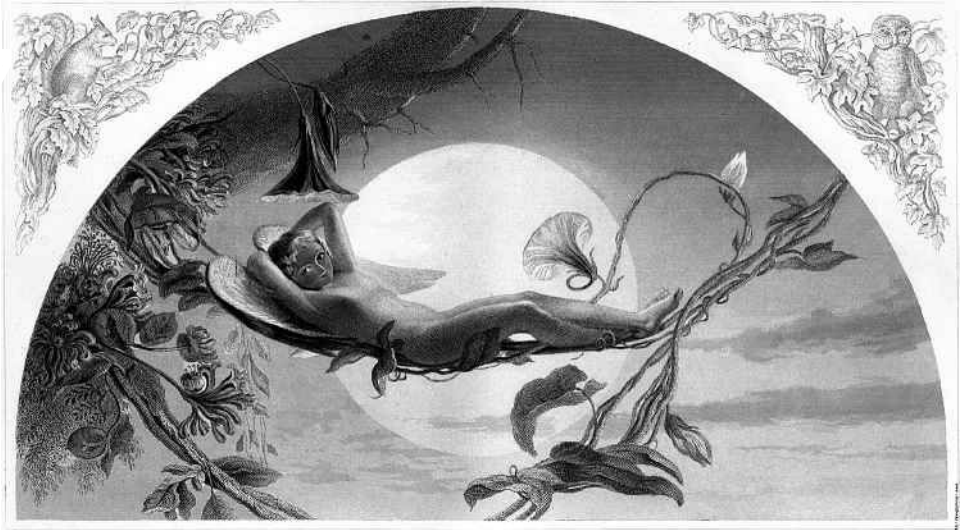


E-boats and aircraft. In 1947 she enrolled for a diploma in prehistory under Gordon Childe at the Institute of Archæology. Later she took a BLitt in Archæology at St Hugh's College, Oxford. Her degree thesis was published as her first book, *Bronze Age Cultures in France* (1957). During the 1950s and 1960s she joined many archæological digs in Europe and the Middle East, and published a number of authoritative works, including a translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, a poem written on clay tablets in a cuneiform script around 1,000 years before Homer, making it the oldest epic poem in world literature. Published as a Penguin Classic, it sold more than a million copies and remains in print.

Her *Sea-Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean* (1978) examined an intriguing era of havoc in the eastern Mediterranean and surrounding areas towards the end of the second millennium BC, when Egyptian influence collapsed, the Hittite Empire and the late Bronze Age cities of Cyprus and Mesopotamia fell, and the Mycenaean civilisation lay in ruins, plunging Greece into a "Dark Age" that lasted more than 300 years.

The dearth of texts from the period, coupled with a paucity of archæological evidence, prompted some theorists to posit some natural catastrophe sweeping across the entire region. Sandars, however, focused her attention on the so-called "sea peoples", a confederacy of navel raiders who harried the coastal towns and cities of the Mediterranean region between about 1276 and 1178 BC, with a ferocity that made the Vikings seem positively benign. Although the sea peoples remain something of a mystery, Sandars deftly drew together evidence from several cultures, from literature and archæology, to speculate that their origins lay in Anatolia, which had been in the grip of a widespread and severe famine caused by a climatic downturn. Sandars's other publications included *Prehistoric Art in Europe* (1967), *Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia* (1971) and a book of her own poems, published in 2001.

*Nancy Katharine Sandars, archæologist, born Little Tew, Oxfordshire, 29 June 1914; died 20 Nov 2015, aged 101.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

### BOGEY BEASTS

Folklore does not necessarily have strong connections with real life experiences, but through much of the English-speaking world, people out walking or riding at night reported, even as late as WWI, encounters with shape-changing monsters. These were eye-witness accounts, and if we take UFO or sasquatch reports seriously it is difficult to nonchalantly dismiss the night-time walker in the Fylde or Wakefield who saw, say, a white dog turn into a black donkey or *vice versa*.

These monsters are what folklorists have called 'Bogey Beasts', shape-shifting supernatural entities tied to certain haunted patches of countryside; locals called them, instead, 'dobeys', 'boggarts', 'bogles', 'shucks', or even simply 'ghosts'. Now Bogey Beasts have, of course, like all good shape-shifters, to decide what animals to introduce into their repertoire. In rough order of frequency, their preferred forms in the accounts that come down to us were: dogs, humans, calves, rabbits, bears, horses, donkeys, bulls, pigs, deer, hare, cats and birds, but there are also records of badgers, foxes, fish and glow-in-the-dark mice. Rabbits and hares were the typical vehicles for shape-changing witches, so there is a kind of logic there.

But why did Bogey Beasts love calves so much? I have no answer unless it is calves' playfulness. I'm also intrigued by the bears.

Were these shadows of the victims of bear baiting, only banned in 1835 in the UK? Or were they an ancestral memory of the indigenous British bear? If so, where are the wolves and boars? And what about sheep and goats? Why are they discriminated against?

What else do we gather from the Bogey reports? Well, two colours, white and black, dominate: usually there is just one but sometimes there is a mixed 'zebra' effect. The animals are often 'shaggy' (a word that comes up again and again) with glowing eyes. Shape-changers seem to have had the capacity to go from rodent size to, if we believe one Lancashire eyewitness, the size of a house. A minority

hovered among different forms, being a dog or a donkey or 'something in between'. Others dazzled with their versatility, flicking from one creature to another like a CD changing tracks. Also, bits of the animal were frequently absent: above all, heads. And where are the Bogey Beasts today? It has been suggested that they became Alien Big Cats, the large out-of-place felines that stalk most of the British Isles. But though ABCs have something protean about them, they do not, to the best of my knowledge, change shape before the eyes of witnesses. It looks very much as if this trickster, like much else that was good, disappeared from the haunted lanes and wooded valleys sometime between the wars. **Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs [www.fairyist.com](http://www.fairyist.com)**

SHAPE-SHIFTING  
SUPERNATURAL  
ENTITIES TIED TO  
CERTAIN HAUNTED  
PATCHES OF  
COUNTRYSIDE



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## UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANGLES RE-EXAMINES BRITAIN'S BIGGEST AND MOST CONTROVERSIAL UFO CASE 35 YEARS ON

### RENDLESHAM FOREST GENESIS: PART THREE

During 1981 I tried to make sense of the handwritten notes and frequent long phone calls with Brenda Butler and Dot Street. It was like knitting fog, as an ever-growing pile of stories from airmen, farmers and local folk emerged, some of which were true (as I later verified directly) others unresolved to this day – and all in addition to the account from the RAF Watton radar operator.

The USAF witnesses were silent for years, fearing it might affect their careers, so we struggled to persuade ufologists that there was a case. I wrote progress reports just to keep it ticking over, but this did help researchers in America to pick up hints from USAF personnel returning stateside. However, British ufology only became convinced after 13 April 1983, when I received the first written admission from the MoD via Air Staff officer Pam Titchmarsh. She included a blank report form to prove that that MoD case files contain “very little” data, yet ignored Rendlesham altogether – the file I had asked for – and instead sent me two redacted forms from very recent cases in Wales.

I had the chance to pursue one near Cardiff. It was a fascinating close encounter with multiple witnesses – including an RAF aircraft engineer at an airbase. So, if the MoD *did* just log this report without any follow-up I had found serious cause to wonder just how many other significant cases they missed as a result of never following any of them up.

Regarding Rendlesham, the MoD letter could “confirm” that “USAF personnel did see unusual lights outside the boundary fence (of RAF Woodbridge) early in the morning of 27 December 1980”. This was the wrong date, yet the MoD said “no explanation for the occurrence was ever forthcoming”.

I copied this key letter to everyone involved and finally persuaded BUFORA that we should debate Rendlesham at an upcoming conference. Weeks later, US researchers (to whom I sent it) using a Freedom of Information Act obtained the report sent to the MoD in mid-January 1981 by deputy base commander Lt Col Charles Halt. It formed the basis for Ms Titchmarsh's letter to me. The MoD had helped the USAF release this to Americans, but kept its own citizens in the dark.

A March 1985 letter to me from Defence Minister Lord Trefgarne later confirmed that the Halt memo was the Ministry's *sole* source of knowledge: as in the South Wales case, it seemed that they had not followed it up.

So by August 1983 Brenda, Dot and myself had perfect ammunition to go to the MoD in London and ask to see the Air Staff officer who had written to me four months earlier. Catching her on the hop with a copy of their ‘secret’ Halt report, we were able to ask all sorts of questions of Pam Titchmarsh after she confirmed it seemed genuine. We knew that we risked arrest under the Official Secrets Act by telling her we were to make the report public at the BUFORA conference. Interestingly, despite no warning, the MoD officer knew all about this three-year-old case. She insisted

they had checked all radar sources from the area and found none of them had tracked anything – partly confirming the claims of David Potts at Watton. I asked how she knew this, given that the MoD officer insisted that she had not ‘boned up’ on her way to see us. She stated that this failure to verify radar tracks had been discussed at a recent briefing on attempts to correlate UFO reports, and indeed had been used as a good illustration of how this had never once happened.

Potts had told us that Watton had themselves checked with the air traffic control centre in West Drayton who indicated that an aircraft on airway ‘Red One’ had filed a UFO sighting around that time and how another radar report had come in that weekend from Ash, Kent. Despite a lot of papers released by the MoD since 1983 I have seen nothing on these other “non-correlations”.

According to Potts, the call to Watton from Bentwaters tower overnight on 27/28 December spoke of UFOs seen over the forest four miles east of Woodbridge. The USAF requested access to their radar data for that night and “several others”, and “a few days later” USAF and RAF/MoD staff sought this data. The USAF staff told Watton that a base commander and several other officers took a jeep and went into the forest after being called away to investigate from a base party.

From witness testimony and documentation that emerged much later, we know this officer was Colonel Halt himself and the party was at Woody's bar on that Saturday evening. Potts further explained that the US team heading into the forest told of problems with their radio transmissions and lights and then examined ground traces and “radiation traces” in the forest. The events that ensued were also recorded as they happened. All this information had made its way into my notes just five weeks after the events and days after Halt's memo reached the MoD. So why was the MoD never aware of so much significant data missing from Halt's report?

In 1997 I asked Halt this question and he told me that he believed the MoD already knew about the case well before he sent what he intended as a summary, expecting the MoD to dig deeper into it. Had they sought more detail from him he would have co-operated. But they never did. However, the MoD might have found his understated report useful – as something safe to release to the public should a Freedom of Information request ever require a file to go on open record. Halt's suspicion



ABOVE: Dot Street (middle) and myself with American investigator Ray Boeche, who helped a lot in the early days to get the US airmen to talk. We are outside the MoD main building in Whitehall where we took the Halt memo and confronted Pam Titchmarsh, risking arrest by declaring we were going to make it public.



matches Potts's story that the radar tapes were accessed *long before* the Halt memo was even submitted, although no released MoD files confirm any of this as more than my speculation.

Halt also has support from Brenda and Dot, who set up a visit to the base on 18 February 1981 – just a month after Halt's memo reached the MoD. They were directed to meet Squadron Leader Donald Moreland – the sole RAF officer there acting as liaison with the MoD and a sort of landlord to the USAF. He had asked Halt to send the memo to Whitehall. Moreland's secretary guessed why they were there ("Oh, the events around the end of December"), and Moreland and he thought they had come from the MoD to follow up Halt's report. Once he realised otherwise he stopped cooperating and told them they must get MoD approval first. But this confirms what Halt told me: that the MoD did not follow up on base at all after his memo – so they never discovered the hard evidence, such as the tape, photos of ground traces and plaster casts of the 'landing marks'. He showed some of this to me when we met.

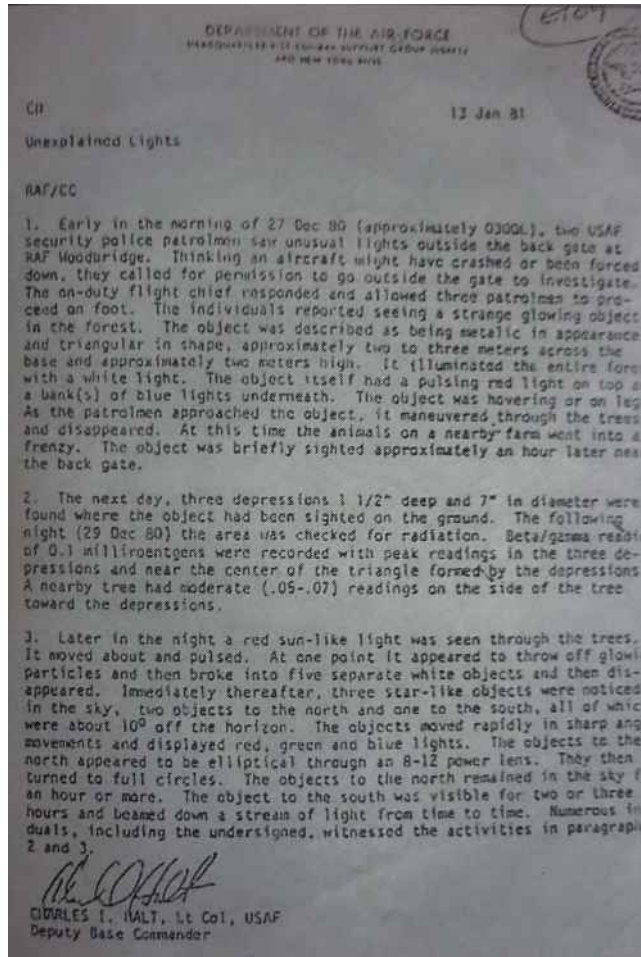
I believe the other things that Potts told me on 2 February 1981 were also beyond what the MoD knew at that point or – based on the Trefgame letter – *ever* knew. What's astonishing is that we are talking about a strategic air base staffed by the USA, reputedly possessing nuclear material, close to a nuclear reactor in the middle of the Cold War. Whatever your views on UFOs, this decision not to pursue hard evidence – including alleged physical traces and radiation readings – in a case which the MoD itself said it could not explain looks disturbing, to say the least.

On 30 January 1984, I went on base to see Moreland myself, unannounced. He granted me a few minutes but was not complimentary about the media circus and "exaggerations that blew the case up out of all proportion". He was right that the *News of the World* stories of aliens hovering in light beams were unhelpful. He insisted that nothing like this had happened, and anyway it was now "almost certainly explained to almost everyone's satisfaction as the lighthouse". So – he pleaded – "Why not leave us all alone?"

I asked about the then still unreleased Halt tape – which he confirmed was real but "just a commentary – nothing more". He insisted the case consisted of "just a few lights" and blamed an unnamed "airman who has been blabbing away and has now been sent home" for exaggerating the sighting into "absurd stories", perhaps as "revenge against the USAF".

Before telling me my time was up Moreland suggested that I give up investigating the case, as there was *nothing* worth investigating. I politely disagreed, although I believed – and still do – that all his comments were sincerely offered. He also reminded me pointedly that he was not present during any of the events.

Potts had given us crucial details apparently not in any MoD records. There is no reference



LEFT: The memo describing the Rendlesham encounters written by second night eye witness Lt Col Charles Halt, deputy base commander.

So we have a mystery. If his current recall is the full extent of what happened at RAF Watton in 1980, where did the details come from that I wrote down in February 1981? Did I wrongly ascribe them to Potts when they came from someone else? If so, then who was it? I spoke to no one other than Potts up to 2 February 1981 and have always believed it was he who said all this (though partly at second hand via a radar colleague and USAF officers, of course).

Interestingly Kevin McClure (who confirms he also spoke to Potts, though once again Potts does not recall this) thinks he *might* have talked with another 'peripheral' witness in February 1981 but has no idea who that might have been. The only person then talking to Brenda and Dot locally was 'Steve Roberts' from base affairs, and his account is very unlike what I documented via Potts.

Commenting in *Magonia* in 2001 about what he was told (by Potts or this other unknown witness) Kevin said that the object seen was: "Solid, light, reflective, possibly burning, appearing to be in a tree". It was such a specific description that

when the theory that the airmen mistook the lighthouse first surfaced McClure dismissed it because of that account.

Kevin seems to have lost all interest since the late Georgina Bruni (who wrote a 2001 book about Rendlesham called *You Can't Tell the People*) convinced him that I had removed his contribution from the case. Bruni stated that I replaced Kevin with a fictional person called 'Bob Easton'. She could not research this aspect of the case because of that "deception" and, though she asked me lots of questions by email when writing her book, all of which I answered, she never raised this nonsense with me.

It is nonsense for two reasons that can be established just by reading the book on Rendlesham that Brenda, Dot and I wrote in 1984 (*Sky Crash*). Kevin McClure's limited role is credited in chapter three, followed by that of Bob Easton – who was the very much *non-imaginary* BUFORA East Anglian co-ordinator working with Dot Street and who made a few enquiries with her during those weeks.

Bruni's curious allegations helped steer Kevin McClure away from the case, which is a pity as his insight would have been very useful. But her strange error here fired me to try to unravel the early months of this now legendary case in search of possible clues.

In the final parts of this article I will try to piece together what we can conclude from my early contact with USAF witnesses – did they misperceive meteors and the lighthouse? – and discover whether, as sceptics claim, their stories changed across the decades to become ever more bizarre.

to the base party or an engine problem or VHF radio malfunction or a live tape recording of the sightings in Halt's account sent to the MoD.

Yet all of this did occur, and in 1985 we got the Halt tape to prove it. Hoping to clarify things for this column, I did some digging to find Potts as he had moved area and changed jobs since 1981. He was surprised that I was enquiring about the case, but not uncooperative, saying he recalls very little about it now and did not even remember talking to us in 1981 or meeting Paul Begg. He also had no recollection of any story about an actual radar tracking heading toward Rendlesham as communicated to him by another (military) radar officer before the events that he witnessed that weekend.

"Did I say that?" he asked. Well, it is what I wrote down on 2 February 1981.

Nor does he remember any details about when radar tapes were accessed by the authorities. "I only recall that they were very eager to study them because their base officers saw something."

But he does recall that it was a quiet Christmas night and they might even have been watching TV when sudden pandemonium broke out on the night of 27-28 December.

"I recall all the phones were going," he says, and that senior staff were running about asking them all to check their scopes to look for what the guys at Bentwaters were seeing in the sky. But none of them had anything on the Watton radar screens.

That was pretty much it – though he did not deny that other things might have occurred or been said 35 years earlier; it was not something he had given much thought to since then.

# THE MAGE WHO SOLD THE WORLD

## THE STRANGE FASCINATIONS OF DAVID BOWIE

From an early interest in UFOs and Aleister Crowley to flirtations with Kabbalah and Nazi mysticism, David Bowie cultivated a number of esoteric interests over the years and embraced alien and occult imagery in his costumes, songs and videos. **DEAN BALLINGER** explores the fortean aspects and influences of the late musician's career

**D**avid Bowie – who died on 11 January this year, two days after the release of his final album *Blackstar* on his 69<sup>th</sup> birthday – was inarguably one of the most influential rock musicians and pop culture personalities of the last 50 years. His artistic sensibilities and stylistic experimentation, particularly in relation to the phenomenally creative body of work he produced during his golden years of the 1970s, have been instrumental in inspiring innumerable musicians working in a wide variety of genres. Bowie can also be considered as a distinctly fortean superstar, with occult and paranormal themes constituting an integral dimension of his long and complex career. As mainstream eulogies and encomia to Bowie gush forth in the music blogs and gossip mags, it is an apt time for *FT* to pay tribute to the weirder side of the performer born in post-war Brixton as David Robert Jones...

As most of his biographers acknowledge, Bowie was interested in two main aspects of the occult and paranormal: magic/esotericism and UFOs. While Bowie's ufological tendencies tend to err on the side of the superficial and sensational (see 'Loving the Alien' panel), more serious consideration has been given to his engagement with the occult. Commentators and scholars exploring the subject of post-war occulture (the relationships between popular culture and occult ideas) often place Bowie in the small but influential group of 1970s rock'n'roll magi exemplified by Led Zeppelin guitarist and Crowley acolyte Jimmy Page (Peter Berbegal's 2014 study *Season of the Witch: How the*



GROUP MEDITATION SESSIONS WERE DIRECTED AT CONTACTING PASSING SPACE BROTHERS

*Occult Saved Rock and Roll* is a good recent reference point in this respect; see also **FT333:51**). While Bowie's relationship with the occult is pretty loose by comparison with Page's – Bowie's natural inclination was to be a dilettante rather than a devotee – it is clear from references in interviews, lyrics, and videos that such ideas played a substantive role in his creative output and personal life.

However, upon considering Bowie's career in its entirety it is also apparent that his esoteric leanings manifested themselves most visibly in specific periods of his life and in specific pieces of music. While occultism no doubt informs his oeuvre on a number of subtextual levels, it would perhaps be a bit of a stretch to contemplate recondite meaning in the Tin Machine albums or his contributions to the *Labyrinth* soundtrack (although theosophists, with their interest in elementals, may perhaps be able to discern profundities the rest of us have missed in Bowie's infamous 1960s novelty-ditty 'The Laughing Gnome').

### GOLDEN DAWN: THE EARLY 1970S

Bowie's early creative life, as struggling musician and actor in late-1960s London, incorporated many of the mystical activities and interests that were *de rigueur* for any self-respecting counterculturalist. These included group meditation sessions at a friend's flat near Hampstead Heath directed at contacting any space brothers who might be passing overhead alongside more considered investigations of Eastern

**ABOVE:** David Bowie on stage in London at the last of the Ziggy Stardust concerts, 3 July 1973.







spirituality, with Bowie studying the tenets of Tibetan Buddhism from expatriated lamas.<sup>1</sup> That Bowie was also reading up on esoteric subjects and alternative ideas in a relatively in-depth way beyond fashionable namedropping is made clear by the songs on his fourth album, *Hunky Dory* (1971). The jaunty pop of ‘Oh You Pretty Things!’ is belied by lyrics that evoke a rather sinister picture of spiritual evolution, in which the listener is asked to “make way” for “the coming race” of “homo superior” Nietzschean superchildren (these references came across as humorously incongruous when sung by ex-Hermans Hermits frontman Peter Noone, for whom a cover of the song was a Top 20 hit that same year). The “coming race” is also a probable nod to the Bulwer-Lytton novel of the same name that became a staple of the ‘Vril’ mythos associated with occult-minded Nazis (see FT303:42-46), a subject that would have a rather negative influence on Bowie in the near future.<sup>2</sup> More overt is the ballad ‘Quicksand’, in which Bowie expounds a New Age manifesto – “I’m not a prophet or a Stone Age man/Just a mortal with potential of a superman” – with reference to the Western magical tradition



## IT SUGGESTS THAT BOWIE WAS QUITE FAMILIAR WITH CONTEMPORARY FORTEAN LITERATURE

(“I’m closer to the Golden Dawn/Immersed in Crowley’s uniform/of imagery”), The Tibetan Book of the Dead (“You can tell me all about it on the next Bardo”), and Nazi mysticism (“Portraying Himmler’s sacred realm of dream reality”).<sup>3</sup> These references also suggest that Bowie was quite familiar with contemporary fortean literature, such as Pauwels & Bergier’s seminal *The Morning of the Magicians*, one of the first popular expositions of subjects such as Nazi occultism and the psychic evolution of humankind (see FT277:54-55). Another fortean classic, Colin Wilson’s *The Occult*, was also published in 1971, but given that Bowie recorded *Hunky Dory* in June of that year using songs he had composed earlier it seems highly unlikely it was a source of inspiration for this album.<sup>4</sup>

With Bowie’s star rising rapidly at this time – his next album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* (1972), would prove his ticket to megastardom – it’s a good point to consider some of the evident resonances between occultism and his musical career. Bowie’s autodidactic and aesthetic tendencies were a crucial part of his creative *modus operandi*, enabling him to keep his music fresh (through the 1970s, anyway) by drawing inspiration from a wide range of cultural influences. The realms of the esoteric, rich in drama and symbolism, would undoubtedly have been sussed by Bowie as a source of stimulating ideas and imagery to explore in lyrics, costumes and videos. The theory and practice of magic can also be seen to possess a more integral relationship with Bowie’s work.

Parsing Crowley’s legacy, one of the key aspects of magic is the transformation of the self (and, possibly, the wider social reality) through acts that focus the imagination/will towards such change, such acts including sex, drug consumption, meditation, and creative performance (i.e., rituals). In this vein Bowie can be considered a distinctly magical musician whose whole career revolved around the transformation of the self and the wider culture through the ‘ritual performances’ of rock music, such as concerts, recordings, and videos. In his most influential period of the 1970s, Bowie created personæ (such as Ziggy, Aladdin Sane, and the Thin White Duke) and undertook musical experiments (the ‘plastic soul’ of *Young Americans* and the avant-garde/krautrock/funk synthesis of the ‘Berlin trilogy’) that in turn transformed rock culture by inspiring scores of other artists. The gender-bending that was a notable aspect of Bowie’s personæ in this period (for example, the androgynous cover photo for *The Man Who Sold The World* (1970) or the 1979 video for ‘Boys Keep Swinging’), and the cultivation of bisexual overtones in his lyrics and performance (‘John, I’m Only Dancing’ as an account of bisexual angst), are also interesting to consider in relation to Crowley’s emphasis on sexuality as a core component of magical transformation. The richness of meaning to be had from interpreting Bowie’s œuvre in relation to magical perspectives has led to him becoming a cult figure for contemporary esotericists (see ‘Sound And Vision’ panel).



TOP: 1971’s *Hunky Dory* album seemed to confirm that Bowie was indeed “immersed in Crowley’s uniform”, dropping references to esoteric matters. ABOVE: The pop star as Starman, embracing futuristic glam fashion.



# LOVING THE ALIEN: BOWIE AND UFOs

In the 1970s Bowie quickly became established as an icon of alienness thanks to his unusual appearance (aided by his famous dilated eye), space-themed tunes ('Space Oddity', 'Starman', 'Moonage Daydream') and otherworldly personæ, notably Ziggy Stardust. It was an identification cemented by his starring role in Nicolas Roeg's arty 1976 sci-fi flick *The Man Who Fell To Earth* (right). On a personal level, Bowie's interest in occultism was complemented by a fascination with UFOs. In a remarkable 1975 interview in the US rock mag *Creem*, writer Bruno Stein documents Bowie's post-gig discussion with a contactee from Missouri, in which he makes the following claims about his skywatching experiences in hippy London:

"I used to work for two guys who put out a UFO magazine in England," he told the flying saucer man. "About six years

ago. And I made sightings six, seven times a night for about a year when I was in the observatory. We had regular cruises that came over. We knew the 6.15 was coming in and would meet up with another one. And they would be stationary for about half an hour, and then after verifying what they'd been doing that day, they'd shoot off."<sup>1</sup>

While sceptical commentators have suggested that Bowie and company were simply misperceiving the busy flightpaths around Heathrow whilst under the influence of various substances, many of Bowie's acquaintances from that time confirm that they really did espy saucers.<sup>2</sup> Interviews from around the same period feature Bowie espousing various theories of UFO cover-ups that imply a more

than passing familiarity with the UFO underground of the pre-Roswell and *X-Files* era. For instance, a 1974 dialogue has Bowie earnestly talking about the recent recovery of a crashed saucer around "Akron, Ohio" and then-US senator Barry Goldwater's decision, aware that official disclosure would soon be forthcoming, to resign from politics in favour of UFO research. This reference to a UFO crash presumably refers to the UFO story related by ex-wife Angie Bowie in her autobiography, in which

Bowie's entourage, hanging out in a Detroit hotel room during his 1974 US tour, watched an afternoon TV newsflash about a local UFO crash involving four alien bodies. The main 6pm bulletin confirmed the earlier report.

However, the 11pm update debunked the whole

story, revealing that the earlier reports were a hoax perpetrated by the (now-sacked) prime-time news team. Ms Bowie states that everyone present would have dismissed the incident as "an overblown cosmic-hippie-cocaine dream" if not for the fact that British documentary Alan Yentob, then shooting the contemporary BBC Bowie documentary *Cracked Actor*, had taped the evening newscasts in question, confirming their veracity. As with most stories of this ilk, these invaluable pieces of evidence have, as of yet, failed to resurface.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bruno Stein, 'Flying Saucers, Hitler, and David Bowie', *Creem* Feb 1975: archived at the Bowie Golden Years website, <http://www.bowiegoldenyears.com/articles/750200-creem.html>. See also FT88:34-88.

<sup>2</sup> Trynka, ch 14.

<sup>3</sup> <http://kevinrandle.blogspot.com/2008/12/david-bowie-and->



## COCAINE, CROWLEY, KABBALA: THE MID 1970s

While occultism may have constituted an important subtext for most of Bowie's career, the mid-1970s was his 'dark' period, when these interests manifested in more overt and sinister forms. Beset by fiscal, managerial, and marital problems – and probably suffering the psychological and emotional effects incurred from several years of non-stop writing, recording, and touring – Bowie spent most of 1975 living in LA in a state of drug-addled manic depression. Subsisting on an 'all white' diet of cocaine and milk, he studied occultism in a more serious fashion. In his comprehensive biography, *Starman*, Paul Trynka asserts that this enthusiasm derived from a February 1975 meeting with Jimmy Page (who, interestingly, shares his birthday with Bowie), in which the artistically competitive and status-conscious Bowie, intimidated by Page's Crowleyan hauteur, was inspired to develop his own magickal will accordingly. Bowie's subsequent coked-out immersion in books such as Dion Fortune's *Psychic Self-Defence*, Trevor Ravenscroft's *The Spear of Destiny*, and the works of Golden Dawn acolytes Israel Regardie and AE Waite, had a number of significant consequences.<sup>5</sup>

One was an interest in Arthurian mythology and Grail mysticism. Unfortunately, as Bowie himself later admitted, this interest led on to a contemplation of Nazi occultism (a subject introduced in *Morning of the Magicians* and subsequently exploited in the early Seventies by sensationalist tomes such as



ABOVE: Station to (Victoria) Station, 1976; moments after this photograph was taken, Bowie gave what was interpreted by some as a Nazi salute.

*The Spear of Destiny* and *Occult Reich* by J H Brennan). This unsavoury fascination in turn manifested in quasi-fascist statements made in interviews around this time and an enduring controversy about whether or not Bowie greeted UK fans at Victoria Station in 1976 with a Nazi salute. Another was a bout of full-blown occult paranoia, in which Bowie, among other things, solicited the advice of friends regarding a *Rosemary's Baby* scenario in which a coven of witches

was out to steal his semen for the purposes of making a 'devil child'. Sadly, the yarns that he carefully collected his bodily residues such as nail clippings and urine, and stored them in his fridge so that they couldn't be used in black magic acts against him, appear to be apocryphal.<sup>6</sup> This paranoia reached its apotheosis in the story of 'the demon in the swimming pool', related by Bowie's then-wife Angie in her salacious 1993 autobiography *Backstage Passes: Life on the Wild Side with*

KESTONE / HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

## SOUND AND VISION: ESOTERIC BOWIEOLOGY

Discussion of the esoteric aspects of Bowie's life and work can be found readily online, with speculation unsurprisingly booming after Bowie's recent passing. Much of this material is tainted with tosh: for instance, one anecdote doing the rounds of mystery and UFO websites claims that aliens were audience members at Bowie's LA concerts in September 1974, the otherworldly costuming and make-up of Bowie fans enabling them to mingle amidst humans incognito (apart from being intuitively sensed by the man himself from the stage). While this story appears to be presented as 'fact', it is derived from a passage in the 1994 postmodern sci-fi novel *Diamond Nebula* by UK author Jeremy Reed, in which Bowie is one of the main characters.<sup>1</sup>

However, there are several writers who have produced well-developed analyses of Bowie's esoteric dimensions that are available online. Mark Dery is an American cultural theorist whose critical novella *Leper Messiah: A Jesus Freak's Search for the Meaning of Bowie* (2010) contemplates the star's appeal in relation to the Messianic mysticism of Christianity,<sup>2</sup> while Australian artist Tanja Stark has written extensively on Jungian interpretations of Bowie's work ('Jung the foreman' being a lyric in 'Drive-In Saturday' from 1973's *Aladdin Sane*).<sup>3</sup> The Gnostic/magic/shamanistic aspects of Bowie are covered in (often jaw-droppingly) comprehensive detail by two writers in particular: Swiss occult researcher Peter Koenig in his brilliantly titled essay 'The Laughing Gnostic' (updated 2016)<sup>4</sup>, and American Christopher Knowles in multiple entries on his occulture blog *The Secret Sun* (for example, Knowles discusses the magical overtones of Bowie's relationship with transsexual singer Romy Haag, which was a defining aspect of his tenure in Berlin in the late 1970s).<sup>5</sup>

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For example: <http://gnosticwarrior.com/david-bowies-gnostic-obsession.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://religiondispatches.org/leper-messiah-a-jesus-freaks-search-for-the-meaning-of-bowie-a-critical-novella/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://tanjastark.com/2015/06/22/crashing-out-with-sylvian-david-bowie-carl-jung-and-the-unconscious/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.parareligion.ch/bowie.htm](http://www.parareligion.ch/bowie.htm). The title presumably derives from a quip uttered by journalist Steven Wells when interviewing Bowie for the *NME* in 1995: in Egan (ibid), p280.

<sup>5</sup> <http://secretsun.blogspot.com>

*David Bowie*. Having procured an LA manse with an indoor swimming pool, Angie found her husband disturbed one night by a vision of the Devil rising out of the water. NY music journalist and white witch Walli Elmlark was consulted for instruction on exorcising the house of evil spirits, with a ceremony being undertaken by Mr and Mrs Bowie shortly thereafter. Angie describes how, as the ritual progressed, the water in the pool "bubbled and thrashed", culminating in the appearance of a demonic shadow on the bottom of the pool. While the freaked-out and coked-up couple departed the residence shortly thereafter, Angie adds the coda that the 'Mark of Satan' remained visible to subsequent tenants despite extensive repainting of the pool. While a great story, the most plausible explanation for this largely uncorroborated yarn is (if not pure invention) that the couple experienced a *folie a deux* related to Bowie's advanced state of cocaine-induced psychosis. In a much-cited *Rolling Stone* interview from 1976, journalist Cameron Crowe (now a leading Hollywood director) describes a June 1975 encounter with Bowie in which the musician breaks off his megalomaniacal ramblings ("I think I might have been a bloody good Hitler. I'd be an excellent dictator. Very eccentric and quite mad") to look through the blinds, decorated with protective pentagrams, after hallucinating a body falling past a window.<sup>7</sup>

Bowie initiated his recovery from this slough of despond in late 1975, by undertaking work on the *Station to Station* album. The abstruse lyrics to the epic title track can be interpreted as an autobiographical account of Bowie's mystical/narcotic gnosis, in which his "searching and searching" results in him being able



to overcome "the side effects of the cocaine" and find redemption in some (presumably spiritual) love. Explicit reference is made to an ascent of the Sephiroth, the Kabbalistic Tree of Life ("Here are we/One magical movement from Kether to Malkuth"), along with a nod to a well-known volume of Crowley's mystic-erotic poetry ("The return of the thin white duke making sure

*white stains*"). Despite the lyrical references to Crowley here and in 'Quicksand', it is interesting to note that Bowie was markedly ambivalent about his influence. For example, in a 1993 *NME* interview, Bowie states that "I didn't get into Crowley, by the way, because he uses too much Greek. I'm always very suspicious of anybody who says they're into Crowley because they'd better have a pretty fair handle on Greek and Latin otherwise they're talking bullshit".<sup>8</sup> Bowie's occult 'dark night of the soul' proved an ultimately fruitful experience, as he thereafter moved to Europe and hit what many critics and fans consider his creative peak with the 'Berlin trilogy' of *Low*, *Heroes*, and *Lodger* (1977-1979).

### I'M A BLACKSTAR: 2016

Esotericism doesn't appear to be particularly overt in most of Bowie's post-70s work, unless his creative nadir in the mid-80s is considered a delayed case of psychic backlash from his occult dabblings in the prior decade. Even this period, however, produced the likes of 'Loving the Alien' (1984), an atypical commentary on the dark history of Western religion inspired by another tome from Bowie's forteen library, Donovan Joyce's 1972 *The Jesus Scroll*, which pioneered the 'Jesus conspiracy' genre several years before *The Holy Blood and The Holy Grail*.<sup>9</sup> *Outside* (1995), an experimental concept album about



TOP: The 1976 *Station to Station* contained references to the Kabbalah and Crowley. ABOVE: Both Crowley and Bowie were fond of dressing up and Bowie's sartorial choices sometimes seemed to echo those of the Beast.





ABOVE: Bowie brandishes a Blackstar bible in the song's video. BELOW: The transfiguration of Major Tom?

the *fin de siècle* that saw Bowie collaborating once more with Brian Eno, was based around the premise of mutilation murders being committed as a new form of art, echoing one of the real-life explanations for the notorious 1946 'Black Dahlia' murder (see FT334:48-54).

However, the *Blackstar* album has seen Bowie go out with a distinctly occult bang, with the artwork, lyrics and accompanying music videos being steeped in symbolism that actively invites esoteric interpretations of Bowie's impending mortality. As every prior Bowie album cover has featured a portrait, the five-pointed 'black star' of this one is presumably meant to represent Bowie too – perhaps in his ultimate persona as spirit (the five-pointed star being a classic Hermetic/Gnostic symbol of “man as microcosm”, with the contradictory image of a ‘black star’ also evoking a koan or the alchemical union of opposites). The creepy atmosphere conjured up by the lyrics of the title track – “In the villa of Ormen/stands a solitary candle/On the day of execution/Only women stand and smile” – is successfully evoked in the video for the song. Bowie is depicted as preacher of some dark 21<sup>st</sup>



century faith, brandishing a Blackstar bible among acolytes whose spasmodic ‘dancing’ suggests a state of possession. A reading of the imagery here as analogous to Crowley and his *Book of the Law* is perhaps apt; director Johan Renck, who designed the videos with Bowie, has mentioned Crowley as a reference point.<sup>10</sup> Some kind of Hermetic/Gnostic subtext about eternity, spirit and the flesh is further implied in the imagery of the video's other ‘storyline’, in which the shade of a dead astronaut – Bowie himself, in his formative Major Tom persona? – floats up into a ‘black star’ of eternity, before, in a possibly Orphic reference, leaving behind

his bejewelled skull for ritual veneration by a sect of mutant women. Where the esoteric overtones of the ‘Blackstar’ video are eerie, those of the video for ‘Lazarus’ are poignant. Bowie plays himself as a patient in a hospital bed, whose closet is a portal from which appears a double who is seemingly meant to signify his essential spirit. This figure is not garbed as Ziggy, the Thin White Duke or any of Bowie's most famous personæ, but in the striped black jumpsuit in which he undertook the famous occult photo shoot for *Station to Station*, in which he is depicted drawing Kabbalistic symbols on the wall. That Bowie chose this costume for his valedictory performance suggests he was giving a subtle nod to the deep, lasting metaphysical significance that this period had upon the rest of his life.

While critics may readily dismiss Bowie's magical side as the drug-addled dabbings of one of rock's greatest poseurs, the overall nature of his esoteric references and experiences has an intensity and integrity that indicate something of more intrinsic import to his life and work. For instance, in a 50<sup>th</sup> birthday interview in 1997, he expressed the “abiding need in me to vacillate between atheism or a kind of Gnosticism... what I need is to find a balance, spiritually, with the way I live and my demise”. His views on death, however, appeared ultimately to tip towards the Gnostic rather than the atheistic: “I believe in a continuation, kind of a dream-state without the dreams. Oh, I don't know. I'll come back and tell you”.<sup>11</sup>

In light of the magical transformations that marked his entire career it would, perhaps, be unsurprising if Bowie ended up the first post-mortem rock star, relaying new music through media such as séances, Ouija boards, and ghost boxes. FT

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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## NOTES

1 Paul Trynka, *Starmans: David Bowie, The Definitive Biography* (Sphere, 2011), pp83-84.

2 David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: David Bowie, The Definitive Story* (Virgin, 2005), p233.

3 The song ‘After All’ on *The Man Who Sold The World* (1970) apparently includes a Crowley quote in the lyrics: Buckley (ibid) p85.

4 Gary Valentine (Lachman), *New York Rocker* (Sidgwick & Jackson, 2002), pp226-227. Lachman also outlines here a comical occult encounter with Bowie, in which his attempt to engage in conversation about Colin Wilson is met by Bowie's breathless assertions that Wilson is a ‘witch’ who can ‘invoke the spirits of ectoplasmic Nazis to do his bidding’.

5 Bowie's esoteric reading is mentioned in many sources, such as Valentine (2002) above: Trynka (2011), ch 14; and Marc Spitz, *David Bowie: A Biography* (Aurum Press, 2010) ch 18. Bowie himself outlined his magical reading in an interview with Steve Sutherland, ‘One Day, Son, All This Could Be Yours...’, *NME* 20-27 Mar 1993: in Egan (2015), p 218.

6 Trynka, p236.

7 Cameron Crowe, ‘Ground Control to Davy Jones’, *Rolling Stone* 12 Feb 1976: archived at the *Bowie Golden Years* website, <http://www.bowiegoldenyears.com/articles/760212-rollingstone.html>

8 Sutherland, *ibid*.

9 Charles Shaar Murray, ‘Sermon from the Savoy’, *NME* 27 Sept 1984: in Egan (*ibid*).

10 [http://noisy.vice.com/en\\_au/blog/david-bowie-blackstar-video-johan-renck-director-interview](http://noisy.vice.com/en_au/blog/david-bowie-blackstar-video-johan-renck-director-interview)

11 David Cavanagh, ‘ChangesFiftyBowie’, *Q* Feb 1997: in Egan (*ibid*), p322.

# THE RUNNING MAN

**CHRIS AUBECK** and **MARTIN SHOUGH** unearth a baffling proto-UFO incident, involving a fiery anthropomorphic figure, from the early 19th century, and explain the work of Magonia Exchange, an online group dedicated to bringing fortean research into the 21st...

*As James Smith, a labourer, was going to his work on Lansdown, on Thursday morning last, about half-past five o'clock, it was completely dark, but all of a sudden it became as light as day; he looked up and saw the element in a quivering blaze of fire for the space of a minute, after which it became as dark as before. He never saw anything like it in his life; it appeared to him like flames issuing from the sky.*

*The meteoric phenomenon was seen between Frome and Maiden Bradley, by Mr Wadman, Weymouth carrier; by the turnpike man at Midford (Elliot), to whom it appeared in shape like the face of a clock, and about the height of a man; a quarter of a mile farther it was seen by two men, and it appeared to them to have legs to it like men's legs.*

*The wife of the turnpike man said, as she lay in bed the whole room appeared to her to be in a blaze. At Brislington, it passed by a waggoner with a rustling noise like the wheel of a carriage, and there is a pathway where the grass is completely scorched by it. It was seen at Devizes very high in the element; it appeared in various shapes and threw out a great light. Farmer Wooley, of Hinton, saw it like a*

*large tea kettle; it came down to the earth and then rose up into the heavens again. The hostler and several men at the Fox Inn, Milford, saw it like a huge figure of fire, in shape like a man; it passed by them and they thought they should have been burnt to death by the heat; it then went up through the valley, like a man running, and passed two men near the canal, but it did not burn them; it then ascended out of sight.*

*This phenomenon has been witnessed in various parts, in Devizes, in Wincanton, in Bridgwater, at the New Passage, by the Severn; at Frome, and various other places. The country people seem puzzled how to account for the dazzling light, the heat, the curious forms it assumed, and the numerous places in which it was seen. The millenarians will think the fulfilment of prophecy is at hand; all will think some wonderful events are coming, until the philosophers convince them of its physical cause.*

— *The Courier* (London, England), 12 December 1831, taken from the *Bath Journal*

Here, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, we find an account associating a bright object with scorched ground and a fiery humanoid figure. Its resemblance to modern UFO encounters is clear, and the report is impressive: although fragmentary and confusing, it provides multiple named witnesses and locations, something few of today's UFO stories possess.

For the sake of clarity, we present a rearranged and bulleted version of the information contained in the newspaper article:

- James Smith, labourer, was travelling to Lansdown at 5.30am when the dark sky was suddenly lit up by a blaze of fire. It lasted a minute and then disappeared.
- Mr Wadman saw a meteoric phenomenon between Frome and Maiden Bradley.
- The turnpike man at Midford saw

**On Thursday last, a meteoric phenomenon was seen in the West of England which appears to have sadly puzzled the good folks in that part of the kingdom. To one it appeared "like a huge clock," to another it had "two legs like those of a man," to another "like a large tea-kettle," to another, like "a man running," passing by certain travellers, who thought they should have been burnt to death, &c. &c.**  
**A stormy petrel was shot yesterday at Twynning; it was probably driven so far inland by the high wind on Monday night.—It is being stuffed by Thos. Robinson, of the Shambles, in this city.**

something resembling a clock face in shape, the size of a man. His wife said it illuminated the whole bedroom.

- Two men saw it a quarter of a mile away. They said it seemed to have legs.
- At Brislington, it passed by a waggoner with a rustling noise, scorching the grass.
- Farmer Wooley, of Hinton, described it as like a large teakettle that descended to the ground and returned to the sky.
- Men at the Fox Inn, Milford, saw it as a huge man-shaped figure of fire. It passed so close they were surprised not to be burnt.
- It went along the valley, in the form of a

man running, and passed two men near the canal without harming them. It then ascended out of sight.

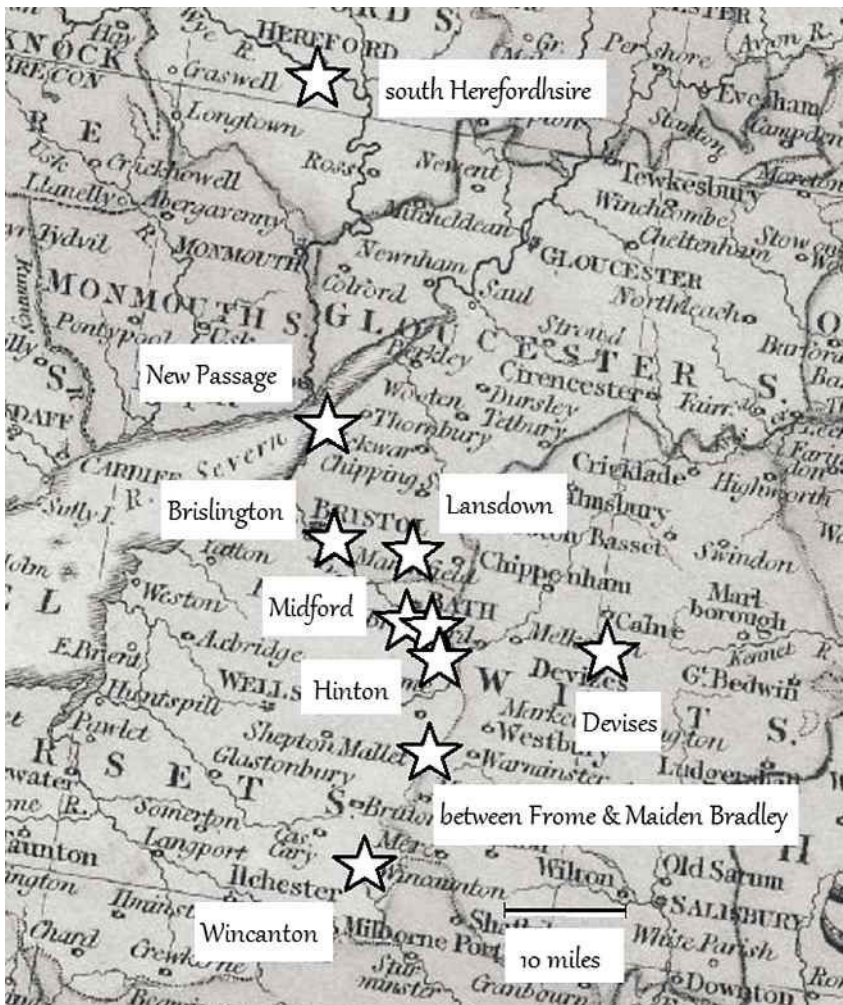
- The phenomenon appeared in Devizes (in the form of a powerful light high in the sky, in various shapes), in Wincanton, in Bridgwater, at the New Passage, by the Severn, at Frome, and elsewhere.

## SEARCHING FOR A ROUTE

Most of the locations are scattered along a roughly north-south line 40 miles in length from the Bristol Channel to Wincanton (see map on opposite page), but the time of day is not given except for the first sighting, so we cannot plot a path. If a sequence is implied, then it runs northward from Maiden Bradley and Frome, past Hinton to Midford, and then on to another point a quarter-mile "further on", maybe heading north to Brislington. But this is unclear.

The common denominator of these accounts is the fiery nature of the





Sightings in the vicinity of Bath (map, R Wilkinson, 1812. OPPOSITE PAGE: A clipping from the *Worcester Journal*, 15 Dec 1831.

phenomenon. Its shape and behaviour varies from “a quivering blaze of fire” to a circular light, a man-shaped figure of fire, or a kettle shape, or a thing with legs, either close to the ground or up in the sky. Are they all related? It might be more prudent to identify a core of connected stories, focusing on those with more details, and then consider the possibly unrelated ones. The former group includes Lansdown, Brislington, Midford (the Fox Inn and the Coal Canal), Hinton, and the Frome-Maiden Bradley road. The latter group includes sightings at Wincanton, Devises, New Passage, and at Bridgwater, some 30 miles (48km) west of the Bath cluster.

Those in the latter group tend to be geographical outliers, while the descriptive core tends to cluster within about a dozen miles of Bath. Since the original source is the *Bath Journal*, this all seems consistent. A group of circumstantial accounts collected from known sources in the local area form the core story, but in the excitement these were combined with stories from further afield.

### A DAYLIGHT METEOR?

Other brief newspaper summaries were printed in Bath, Worcester, and Yorkshire, all evidently based on the *Bath Journal* story. However, a meteor catalogue does have this entry: 1831 – Dec. 8 – Herefordshire – large – by daylight; also

## “THE COUNTRY PEOPLE SEEM PUZZLED AS TO HOW TO ACCOUNT FOR THE DAZZLING LIGHT AND CURIOUS FORMS”

seen at Bath.<sup>1</sup>

Herefordshire is an interesting additional location. When we plot the Somerset sightings on a map, there is a hint of a near north-south alignment that, extrapolated north, would indeed pass over Herefordshire. Is this a coincidence? The report that at Brislington “it passed by a waggoner with a rustling noise” is suggestive of the so-called “electro-phonetic” sounds sometimes heard by observers of fireball meteors; vague stories of fiery forms in the sky could be distorted; and the scorched grass may have had nothing to do with it.

The problem with seeking a common cause for both sightings is that the one from Herefordshire is listed as a “daylight” meteor, whereas the Bath events happened in the dark. James Smith at Lansdown, a labourer on his way to work, said it was “full dark,” and the Midford turnpike man’s wife still “lay in bed” when the object lit up the bedroom. In fact, at the

reported time of 5.30am, the Sun was 22° under the horizon, fully two and a half hours before sunrise (around 8am).

It is possible that, in addition to the early morning sighting in Bath, a meteor also passed across the sky at Bath and in Herefordshire in sunlight hours on 8 December, but this would be an unusual coincidence. We think it is more likely that someone had read about the Somerset affair, either the original story or a summary, and assumed that whatever happened in Herefordshire was the same as the incident at Bath because of the date.

Only one possible source of this Herefordshire meteor story has turned up so far, in a British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) publication of 1852.<sup>2</sup> This mentions a single vague observation of an unidentified flickering light made under “dense cloud” on the morning of 8 December. If this is the same event, then on the one hand it does help us connect it with the Bath sequence, because it was not in “daylight” but early in the morning and “very dark.” On the other hand, this is hardly a meteor observation at all, and it is ironic that the editor justifies carrying it as such only because he associates it with the “unscientific” story in the *Bath Journal*.

If the speculative BAAS account is the source for the “Herefordshire” event in the meteor catalogue,<sup>3</sup> then there is no basis for it. In fact, we suggest that the opposite is true: *it was the Bath UFO event that gave rise to the vague tale of a meteor over Herefordshire*. On the other hand, the article helpfully provides a weather report for south Herefordshire that positively discounts the likelihood of any clearly observed meteor in the area: “Overcast with very low foggy clouds... such dense clouds”.

### PEOPLE AND PLACES

Although there is no Fox Inn at Milford, east Yeovil, today, there was one at *Midford*. Local inquiries established that the Fox Inn continued in business into the 20th century but is today a private house.<sup>4</sup> Could the event have occurred at Midford? We think so, because the story specifically says: “It went up through the valley... and passed two men near the canal.” There is no canal anywhere near Milford. However, Midford is just a mile from the important Kennet and Avon Canal. A simple typo probably changed Midford to Milford. In 1858, a previous innkeeper, William Chancellor, was summoned to Somersetshire County Court on an unnamed matter. We wonder if William Chancellor “late of the Fox Inn” was the very innkeeper who was witness to the amazing events of 1831.

The canal mentioned was a local branch known as the Somerset Coal Canal, opened

# A RETURN TO MAGONIA

CHRIS AUBECK argues that a global army of latter-day Charles Forts, armed with laptops and with access to the digitised archives of the world's newspapers, is transforming fortetean research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century...

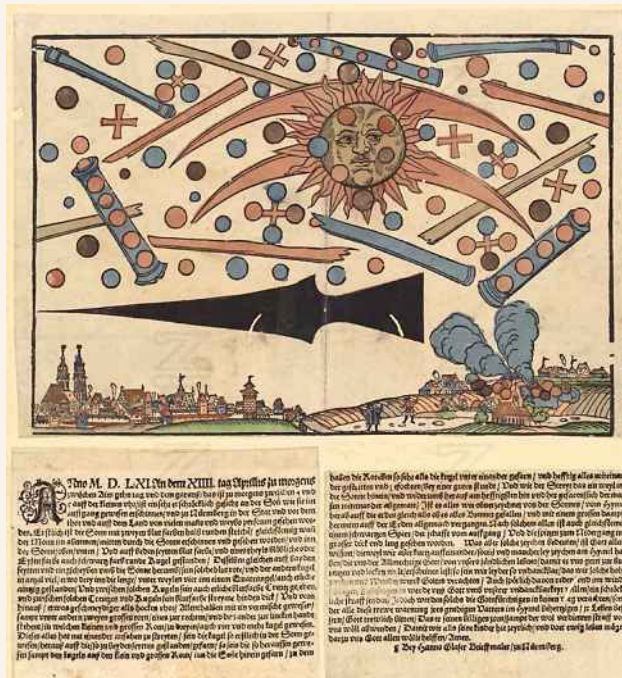
As devoted as Charles Fort was to the search for reports of strange phenomena in historical texts, he must have been painfully aware that just one man could only peruse a limited number of archives in a single lifetime. Libraries hold hundreds of thousands of journals and newspapers, bound together in thick musty volumes. With their tiny print, and often labyrinthine structure, a single month of dailies might take an hour to thumb through. Back then, transcribing whole articles was too impractical and time-consuming, so, in the absence of photocopy machines or scanners, gathering information meant taking copious notes with a pencil in a notebook or on index cards. Those of us who began research in traditional bricks-and-mortar libraries can only sympathise with Fort and marvel at his stamina, his unflinching eyesight and more-than-likely backache.

Fortunately, things have changed in recent years. The advent of computers has led to the digitisation of the world's libraries, allowing us to carry on Fort's tireless efforts in only a fraction of the time. Since the late 1990s, dozens of public and private archives have been scanning their collections to make them available online. Most of these projects are free of charge, others charge a monthly or annual subscription, but they all offer something Fort would have loved to see: search engines. Instead of fetching heavy bound volumes from a shelf and gingerly turning each brittle page hoping to find something useful amid all the announcements of births, marriages and deaths or political commentary, we can now type a series of words such as "shower of fish" or "singular phenomenon" into a box and click search: a list of results springs into view that would have taken months to assemble the old-fashioned way. This is the future of fortetean research, and we don't even have to leave the house to do it.

We still need somewhere to put our finds, though, as saving them to the hard

drive helps nobody.

In April 2003, a colleague and I set up an online group in which fellow researchers could store and share their latest discoveries made in newspaper libraries. It was an exciting time. Genealogy was becoming big business as people looking for clues about their family history finally got to consult the census records and birth or death certificates that had previously been locked away in government basements or sat on shelves in rolls of microfilm.



Some newspapers and scientific journals had their own webpages where you could consult century-old back issues, and universities invested in giving students easy access to old books. It was a no-brainer: if we built up a network of likeminded individuals we could scan the world's libraries for UFO and fortetean data in no time and build the world's largest archive of cuttings on weird sightings through history. Thus Magonia Exchange was born, and thanks to the work of many dedicated researchers it is still going strong. In 13 years we have amassed over 30,000 individual items relating to strange phenomena from mediæval times up to the first decades of the 20th century, in languages ranging from English and French to Russian and Greek – and even Chinese. The group adds an average of

200 new items a month, few of which had ever been seen since they were first published.

Magonia Exchange also serves as a network of colleagues across the world, in countries such as the US, Britain, Canada, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece and Russia. This helps not only in obtaining rare research material but also in translating documents. Finding out that very similar encounters with unknown entities took place in different parts of the world, sometimes simultaneously, is invaluable.

Since its inception, three other groups have been established using the same basic model. PreUFO, an Italian-language group directed by ufologist Edoardo Russo; Forteana Exchange, founded in 2012 by Bob Rickard; and recently Magonia Exchange ES, a Spanish-language group I opened in January 2016. Membership is free and open to anyone who wants to help build up the archives. Our vision is simple: let's collect all the data we can, as often as we can, and share it. Imagine an army of Charles Forts armed with laptops all over the world!

Readers of my two co-authored books *Wonders in the Sky* (2009) and *Return to Magonia* (2015) will have seen what can be done with access to so much new information. Having access to books and documents from across the centuries gives us a completely new view of our fortetean past and shows that very few of the strange sightings reported today are as unique or new as they seem. How we should

interpret all this new data, of course, is a different question altogether. Are we staring at proof of alien intervention, or confirmation that the human imagination is confined to a series of archetypes that resurface in similar ways in every generation? If our grandparents' crashed saucers are still controversial today, what about the objects that fell in our great-grandfathers' back yards, and even in those of their great-grandfathers? Join us in the hunt for the roots of all this and maybe you, too, can experience what Fort must have felt as he read about people's encounters with the seemingly impossible and dreamt of shipwrecks in the sky.

[https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/magonia\\_exchange/info](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/magonia_exchange/info)  
[www.chrisaubeck.com](http://www.chrisaubeck.com)





ABOVE: The Fox inn, Midford, early 1900s. The innkeeper and locals felt the heat from “a huge figure of fire, in shape like a man”, passing up the valley.

in 1805 to connect the Kennet & Avon Canal with coalfields to the west, running close by the Fox Inn. It went into decline after a peak in 1838 and closed due to competition from the railway in 1898.

Today the Coal Canal is mostly derelict and filled in, but in 1831 it came from Combe Hay in the west down the valley of the Cam Brook, passing through Midford along the line of the Midford Brook towards a junction with the Kennet & Avon Canal in the northeast. To pass along the valley close to the men by the canal, the phenomenon could have been heading either northeast or west. We favour the latter, simply because the story describes it as passing “up through the valley”. The gradient of the valley floor is not great, a fall of only 135ft (41m) overall, but it descends to the east towards the Kennet and Avon. The Coal Canal climbed west by Combe Hay via a flight of 22 6ft (1.8m) locks, so we think this would have defined the “up” and “down” for locals in 1831.<sup>5</sup> Thus we infer that the direction of departure of the phenomenon seen at Midford was towards the west.

We infer that “Hinton,” where farmer Wooley saw the object descend to the earth and rise again, looking like a large teakettle, refers to the area of Hinton Charterhouse and Hinton Hill Road about 1.5 miles (2.4km) south of Midford, but we have struggled to trace “farmer Wooley”.

There is a Woolley Barn Farm in a district of northeast Bath known as Woolley, and this appears in some records of the early 1800s as “Wooley,”<sup>6</sup> but no Hinton exists near there; on the other hand, no “Wooley” connections are findable in Hinton Charterhouse to the south of Bath. Old maps before the 1950s show five farms around Hinton, but there has clearly been much merging and changing of names. Today the farm names in the area include Tytherly Farm on Willow Lane and Willow Farm at Willow, leading to a suspicion that Wooley and Willow or Willow might be cognate corruptions,<sup>7</sup> but this is speculative. We cannot trace “farmer Wooley”.

## FARMER WOOLEY SAW THE OBJECT DESCEND TO THE EARTH AND RISE AGAIN, LOOKING LIKE A LARGE TEAKETTLE

### MILLENARIAN PORTENTS

The *Bath Journal* had predicted that: “The millenarians will think the fulfilment of prophecy is at hand. All will think some wonderful events are coming; until the philosophers convince them of its physical cause.”

Another writer, proposing to fill this solemn role in the *Bath & Cheltenham Gazette*, announced complacently that it was a “meteoric phenomenon” that was wholly expected given the “unusual warmth and moisture of the atmosphere next to the earth, meeting with cold currents of superior air,” wafting across the country “as driven by slow-moving currents of air” – in other words, a mirage. He noted that the variety of descriptions is “easily accounted for, every meteor is liable to a change of form like a common cloud, and with a little aid from imagination may be supposed to resemble anything.” He found the witnesses’ “palpable misconceptions” to be “quite amusing,” and lamented “the foolery of believers in portents and omens.”

We see no evidence of millenarian foolery in the sighting accounts themselves. Phrases such as “they thought they should have been burnt to death by the heat; it then went up through the valley, like a man running, and passed two men near the canal, but it did not burn them” might owe something to the writer’s instinct for scriptural allusion, in this case Daniel 3:25 (“He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God”). However, there is nothing religious about the sightings. The same writer tells us: “The country people

seem puzzled how to account for the dazzling light, the heat, the curious forms it assumed, the many places it was seen.”

There is no mention of anyone seeing an angel, or a devil. Cases of anthropomorphised fireballs were reported throughout the 19th century, but there’s no cluster of cases that shows us any common thread of popular theory. An ordinary person who thought he saw a luminous human-like figure in this era would suppose it to be a ghost (as in, for example, a case in Illinois in 1874).

### SEARCHING FOR EXPLANATIONS

Insofar as the people and places are traceable, there is little to indicate a hoax.

Whether all the incidents are causally connected is unclear, but it seems a core group of events in the Midford area may have attracted a halo of tenuously related anecdotes from further afield. The core stories indicate a low-level fiery blob, sometimes with appendages, moving quite fast, giving off scorching heat.

Ball lightning is more or less a reflex explanation in cases like this, but the implied geographical scope and duration are excessive. Several distinct ball lightning events are a possible explanation, if highly improbable; but there is no evidence of the thunderstorms that might have caused them.

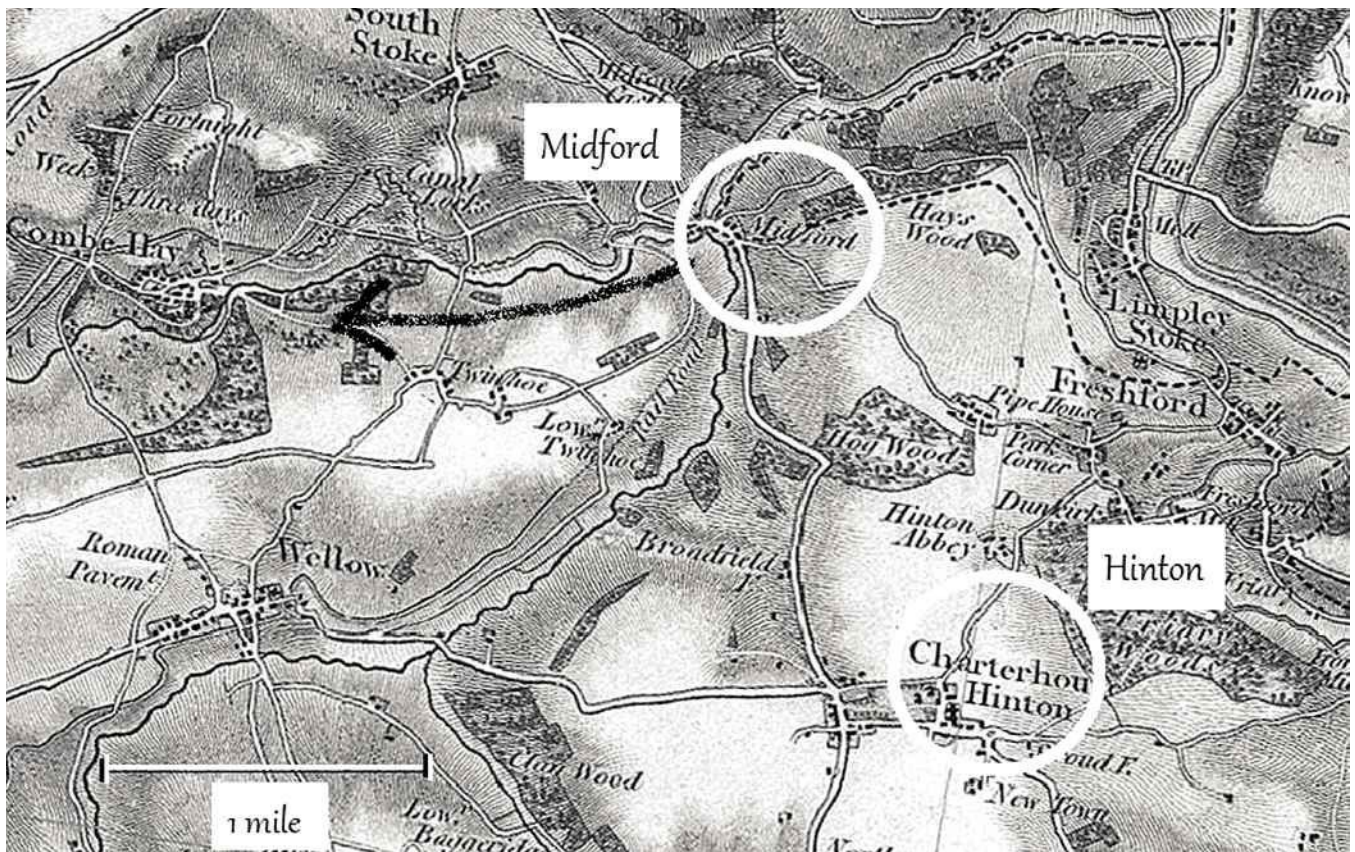
The *Bath & Cheltenham Gazette* claimed all the descriptions were “easily accounted for” by mirages and imagination – to which we respond, *mirages of what?*

Our search for some astronomical stimuli turned up nothing. Obvious candidates might be the Moon (“in shape like the face of a clock”) or Venus. On the date in question the Moon was a thin crescent, and at 5.30am it was still far below the horizon, only rising in the southeast three hours after the Sun. Venus was very bright (magnitude -4.2) and at maximum elongation (46°), rising well ahead of the Sun. At 5:30 it was about 15° above the horizon in the southeast and would have been very prominent (if the sky were clear). That direction appears not to fit the core sightings at Midford, but Venus might have been involved in some peripheral sightings the same morning, about which we have little information.

Other sketchy stories suggest a bright auroral display – such as the Lansdown report of “flames from sky”, and the flickering light in the clouds over south Herefordshire – but only if “in the clouds” could be interpreted to mean “between the clouds”. This is unlikely given that the cloud was described as “dense”, “overcast with very low foggy clouds”. A bright display would be very unusual at this latitude, except during exceptional solar events. These sometimes occur around the peak of the solar cycle, but this date was closer to the *minimum* of Cycle 7 (May 1823 to November 1833). Activity was therefore low.<sup>8</sup>

In some ways this case reminds us of others we have come across and where we have considered a tornado as a possible cause.<sup>9</sup> In this case, though, phrases like “blaze of fire” and “great light” imply a real luminosity that isn’t easy to square with a regular funnel cloud.





TOP: Map of the Midford sighting area showing probable westward departure direction along the route of the old Somerset Coal Canal (Ordnance Survey, 1817).

Taking together the linear alignment across the countryside, the rushing motion generally at ground level, references to fire and heat, and in one place a “scorched path”, one thinks of a fire-tornado or “fire whirl”. These are real phenomena, but they do not come from nowhere. There is no hint of the devastating heath fires or forest fires that might maintain a fire-tornado over a distance of tens of miles or generate a series of separate ones.

It seems as if the heat and burning were secondary local effects of the phenomenon rather than its primary cause. What was seen remains a mystery – perhaps several mysteries. But because of the fiery or glowing figure mentioned in three cases, it remains of special interest. Folklore and legends aside, this is a rare early example of a man-like creature associated with objects from the sky in reports from named individuals.

To summarise: witnesses saw a fiery phenomenon descend from the sky in Somerset, England, on 8 December 1831.

Descriptions differed: one man said it was like a clock face; to another it seemed to have human legs. It emitted light, heat and sound. To one observer it resembled a large kettle. Some saw a man-shaped fireball. It descended from the sky – scorching the grass as it passed – and ascended again. The locations are named and appear on a map, but without the time of day we cannot plot the path it took. Many of the accounts come from near Bath, where the article appeared in the local newspaper. Other sources noted a meteor over Herefordshire on the same day, but apparently this was hearsay based on the phenomenon described near Bath. Collectively these stories have some of the common features of a fireball, but other aspects are more unusual. We are left with a fragmentary but fascinating account of a UFO with all the trimmings: a luminous object behaving strangely, physical traces on the ground, possible references to an entity (or appendages on the object itself), and no hint of a veiled political or religious message. **FT**



This article is extracted from the book **Return to Magonia: Investigating UFOs in History** by Chris Aubeck and Martin Shough, Anomalist Press, 2015.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**CHRIS AUBECK** lives in Spain, where he works as a translator and teacher. He runs Magonia Exchange and has coauthored two previous books: *Wonders in the Sky*, with Jacques Vallée (2009) and *OOPARTS*, with Juan Jose Sanchez Oro (2015).



**MARTIN SHOUGH** is a Research Associate for National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena (NARCAP) and author or co-author of numerous papers and other publications. He has been a photolithographer, musician, artist, and gallery owner and lives in the Scottish Highlands.

#### NOTES

**1** [www.meteoritehistory.info/UKIRELAND/CAT5.HTM](http://www.meteoritehistory.info/UKIRELAND/CAT5.HTM)

**2** *Report of the 22nd Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Belfast Sept. 1852*; John Murray, London, 1853 p.182.

**3** The “daylight” listing would be just a careless error.

**4** We initially thought that the Hope & Anchor inn, which was renamed in the 19th century after being enlarged in expectation of business from new canal traffic, was the site of the Fox Inn.

Luci Smolarek, co-proprietor of the Hope & Anchor inn ([www.hopeandanchormidford.co.uk/](http://www.hopeandanchormidford.co.uk/)), kindly gave us information leading to the actual site nearby.

**5** A southern branch of the canal was planned coming from Radstock in the southwest, but this was never

completed. It was built only as far as Twinhoe and did not reach Midford, so is not relevant here. [www.coalcanal.org/maps/m04.htm](http://www.coalcanal.org/maps/m04.htm)

**6** [www.payman.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/somersetshire/descendants-of-peter-noad-1760-to-1843](http://www.payman.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/somersetshire/descendants-of-peter-noad-1760-to-1843).

<http://www.freshford.com/hintonmaps.htm>

**7** A 1750 map identifies a large area west of the village as “West Wells” and “Willis’s land.” [www.freshford.com/hintonmaps.htm](http://www.freshford.com/hintonmaps.htm)

**8** [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar\\_cycle\\_7](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_cycle_7)

**9** For example, a smoky, fiery thing that visited Perthshire in 1767; this and other examples can be found in the book from which this article is extracted.



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# IS THE TRUTH STILL OUT THERE?

**LOREN AND JENNY COLEMAN** welcome *The X-Files* back to our TV screens after a decade-and-a-half absence - but what do Mulder and Scully have to say to us in a post-9/11 world?

**T**he *X-Files*, the phenomenally successful American science fiction/horror television series created by Chris Carter in the 1990s, made a comeback in early 2016 on its home network, Fox TV. From the airing of its first episode on 10 September 1993 to its series finale on 19 May 2002, the show presented UFO mysteries intersecting with government cover-ups and manipulations of the truth. “Trust No One” and “The Truth is Out There” episodes focused on the extraterrestrial/conspiracy storyline that evolved throughout the series, while standalone ‘Monster-of-the-Week’ episodes concerned creatures, cryptids and the unexplained (“I Want to Believe”), providing variation and needed respite from the heavy mythos thread running through the long seasons. Viewers across the world were hooked.

But somewhere along the way, 9/11 happened. The destruction of the Twin Towers destroyed the series, so the story goes: why would one “want to believe” in aliens and conspiracies and scary creatures, when actual monsters walked amongst us in the form of terrorists? Weird as it may seem, even a spin-off of *The X-Files* became part of the conspiracy theories associated with 11 September 2001. The pilot episode of *The Lone Gunman* aired on 4 March 2001, its storyline following a terrorist plot to fly a hijacked airplane into one of the World Trade Center’s towers (see FT165:52). However, terrorists were not orchestrating the chaos and destruction in this episode; it was government agents who wanted to sell more arms in the ensuing war. Whoa! 9/11 and its aftermath were predicted in a haunting fashion.

The rather abrupt end to *The X-Files* fuelled a longing for the return of the series among fortetans. After all, it was an enjoyable fantasy that a special division of the FBI might actually be investigating all those pesky mysteries we’d been researching and poring over for so many years. Were we, asked fortetans, missing the pre-9/11 days of the 1990s? Was our pining for the adventures of



AGUNG PARAMESWARA / GETTY IMAGES



Mulder and Scully based in nostalgia?

I don't think so. Yes, we were delighted with how remarkably on-target the series was in addressing so many of the interests we had in UFOs, cover-ups, animal mysteries, wild talents, strange people, and monsters. After all, those things, we knew (even if the general television audience didn't) were called *forteana*. When I (Loren) wrote the first *X-Files* article for *Fortean Times*, (FT82:22-29) I mentioned how Chris Carter appeared to be using source material from my book *Mysterious America* (1983) and the work of many friends who had written for *FT* back in the 1970s and 1980s. For us, the series was a warm and comfortable televised projection of the *forteana* worldview. The stories spoke to us, and Mulder and Scully were parts of our own personalities, right there on the screen.

Would the return of the series in 2016 also feel like "home" again? So much has happened. We are all older. Mysteries have been solved or debunked. More government cover-ups and cover stories have been revealed. But *forteana* still exists: more monsters are out there, and a greater number of reports, cases, and histories need to be investigated. Conspiracies are darker, alien histories are longer, and DNA legacies are more complex than the 1990s led us to believe. Phrases like false flag, Snowden, and the NSA are now a part of daily jargon, used not just by conspiracy theorists and their ilk, but by practically everyone.

How would *The X-Files* mirror the scary mess that is the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

First off, *The X-Files 2016*, or Season X, if you will, has not gone all glam on us. The sartorial styles of Fox Mulder and Dana Scully appear very familiar, as if they stepped straight from 1993 into 2016, with the exception of Scully's sensible pumps being replaced by sharp stilettos. The lines of their faces and bodies tell us they have aged since the end of the series, but Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny are still, as they say, "easy on the eye". FBI agents once again,



ABOVE: Old friends and new quests – Mulder and Scully reunited in episode one, "My Struggle".

## FOR US, THE SERIES WAS A WARM AND COMFORTABLE TV PROJECTION OF THE FORTEAN WORLDVIEW

they are immediately believable in their assignments and examinations of evidence, events and artefacts of the unknown (albeit seemingly more known than unknown in this day and age).

Some critics, using phrases such as "too heavy-handed" or "too bogged down," have roundly criticised the first episode in this new season. It's important to understand that, after all these years, there are many people who need to catch up or have their memories

refreshed. And then there are those new to the series, who must be carefully brought up to speed via talking points setting out how the conspiracy has evolved. It can't have been easy to summarise over 20 years of plotlines and backstories into under an hour and cater to both rabid fans and newbies alike.

Personally, we would have been a little disappointed if there had not been the touchstone of the legacy of the 1947 Roswell incident at the beginning of this revival. It seemed, well, just right.

The six episodes of the new miniseries reflect the diversity of the writers perfectly. The first one was all Chris Carter and his foundation mythos. (The last three episodes, "Home Again," "Babylon," and "My Struggle II," are expected to resolve some of the questions posed in the mythology arc, but we will make some observations about only the first three of the six.)

"My Struggle" bursts forth, outlining the internal challenges all the characters – the X-Files division, the FBI, the agents and their boss, Walter Skinner, and, yes, even their creator, Chris Carter – have had to overcome to get here again. The political and media hurdles seem obvious, but the externalising of this through the Alex Jones-like figure was a nice stroke for the conspiracy storyline.

The key to "My Struggle" is reflective of what is to be found in the Norwegian novelist Karl Ove Knausgård's 3,600-page autobiographical novel, *My Struggle*. The book holds a mirror up to Knausgård's life, and the reader finds that what one sees is oneself. The first *X-Files* episode of 2016 begins this journey by saying something similar. We are all in this morass, post-9/11, and we are all feeling this together. Did aliens crash? Was the collapse of the Twin Towers symbolic of the fiscal collapse most of us experienced seven years later? Are aliens genetically engineering babies and stealing them from mothers? What the hell is going on here, and who is more truthful: Alex Jones, Art Bell, or Brian Williams? Dana Scully, Fox Mulder or the Cigarette Smoking Man?



ABOVE: Episode two, "Founder's Mutation", pulls together *X-Files* mythology old and new.



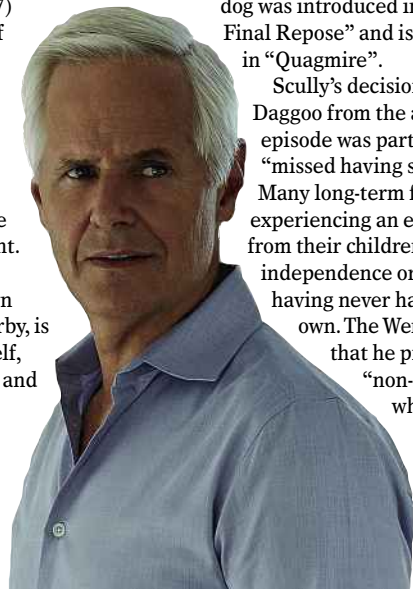
ABOVE: Scully and Daggoo in “Mulder and Scully Meet the Were-Monster”. BELOW: *X-Files* creator Chris Carter.

In the second episode, “Founder’s Mutation,” written and directed by James Wong, we find a tender journey in which Scully and Mulder have frequently created memories of a child they were forced to place for adoption. It is an episode about deformed children, suicide, and PK. It is horror realised, and horror lived. Anyone who has lost a child – through death, divorce or adoption – will realise quickly that whoever wrote this episode understands that, as Scully says, a mother never forgets her child; neither do fathers.

The mythos of the series – old and new – is pulled together in “Founder’s Mutation,” as it becomes apparent that the “monsters” of the “Monster-of-the-Week” episodes probably have something to say to us about alien genetic engineering. Watch the episode and see for yourself. Like “My Struggle,” this is a form of meditative insight about you, as a fortean, as a citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as a nerd – but not as a Wall Street banker or a rock star or a politician, please note. This show is about you.

Next, comes a self-evident “Monster-of-the-Week” episode: “Mulder and Scully Meet the Were-Monster.” It’s a Lizardman, straight from the pages of *Fortean Times* old (“Creatures From The Black Lagoon”, Loren Coleman, FT40:43-47) or new (“The Lizard Man of Scape Ore Swamp”, by Ben Radford, FT333:26-34).

Carter was inspired by the 1970s series *Kolchak: The Night Stalker* to create *The X-Files*, and the new season visits that landscape again in the third instalment. The character of Guy Mann, played by well-known cryptozoology fan Rhys Darby, is dressed like *Kolchak* himself, right down to the straw hat and seersucker sports coat.



This episode’s writer and director is Darin Morgan. Darin Morgan is the brother of Glen Morgan and brother-in-law of Kristen Cloke, who worked in various capacities on a total of 28 episodes of *The X-Files* and 23 of *Millennium*. In *The X-Files*, he guest starred as Flukeman in the Season 2 episode “The Host” and as Eddie Van Blundht in the Season 4 episode “Small Potatoes”.

Darin Morgan also penned the classic *X-Files* episodes, “Humbug”, “Clyde Bruckman’s Final Repose”, and “Jose Chung’s ‘From Outer Space’”. Morgan has a pronounced and unique sense of humour, and is very much a fortean. Furthermore, he ghostwrote *The X-Files*’ “Quagmire”, the very first television series episode to mention the word “cryptozoology”. It’s a story that has a lake monster called Big Blue dwelling in Heuvelman’s (sic) Lake.

Morgan places many – very many – Easter Eggs throughout this “Were-Monster” story. As in “Quagmire,” he references Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Guy Mann’s runaway dog in this 2016 episode is name Daggoo, which is also the name of one of the harpooners on the *Pequod*, Ahab’s ship. Scully’s pet Pomeranian in “Quagmire” was named Queequeg, another harpooner on the *Pequod* and good friend of Ishmael. The dog was introduced in “Clyde Bruckman’s Final Repose” and is eaten by an alligator in “Quagmire”.

Scully’s decision to steal (or rescue) Daggoo from the animal shelter in this episode was particularly poignant; she “missed having something to love”. Many long-term fans of the show are experiencing an empty nest, either from their children transitioning into independence or from the regret of having never had children of their own. The Were-Monster expresses that he prefers the company of “non-humans” to humans, while pondering the

pointlessness of human existence. He thanks Mulder for being, essentially, a decent human, to which Mulder replies, to a Horny-Toad Lizardman that shoots blood from his eyes: “Likewise”. Point made.

At its heart, the “Were-Monster” episode is about loss, and the internal changes we experience here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The tombstones of Jack Hardy and Kim Manners are there, in the background. They are two beloved producers of *The X-Files* who died in the intervening years.

We must reflect that as this episode opens, Mulder’s monologue details the withdrawal of his affections from Bigfoot and Mothman, and his understanding that the Jackalope is a myth. He also talks of Charles Fort, openly and deeply.

“Since we’ve been away, much of the unexplained has been explained,” he says to Scully. “Charles Fort spent his entire life researching natural and scientific anomalies.”

Mulder appears to be pining for the days when he was a young man, like a young Charles Fort.

“At the end of his life, Fort himself wondered if it had all been a waste,” Mulder pondered. “I get it.”

Now feeling like an old Charles Fort, Mulder tells Scully, he’s now middle-aged and wonders if it’s “time to put away childish things. Is this how I want to spend the rest of my days, chasing monsters?”

And then Scully tells Mulder: there’s a new case... and it’s a monster.

As we know, *The X-Files* is fiction. We don’t know that Fort, despite his recurrent frustrations, ever felt as deeply despondent as Mulder suggests, and we certainly don’t feel we have wasted our lives being forteans... or watching *The X-Files*, come to think of it.

We see ourselves in Mulder and Scully. In their confusion with technological advances, their regret over past decisions, and their willingness to continue to fight for the truth, they represent an aging generation that just wants to sit quietly and think for a minute. As for the younger crowd, the new, post-9/11 inductees to the world of *The X-Files*, they enter with different eyes, their vision filled with scepticism and knowledge, but possibly wonder too. Perhaps we older forteans have become jaded, our worldview tired. But if *The X-Files* can rise splendidly from the ashes and still have something to teach us about forteana and the unexplained, if it can make us question, discuss, think and look up from our devices long enough to see the unseen, then maybe we are, as Scully says, “immortal” after all. **F**

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**LOREN COLEMAN** is the Director of the International Cryptozoology Museum and the author of over 40 books. **JENNY COLEMAN** is the Editor of the new *Journal of the International Cryptozoology Society*.



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# THE CAVE OF THE WITCHES

According to local legend, a Chilean island was once home to a secret society of powerful warlocks who murdered their victims, kidnapped children, created terrifying monsters and were only brought to trial in the late 19th century. **MIKE DASH** uncovers a strange story from a land of mystery and darkness...

**T**here is a place in South America that was once the end of the Earth. It lies close to the 35th parallel, where the Maule River empties into the Pacific Ocean, and in the first years of the 16th century it marked the spot at which the Empire of the Incas ended and a strange and unknown world began.

South of the Maule, the Incas thought, lay a land of mystery and darkness. It was a place where the Pacific's waters chilled and turned from blue to black, and where indigenous peoples struggled to claw the basest of livings from a hostile environment. It was also where the witches lived and evil came from. The Incas called this land "the Place of Seagulls."

Today, the Place of Seagulls begins at a spot 700 miles (1,130km) due south of the Chilean capital, Santiago, and stretches for another 1,200 miles (1,930km) all the way to Tierra del Fuego, the "land of fire" so accurately described by Lucas Bridges as "the uttermost part of the Earth." [1] Even now, the region remains sparsely inhabited, and at its lonely heart lies the island of Chiloé: rain-soaked and rainbow-strewn, matted with untamed virgin forest and possessed of a distinct and interesting history. First visited by Europeans in 1567, Chiloé was long known for piracy and privateering. In the 19th century, when Latin America revolted against imperial rule, the island remained loyal to Spain. And in 1880, a little more than half a century after it was finally incorporated into Chile, it was also the scene of a remarkable trial – the last significant witch trial, probably, anywhere in the world.



**CHATWIN STUMBLED UPON THE STORY OF A SECT OF MALE WITCHES ON THE ISLAND OF CHILOÉ**

## WARLOCKS AND MONSTERS

Who were they, these sorcerers hauled before a court for casting spells in an industrial age? According to the traveller Bruce Chatwin, who stumbled upon traces of their story in the 1970s, they belonged to a "sect of male witches" that existed "for the purpose of hurting people." [2] According to their own statements, made during the trial of 1880, they ran protection rackets on the island, disposing of their enemies by poisoning or, worse, by *sajaduras*: magically inflicted "profound slashes." But since the same men also claimed to belong to a group called *La Recta Provincia* – a phrase that may be loosely translated as "The Righteous Province" – and styled themselves members of the *Mayoria*, the "Majority," an alternative interpretation may also be advanced. Perhaps these witches were actually representatives of a strange sort of alternative government, an indigenous society that offered justice of a perverted kind to Indians living under the rule of a white elite. Perhaps they were more shamans than sorcerers.

The most important of the warlocks brought to court in 1880 was a Chilote farmer by the name of Mateo Coñuecar. He was then 70 years old, and by his own admission had been a member of the Righteous Province for more than two decades. According to Coñuecar's testimony, the society was an important power on the

LEFT: Travel writer Bruce Chatwin, who came across the story of the witches. **FACING PAGE:** The island of Chiloé – "rain-soaked and rainbow-strewn, matted with untamed virgin forest..."





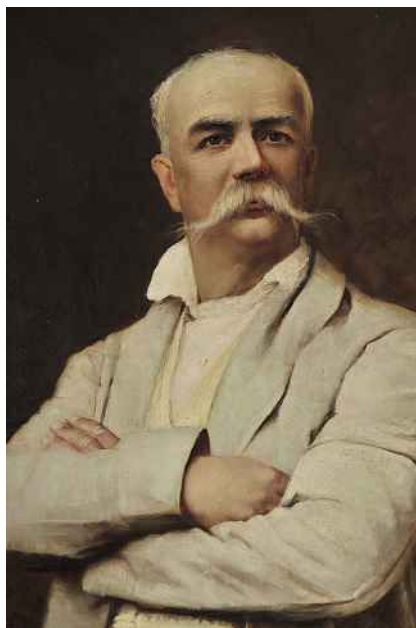


island, with numerous members, an elaborate hierarchy of “kings” and “viceroys” – and a headquarters located in a vast cavern, 40 or more yards long, whose secret entrance had been cleverly concealed in the side of a ravine. This cave (which Chilote tradition asserts was lit by torches burning human fat) was hidden somewhere outside the little coastal village of Quicavi, and was – Coñuecar and other witnesses swore – home to a pair of monsters that guarded the society’s most treasured possessions: an ancient leather book of magic and a bowl that, filled with water, allowed secrets to be seen.

Coñuecar’s testimony, which may be found lodged among the papers of the Chilean historian Benjamín Vicuña McKenna, includes this remarkable recollection of his first visit to the cave:

*Twenty years ago, when José Mariman was king, he was ordered to go to the cave with meat for some animals that lived inside. He complied with the order, and took them the meat of a kid he had slaughtered. Mariman went with him, and when they reached the cave, he started dancing about like a sorcerer, and quickly opened the entryway. This was covered over with a layer of earth (and grass to keep it hidden), and under this there was a piece of metal... the ‘alchemy key.’ He used this to open the entryway, and was then faced with two completely disfigured beings which burst out of the gloom and rushed towards him. One looked like a goat, for it dragged itself along on four legs, and the other was a naked man, with a completely white beard and hair down to his waist.*

It is possible, from other records of the Righteous Province, to learn more about the hideous creatures that Coñuecar swore



he had encountered in 1860. The goat-like monster was the *chivato*, a deformed mute covered in piggish bristles. The other – and by far the more dangerous – of the cave’s twin denizens was the *invunche* or *imbunche*. Like the *chivato*, it had once been a human baby, and had been kidnapped in infancy. Chatwin describes what happened to the baby next:

*When the Sect needs a new Invunche, the Council of the Cave orders a Member to steal a boy child from six months to a year old. The Deformer, a permanent resident of the Cave, starts work at once. He disjoints the arms and legs and the hands and feet. Then begins the delicate task of altering the position of the head. Day after day, and for hours at a stretch, he twists the head with a tourniquet until it*

*has rotated through an angle of 180 degrees, that is until the child can look straight down the line of its own vertebrae. There remains one last operation, for which another specialist is needed. At full Moon, the child is laid on a work-bench, lashed down with its head covered in a bag. The specialist cuts a deep incision under the right shoulder blade. Into the hole he inserts the right arm and sews up the wound with thread taken from the neck of a ewe. When it has healed the Invunche is complete.*

Naked, fed principally on human flesh, and confined below ground, neither the *chivato* nor the *invunche* received any sort of education; indeed it was said that neither ever acquired human speech in all the years they served what Chatwin calls the Committee of the Cave. Nevertheless, he concludes, “over the years, [the *invunche*] does develop a working knowledge of the Committee’s procedure and can instruct novices with harsh and guttural cries.”

### THE RIGHTEOUS PROVINCE

It would be unwise, of course, to accept at face value the testimony given at any witch trial – not least evidence that concerns the existence of a hidden cave that a week-long search, conducted in the spring of 1880, failed utterly to uncover, and that was extracted under who knows what sort of duress. Yet it is as well to concede that, whatever the Righteous Province actually was, the society does seem to have existed in some form, and that many Chilotes regarded its members as fearsome enemies possessed of genuinely supernatural powers.

Accounts dating to the 19th century tell of the regular collection of protection money on Chiloé – what Ovidio Lagos describes as “an annual tribute” demanded of “practically all villagers, to ensure they would have no



TOP: The papers of the Chilean historian Benjamín Vicuña McKenna contain a remarkable account of a visit to the witches’ cave. ABOVE: The Traiguén River, in which the initiates of Chiloé’s sect of witches were said to wash off the effects of the Christian baptism, bathing in the freezing waters for 15 successive nights.





ABOVE: A statue of a flesh-eating *invunche* – a kidnapped infant turned into a deformed monster that would serve the Committee of the Cave and carry out the will of its sorcerer members.

accidents during the night”. These make it clear that islanders who resisted these demands for payment could expect to have their crops destroyed and their sheep killed – by sorcery, it was believed, for the men of the *Mayoría* were believed to possess a pair of magical stones that gave them the power to curse their enemies. The records of the trial of 1880-81 make it clear that the proceedings had their origins in a rash of suspicious poisonings that had claimed numerous victims over the years.

Whether one takes literally the many supernatural claims that litter the trial transcripts, though, is a very different matter. The members of the Righteous Province claimed, for example, to possess the ability to fly, using a special word – *arrealhue* – as they leapt into the air, and wearing a magical waistcoat, known as the *macuñ*, that gave them the power to defy gravity. Each novice, when he joined the sect, was expected to fashion his own waistcoat; Chatwin reports that it was done by digging up and flaying a recently interred Christian corpse, though other sources say the waistcoat was made from the skin of a virgin girl or a dead sorcerer. Once dried and cured, the skin was sewn into a loose garment, and Chatwin adds the detail that “the human grease remaining in the skin gives off a soft phosphorescence, which lights the member’s nocturnal expeditions.”

Nor were the *chivato* and the *invunche* the only supernatural beings thought to be under the control of the Righteous Province. The prisoners who testified in 1880 admitted that, on joining the society, each warlock was given a small, live lizard, which he wore strapped to his head with a bandana so that it was next to the skin. It was a magical creature from which the novice might imbibe all sorts of forbidden knowledge – not least how to transform himself into an animal and how to open locked doors. Among the islanders, initiates were also believed to use seahorses to convey them to a magical vessel owned by the society and known as the *Caleuche* – a word that means “shapeshifter” in the local language. The *Caleuche* was a brightly lit ghost ship that could travel underwater and surfaced in remote bays to unload contraband cargoes carried for the island’s merchants, a trade that was one of the chief sources of the warlocks’ wealth. This tradition has outlived the warlocks of the Righteous Province, and even today, many Chilotes firmly believe that the *Caleuche* still haunts their coast, harvesting the souls of drowned sailors.

When the witches needed spies and messengers, they drew on still other resources. The society was widely believed to use adolescent girls, who were stripped naked and forcibly fed a drink made of wolf-oil and the juice of the *natri*, a fruit found

only on Chiloé. This potion was, supposedly, so noxious that it made them vomit up their own intestines. Thus lightened, the girls turned into large, long-legged birds, resembling rooks, whose caws, Lagos says, “are the most unpleasant sounds ever to fall on a human ear.” When their mission was completed, the birds returned at daybreak to the spot where the potion had been drunk to re-ingest their entrails, and once again they became human.

The power to perform such spells was never conferred lightly, and the testimonies collected in 1880-81 suggest that the society developed elaborate initiation ceremonies to test would-be witches. Initiates were first required to wash away all traces of their baptism by bathing in freezing waters of the Traiguén River on 15 consecutive nights. They might then be ordered to murder a close relative or friend to prove that they had cleansed themselves of human sentiment (these murders, for some unstated reason, were to take place on Tuesdays) before running three times round the island naked, calling to the Devil. Chatwin, eccentric as ever, adds two further details that do not appear in the surviving trial transcripts: that the novice was required to catch, without fumbling, a skull thrown to him from the crown of a tricorne hat, and that while standing naked in the freezing river, prospective members were “allowed a little toast.”

It was only when these tests had been completed that the initiate would be admitted to the cave at Quicavi, shown the secret book of magic, and allowed to meet the elders who ran the Righteous Province. (Lagos suggests that the word *mayoría* refers to these elders – *mayors* – rather than to the proportion of Chiloé’s Indian population.) There he received instruction in the strict code that governed members, including prohibitions on theft, rape and eating salt. It was claimed that these ceremonies concluded with a great feast in which the chief dish was the roasted flesh of human babies.

#### MAGIC AND MURDER

Thus far, perhaps, the details uncovered in 1880 are of value chiefly to folklorists. The organisation of the Righteous Province, though, is of interest to historians and anthropologists, for it consisted of an elaborate hierarchy whose titles seem to have been deliberately chosen to ape the established government. Chiloé was, for example, divided into two kingdoms, each with its own native ruler – the King of Payos, who held the higher rank, and the King of Quicavi. Below them came a number of queens, viceroys and finally *reparadores* (“repairmen”), who were healers and concocters of herbal medicines. Each ruler had his own territory, to which the society gave a name associated with the old Spanish empire – Lima, Buenos Aires, Santiago. Perhaps, Lagos suggests, it did this in the belief that “this change would not only encourage secrecy, but also magically recreate a geography.”

The fine detail of the trial transcripts



suggests that an intriguing marriage had taken place between local traditions and Christian belief. Chiloé was, and is, inhabited largely by the Mapuche, an indigenous people, noted for their *machis* (shamans), who had long resisted the rule of Spain. Gonzalo Rojas Flores, with his background in anthropology, suggests that the Righteous Province “succeeded in establishing deep ties to rural communities, providing solutions to needs the Chilean State could not satisfy.” This same model, of course, has driven the emergence of secret societies such as the Mafia in many different jurisdictions. It helps to explain why the *Mayoría* had an official known as the “Judge Fixer,” and why – laced though they were with magical trappings – the most important of its activities revolved around its attempts to compel obedience from poor local farmers.

Several of the warlocks who testified in 1880 expressed regret at the way their society had changed in recent years, becoming ever more prey to personal vendettas. Both Mateo Coñuecar and José Aro, a Mapuche carpenter who was his co-defendant, shed interesting light on these attempts to exercise power. According to Aro, he was ordered to kill a couple, Francesco and Maria Cardenas, who had fallen out with Coñuecar. He invited the pair for a drink and slipped a preparation of arsenic into their cups when he served them; when the couple failed to notice anything, he attributed his success to the fact that his potion had been prepared



according to a magical recipe. According to Coñuecar, when an islander named Juana Carimonei came to him to complain that her husband had been seduced by another woman, he arranged the murder of her rival in exchange for a payment of four yards of calico.

The idea that the Mapuche still aspired to govern themselves years after the

## HE INVITED THE PAIR FOR A DRINK AND SLIPPED ARSENIC INTO THEIR CUPS AS HE SERVED THEM

Spanish conquest is not especially far-fetched; Spanish rule was only lightly felt in Chiloé, and representatives of the central government were rarely encountered outside the island’s two main towns, Castro and Ancud. This vacuum in authority no doubt helps to explain why much of the evidence collected in 1880 related to struggles for power within the Righteous Province itself. These had apparently been going on for decades; writing in June 1880, a columnist for a newspaper published in Ancud recalled the details of a murder inquiry that had taken place in 1849 when one Domingo Nahuelquin – who as King of Payos was in theory the supreme leader of the sect – had disappeared without a trace. Nahuelquin’s wife alleged that he had been killed on the orders of the King of Quicavi, the same José Mariman who a few years later took Mateo Coñuecar to meet the *invunche*, and that Mariman had thereby seized control of their society. The mystery of Nahuelquin’s disappearance was never formally resolved, since Mariman, it seems, had his rival and several of his supporters dropped into the sea with large rocks chained around their necks.

It may be asked why, if the existence of the Righteous Province had been known to the Chilean authorities for more than 30 years, the government chose 1880 to clamp down on the Mapuche and their murderous sect of witches. The answer, so far as can now be ascertained, has to do with shifting circumstances, for in 1880 Chile was in crisis,



TOP: A photo purporting to show members of Chiloé’s murderous society of warlocks. ABOVE: Mapuche *machis* – healers and shamans – photographed in 1903.





ABOVE: Stilt houses on Chiloé.

fighting Peru and Bolivia in a brutal four-year conflict known as the War of the Pacific. As a result, the great bulk of the country's armed forces were committed far to the north – a situation that Chile's old rival, Argentina, was quick to take advantage of. The Argentines chose 1880 to revive a number of claims they had to land along their border, and this threat was keenly felt on the western side of the Andes until it was defused by the 1881 *Tratado de Límites* – a treaty that continues to determine the boundary between the countries. Chiloé's witch trial is probably best understood as a product of these tensions; certainly the first published references to the Righteous Province appear in decrees ordering the round-up of army deserters that were issued by the island's governor, Louis Rodríguez Martiniano.

If this interpretation is correct, the persecution of the Righteous Province grew out of official concerns that the native Chilotes who were sheltering indigenous deserters from the Chilean army might also be sheltering Mapuche sorcerers. The pursuit of the deserters seems to have turned up evidence against the *Mayoría*. Flores points out that Rodríguez proclaimed only one month later that: "sorcerers and healers have for many years formed a partnership that has produced misery and death for whole families."

The governor did not believe in magical powers, and found it easy to convince himself that the men of the Righteous Province were nothing more than "thieves and murderers". One hundred or so members of the society were rounded up, and if their interrogation revealed that at least a third of them were harmless native "healers," it also produced evidence of a number of murders and

– perhaps still more damagingly – proof that other members of the group believed themselves to represent a legitimate native government.

It is not, perhaps, surprising in the circumstances that the Chilean authorities went to considerable lengths to destroy the power of Chiloé's sorcerers. Two members of the Righteous Province were sentenced to serve 15-year terms for manslaughter, and 10 more were convicted of membership in an "unlawful society". The old warlock Mateo Coñuecar was sent to prison for three years, and his brother, Domingo, for a year and a half. Not, it should be noted, on charges of witchcraft – Chile, in 1880, had long ceased to believe in such a thing – but as racketeers and murderers who had subjected their island to reign of terror for the best part of a century.

The governor's triumph was short-lived; the dubious testimony of the prisoners aside, it proved all but impossible to uncover credible evidence that the Righteous Province had wielded real influence in Chiloé, much less that its members killed by magic or could fly. The majority of the sentences imposed in 1881 were overturned on appeal. But on Chiloé the imprisonment of many of its leaders was widely believed to have finished the Righteous Province off for good, and no conclusive trace of any such organisation has been found on the island since.

Still, several mysteries remained when the verdicts were handed down. Had every member of the *Mayoría* really been accounted for? Had the society actually been headquartered in a hidden cave? If so, what happened to its ancient leather book of spells?

And what became of the *invunche*? **FT**

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**MIKE DASH** is a longtime member of the Gang of Fort. He was FT's publisher for some years, as well as a regular contributor, and is the acclaimed author of the books *Tulipomania*, *Batavia's Graveyard*, *Thug*, *Satan's Circus* and *The First Family*.

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# AMERICAN PSYCHOS 2 RAPING RONALD REAGAN

As the US prepares to choose a new leader in 2016's presidential elections, SD TUCKER profiles some other recent American candidates for high office who almost make Donald Trump sound normal... well, almost.



LEFT: Ronald Reagan on the presidential campaign trail in 1979. BELOW: The first edition of JG Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition*.

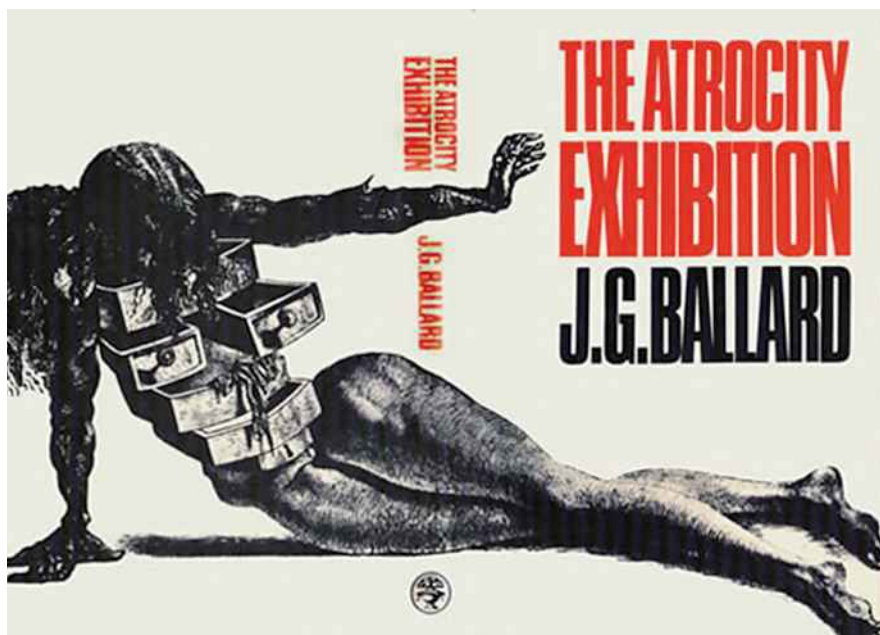
– advice, according to MacLaine, that he accepted.<sup>1</sup>

Reagan's false-memories, meanwhile, were inextricably mixed up with his old Hollywood film career. Brass Bancroft, Secret Agent (whom Reagan once played), seems to have been particularly enamoured with the 1944 war-movie *A Wing and a Prayer*, publicly recalling how he had personally given a medal to its entirely fictional hero for his bravery. Even weirder, Reagan also claimed to have been present at the liberation of the Nazi concentration-camps – when in fact he had been stationed back home in California with the USAAF's First Motion Picture Unit, where he had spent several weeks helping process genuine footage of Nazi atrocities for use in newsreels. Apparently the task made such an impression on Reagan that, as the years passed, he began utterly to confuse his own life with one he had simply seen depicted on screen. Thank God he never saw

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

**T**he slurs and political scandals we looked at last month were alarming enough, but are as nothing compared to the numerous false allegations that have been made down the years against the 40th President of the United States, Ronald Reagan... sometimes even by himself. Reagan was a highly fortunate President. Not only did he claim to have seen UFOs, he also suffered from false-memory syndrome (which makes you wonder what he would have 'remembered' under hypnosis had John Mack ever got his hands on him).

Maybe Ron would have recalled a strange event that New-Age Hollywood actress Shirley MacLaine described to newspapers in 2012. According to MacLaine, Reagan only switched careers from acting to politics after encountering an alien while on the way to a party attended by the *I Love Lucy* star Lucille Ball back in the 1950s. Supposedly, a saucer landed, Reagan pulled over in his car, and an ET advised the star to become a politician





*Dr Strangelove.*<sup>2</sup>

It has often been argued that Reagan was himself a kind of myth, a sort of jobbing actor waiting to fill any role you desired him to. This was the view of the English novelist JG Ballard, who was accidentally responsible for spreading the most bizarre Reagan-related rumour of all – namely, that large numbers of the American public would like to forcibly sodomise him following a car-crash. Ballard’s experimental 1970 anti-novel *The Atrocity Exhibition* features, among many other ingenious obscenities, discussion of the idea that there was some unacknowledged sexual component to the way the public consumed car-crashes through the media – think of the way both smashes and sex involve the collision of bodies. Towards the end, the book eschews narrative altogether and becomes a series of fake psychological and medical reports, including one very, very strange one called *Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan*, which purports to be a discussion of the suppressed politico-sexual desires of a focus-group of mentally disturbed potential voters, many of whom are in the final stages of syphilis.

Ballard wrote the piece in 1967, when Reagan, as the newly elected Governor of California, was getting a lot of airtime. To Ballard, Reagan exploited his thespian skills in order to dupe viewers into believing he was something he was not: “Reagan used the smooth, teleprompter-perfect tones of the TV auto-salesman to project a political message that was absolutely the reverse of bland and reassuring. A complete discontinuity existed between Reagan’s manner and body language on the one hand, and his scarily simplistic far-right message on the other. Above all, it struck me that Reagan was the first politician to exploit the fact that his TV audience would not be listening too carefully, if at all, to what he was saying, and indeed might well assume from his manner and presentation that he was saying the exact opposite of the words actually emerging from his mouth.”

But what if, Ballard suggested, rather than merely political desires, viewers were also projecting their secret *sexual* desires onto their new, media-literate politicians too? The psychologists in Ballard’s fake survey appear to have uncovered the ‘fact’ that all elected leaders have faces which subconsciously reflect the *zeitgeist* of their times – by virtue of their hidden resemblance to male genitalia. If you look at former President Lyndon B Johnson, for instance, you will notice his face is “clearly genital in



LEFT: JG Ballard at home in Shepperton, 1988. BELOW: The 1968 Unicorn Bookshop printing of the author’s experimental story.

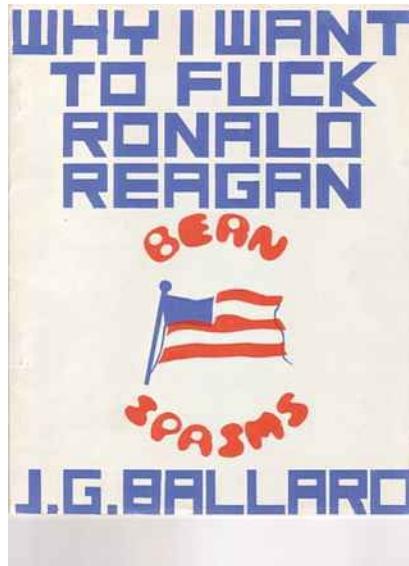
significant appearance” with the end of his nose resembling the tip of a flabby, drooping penis, and his jowly jaw a baggy, age-worn scrotum. Johnson came to power during the depressing period following JFK’s death (JFK’s face represented a circumcised penis, thus presumably showing him as young, open and fresh, although also horribly exposed), and thus had the correct disheartening facial-genitalia to fit the mournful public mood. Now times were improving, however, and amongst the focus group Reagan’s face “was uniformly perceived as a penile erection”, pointing towards a more vigorous and hopeful future.

However, there were inconsistencies among the findings. Whilst 65 per cent of male respondents made “positive connections” between Reagan’s hairstyle and their own pubic hair, this did not necessarily correlate with the fact that, when asked to imagine the best way to rape Reagan following

an imaginary car-crash, 82 per cent of voters expressed desire to enjoy a “massive rear-end collision” with the then-Governor, ideally involving “expressed faecal matter and rectal hæmorrhages”. (One shudders to think what else Ballard would have invented at this point had he known Reagan’s pet name for his wife Nancy was ‘Mommie Poo Pants’ and hers for him ‘Daddie Poo Pants’.) Apparently, thinking of vaginal sex with an imaginary Reagan proved “uniformly disappointing”, as did the idea of enjoying congress with his armpit, bellybutton, eyes or ears. Only visualising anal penetration made voters consistently satisfied, leading to the conclusion that Reagan’s “profound anality... may be expected to dominate the United States in the coming years”. The overall conclusion was that Reagan had a wholly “non-functional character” and thus stood merely as a kind of ink-blot, in which each individual saw whatever it was they wanted to see – in this case, something very disturbing indeed.

As may be expected, this insane daydream got Ballard into all kinds of trouble. In 1970, his US publisher, Doubleday, pulped the whole first print-run of the book after its CEO, who knew Reagan, flicked idly through an advance-copy one day and saw what was in it. In 1968, the American poet Bill Butler, who ran Brighton’s Unicorn Bookshop, had published the Reagan piece as a separate

## THIS INSANE DAYDREAM GOT BALLARD INTO ALL SORTS OF TROUBLE





WESLEY / KEYSTONE / GETTY IMAGES



ABOVE LEFT: A wrecked American Pontiac on show at 'The Atrocity Exhibition' mounted by Ballard and sponsored by the Institute for Research in Art and Technology, Robert Street, London, 1 April 1970. ABOVE RIGHT: Jordan D Haskins, whose love of 'cranking' seems living proof that Ballard's 'autoerotic' fantasies have jumped from the printed page.

booklet, and was hauled into court to face obscenity charges for his pains. Much more bizarre, however, were events at the 1980 Republican Convention in Detroit, at which Reagan won the Party's nomination to run for President in that year's election. Here, delegates found a strange paper being distributed, on genuine Republican stationery, headed 'Official Republican 1980 Presidential Survey'. It was Ballard's fake report, shorn of its title and attribution. Some ex-Situationist pranksters had printed hundreds of copies and given them away to make mischief. The joke worked splendidly; despite its overwhelmingly absurd subject matter, those who read it, while deeply confused, believed it was real. In Ballard's own words: "It was accepted for what it resembled, a psychological position-paper on the candidate's subliminal appeal, commissioned from some maverick think-tank."<sup>3</sup>

### CRANKING ONE OUT

Nowadays, such is Reagan's sainted status, it is almost obligatory for new Republican candidates to proclaim how influenced by him they are; but only one man – Jordan D Haskins, who stood for election to Michigan's District House in 2014 – appears to have been inspired not by the real Reagan, but by Ballard's highly-sexualised, automobile-related fantasy-version. Aged only 24, Haskins outlined his philosophy and life-story in a truly touching speech to reporters: "I have dreams," he said, "and I want to make a difference. I want to be the conservative candidate that says red-blooded American conservatism is all about grit, hard work, loyalty and traditional family values." So far, so Ronnie. But then, Ballard kicked in. "Why should my youthful indiscretions prevent me getting my message

across, just because I used to break into cars, disconnect the ignition wires, start the engine and masturbate as the wires sparked and snapped? I was just a lonely, angry kid at the time".

Haskins felt obliged to address this issue in his speech, as police-reports had surfaced detailing his prior convictions for breaking into empty squad cars and pest-control trucks, joyriding them, then tossing himself off to a climax after removing the sparkplugs. Apparently, the niche hobby is known as 'cranking', and Haskins became obsessed with it after viewing specialist websites. "The only way I can explain my youthful indiscretions is that I had no friends at the time," Haskins explained, before, unbelievably, going on to claim that his perversions actually *qualified* him to hold public office. Seeing that he had been sentenced to prison in 2011, Haskins considered that his intimate familiarity with the criminal justice system gave him special insights into issues of law and order, and he proposed a scheme to help former inmates find gainful employment after release. Furthermore, seeing as most candidates

these days were "whitewashed" and bland, with all their rough edges smoothed down, Haskins opined that his backstory was actually a highly compelling one that would make him stand out from the faceless political crowd. It appears that most voters disagreed with this assessment, however, and Haskins later withdrew his candidacy.<sup>4</sup>

Still, never mind, Jordan. If all else fails, *Top Gear's* still in need of new presenters. Due to his knack of forecasting future trends, JG Ballard was often dubbed 'The Sage of Shepperton', after the town where he lived. Perhaps we can chalk this sorry tale up as yet another success for Ballard's amazing predictive powers. **FT**

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**SD TUCKER** is a regular contributor to FT whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. His *Great British Eccentrics* is available now from Amberley Publishing.

### NOTES

- 1 [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2205360/Screen-legend-Shirley-MacLaine-says-Ronald-Reagan-spotted-UFO-1950s-alien-told-switch-careers.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2205360/Screen-legend-Shirley-MacLaine-says-Ronald-Reagan-spotted-UFO-1950s-alien-told-switch-careers.html); [www.presidentialufo.com/ronald-reagan/99-reagan-ufo-story](http://www.presidentialufo.com/ronald-reagan/99-reagan-ufo-story)
- 2 Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World*, 1997, Ballantine Books, p140; [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/)

[content/article/2011/02/04/AR2011020403106html](http://content/article/2011/02/04/AR2011020403106html)

- 3 JG Ballard, *The Atrocity Exhibition (Annotated Edition)*, 2014, 4<sup>th</sup> Estate, pp165-170; John Baxter, *The Inner Man: The Life of JG Ballard*, 2011, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pp181-184, 210; Jeanette Baxter, *JG Ballard's Surrealist Imagination*, 2009, Ashgate, pp97-98; John Baxter in his biography of Ballard says that Doubleday actually pulped the book because the

firm's head was a Democrat who objected to a different chapter relating to the proposed assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy, but the version given above is Ballard's own account.

- 4 *Private Eye* #1372, citing *Michigan Local News*, 27 June 2014; [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2672678/GOP-state-House-candidate-24-trying-past-sex-fetish-convictions-caught-pleasuring-inside-cop-cars-cranking-engine.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2672678/GOP-state-House-candidate-24-trying-past-sex-fetish-convictions-caught-pleasuring-inside-cop-cars-cranking-engine.html)



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## The Automatic Leprechaun

RYAN SHIRLOW shares an unusual first-hand experience of 'mass hysteria' – just in time for St Patrick's Day...



RYAN SHIRLOW is a Northern Irish writer and punk musician, currently working undercover as a civil servant, and father of two. His debut novel *Doubt* is available on Amazon or via [www.ryanshirlow.com](http://www.ryanshirlow.com)

I'd like to tell you a personal story. It's one that I feel has some relevance to the subject of mass hysteria, in particular laughing hysterias in schools and religious institutions; and it has a particular Irish twist to it.

Campbell College is an all-boys' school in Belfast, still known as a 'grammar' school in Northern Ireland, and combines a fearsome reputation for rugby with a Hogwarts style atmosphere of mystery and history.<sup>1</sup>

As a young 'day boy' I displayed no aptitude whatsoever for any of the traditional sporting activities. I was also useless at chess, couldn't sing, and was a serious liability in the Combined Cadet Force; so my options for after-school clubs were rather limited. Somehow I fell into membership of the Scripture Union, a religious society that conducted harmless sing-a-longs and wholesome Bible study, and occasionally terrified us with video nasties of Hell and damnation.

It was on one of their annual weekend camps in the mid-1990s that my friends and I were to inadvertently encounter, or to create, a discarnate force we dubbed the Automatic Leprechaun.

The camp was held at a youth hostel near the south east coast of County Down called Mullartown House. I recall a lovely country property with an extended dormitory and grassy grounds that still play host to scouts, youth groups and Christian events.<sup>2</sup>

On the first night, we had a break from Jesus and watched the strictly non-canonical *Wayne's World 2*,<sup>3</sup> the only portion of which I can remember is the short scene in which Wayne torments Garth by shining a torch under his chin and screeching: "I'm the leprechaun!"



ERIC JONES / CREATIVE COMMONS

### Sing-a-longs, Bible study and videos of Hell and damnation

Later, in the dormitory, with our sleeping bags and torches, there were many tiresome re-enactments. As we were on a single-sex religious retreat in the Ulster countryside, I'm afraid there was precious little else to do other than teenage goofing around.

At some point, long after we were supposed to be asleep, one of the boys was still complaining about his ingrowing toenail, and another – Keith – offered to shine his torch at the offending foot so he could paint on the foul anti-septic ointment that his mother had given him. Flicking the torch on and off, Keith announced to no one in particular: "I'm an *automatic leprechaun!*" The conversation continued for a few seconds. Then I did

ABOVE: Mullartown House, Annalong, a venues for Christian camps for many years.

FACING PAGE: The scene from the film *Wayne's World 2* that appears to have sparked the leprechaun hysteria.

a double-take: "Keith, you're a... *what did you say?*"

There was something instantly wonderful about this juxtaposition of words – the mechanical and the mystical, the modern and the arcane. It also particularly suited Keith, who had an impish grin and shock of gingery hair. Keith laughed, and claimed it was a slip of the tongue.

But the Automatic Leprechaun had summoned himself into being, and much childish laughter and repetition of our torch based antics followed. Despite (or perhaps because of) several angry visits from the teachers, we could not settle down and that night we got very little sleep.

The next morning at breakfast our relentless giggling tormented the older, more serious boys, who were supposed to be keeping order. Their stern disapproval only made it harder to control our behaviour. The game quickly developed that we would try and trick one of these prefects, or even a teacher, into saying the word "automatic". Then someone, usually Keith, would shout "Automatic Leprechaun!" before everyone who



was in on the joke would roll around in hysterics, leaving the bemused 'victim' none the wiser as to what on earth was going on.

"Sir, what type of car do you drive? Is it an... *automatic*?" And so on... and so on... seemingly without end – and indeed, at this remove, without any element that an adult might recognise as humour.

Following our lead, the younger children from another dormitory asked us what was going on. Soon they joined in, sharing the opportunity for nonsensical silliness at the expense of authority figures. And so leprechaun mania consumed the whole of Saturday morning and continued into lunchtime. A couple of the more imaginative, keen to curry our favour, developed a whole background mythos to the Automatic Leprechaun and invented adventures for him now mercifully lost in the mists of my memory.

Perhaps for us, as Protestant city boys, there was something intrinsically fascinating in the 'other' nature of the leprechaun; something rural, ancient and well... Irish, which was a culture we were *not* encouraged to identify with at that time. Which made it all the more forbidden and exciting.

By the afternoon, the teachers were getting seriously irritated, especially as leprechaun madness was disrupting their planned Bible lessons and, crucially, children were sniggering during prayers. And that was when things started to get weird.

By evening the original joke had run out of steam, our brains robbed of serotonin by close to 24 hours of pointless laughter. But the Automatic Leprechaun refused to leave us. Instead, his grip on our bored and infantile minds only tightened and evolved into a strange compulsive desire to mumble his name, just within earshot of the teachers. Boys passing in the corridor would tense up, waiting for the inevitable. "Automatic," one would mutter, joylessly. "Automatic Leprechaun," the other would respond, completing the ritual, without laughter,

and seemingly without free will.

As the serious religious content of the weekend had by now been derailed, doubts began to circulate as to who or what might be behind the Automatic Leprechaun. Was the Satanic adversary attacking our gathering, distracting and misdirecting God's children? Was he filling our minds with inane and involuntary thoughts to block out Christ? Some of the more impressionable young children became justifiably frightened. We were all painfully aware of the then highly controversial 'Toronto Blessing', which involved laughing and speaking in tongues (FT77:24-28, 310:44-49) and which had been condemned in some of our conservative religious circles. Many of the children from these backgrounds in Northern Ireland had been brought up to believe in the literal reality of the Devil and demonic activity. Why could we not stop thinking about the leprechaun?

There was a gentle, but firm clampdown on mentioning his name. Of course, as soon as we were *trying not to think of the leprechaun*, he consumed our every thought. His victory was complete. The boys, now silent, all knew what everyone else in the room was thinking. We may have been quiet, but not a word of the lesson could be heard above the infernal, internal chanting. Automatic. Automatic Leprechaun.

Many years later I had the misfortune to watch the original *Leprechaun* film that *Wayne's World* had lampooned, and it was interesting to note that the leprechaun was himself the victim of strange compulsions. In several scenes, characters are able to escape from the leprechaun by throwing shoes, which he is then compelled to pick up and polish.<sup>4</sup>

This strange little experience is perhaps informative as part of the long history of hysterias that have afflicted schools and religious

institutions, and which are regularly documented in *Fortean Times*. Perhaps the most famous of these was the 1962 Tanganyika laughing epidemic in Tanzania that engulfed a mission-run boarding school, although that went on to spread across several schools and lasted 18 months (see FT229:46-50). Hysteria of a different kind informs the high concept behind the recent Maisie Williams film set in an equally 'strict' girls school: "The Falling" (reviewed FT327:64).

Poltergeist activity, too, is typically associated with teenagers. We can speculate about whether the pubescent mind is particularly vulnerable or attractive to spiritual forces – or more simply prone to intense emotion and creative flights of fancy, along with a healthy disrespect for authority. Perhaps such a mischievous, folkloric force as the leprechaun can encompass both explanations.

Finally, on the Sunday, our camp drew to a close.

At the last meeting, one of the older boys, in a lame attempt by authority to co-opt and dismiss the whole horrible craze, presented the SU leader with a leprechaun T-shirt. It is telling that not one of the affected children laughed. In fact, I can remember feeling nauseous and uncomfortable, glancing around at the pale faces of those who, by that point, could not bear to look upon the leprechaun's dread visage.

Back at school, we soon moved on to the next obsession, and the Automatic Leprechaun was swiftly forgotten. In fact, for something that had so utterly consumed us, the forgetting was extraordinarily quick and absolute. Deliberate even. When, a week or so later I laughed a loud "Automatic!" at the boy with the ingrowing toenail, his reaction was so overwhelmingly aggressive that I refrained from trying to kick-start the joke ever again.

Perhaps I should have realised that we had left the leprechaun behind in his Irish country domain. Perhaps he still resides there, stalking the minds of the devout and upstanding young, impishly distracting them from prayer and righteous thought. **FT**

#### NOTES

1 [www.campbellcollege.co.uk/](http://www.campbellcollege.co.uk/)

2 [www.mullartowncamp.org/](http://www.mullartowncamp.org/)

3 This dates the experience to after 1993, although as the film was either on TV or a rented VHS, 1995/1996 seems most probable.

4 My favourite leprechaun story is the one in which the hero catches, tricks or rescues a leprechaun who then owes him a favour. Compelled to reveal the location of his pot of gold by tying a ribbon around the tree where it is buried, the hero arrives the next morning to find the entire forest has been bedecked with golden ribbons. There remains a lesson here for our so-called Information Age.



# North Suffolk's mystery mutant moggy

MATT SALUSBURY is undaunted by a big cat setback – after all, it was just one of many examples from the county



**MATT SALUSBURY** is editor of English language teaching industry newspaper *EL Gazette* and the author of *Pygmy Elephants*. His next book, *Mystery Animals of the British Isles: Suffolk*, is imminent.

I was recently in a state of tense excitement over some CCTV footage of an animal briefly known as the “North Suffolk mystery mutant moggy”. Last September, a call came from a free-range poultry farmer in a secret location in North Suffolk who told me his CCTV security camera had captured what looked like a British big cat. (East Anglian agriculturalists default to the “anonymous” setting for anything to do with big cats.)

My source and I convinced ourselves we’d seen a young puma, or possibly a long-legged lynx or serval. The 18 seconds of monochrome footage that so vexed us begins with a cat-like animal walking towards a farm gate on a dark night, its eyes showing up as two huge white blobs in infrared. Then it walks towards a building just out of the frame, at which point it triggers the motion-sensor security light and more detail becomes visible. The mystery cat then strolls casually out of shot.

It’s an odd-looking cat – long-limbed and long-bodied, with a small head, a relatively short tail and a pointy chin. It’s hard to make sense of the low-resolution video, recorded as it was on a desktop PC, shot mostly in infrared darkness. Sometimes the mystery cat has the appearance of a stripped-down, whippet-like puma. In a couple of frames it appears to have spots. In one frame we thought we saw long, pointed, lynx-like ears. It was as if the animal were shape-shifting from a puma to a spotted lynx; perhaps Merrily Harpur was right about British big cats being phantoms or “daimons” after all (see FT\*\*:\*\*).

But most of this “data” is just artefacts thrown up by a low-resolution camera in low light. More problematic was the background in the footage – a featureless tarmacked yard, with nothing giving any sense of scale except for a black rubber doormat in front of a just-out-of-shot door. In the footage, our cat briefly walks alongside the mat, which we measured at just over 1.83 metres long.

I visited the scene with the farmer,

taking measurements and estimating how close to the doormat our mystery cat had passed. Based on instructions shouted to each other through an open door into the yard while watching it live on the farm office’s CCTV monitor, we set up crude markers for the approximate distance from the edge of the rubber doormat to where the cat had walked. Some rough-and-ready maths produced a tentative estimate of a mystery cat just under a metre long, plus the tail – smallish puma-sized. We realised our calculations were not terribly scientific and that further study was needed.

Centre for Fortean Zoology director Jonathan Downes advised caution, recalling red faces over some previous footage that turned out not to be a big cat after all. Ten big cat experts in the pub after a British Big Cat Research gathering concluded our footage was more likely a “mutant moggy” than our hypothetical young puma. But even the prospect of a feral domestic cat close to a metre long was exciting!

Mark Fletcher, an award-winning wildlife filmmaker who has filmed North American pumas in the wild, kindly offered to do some “scaling” work for us, overlaying images from the footage on something that could give an idea of scale. First we needed to return

to the location shown on CCTV with measuring poles and some big cat cut-outs positioned at various points in the yard for comparison.

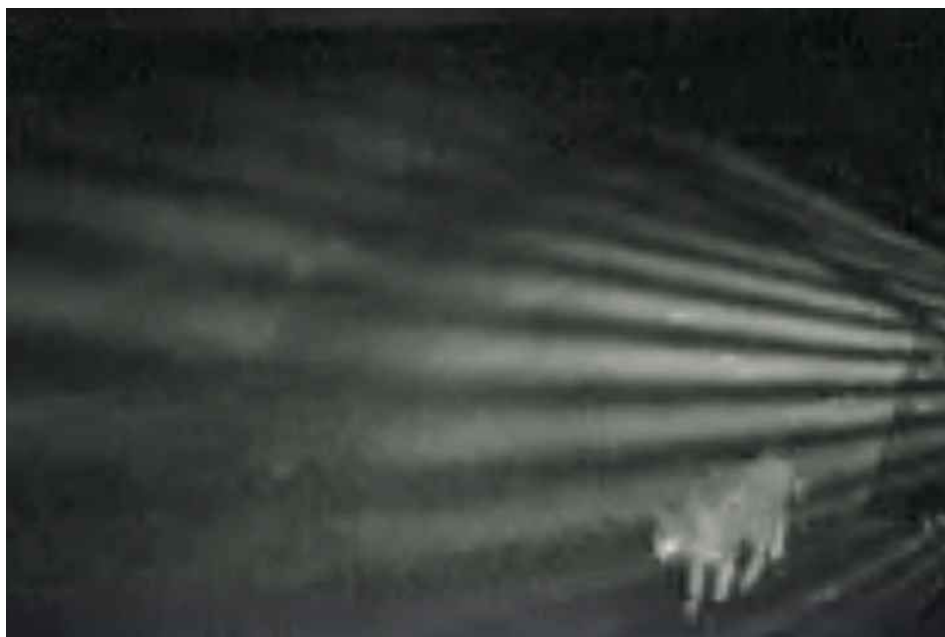
It was a couple of months before I could finally turn up – during a gale, as it turned out – at the secret North Suffolk location; at the ready was my improvised measuring pole with 50cm (20in) stripes in red and white, as recommended by an archaeologist.

I’d sent homemade cardboard cut-outs ahead by post. These included my attempt at a silhouette of the animal seen on the confusing, blurry farmyard footage – a leggy, slim, one-metre long cat outline – and a 50cm domestic cat cut-out for comparison.

We obtained footage on the same CCTV camera of myself marching around a rainy, featureless yard with a one-metre measuring pole, trying to reconstruct the walk taken by our mystery moggy. I was then filmed moving our various cut-outs around the same yard. I sent off these little films to Mark Fletcher, who responded with video overlays revealing our mystery mutant moggy was, beyond doubt... an ordinary domestic cat; and a small one at that!

The video of me in the yard, superimposed with the ghostly images of our mystery moggy, clearly

**BELOW:** The mystery cat caught on a free-range poultry farm’s CCTV on the night of 05 September 2015. Just visible on the right is the doormat, the only background feature.





showed a small domestic cat next to my measuring pole laid on the ground. Its length didn't reach the end of the pole's 50cm red stripe. In the frames that showed my cuts-outs deployed in the same yard, my "domestic cat" silhouette was slightly bigger than the mystery animal. As the farmer commented: "Disappointing, but you can't argue with that."

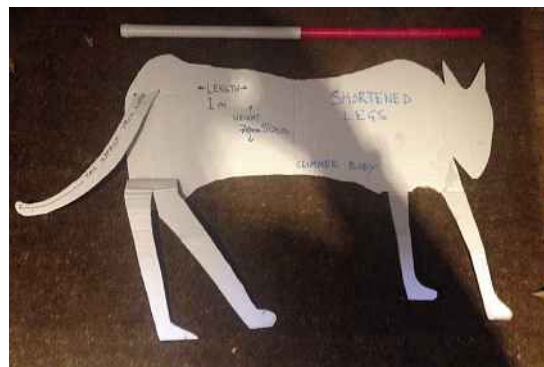
The "North Suffolk mystery mutant moggy" affair shows how easy it is to misidentify animals as big cats, particularly in the dark. It's made me wary of reports I receive of after-dark big cat sightings, like the recent one from a driver who saw "the eyes of a big cat" in his headlights at Yaxley, Mid-Suffolk, or another motorist's encounter with a pair of eyes in his headlights he thought were a big cat's, near the Tesco roundabout outside Thetford in early 2015. PC Paul Carter, a Cambridge Police Wildlife Officer, has for years been on the case of the "Fen Tiger" frequently seen along the Suffolk-Cambridgeshire border. He told the *Newmarket Journal*: "As most sightings occur after dark, it is possible that peoples' minds can play tricks on them."<sup>1</sup>

Over the last 18 months I've gathered over 140 Suffolk big cat reports going back to 1974 – and some hilarious Suffolk big cat misidentifications too. Following my own East Anglian big cat setback, my sympathies go out to all those who think they've seen a big cat, only for it to be no such thing.

Sudbury Town Council's wardens Bradley Smith and Nathan Mitchell, for example, were on patrol in their hi-viz vests in February 2012 when Bradley got a call regarding "a tiger on the loose" in the South Suffolk market town's Siam Gardens. Bradley told the *Suffolk Free Press* that: "We normally get calls about dogs on the loose, but never tigers." He and Nathan arrived to see a tiger hiding behind a tree.

It transpired it was a tiger of "the large cuddly toy species". After the obligatory posed news photograph of the wardens crouching next to the large, realistic soft toy tiger (every day is a slow news day in Suffolk), the Sudbury Tiger went to the *Suffolk Free Press* office for safekeeping. A reader offered to take it off their hands in exchange for a £20 donation to the newspaper's favoured charity, so it found a good home.<sup>2</sup>

Another Suffolk tiger a year later was the "Big cat spotted in Trimley St Martin!" according to the *Evening Star* of Ipswich. Many motorists passing a property on the old A45 road were



reported to "rub their eyes and look twice" on seeing a tiger lounging on the roof, whence it was watching over the "great grasslands of the Trimleys". (The two adjacent villages of Trimley St Martin and Trimley St Mary, inland suburbs of the port of Felixstowe, have their churches at opposite ends of the same graveyard.)

Drivers quickly realised, however, that it was a soft toy tiger, albeit a rather realistic one, "of the type won accidentally at fairground stalls," as the *Star* put it. A worker renovating the house confessed to finding the soft toy inside and placing it on the roof "for a laugh".<sup>3</sup>

Then there was the big cat furore circa 2004 at the Cliff House campsite, Dunwich. Its director Steven Johnson told me contractors were laying concrete pads as bases for new chalets. "The contractors said they saw a cat – a big cat." Then a big paw print appeared overnight, set in the dried concrete: "a nice clear one".

A big cat investigation group was sent a photo of the "nice clear" print

**TOP:** An image showing the author with his "biggest possible domestic moggy"-sized cardboard cut-out overlaid onto the original CCTV footage.

**ABOVE:** The "big cat" cutout with the legs shortened after a trial run, still completely wrong. It was based on our initial calculations on the size on the animal in the footage.

and became "so excited, they sent someone along. He was very convinced it was the print of a big cat. He made a plaster cast... sent it to the Natural History Museum for verification." Steven rang up to see how it went. The big cat guy was despondent. "Dog" was the Natural History Museum's conclusion.

A far stranger saga comes from Laxfield, where the Blyth Valley meets Mid-Suffolk, via a source I agreed not to name. "My friend was out lamping at night with his gamekeeper and saw a dark shape hunkered down in one field. Looking at it through the rifle scope the gamekeeper swore that it was a big black cat and wanted to shoot it. My friend wouldn't let him shoot and they drove closer and closer, with the gamekeeper swearing more and more it was a big black cat, the closer they got! When they were only a few feet away, this 'black cat' jumped up and turned into a night hawk" – a clandestine detectorist out metal-detecting without the landowner's permission – "who promptly threw his detector... at the farmer, shouted 'keep it' and ran off without a backward glance."

Nonetheless, I continue to hear remarkably consistent accounts of big cats from around the county. These range from a black leopard cluster along the Waveney River to the "Haverhill Puma" and other West Suffolk sandy pumas, to lynxes in a 10-mile coastal corridor from Dunwich Forest to Wrentham in the north. As I write, there's news just in of an A-level student seeing a black leopard at dusk on the sports ground of the large Suffolk village of Wickham Market, which made the national press – the *Daily Mirror's* 'Weird News' section. The struggle continues... **[T]**

#### NOTES

**1** PC Carter's comments in "I taw I taw a puddy cat, I did," *Newmarket Journal*, 17 Sept 2008; "Driver spots 'big cat' on late night A11 journey", *Thetford and Brandon Times* 4 Feb 2015. The Thetford sighting was technically just over the Norfolk border.

**2** "Look what we found lion in town gardens," *Suffolk Free Press*, 28 Feb 2012; Duncan Bradley, *Suffolk Free Press* editor, pers. comm. by email 12 Jan 2015.

**3** "Trimley: Big cat spotted in Trimley St Martin!" *Evening Star*, 27 Apr 2013



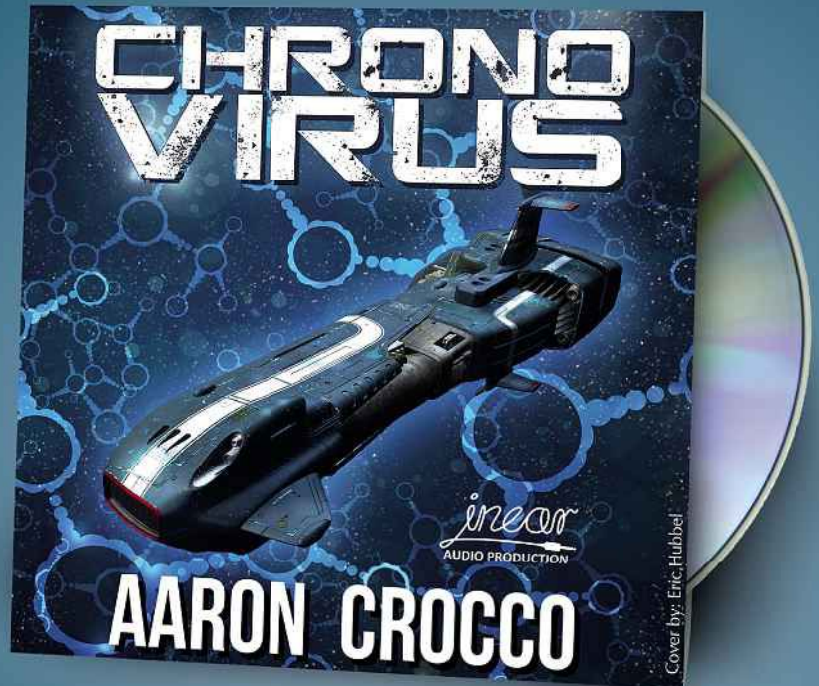
**Mystery Animals of the British Isles: Suffolk by Matt Salusbury is available from CFZ Publishing later in 2016. Meanwhile, it's on Twitter at @MysteryAnimals**

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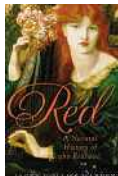
This month's books, films and games

# reviews



## Flame-haired seductresses?

Posh redheads are auburn, redheaded females are passionate and the chaps are gingers – and they all have different biochemistry from their mouse-haired brethren



### Red

**A Natural History of the Redhead**

Jacky Collis Harvey

Allen & Unwin 2015

Hb, 230pp, £16.99, plates, notes, ind, ISBN 9781925266191

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

Jacky Collis Harvey begins *Red*, her utterly splendid study of the redhead, with a story of when she was five. The school bully annoyed her friend, so she punched him in the face. Expecting to be told off, if not punished, she was astounded to hear teachers and other kids' parents say, "Well, what did he expect? She's a redhead!" She spent the rest of her childhood and teens growing into the expectations that other people had of her.

We all know there's something different about redheads – but what is it? Why are redheaded women sexy and alluring – the archetype of "the flame-haired seductress, exotic, sensual, impulsive, passionate" – and redheaded men just ginger? But redheaded women are also dangerous. Boudicca, with her mythical yard-long knives protruding from her chariot wheels, is "the image of the indomitable, ferocious and usually voluptuous female barbarian... what other colour could Boudicca's hair be?"

Redheads feature prominently in religious iconography. Mary Magdalene, especially when portrayed as a reformed prostitute (blame Pope Gregory

I), always has gloriously long, gloriously red hair only partly covering her curves. But on the other hand, redheaded men are sometimes seen as traitors; Judas is often shown as a redhead.

Amongst northern Europeans being red-headed is a by-product of a recessive gene for pale skin which makes your body "much more effective at synthesising vitamin D, using whatever sunlight is available, than if your skin were darker". Vitamin D helps your skeleton develop correctly and stops you having rickets, which can distort the pelvis and "make carrying a pregnancy to full term difficult and childbirth hazardous, if not fatal".

The author wonders "whether the often highly sexualised image of female redheads might not start here, with the simple fact that choosing a redhead as a mate meant you bred successfully, and that your pale-skinned children, themselves now carrying the genes for red hair, did the same". But "red hair is simply the signifier", she says; "it's the pale skin that makes the difference".

Red is the colour of blood. One of the most ancient slurs thrown at redheads, she writes, is that they are the product of sex during menstruation. And as well as the colour of blood and of passion, it's the colour of fire. Christian authorities took against red hair early on. St Jerome wrote to Læta about her daughter Paula in AD403: "Do not dye her hair red, and thereby presage for her the fires of hell."

One of Britain's strongest queens was a redhead, and jealous of competitors. She banished Lettice Knollys, who married Robert Dudley, from

### "Redheads are notoriously bad at keeping dental appointments and having injections"

her court. "Lettice was as head-turning a redhead as Elizabeth... and she was ten years younger."

The contradictory stigma about red hair means that if you want to be approving of it, you sometimes call it something else. Mark Twain wrote in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, "When red-headed people are above a certain social grade their hair is auburn." It even applies to dolls; until the 1980s, Harvey says, red-haired Barbie dolls were sold as 'Titian'.

In art, red hair is usually shown loose, "so luxuriant that it's almost out of control" – and of course it was a favourite of the Pre-Raphaelite artists who, we discover, favoured the term 'stunner', still used in tabloid headlines today.

Red-headed men have a harder time. In literature they are often deeply unpleasant characters: Uriah Heep in Dickens's *David Copperfield* and Peter Quint in James's *The Turn of the Screw*. Children's literature redresses the balance somewhat: Tin-Tin, the loyal Ginger in the *Just William* stories, and more recently Harry Potter's sidekick. "But it takes many, many Tin-Tins, Gingers and Rons to expunge the centuries-long prejudice reflected in a single Uriah Heep."

As well as art and history and religion and literature there's

plenty of science. Do redheaded women smell different, as the 19th-century Dr Augustus Galopin claimed in *Le Parfum de la Femme*? Well, yes, says Harvey – "or rather, if you have red in your hair, anything applied to your skin is going to smell different from the way it will smell on anyone else", because redheads have a "uniquely different biochemistry, the consequences of which have all fed into the stereotyping and societal and cultural attitudes evinced towards the redhead for centuries". So there's something behind the verse by Toulouse-Lautrec's friend, cabaret singer Aristide Bruant: "She has soft skin / And freckles / And the scent of a redhead / That gives you the shivers." They taste different as well, Harvey says.

It's really all about sex.

If you have red hair, certain parts of the body (male and female), when aroused, are redder than on non-redheads, and even more so against the characteristically pale skin. And so redheads are literally seen as being more passionate. Jonathan Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels*, "has the red-haired members of his imaginary race the Yahoos being 'more libidinous and mischievous than the rest'".

Harvey has an amazing eye for detail – and some of her almost throwaway details are fascinating. Redheads feel pain more acutely; they have to be given 20 per cent more anaesthesia in surgery. And so they are "notoriously bad at keeping dental appointments, having injections, and as children, having knots dragged out of our red hair". They react badly to cold – but can eat spicier curries than

*Continued on page 60*

# Optimistic Lee

Rosy-tinted but enjoyable graphic novel of poor-boy-made-good comic maestro



## Amazing, Fantastic, Incredible

A Marvelous Memoir

Stan Lee, Peter David & Colleen Doran

Simon & Schuster 2015

Hb, illus, 192pp, £20.00, ISBN 9781471152597

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.00

Stan Lee's life story is presented here, appropriately enough, as a graphic novel, its subject's rambling recollections shaped and visualised by a pair of industry veterans, writer Peter David and illustrator Colleen Doran.

The book follows Stanley Lieber's progress from an impoverished New York childhood, spent devouring the works of HG Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle, to his current role as *eminence grise* of the comic business and offers a whistle-stop tour through the history of Marvel and of the medium itself into the bargain.

The author's fortunes are bound up with those of the company – indeed, industry – he helped reinvigorate, and its ups and downs are recollected in typically humorous style. There are nice asides about the vicissitudes of comics in the immediate post-war era: the social stigma of admitting you wrote them for a living, the bafflement of a Senate Subcommittee faced with some of campaigner Fredric (*Seduction of the Innocent*) Wertham's more outré Freudian readings of them and the eventual introduction of the Comics Code.

Perhaps less successful are the attempts to deal with more

personal issues, such as the loss of Lee's second daughter at just three days old. "Let's not dwell on it," he says, before jumping back into the story of how his impossible workload led to the creation of the 'Marvel Method' (in which his hurriedly typed synopses were given to artists to draw from before he added the final script at the end of the process). Arguably, it's a telling bit of character detail; it's also the stuff of the American Dream, in which personal setbacks must be overcome on the road to eventual success. And it's Lee's public persona that comes through most strongly: the hyperactive, hyperbolic carny-barker, teetering knowingly on the very edge of self-parody, a four-coloured, Fifth Avenue Mad Man determined not just to create good comics but to promote the hell out of them too.

Views of Lee have become polarised in the era of creator-owned comics and IP rights for artists that are a world away from the conditions of the 1960s. Despite his lavish praise on Kirby and Ditko, one suspects Stan still believes that his was the primary creative act in bringing the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, and a host of other characters to life. This book won't lay the arguments to rest, but it's an enjoyable, rosy-tinted vision of the Silver Age revolution and Lee's undeniably crucial role in that process. And for those of us who grew up with Stan's Soapbox and the Bullpen Bulletins, it's hard to resist his seemingly inexhaustible fund of self-belief and optimism, or not to be rather touched by the fact that when he meets Joan, his wife-to-be, it's in a panel that quotes Mary Jane Watson's famous "Face it tiger..." entrance back in *Amazing Spider-Man* #42. **David Sutton**

### Fortean Times Verdict

ENJOYABLE LIFE AND TIMES OF ONE OF AMERICAN COMICS' GREATS **7**

*Continued from previous page*

the rest of us. And because their hair contains more sulphur, it's more difficult to perm. Oh, and redheads are more likely to be stung by bees.

Less happily, redheads have a three-times greater risk of developing Parkinson's than people with dark hair. Redheads are also 'over-represented' amongst sufferers from Tourette's syndrome.

To come back to lighter matters, some of the best-known redheads on the large and small screen weren't: Rita Hayworth, Lucille Ball and Alyson Hannigan (*Buffy's Willow*) all dyed their hair red. So did Gillian Anderson, who we learned after this book was published will be wearing a wig as Agent Scully in the remake of *The X-Files*.

*Red* is beautifully illustrated, not just with the expected Pre-Raphaelites but with paintings throughout history, and with some startling photographs of redheads from Afghanistan, China, the Solomon Islands and elsewhere, showing that although genetically the redhead is a northern European pale-skinned type, there are exceptions around the world.

Fact-filled and thoroughly enjoyable, this has to be the definitive book of the redhead. **David V Barrett**

### Fortean Times Verdict

ART, LIT, RELIGION AND SCIENCE OF REDHEADS – A SPLENDID BOOK **10**

## They Exist

A Review of Key Literature on Extraterrestrial Existence

Piers Morris

Grosvenor House Publishing 2015

Pb, 248pp, £7.99, ISBN 9781781489147

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £7.49



Morris' book starts off badly by asserting there is an 'extraterrestrial Controller' race operating on Earth. Maybe, but where's the evidence? For Morris, the evidence is enshrined in historical sightings of UFOs and the saucer scare stories emanating from Tim Good, Moulton Howe, William Cooper and others of that ilk. Morris's

join-the-dots approach is a fevered stew of contactees, abductees, government cover-ups, crashed saucers and the usual folkloric flotsam and jetsam from the far shores of ufology. There is no critical authorial voice, nor is there any counter-evidence from the sceptics. Each and every story is given equal credence, right down to the notion the Moon and our DNA are alien creations. Without even a hint of sceptical balance the book is redundant in terms of its subtitle. ET believers will lap it up and seasoned, sceptical ufologists will find space on their bookshelves for it as position statement of where belief in extraterrestrial involvement in earthly matters sat in the early part of the 21st century. **Andy Roberts**

### Fortean Times Verdict

A PARTIAL LITERATURE REVIEW AND A FUTURE CURIOSITY, PERHAPS **4**

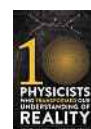
## Ten Physicists who Transformed our Understanding of Reality

Rhodri Evans & Brian Clegg

Robinson 2015

Pb, xii + 258pp, ind, £9.99, ISBN 9781472120373

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49



The title of this book sums it up in a nutshell – it's all about people who changed the Western world's collective view of reality.

You may not be a big fan of physics, or you may even hate the subject, but if your world-view includes things like planets and atoms – or spacecraft, mobile phones and nuclear weapons – then you have these 10 physicists to thank for it. Some of them are household names, like Galileo, Newton, Einstein and Marie Curie – all of whom were fascinating human beings as well as great scientists. Others are less well-known, particularly in the latter part of the book (it's arranged chronologically), as the work becomes increasingly abstract and the focus shifts from individual researchers to teams of scientists. Any book of this type is going to involve a mix of biography and popular science.



This one does an excellent job (within the space available) of the first of these. So much so, in fact, that I felt it didn't quite live up to its billing.

By summarising each person's whole career, their single towering contribution that "transformed our understanding of reality" ends up being diluted. Personally I would have liked to see a stronger emphasis on those big discoveries, and on their impact and legacy. As it is, this is still a must-read book for anyone interested in the history of ideas. **Andrew May**

### Fortean Times Verdict

EASY-TO-READ PRIMER ON 10 OF THE GREAT NAMES OF SCIENCE **8**

## Shirley MacLaine Meets the Pleiadians

The Amazing Flying Saucer Experiences of Celebrities, Rock Stars and the Rich and Famous

Timothy Green Beckley & Sean Casteel

Global Communications/Global Journal 2015

Pb, 227pp, refs, illus, £15.00, ISBN 9781606111932

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.50



Director John Waters would love this book. Here is the collection that camp gossip junkies have been waiting for. With shameless self-promotion, the author recounts how he and Harold Salkin covered crackpot news for *The National Enquirer*, "which had a bad, but totally undeserved, reputation for sensationalism". (This is like saying night has a totally undeserved reputation for dark.) Soon, "celebrities were calling us to tell us about their psychic experiences as well as their sightings of UFOs". Included are Charles Bronson, Russell Crowe, Milton Berle, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, circus clown Emmett Kelley, Jr, Charo, and 'King of UFO Watchers' Muhammad Ali. Brilliantly titled and shoddily referenced, but who cares? William Shatner sought psychic communication with aliens!

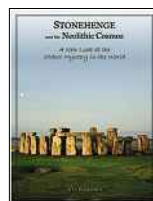
Jay Rath

### Fortean Times Verdict

SOLID GOLD FOR FANS OF CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE GLITTERATI **6**

# Sister Moon's circle

A well illustrated, succinct and well written book (with a bit of hard-to-follow numerology) on Stonehenge (and Sister Moon)



## Stonehenge and the Neolithic Cosmos

A new look at the oldest mystery in the world.

ND Wiseman

The Vinland Press 2015

Pb, 58pp, illus, £19.99, ISBN 9780692362822

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £17.00

Stonehenge books with their inexhaustible supply of arcane, new, or re-interpreted knowledge, must sell well. In this century few years have passed without one or two authors' "new revelations" that promise to "rewrite the history of Stonehenge".

These works fall into a minimum of three categories; data-rich and written by professional archaeologists, state-funded, (loosely) constrained by peer pressure and attached to mainstream publishers; non-professionals, sometimes self-funded and published privately or with bespoke/boutique publishers, the authors undergoing translation into archaeo-astronomers etc; and the self-taught, mono-railers, who through misunderstanding, misinterpretation or misuse of data (or more often a datum) find themselves as sole holders of The Truth (which is out there) and compelled to enlighten the world.

Mr Wiseman, a credible commentator on the Druidical Plains, tells us early on that he does not hold 'The Truth'. In just 58 pages, he has synthesised much of the recent, first-category literature. Despite his choice of a slightly recycled title, for most of the book he remains close

to the middle category, though sometimes in clear viewing distance of the third, most notably when Sister Moon (Keeper of the Dead) and Father Sun appear above the horizon to illuminate the text. His rewriting of the literature is selective but has few factual errors, though the origin of sarsens is wrong, there is no prehistorical use of tin metal in Wessex, and sarsen is not six times harder than granite. It is topical, but Vespasian Camp/Blick Mead and its votive stone ducks and the Mesolithic generally, may, eventually, be shown to have little to do with the far later main reason(s) for Stonehenge.

Wiseman belongs to the subset of Stonehenge workers, the 'cabalistic aligners', for whom the summer-winter solstice alignment/orientation (for Father Sun) is just first amongst the piers (sic). Over a third of the book discusses the celestial significance of alignments between the standing stones, the 56 Aubrey Holes and the legion of post holes within the half of Stonehenge that has been excavated (but what of the, as yet, uncovered rest?) and later the relationship between the stone circle and its closest satellite barrows. Many sight lines, he asserts, were to keep "constant surveillance on ever capricious Sister Moon". Father Sun only later rose in importance, striding along the summer-winter solstice alignment into the Trilithons of "solid imperishable Earth Mother". As with many mainstream and most non-orthodox archaeo-astronomical

texts this numerological aspect of the book is difficult to follow, seemingly perching on a few, given as read (even revealed) assertions; challenge those and only a ruin remains.

The text is written in a light, informative style, though there are intrusive asides and talking to the fourth wall ("Yabba Dabba Doo"). The book's impact for most readers will be due more to the diagrams and photographs than the text. Much care has gone into the blending of newly commissioned and historical photographs. Glastonbury's aerial view of the Stonehenge Greater Cursus is a highlight, being wonderful, plus playfully ironic in almost losing Stonehenge in the upper right hand corner and allowing us to see the 'Stonehenge Landscape'. It is a pity that the quality of the printing and paper (ultimately one of the costs associated with self-publication) do not allow for a greater crispness; it just misses out on being a fine coffee-table book. Would there be a market for a deluxe, limited edition on high quality paper?

Is the book worth having, does it stand re-reading? Clearly, yes. But does it (and the abundant, new [in]sight-lines) add to Stonehenge studies? Others need to understand them and judge. Has Mr Wiseman been wasting his and our time? Most definitely, no.

Robert Ixer

### Fortean Times Verdict

INTERESTING, WELL ILLUSTRATED, CONCISE AND LARGELY ACCURATE **8**

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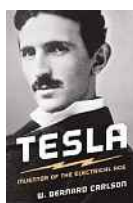
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## An illusionist inventor

Nikola Tesla was equally the persuasive figure adored by the alt science community and a boastful but failed inventor



### Tesla

**Inventor of the Electrical Age**

W. Bernard Carlson

Princeton University Press

Pb, 520pp, illus, notes, ind, £13.95, ISBN 9781400846559

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.45

The problem for any biographer is that there are really two distinctly different Nikola Teslas.

One is the towering genius shunned by the ignorant establishment, whose greatest works are still suppressed; this is the Tesla adored by the alternative science community and the popular media. Being played by David Bowie as a miracle-worker is surely the highest accolade any scientist could aspire to.

The other Tesla is the miserable failed inventor whose great plans and endless boasts came to nothing, and who ended up living in poverty in New York with pigeons as his only friends.

Carlson manages the impressive feat of steering a middle course between these two. He explains how great Tesla's contributions were but how he stumbled over his biggest project, a giant tower to transmit wireless power at Wardencliff, and how this effectively ended his career. The two Teslas are reconciled into a single complex individual.

There is a thorough account of Tesla's unusual childhood and upbringing in Croatia, including the moment when the young Tesla first encountered electrical sparks while stroking Macak, the family cat. Tesla's early years as an inventor are covered in detail, perhaps far more than any non-

technical reader will be able to handle. The complex descriptions of brushless electric motors and the intricacies of polyphase current are covered exhaustively, and anyone without a good working knowledge of electricity is likely to be left no wiser than before.

Carlson is much more illuminating in describing Tesla's method of working, his vivid, detailed flashes of inspiration and his ability to construct a mental image of a piece of apparatus. Tesla evidently did most of his tinkering in his head, making slight changes to complex devices and working out the results before he built anything. This made him the opposite of the arch-mechanic Edison, who famously worked through all possible combinations by trial and error in the laboratory.

There is also, crucially, the aspect of what Carlson called 'illusion', which is not deception but rather "a blend of wizardry, scientific facts and social commentary" which was the key to Tesla's ability to persuade backers to finance his schemes. Carlson somewhat speculatively traces Tesla's understanding of the importance of illusion in fostering belief to the Orthodox religion of his childhood. During his scientific career, Tesla repeatedly used this type of illusion to make investors aware of the possibilities and advantages of his inventions. On some occasions, most notably at Wardencliff, Tesla's belief in the illusion outran the physics needed to support it.

In the middle section the book leaps about, following Tesla's own lurches from one field to another. From tracking thunderstorms by their electrical effects to inventing radio-controlled torpedo boats (which Tesla optimistically thought would end war) to setting up a huge power plant at Niagara Falls,

to sending radio signals across the Atlantic, to experimenting with artificial earthquakes, to receiving communications from outer space... it soon becomes apparent that Tesla became bored quickly after the initial discovery. Once he had made the intellectual breakthrough need to crack a problem, he had little interest in seeing through the thousand details needed to move his projects forward. Money in particular was a problem.

After a brief heyday, Tesla found himself increasingly devoting his time to trying to sell himself in a market which had lost interest in electrical novelties. Nor did rivalry with Edison and Marconi help, and Tesla soon stopped being the celebrated inventor. His lack of visible successes made him look like a chancer if not an outright fraud. Without backers, Tesla was confined to the smallest of experiments and lost any chance of being an important figure in scientific or industrial circles.

Carlson does a good job of explaining why Tesla has become such a giant in the counter-cultural world, largely thanks to some of his more spectacular 'illusions' and his grandiose claims. The truth behind the peculiar story of the 'missing papers' left on Tesla's death, reputed to contain secret plans for world-shaking inventions, is given a thorough airing.

As a biography, *Tesla: Inventor of the Electrical Age* is sound enough, but could perhaps have done with some editing in the more technical passages. For those able to wade through it, there is plenty of interesting material on this most fortunate of scientists, and it will do Tesla's reputation no harm at all.

David Hambling

### Fortean Times Verdict

BALANCED BIOGRAPHY, BUT THE TECHIE BITS ARE CHALLENGING

8

## UFOs Over Poland

The Land of High Strangeness

Piotr Cielebia

Flying Disk Press 2015

Pb, 182pp, £6.95, ISBN 9780993492808

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £6.45



Piotr Cielebia's book underlines that UFO sightings and high strangeness encounters are global.

He puts Polish sightings in a folklore context; *Ognik* (flame) or *Swietlik* (firefly) phenomena are similar to our will-of-the-wisp. (Lights dancing over a field near Czestochowa in the 1980s were explained as *Swietlik*.) Another folkloric theme was of sky people blown down to Earth, who manifested as small, sexless monsters or old, linen-clad men, much like today's 'space' aliens. Even after WWII, older witnesses often interpreted sightings in such terms rather than as UFO phenomena.

For Cielebia, the first 'modern era' report was in 1922, when hundreds of people in Warsaw saw an enormous flying object "like two plates connected together". Among other historical and WWII accounts is one of a hat-like object that landed at Nowiny, eastern Poland; eight or nine small humanoids in uniforms spoke what sounded like Japanese before flying off. Such incidents show that UFOs were not just a product of the Cold War. In the flying saucer era, the earliest abduction story in Poland occurred in 1954. There is even a UFO crash report in 1959. This was probably a meteorite impact or satellite re-entry, though it became associated with a story of a male humanoid found not long afterwards (perhaps seeded by US intelligence to discredit the story).

Cielebia details many equally bizarre cases: flying humanoids, telepathic encounters, sightings, landing reports and even little green men. He sides with Jacques Vallee: the UFO phenomenon is real, but remains a mystery because it presents itself in a chaotic and baffling manner.

Nigel Watson

### Fortean Times Verdict

A FASCINATING REVIEW OF HIGH STRANGENESS IN POLAND

8



# ALSO RECEIVED

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

### Goodbye God?

#### An Illustrated Exploration of Science vs. Religion

Sean Michael Wilson & Hunt Emerson

New Internationalist 2015

Pb, 117pp, illus, £9.99, ISBN 978170262260

Wilson, better known as a writer of graphic novels, presents the argument and campaign by the Humanist Society against the deleterious effects of the religious imperative in general and the teaching of Creationism in schools in particular, and tackles the many manifestations of fundamentalism along the way. But there is little opportunity for you to nod off with this tightly written exposition because it is wonderfully illustrated throughout – as a graphical thesis – by our own Hunt Emerson in a variety of styles, from maps, diagrams and photos, to portraits and strips, and his illustrated monologues of Christopher Hitchens, Stephen Law, AC Grayling, Lawrence Krauss (who also provides a foreword), and many other advocates past and present.

Written with wit and style, this brilliantly entertaining and provocative book – perfect for anyone who has no time to read or is too daunted by more scientific or philosophical texts – needs to be in every school library.

### Dictionary of Ancient Magic Words

#### From Abraxas to Zoar

Claude Lecouteux

Inner Traditions 2014

Hb, 418pp, \$35.00, ISBN 9781620553749

The main part of this intense book is arranged as a huge dictionary discussing each magic word, its etymology and uses, with sources. Lecouteux is a professor of mediæval literature at the Sorbonne, and this book is a monument to his erudition and fascination with magical languages. There are appendixes on cryptography (tabulating the character alphabets supposedly invented or created by such

magicians, mystics, wizards, alchemists, necromancers and demonologists, etc; and a list of what words appear in which spell.

We hope someone somewhere will want this reference book because an awful lot of scholarly time and effort has gone into it.

### Our Holographic World

Anthony Milne

Empiricus Books, 2014

Pb, 326pp, notes, index, £10.95, ISBN 9781857568271

Milne has spent most of his life fascinated by the mysteries of time and 'reality'; or, as he puts it, "people's unusual time and dream experiences and the mystery of coincidences" which he endeavours here to "integrate into a mainstream scientific frame of reference".

The conclusion he presents is that 'reality' behaves like a hologram; and that phenomena often judged paranormal may actually be a misperception of something quite natural but beyond the scope (or interest) of orthodox scientists to explain. Nothing new in this hypothesis, but it's always interesting to see another theorist's selection of evidence and data and Milne explains with patience and clarity.

### Revisiting the 'Nazi Occult'

#### Histories, Realities, Legacies

Eds. Monica Black and Eric Kurlander  
Camden House, 2015

Hb, 297pp, illus, notes, bibs, index, £60.00, ISBN 9781571139061

Those of you looking for a more substantial and reliable account of the Nazis' fascination with occultism in both theory and practice than Trevor Ravenscroft's highly influential but thoroughly fanciful *Spear of Destiny* (1973) will do well to turn to this anthology of 12 scholarly papers.

The first part looks solidly at the sociological and historical background of the 'Modern Occult Revival' in Germany and across Europe. The second deals with

the use of pseudoscience by the SS; Hitler's interest in astrology, the mystical anthroposophy of Rudolf Steiner and the glacial cosmology of Hanns Hörbiger; the militaristic use of 'pragmatic occultism'; and the synergy between 'national socialism' and the phenomena of Therese Neumann, the famous stigmatic. The third part looks at the influence of the German mystic Bruno Gröning, believed by some to be a 'messiah'; the origin and rise of German parapsychology research under Hans Bender; the legacy of the Nazis in modern comics and video games; and the Nazi use of folk myth and music in promoting modern 'paganism'.

### The UFO Dossier

Kevin D Randle

Visible Ink 2016

Pb, 413pp, notes, bib, ind, \$19.95, ISBN 9781578595648

If you are interested in UFOs but bewildered by the myriad contentious topics that spin off from the relatively straightforward topics of aliens and lights in the sky, you need an authoritative guide – and few come more experienced than Kevin Randle, a well-known veteran of UFO research. Around a core of 60 different cases, Randle presents overviews and discussion of astronomical 'UFOs'; photographic evidence; sighting flaps; injuries by UFOs; scientific and political opinions; and so-called 'humanoid' encounters. There is full coverage, along the way, of alleged conspiracies, cover-ups, hoaxes and denials, with much material drawn from the files of the CIA, FBI and other military and governmental agencies.

### There Must Be Evil

#### The Life and Murderous Career of Elizabeth Berry

Bernard Taylor

Duckworth Overlook, 2015

Pb, 242pp, illus, bib, index, £12.99, ISBN 9780715650516

Against the backdrop of grinding poverty, Victorian England became fascinated with the trial of

Elizabeth Berry in 1887. As a young nurse working in the Oldham Workhouse, she was tried and hanged for the poisoning of her daughter. Even after her death the press and rumour-mill suggested she might also be responsible for the deaths of her mother, her husband and several other children.

Taylor, a winner of the Non-fiction Crime Writers' Association award, argues in a well-written and gripping account of his research that she was indeed a cold-blooded murderer. Coming after the previous year's acclaimed book by Stephen Bates on the crimes of Dr William Palmer, executed in 1856 and England's "most prolific medical murderer" before Harold Shipman, Duckworth is developing a grim but edifying line in period criminology.

### A Colorful History of Popular Delusions

Robert E Bartholomew & Peter Hassall

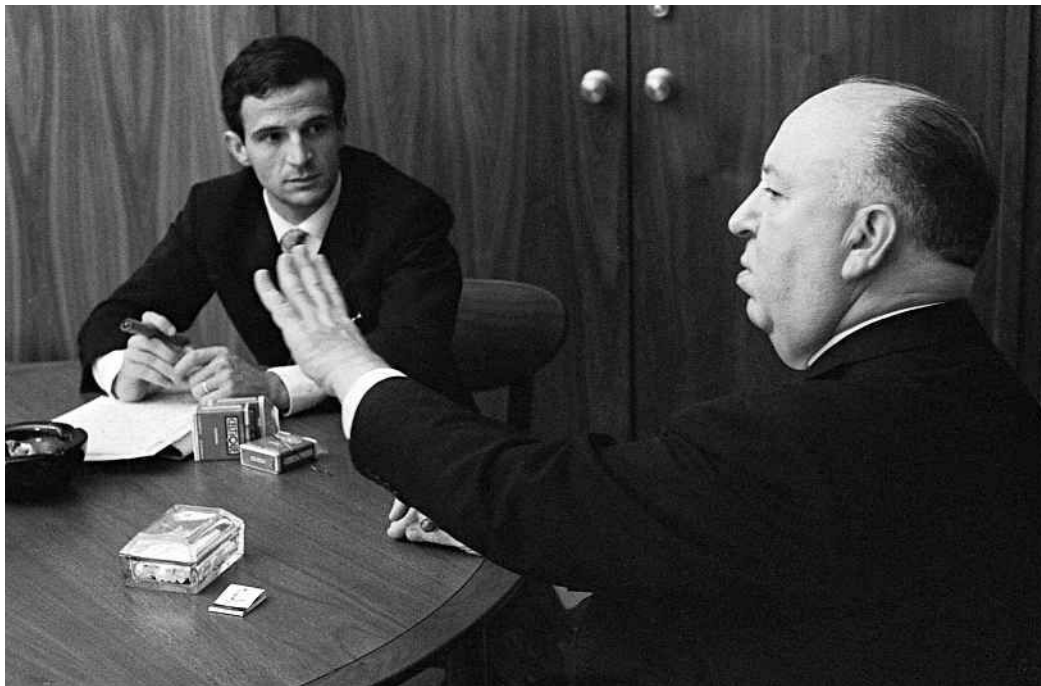
Prometheus Press 2015

Pb, 354pp, notes, \$19.00, ISBN 9781633881228

If you want a handy, up-to-date reference to what the 19th century writer Charles Mackay called "extraordinary popular delusions and the madness of crowds", you can have no better or more qualified guides than Robert Bartholomew, a sociologist who has specialised in mass hysteria, and Peter Hassall, a skilled forteen researcher and stuntman, both of this parish.

Here – organised as separate chapters on rumours, fads, crazes, manias, urban legends, panics and stampedes, mass hysteria, anxiety hysteria, immediate community threats, moral panics, riots, and small isolated groups – are countless fascinating examples drawn from the records of every age, from classical antiquity up to yesterday's newspapers. A concluding chapter offers an analysis of the similar characteristics shared by the 'deluded' and their 'delusions', and some wise words on how to defuse such situations. It could do with an index, but does have a whopping 53 pages of notes.

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



### Hitchcock/Truffaut

Dir Kent Jones, France/US 2015  
On UK release from 4 March

There aren't really all that many *bona fide* classics in the field of written film history, but François Truffaut's 1966 study of Alfred Hitchcock is one of them. It was a genuine game-changer of a book, the product of a series of 1962 interviews in which the young French director sat at the feet of the Anglo-American master and drank up the cinematic wisdom of the ages; in the process, he turned conventional wisdom on its head and ensured that the ageing Hitch was no longer thought of merely as a purveyor of slick, effective thrillers but as a major artist whose stylistic and thematic concerns were always visible despite working within the commercial constraints of the Hollywood system. Ah, yes: the *politique des auteurs* – usually set forth and debated within the hallowed pages of *Cahiers du Cinéma* – here went mainstream in the Anglophone world, and nothing was ever the same again.

Kent Jones's film uses the 1962 interview tapes – as well as rare filmed portions of them – along with still photos, film clips and newly filmed contributions from the likes of Scorsese, Paul Schrader, David Fincher and Wes Anderson. Hardcore cineastes will find nothing particularly rev-

elatory here, but the stroll down memory lane is never less than enjoyable; for newbies, though, this is a perfect primer on Hitch, auteur theory and the French New Wave – just like the original, inimitable book itself. It also goes some way to explaining how Hitchcock's almost mathematical attention to form and film technique could somehow achieve a sort of transcendence, and how for a particular generation of cineastes film could bear all the marks of a revealed religion.

David Sutton

#### Fortean Times Verdict

TRUFFAUT'S HITCHCOCK  
INTERVIEWS LIVE AGAIN

8

### Miss Hokusai

Dir Keiichi Hara, Japan 2015  
Anime Ltd, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

It's refreshing to see that not only did women make important contributions to award-winning Japanese anime film *Miss Hokusai* (which took the Jury Award at the 39th Annecy International Animated Film Festival among others), but that the film's subject is one of that rarest of breeds (if you believe the standard history books) – a 19th century female artist. Director Keiichi Hara's film is closely based on female artist Hinako Sugiura's cult 1980s manga series *Sarusuberi*, and was even adapted for the big screen by a female screenwriter.

It's episodic in nature and focuses on O-Ei, the daughter of Katsushika Hokusai (often called Tetsuzo in the film), he of "The Great Wave off Kanagawa", a print that had an enormous influence on Western painters like Degas and Monet and inspired music by Debussy and poetry by Rilke.

Set in 1814, and apparently largely based on contemporary accounts, (manga creator Sugiura is a specialist in Edo-era Japanese culture) the film shows how this pipe-smoking, back-chatting daughter is the unsung painter of some of her father's prints, working on them in Hokusai's grotty Tokyo studio alongside the surly painter and his misbehaving student.

Behind closed doors, O-Ei creates erotic prints and paints a fabulous dragon that's presented to its buyer as a Tetsuzo creation, while in public carrying out the traditional role expected of her, blushing at boys and looking after her little blind sister. It's thought that the real O-Ei did produce many of her father's paintings, helping him in the studio into his 90s when he started painting in a style not completely consistent with his age.

*Miss Hokusai* is a beautifully animated film with some interesting rocky electric guitar pieces on the soundtrack, hinting at O-Ei's not wholly conventional lifestyle and personality. Its stories are nicely punctuated with some supernatu-

ral episodes that will appeal to the fortean viewer: bringing a dragon to be healed in order to finish a painting, a night-time session with a possessed Geisha and some dreamtime wandering hands all feature.

While this isn't the most action-packed of movies, there's lots of interest in a film that celebrates female creativity, has nice little touches of humour, a sprinkle of pathos (O-Ei's relationship with her sister is very moving) and a great deal of beauty.

Julie McNamee

#### Fortean Times Verdict

BEAUTIFUL CELEBRATION OF  
FEMALE CREATIVITY

7

### Insidious Chapter 3

Dir Leigh Whannell, US 2015  
Entertainment One, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

This unnecessary sequel doesn't require you to have seen the two preceding films, as it's a prequel, but you'll get slightly more out of it if you know the rest of the series. The main connecting character is troubled medium Elise (Lin Shaye); the Lambert family of the other movies is nowhere in sight).

The advantage of this move is that *Insidious Chapter 3* shows how Elise hooks up with goofy ghost-busters Specs (director Whannell, whose character was killed off in the original *Insidious*) and Tucker (Angus Sampson), allowing for an ongoing series of adventures – however, they'd have to be an awful lot more engaging than this one.

Elise gets involved with single father Sean Brenner (Dermot Mulroney) and his daughter Quinn (Stefanie Scott), who is being haunted by a malevolent demon after attempting to contact her late mother in the afterlife. Everything that follows is fairly predictable. The most interesting thing is how a series of events incapacitates Quinn, putting her in several plaster casts and thus unable to easily outrun the supernatural nemesis.

The scares are rote, the character work basic, and the effects nothing not seen before. The depiction of the spirit world is timid, failing to push the surrealist opportunities the setting and modern effects technology could allow a suitably imaginative filmmaker to explore. Building a series around the older female character of Shaye (a horror



film perennial since the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* is not a bad idea. She simply needs a better vehicle than Whannell has been able to offer her.

Brian J Robb

### Fortean Times Verdict

OVERLY FAMILIAR AND UNFORGIVABLY UNSCARY

3

## Dragon Blade

Dir Daniel Lee, China 2015

Signature Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray, £12.99 (DVD))

When John Cusack was making *The Grifters* in 1990 I doubt he considered he would ever be second billed to Jackie Chan in a corny historical martial-arts movie. I also doubt that as Adrien Brody walked off the stage at the 2003 Academy Awards clutching his Oscar for Best Actor it crossed his mind that one day he'd be third billed behind Jackie Chan and John Cusack. For my part, I never thought I would end up writing about a film starring those three and proclaiming that Jackie Chan gives the best performance. But such are the vagaries of life that this situation has come to pass.

Chan plays Huo An, the leader of a squad that protects the Silk Road trade route; his method is to eschew conflict in favour of diplomacy. For various reasons, he and his men find themselves exiled to a part-demolished fort sited at a strategic point along the Road. When the fort is approached by a Roman legion commanded by the honourable Lucius (Cusack), Huo An forms an alliance with him and is dragged into a rebellion against tyrannical consul Tiberius (Brody).

It's all nonsense, of course, and apart from a few moments of broad comedy is presented with great solemnity. But nothing looks right: the CGI isn't very good, the sets don't look authentic and the period detail is virtually non-existent; there is greater verisimilitude in an episode of *Horrible Histories*. On top of all that, the script is awful – a ragbag collection of sentimentality, platitudes and rabble-rousing *Braveheart*-style rhetoric.

John Cusack looks pitifully uncomfortable throughout: he is the least convincing screen Roman soldier since *Carry On Cleo* and the distant look in his eyes suggests he is either contemplating how he ended up on location in China wearing a brush on his

## 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.theficksthatchurchforgot.com](http://www.theficksthatchurchforgot.com); @revpeterlaws)

### THE MUTILATOR

Dir Buddy Cooper, US 1984

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual format)

### FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON

Dir Mario Bava, Italy 1970

Arrow Video, £14.99 (Dual format)

### DEEP RED

Dir Dario Argento, Italy 1975

Arrow Video, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

This month we have a trio of titles showcasing psychos with big pointy knives.

First to run amok is *The Mutilator* (also known as *Fall Break*, a title that would have been incomprehensible to many non-US audiences at the time). It's a fun and freaky slasher from the mid-Eighties which starts like a home-made episode of *Casualty*. A proud young boy pastes a sweet, hand-written note on a gun cabinet: Happy Birthday Dad. All Cleaned by Me! He gets polishing, then: BANG! Mum, in the next room, gets a bullet in the back. Dad reacts strangely, dragging the corpse into the other room so he can share a whiskey with it. And then takes the kid's note and sets it neatly on mum's bloodied chest. All Cleaned by Me! Such is the twisted nature of a film that's an irresist-

ible cocktail of incompetence and inspired brilliance. Actors may well shuffle into shot and stare straight into the camera, but then you come across scenes that are cleverly framed and artfully shot. Even gender stereotypes are turned on their head. Plus – and this isn't to be sniffed at – the film boasts actual, real-life suspense. The restored gore delivers too, with some brutal scenes that still have the power to shock. *The Mutilator* is a great example of a 'throwaway' movie that endures long after expensive and anodyne studio efforts have faded from memory.

Mario Bava's *Five Dolls for an August Moon* could have faded from memory too. One of Bava's most obscure titles, it enjoyed an all-too-brief resurgence on DVD almost 30 years after its original 1970 release. Now, Arrow have restored it and thrown it on the HD table for those who might have missed it. It's an island-set, Agatha Christie-style carve-up, in which kooky millionaires try to persuade a scientist to give up a fortune-making formula. But people keep getting murdered and sealed in plastic. Bava's visual flair means there are plenty of sweet things to look at (not least Edwige Fenech), yet it's



ultimately a pretty tedious and confusing affair. I therefore recommend playing the Mario Bava drinking game to add to the fun. Basically, have one drink for every camera zoom – *et voila!* You and your friends will be paralytic within the first 11 minutes.

Dario Argento brings this month's most distinguished and best known entry. *Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*) is an ideal introduction to the director's style. The gliding camera, the bad-ass prog soundtrack, the brutal (yet somehow still tasteful) violence. It's all here, in a giallo that heralds Argento's welcome first steps into more supernatural waters. His masterpiece, *Suspiria*, was to follow, and there are times when you can almost taste that film, deep inside the red, here.



head or daydreaming about firing his agent. Probably both. Adrien Brody takes the opposite tack, and overacts like mad. Jackie Chan pitches his performance just right though; he's in his 60s now, and while his action sequences are still dazzling and his charm still shines, I think he has realised he's going to be relying on his acting a lot more from now on. He's got the best part, of course, but he's the only one who's really giving it the beans.

Despite all its faults, and they are – if you'll pardon the pun – legion, I found myself enjoying it. What I liked was that even amid the corny dialogue and Hallmark card sentimentality there was a grain of truth – profundity even. You don't see many action movies where the star preaches love instead of hate, tolerance instead of prejudice, forgiveness instead of revenge. And you don't see many films of any type in which people of different religions and ethnicities work together to achieve shared goals. As the music swells and the Parthians arrive over the mountains to join their Roman, Chinese, Indian and Hunnic comrades in battle, only the hardest of hearts will be able to resist such rousing stuff.

**Daniel King**

### Fortean Times Verdict

CORNY BUT STIRRING  
HISTORICAL ACTION

**6**

## Maelstrom

Dir David Maloney, UK 1985

Eureka Entertainment Ltd, £24.99 (DVD)

Scary Scandinavian stories are a mainstay of today's TV – but they go back further than you think. Set in Norway, *Maelstrom* dates from 1985 and was the final BBC drama by Michael J Bird, better known for his four Mediterranean series, including *Who Pays for the Ferryman?* and *The Dark Side of the Sun*. Before these he had worked on *Journey to the Unknown* and *Out of the Unknown*, which might account for the sense of the weird in his stories, the deliberate blurring between psychological and possibly supernatural elements. He's helped in *Maelstrom* by director David Maloney's background in some of the more disturbing episodes of *Doctor Who*.

Recently redundant advertising executive Catherine Durrell (Tusse Silberg) learns to her surprise that she has inherited two houses

and a fish factory from a wealthy Norwegian she has never heard of, Hjalmar Jordahl. She goes to the port of Alesund in western Norway to see her inheritance, intending to sell it, and meets her benefactor's two daughters, Anna-Marie (Susan Gilmore, later in *Howard's Way*) and Ingrid (Edita Brychta), about the same age as herself. She learns that their mother Freya had taken her own life when they were children.

When Catherine moves into one of the houses she is startled to see a painting of Freya; she had seen her on the coastal steamer as she was travelling to Alesund. The other house, a short distance away on a small island, had been Freya's home, and it had been kept exactly as she left it, with her dresses and strange collection of dolls. Each time Catherine visits she finds that the dolls have moved or that a record is playing on the record player. One evening, she looks across the narrow water and sees Freya standing outside her house. In the basement she discovers a stack of paintings showing distorted and mutilated figures; clearly the artist was deeply disturbed. Did Freya paint them, or one of her daughters? Then, one evening when she goes over to the island, her little dinghy is deliberately rammed by a motor launch.

Why did Jordahl leave her the houses? Is Freya somehow still alive, or is she haunting her? Why are other people – the daughters, an aged great aunt, an over-friendly and slightly creepy doctor – acting strangely towards her? And why do the dolls keep moving around? As the tension rises, Catherine's only ally is local journalist Anders Bjornson (David Beames), who has been doing his own research into the family; they soon become lovers.

Tusse Silberg has been criticised for her somewhat flat acting in this series, but in some ways her bland normality helps heighten the scarieness going on around her. The atmospheric music is by Johnny Pearson, better known for the *All Creatures Great and Small* theme and for his arrangements on *Top of the Pops*. And the scenery – *Maelstrom* was filmed on location – is just magnificent.

**David V Barrett**

### Fortean Times Verdict

TENSE AND DISTURBING  
PSYCHOLOGICAL THRILLER

**7**

## SHORTS

### DEATHGASM

Studiocanal, £9.99 (DVD)



Brodie and Zakk are the only two metalheads in a bland suburban New Zealand town; Brodie is routinely beaten up at school, whereas Zakk is expelled for stabbing someone with a set square. When they come into possession of ancient sheet music that unlocks a demonic portal, it's up to them to save the world. Any gross out horror-comedy from New Zealand will immediately invite unfair comparisons with Peter Jackson's early films; this isn't in that class, but it is nevertheless rather entertaining. Crucially, it's funny – where many attempts at this genre are not – and the gore is both inventive and plentiful. Some of the characters are little more than stereotypes (jock, RPG nerd, uptight Christian) but there's a genuine affection here for life's misfits. Subtle it ain't, but then the title (the name of Brodie and Zakk's band) pretty much gives that away. **DK 7/10**

### TRIPPED

ITV Studios Home Entertainment, £12.99 (DVD)



In this mini-series first broadcast on the UK's E4 channel, feckless stoner Milo (George Webster) and reformed, soon to be married, Danny (Blake 'Inbetweeners' Harrison) are two friends who find themselves stuck in a seemingly endless cycle of parallel universes. Trying to get back to their own world, they wisecrack, pratfall and goof their way through various adventures, all of which involve in some capacity Danny's fiancée Kate (Georgina Campbell), a time-travelling assassin, and Milo's gran. The idea is unoriginal (*Quantum Leap*, *Sliders*), the tone grating (cf aforementioned *Inbetweeners*) and the execution poor, both in script and effects. It is at least performed with gusto by the leads, but there just isn't enough decent material to fill 160 minutes of TV. I'll put my hand up and say that as an old-ish fart I'm miles outside the demographic for this sort of thing; perhaps in some alternate reality I'm lapping it up... **DK 4/10**

### AAAAAAAHH!

Icon Entertainment, £7.99 (DVD), £11.99 (Blu-ray)



Imagine that people were more like their primate cousins; imagine that they lived among the trappings of civilisation – games consoles, TV shows – but acted like chimps. I can imagine someone, perhaps a group of people, imagining this. I can imagine them imagining it after coming back from the pub and smoking a few spliffs. Steve Oram did imagine this, and then he made a film of it with his mates from *The Mighty Boosh*. Alpha male Smith (Oram) and his Beta sidekick (Tom Meeten) displace previous Alpha Jupiter (Julian Barratt) and take over his house and females, one of whom is played by Toyah Wilcox (whose hubby Robert Fripp contributed the soundtrack music). The cast communicate by grunting in ape-talk (a helpful director's commentary by Oram is similarly language-free), throwing food at one another, marking territory by urinating and crapping on the floor, and, ultimately, through acts of extreme violence. The whole thing is shot, inexplicably, in 4:3 ratio as if it were a television programme from the 1970s. Part of me thought this was a brave, bleak, situationist satire on our most cherished human delusions; part of me thought it was a TV comedy sketch stretched to an insufferable 80 minutes. Who knows? **DS 5/10**



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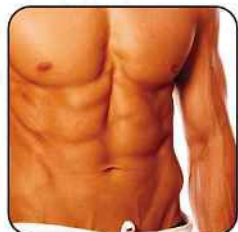
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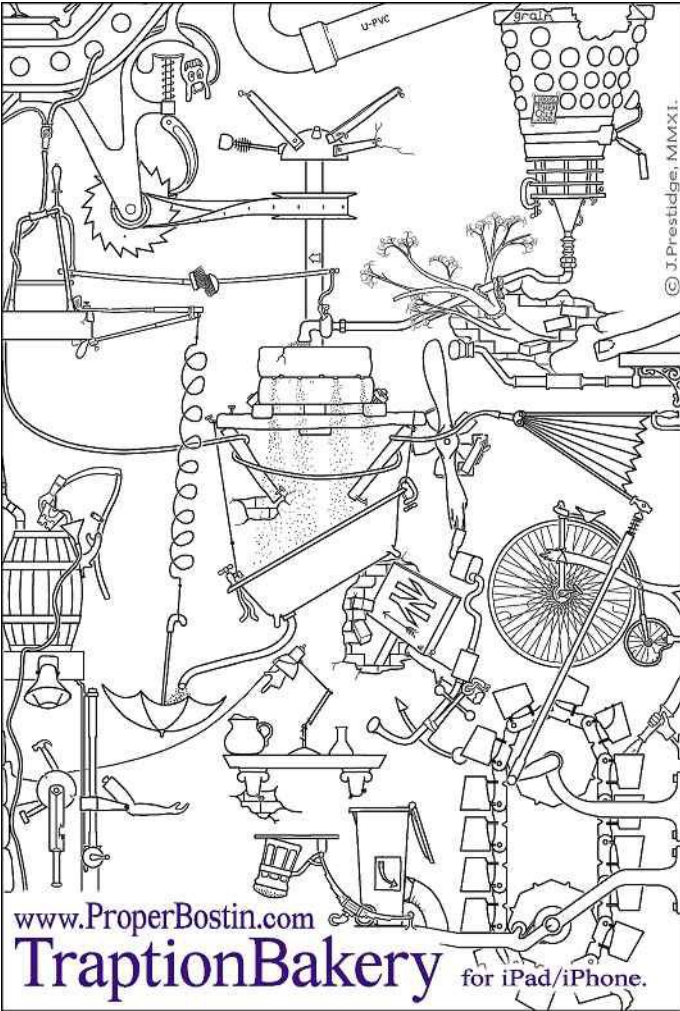
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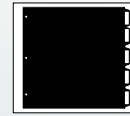
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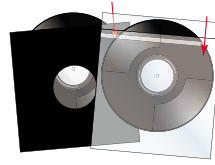
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Dear FT...

# letters



## Spectrophilia

Alan Murdie's article on spectrophilia [FT336:12-14] was interesting, but I am not convinced that his conclusions reflect the modern situation. As he rightly points out, spectrophilia has probably been around for a long time. However, it is probably only in the 21st century that it has been possible for it to be openly discussed. Quite apart from religious concerns, it is only recently that it has been acceptable for women to say that they enjoy sex for its own sake (rather than as part of a "meaningful relationship"). This means that they can talk of ghosts as purely sexual partners rather than in the terms that Alan Murdie posits at the end of his article.

One caption mentions the film *Ghost*, but not its UK contemporary *Truly Madly Deeply*. This, readers will no doubt recall, also involved a dead lover returning as a ghost; but instead of American sentimentality, it showed the dead lover behaving just like a live boyfriend (e.g. bringing his dead mates round to drink beer, watch videos and generally interfere with his girlfriend's routine). The message was that a sensitive live boyfriend was preferable to an insensitive dead one. The spectrophiliacs' lovers cited in the article definitely do not behave like *that* ghost.

**Martin Jenkins**  
London

## Panic in Chile

I was fascinated by the article "The monster makers" [FT334:30-31], especially with the reference to the missing children panics of 1869. This is a subject of which I am making a special study. In the same year that the strange character called Femorus was seemingly trying to graft the wings of a swan onto a human child, the following report appeared in *Chambers' Journal* (7 January 1854):

"We learn by the *Valparaiso Herald* [in Chile] that an extraordinary excitement prevails in that place, in consequence of a report having arisen that an Individual—

## Simulacra corner



## Cowed witness

Around noon on 7 January 2016, Kirsty Richardson took this photograph on her iPhone of the aftermath of a car crash on a main trunk road called Simonsway in Wythenshawe, south Manchester. She sent it to my son, her boyfriend, as he drives the same car in the same colour and it was in his neighbourhood. He texted her back to ask what the hooded figure was doing on the grass verge to the right. She hadn't noticed the strange figure, which appears to be hovering above the grass and carrying some kind of bag.

**Anthony Cranstoun**, by email  
Editor's note: *Though spooky, the 'monk' might just be a simulacrum, but I guess we'll never know for certain.*

no one knows of which sex—is in the habit of devouring any number of children he or she can get hold of. The juvenile population is of course in as great terror as the papas and mammas; and one day a boy, on being asked by a Frenchman for a light to his cigar, took to his heels in such trepidation, that he stumbled, and rubbed the skin off the point of his nose. This was seen at a glance to be 'the first bite of the ghoul'; and the exasperated populace made a rush at the monster, and would have torn him to pieces if he had not been rescued by the police. These put him in a carriage, and whirled him off towards the station-house; the crowd gave chase, and for two miles or so ran hooting and yelling after the carriage; everywhere the alarm spread, and the mob

increased; they poured through the streets like a torrent, and ladies, as they swept by, crossed themselves, and exclaimed: 'A revolution!'

"But the unfortunate prisoner was safely landed at the station-house, and the mob, by thousands, pressed round, eager and furious. Then the story ran: 'This is the man who eats our children! He has been at it two years and a half! He has eaten up one hundred and ten infants!' 'Two hundred!' says another. 'Two hundred and fifty!' says a third. 'He eats them raw!' 'He broils them on a gridiron!' 'He makes them into sausages, and sells them!' The end of the adventure was, that as the mob seemed determined not to raise the siege of the station-house, the Frenchman was dressed in some disguise, let out

by a private door, and so escaped for the time. But the most curious part of the story is to come: it is an ascertained fact, that *not one child in Valparaiso is missing!*"

**Mr LB Jackson**  
Willenhall, West Midlands

## Goat chow

In *Mythchaser* [FT336:21], a reader wanted to know if her goat was being a fussy eater. Goats in general are not fussy eaters; however, if they are pets or are otherwise used to being fed goat chow, grains, or some other regular foodstuff, then that is what they expect to be fed. If a goat has not been taught to forage by its mother or its flock then it will not do so instinctively. If someone takes a pet goat and decides to 'go cheap' and let the goat forage in the yard – forget it. The goat will stand around and wait to be fed. Goats will not eat cans, though they may try to get the labels off. They won't eat anything that's metal or plastic (as far as I know) unless they are just trying to get at something remaining in the container or the aforementioned labels.

In the last two years I learned a lot about goats from the co-owner of Eco-Goats.com, who hires out its herd of goats in the Pennsylvania-Maryland-Virginia area. We used them in May 2015 to eat invasive plants from a one-acre plot belonging to the swimming club adjoining our neighbourhood. That was a great experience and I learned a lot about what goats will and won't eat.

**Tracey Serle**  
Alexandria, Virginia

## Lady Diana Cooper

Alan Murdie says he was told by Denis Healey that a ghost seen in his Admiralty House flat in 1969 was that of Lady Diana Cooper [FT234:18]. Since Cooper was still alive in 1969, only dying in 1986, this was either an apparition of a living person rather than a ghost – or Healey was pulling Murdie's leg.

**Rob Kemp**  
Colchester, Essex

## Wait Umno

In response to footnote three of “Were the Ummites British?” by Reinaldo Manso [FT336:58-59], the film *Los Monstruos del Terror/ The Man Who Came from Umno* was released in Britain as *Dracula vs Frankenstein* in 1970 on a double bill with the Pete Walker-directed Susan George thriller *Die Screaming, Marianne*. American International Pictures bought the film, it played USTV and had a VHS release. It seems *The Man Who Came from Umno* was a working title for marketing the film.

**George White**  
Bray, Co Wicklow

## Foreign water

Mythchaser [FT334:25] asks if anyone is still told not to drink the water whilst travelling in foreign lands, and whether only the British were so warned. I reside in the UK, and make the following observations.

In 1996 I went to Spain with three friends for the usual Costa del Sol sort of holiday, staying just outside Malaga. We were told by travel reps *not* to drink the water and *never* to have ice in our drinks, as the water was “not clean” and we would get ill. Incredulous, we drank the water and didn’t get ill. We were all fine. In 2001 I went to Tunisia as part of a tour group with the company Cosmos. We were told to drink only bottled water that we had purchased, as once again the water from taps was “not clean

enough” and we would get ill if we drank it. I drank it, and was fine (as was my husband). Everyone else on the tour thought we were bonkers and purchased bottled water.

In 2010 I went to Germany to see the Passion Play at Oberammergau. I went as part of a group with the company Leger, whose tour rep told us that we should drink only bottled water because we would get “upset tummies” from water we “were not used to”. I questioned this. The rep was adamant that tap water would make everyone ill. Not because it was dirty, but because it was “different”. This was the first time I had heard this explanation. I couldn’t get any answer as to *how* it was different. I drank the tap water. I was fine.

In 2015 I was in Chile, and at one point I was in the Atacama Desert, based near the town of San Pedro de Atacama. Everyone in that area is told not to drink the water, and everyone buys bottled water (all local people included) because the tap water is contaminated with trace amounts of arsenic. This is due to all the copper mining that goes on there – near Calama (about 75 miles/120km away) is the world’s largest copper mine, and arsenic is a by-product. This was a sensible reason for not drinking the water, so here I purchased bottled water. I don’t have any great worries about drinking tap water generally in most developed countries; I don’t think I lead a wild and daring life by doing so, either.

**Lorna Stroup Nilsson**  
Princetown, Devon

## Perks or perils

I was gratified by the letter about the link between fortune and creativity [FT335:70], as I recognised myself in his description of artistic types having brushes with the paranormal, as well as having experienced mental

breakdowns or apparent mental illness whilst incorporating their experiences into their creations.

While I am certainly no Wordsworth, I have found a safe haven in creative writing and find the twin demons of mental illness and inexplicable happenings morph into an angel when expressed in poetry. The paranormal experiences go back to childhood and include bedroom visitors, out-of-body experiences directed by said visitors, a waking dream of life in the 22nd century directed by a four-foot-tall lady in blue, the face of an Aztec god staring at me from the ceiling on waking, and most recently a robotic voice behind me, on waking in an armchair, seemingly giving me an instructional lecture. When I turned round to see what was going on the voice went into skip mode like an old vinyl record, and only resumed when I closed my eyes and went back to sleep.

When I write it is a subliminal attempt to make sense of why such things have happened to me, and what is the true nature of reality, consciousness and history. It seems an impossible task given the elusive nature of fortune, but I am only happy when writing.

**‘Bertrand Beech’**  
Somerset

## Selling hair

Just a contextualising footnote to Ulrich Magin’s letter on hair-clipping panics [FT336:71]. The girls who lied about selling their hair are most likely to have disposed of their crowning glory to a wig-maker. At a time when women rarely if ever cut their hair, a young girl of the lower orders blessed with luxuriant locks might well be prepared to sacrifice them for cash. Country girls and peasants (in those areas where such a term was still applicable) were supposed to provide the best hair because of their healthy rural lives away from the polluted atmosphere of cities. As a good head of hair was considered a major asset to a woman’s charms, however, such an action might not go down well with parents or lover – hence the need to make up a story about the hair being cut off against their will.

From the buyer’s point of view,

fashionable hairstyles (especially in the 1860s, which is the period cited) were often so elaborate as to absolutely require “false hair” (well, preferably someone else’s real hair) to bulk them out. This practice found its way into 19th century literature. In *The Woodlanders* (1886-7) Thomas Hardy offered an uncharacteristically sympathetic account of the peasant girl, Marty South, who sells her beautiful chestnut hair. More typical was Anthony Trollope’s distrust, verging on disgust, for the fashion of padding out a lady’s coiffure. In *Is He Popenjoy?* (1877) he memorably describes a character’s “great crested helmet of false hair nearly eighteen inches deep”, while in *He Knew He Was Right* (1869) Trollope has his character Mr Gibson frightened off from marriage by the size of his intended’s chignon: “...never in his life had he seen anything so unshapely as that huge wen at the back of her head... It grew bigger and bigger, more shapeless, monstrous, absurd, and abominable, as he looked at it. Nothing should force upon him the necessity of assisting to carry such an abortion through the world.”

In *A Summer in Brittany* (1840) Trollope’s brother, Thomas Adolphus Trollope, aided by their mother Frances, described the practice of hair-selling as being organised and acceptable in country districts:

“In various parts of the motley crowd there were three or four different purchasers of this commodity, who travel the country for the purpose of attending the fairs, and buying the tresses of the peasant girls. They have particularly fine hair and frequently in the greatest abundance. I should have thought that female vanity would have effectually prevented such a traffic as this from being carried on to any extent. But there seemed to be no difficulty in finding possessors of beautiful heads of hair perfectly willing to sell. We saw several girls sheared one after the other like sheep, and as many more standing ready for the shears, with their caps in their hands, and their long hair combed out and hanging down to their waists. Some of the operators were men and some women. By the side





of the dealer was placed a large basket, into which every successive crop of hair, tied up into a whisp by itself, was thrown. No doubt, the reason for this indifference to their tresses on the part of the fair Bretonnes, is to be found in the invariable 'mode' which covers every head, from childhood upwards, with close caps, which entirely prevent any part of the hair from being seen, and of course as totally conceal the want of it."

The sophisticated urban author can't eliminate a hint of cultural superiority here. The peasants of Brittany are viewed as interesting curiosities, described in the book's preface as offering to the cultured observer the "most perfectly preserved specimen... [of] the remaining lineal descendents... of the ancient Celtic race".

While wearing false hair was usually criticised as a practice related to vanity and deception, the Victorians did have a complex and often contradictory attitude to feminine tresses. Even amongst the leisured classes it was common to save the loose hair or "combings" that brushing long hair always produces. These could be woven into sentimental keepsakes, such as a watch-chain for dear Papa or a display in a glass-fronted brooch – a practice also common with the hair of the deceased. It can be difficult to distinguish mourning jewellery of this kind from merely sentimental examples that used the locks of a living relative or friend. One's own combings could, of course, also be arranged as hair-pieces, especially as curls for the forehead, known as "false fronts". Older ladies with thinning hair typically had recourse to this innocent deception.

**Gail Nina Anderson**

*Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne*

## Loch Inver creature

Here is an interesting sea monster account from a Black Isle fisherman skipper, 45 years at sea.

"One particular day that always sticks in my memory was in the summer of '52 whilst we were steaming from Ullapool, along with five other driftnet boats, making for the Handa grounds off Cape Wrath. We were inside the boat



when crossing the deep water off Loch Inver on a beautiful calm day in June, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, when one of the crew saw a strange creature with a head on a long neck, at least three feet [90cm] long, above the surface. I can only describe the head as being similar to a seal's, but much larger and having that distinct neck. We decided to attempt to lasso it and I and one of the crew each made one, then we slowed the boat down and approached the creature to within a few yards, but both attempts missed and it dived down, giving us all a clear view of its body. The creature was eighteen to twenty feet [5.5-6m] long, had large flippers, one on each side, a grey/brown/black body with a white blotch on its side. It reappeared on our port side and as before dived under again on being approached. In all we made four or five attempts to catch it, and the nearest boat on our offside, the *Marguerite*, called us up on the WT enquiring if we had a man overboard as we had been circling so much. My father reassured him that all was well and then told us to forget what we were trying to do as we were only wasting time. Catching herring was what we should be interested in... I have never had any enlightenment as to what the species might be... This was a real creature, observed by all the crew... That creature we saw was no Loch Ness Monster, or whale, or walrus."

[Donald Patience: *Skipper's Yarns from Avoch*, published 2010 by 'For The Right Reasons, Inverness', pp.83/4.]

• Theo Paijmans's account of reports about 19th century body snatchers in Afro-American communities [FT332:30-31] includes "a plausible solution" as to the origin of the stories, and the suggestion by the *Wisconsin State Register* in 1891 of "a new word [added] to the dictionary – 'burking' – stealing

corpses for purposes of dissection." The archives of the School of Scottish Studies offer 38 recorded accounts from 20th century Scottish travellers of escapes from or being lost to burkers, at <http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/>. These are all related as true events, at times happening to members of the reporter's family. A much earlier use of the word is in an account of the 1831 London Burkers at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London\\_Burkers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London_Burkers). The name of course derives from the notorious Edinburgh body snatchers and murderers Burke and Hare, active in 1828.

**Ewan McVicar**

*Linlithgow, West Lothian*

## DIY mummies

Regarding the letter from Richard Ecclestone [FT335:69], my former student misses a couple of points which professional pride and royal pedantry demand that I make good. I'll not have it said that I sent a student out into the world with an iffy grasp of Japanese dead folks.

Though Richard suggests that the process of Sokushinbutsu is of Japanese origin, this is not really fair. It was certainly refined by the monk Ku'kai (774-835), working from his base at Mount Ko'ya, but he had already acquired much of the lore regarding the preservation of the flesh of important Buddhist priests whilst travelling in China, and the technique itself appears to have been transmitted from India. However, what is certain is that when Ku'kai's traditions began to penetrate into the cold, hard lands of northern Japan (old Dewa – modern Akita and Yamagata prefectures) the Shingon monks who took up their master's ideals often drove themselves to extremes. Shingon being a tradition that encompasses physical privation as a way to spiritual purity, it is not surprising that someone would come to the conclusion that enduring the ultimate test in an excruciating death would bring the greatest benefit.

This is where we get to the Sokushinbutsu: The Three Thousand Days of Endurance. First thousand days: starvation diet, daily exercise and prayer. Ridding

the body of excess fat. Second thousand days: the adoption of a special nut, herb and tea diet which mixes sap from the Urushi tree (*Toxicodendron vernicifluum*). The sap induces vomiting and urination, and the intent was to help the body rid the flesh of moisture. Add to that drinking water from a sacred spring on the slopes of Mount Choukai, which is to this day rich in arsenic. Whether the effect was understood or not, the consumption of this water helped suffuse the flesh of the priests involved with enough toxic material to hinder the growth of post mortem flora, and thereby slow – even stop – decay. Final thousand days: the living priest – if he has not already passed on from his trials – is interred in the ground with only a bell and an air tube. Whilst the bell rings, air is fed to the tomb. When the bell stops, the tomb is sealed and left for a thousand days.

It seems that most who undertook this process failed, but 24 such monks live to this day, standing on the brink of Nirvana as Bodhisattva guiding the faithful on, and protecting their flocks. My local haunt, Sakata, was the home of the two priests mentioned, Chukai and Enmyoukai – men who died not to escape the world and its burdens, but to serve the world as they saw it. No wonder they are still 'employed' by the family temple and receive the stipends that priests normally receive. However, as Richard rightly suggests, they might spend their money on their regular redressings (every decade), after which their clothes are shredded and offered, bound in sea shells, as tokens of luck for pilgrims heading out to climb Mount Choukai.

Noble? Foolish? Certainly dedicated... Indeed, the current head priest of the Kaikoji in Sakata even speaks of one such priest castrating himself as a way of convincing his old flame that his former life was over... Dropping the meat-and-two-veg into her lap and telling the poor woman to 'sling her hook'. There's a certain finality to that though...

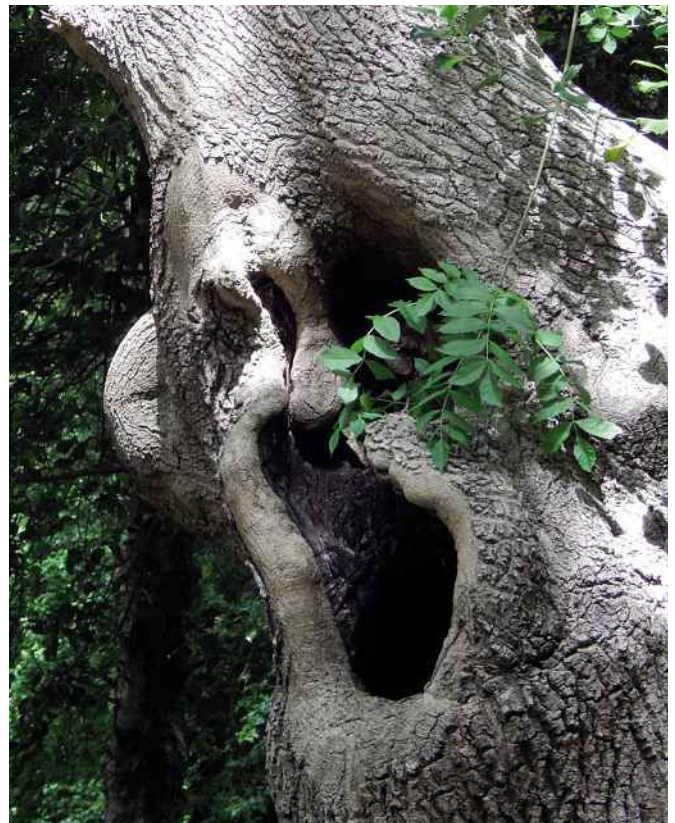
**Dr Darren-Jon Ashmore**

*Professor of Anthropology, Yamanashi Gakuin University, Sakaori, Japan*



## Simulacra corner

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 [sieveking@forteantimes.com](mailto:sieveking@forteantimes.com) – and please tell us your postal address.



ABOVE: Some wooden personalities snapped and sent in by FT readers (clockwise from top left): Great Coates, Lincolnshire by Nicola Maasdam; Stowe Estate, Buckinghamshire, by Pete Bowman; Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, by Chris Seavor; Highgate Cemetery, north London, by Nickie Baglow.



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## Phantom Footsteps

Sometime in the early Seventies I was staying at a farm in rural Norway. This was a traditional Norwegian smallholding in a traditional farming district, but the owners had a countercultural bent and the place was a popular stopover for European and American hippies. (Let me make it clear that there was no overt drug use on the farm, and I did not myself indulge in any kind of drug-taking, so this cannot be used as an explanation for the ghost.) The main building was (and is) an old, ramshackle, two-storey wooden house. The upper floor had several bedrooms plus a bath and a toilet; the ground floor had a large kitchen-cum-dining room and a large common room. Outside the kitchen was a narrow hall or vestibule with a staircase to the first floor. It is important to understand that it would be impossible to get around the house without making a noise. The staircase was creaky, and the outside door and the kitchen door were large, ungainly affairs with heavy, hand-wrought hinges, locks and handles – at least 100 years old and maybe more.

One night I had to sleep in the kitchen (which was equipped with bunk beds) since all the upper bedrooms were taken. I was thus the only person on the ground floor. Sometime during the night, I was awakened by heavy footsteps, 'slow and deliberate' as in Matt Kenway's story [FT319:75], tramping around inside the kitchen. It was absolutely pitch dark, so it was impossible to see anything. I was of course scared stiff, so I didn't dare switch on the light – I just lay stock still until the footsteps stopped.

The obvious explanation would be that someone else in the household had come into the kitchen. But if they had any business there, they would have switched on the light or carried a torch. On the other hand, if somebody had wanted to scare me as a practical joke, they wouldn't have been able to enter or leave without making a lot of noise. Having stayed there many times before, I knew the sounds of the house well, and I am certain that nobody left the room after the footsteps ceased.

So, to make a long story short, I am pretty sure it was a 'ghost', whatever that is. Stupidly, I never told the owners about it, so I never got to know if the house was supposed to be haunted. I have of course ruled out 'house noises' as a cause of these sounds. Heavy footsteps are heavy footsteps, and everybody knows they sound different from the cracks and pops in old wood. Matt Kenway also mentions mice as a possible cause of sounds. I have lived in two different houses with mice, and apart from the fact that you would never believe what a racket these small animals can make, it is impossible to mistake them for footsteps.

**Nils Erik Grande**  
*Oslo, Norway*

In response to Matt Kenway's "Phantom footsteps" [FT319:75]: I often have large doves and pigeons land on the flat roof of my extension and it is surprising the amount of noise they can make as they waddle around. I have often thought that a person was on my roof – so don't rule out an avian source for the noise.

**Paul Jackson**  
*Wiltshire*

## Bloodshot Eyes

I had my appendix removed when I was 11 years old. I was already pushing 6ft (1.8m) and was on the men's ward in North Staffordshire Hospital, Stoke-on-Trent. On the day I left, an Asian chap walked up to me and shook my hand. He was very elderly and had bloodshot eyes. Two years later when playing football with my friend in a churchyard, the same man appeared as if from nowhere and tried to shake my hand again. Freaked, we ran. My friend revealed how *he* was freaked out as the Asian guy had 'ruffled' his hair years before at a parade in the town centre. We both remembered his weird bloodshot eyes and how old he looked.

During the summer holidays in 1997, the day after Princess Diana died, I was walking to my local shop in Stoke-on-Trent to buy a newspaper for my mother. As I walked past a public phone box in Sun Street, the phone rang. Picking it up, I was astonished to hear my friend on the other end – even weirder was that apparently, *I had called him*. Note that we lived miles apart, myself in Shelton, he in an area known as Berry Hill.

**Elijah Lycett**  
*Macclesfield, Cheshire*

## Music Hall Fright

Many years ago I was a stagehand at the City Varieties Music Hall in Leeds, Yorkshire, one of the oldest surviving Music Halls in the UK. One night it was my turn to turn off the lights in the theatre's auditorium. Although I have a fortean view of ghosts and "as a fortean I have no opinion", there is nothing more spookier than walking around a darkened auditorium in the dead of night. I am quite happy to account for the ghost phenomenon with the "stone tape" theory: over a period of 200 years so much emotion has been expressed by actors and singers alike that it's quite feasible that emotional energy has somehow become trapped in the environment and this energy is released somehow.

My story begins with me leaving the dress circle bar, which was still open. I had no need for a torch as the lighting board was the last thing to be turned off. The "lx" board was in the upper circle or the "gods", and if I turned around I could see the far off chink of light from

the bar and head there for a late night beer and cigarette.

First I went down to stage level and dropped the heavy safety curtain, after which I was free to turn off the front-of-house lights on each level up to the gods. I was still left with a small 25-volt emergency lighting bulb, which is on until you are out of the door. From the stalls (ground floor) I proceeded through the tiny "green room" up a set of stairs to the dress circle, turning lights off until I was up in the gods. Everything now was pitch black apart from the comforting chink of light behind me.

As I reached over to switch off the lighting desk, I heard an audible sigh from the stalls 10m (33ft) below me, then a groan, and the unmistakable sound of the cinema-style seat squeaking and flipping to its upright position as if someone had stood up. Suffice to say I was in the bar very quickly after this incident. I like to think it was a patron from long ago, finally realising it was time to go home after spending a wonderful night at the theatre.

**Nidge Solly**  
*By email*

## Bettyhill Phantom

In August 1974, when I was 14, I spent a family holiday in Bettyhill in the north of Scotland. My parents had rented a tiny isolated caravan down by the beach.

One day my mum suggested she and I visit the large shingle deposit on the beach, as a local guidebook indicated the presence of several ancient graves. To reach the site, we had to walk to the local village and cross some low heathland. The area was remote with long reaching views, and the weather fair but not sunny. We exchanged greetings with a French couple eating a picnic by their car and continued walking for about 20 minutes before arriving at the shingle mound.

Not being sure what we were looking for, we split up. A few moments later I heard my mum call out: "Karen – over here. I've found one!" Turning round, I saw my mum waving me forward. Behind her stood a tall figure, about 6ft 6in to 7ft (2–2.1m) tall, with arms stretched out, wearing a long-sleeved black robe with a hood or cowl over its head and face. I scampered down a slight dip and crossed to where my mum was indicating a box-like grave. "Was it the French tourist who showed you?" I asked, to which she replied: "There's no one else here – only you and me."

I have no idea why I thought it was a French tourist. The following day I went back by myself and willed it/him/her to appear, but nothing happened. I will always be grateful to have had that experience – it convinced me there is more to this world than we know.

**Karen Lilly**  
*Chatham, Kent*

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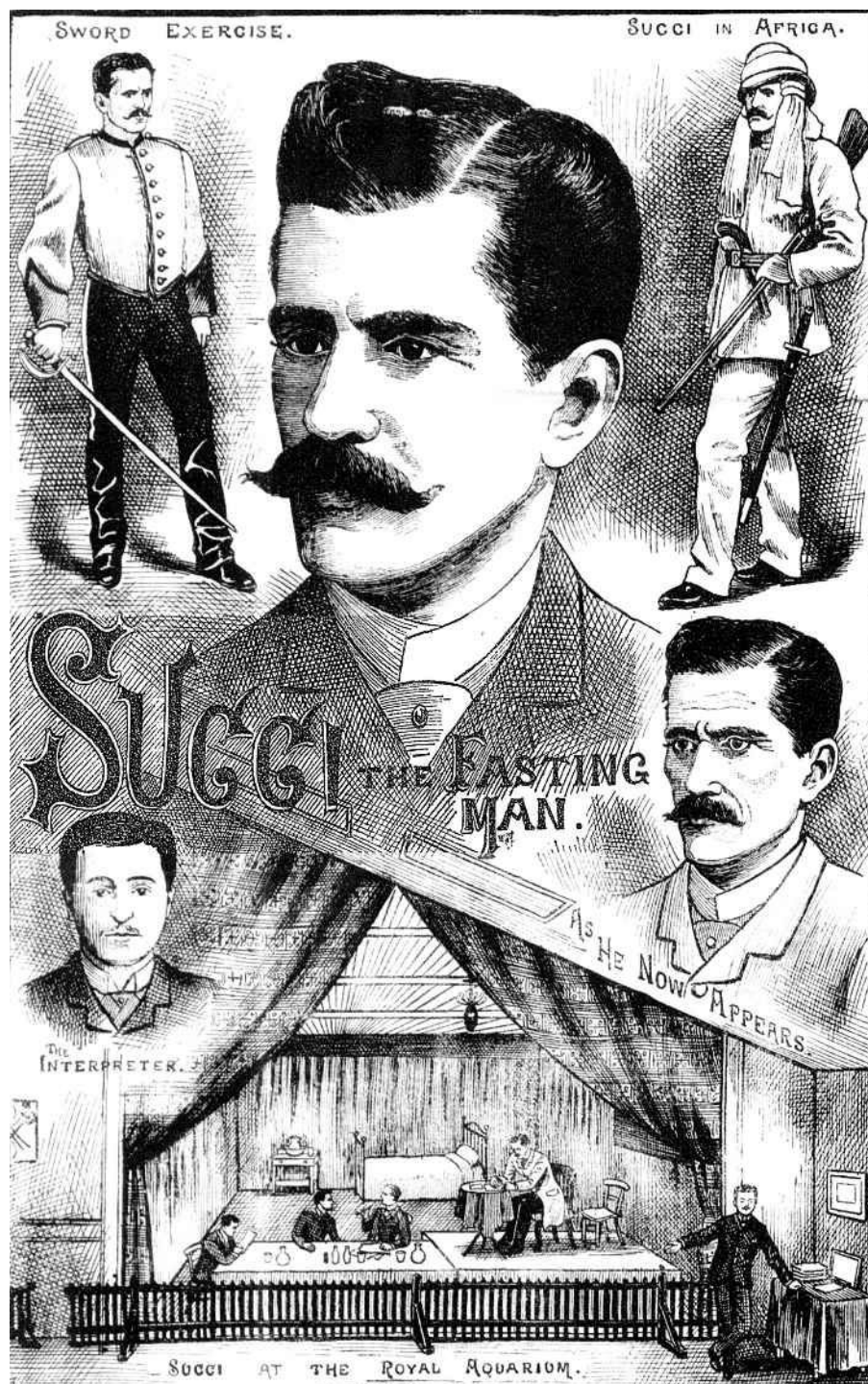
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LAW COURTS AND WEEK

JAN BONDESON presents more sensational stories and startling Victorian images from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

## 45. SUCCI, THE FASTING MAN

Giovanni Succi was born in the coastal town of Cesenatico, Italy, in 1853. His early career was uneventful and he became a bank clerk in Rome, but in the 1880s he travelled as a commercial agent in Madagascar and East Africa and claimed to have discovered an elixir that enabled him to fast for extended periods of time without any ill effect. To prove that his elixir worked, he made himself available to the medical profession in Italy and France. Experiments began in Paris, where Succi fasted for 14 days and nights. In August 1886, he completed a 30-day fast in Milan, and in December the same year, he won a bet of 15,000 francs by repeating the same feat in Paris. In 1888, he was awarded a diploma by the Medico-Physical Academy of Florence after successfully completing another 30-day fast. 'Fasting Artists' were considered quite a novelty in the 1880s and 1890s, and Succi could make a comfortable living, travelling around in Europe to show off his fasting prowess.

In March 1890, he came to the Westminster Aquarium, where he wanted to complete a 40-day fast. There was immediate interest from Londoners, who took a keen interest in fasting artists, as well as from the medical profession, who saw a golden opportunity to study the physiology of fasting at first-hand. According to Dr George N Robins, Succi's personal medical attendant, the Italian was 5ft 5in (165cm) tall and slightly built. He seemed quietly confident that the fast would be a success, and ate heartily in the days before it was to commence. After beginning to fast, Succi took neither solid nor liquid nourishment; he drank only water, and regularly sipped small quantities of his elixir. He smoked one or two pipes each day, and occasionally a cigar or cigarette. After 10 days of fasting, Succi had lost more than 16 pounds in weight, but he seemed none the worse for his abstinence from nourishment. He sometimes suffered from biliousness, which he treated using warm water as an emetic. On the 40th day of fasting, he remained in good



health: his pulse was regular and fairly firm, and his heart sounds, though feeble, were distinct. He had lost more than 34 pounds in weight, in excess of 26.5 per cent of his original

body mass!

After the 40-day fast at the Royal Aquarium, Succi became the most famous fasting artist in the world. He was paid £3,000 for his ordeal,

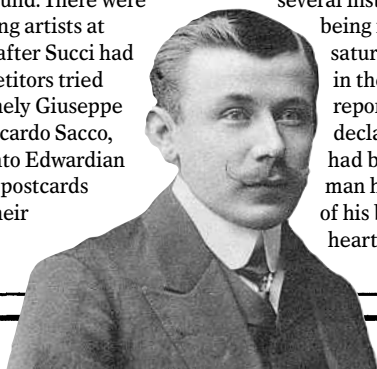


# ILLUSTRATED NEWS

WEEKLY RECORD



and had no shortage of other offers. Later in 1890, he completed a 45-day fast in New York. In 1892, he was back at the Royal Aquarium for an intended 52-day fast, but he felt very ill on the 44<sup>th</sup> day, and had to take nourishment. For several years to come, he travelled around in Europe, performing various fasting stunts, sometimes combined with gymnastic performances. When he came to Vienna, disaster struck: during a 50-day fast, it was discovered that he had nourishment smuggled in to him. This exposure did not end his career, however: in Verona, he was bricked up inside a small prison without windows, and in Florence, he was imprisoned in a cell without food. In 1897, when Succi was performing at a music-hall in Paris, he went stark raving mad and broke everything in his room. When two police constables appeared on the scene, the frenzied Italian threw empty champagne bottles at them, until he was eventually secured and tightly bound. There were quite a few other fasting artists at large at the time, and after Succi had left Britain, two competitors tried to usurp his fame, namely Giuseppe Sacco-Homann and Ricardo Sacco, who both flourished into Edwardian times and had picture postcards printed to celebrate their exploits.



As for the original performer, Giovanni Succi fell on evil times in the 1900s, since fasting artists had gone out of fashion. In Vienna, he was paid only £20 for a 30-day fast. According to a newspaper article from 1908, Succi was working as a male nurse at the asylum in Nanterre outside Paris, commenting that "Fasting does not feed the faster!" Another newspaper report said that in 1918, Succi had died destitute in Florence; after fasting had completely gone out of fashion during the Great War, the once-famous artist could no longer support himself. He was said to have been 70 years old at the time of his death, but the real Succi was just 65 at the time. It is also suspicious that according to Oettermann & Spiegel's *Lexikon der Zauberkünster*, Succi was still alive in 1924.

Fasting performers have always been regarded with suspicion, and there have been several instances of their drinking water being mixed with nutrients, and cloths saturated with broth. But a writer in the *British Medical Journal*, who reported on Succi's 40-day fast in 1890, declared himself certain that there had been no deception; after all, the man had lost more than 26.5 per cent of his body weight. After having eaten heartily for a week after his fast, he

had regained more than 14 of the 34 pounds he had lost. Extreme fasting of this kind can lead to serious electrolyte disorders, and Succi was fortunate to survive his foolhardy exploits; his 'madness' in 1897 may well have been related to some dangerous fluctuation in his serum levels of sodium and/or potassium. Later, during an even longer fast in Vienna, Succi is recorded to have been exposed as a cheat, and this of course undermines one's confidence in the authenticity of his other exploits, although the careful monitoring of his London fast in 1890 was quite impressive. Succi's 'elixir' may well have contained some appetite suppressant, although I would put it beyond the witch-doctors of East Africa to have made any important breakthrough in this field. A jocular London paper recommended that Succi's elixir should be mixed with the drinking-water of the paupers and workhouse inmates, in order to reduce the bills for food to maintain the poor; and with this rather Swiftian modest proposal, the tale of the Italian fasting performer ends.

FACING PAGE: 1. Succi the Fasting Man at the Aquarium, *IPN*, 26 April 1890. ABOVE: The end of Succi's fast, *IPN*, 3 May 1890. LEFT: The fasting usurper Ricardo Sacco from a signed postcard sold at his performances.



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# Why Fortean?



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**FT** toes no party line.

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# PHENOMENOMIX David Bowie

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

JANUARY 10<sup>TH</sup> 2016... KEVIN JACKSON IS DISTRESSED...

WEEP WEEP!  
DAVID BOWIE'S DEAD!  
CAN WE DO A "GREAT OCCULTISTS" ABOUT HIM?

SURE! BUT I DIDN'T REALIZE HE WAS A "GO..."

OH YES! WELL-FIRE AWAY...

OK-HOW ABOUT THIS?...

DAVID BOWIE WAS ALWAYS FASCINATED BY THE OCCULT, BY EASTERN RELIGIONS, BY SCIENCE FICTION, AND BY MYTHS... THOUGH SOME OF HIS EARLY SONGS ABOUT THAT SORT OF THING COULD BE A BIT DAFT!

HA HA HA

HEE HEE HEE

ON HIS 1971 ALBUM **HUNKY DORY** THINGS GOT A BIT MORE SERIOUS - THE LP IS CRAMMED WITH REFERENCES TO THE NIETZSCHEAN SUPERMAN...

OH YOU PRETTY THING... YOU BETTER MAKE WAY FOR THE HOMO SUPERIOR!

AND, OF COURSE, TO UNCLE ALEISTER CROWLEY HIMSELF...

HMMM... I LIKE THE CUT OF THIS YOUNGSTER'S JIB!

"I'M CLOSER TO THE GOLDEN DAWN IMMERSSED IN CROWLEY'S UNIFORM..."

HE PLAYED AN ALIEN IN "THE MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH".

... AND A VAMPIRE IN "THE HUNGER"...

HIS GREAT ALBUM "STATION TO STATION" IS CRAMMED WITH ESOTERIC REFERENCES TO THE KABBALAH!

ONE MAGICAL MOVEMENT FROM KETHER TO MALKUTH!

"KETHER" AND "MALKUTH" ARE THE TOP AND BOTTOM "STATIONS" OF THE KABBALISTIC TREE OF LIFE.

WHEN HE WAS WORKING ON THE ALBUM, HIS HOUSE BECAME INFESTED WITH EVIL SPIRITS - HE CALLED IN AN EXORCIST, NAMED WALLI ELMLARK... SHE EXORCISED HIS SWIMMING POOL, AND SAID THAT-

THE SPIRITS THRESHED LIKE WAVES ON AN ANGRY SEA!

HIS FAREWELL TO THE WORLD WAS THE CRYPTIC AND BEAUTIFUL "BLACK STAR", FULL OF DEAD SPACEMEN, ALIENS, AND OCCULT IMAGERY...

AMONG HIS LAST WORDS: WHEREVER I'M GOING, I PROMISE IT WON'T BE BORING!

FAREWELL DAVID BOWIE... YOU GAVE US SO MUCH!  
OR, IN OTHER WORDS... WHAM BAM THANK YOU MA'AM!!





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# FORTEAN TIMES 339

ON SALE 31 MAR 2016

# STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



A German man died on Christmas Day after blowing up a condom dispenser with a homemade bomb in a botched robbery. The 29-year-old from Münster, and two accomplices, attached the bomb to the vending machine in a quiet street before taking cover in their vehicle; but the victim didn't close the door in time and was struck in the head by a steel shard from the explosion.

His accomplices took him to hospital but he later died of his wounds. The men told staff at the hospital in the western town of Schoppingen, near the Dutch border, that their unconscious friend had fallen down the stairs, but one of them later admitted what had happened. Police confirmed that none of the money or condoms from the machine had been taken. The two surviving men were arrested before later being released from custody. *BBC News, 28 Dec 2015; thelocal.de, 9 Jan 2016.*

A suspected burglar who jumped into a Florida lake while fleeing police was killed and partially eaten by an alligator. The body of Matthew Riggins, 22 – missing parts of both legs and an arm – was found 10 days after he disappeared on 13 November while being chased by sheriff's deputies in a residential area of Palm Bay, where he had gone with a friend to break into houses. His corpse was found in Barefoot Bay lake near an aggressive 11ft (3m) alligator, which was later killed. Parts of his body were found inside the reptile's stomach.

There are more than a million alligators in Florida. Attacks on humans are rare, though Riggins's death was the second in two months (in October, a 61-year-old man was attacked while swimming). Before that, the last fatal alligator attack was in 2007 when, like Riggins, a convict fleeing police dived into a lake. Florida wildlife officials said that there had been 22 known deaths caused by alligators since 1948. *Times, Irish Examiner, 9 Dec; (Queensland) Courier-Mail, 10 Dec 2015.*

The body of 18-year-old Joshua Vernon Maddox, reported missing in May 2008, was found in the chimney of a cabin less than 2km (1.2 miles) from his home in Colorado. The macabre discovery was made in September 2015, when builders demolished the cabin, named Thunderhead Ranch, which had been abandoned for more than a decade. The teenager was identified by dental records. His death was ruled an accident with no signs of trauma, but the circumstances are likely to remain a mystery. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, Adelaide Advertiser, 2 Oct 2015.*

Donnie Barker III, 25, and his neighbour, Steven Lee Setser, 19, were out hunting on a mountain in Boone County, in southern West Virginia, on 23 November. They built a fire beneath a massive sandstone boulder sitting atop a rock, and the heat evidently split the boulder in half and a part of it landed on Barker, killing him. A policeman estimated that the lethal rock was the size of a police cruiser. Setser barely escaped with his life, as the sheared boulder grazed his head. He was able to leave the scene on an all-terrain vehicle to summon help. *[AP] 24 Nov 2015.*

New Year's firecrackers, which are said to ward off evil spirits in the Philippines, left 380 people injured and one dead: a drunk man who lit a firecracker called "Goodbye Philippines" and was killed as he embraced it. *Times, 2 Jan 2016.*

A Pennsylvania man was helping to decorate his mother-in-law's tombstone last Easter when it toppled over, pinning him underneath and killing him. We wonder what "decorating" a tombstone involves... *Irish Independent, 11 April 2015.*

A 71-year-old woman was walking on a sidewalk in central New York when she was crushed by a woman who had jumped from a window on the third floor of her apartment building. People at an office party rushed to help. The jumper was rushed to Bellevue Hospital, where she died. The pedestrian suffered serious, but not life-threatening injuries. *(Sydney) D.Telegraph, 14 Dec 2015.*

Ka Yang, 34, an office worker and mother of four from Sacramento, California, was jailed for life on 29 December for murdering her one-month-old daughter Mirabella Thao-Lo by putting her in a microwave oven for up to five minutes in 2011. The baby suffered horrific burns. Yang claimed she had an epileptic fit, blacked out and woke to find the bay injured next to the microwave. She had a history of seizures, but paramedics said she was not disoriented when they got to her home, and they found the baby's pacifier in the microwave. Ka Yang was jailed for a minimum of 29 years for first-degree murder.

Another death-by-microwave took place in Houston, Texas, last November, when police found the body of J'zyra Thompson, aged 19 months, covered with burn marks. Two of J'zyra's siblings, both three years old, told investigators one of them put their sister in the oven while the other turned it on. The children said they made the oven "hot" and J'zyra was kicking the door while inside. (Their mother was out at the time). *(Queensland) Courier-Mail, 24 Nov; Sun on Sunday, (Queensland) Sunday Mail, 20 Dec 2015.*

His Li, known as Michael, was walking his pug-type dog in Dovercourt, Essex, on a lead when it dragged him into the path of a car. He suffered head injuries and died in hospital. The pet was unhurt. *Sun, 30 Sept 2015.*

Three Chinese men suffocated while trying to rob an ancient tomb in Henan province. Yiyang county police said that five villagers entered a tomb near their village of Chengjiao when three of them fainted from lack of air. The other two called for help, but a rescue attempt failed. *Irish Independent, 2 Oct 2015.*

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