

WIN!
THE TWILIGHT ZONE
SEASON 1
ON BLU-RAY!
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**BEAM ME UP,
SAMMY!**

VAN HALEN MAN
CLAIMS ALIENS
ABDUCTED HIM



**STIFF
PENALTIES**

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SAVE YOU FROM
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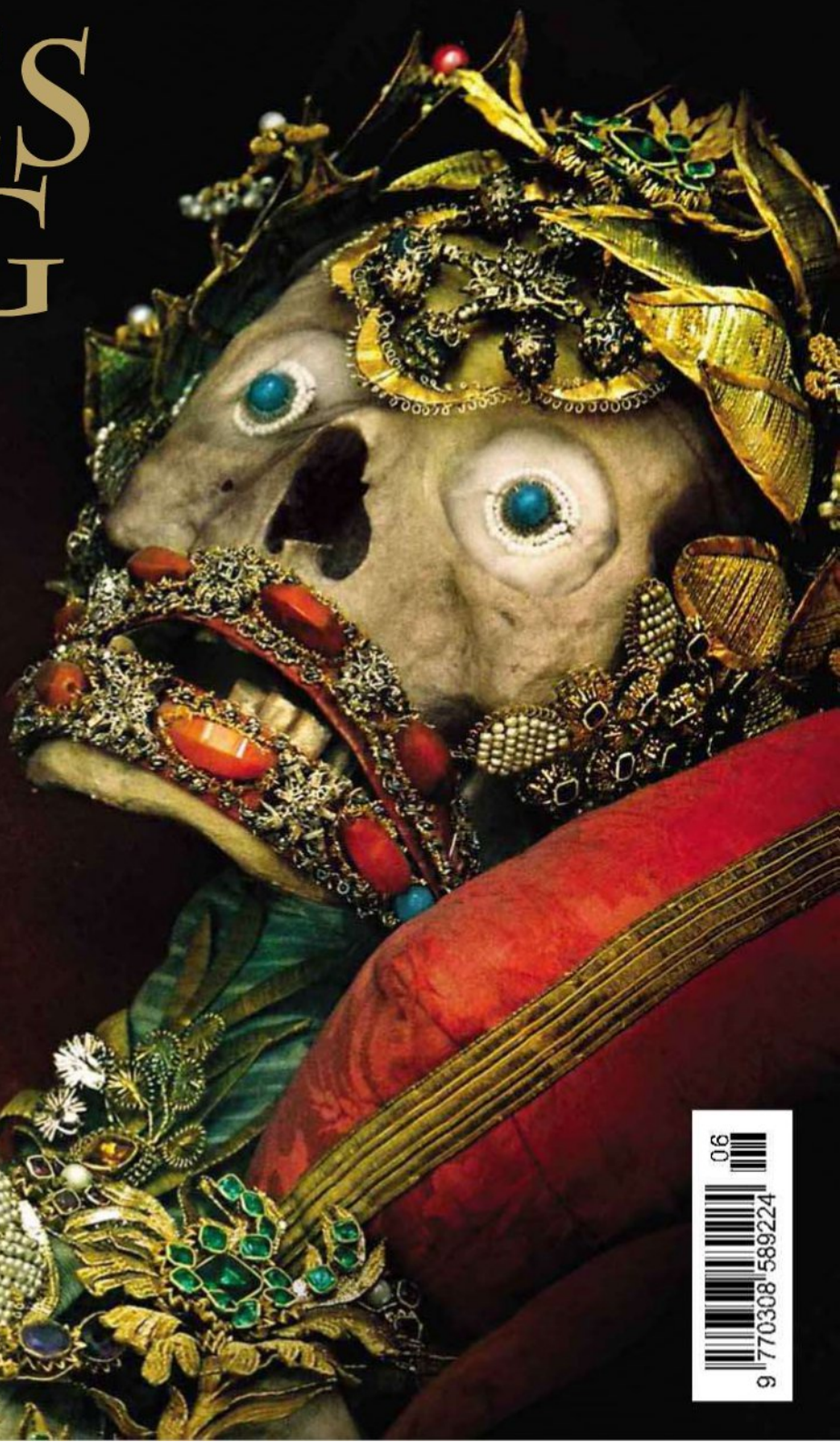
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HIJACKED THE PARANORMAL

WATERS OF LIFE

EXPLORING HOLY WELLS
AND SACRED SPRINGS



Write Your Way To A New Career!

Writers Bureau Celebrates Twenty-two Years of Helping New Writers

by Nick Daws

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

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

"My writing career took off exponentially."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hazel McHaffie



Tim Skelton



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

Michael Foley, Essex

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



Cindy-Lou Dale, Kent

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

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editorial

Putting monsters on the map

UnConvention 2011 dates confirmed

People have been asking us whether there would be a 2011 UnConvention quite literally from the moment our 2010 event finished! We're now pleased to be able to announce that UnCon will indeed return this year, and will take place at a venue in Central London over the weekend of 12-13 November. We will announce the full details in the next issue of FT, but in the meantime, put the date in your diary, tell all your friends, and get ready for another wonderful weekend of weirdness.

The return of Trunko

While most present-day cryptids remain frustratingly elusive, despite numerous attempts to track and identify them, we can sometimes console ourselves with the fact that every now and then a puzzle from the cryptozoological past is finally solved through the appearance of new information. In this issue, our resident cryptozoologist Dr Karl Shuker provides the solution to an 80-year-old mystery surrounding a very strange beast reported off the South African coast in the 1920s. The large, white, furry and trunk-sporting creature was reportedly seen battling a pair of whales in the waters off Natal before washing up dead on the beach at nearby Margate. Sadly, before it could be properly examined and photographed, the mystery monster was taken out to sea once more by the tide, leaving us with some descriptions, sketches and the memorable name which Dr Shuker coined - 'Trunko'.

But recently, as you will read, Karl and his co-researcher Markus Hemmler discovered three forgotten photos taken in 1924 and actually showing Trunko's decaying carcass on the beach at Margate. Suddenly, it had become possible to reconstruct the true story of Trunko, and file this particular case under 'solved'. Turn to p42 for the full story.

Even more remarkably, just as we were going to press, a fourth unseen photograph of the unfortunate Trunko surfaced. It was discovered languishing in the archives of the Margate Museum by Margate-based artist and Trunko enthusiast Bianca Baldi, and shows a classic globster (pictured above). Bianca was struck by how, despite the fame of Nessie, Bigfoot and

other cryptozoological heavyweights, few of the townspeople of Margate seemed to know anything about their very own 'monster'. As a result, she has been working on an art project entitled *Natal Patria*, which, aims to put Trunko back on the local map, using "the historical documented accounts

and the town's archive to re-imagine the monster in collaboration with the local community". Go to <http://natalpatria.com/> to find out more.

A plea for information

We recently received an email from Barbara Davis, the niece and last living relative of the late Stan Gooch. Barbara is trying to find more information about her uncle's latter years and would be grateful to hear from anyone who corresponded, visited or had contact with Stan when he lived in Swansea (or, indeed, before that).

If anyone would like to pass on their recollections, memories or any other information concerning Stan, please either write to us at the usual editorial address (see panel at left) and we will forward to Barbara, or email her directly at: winnytom@telus.net.

Erratum

Reader Mark 'Tiny' Jackson spotted an error in last issue's "Roaming raccoons" item (FT274:10), where witness Mr Rothwell from Ringwood is later on referred to as "Mr Ringwood" (from Rothwell, we presume).

David Sutton
DAVID SUTTON

Bob Rickard
BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?



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

SEE PAGE 78

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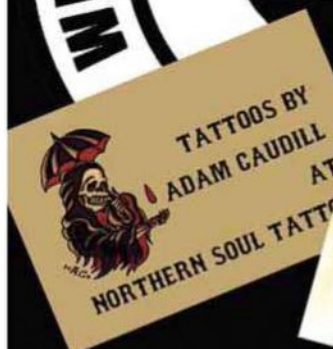
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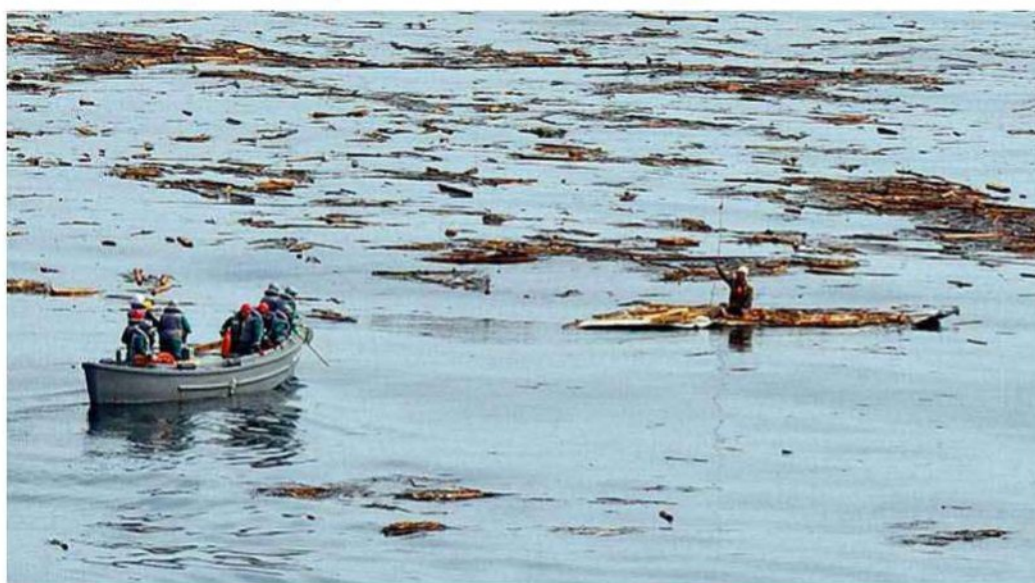
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Japan's tsunami survivors

Despite the earthquake and giant wave that followed, some remarkable 'lucky escapes' were reported



GETTY IMAGES / AFP

Following the massive earthquake of 11 March, Hiromitsu Shinkawa, 60, and his wife returned to his house in Minamisoma city, Fukushima prefecture, to gather some possessions – but then the tsunami hit the coast. His wife was swept away, but he survived by climbing onto the roof of his home as it was pushed out to sea. “Several helicopters and ships passed by,” he said, “but none of them noticed me. I thought that day was going to be the last day of my life.” Luckily, the weather was mild and the sea fairly calm. Two days later, he was rescued by a rowing boat from a Japanese destroyer 10 miles (16km) from shore (above). He was reported to be in “good condition” after being taken to hospital by helicopter.

On 20 March, nine days after the quake, an 80-year-old woman and her grandson were rescued from the rubble of their flattened home. Sumi Abe and Jin

Abe, 16, were trapped in the kitchen when their two-storey house collapsed around them in the devastated coastal city of Ishinomaki. The boy reached the fridge and fed his grandmother on yogurt, bread, Coca-Cola and water, staying close to her to keep her warm. He eventually climbed through a small hole onto the collapsed roof and shouted for help. Passing police officers heard him and called a rescue team. After 45 minutes removing debris, they reached the kitchen, where they found Mrs Abe on top of a fallen cupboard, wrapped in blankets. She was placed on a stretcher and winched away by helicopter. She and her grandson were hospitalised with hypothermia. *BBC News*, 13 Mar; *D.Telegraph*, 14+21 Mar; *Sun*, 21 Mar 2011.

Tami Akanuma, 83, was in her living room in the city of Miyako, about 200m (650ft) from

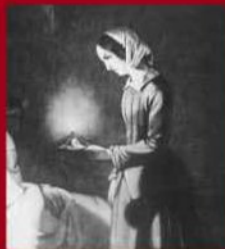
the sea, when the quake struck. The lights went out and Babu, her 12-year-old shih tzu, started scampering around the room, whimpering loudly and madly wagging her tail. “It’s a bit early for a walk,” the old lady thought, but she put Babu on her leash anyway (the two are shown below).

While they were in the entrance hall, a warning that a huge tsunami was heading for the Pacific coast was broadcast over the town’s community speaker system. Akanuma lived through the 1933 Showa Sanriku quake, which triggered a tsunami that left more than 900 people dead or missing in the Taro district, so she realised the need to evacuate. As soon as she opened the door, Babu frantically ran outside and headed

toward a nearby hill – the opposite direction they usually went for a walk. When Akanuma’s pace slackened, Babu would look back, seemingly urging her owner to walk faster. When Akanuma caught up, Babu would bound ahead again, straining at her leash.

When Akanuma finally took a breather, she had climbed the hill where an evacuation centre was located about one kilometre (1,100 yards) from her home. Turning around, she could barely believe her eyes: most of the route she had walked had been swallowed up by the tsunami and her home was under the muddy water. *Daily Yomiuri (Japan)*, 28 Mar 2011.





LADY WITH THE LAMP

Cornish vision: Virgin Mary or Florence Nightingale?

PAGE 8



MIND GAMES

Rewired senses, fearless woman, brainshare twins swap thoughts

PAGE 11



OCCULT FIGUREHEAD

Kenneth Grant worked with Crowley, Spare and Gardner

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Moon Man causes stir

Ken Ring (right), a fishing commentator and author of *Pawmistry*, a book about palmistry for cats, has become the subject of heated public debate in New Zealand in recent months over his earthquake predictions, based on the fringe science belief that quakes are caused by the gravitational pull of the Moon on tectonic plates. Although rubbished by seismologists, the theory gained traction as word spread that the "Moon Man" appeared to have predicted both the initial September quake and the big one of 22 February that killed more than 182 people. Mr Ring (right) then warned of another impending giant quake – one that "could be another for the history books" – on the morning of Sunday, 20 March, as the Moon passed close to the Earth. "The killer

is still loose on the streets," he wrote, "the one that strikes on full moons." His warnings prompted some residents to flee their homes and played on the nerves of many who remained.

Scientists, politicians and sections of the media moved to calm the hysteria; current affairs broadcaster John Campbell savaged Mr Ring in a primetime interview that was criticised as unfairly hostile. On Sunday, a group of geologists, engineers, and a cabinet minister with a PhD in geotechnical engineering gathered at a publicity-courting "non-event", holding a lunch in one of Christchurch's oldest, tallest

buildings, at the time the "7 plus" doomsday quake was supposed to strike. The lunch passed without incident; the sceptics were satisfied. However, at 9.47pm, the city was shaken by a 5.1-magnitude aftershock. It was about 1,000 times less powerful than the killer

that Mr Ring had prophesied, and it came 10 hours late – but it was the biggest aftershock since the February catastrophe and, for many of the Moon Man's supporters, it came as the most public of vindications.

In fact, Sunday's quake conformed to the expected pattern of aftershocks, and was just one of more than 20 of a similar size since the September quake. "We've been having a magnitude four earthquake about

once a day," said Dr Marc Wilson, a psychology lecturer who was one of the pundits to speak out against Mr Ring.

Dr Mark Quigley, a lecturer in active tectonics and geomorphology, said controversial research had argued there might be a small correlation – perhaps an increased earthquake likelihood of up to one per cent – between smaller continental quakes and "solid Earth tides", the changes in the planet's shape due to the Moon's gravitational pull; but there was no evidence that supported Mr Ring's hypothesis. Typical quake-induced stress changes were 100 to 1,000 times greater than those induced by the tides, he said. "Vague quotes about dates of 'increased' activity plus or minus several days, without magnitudes, locations, and exact times do not constitute prediction," he said. *Independent*, 23 Mar 2011.



KEN RING

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Herbivorous dinosaurs kept mammals the size of rodents

Int. Herald Tribune, 1 Dec 2010.

MAN DIED IN SEX STUNT WITH TREE

Sun, 10 Aug 2010.

Cat group may face watchdog

(Melbourne) Age, 28 Nov 2010.

Jesus gets down and dirty

Cherwell (Oxford), 26 Nov 2010.

Daily healthy eating could be declared a mental illness

Irish Examiner, 23 Sept 2010.

Russian police still pursuing dead lawyer

Int. Herald Tribune, 16 Nov 2010.

Man on probation for releasing gas

Alloa and Hillfoots Advertiser (Clackmannanshire), 17 Nov 2010.





TRICKS OF THE LIGHT

EYE IN THE SKY

This impressive solar halo (facing, top) was photographed by Reyaz Limalia as he was driving near the village of Birdlip in Gloucestershire. It was caused by light refracted off millions of tiny ice crystals in very high cirrus clouds. These circles of light are known as “22 degree halos” because of the angle formed between the outer edge of the halo and its centre as viewed by the observer. The reason why these halos are always 22 degrees – and hence always the same size – is to do with the geometry of the hexagonal ice crystals and the way they refract sunlight in a uniform manner. Such halos can be seen around both the Sun and the Moon and occur even in the

hottest climates as the ice crystals form very high in the atmosphere, where it is always cold. *Independent*, 23 Oct 2010.

PHOTO: APEX / REYAZ LEMALIA.

RAINBOW BRIDGE

Andy Kyle, who every day for seven years has taken photographs of the view of the river Dart from his office window in Dartmouth, Devon, captured the perfect double rainbow shown at bottom on facing page on 26 October. *D.Telegraph*, 27 Oct 2010.

PHOTO: ANDY KYLE.

SPECTRE PHOTOGRAPHED

Amateur photographer Mikhail Baevsky, 59, was on the highest peak of Ukraine's Chatyr-Dag mountains

– 5,010ft (1,525m) – when he took the photo above. “I was scanning the horizon for a good shot and while turning my head noticed this dark, ghostly figure behind me,” he said. “It was scary at first but I stayed calm and took as many shots as I could before it disappeared as quickly as it appeared. I can’t decide on a plausible explanation.” Mr Baevsky lectures in science, but evidently not including meteorology or optics.

The phenomenon he captured is a variant of glory or fogbow, formed when the observer’s shadow is refracted from banks of uniform water droplets. It is known as a “Brocken Spectre” after the highest peak in the north German Harz Mountains. The shadow is

often an odd triangle-shape due to perspective, and can appear three-dimensional because of the depth at which it descends into the mist. Though no doubt witnessed for centuries, it was first described by Johann Silberschlag in 1780, and has since been recorded often in literature about the region. It became infamous as a portent of doom; legend has it that a climber on Brocken fell to his death after being startled by the unearthly appearance of a haloed human figure in the swirling mists. Glories are most easily seen on the shadow side of an aircraft above the clouds. *Rickard & Kelly: Photographs of the Unknown* (1980); *Metro*, 27 Jan 2011.

PHOTO: CATERS.

SIDELINES...

SNAKE WEDDING

Hundreds flocked to a Buddhist wedding ceremony in Svay Rolum village, Cambodia, between a 16ft (4.8m), 200lb (90kg) female python and her slightly smaller mate – both believed to be magic snakes that bring prosperity and peace. Villagers showered them with flowers as wedding music played. Chamrouen, the female python, was found 16 years ago, while the male, named Kroung Pich, was caught 12 days before the ceremony by a childless woman who said she regarded it as her son. [AP] 3 Jan 2011.

DICKENS IN SPACE

In December, a theatre in Chicago staged a production of Dickens's "A Christmas Carol" entirely in Klingon. It featured a miserly alien warrior named Squja (Klingon for Scrooge) on the planet of Kronos, who is visited by a trio of holiday ghosts. *MX News (Sydney)*, 22 Dec 2010.

BEST CELLARS

Landlady Heidi Lenderyou, 38, lived up to her name by opening a 500-book library in her pub in Horrabridge, Devon. *Sunday Mirror*, 13 Feb 2011.

DOG MYSTERY

On 15 January an unnamed resident of British Columbia in Canada discovered a dead dog encased in ice on his front lawn. He did not recognise the dog or know how the block of ice arrived on his property. (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 28 Jan 2011.

A Cornish apparition

Figure of a woman seen in a West Country cave entrance



SWNS

Caroline and Stephen Gray were on holiday in Cornwall when Caroline, 38, took a series of shots with her digital camera at Newquay's Western Beach at about midday on St Valentine's Day (14 February). Returning home to Chester, she was astonished to see in one of the photographs a grey figure sheltering beneath rocks. "There was absolutely nobody else on the beach at the time, which makes this all the more intriguing," she said. "It looks like a pregnant woman and she appears to be holding a lamp. It certainly looks like the Virgin Mary. I don't know if it would still be visible if you went there to see it, but I'm sure that won't stop people from trying. The image was definitely not part of the rock formation and it was not visible at the time. Some people have suggested that it may be just a light reflection, but the sun was behind the rock face and it would have filled the whole cave instead of just forming a perfect image."

SWNS

"It looks like a pregnant woman holding a lamp..."



ABOVE: The exact location of the fleeting image is being kept secret.

However, England's most famous "Lady with the Lamp" was Florence Nightingale – and it could be interpreted as a figure holding a tankard of ale, an unlikely pose for the Blessed Virgin. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail*, 3 Mar 2011.



ABOVE: The ghostly figure seen in the cave (left) and Florence Nightingale, with lamp.

GETTY IMAGES / HULTON ARCHIVE

MARTIN ROSS



Who'd have thought it?

Amazing coincidences that prove romance is still alive



ABOVE: Married couple Mandy and Ray Knaggs were unknowingly photographed together.

• A married couple were astonished to find they are both in a photograph taken 14 years before they met. The black and white snap shows Mandy Best aged four (circled) on a family holiday. Captured in the foreground is Ray Knaggs, also four – the boy she would marry 20 years later. They only realised the coincidence recently as they shared family photographs. Mandy, 50, said: "The picture was taken by my mum or dad. Ray looked and said, 'That's me!' What are the chances of that?" The picture was taken at Butlins in Filey, North Yorkshire, in 1965. Their families, who lived streets part in Billingham, Teesside, were on holiday at the same time but didn't know each other. The pair met at a club in 1979, married in 1985, and have four children – Louise (23), Mark (20), Jessica (18) and twins Ashleigh and Liam (16). *Sun*, 23 Feb 2011.

• Gordon and Virginia Haslam, married for 43 years, were filing paperwork recently when Mr Haslam noticed they had consecutive birth certificates (DB 941019 and DB 941020) – meaning their mothers must have queued together 69 years ago to register them. They were born six days apart but both were registered

A childhood holiday snap showed her future husband

on 3 April 1942 at the same office in Farnworth, near Bolton. The couple, who have two children, were both born at Bolton General Hospital and their parents lived a mile apart. Gordon moved to Australia in 1962 but returned three

years later and met Virginia. "It's uncanny," she said. "You could say we were meant to be together." *Sun*, 9 Mar 2011.

• Last November, Sarah Kemp, a cleaner living in Edinburgh, signed up to the website Forget Dinner looking for love – and found George Bentley, a builder. The pair swapped emails and photos and hit it off so well that three months later they arranged to meet for lunch at Mr Bentley's local pub in East Ham, London. During a chat about their childhood, they realised they were long-lost siblings separated by a family rift 36 years ago. Mrs Kemp, 42, and Mr Bentley, 47, were born in Ashford, Kent, to Felicity and David Bentley. Their parents divorced in 1975; Sarah, aged six, went with her mother to Edinburgh, while 11-year-old George went with his father to live in London. Neither parent remarried but the two children lost touch with each other. As adults, they tried to find each other, but the search was made more difficult as Sarah became Mrs Kemp in 1989 and, even though she divorced a decade later, retained her husband's surname. Despite their embarrassment over the unlikely situation, they celebrated the reunion with a bottle of champagne and plan to visit each other regularly. *D.Mail*, 26 Mar 2011.



ABOVE: As the Knaggses shared family photos, they realised they were both in one picture.

SIDELINES...

LED BY A DREAM

Roman Mokijewkiego, 55, from Lubelskie in Poland, went missing in late 2009. "We didn't know if he was dead or alive. He just disappeared," said his brother, Waldemar, 57. "But then I had a dream and a voice came to me telling me to go to an abandoned house on the edge of our village. I didn't go straight away; I didn't see the point. But the voice kept coming back to me so eventually I did – and that's when I found Roman's body." He had died of alcohol poisoning more than a year earlier. *Metro*, 14 Feb 2011.

DYING TO BE INVITED

Estibalis Chavez, 19, was camping outside the British Embassy in Mexico City in an attempt to get invited to Prince William's wedding on 29 April. She had not eaten for eight days and was living on water. "Are they going to let me die just because they wouldn't give me an invitation to the royal wedding?" Miss Chavez had written on a flyer she had put up near the entrance. "This is my only dream," read another flyer. *D.Telegraph*, 19 Feb 2011.

CANINE BRIDE

An Australian took the notion that a man's best friend is his dog to a new level by marrying his pet. Joe Guiso, 22, tied the knot with Honey, his golden Labrador, in the Queensland town of Toowoomba. "It's not sexual," he assured friends and family attending the ceremony. "It's just pure love." *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 1 Dec 2010.

MARRIES HERSELF

Chen Wei-yih, 30, an office worker in Taiwan, decided to marry herself due to a lack of potential suitors. She posed for photos in a flowing white dress, enlisted a wedding planner and rented a banquet hall for a celebration on 16 November with 30 friends, before a solo honeymoon in Australia. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Oct 2010.



SIDELINES...

IS THAT A THREAT?

Instead of the usual "You'll never walk alone" (the song from the musical *Carousel* became an Anfield anthem after Gerry and the Paces-makers covered it), a dodgy Liverpool Football Club shirt on sale in Malaysia has a badge reading: "You'll never walk again". *Irish Times*, 24 Jan 2011.

GOODBYE MOON

The Moon is getting further away. Computer simulations of the birth of our satellite, thought to have been created when a planet collided with Earth some 4.5 billion years ago, have revealed that it once orbited at a distance of around 14,000 miles (22,500km). Now the gap is around 250,000 miles (402,000km). It is drifting away at a rate of about 1.49in (3.78cm) per annum – about the speed at which our fingernails grow. *The Week*, 12 Feb 2011.

FAIRY TREE FELLED

On the night of 18 January, someone cut down the 'fairy' Hawthorne tree near Mahon Falls in the Comeragh Mountains, Co. Waterford. It was decorated with many ornaments and sentimental keepsakes. According to local legend, fairies propelled cars backwards uphill on the so-called "Magic Road" nearby – although spoilsport scientists have recently shown that the sensation is caused by an optical illusion. *Dungarvan (Co. Waterford) Leader*, 28 Jan 2011.



FORESTRATH - FOTOLIA.COM / ETIENNE

STIFF PENALTIES

EVEN DEAD DRIVERS CAN'T ESCAPE THE ATTENTIONS OF SOME TRAFFIC WARDENS

● On 18 October 2005, a traffic warden stuck a parking ticket under the windscreen wiper of a Volkswagen Passat at the Croydon Market shopping centre in an eastern suburb of Melbourne, Australia. He hadn't noticed the body of a 71-year-old Greek taxi driver, known only as Kon, slumped at the wheel. In defence of the warden, it was pointed out that the car's windows were tinted. Kon had been dead for up to a week, and it took another couple of days for anyone to notice his body after detecting a bad smell coming from the locked vehicle. He had been reported missing nine days before his car was ticketed and was known to be seriously ill with cancer. *[AFP] (Melbourne) Age*, 21+22 Oct; *(Melbourne) Herald Sun*, (Queensland) *Courier-Mail*, 22+24 Oct 2005.

● On 22 July 2008, a man in his 70s was found dead in a parked car that had been ticketed nine hours earlier in the Pico Rivera district of Los Angeles. At the time of the report, it was not known how long the man had been dead or what had caused his death. *Los Angeles Times*, 24 July 2008.

● The body of John Waldo, 42, was found on the back seat of a silver BMW in Gainesville, Florida, on 23 February 2009. The engineer had been reported missing for 12 days. The car had been given seven parking tickets, beginning the day after Waldo was last seen alive. The traffic wardens probably didn't see the body because of the tinted windows. The dead man had had the ignition key in his possession and a loaded pistol was found in the trunk of the car. There was no obvious cause of death and investigators were awaiting toxicology results. *Gainesville (FL) Sun*, 25 Feb 2009.



A man lay dead on the back seat for weeks before being noticed

● A city marshal in New York found the decomposed body of George Morales on 3 June 2009 while trying to tow a 2000 Chevrolet Ventura minivan from beneath the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway overpass. Morales, 59, a diabetic handyman, was on the back seat, having apparently been dead for weeks. There were several parking tickets on the vehicle. An autopsy showed he had died naturally from heart disease. His daughter Jennifer, 29, said she had called police when he had disappeared in early May. "The window was cracked open," she said. "I don't understand how no one noticed." *[AP] NY Daily News*, 5 June 2009.

● A traffic warden in Seattle ticketed a car on 3 August 2010 for exceeding the time in a two-hour parking zone. Assuming the driver was sleeping, she rapped on the car window, but when he failed to wake up she concluded he was just a heavy sleeper. The driver's girlfriend located the vehicle with a GPS device 40 minutes later. She found that Derek Michael Eldridge, 36, was

dead. *seattlepi.com*, 4 Aug 2010.

● Parking attendants ticketed an SUV parked at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque three times without noticing a dead woman in the front seat. Police found the 47-year-old's body on 11 November 2010. Her husband had reported her missing a week earlier. A police spokeswoman said

the driver's seat was laid back, making the body difficult to see. *[AP] 19 Nov 2010.*

● A traffic warden noticed a Nissan Qashqai had run out of time in a pay-and-display bay in Cambridge, England, and wrote out a ticket before spotting a man slumped on the back seat. He called police, who found the man, in his 50s, was dead. It was thought that he had had a heart attack. *Sun*, 10 Dec 2010.

● A parking attendant ticketed a black BMW at an expired meter in Tampa, Florida, on 20 April 1998 without seeing Robert Enlow, 69, dying inside, bound hand and foot and shot several times in the head. When a second parking attendant noticed him, he was taken to hospital but died the next day. He was to have been a witness at an upcoming bank fraud trial. *[R] 22 April 1998.*

● A traffic warden ticketed a Mercedes parked on a yellow line in Hayes, Middlesex, without noticing the owner lying dead on the back seat. Keynah Khan, 36, had been strangled by her fiancé Wasim Khan. Her body was noticed by a passer-by. *D.Star*, 19 April 2001.

● Also on file are two further cases from Colesalveti in Italy in September 2009 and Queens, New York, in September 2010. For previous examples, see FT48:23, 59:13, 71:14, 176:28.

ON THE BRAIN

SENSORY REWIRING, A TRULY FEARLESS WOMAN, PLUS CONJOINED TWINS' BOND

A NEW WAY OF LOOKING

Research at the University of Western Ontario, published in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*, suggests that people born deaf from birth may be able to reassign the area of the brain used for hearing to boost their sight (in the same way that blind people often have enhanced hearing). Improved peripheral vision, often reported by deaf people, could be generated by the brain area that would normally deal with peripheral hearing.

The Canadian research tested the hypothesis using congenitally deaf cats to establish which parts of the brain were responsible. (Cats are the only animals besides humans that are born congenitally deaf.) Lights were flashed at the very periphery of the animals' normal vision. When the auditory cortex was temporarily deactivated, their enhanced peripheral vision appeared to be switched off. Narrowing the research, the team found that the part of the auditory cortex responsible was the part that would ordinarily detect peripheral sounds.

"The brain is very efficient and doesn't let unused space go to waste," said Dr Stephen Lomber, who led the research. "It wants to compensate for the lost sense with enhancements that are beneficial. For example, if you're deaf, you would benefit by seeing a car coming far off in your peripheral vision, because you can't hear that car approaching from the side – the same with being better able to detect how fast something is moving." One question the researchers hope to answer is whether the brain will re-wire itself again if hearing is restored by cochlear implants. *BBC News*, 10 Oct 2010.

SURVIVING UNAFRAID

A woman who knows no fear because of damage to a key emotion centre in her brain is lucky to be alive, according to researchers. The 44-year-old American, known only as SM, lives in a poor and dangerous neighbourhood and

has been the victim of numerous crimes. Over the years, she has shrugged off being held at knife and gunpoint, death threats and assaults, and was once nearly killed in an act of domestic violence. Yet even when her life was in peril her behaviour "lacked any sense of desperation or urgency".

In tests, she showed no hint of fear when exposed to snakes and spiders, both of which she claimed to "hate"; or during a trip to Waverly Hills Sanatorium in Louisville, Kentucky, reputed to be one of the most haunted sites in the world. Once a year, staff at the sanatorium add to the spooky atmosphere by dressing as monsters and ghosts and try to frighten visitors. Amid screams from other members of her tour group, SM could not be scared – and even gave one of the "monsters" a shock by poking it in the head. She was also unmoved when subjected to clips of spine-chilling horror films. However, other emotions such as happiness and sadness remained entirely intact.

SM suffers from a rare condition that has destroyed her amygdala, an almond-shaped region of the brain linked to fear reactions. Neuropsychologist Justin Feinstein, one of the researchers at the University of Iowa, said: "The nature of fear is survival and the amygdala helps us stay alive by avoiding situations, people, or objects that put our lives in danger." The research could lead to better treatment for PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and other anxiety conditions. *Current Biology*, *Independent*, 16 Dec 2010.

SHARING THOUGHTS

Conjoined twins Krista and Tatiana Hogan, who turned four on 25 October, have a condition known as craniopagus – a conjoined section of the brain, allowing them to see through each other's eyes and possibly hear each other's thoughts. "When they are playing, one of

the girls will reach over and grab something from her sister's side and know exactly where it is without possibly being able to see it," said their mother, Felicia Simms, from Vernon, British Columbia. They also seem to experience each other's feelings, she said. "If one of the girls is hurt, the other can feel it and if you discipline one the other will also cry." They certainly appear to be telepathic. "Nobody will be saying anything," observed their mother, "and Tati will just pipe up and say, 'Stop that!' And she'll smack her sister."

In 2009, tests were done on the girls' vision at British Columbia Children's Hospital. The eyes of one twin were covered, then lights were flashed which only the other could see. Brain scans, however, showed activity in both the girls' brains. Paediatric neurosurgeon Doug Cochrane, who has looked after them since birth, said: "Their brains are recording signals from the other twin's visual field." The girls were the subject of a documentary "Twins Who Share a Brain", produced and directed by David McIlvride and Alison Love, which was broadcast in the UK last May.

Ms Simms and her partner Brendan Hogan, 26, were unaware their daughters were conjoined until five months into the pregnancy. They share a thalamus, the part of the brain that sends physical sensations and motor functions to the cerebral cortex.

The family agrees Krista is the dominant twin, but Tatiana, while smaller, is the workhorse; her heart does much of the pumping, her kidneys and liver do most of the filtering. When they were born by caesarean section, they weighed just 6lb 8oz (2.9kg). Only eight such cases have ever been documented and just three of those survived the birth. *www2.macleans.ca*, 2 Nov; (*Victoria BC*) *Times Colonist*, 7 Nov; *Metro*, *D.Mail*, 22 Nov 2010.



SIDELINES...

THE FALL OF MAN

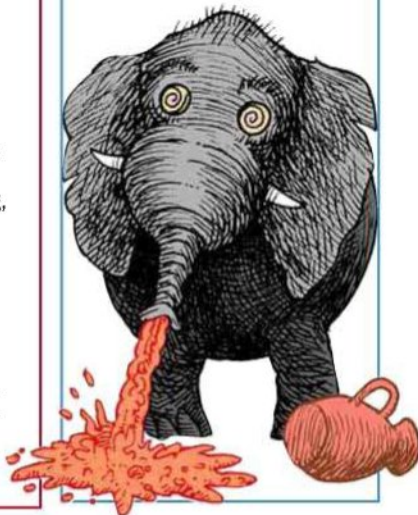
The body of a man dressed in a suit and designer shoes was found face-down in the snow on top of a mountain in Mallnitz, Austria, at an altitude of 2,000m (6,500ft). "It's very unlikely he could have walked that high with no winter clothing and the shoes he had," said a police spokesman. "The conditions are icy and very slippery. It's possible he fell out of a plane." The body had to be airlifted from the mountain in the eastern Alps. The man had yet to be identified. *D.Mirror*, 12 Feb 2011.

WHISKER GALORE

Two men admitted forcing a friend to eat his own beard during a row over a lawnmower. A fight broke out as James Hill and Troy Holt tried to negotiate a price for the mower with Harvey Westmoreland of Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. Hill and Holt were put on probation. *Sunday Times*, 20 Nov 2010.

GIANT BENDER

A herd of 70 elephants, drunk on local hooch, killed three people and destroyed 60 homes in a four-day rampage through remote Indian villages on the borders of Orissa and West Bengal. With a festival approaching, villagers had stockpiled the fermented rice-based drink in earthenware vessels, which the canny pachyderms found and consumed. On 2 December, they were sleeping off hangovers. See p17. *Guardian*, 4 Dec 2010.





SIDELINES...

TOTALLY PICKLED

Aleksander Andrzej, 32, found lying on a Warsaw park bench in his underwear, survived temperatures of -5°C (23°F) because of the amount of alcohol in his blood – 1,024mg per 100ml, 30 times the legal limit for driving. The alcohol acted like anti-freeze. Even 300mg per 100ml is potentially lethal. *Sun, Metro, 31 Jan 2011.*

FREEDOM TO PIERCE

A court ordered a North Carolina high school to readmit Ariana Iacono, 14, who had been suspended for wearing a nose piercing. A dress code banned facial piercings, but allowed for exemptions based on "sincerely held religious beliefs". The Iacono family belong to a religious group called the Church of Body Modification, which sees piercings and tattoos as religious devotion. *(Adelaide) Sunday Mail, 10 Oct 2010.*

WHALES AND THE QUAKE

On 20 February, hikers found a pod of 197 pilot whales stranded near Cavalier Creek on Stewart Island, off the southern tip of New Zealand's South Island. None of them could be saved. Less than 48 hours later, at 12.51pm on 22 February, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck Christchurch on South Island, about 350 miles (560km) to the north of the whale beaching, killing at least 75 people. Was there a link? *[AP] 22 Feb; Independent, 23 Feb 2011.*

PRIZE CORRECTION

On 6 February, a local Queensland paper called the *Bully* ran a report headed "Pigs float down the Dawson River", which stated that "more than 30,000 pigs were floating down the Dawson River". This was reprinted in another paper the next day before inquiries showed that what Baralaba piggery owner Sid Everingham had actually said (presumably over the phone) was: "Thirty sows and pigs". *Rockhampton (Queensland) Morning Bulletin, 7 Feb 2011.*

CANINE CURIOSITIES



GRAVEYARD VIGIL

A dog refused to leave the muddy graveside of his owner who was killed in the floods that devastated Brazil in January. Loyal pet Leao was photographed after spending a second day waiting for Cristina Maria Cesario Santana, who died in the Teresopolis region. The dog's vigil drew comparisons with Greyfriars Bobby, the Skye terrier who spent 14 years guarding the grave of his owner, John Gray, in Edinburgh, until he himself died on 14 January 1872. Lady Burdett-Coutts had a statue and fountain erected at the southern end of Edinburgh's George IV Bridge to commemorate Bobby, and the 1961 film made him world famous. In 1999, historian Jim Gilhooly declared that Bobby was pining at the grave of the wrong John Gray **[FT127:21]**. Two John Grays died within a week of each other in 1858. The policeman of that name was buried in Greyfriars, while Bobby's master, a Borders farmer visiting Edinburgh for the market, was buried in a paupers' cemetery three miles (5km) away. However, since dogs can't read, what on Earth made Bobby pine at the wrong grave? *D.Mirror, 18 Jan 2011.*

There are many stories from all over the world of animals, usually dogs, so faithful to human companions that they will not be separated from them, even after death. Many may owe more to folklore than fact. For a selection of examples, see "Faithful Dogs" in *The Rough Guide to Unexplained Phenomena* by Bob Rickard and John Michell (second edition, 2007, pp.369–374).

A REAL SHEEPDOG?

Liu Naiying, a farmer in China's Shaanxi province, insists one of his sheep has given birth to a dog. The 'puppy' has wool like a lamb, but its mouth, paws and tail look canine. The animal even plays

like a hound. "I was herding sheep and saw a sheep licking her newborn lamb on the grassland," said Mr Liu. "The lamb was still wet. When I went up close to check on the lamb I was shocked because it looked so weird. I

was a bit frightened, as I've been raising sheep for 20 years and had never seen such a creature." Yue Guozhang, a researcher at Xi'an City Animal Husbandry Technology Centre (and an honorary member of the Bleeding

Obvious Society) said sheep and dogs were different species. "It's not possible that a sheep could become pregnant with a puppy," he said. "It's likely that this is just an abnormal lamb." *dailymail.co.uk, 25 Mar 2011.*



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WHAT SCIENTISTS REALLY SAID ABOUT THE ALIEN INVASION

When scare stories appeared in the press about new tick-borne diseases spreading across Britain, **DAVID HAMBLING** decided to check the original report – and discovered that the news wasn't quite what the papers were telling us.

The world is richer, stranger and more complex than people think. You might assume that our ignorance is rooted in the blinkered, unimaginative stance taken by scientists who form our view of the world; certainly Charles Fort spent much of his career attacking it. But the blame may lie in another direction, as reports of a recent alien invasion reveal.

"A species of blood-sucking tick native to continental Europe has become established in the UK, scientists say", the BBC reported in March.¹

The *Daily Mail*, never one to downplay a foreign threat, described the tick *Dermacentor reticulatus* as "the European invader that's after your blood", implied that it had carried new diseases into the country, and added: "Scientists say that climate change has brought the parasite to the UK."² An invasion from Europe, deadly disease, climate change and the chance to print scary pictures of ticks made for a popular story. It was picked up widely and, thanks to the Press Association, it went global.

Ticks are pretty unpleasant even by the standards of parasites. They are arachnids, distant eight-legged relatives of spiders, usually about 4mm across, and their method of feeding is straight out of *Alien*. They have no eyes but detect prey with Hallers Organ, located on the legs, which senses smell and humidity. They lurk in ambush in tall grass. When prey passes by, they latch on to it, clamping hold with a pair of piercing mandibles. The hypostome or feeding tube, covered in curved teeth, then punches through the skin and starts sucking out bodily fluids. During this, they inject their prey with a mixture of substances including anaesthetic, anti-coagulant to stop blood from clotting, and a neurotoxin that can cause paralysis in children and animals.

Adult males generally don't



LEFT: *D. reticulatus* waiting for a ride.

Science stories may be complex, and scientists are rarely great communicators

bite, but female ticks need blood to reproduce. Having fed and ballooned to several times normal size, they lay several thousand eggs.

But their worst aspect is that ticks carry a range of diseases. Most common is Lyme disease or *Lyme borreliosis*. This announces itself with a "bull's eye" rash around the bite, and then develops into a severe flu-like condition with high fever, muscle pain, joint pain and swelling. It can also affect the nervous system, a condition called neuroborreliosis with symptoms including a schizophrenia-like psychosis. Lyme disease is also occasionally fatal. There are currently believed to be 1,000 to 2,000 cases in the UK each year,³ but this is probably an underestimate, as there is no easy means of diagnosis and it may be mistaken for flu.

Britain's commonest native tick species is the sheep tick, *Ixodes ricinus*, but several others are known. *Dermacentor*, the European tick that so upset the

Daily Mail, has actually been known in the UK for some time, with a report of an established colony in Southend in 2009.

The paper that kicked off all the media frenzy was "Prevalence, distribution and risk associated with tick infestation of dogs in Great Britain" by the Veterinary Parasitology and Ecology Group at the University of Bristol.⁴ This described an exercise in which 173 vet practices around the country closely examined dogs for ticks using a standard procedure, and returned the ticks found for identification. However, a scan of news reports suggests that few journalists looked at the paper, preferring the press release that went out with it.⁵ The press release says the study confirmed the presence of the European *Dermacentor*; checking the paper would show that the researchers did not claim to have discovered it for the first time, although the study does show that tick prevalence was much greater than previously thought. The authors don't claim that this means there are more ticks than before, though they do mention the possible effects of climate change. And the study doesn't mention the possibility of new diseases, though this is hinted at in the press release.

So the tale of a new European tick with new diseases brought

by global warming was wrong on all counts. The moral seems to be that the scientist spending years painstakingly assembling data has less impact than the PR person who dashes off a press release one morning. And the PR person only functions to inspire journalists who put their own spin on the story without necessarily understanding it.

Science stories may be complex, scientists are rarely great communicators, and journalists usually have little understanding of science. This makes it infinitely harder to cover than other areas like politics, business or crime. So when you see a story that "scientists say" something, it's entirely possible that they don't say that at all, but the real story is probably more complex than the news media can handle.

HOW TO REMOVE A TICK

The one thing the prevalence report does tell is that the threat from ticks is greater than previously thought. If you do find a tick on yourself or your dog, the best way to remove it is to grasp it firmly without squeezing, preferably with tweezers, and pull it out.⁶ Folklore says that you should twist to disengage the jaws, with different schools advocating clockwise or anticlockwise direction. This is untrue, and twisting is likely to separate the mouthparts, leaving them attached. Other folklore suggests coating the tick with liquid soap, or petroleum jelly, or burning it with a match. None of these is as effective as pulling it out.

NOTES

- 1 <http://bbc.in/g9oyCp> (BBC).
- 2 <http://bit.ly/hQDfOs> (*D. Mail*).
- 3 <http://bit.ly/ccNO3m> (NHS Direct).
- 4 <http://bit.ly/hZrb1k> (onlinelibrary.wiley.com).
- 5 <http://bit.ly/hzoOx3> (bristol.ac.uk).
- 6 <http://1.usa.gov/dP5kvh> (Centre for Disease control).

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GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE bemoans the influence of celebrity culture on serious ghost research.



LEFT: The Saturdays; would you engage in parapsychological investigations with this lot?

seems more likely their heads were concealed under cowls. But of the decapitated monk at Thorpe Park we learn nothing, not even the colour of his robes (which might help identify his order). Rather, journalists preferred to concentrate upon the legions of would-be investigators. The practice of focusing upon personalities rather than facts is common across the media today, with journalists uncritically regurgitating information posted on the Internet by small ghost-hunting groups. Unfortunately, a number of groups simply seem to be running websites as an extension of social-networking rather than as serious research forums, telling us more about the profiles of members rather than their discoveries. Few of these

groups ever report seeing ghosts – but is this surprising when they are so busy looking at themselves?

The switch from facts to performers in TV programmes about the paranormal has recently drawn fire from the disgruntled satirist Charlie Brooker in his *How TV Ruined Your Life* series (BBC 2, 8 March 2011). Typical examples include “Ghost Hunting with the Saturdays” where a female pop band traipse off to a haunted site in Wales and indulge in minor hysterics, following the even more improbable “Ghost Hunting with the Happy Mondays” involving the male pop band. Such shows were the brainchild of broadcaster Yvette Fielding (below left), but it would be unfair to pin the blame entirely upon her and fallout from her *Most Haunted* series.

Dragging ghost-hunters into programmes has become a stock tactic for enlivening exhausted TV formats. For instance, in 2008 someone involved with Channel 4’s *Big Brother* programme contemplated communication with the dead as a feature to enliven the 2009 series. To set this in motion, one optimistic representative from the show even invited me to attend auditions for *Big Brother* 2009, but I had no hesitation in stating I would rather be found dead in a ditch than participate. Similarly, in January 2011 someone representing Peaches Geldof (right) contacted the Ghost Club asking it to provide a readymade ghost investigation

The treatment of the allegedly haunted amusement park at Chertsey, Surrey, [FT273:4] in the popular press illustrates how ghostly phenomena are typically covered in the media today – as a branch of the entertainment business with the actual ghosts themselves being increasingly sidelined. Certainly, it is not the first time an open-air amusement park has claimed a haunting – in 1997, the late Andrew Green (1927–2004, obit. FT189:26) investigated reports of ghostly phenomena at Dreamland in Margate, Kent. Indoors, the London Dungeon hosted a mass ghost-hunt in 1998. So there was nothing novel in claiming Thorpe Park might be haunted. But rather than report manifestations, press attention focused on the ‘paranormal detective agency’ and the self-proclaimed psychics and investigators all seeking to be involved, apparently overcome by the excitement of the occasion. Left behind in the process were both the poor ghost and the witnesses (presuming any existed).

One learnt only in passing that the clamour arose from the alleged appearance of a headless monk, in the area chosen for the 64ft (20m)-tall ‘Storm Surge’ water ride. Such a sighting would once have been interesting enough in itself to warrant attention. While ghostly monks are commonplace, those without heads are not. Early in the 20th century, a headless monk was seen at Tilty Abbey, near Great Dunmow, Essex. In 1942, an intact grave was opened and a headless skeleton revealed – although this might have been anticipated owing to a local tale of King John’s soldiers beheading monks in the 13th century (see Joan Forman: *Haunted East*

They rarely report ghosts – they are too busy looking at themselves



Anglia, 1974).

A vision interpreted as a crowd of headless monks was once seen inside Avenbury Church, near Bromyard, Herefordshire, but it



as a backdrop for her television show. This was also declined. Once again, the ghosts themselves are being sidelined by the involvement of what have been dubbed "consume-and-dispose celebrities" (CADs for short). Why, one might ask, is so much screen time and technical expertise wasted on programmes that contribute zero to any understanding of the paranormal?

Various theories may be advanced, including that of Robert C Baker (1921–2005, obit. **FT204:27**), one of the leading lights of American scepticism, who took particular interest in media stories of ghosts and aliens. Considered a heavyweight in sceptical circles, Baker was the type of guy admired by those believing human beings are mere chance collections of accidentally self-conscious chemicals. Baker was convinced that paranormal experiences arose from defects in the brains of witnesses, encouraged by delusions spread by the mass media, and his explanation for the proliferation of dismal ghost and alien stories on TV was simple. What the population craved most at the end of the 20th century was to be entertained. The less cerebral the programme and the more vulgar, fantastic or hysterical its content, the greater its entertainment value for the weak-minded mass audience. He wrote: "In this vast human sea of faceless and egoless impersonality it's better to be wanted for murder than not to be wanted at all." (Robert C Baker: *Hidden Memories: Voices and Visions From Within*, 1992, pp344–345).

It must be said that Baker's view was not new; ghost-hunters over half a century ago foresaw just this. In 1954, the founder of *Panorama*, Dennis Bardens (1911–2004, obit. **FT201:26**), warned: "The clown who excels at parlour games will soon replace anything of intellectual, artistic or cultural merit on television." It was already apparent that a media culture driven by audience figures and commercial motives would be bad news for any sensible treatment of the paranormal or anything else.

Even earlier, the popular philosopher and occasional ghost-hunter Dr CEM Joad (1891–1953) pinpointed the underlying cause, albeit in language dated by its inherent sexism: "The man who lives the life of the mind and enjoys on occasion the experiences of the spirit is a bad consumer of commodities. While others are... playing games or looking at shows and spectacles, he is reading an inexpensively priced paperback, sitting in a cheap seat at a concert or tramping in the countryside... in extreme cases he is content with a green thought in a green shade, which costs nothing at all or he is attending meetings or engaging in discussion... the 'intellectual' is, in short, in all his forms a bad consumer." (Joad: *Decadence: A Philosophical Inquiry*, 1948).

Modern advertisers agree and so don't target people who think too much or exercise critical judgment. Programme-makers dependent on revenues follow suit, realising celebrities will command larger audiences than any sensible treatment of paranormal topics.

In the circumstances, it is wrong to blame sceptical scientists for preventing the wider acceptance of ghosts; equally today's sceptics have to resort to conjuring tricks to get any TV airing at all for their ideas.

GETTY IMAGES / STEFANIA D'ALESSANDRO



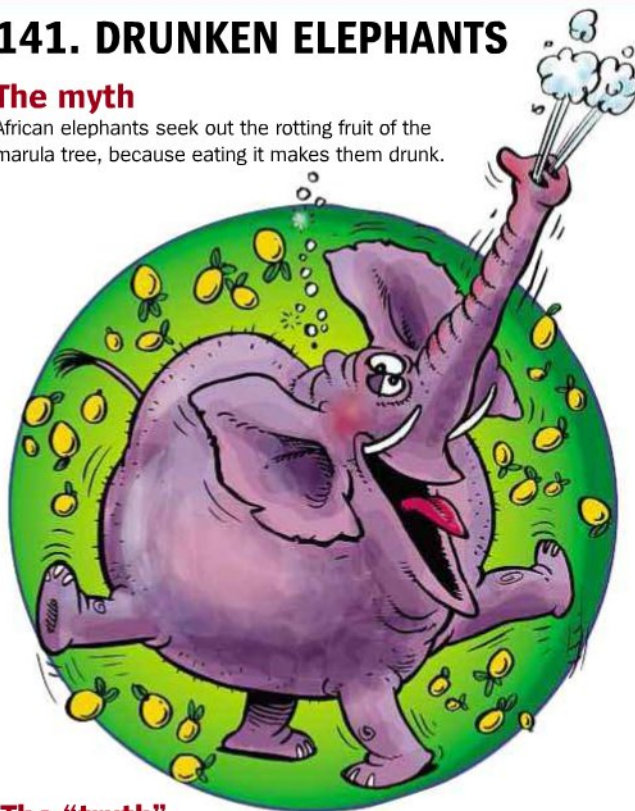
Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

141. DRUNKEN ELEPHANTS

The myth

African elephants seek out the rotting fruit of the marula tree, because eating it makes them drunk.



The "truth"

Elephants – along with several other species – certainly will travel some distance for a chance to eat marula fruit. But it doesn't make them drunk, according to a study by scientists at the University of Bristol. Based on estimates of how much ethanol an elephant would need to consume in order to get sloshed, and how much ethanol a marula fruit contains, researchers reckon that it would take about 1,500 fermenting fruits eaten all at once, under ideal conditions, to produce a pissed pachyderm – and that it's not feasible for one elephant to manage even half that many in a single day. Besides, the animals actively avoid rotten fruit, preferring to take nicely ripe specimens direct from the tree, and even pushing trees over to get at them, while ignoring easily obtained windfalls.

Sources

BBC Wildlife, Mar 2011; <http://bit.ly/hhhBKC> (krugerpark.co.za); <http://1.usa.gov/7wwIO2> (ncbi.nlm.nih.gov); <http://bit.ly/bOxOAC> (news.nationalgeographic.com).

Disclaimer

So how to explain the persistent, centuries-old folk reports of elephants behaving strangely in the vicinity of marula trees? Currently favoured hypotheses include anthropomorphism on the part of observers (humans *do* get drunk on marula beer), and bull elephants defending prized trees. But if you have information to the contrary, and you're in a fit state to tell us about it, please write in.

Update

In January 2010, Paris police were seeking two thugs who tried to set light to an Algerian feminist playwright. According to the *Independent* (16 Jan 2010), the victim was sprayed with petrol, before a lit cigarette was thrown in her face. "The petrol did not ignite," said the paper, "possibly because of the extreme cold." Nothing to do with the cold, we suggest: see **FT223:17**.



FOR MORE MYTHCONCEPTIONS, GO TO:

www.forteantimes.com/strangedays/mythbusters



ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING reports on some soup well past its sell-by date, early coca use, how aerial photos revealed an unknown Bronze Age culture, the move to a grain diet, plus what lice can tell us about human development.



ABOVE LEFT: Liu Daiyun with a mess of old Chinese potage. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A Bronze Age site in the Caucasus spotted on aerial photographs taken in the 1970s.

ANCIENT MEATY SOUP

A 2,400-year-old pot of soup with animal bones still floating in the broth has been found near the city of Xi'an in China. It was in a sealed, three-legged bronze cauldron in the tomb of a man thought to be a low-ranking military officer from the Warring States period (475–221 BC). The tomb was excavated because it is in the path of an extension to Xi'an airport. Xi'an, where the terracotta army of the first emperor was found in 1974, served as China's capital for more than 1,000 years.

Liu Daiyun of the Shaanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology took the lid off the cauldron and was amazed to find it half-full of liquid. A green film caused by oxidation covered the surface of the soup. Also in the tomb was a taller bronze pot of a type used to hold wine. It still contained about a litre (2.1 pints) of an almost colourless and odourless liquid.

Far older than the soup is a 4,000-year-old pot containing noodles made from grains such as millet that was found in 2005 near the Yellow River [F7204:19]. *BBC News*, 13 Dec; *Times*, 14 Dec 2010.

THE BRONZE AGE SITES WERE ALL BUILT TO THE SAME PLAN

8,000-YEAR COCA HABIT

Evidence of the chewing of coca leaves has been found from around 3,000 years ago, but the addition of calcium-rich substances – which draw out far more of the alkaloids – was thought to be a much more recent development. However, a recent report in *Antiquity* by Tom Dillehay of Vanderbilt University in the US and his colleagues describes very early evidence both of chewed leaves and calcium-rich rocks that were burned and scraped to supply ash for chewing. The team excavated beneath the buried floors of the homes of foraging peoples from northwestern Peru, conditions there being favourable to preserving organic material. The samples were dated to about 8,000 years ago. *BBC News*, 2 Dec 2010.

NEW BRONZE AGE CIVILISATION

Traces of a previously unknown Bronze Age civilisation dating from the 16th to the 14th centuries BC have been discovered in the mountains south of Kislovodsk in Russia's North Caucasus region. Andrei Belinsky, head of a joint Russian-German expedition, said researchers had discovered stone foundations, some up to a metre (3.3ft) high, at nearly 200 sites, all "visibly constructed according to the same architectural plan, with an oval courtyard in the centre, and connected by roads". The sites, at an altitude of between 1,400m (4,620ft) and 2,400m (7,920ft), are spread over about 60 miles (100km) between the Kuban river in the west and the city of Nalchik in the east. The decorations and forms of bronze items found in the area indicate a link to the Kuban civilisation, discovered at the end of the 19th century at the foot of Mount Kazbek. The discovery of this older civilisation was possible thanks to photographs taken in the 1970s, used in conjunction with modern global positioning systems. [AFP] 11 Oct 2010.

STONE AGE MILLING

Early humans may have begun moving away from a largely carnivorous diet 20 millennia earlier than previously thought. A study of stone-grinding tools at sites in Italy, Russia and the Czech Republic has found evidence that humans were milling flour 30,000 years ago. Microscopic study of starch grains at the Italian Institute of Prehistory and Early History in Florence suggests early humans had a taste for cattail plants and ferns, a rich source of carbohydrates. Until now, it was assumed that the Upper Palaeolithic diet consisted mostly of meat and fat, but the discovery of starch grains on grinding stones indicates that complex food processing was taking place long before more sophisticated farming methods appeared across Europe. *Independent*, 19 Oct 2010.

OF LICE AND MEN

A study of lice evolution shows modern humans started wearing clothes about 170,000 BP, a technology which enabled them to migrate out of Africa about 100,000 years ago. This is much

CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

137: SOME OLD BOOK CASES

(Companionette to Harry Bruce's *Page Fright: Foibles and Fetishes of Famous Writers*, McLelland & Stewart, Toronto, 2009.)

"To keep on sending little frogs... is like keeping on teaching Latin and Greek. What's that for? Most of the somewhat good writers know little of either" – Fort, *Books*, p668.

Homer was said to be blind. His name means 'hostage'. Three links with the sightless, once-gaoled epicist John Milton.

The anonymous *Contest between Homer and Hesiod* (paras315–26) has the latter win a poetic cutting contest. But Hesiod was soon murdered by the brothers of a girl he allegedly seduced. Homer, having composed his own epitaph, fell fatally into a clay pit.

Archilochus (seventh-century) was a mercenary soldier, Forsythian "Dog of War". His name means "Leader of the Pack" (thus, patron saint of the girl group Shangri-Las). His fragmented poems run from nonchalant confession of cowardice ("Threw my shield away, can always buy another") to squaddie consolation ("Ares is a democrat"), to (fr103) the still-puzzling "The fox knows many things; the hedgehog knows one big thing," which always fascinated that old windbag Isaiah Berlin (cf. his published letters & Michael Ignatieff's biography).

Classical writers were rarely 'Men of Letters', insulated from reality. Aeschylus fought at Marathon and Salamis, only to perish when an eagle dropped a tortoise onto his bald head. Sophocles was elected to both military and civilian offices, possibly commanding a fleet against the Samian one led by the philosopher Melissus (Noel Coward's *In Which We Serve* can't compete there). When accused by his son of senility, he won the case by reciting lines from his new *Oedipus at Colonus* – son was adjudged the real lunatic. Three competing versions of his death: 1) asphyxiated from reciting a long passage from his *Antigone* without drawing breath; 2) choked on grapes at a wine festival; 3) died of joy over his last drama competition.

Euripides (pictured above) is said to have lived in a cave, in a *ménage à trois* with wife and amanuensis Cephisophon, possibly an unacknowledged co-author (shades of Dorothy

Wordsworth). Self-exiled to Macedon, he was eaten alive by wild dogs.

Plato was sold into slavery in Sicily – a pity he was ransomed. Aristotle landed a plum job: tutor to Alexander the Great, at whose poisoning some suspected he connived. Many and various were the foibles and fates of Greek eggheads (no wonder they intrigued Bertrand Russell, no stranger to anecdote and scandal), best read in their *Lives* by Diogenes Laërtius.

Poet-librarian Callimachus was the Greek Philip Larkin. Which hat was he wearing when proclaiming "A big book is a big evil"? – I never met a student who disagreed.

"Water-drinkers can't write good poetry" (Horace, *Epistles*, bk 1 no19 vv1–11, instancing Homer and Ennius). Not all agreed: "Water is Best" ran one Greek proverb. Horace was thinking of Athenian comedian Cratinus, said (Aristophanes, *Peace*, vv700–3) to have died of grief at seeing a wine-jar smashed. He would have agreed with Brendan Behan's "I'm a drinker

with a writing problem." Not so Julius Caesar, an energetic author (he dictated his book on grammar while galloping on horseback in Gaul – one both pities and admires his secretary), so temperate as to be dubbed (Suetonius, *Caesar*, ch53) "the only sober man to ruin Rome".

Comic playwright Terence (so Suetonius's biography) was an ex-slave who slept his way into literary eminence (no shortage of modern parallels there), earned unparalleled monetary success with six plays, then simply vanished – a superior ancient Simon Dee.

The ultimate literary workaholic was Pliny the Elder. According to his nephew's account (*Epistles*, bk3 no5), he read and wrote through the night, was read to during meals, litter-rides, and bathing, though didn't prefigure Voltaire in using a mistress's naked back as book-rest (Bruce, pp165–71, adducing, e.g., Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson, Orson Welles for these and similar habits.)

How to choose between Virgil's two rival maxims, *Omnia vincit amor* or *Labor omnia vincit*?

"Perhaps if Existence should stop sending little frogs, and stop teaching Latin and Greek, a whole would be in a state of amnesia" – Fort, p669.



AFP / GETTY IMAGES

older than the earliest solid archaeological evidence.

Principal investigator David Reed, associate curator of mammals at the Florida Museum of Natural History, used DNA sequencing to calculate when clothing lice first began to diverge genetically from human head lice. Humans are the only primates that have three distinct species of lice: head, pubic and body lice. "Because they are so well adapted to clothing," said Reed, "we know that body lice almost certainly didn't exist until clothing came about in humans."

The study also shows humans started wearing clothes well after they lost body hair, which genetic skin-coloration research pinpoints at about a million years ago. Lice are studied because, unlike most other parasites, they are stranded on lineages of hosts over long periods of evolutionary time. The relationship allows scientists to learn about evolutionary changes in the host based on changes in the parasite. Because archaic hominins did not leave descendants of clothing lice for sampling, the study doesn't explore the possibility that our human cousins outside of Africa were clothed in some fashion 800,000 years ago. But while archaic hominins were able to survive for many generations outside Africa, only *Homo sapiens* persisted there until the present. *Science Daily*, *Los Angeles Times*, 7 Jan 2011.

GETTY IMAGES / HUTTON ARCHIVE

JUST A WEE SNACK...

EGGS BOILED IN SCHOOLKIDS' PEE, STALLION SEMEN SHOTS, PLUS BREAST MILK ICE CREAM

ALL PIX: REX FEATURES / QUIRKY CHINA NEWS



ABOVE: Collecting the vital ingredient in a school in Dongyang, China (left), cooking the eggs (centre), and what this prized delicacy looks like before consumption (right).

URINE EGGS

For hundreds of years, "virgin eggs" – eggs boiled in children's urine – have been a treat in Dongyang, a town in Zhejiang province, eastern China, and now culture officials want to promote the delicacy worldwide. "The urine is gathered from local schools and the very best comes from boys under 10 years old," said traditional chef Lu Ming. "They pee in buckets and we collect it fresh every day. Then the eggs – which have official cultural significance status – are boiled in the wee, first with their shells on and then with them off for a day and a night before they're ready to be eaten. The eggs are delicious and healthy. They stop fevers and can help you concentrate if you're feeling sluggish or sleepy."

A woman surnamed Liu, who moved to Dongyang several years ago, has developed a taste for virgin eggs. "They are so delicious that I can eat 10 a day," she said. "I had never eaten them before I came here, but now I am addicted." Many Dongyang people regard virgin eggs as the perfect tonic for spring, preventing drowsiness and heatstroke. Wu Yunhua at Dongyang Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine told the *Shanghai Daily* that urine contains a kind of crystal that can "diminish the internal heat of the human body" and stop bleeding. However, Huang Jian, the chief urology physician of Jinhua Central Hospital, insisted

there was nothing good for people's health to be found in pee. "After all, it is waste from the body," he said. Drinking urine has long been extolled as a panacea, particularly in the East and amongst showbiz celebs, and it has been suggested that alchemists seeking the Philosopher's Stone used this "water of bitter taste ... familiar to all men, yet [...] despised by all. It is cast into the street by serving maids" (see **F781:14**). *croatiantimes.com*, 11 Mar; *www.whatsonningbo.com*, 12 Mar; *MX News (Sydney)*, 14 Mar 2011.

WILDFOOD FESTIVAL

On 12 March, about 10,000 people from all over New Zealand descended on the small town of Hokitika on South Island for the annual Wildfoods Festival, now in its 22nd year. Organisers gave 300 free tickets to the student army that had been cleaning up Christchurch streets and properties since the earthquake on 22 February. While much of the fare such as venison and wild boar is relatively unchallenging, organisers like to spice up the menu with more exotic attractions such as raw and cooked scorpions, ram's testicles, chocolate-covered beetles, pickled huhu grubs, pig gut kebabs with fresh eel slime sauce and wasp larvae ice-cream.

The most eye-catching novelty this year was protein shots of stallion semen. This equine delicacy was the brainchild of

Christchurch racehorse breeder Lindsay Kerslake. "Think of it as a healthy energy milkshake," he said. "Stallions are pure testosterone so you should have as much zizz as a stallion for a week. It's all safe – we're getting the semen in the same way breeders do, using an artificial vagina and storing it in the formula they use." At NZ\$10 (£4.76) a pop, the shots were provided *au naturel* or in cherry, liquorice and banoffee pie flavours. They were served by women brandishing riding crops and washed down with a chaser similar to Red Bull, but more aptly named "Powerhorse".

The huhu grubs are a top attraction every year. Rotten logs are chopped open on site to reveal the grubs feeding inside. For the less daring gourmands, another stall offered the huhu pickled on a toothpick. *[AFP]* 17 Feb; *www.tntmagazine.com*, 18 Feb; *[AAP]* *Herald-Sun (Melbourne)*, 19 Feb; *www.scoop.co.nz*, 13 Mar 2011.

BABY GAGA

In February, a restaurant in London's Covent Garden, called Icecreamists, was serving a range of ice cream made with breast milk. The dessert, called 'Baby Gaga', was churned with donations from Victoria Hiley, 35, a mother of one from Leeds, and sold for £14 a serving with a rusk and an optional shot of Calpol, Bonjela – or whisky. Mrs Hiley's donation was expressed

on site and pasteurised before being churned with Madagascan vanilla pods and lemon zest.

Icecreamists founder Matt O'Connor placed an advertisement on the Mumsnet web forum appealing for breast milk donations and 14 volunteers came forward to offer their services. "If it's good enough for our children, it's good enough for the rest of us," said Mr O'Connor. "No one's done anything interesting with ice cream in the last 100 years. We wanted to completely reinvent it." Mrs Hiley, 25 (or 35), said if adults realised how tasty breast milk was, more mothers would be encouraged to breast-feed. She got £15 for every 10oz (283g) of milk she donated, and said it was a great "recession beater".

The first batch of Baby Gaga quickly sold out. Even though health checks for the lactating women were the same as those used by hospitals to screen blood donors, officials confiscated the stocks of Baby Gaga on 25 February. A spokeswoman from Westminster City Council said it was responding to two complaints from the public and was awaiting guidance from the Food Standards Agency. By 10 March, Baby Gaga was declared safe. As the Icecreamist's blog declared: "It's been one small lick for man, one giant scoop for motherkind". *BBC News*, *Metro*, 24 Feb; *dailymail.co.uk*, 26 Feb; *[AFP]* 27 Feb; *MX News (Sydney)*, 1 Mar 2011.

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REWRITING HISTORY

A new theory on the man who “sailed the ocean blue”, plus a relic of a French royal martyr



KRISTOF COLUMBOWICZ?

The origins of the explorer known to history as Christopher Columbus (Cristóbal Colón) have long been a subject of speculation. According to conventional wisdom, Columbus was from a family of humble Italian weavers, born in 1451 to Domenico Columbo, a weaver who also ran a cheese stall in the port city of Genoa; but since the 19th century it has been claimed that he was a native of Greece, Catalonia, Galicia, France, Corsica, Portugal – or even Lanarkshire in Scotland [FT259:22]. Some claimed his origins were hidden because he was Jewish or a double agent for the Portuguese royal family.

The orthodox narrative is that at the age of 22 Columbus started working for Genoese merchants trading throughout the Mediterranean, and three years later took part in a special trading expedition to northern Europe, docking at Bristol before continuing to Ireland and Iceland. Throughout the 1480s, when he was in his 30s, he traded along the African coast. Historians say it is a myth that navigators thought the world was flat before Columbus

sailed west – they had been using the stars at night as a primitive navigation system that assumed the Earth was a sphere. What was unknown was the planet's dimensions and how long it would take to sail round it. When Columbus persuaded financiers to back his voyage west in 1492, he had completely miscalculated the distances – he arrived in the Bahamas, thinking he was somewhere off the coast of China.

The latest theory, propounded by Prof. Manuel de Silva Rosa after 20 years' research, is that the great navigator, who died in 1506 after four voyages to the New World, was the son of King Vladislav (Wladyslaw) III of Poland, who was supposedly slain in the Battle of Varna in Bulgaria in 1444. Rosa, an information technology analyst at Duke University in North Carolina, makes his case in *Colón: La Historia Nunca Contada* (*Columbus: the Untold Story*), published in Spain last November. He suggests that Vladislav survived the battle with the Ottomans, fled to the island of Madeira, a Portuguese territory, where he was known as “Henry the

He believes a conspiracy hid the explorer's true origins

German” and married a Portuguese noblewoman. He believes a conspiracy hid the true origins of Columbus to protect his father.

“The courts of Europe knew who he was and kept his secret for their own reasons,” he said. Columbus's high birth would explain how he could marry Filipa Moniz Perestrelo, the daughter of a Portuguese nobleman, 15 years before his first voyage. “The marriage was approved by the King of Portugal, something that could never have happened if we believe the myth that Columbus washed up in a shipwreck in Portugal. His knowledge of geography, algebra, cartography and even the fact that he used a secret cipher to communicate with his brothers all point to the best education.

He was clearly a scholar and not self-taught as the myth goes,” said Rosa. He claims to have proved that a last will dated 1498, in which Columbus wrote “I, being born in Genoa”, was forged 80 years later by Italians with the name Columbo who wanted to claim his inheritance.

Other evidence supporting Rosa's theory includes the similarity of Columbus's coat of arms with that of the Polish king and a painting of the explorer housed in the Alcazar in Seville in which a crown is hidden on his sleeve. There is also the fact that many paintings show he was reddish-haired, fair-skinned and blue-eyed – all features more common in Poland than in Italy.

Rosa's next step is to take DNA from the tombs of Polish kings to compare with that of the explorer's son who is buried in Seville cathedral. “I have made a request to the cathedral in Kraków to examine remains from the tomb of Vladislav II, who could turn out to be the grandfather of Columbus,” said Rosa. “It would prove the truth of my theory.”

“Another nutty conspiracy theory! That's what I first supposed as I started to read... I now believe that Columbus is guilty of huge fraud carried out over two decades against his patrons,” said US historian Prof. James T McDonough. The preface to Rosa's book was written by Prof. Joaquim Verissimo Serrão, former Dean of the University of Lisbon and author of 15 volumes of the History of Portugal, who declared he was 99 per cent in agreement with Rosa's thesis, which has been steadily gaining followers. “This book will forever change the way we view our history,” said Portuguese historian Prof. Jose Carlos Calazans. *National Geographic* is reportedly interested in making a documentary. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 29 Nov 2010. See also “*The Curious Columbus Confusion*” by William R Anderson and “*What New World?*” by Steve Moore and Bob Rickard [FT43:58–62, 61:24–28].

KING'S HEAD IDENTIFIED

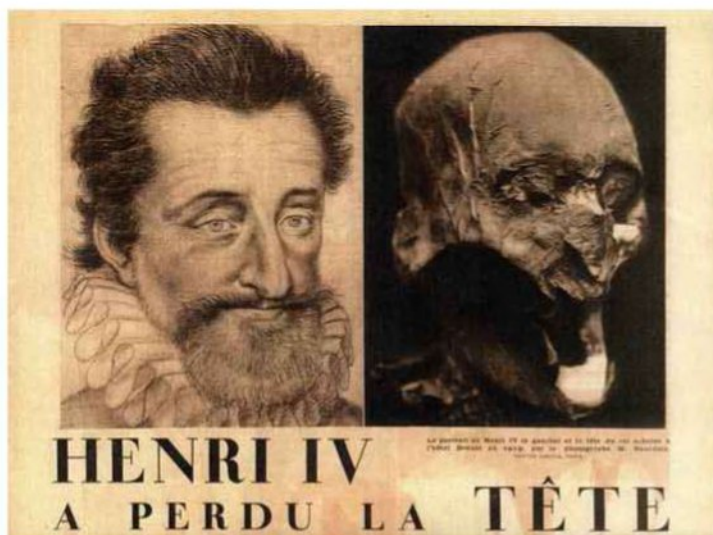
On 16 December, after nine months' research, a group of 19 prominent historians and scientists announced that a long-lost mummified head belonged to Henri IV, the first Bourbon king of France, who was stabbed to death at the age of 57 by a Catholic fanatic on 14 May 1610. On his succession in 1593, Henri abjured Protestantism to end a religious war, allegedly declaring "Paris vaut bien une masse" ("Paris is worth a Mass"). In 1598, his Edict of Nantes granted freedom of worship to Protestants – an edict revoked by his grandson, Louis XIV, in 1685. Henri is also known for two of the most beautiful landmarks in Paris, which were completed or started during his reign: the Pont Neuf and the Place des Vosges.

Henri was buried with other former monarchs in the Basilica of Saint Denis, outside Paris. French revolutionaries dug up the royal cadavers in 1793, and a mystery admirer made off with Henri's head. Historians lost track of it in the 19th century, but it resurfaced in 1919 when antique dealer Joseph-Emile Bourdais bought it for three francs at Drouot's auction house. He kept it in his gallery in Montmartre, charging visitors a small fee to look at it. "He was convinced it belonged to Henri IV and became a man possessed, gathering a huge number of photos and engravings to prove the likeness," said leading Henri IV scholar Jean-Pierre Babelon. On Bordais's death, the Louvre declined to accept the head as a gift, so in 1955 his widow sold it to a tax collector called Jacques Bellanger.

Two years ago, Babelon tracked down the 84-year-old Bellanger, who kept the royal relic in his attic.

The research was led by pathologist Philippe Charlier, already famous in France for proving that the remains said to belong to Joan of Arc in the Château de Chinon were fakes, and that Agnes Sorel, Charles VII's favourite mistress, died of mercury poisoning. Babelon said the experts were "99 per cent sure" that the head belonged to Henri. They used a "whole range of methods" to cross-check their findings. These included matching the head's measurements with that of contemporary portraits and Henri's plaster death mask, dating the skull, and conducting "deep research" into the embalming techniques used at the time.

The head was described as well preserved, boasting "a light brown colour, open mouth and partially closed eyes... [with] all soft tissues and internal organs well conserved". While the king's face still had a few hairs from his beard, these were too damaged to provide conclusive DNA proof linking him to his descendants. The "killer evidence", said Babelon, came from visible facial details: a small mole over the right nostril, a pierced right ear, and a knife gash above the upper lip inflicted in the unsuccessful assassination attempt of 1594. Bellanger has given the head to the king's descendant, Prince Louis de Bourbon, the Duke of Anjou, and it will be re-interred this year in the Basilica of St Denis. *British Medical Journal*, *D.Telegraph*, *BBC News*, 15 Dec; *[AP] Independent*, 16 Dec 2010.



COURTESY GALAXIE PRESSE



KONSPIRACY KORNER

ROBIN RAMSAY, EDITOR OF LOBSTER MAGAZINE,
REPORTS FROM THE BUNKER ON...

HOW WE'RE HARDWIRED TO DISCOVER CONSPIRACIES

The Anglo-American Internet-based conspirasphere is seemingly a very busy and populous place these days, far too big to properly survey. However, even a casual scan of it shows that after every mass shooting in America, the culprit will be identified as a mind-control victim. Thus of Jared Loughner, who in January shot six people, including an Arizona Congresswoman, one Alfred Webre (above; more on him below) wrote: "He may be a person going through genuine programming under MKULTRA by mind-control methods and programming."¹

Well, yes, he may be. But he may not be. 'May' tells us nothing.

Here's another whopping 'may' from Tony Gosling, who has done a lot of useful data-gathering on the Bilderberg group. Commenting on the murder of Joanne Yates in Bristol in December, Gosling wrote: "The fact [is] that the winter solstice full Moon fell during the week between when Joanne was abducted and when her body was found. This suggests her murder may have been a ritual killing."²

The comments of Webre and Gosling show a feature common to most conspiracy theorists: they see connections and patterns where others do not. Even had we all known that the winter solstice occurred during the week of Yates's murder, very few (none?) of us would have connected it to her death.

Webre and Gosling illustrate the human tendency to inductive thinking: we seem to be hardwired to see or create patterns among the data received by our brains. Unfortunately, having seen or made a pattern or theory, the brain is often reluctant to let go of it, will produce reasons why the pattern should not be abandoned, and will ignore or marginalise facts which tend to falsify it. This also seems to be hardwired.

For example, some of those who believe that the 7/7 London bombings were a 'false flag' operation by state forces reject as fake all the state's evidence – including the CCTV images of the quartet of bombers and the martyrdom videos left by two of them (they're on YouTube).

Alfred Webre, quoted above, made his comment on Jared Loughner as the 'exopolitics' correspondent of the *Seattle Examiner*, a 'citizen-journalism' (i.e. editor-free, post-what-you-like) website. According to his Wikipedia entry, Webre went from academia into corporate law, thence into government and ended up at the now famous Stanford Research Institute (SRI) as a futurist for the Center for the Study of Social Policy, where his interest in exopolitics seems to have begun.

Exopolitics is the study of individuals and institutions alleged to have had contact with aliens. Yes, it's an extension of the MJ12 papers, treating them as if they are genuine, rather than as a psy-op created by the US Air Force. This kind of psy-op is called "the double bubble" by the UK military: subjects are fed disinformation which is then detonated, leaving the subjects confused.

Nothing illustrates the brain's reluctance to let go of a theory better than the survival of the MJ12 material after one of its co-creators announced it was a fake.³

Take our brain's inductive or pattern-making bias and its reluctance to let go of a pattern, expose it to the torrent of real and junk political and historical data on the Net, and you have one of the central causes of the explosion of conspiracy theories in the last 15 years.

Notes

¹ <http://exm.nr/eFW3q0> (examiner.com).

² <http://bit.ly/hkFJZq> (tpuc.org).

³ See Mark Pilkington's *Mirage Men* (Constable, 2010).





NECROLOG

We note the passing of a leading occultist, a bomb disposal man seemingly spared by his guardian angel, and the man who invented the infamous 'real estate bomb'.



KENNETH GRANT

A seminal figure in the post-war development of British (and, arguably, world) occultism, Kenneth Grant was unique in having had close dealings with three of the major figures in 20th-century British occultism: artist Austin Osman Spare, 'Beast' Aleister Crowley and Gerald Gardner, the founder of modern witchcraft.

The son of a Welsh clergyman, Grant wrote to the Great Beast and became Crowley's secretary and pupil in his magical group the *Ordo Templi Orientis* in the mid-1940s (when he also had dealings with Gardner). After Crowley's death in 1947, Grant was the scribe and instigator for a work by Spare that was intended to become a major book; a project hindered by Spare's death in 1956. Grant popularised the work of Crowley and Spare for a new generation in the bestselling partwork *Man, Myth and Magic* (1970–71).

Eschewing the public notoriety and fame (or should that be infamy?) of his erstwhile mentor Crowley (FT231:28–57), Grant pursued a more subtle and deliberate path – that of the scholarly gentleman recluse. So successful was he that few photographs exist (the painting above is by Spare) and little is known about his background and life. He spent his time after the deaths of Crowley and Spare running the magical Typhonian Order, writing copiously and replying to some of his very demanding postbag. He also undertook a good deal of editorial

work, which included bringing out some of the early reprints of Crowley's many works, and introducing Spare to a far wider audience than the south London painter and philosopher would otherwise have known [see FT144:34–40]. It was touching that Grant lived long enough to know of the first major exhibition of Spare's work for decades in the artist's old neighbourhood of south London during Autumn 2010.

Grant wrote his own magical exegeses, including the epic nine-volume *Typhonian Trilogies* – three sets of three trilogies published sequentially, from *The Magical Revival* (1972) to *The Ninth Arch* (2002). (Typhon was a Greek storm daemon, known as the "Father of all monsters".) These books had production standards that leave most competitors far behind and impressive talismanic designs that scream "here be magic" in large letters. Grant wrote several other significant books in a 50-year career, including two mammoth compendia on Spare – *Images and Oracles of Austin Osman Spare* (1975) and *Zos Speaks!* (1999) – and a slimmer volume, *Remembering Aleister Crowley* (1991).

He had a dizzying, intoxicating writing style which touched on ufology, arcane contortions of numerology and cabbala, astrology, world mythology, symbolism, oriental mysticism, magic, voodoo, shamanism, alchemy, tantra, witchcraft, sorcery, art and music, and often involved cryptic analyses of the works of Crowley, Spare, Blavatsky and many other esoteric and religious figures from the 1850–1970 period. While Grant was a gifted communicator, it was at times difficult to understand exactly what he was trying to say. Perhaps this was a deliberate strategy on his part to engage the reader in cognitive work that could in itself be trance-inducing and produce some Gnostic effect. The books have been compared to a magical experience: you read them and come away changed, often in subtle but most definite ways. Perhaps one focal point of Grant's writing was, as he put it, to

prepare the mind for encounters with non-terrestrial entities, be they extraterrestrial, magical or from somewhere else entirely. The other main idea that Grant highlighted was that there was a common core of hidden Western magical lore in the traditions and practices of a diverse group of religions and cults.

Aside from his magical textbooks, Grant was a fine novelist and short story writer, in a distinctive style but one which fitted neatly within the canon that he grew up with – Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood and, of course, HP Lovecraft, around whom his fictional work and often his practical magical work to some extent revolved. Grant's occasional published poetry, beginning with *Black to Black* in 1963, is usually overlooked in favour of his other writings; however, this is rather a shame, as some of it is quite sublime, atmospheric and touching.

It is no exaggeration to say that without the efforts of Kenneth Grant to keep the work of Crowley and Spare alive and flourishing, the shape and scope of contemporary occulture would be simply unrecognisable and no doubt much the poorer for it. Anyone involved with occultism today will owe some kind of debt of gratitude to this colossal and seminal figure.

He is survived by Steffi, his wife and magical partner of over 60 years, herself a fine artist who trained with Spare. Grant's publisher's website states, encouragingly: "His work will continue".

Kenneth Grant, occultist, author, poet, visionary; born Ilford, Essex 23 May 1924; married 1946 (one

son); died London 15 Jan 2011, aged 86.

Dr Dave Evans

NOEL CASHFORD

Lieutenant Noel Cashford (seen below defusing a WWI mine on Margate beach, Kent) was one of the last surviving RNR bomb and mine disposal officers (BDOs) from World War II, and helped develop the principles that govern mine clearance today. In 1941, he joined the Royal Navy as an ordinary seaman, and was sent for officer training. He was about to go to sea when it was discovered that his eyesight was too poor for him to be a watchkeeper, so he volunteered for "Special Duties", which turned out to be dealing with unexploded bombs, mines and booby traps.

On several occasions, he claimed to have seen ghosts, among them the "grey lady" in the Chalk Walk at Greenwich. He also believed that he was under the protection of a guardian angel whom he credited with once saving his life. During the most dangerous phases of disarming a mine, he preferred to work alone, and would send his crew to brew tea from the safety of cover. One night, he had scooped a pit under a German Y-type mine, containing 1,000lb (454kg) of explosive, which was resting upside down on a beach. He was reaching inside it to withdraw the detonator when a wave broke over him, filling the pit with shingle and salt water and rolling the mine on top of him.

Pinned under the mine's weight, he didn't know whether he was



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COUPLES WHO JUST COULDN'T BEAR TO BE PARTED...

going to drown on the incoming tide or be vaporised if the explosive detonated. He remembered praying: "Please, God, get me out of here" – whereupon there was a blinding flash of white light and he was able to push the mine off and scramble to his feet, with the detonator in his hand. He murmured "Thank you, God" several times while he wrung out his soaked clothing and summoned his crew to complete the job. Afterwards, he inspected the mine thoroughly, but could never account for the flash of light.

Noel Cashford, bomb disposal officer, born Tunbridge Wells, Kent, 1 Sept 1922; died 15 Jan 2011, aged 88.

SAMUEL COHEN

Cohen was the American physicist who developed the neutron bomb in 1958. Instead of releasing explosive energy like a conventional nuclear weapon, this "enhanced radiation weapon" works by releasing a burst of infinitesimally small atomic particles called neutrons that can pass through tanks and buildings but will cause lethal damage to the nuclei of living cells. While a conventional nuclear device leaves behind radioactive debris that can contaminate an area for decades, a neutron bomb's radiation quickly dissipates. Cohen described his device as "the most sane and moral weapon ever invented" because "when the war is over, the world is still intact". On the whole, the world did not agree with him, though France, China, Russia and Israel are thought to have produced neutron weapons. It is not known if they still have any.

During the 1990s, Cohen turned his attention to the dangers of "red mercury", which he claimed was capable of detonating a nuclear device as small as a baseball [see FT69:44-45, 127:32-35, 178:14, 215:20]. He alleged that the Soviet Union had produced a number of "micro-nukes" based on the substance, 100 of which were in the hands of terrorists. Later he claimed that Saddam Hussein had taken delivery of about 50 of these devices, supposedly planning to use against coalition forces as they approached Baghdad. Most mainstream scientists dismissed red mercury as mythical, some suggesting that Cohen had been roped into a disinformation campaign by government agencies designed to lure potential terrorists into being captured.

Samuel Theodore Cohen, inventor of the neutron bomb, born Brooklyn 25 Jan 1921; died 28 Nov 2010, aged 89.

A DEVOTED COUPLE MARRIED FOR 56 YEARS died within a minute of each other. Donald Dix, 85, a retired steelworker, collapsed at home in Cardiff and his wife Rosemary dialled 999 for an ambulance. Mrs Dix, 76, stayed at home to call their two daughters with the bad news as her husband was driven off – but she was found dead with the phone still off the receiver. Mr Dix died in the ambulance on the way to hospital at almost exactly the same time Mrs Dix died. "They didn't know how to live without each other," said their daughter Jacqueline. The couple met at a dance in Nottingham, married in 1956, and were buried together. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 3 Feb 2011.*

ANOTHER devoted couple who were inseparable for more than 70 years died on the same day. Bert and Doreen Swan met in Birmingham in the late 1930s, married in 1941, and had three sons. Mrs Swan, 91, died at the nursing home in Marlborough where they both lived at 11.30am while Mr Swan, 93, who was not told of his wife's death, died in hospital of a chest infection at 10.30 that night. He had been a pioneering metallurgist. The couple retired in the 1980s and spent their time ballroom dancing and tandem riding. *D.Express, D.Mirror, 14 Jan 2011.*

IN OCTOBER 2008, ROBIN ROTHWELL WAS travelling to visit his 90-year-old father George in a nursing home when he got a call saying he had died of pneumonia. Then his phone rang again, with the news that his mother Kate, 89, had been found dead at the couple's home in Torbay, Devon. Neither knew the other had died. Another couple died within hours of each other the following month, after being married for 60 years. Farmer Austin Debenham and his wife Jean were in different hospitals. Mr Debenham, 82, died of bronchial pneumonia at 11pm on 7 November. Mrs Debenham, 79, who had a heart operation, passed away at 2am

that night, not knowing her husband had died. *Sun, 2 Oct, 14 Nov 2008.*

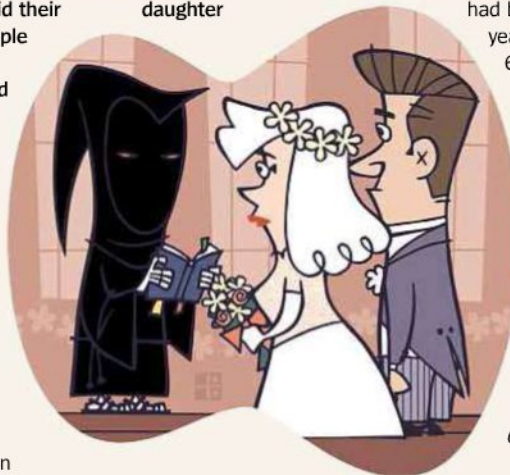
FRANK KEMP, 79, FATHER OF MARTIN AND Gary Kemp who found fame in the Eighties band Spandau Ballet, died of a heart attack in Bournemouth Hospital in January 2009. His wife Eileen, 77, who was in the same hospital after a heart bypass, died 48 hours later "of a broken heart". They had been married for

55 years. Kevin and Liz O'Connor had been married for 35

years. Mr O'Connor, a 61-year-old store manager, had a fatal heart attack near his home in Stalybridge, Greater Manchester, in February 2009 after popping out to the corner shop. His wife, 58, collapsed with breathing difficulties after hearing the news and died later that day in hospital. *D.Mirror, 17 Jan; Sun, 6 Feb 2009.*

RONNIE AND CONNIE PILLING of Emley, West Yorkshire, were married for 67 years. Mr Pilling, 86, died of pneumonia on 16 May 2009 with his wife at his bedside. She died at home the next morning of a suspected blood clot. Olga Whitfield, 61, had a heart attack at 10pm on 18 October 2009. Her husband Stewart Whitfield, 56, dialled for an ambulance but also suffered cardiac failure. Shortly afterwards, paramedics found them both dead at their home in West Boldon, South Tyneside. Fred Launder, 95, and his wife Dorothy, 93, died at home in Newport, Isle of Wight, on the same day in December 2009 after 69 years of marriage. *D.Mirror, 18 May, 9 Dec; D.Mail, 20 Oct 2009.*

A WIDOW DIED AT THE EXACT MOMENT THE funeral began for her husband of nearly 70 years. Irene Edwards, 88, was in hospital for a broken hip and the night before the service she checked: "It's 11 o'clock, isn't it?" She died at exactly that time the next day as her beloved husband Fred, 96, of Stourport, Worcestershire, was laid to rest. *Sun, 15 Feb 2010.*





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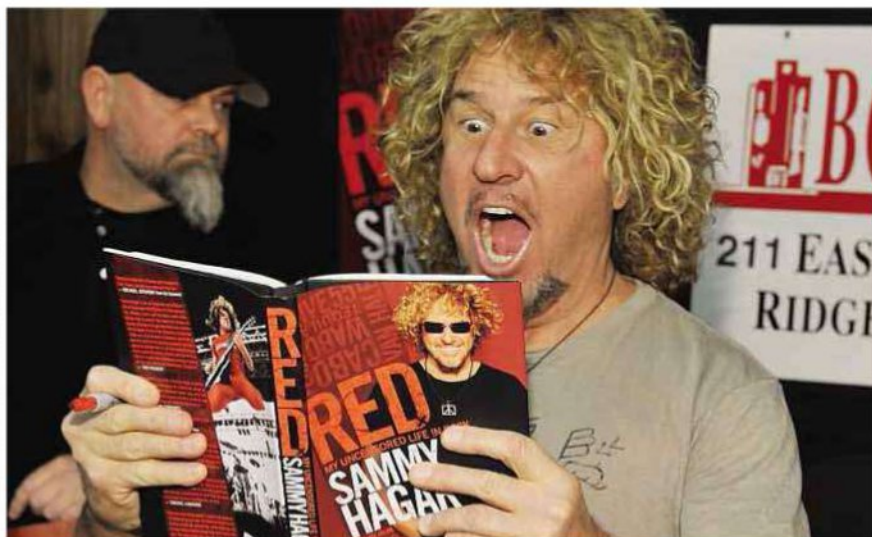
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FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

ROCK'N'ROLL ABDUCTION?

From the debatable 'Moon Shadow' by Cat Stevens, to the undeniable 'No Doubt About It' by Hot Chocolate, via Robbie Williams's recent dalliance with belief in flying saucers, musicians have enjoyed a long and contentious relationship with UFOs (see **FT188:34-38; 244:30-35**). Now, Sammy Hagar (right), erstwhile vocalist for rock outfit Van Halen, is the latest muso to claim contact with 'them'. In promotional interviews for his new biography, *Red: My Uncensored Life in Rock*, he revealed that an account of a dream involving aliens was actually stone cold reality. "It was real... They were plugged into me. It was a download situation... Or, they uploaded something from my brain, like an experiment." Probed further by the inquisitive journalist, Hagar went on to describe a childhood experience in which he had a daylight sighting of an alien space ship, like a car without wheels, hovering over a field near his home. Is it true? We don't know. But we wonder why the reporter didn't just confront Hagar with the obvious: "Come off it, Sammy, you're just making this up to sell your book, aren't you?" Hagar's yarn shows just how embedded in popular culture aliens and abductions really are and just how desperate journalists are for entertaining stories they are unprepared to challenge. 'Twas ever thus! See <http://nyp.st/fqxR3t> (nypost.com).



GETTY IMAGES / MIKE COPPOLA

IRAN FAKES UFO?

The many hoaxers who inhabit ufology constantly manage to blur the line between true and false. But when it comes to *countries* faking UFOs we feel the joke has gone too far! In March 2011, Iran unveiled the Zohal (meaning 'Saturn'), a flying saucer-shaped device that, they claimed, would be used for 'aerial imaging'. But the photographs released to show off the Zohal just looked like a schoolchild's clumsy attempt to fake a UFO. Iran has a long history of announcing technological breakthroughs that never happen and this, we suspect, is the latest example. See <http://bit.ly/f8mzs> (techeye.net).

BAD UFO VIDEOS - ARE THEY GOOD?

Once rare, UFO videos are now commonplace. Cheap but sophisticated computer software makes it possible for highly creative and realistic-looking footage to be produced quite easily. The Internet laps them up and they go viral, becoming 'fact' purely by their ubiquity. By that token, a badly filmed, somewhat fuzzy

UFO might be said to have more evidential value. One such was obtained recently by Brazilian TV channel G1. It shows a vaguely saucer-shaped object moving into a cloud over the town of Agudos. There is nothing exciting about the video that was filmed, *Blair Witch*-style, on a motorist's hand-held camera. The witnesses claim they saw flashes of light and accompanying earth tremors and the film generated the usual standoff between those who believe it was a 'real' UFO and those certain it was a fake. The level of Internet debate has been up to the usual standards: "It looks just like all the other images of UFOs, it must be real!" one poster wrote excitedly. "Are you stupid?" another replied. See <http://bit.ly/hgfBMR> (*D.Mail*, 2 Mar 2011).

BOLS DOWN UNDER

Australian astrophysicist Stephen Hughes believes he has found links between some UFO events and brilliant fireballs in the upper atmosphere. The scientist, who is senior lecturer at the Queensland University of Technology, was called in by TV stations to explain photos of green fireballs captured by residents of Brisbane one night in 2006. He found that at least three separate fireballs were sighted at different times on 16 May, and an online survey by the university uncovered over 100 further eyewitnesses. These included farmer Don Vernon who reported seeing a ball of light rolling down a slope of the mountainous Great Divide, 120km (75 miles) west of the city, just moments after one of the fireballs zoomed overhead. He said

the "soft phosphorescent green" ball of light was visible for five minutes, during which time it appeared to jump over rocks and follow a metal fence. Believing he had seen a plane crash, he called police who searched the area but found no wreckage. Dr Hughes feels the most likely explanation for this sighting is a form of ball lightning or UAP. His paper, published by the *Journal of the Royal Society*, suggests "the passage of the Queensland fireball created an electrically conductive path between the ionosphere and ground, providing energy for a ball lightning phenomenon". The fireballs, in turn, might have been produced by fragments from a comet. He argued that "...if you put together inexplicable atmospheric phenomena, maybe of an electrical nature, with human psychology and the desire to see something - that could explain a lot of UFO sightings." Dr Hughes's theory is similar to that put forward by the author of the MoD's Condign study (**FT211:4-6**), who claimed to have discovered links between UFO flaps and meteor showers. Other scientists have suggested that charges dissipating through the ground could create 'earthlights' of the type described by the Queensland farmer. Plasmas might also explain the unexplained ball of light seen by nurse Pat Evans on a Welsh mountain during the legendary Berwyn Mountains incident in January 1974, recently the subject of a book by Andy Roberts (**FT252:30-35**). Her sighting occurred on an evening that included both a spectacular fireball display and an earth tremor. See <http://bbc.in/f1PIKV> (BBC News/Science & Environment), 1 Dec 2010.

PLANE SPOTTING

The latest batch of MoD files (FT274:28-29) includes a couple of previously unknown pilot encounters. Such cases feature trained observers with an unobstructed view of the skies, and, while this does not make them immune from misperception, such events can be more persuasive to the sceptic.

One occurred on 28 August 2001 at 3am and involved a light aircraft pilot flying over Cherry Valley near Belfast. He described seeing – in clear skies – a large, circular white light moving silently and at high speed at an estimated height of 500ft (150m). He watched it move south-westwards and reported it via Belfast International Airport.

What did the MoD do with this sighting? Not much. So, as far as the authorities were concerned, the case demonstrated “nothing of air defence significance”. Had it been an enemy spy plane then they felt they would have known about it via other means. They didn’t, so it wasn’t. Ergo it was of no interest to official channels.

This neatly demonstrates the MoD’s circuitous logic over UFOs: they look for incidents that reflect some recognised intruder; if they remain unidentified flying objects, they become someone else’s problem. So it was with the Cherry Valley case.

This is a useful insight, because it illustrates the futility of chasing major UFO secrets within the official files, as enthusiasts are wont to do. Real life is not an episode of *The X-Files*; the truth may indeed be out there, but it’s probably not buried amidst government paperwork.

The second aircraft incident was officially reported as an ‘airprox’ – meaning that the UFO had crossed within perceived proximity to a passenger airliner and was viewed as a potential threat. MoD archives list it as quickly solved, but there seems to be a little more to it. The records contain a report from the pilot of an Air France aircraft at 30,000ft (9,000m) on 13 August 2005. It was on flight AFR 2569 heading 150 degrees (south-south-east) en route from Manchester to Charles De Gaulle, Paris. The aircraft had registration F-GUAM, which I traced as an Embraer 145 still operated by the airline’s regional service. Passing about 10 miles (16km) west of Gatwick under control by the London traffic centre at Swanwick, a pilot saw an object at 5.11pm “travelling in front of the aircraft from right to left moving north-east”.

The pilot adds that this sausage-like object was “one–two metres long” (some 3ft to 6ft 7in) and shaped like a “yellow cylinder, more likely a drone, not a met balloon”. A check soon after revealed the wind at that height to be 285 degrees at 75 knots (140km/h).

MoD files note that the pilot withdrew



A sausage-like object was seen moving near the plane

his airprox report when aviation authorities advised that a weather balloon had earlier been launched from the Reading area. Despite the fact that the statement said that it did not look like a balloon and, given wind direction, was moving slightly at variance with the winds, this theory apparently satisfied the captain sufficiently to stop official enquiries.

However, seeking more details via the airprox records I uncovered *another* report for that same date and location. In fact, the record shows that *two* other aircraft (one an unidentified Boeing 737 and the other a similarly anonymous Boeing 777) had an encounter 8 miles (13km) south of Gatwick that day at 7.58am – nine hours before F-GUAM encountered the sausage! This other case is shown as being “still under investigation”.

My personal interest in mid-air sightings began back in the late 1960s. During school holidays, I worked for a private pilot who operated pleasure flights from Ringway (now Manchester International) airport in an elderly light aircraft. My work mostly involved selling tickets but I did make flights, including one with an impromptu aerobatics display for air show crowds. I saw no flying saucers, but the experience made me aware of the environment during a mid-air encounter inside a small aircraft.

Several interesting cases were later investigated locally using contacts I retained, including one from Barton (where, by then, most light aircraft in the Manchester area had concentrated). At 11.45am on 11 December 1979, a flying instructor was training a pupil in a Cessna 150. Flying north-west beyond the M62, a “silvery tennis ball” appeared above Winter Hill and moved below the plane,

passing in and out of cloud on what seemed to be a controlled flight path. The instructor asked his pupil to bank the Cessna so that they could both confirm what they were seeing. The UFO promptly went into a swooping motion and disappeared, rapidly followed by a sudden deterioration in the weather.

I lived close to the airfield at this time and suspected that sunlight had reflected off a bird, but colleague Ron Sargeant (who had some flying experience) dug deeper, and the theory did not match the data secured; the object remained unidentified.

The Barton case is almost a daylight version of the Cherry Valley sighting from the MoD files.

But it’s also typical of hundreds more sightings made by private pilots, dating back to June 1947 when Kenneth Arnold saw several objects over the Cascade Mountains and the term ‘flying saucer’ was coined.

Having two witnesses in the plane from Barton adds to the value of the evidence, but another aircraft sighting had unusual independent verification. I first heard about it via a member of the ground crew of airline Dan Air, based at Liverpool Airport. He wanted no publicity, feeling he had put his job in jeopardy even by calling me. Dan Air had made it clear that they had no intention of being associated with ‘flying saucers’ in a way that might deter paying passengers.

The crew of the aircraft – a cargo flight from Belfast to Liverpool – had been told not to file any report (certainly not an official airprox) even though the UFO had been picked up on radar alongside the HS 748 aircraft. However, they were willing to ‘leak’ that they had seen a bright yellow ball as they made their descent over the Wirral Peninsula. It was out over the Dee Estuary by the North Wales coast as they landed. The sighting was at about 2.30am on 12 July 1981.

As expected, I got nowhere making discreet enquiries; however, an extraordinary sequel followed when I was contacted by two men who had been camping on Thurston Common on the Wirral with a spectacular view across the Dee towards Flint on the North Wales coast. They had no knowledge of the Dan Air case, as it was not on the public record, but they had been camping on what proved to be the same date and time – and had also seen the UFO. These men had been oblivious to a passing cargo plane, but confirmed exactly what the aircrew had seen from a very different vantage point. And their report had put Dan Air’s reticence into context.

Indeed, their verification of this story makes us consider just what does or does not get documented when it comes to aviation sources. How much more evidence exists ‘out there’, but not on the official record?

JEWELLED SKELETONS

Long before Damien Hirst, skeletal bling was all the rage across 16th-century Catholic Europe. **PAUL KOUDOUNARIS** travels to Bavaria and beyond, where he discovers some amazing jewelled skeletons that take us back to a golden age of mediumistic clerics and dodgy relics...

All photographs by the author.

A pair of American tourists pause in surprise in the centre of the nave of the Church of Sts Peter and Paul in the small, rural Bavarian town of Rott-am-Inn. Their attention is fixed on a pair of beautifully jewelled, articulated skeletons in niches on the walls of the church, where one might normally expect to find side altars. Reposing inside glass cases, the bones are covered in a finely filigreed costume of golden leaves and precious stones, and jewels mark their mouths and eyes.

"Who are they?" one of the visitors inquires.

"I'm not sure about one of them," their local guide explains, "but the other is Constantine the Great."

"Constantine? The Roman Emperor?" asks the visitor, now visibly puzzled. "It seems... well, very unlikely that his skeleton would be in this church."

"Well, this is what I've been told," the guide sheepishly replies.

The identification of the skeleton in Rott-am-Inn as the Emperor Constantine is dubious, but he is only one of several such skeletons, usually found in small parochial churches in Germany and Switzerland, fully articulated and covered over with gold, silver, and gems. They represent a curious and largely forgotten piece of Catholic history from a time when clairvoyant priests would use their powers to ascertain the remains of saints and martyrs.

CLAIRVOYANT PRIESTS USED THEIR POWERS TO FIND THE REMAINS OF THE SAINTS



BELOW: The relics of Holy Martyr Valerius were 'dressed' in the parish church of Weyarn, Bavaria, in the late 17th or early 18th century.

FACING: Martyr Valentinus's remains were moved from Rome to Waldsassen Basilica in the 1730s.

PSYCHIC POPES

The trend for jewelled skeletons began in the late 16th century. The Roman catacombs, which had been abandoned as burial sites and largely forgotten about, were rediscovered in 1578 by vineyard workers. This coincided with the initial phase of the Counter-Reformation; the Council of Trent, called to formulate the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, had just concluded, and one of the areas of concern was affirming the efficacy and belief in relics against attacks by their detractors. Since the remains in the catacombs dated from the second to fifth centuries AD, it was possible, with a bit of wishful thinking, for Church leaders to romanticise the bones as belonging to almost any famed early Christian saint or martyr. In the newfound cache they saw a potential tool to bolster their supply of relics and promote their power.

In reality, the bones could have belonged to anyone, since very few were provided with specific, identifying information – skeletons from the catacombs could, in fact, be pagan as easily as Christian. Papal secretaries were assigned to authenticate any potential relics, and the requirements were lax – frequently it was necessary only to find





TOP LEFT: Originally articulated by a team of Swiss nuns, the armoured relics of St Pancratius are housed at the Church of St Nicholas in Wil, Switzerland. **TOP RIGHT:** St Christina, one of four full skeletons in Gutenzell, Germany. **BELOW:** Held in Waldsassen, Holy Martyr Theodosius is said to be an early Christian soldier.

a palm on a coffin, or a bit of dried blood. Either was considered a sufficient emblem of a Christian martyr. More problematic was the issue of determining individual identities for the presumed holy personages. For that, a higher power was needed – psychic communion, involving clerical mediums who would descend into the catacombs and ascertain the identities of the skeletons. The practice continued until the mid-19th century, sometimes even involving the Pope himself, if he too had clairvoyant abilities.

Catholic chroniclers were somewhat loath to give specifics about the process of psychically communing with bones, but SI Mahoney, a former Catholic priest who later defected from the Church, left an 1836 account detailing the process. To augment the supply of relics, he explained, trips were periodically made to the catacombs, but no one had a clue as to the identity of the skeletons found there, or if they were even Christian. Thus, Mahoney recalls, Pope Gregory XVI would descend into the subterranean passages accompanied by a group of priests, invoke the Holy Ghost, and read a prayer, “by which Divine assistance, and directions from on high,



is sought for the performance of this... solemn duty. The Pope then casts his eyes around the confused mass of mouldering skeletons, and, as the whim may take him, calls this the body of *saint* such-a-one, another, the body of ‘*Virgin* some-other-one’ – and so on, till he is warned by his attendants that enough are now baptized... to serve for the present occasion.

The rotten bones are then carefully collected, and, having been sprinkled with holy water, are placed in a chest prepared for that purpose, and carried in procession to the Vatican.”¹

BONEY DOPPELGÄNGERS

One problem with this method was that it often resulted in rather far-fetched identities. Constantine the Great, for example, died near the Gulf of Izmir in Turkey, and was buried in Constantinople – which makes it preposterous to identify him as a body from the Roman Catacombs. There was also the awkward issue of skeletons being divined as the relics of someone whose bones were already known to be in the possession of the Church. The Church of St Nicholas in Wil, Switzerland, for example, possesses the striking armoured and jewelled skeleton of the third-century martyr St Pancratius, taken from the catacombs in the 17th century. The relics of Pancratius, however, were already claimed to be housed in Rome, in a basilica that bore his name.² Nonetheless, Pope Clement X and his staff confirmed the identity of the second skeleton as also being Pancratius, and it was shipped



ABOVE: The final skeleton added to the collection in Basilica of Waldsassen, the remains of St Maximus were installed in a side altar during the latter half of the 18th century.

north without any comment about the inconsistency. Waldsassen, Germany, likewise received a duplicate martyr in 1688, a skeleton which was claimed to have spoken to a papal secretary and declared itself to be St Deodatus – even though in the case of this early Christian bishop there was not just one, but possibly two, competing skeletons already housed in Italian churches.

Churches, especially in the German-speaking Alps, overlooked the spurious nature of the authentication process and the issue of apparent dopplegangers, vying to obtain the sanctified skeletons, sometimes in mass quantities. The Diocese of Konstanz, where the skeleton of St Pancratius is located, accumulated 120 of them in the 17th and 18th centuries. Once acquired, the articulation and decoration of the bones was decided by the local church – and again, often involved mediumistic communion in order to divine the bones' desired pose, and if they wished to be jewelled. The remains of St Pancratius – or whomsoever he may have been – were sent north to St Gallen Monastery, where they were articulated by a team of nuns, who followed the then standard

practice of praying over the bones until provided with the inspiration for a design. In this case, the skeleton was dressed as a soldier, and provided with a palm frond and sword as attributes (the armour itself was re-worked in 1777 by a goldsmith from Augsburg, but the relic retains the original design).

The most famous of all the artists who worked on such skeletons, Adalbart Eder at Waldsassen, was known for his ability to commune directly with the bones. The Basilica at Waldsassen possesses more jewelled skeletons than any church in Europe – a total of 10, lining the nave, as well as two large bust reliquaries on the altar – and these were all decorated during the 18th century by Eder, a Cistercian lay brother and skilled goldsmith. The last of these, the martyr Maximus, stumped Eder with its silence. According to local records, Eder, unable to communicate with it, was driven to the verge of despair in his inability to find an adequate posture for the skeleton. Called to supper, the frustrated artist informed the skeleton that he simply did not know what to do with it, and left his cell; when he returned, the skeleton had positioned itself.

Back in the Church of Sts Peter and Paul in Rott-am-Inn, the local guide acknowledges that the identification of their skeleton as Constantine the Great is unlikely. “I suppose we can’t really have any idea who he is, or who any of these jewelled bodies lining the walls of the churches are – they may have just been normal people.”

He pauses briefly, and then concludes: “But I know that, whoever they are, they do serve a beneficial purpose – having skeletons around at least makes the heavy metal kids think it’s cool to go to church.” **FT**

NOTES

1. St Mahoney: *Six Years in the Monasteries of Italy, and Two Years in the Islands of the Mediterranean and in Asia Minor*, New York, 1836, pp261–262.

2. Basilica San Pancratio, which still holds their own version of Pancratius's remains.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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Television's



Comedian Andy Kaufman was ahead of his time in turning comic conventions upside down and challenging audiences with uncomfortable routines.

BRIAN J ROBB asks whether Kaufman's bizarre approach to his work made him not just an unusual entertainer but a modern embodiment of a mythical 'Cosmic Joker' figure? Main illustration by **CHRIS THORNLEY**.

Comedian and performer Andy Kaufman was a Trickster figure for the television age. Like the Trickster in mythology (see FT175:40–41), Kaufman disobeyed the normal rules and conventions, subverting the expectations of audiences and playing with his chosen medium. His performances, both on TV and on stage, were anomalous and ambiguous (was he being funny or offensive?); he was a deceiver, prankster and player of tricks (who *was* that Tony Clifton guy anyway?); and finally, he was a source of transformation, both in the way he used the characters he played and for the medium of comedy itself.

Kaufman made audiences uncomfortable long before it was in vogue. He deconstructed and disrupted consensual reality, serving as a cultural messenger ushering in a new approach to comedy, one that would become prevalent in the 21st century. Such was the uncertainty around

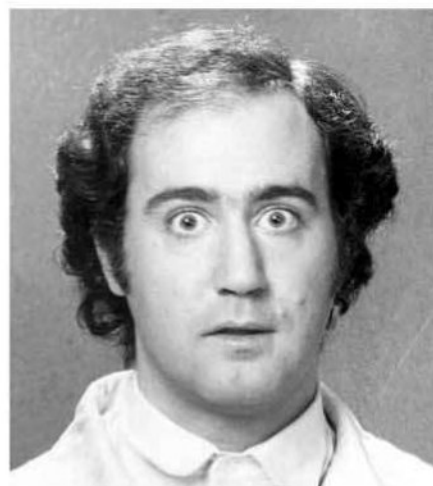
him that even now – 27 years after his untimely death – many of his fans still believe he pulled off the ultimate deception by faking his own demise.

In 2004, 20 years after he was buried, friends and colleagues threw a 'Welcome Home Andy' party, fully expecting his reappearance. However, perverse to the last, Kaufman failed to turn up.

THE KAUFMAN SHOW

Andrew Geoffrey Kaufman was a child of the television age. He was born in 1949, just as the new medium was hesitantly developing its own language and conventions. One of the first shows back on air after World War II was *Puppet Playhouse*, which later became *The Howdy Doody Show*. For Kaufman, Howdy Doody became a real friend. The cheerful puppet was a genuine presence in his life, not just a human-operated avatar. As far as he was concerned – even though he could see the strings and puppeteers –

Doody was real. "When I was seven, I believed



HUTTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

As far as Andy was concerned, Howdy Doody was a real friend

Howdy Doody was in a little world inside that glowing box," he told Tom Cottle on *Up Close* in 1983. "I was hypnotised and I wanted to go away, to be with him in there."

So all-pervasive was the new medium in the 1950s that Kaufman grew up thinking of himself as a television star like Howdy Doody. His bedroom was the heart of 'Channel 5', named for his address of 5 Robin Way, Great Neck, Long Island, New York. He fantasised that there were cameras in his bedroom walls, and that 'out there' in TV land an audience was watching. He'd spend his days performing magic tricks, singing songs and telling jokes... to no one. His behaviour so worried his mother that she insisted he must have an audience if he were to continue. Suddenly, he realised his previously ignored younger sister might have a use after all. Later, the requirement that he attend school interfered with his 'programmes', so he found an isolated spot in the trees behind his school where he could continue his performances at break times. He soon attracted a real audience there, too, as his classmates discovered his 'shows'.

Trickster

His first public performances, from the age of eight, were for local children's birthday parties; much of the absurd material he would later use to amuse adults was originally developed here. It's one of the reasons that his later routines retained a child-like point of view and sense of wonder: he *was* a child when he created much of his material. This innocence would feed into Kaufman's role as a televisual Trickster.

GOOFING ON ELVIS

As a teenager, Kaufman's commitment to his creative endeavours resulted in a neglect of his studies – so much so that he only just managed to graduate from high school in 1967, coming 419th out of 461 students. He certainly didn't want to go to Vietnam, so 'performed' for his military assessors, winning a zero score on the army psychology test and obtaining a '4-F' deferment from the draft on the grounds that he was 'unfit'. None of that mattered, though, as Andy Kaufman was now on a quest to resurrect that pop has-been Elvis Presley.

Kaufman seems to have virtually created the entire Elvis impersonator business. He was one of (if not *the*) first, and Presley acclaimed him as his personal favourite. In 1969, during his college days, Kaufman hitchhiked to Las Vegas in the hope of meeting his idol. *En route*, or so Kaufman told it, he met another entertainer who was to have an even bigger impact on his career – a louche lounge singer called Tony Clifton. Clifton was a has-been, telling terrible jokes and singing awful songs, but so egotistical that he couldn't accept that audiences found him anything but amusingly entertaining. Struck by this peach-tuxedo encased performer's unique approach to entertainment,



ABOVE: Kaufman as the King; his Elvis impersonation was reportedly Presley's own favourite.

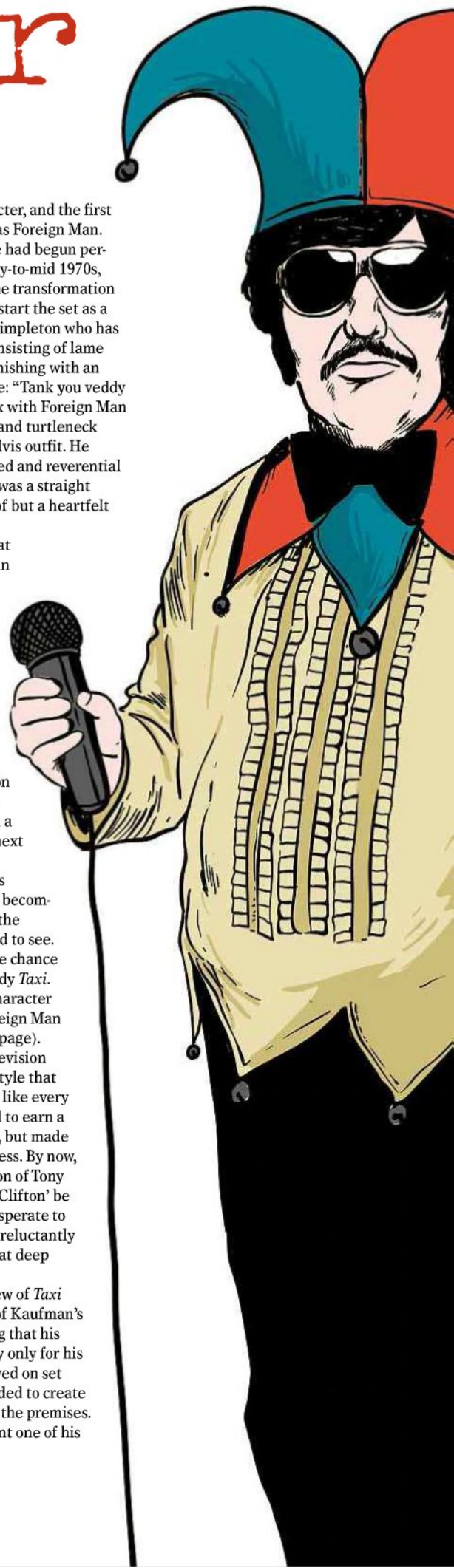
Kaufman took careful note.

Kaufman's best-known character, and the first to bring him to public notice, was Foreign Man. Following his time at college, he had begun performing in clubs during the early-to-mid 1970s, and his signature routine was the transformation of Foreign Man into Elvis. He'd start the set as a seemingly confused European simpleton who has decided to perform stand-up consisting of lame jokes and terrible imitations, finishing with an expression of innocent gratitude: "Tank you veddy much!" The sketch would climax with Foreign Man removing his trademark jacket and turtleneck sweater to reveal a full-blown Elvis outfit. He would then launch into a nuanced and reverential Presley performance. His Elvis was a straight imitation of the King, not a spoof but a heartfelt tribute to his idol.

It was these performances that brought Kaufman to television in 1975, as one of the first performers on the new comedy show *Saturday Night Live*. Kaufman began his TV career by doing one of his kid's birthday party bits: his Mighty Mouse routine, lip-synching to the *Mighty Mouse* cartoon theme tune, played on a nearby record player. He captured the attention of the young and hip audiences tuning in to the show and began a series of appearances over the next few years.

Much to Kaufman's horror, his Foreign Man character took off, becoming so popular that it was often the only character audiences wanted to see. Then, in 1978, he was offered the chance to co-star in the ensemble comedy *Taxi*. He was persuaded to play the character of Latka Gravas, essentially Foreign Man in a mechanic's overalls (facing page). He hated the confines of the television sitcom, believing it an ossified style that needed a creative shake-up, but like every rising performer he also needed to earn a living. He reluctantly signed up, but made his employers suffer in the process. By now, he had developed his own version of Tony Clifton. Kaufman insisted that 'Clifton' be hired as a guest star on *Taxi*. Desperate to secure Kaufman, the producers reluctantly agreed, little understanding what deep waters they were entering.

So it was that the cast and crew of *Taxi* were the only witnesses to one of Kaufman's finest performances. Confirming that his disruptive 'acting out' was really only for his own amusement, Kaufman arrived on set disguised as Clifton and proceeded to create havoc before being escorted off the premises. Kaufman considered the incident one of his



finest moments, and the fact that the reality of what had happened would remain unknown to most people seemed not to matter. He knew what he'd achieved, and that was enough.

One of the major aspects of Kaufman's material is that it destroys expectations, refuses to engage with the audience on its terms, and pierces the thin surface of reality, disrupting the world as the audience expects it to be. One of his finest routines saw him break down on stage after alienating his audience with a series of bad jokes and poor imitations that caused them to boo him off. His gulping, weeping declarations of mistrust would transform into a brilliant, lively conga-drums routine, with the audience always one step behind his performance.

THE DADA OF HA-HA

In mythology, the Trickster figure is often a Jungian archetype existing across many diverse cultures. Different (often animal) figures represent the chaotic Trickster, whose antics usually serve a purpose beyond mere mischief. One set of theories about the Trickster figure concentrates on the use of laughter as a revolutionary force. "Many native traditions held clowns and Tricksters as essential to any contact with the sacred," noted Professor Byrd Gibbens: "People could not pray until they had laughed, because laughter opens and frees [one] from rigid preconception. Humans had to have Tricksters within the most sacred ceremonies for fear that they forget the sacred comes through upset, reversal, surprise. The Trickster in most native traditions is essential to creation."¹

As a televisual Trickster, Andy Kaufman used laughter (sometimes with him, sometimes at him, sometimes just to create nervousness and unease) to break down the reserve of audiences. In doing so, one could argue that he was opening them up to the sacred, making it possible for them to be more receptive to liminal experiences. After all, hasn't watching television

become one of the secular Western world's 'sacred ceremonies', and don't the forms of television (whether in live performance, scripted drama, reality TV or news shows) largely follow Gibbens's idea of "upset, reversal, surprise"? Kaufman knew this, whether those around him knew it or not.

One of the defining characteristics of the Trickster that matches Kaufman almost exactly is that of innocence. The Trickster figure is not usually malicious for the sake of it; in fact, much of the disruption he causes comes from unintentional, seemingly destructive acts that nonetheless have positive effects. The Trickster figure is a rule-breaker and, while he can be cunning, he is just as often innocent and foolish. His role is to perform important cultural tasks, often pertaining to the sacred, but to do so while being funny. Many of Kaufman's routines displayed this child-like approach, whether it was taking the entire audience of his 1979 Carnegie Hall show out for milk and cookies or disrupting and deconstructing his own TV specials by drawing attention to their nature as televisual constructs.

William J Hynes and William G Doty, in their book *Mythical Trickster Figures*,² state that every trickster has several of the following six traits:

1. Fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous
2. Deceiver and trick-player
3. Shape-shifter
4. Situation-inverter
5. Messenger and imitator of the gods
6. Sacred and lewd *bricoleur*

It's immediately apparent that Kaufman's work touches almost all of these bases. His characters — whether Foreign Man, Tony Clifton, or the British Man who reads aloud from *The Great Gatsby* to confused and annoyed college audiences — were all "ambiguous and anomalous" figures. Audiences never quite knew where they were with a Kaufman performance: was his verbal spat with ex-girlfriend Elayne Boosler on the 1983 *Andy Kaufman Show* (during an apparent ad break) real

or faked?

His entire career was that of "deceiver and trick-player". Besides the off-air Tony Clifton *Taxi* incident, Kaufman's biggest on-air trick was his appearance on *Fridays*, a comedy and variety show, in 1981. He'd become something of a regular on the programme, and mid-live sketch he suddenly decided not to follow the lines, declaring that he felt "silly". When other cast members reacted, including the show's star Michael Richards (who retrieved off-screen cue cards for Kaufman to follow), a physical fight erupted before the broadcast could be cut off. The stunt had been set up, but even those who were aware of what was going to happen didn't know exactly how far Kaufman would go. Even the following week's on-air *mea culpa* from a distraught and dishevelled-looking Kaufman was another put-on job. There is little in Kaufman's public career that can be taken at face value, something that has foxed his would-be biographers.

Hynes and Doty's third attribute of the Trickster is that of 'shape-shifting'. This was at the heart of many of Kaufman's performances, from his Foreign-Man-becomes-Elvis switcheroo to his own Tony Clifton *alter ego* or the breakdown-into-conga-drums routine, among many others.

Towards the end of his life, in the early 1980s, Kaufman became something of a regular on David Letterman's early chat shows. Across a variety of appearances, Kaufman built up a brilliant, ongoing narrative featuring the trials and tribulations of a series of fictional versions of himself. These ranged from claims that he'd become homeless and penniless after being thrown off *Saturday Night Live* (as the result of a public vote Kaufman had encouraged, then lost), and was now living on the streets, to the introduction of his three adopted sons (a trio of fully grown African-Americans who didn't seem clear on the extent of the joke). These were more subtle transformations, as in each one Kaufman claimed to be revealing his true self, even though each of these 'true selves' was incompatible with the others and with what was already known of the 'real' Kaufman. It was quite an achievement and was sustained, with Letterman's connivance, over a significant period of time.

The final three of Hynes and Doty's Trickster attributes are more mythological in nature, although it is still possible to see distinct echoes of them in Kaufman's work. He was certainly a "situation-inverter", never more so than in his 'professional' wrestling career. Kaufman had always enjoyed pro-wrestling on TV when he was younger, although he knew the bouts were put-up jobs with pre-defined outcomes (like much of his own comedy work). His twist on the wrestling-as-entertainment formula was to wrestle only women. Dubbing himself the 'Inter-Gender Wrestling Champion of the World', Kaufman toured the US challenging women to fight him (he often failed to cash his cheques from these appearances, suggesting money wasn't the

GETTY IMAGES / STEPHEN SHUGERMAN



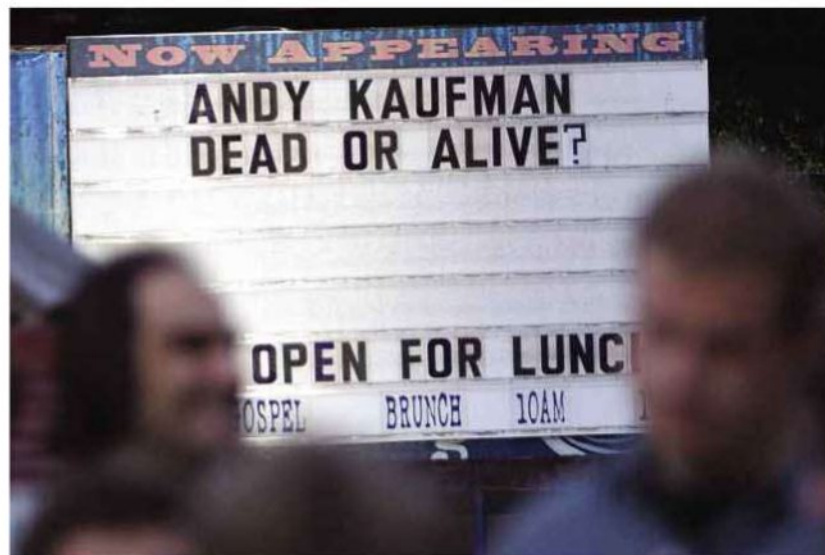
ABOVE: The legendary Tony Clifton in action (or is it comedian Bob Zmuda in disguise?)

motive). Along the way, Kaufman came into conflict with wrestling figurehead Jerry 'The King' Lawler and engaged in a public battle over the airwaves, including an iconic Letterman appearance that saw the two trading blows. During their one-and-only wrestling bout, Lawler appeared to seriously injure Kaufman's neck, and Kaufman spent many months wearing a neck-brace in public to back up his claims of injury. It was only years after Kaufman's death that Lawler confirmed that their entire media-spat (including the neck injury) had been a carefully contrived put-on, one that many audiences believed at the time to be real – so much so that they turned against Kaufman in their droves (a forthcoming book fulfils one of Kaufman's stated ambitions by collecting together much of the 'hate mail' he received during this period).

THE FINAL PRANK

The last two of Hynes and Doty's Trickster attributes portray the Trickster figure as a "messenger and imitator of the gods" and "sacred and lewd *bricoleur*". Kaufman was certainly a transgressor of boundaries, engaged in rebellion against the proper way of doing things in the world of entertainment, using the tools and language of the TV establishment to deconstruct what had, through repeated and ossified convention, become banal (like the traditional sitcom or stand-up routine). To that extent, he was certainly fulfilling the Trickster's role as cultural messenger, moving the art of comedy forward by destroying the 'old gods', whether Elvis Presley or the accepted forms of variety entertainment.

Hynes and Doty used the term *bricoleur* to mean "a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution". Hynes and Doty's Trickster *bricoleur* is described as being both "sacred and lewd". Being lewd was never part of Kaufman's approach to comedy; but, through Tony Clifton, even this final criterion is fulfilled. Hynes and Doty write: "The trickster traffics frequently with the transcendent, while losing lewd acts upon the world. Gastronomic, flatulent, sexual, phallic, and faecal feats erupt." Who else could they be



ABOVE: In 2004, the House of Blues in Los Angeles held a special show to celebrate Kaufman's work.

describing but Kaufman's exuberant disguise as the obnoxious Tony Clifton?

And it was through this *alter ego* that Andy Kaufman enacted his final fortaean mystery. Kaufman's fascination with Presley extended to the various conspiracy theories that arose following the star's untimely death in 1977 (see FT166:42–47). Had Elvis faked his own death to escape the public eye? Many of his colleagues reported that Kaufman was interested in the idea and had spoken of it as the ultimate public performance trick. He'd written a screenplay for a Tony Clifton movie, charting the transformation of assembly-line worker Clifton into the burned-out, ego-driven crooner who audiences loved to hate. The screenplay includes Kaufman's own rise to fame and fictionalises the already (probably) fictional encounter between him and the 'real' Clifton. Playing with identities on several levels, the kicker in the script comes at the end. Clifton dies in Cedar-Sinai hospital of lung cancer (the character is, after-all, a chain-smoker). Five years later, Andy Kaufman himself would unexpectedly die at the age of 35 in Cedars-Sinai hospital of a rare form of lung cancer on 16 May 1984, despite his non-smoking, vegetarian, Transcendental

Meditation-practising lifestyle. Was this some kind of bizarre fortaean 'coincidence' or example of Jungian synchronicity? Or, as some Kaufman fans believe, is it a clue that Kaufman pulled off his oft-stated ambition of faking his own death? It seems unlikely, as surely the point of such an act would be to stage a triumphant resurrection? Even given Kaufman's apparent ambition to wait 10 or even 20 years before resurfacing, it's now 27 years since his death.

Or has Andy Kaufman played his final, metaphysical, Trickster-style prank by *refusing* to come back from the dead? How can we ever be sure? Let's leave the final word to Kaufman himself: "What's real? What's not? That's what I do in my act, test how other people deal with reality." **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

BRIAN J ROBB is a *New York Times* best-selling author whose books include *Counterfeit Worlds: Philip K. Dick on Film and Screams & Nightmares: The Films of Wes Craven*, as well as biographies of River Phoenix, Heath Ledger, Johnny Depp and Brad Pitt, among others. His latest book is *Timeless Adventures: How Doctor Who Conquered TV*.



NOTES

1 Quoted in George Carlin: *Napalm and Silly Putty*, Hyperion, 2001.

2 William J Hynes & William G Doty: *Mythical Trickster Figures*, University of Alabama Press, 1993, pp34–42.

FURTHER READING

Bill Zehme: *Andy Kaufman: Lost in the Funhouse*, Fourth Estate Ltd, new ed., 2 Nov 2000.

Easily the best Kaufman biography, with Zehme working hard to get under his subject's skin. There are perhaps too many descriptions of Kaufman's routines, but that's only a concern if you are very familiar with them.

Bob Zmuda: *Andy Kaufman Revealed! Best Friend Tells All*, Little, Brown & Company, 1999.

An insider account from Kaufman's late-period writer/occasional co-performer Bob Zmuda, used as the basis for the chronology-mangling film *Man on the Moon*.

Julie Hecht: *Was This Man a Genius? Talks with Andy Kaufman*, Vintage Books USA, reprint ed., 2002.

Essentially an extended magazine piece, this volume recounts a series of meetings and interviews between the author and Kaufman, some insightful, some trivial.

FURTHER VIEWING

Television

Taxi (1978–1983)

Several seasons of the sitcom are available, featuring Kaufman as garage-hand Latka Gravas, a version of his Foreign Man character.

Andy Kaufman TV Specials

Andy Kaufman: The Midnight Special (1981) and *The Andy Kaufman Show* (1983) are both available on DVD and are excellent showcases for some of his key routines.

Films

Man on the Moon (1999)

Milos Forman's entertaining, if flawed, biopic of Kaufman stars Jim

Carrey. Events and people are re-arranged for dramatic purposes, but most of the main beats of Kaufman's life are here in one form or another.

God Told Me To! (1976), *In God We Trust* (1980) and *Heartbeeps* (1983) are all available on DVD, though not representative of his finest work.

YouTube

A huge amount of Andy Kaufman's work, from classic TV appearances (the *Fridays* debacle, the Letterman appearances) and comedy club routines, are widely available online through YouTube.

Holy Waters

Folklore concerning the curative powers of holy springs and healing waters can be found all over the world, while many holy wells in Britain and Europe continue to draw pilgrims even today. But are these fascinating sites really survivals of Pagan and early Christian tradition, or a modern-day invented tradition to plug a spiritual gap? **TED HARRISON** investigates.

I was walking along the path towards St Madron's Well in Cornwall when a family group came in the opposite direction. Despite my passing greeting, none of the family said a word. They went by in silence, averting their gaze. I noticed the young woman in the group holding a tiny, sickly baby close to her body.

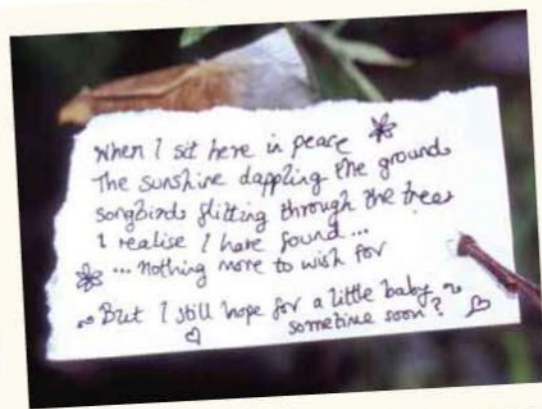
On arriving at the ruins of the little chapel at the well site, I found a candle and some votive offerings – flowers and coins. The candle appeared to have been recently snuffed out. It seemed that the family had been taking part in a ritual at this ancient holy place – possibly praying for the health of the fragile-looking infant.

They were clearly not the only people who had visited the spot. Nearby, a tree was festooned with ribbons, rags, paper and plastic hangings, messages and prayers. One I read was from a woman hoping to conceive. Others talked of sickness or emotional turmoil.

Belief in the power of holy wells and the efficacy of their waters is clearly not just the stuff of ancient history. Although many of the local wells in Britain have been lost to nature or agricultural drainage schemes, hundreds are still maintained and hold fast to their reputations.

Of the dozens in Cornwall, with such singular and exotic names as Menacuddle, Sancreed, Alsia, St Clederus, St Cuby and St Guron, many are regularly visited and appear to be the places of contemporary ritual. Like St Madron's Well, those at Sancreed and Alsia are also associated with the tying of strips of material to the branches of nearby bushes and trees. It is a practice found across the British Isles from Cornwall to Scotland. One of the best examples is to be found in the far north near Munlochy, Easter Ross. There they are

A nearby tree was festooned with ribbons and prayers



ABOVE: A plaintive message left at St Madron's Well, Cornwall. **FACING PAGE:** A window at Winefride's Well, Holywell.

known as cloutie (or cloutie) wells, because of the cloths (or clouts) left hanging. Munlochy is now established on the region's tourist trail.

A standard explanation of the cloutie tradition can be seen on the Scottish Natural Heritage visitors' web pages.

"Holy wells were often regarded as places of healing, with certain wells associated with particular afflictions. The 'cloutie wells' are a survival of this belief. Sufferers hung strips of cloth from trees beside the well, and as the cloth decayed

so did the affliction disappear. A number of wells and springs became the site of religious pilgrimages and were regularly visited over many years. Rituals associated with wells and springs persisted into the 20th century. For example, there is a well-known cloutie well on Culloden Muir. In 1937, a crowd of over 12,000 people assembled here to drop coins in the water, drink from the well, wish for something and tie a rag to one of the nearby trees. Still today, you pass areas such as these with rags tied to trees near wells!"¹

Holy wells are thus officially positioned as a species of heritage curiosity, as places where odd or amusing customs survive from some vaguely defined lost age.

Judging by their demeanour, I would have thought it unlikely that the main interest of the family I encountered at St Madron's Well was in keeping alive an old tradition. Their visit to the well appeared to have a serious purpose. Evoking the magic of the well might even have been their last hope of finding a cure for a sick child, perhaps after weeks of conventional medical treatment.

Far from taking part in a picturesque curiosity, the family was but one example of thousands of individuals and families worldwide who continue to seek out sources of holy – and often, by implication – healing waters.

But how ancient are these beliefs? Have they survived in an unbroken line from before the mists of time, or at least before the days of Christianity? Or, are they a relatively recent fabrication?

HOLY SPRINGS AND ZAM ZAM WATER

Holy springs and wells are found all over Europe and a few have acquired





GETTY IMAGES / HUTTON ARCHIVE

ABOVE: Children lined up at the edge of the pool at St Winefride's Well in 1948. The shrine, at Holywell, is traditionally one of the Seven Wonders of Wales.
BELOW: St Non's Well, Pembrokeshire, said to have sprung up during a thunderstorm when St David was born (c AD 600) and reputed to have healing qualities.

international reputations. Nowhere else in Christendom matches the fame of Lourdes in France. Thousands of pilgrims visit the Pyrenean town every year seeking cures. They drink from the holy spring in the Grotto of Massabielle and wash in the waters discovered, with a little help from the Virgin Mary, by St Bernadette only 150 years ago (FT222:32–38).

“[The Lady] told me that I should go and drink at the fountain and wash myself,” to quote from St Bernadette’s own account. “Seeing no fountain... she pointed with her finger that I was to go in under the rock. I went, and I found a puddle of water which was more like mud, and the quantity was so small that I could hardly gather a little in the hollow of my hand. Nevertheless I obeyed, and started scratching the ground; after doing that I was able to take some. The water was so dirty that three times I threw it away. The fourth time I was able to drink it.”²

In due course, a small spring began to flow from the spot. The first miracle occurred when a friend of Bernadette healed a dislocated arm by placing it in the water. News of Bernadette’s apparition of the Virgin Mary and the curative powers of the spring rapidly spread.

Today Lourdes is the major economic centre of the district. The healing water is in such demand that it has to be piped and collected for distribution. Those who require its healing properties, but cannot themselves travel to Lourdes, can buy bottles of it online from The Lourdes Water Shop.³ A small transparent Virgin Mary bottle filled with water can be bought for \$33.20 and a litre can be ordered for \$138.80. It is even more expensive than water from the River Jordan, a small bottle of which will be dispatched in

Water plays a key role in many religious rituals around the world



a presentation pack by Holylandmall.com for only \$12.95.

Water rivalling that of Lourdes and the Jordan in efficacy and value can be found in the context of other faiths. When performing Hajj or Umrah in Mecca, devout Muslims visit the well of Zam Zam close by the Kaaba. The legend goes that the well was discovered by Ishmael, the infant son of Abraham. He and his mother were in the desert. They were thirsty and Ishmael was crying for water. He began kicking at the ground and water miraculously sprang forth. Water still flows from the same spot. Today the flow has to

cope with the demand of millions of pilgrims every year. They not only drink it from the taps on site – it is even collected and bottled industrially for wider distribution.

Rarely over its supposed 4,000-year history has the well dried up, but never has demand for its water been so great as it is now. Thanks to air travel, the numbers of pilgrims performing Hajj has risen fast – more than ten-fold in a generation. Once, the devout Muslims going on pilgrimage would have numbered just a few thousand; today millions are involved and they travel from all around the world.

In the early days of Islam, the value of Zam Zam water was as much practical as devotional. It was a rare, pure water source in a notoriously dry area. Mecca has on average four inches (10cm) of rain a year. Today visitors to, and residents of, Mecca emphasise Zam Zam water’s spiritual properties. They are unique, say Muslims, and many cures have been attributed to them. Such is its value that there has been a reported trade in counterfeit Zam Zam water.

Three years ago, Westminster City Council warned Londoners to be wary of supplies being sold during Ramadan. Environmental health officers seized a consignment of supposed holy water from a shop in the Notting Hill area at the start of the holy month. Laboratory tests found the water contained three times the permitted level of arsenic.

In a statement, Westminster Council said that the export of genuine Zam Zam water was expressly forbidden by the Saudi authorities: “Any being offered for sale in the UK will be from unauthorised sources and potentially harmful. Genuine Zam Zam, which is sourced from the Well of Zam Zam, located within the Masjid al Haram in Mecca, can

HELEN HARRISON

only be taken out of Saudi Arabia in small quantities by returning Pilgrims for personal consumption.”

WATERS OF LIFE

Britain's holy wells are far more modest in scope and ambition than those of international renown. Even Britain's 'most-visited' – St Winefride's Well at Holywell in North Wales, which has a religious order and a hospice attached, is a modest place of pilgrimage compared to Lourdes. But it has a recorded history that goes back further than its better-known French counterpart, indeed longer than that of most other holy wells. Written references to it are found in mediæval manuscripts and the chapel and well buildings date back to the 16th century. However, only legend can date it as a sacred site before the 12th century and only supposition can give it pre-Christian antecedents.

There is no commercial trade in water, real or fake, from the holy springs of Cornwall or Wales – yet there are close parallels between the legends associated with them and those told about some of the more famous holy water sources of the world. There might even be an explanation in common as to why certain springs and wells attract legendary properties.

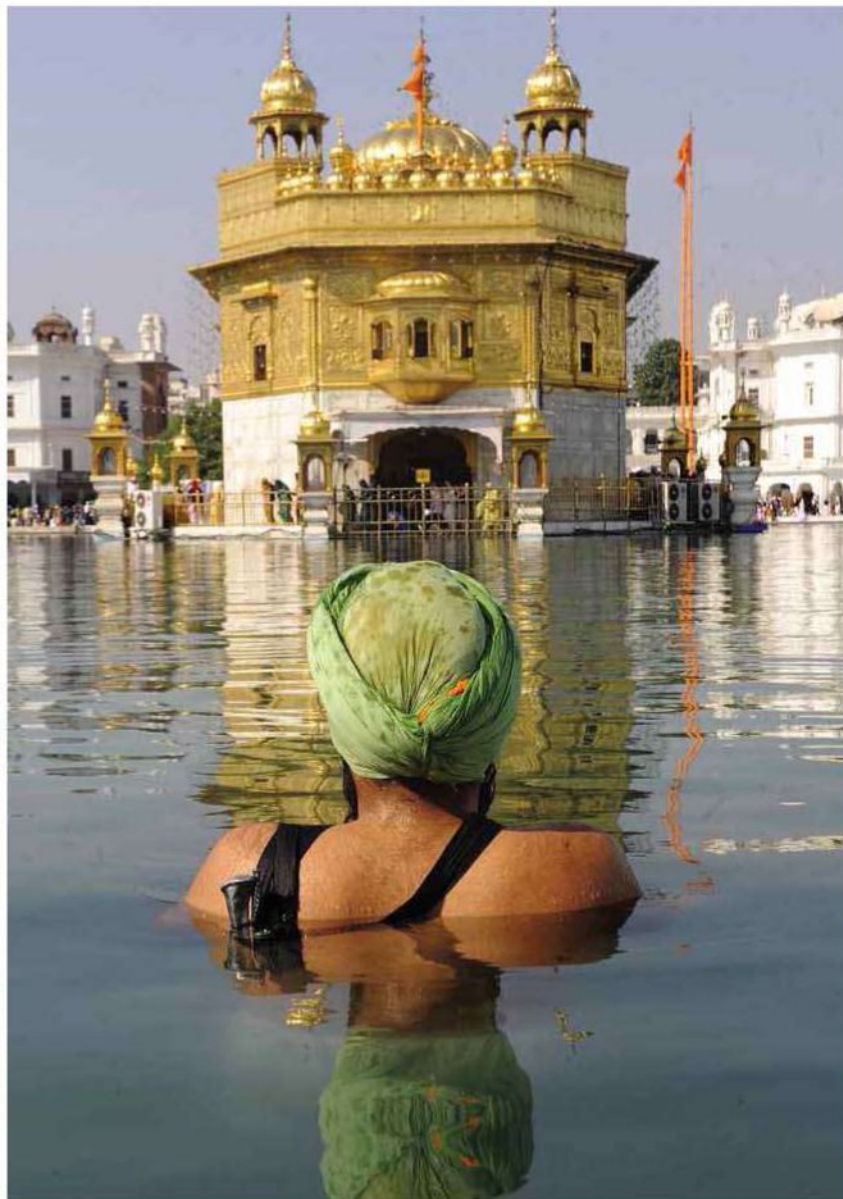
Water is essential to human life. Without a reliable water source, no community can survive. Yet, water is not simply a practical necessity. It can come to symbolise life itself and thus also plays an important role in many religious rituals. Whether in ritual washing, baptism, sprinkling of holy water, the mixing of water and wine, mystical powers are attributed to plain, ordinary water.

In parts of the world where water is a scarce resource, a single well or spring serving a community is at the heart of that community's religious, cultural, as well as economic life.

The Bible tells of Jerusalem's Pool of Siloam. In the first century AD, it was the city's only permanent supply, being fed by ancient tunnels from the Gihon Spring. In Christian tradition, it became associated with a miraculous healing after Jesus sent a blind man to the pool with instructions to wash. As a result, the man received his sight.⁴

The story, like that of the baptism of Jesus, has its parallels in the traditional Jewish custom of the Mikveh. The ritual washing, by immersion in water, is undertaken to achieve spiritual purity. Today it often precedes conversion to Judaism, and in some Orthodox circles it is a ritual undertaken before holy days or to 'cleanse' a woman after pregnancy.

The sacredness of water appears to be pan-cultural. Worldwide, the water source that attracts the most devotees is the River Ganges, holy in many strands of Hinduism. The river, despite its modern pollution, can wash away the sins of the faithful. It is particularly efficacious at the time of death and many practising Hindus seek to breathe their last on the river's banks. The city of Varanasi on the banks of the Ganges hosts 50,000 funerals a year. Death is the city's main industry as thousands of Hindus travel there in order to die within sight of the sacred river



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / NARINDER NANU



GETTY IMAGES / AFP / MUSTAFA OZER

TOP: An Indian Sikh devotee bathes in the holy sarover (water tank) at the Golden Temple in Amritsar. ABOVE: A Saudi worker loads containers of zam zam water at the Zamazamah United Office in Mecca.

and then be cremated on her banks.

What often identifies a source of water as holy, be it river or spring, is that it has attracted a genesis legend – a poetical and apocryphal story which is told to explain its origin. In the case of the River Ganges, there are several. She is associated with the Goddess Ganga, the mother goddess said to have descended to Earth through a lock of the God Shiva's hair. Or, in another Hindu myth, the river is said to have emerged from the feet of Lord Rama.

Whether the legend is Cornish, Indian or Arabic, the common feature is that the water was created or discovered in some magical way, or is associated with a great mystic of the past.

St Non's Well in Pembrokeshire is named after the mother of the great Welsh religious leader, St David. According to folklore, writes Janet Bord, the well began to flow at the time of his birth, "which was said to have taken place on the cliff-top where the ruined chapel now stands".⁵

St Neot's Well in Cornwall is associated with a story about a saint who survived on eating fish that miraculously appeared in the waters of the well. The legend told about St Teilo's Well at Llandaff, Cardiff, is equally odd. The saint is said to have found women washing butter by the well. He first of all turned their butter-pats into a cup in order to have a drink and then miraculously turned the cup into a bell.

PAGAN OR CHRISTIAN?

British holy wells are found mostly to the west of the country in Wales, the Welsh borders and Cornwall in particular. It has been estimated that 100 years ago the average number of wells per British county was 40. There were at least 90 in Cornwall and 600 in the counties of South Wales – Pembrokeshire alone having over 200.

The reason for the preponderance of wells

in the west of the country might be that they survived better in areas of the country which were largely Celtic, or it could be for the more mundane reason that the rainfall out west is higher and therefore there are more springs and rivers. If the latter is the cause, left unexplained is why some of the wells attracted legends of healing and others did not.

One possibility, some would say a fanciful one, concerns 'ley lines' and earth energies. Leys drawn on maps frequently go through holy well sites as they join other places of spiritual importance. Dowsers say they can trace the energy of leys in much the same way as they can dowse for water. Holy wells, it is said, are natural water sources which occur on earth energy lines, and as a result their water can be used for healing and for divination.

A more scientific explanation as to why some wells are considered to have healing properties – and others are not – is that the waters themselves might have special physical properties. Possibly they are high in beneficial trace elements. Analysis of Zam Zam water, it is claimed, shows a higher than normal content of calcium and magnesium salts and natural fluorides.

But how 'authentic' are Europe's holy wells? Have the rituals performed at them really survived from the mists of time, or are they relatively recent inventions? Writers like

Was there some form of pre-Christian folk faith based on holy wells?

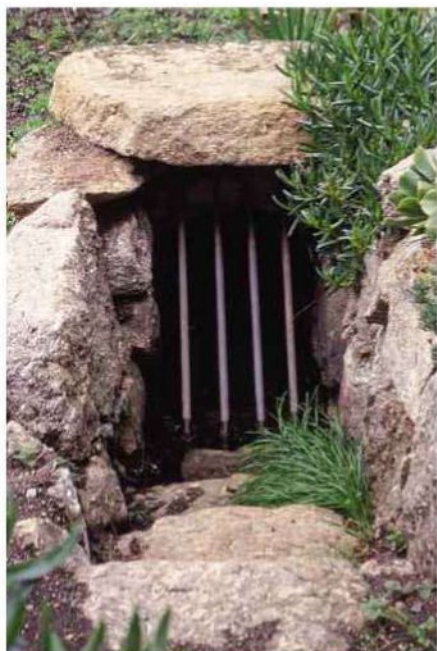
Ronald Hutton have suggested there is very little hard evidence for supposing that the rituals of modern Paganism are rooted in genuine pre-Christian practices. Certainly there is evidence of pre-Christian cultures – those responsible for the building of the megaliths – positioning their stones near to water sources. Whether this was for religious purposes, or because the builders needed to have a supply of water, is open to question. What is also open to question is whether the ancient water sources continued in use through the Christianisation process, the mediæval period and through to modern times.

Evidence from Denmark suggests there was a break in continuity, which may be typical of the rest of Europe. "Two kinds of silence, archaeological and theological, suggest that holy springs were of little or no importance during the Middle Ages," wrote Jens Johansen in 1997. "While many coins and pieces of pottery have been found at places identified as holy springs, few of the artefacts are of mediæval origin."⁶

Johansen continues: "Moreover, early Danish reformers such as Hans Tavsén and Peder Palladius never referred to the existence of holy springs in their copious writings on superstition published during the 1550s.

"In the late 1580s, the Regisse Spring on the island of Funen is mentioned for the first time. Archaeologists have uncovered rags, crutches, hair and caps there. Such items have also been found at the Helene Spring, first mentioned in 1617... Evidently, people's faith in miracles had not suddenly disappeared with the coming of the Reformation. Instead, ordinary people shifted their focus to the holy springs, which in Catholic times had played a rather unobtrusive and insignificant part among the wealth of possible expressions of faith in saints and miracles. Undoubtedly, the growing belief in holy springs can be considered a way of compensating for the loss of other ways of worship."

The suggestion is that if there had been some form of pre-Christian folk-faith based



ABOVE LEFT: St Levan's Holy Well, near Land's End, Cornwall. ABOVE CENTRE: St Seriol's Holy Well, by Penmon Priory, Anglesey.

ABOVE RIGHT: St Cuthbert's Well outside the churchyard wall at Bellingham, Northumberland. It is believed that St Cuthbert found and consecrated the spring.

on holy wells – which, given the significance of water in human history, is not unlikely – the observances faded through the mediæval period, their revival only coinciding with the rise of Protestantism.

James Rattue's book *The Living Stream: Holy wells in Historical Context* also challenges the notion of the widespread survival of pre-Christian rites and belief systems evidenced through a survival of holy well rituals. Rattue examines the effects of the Reformation on hydrolatory (the worship of water) and the influence of the romantic post-Reformation period – the period in which, to quote from Rich Pederick, the editor of *Living Spring Journal*, "...antiquarians first began to wax lyrically about lost treasures and the upper classes attempted to envelop themselves in the romance of times past by surrounding themselves with temples, follies and grottoes, and devouring all things antiquarian. This arousal of interest in wells resulted in a lot of literature."

Rattue brings the story of the holy well into the modern period and tells of country vicars who 'reinstated', or rather invented, rituals around wells in their parishes. According to Pederick, the late 19th century saw the creation of many well-dressing ceremonies. A Roman Catholic pilgrimage to St Plegmund's Well in Plemstall, Cheshire, began as late as 1938. Visitors to many of the holy well sites in Britain find them restored, with a Victorian or 20th-century well house covering them.

"By the early 20th century," wrote Pederick, "romantic assumptions had 'graduated into a theory which became all-dominating'. Rattue asserts that 'at the root of that theory was romantic urban angst'. In conclusion, Rattue attempts to succinctly disentangle the romantic from the historical, asserting that it is 'the aching alienation of the modern mind from the land itself' that has led to such an entanglement."⁷

REINVENTING TRADITION

Worldwide, holy wells continue to be discovered or created. Healing waters have of late been found in Mexico, Germany, China and India – at least, so claims Share International, the movement which claims a new messiah, the Maitreya, is currently active in the world.

One of their reports estimates that 10,000 people a day have been queuing for water at a miracle well at Tlacote, Mexico, said to cure everything from AIDS and cancer to obesity and high cholesterol. The healing properties of the waters were first noticed when it was lapped up by a sick farm dog.



ABOVE: Messages, ribbons and tokens left on and beneath trees surrounding the two pools and connecting stream at St Madron's Holy Well, Cornwall.

of Christianity" during difficult times, such as illness or bereavement, when they are "looking for some sort of guidance" and a way of "making sense of death".⁹

Substitute the word 'religion' for 'Christianity' and an explanation for the rites at holy wells might be found. Might members of Generation Y, not having traditional faith roots of their own, have had to reinvent their own forms of spiritual practice from surviving cultural remnants?

Thus the rituals observed at holy wells are not survivals of an ancient tradition, but inventions, based on some popular idea of what ritual ought to include. Like the creation of shrines at the sites of motorcycle accidents and the placing of flowers and cards on the gates of Kensington Palace to remember Princess Diana, are contemporary holy well rituals being created to fill a cultural or spiritual void?

Some of the practices would superficially appear to follow the supposed 'old ways', but actually seem to have missed the point – an indication perhaps that

The waters had supposedly been empowered by the Maitreya himself. As had those at a spring in a disused slate mine at Nordenau in Germany, where an ex-miner said his back was healed and he has thrown away his crutch. Another woman said: "I always had problems with high blood pressure and was afraid of collapsing. I went to the grotto with my pressure at 160 to 100. I came out with 130 to 100. Now the blood pressure is constant, a fact which my doctor cannot explain."⁸

Individual holy wells become associated with specific practices. At some rags are hung, others have coins left or pins. Some are said to heal blindness, while others specialise in rheumatism. Some are places of divination. At a new holy well site, or at one that has been revived in modern times, how do these rituals or associations come about? Why do the visitors opt to perform certain rites? When much of the traditional Christian practice of Britain and Europe is being lost, and church leaders talk of a 'Generation Y' – the new young adults who know nothing of Christianity, not even the Lord's Prayer – who determines what behaviour and practices are appropriate for a holy well?

A clue may be found in a new work by sociologist Sylvia Collins-Mayo. From her study of the views and attitudes of 300 people born after 1982, she found what she described as a "benign indifference to religion". However, young people do turn, she said, to "a faded, inherited cultural memory

they are reconstructed from fading memory. Rags were, it is said, left at wells so that they could rot away. It was as they decomposed, so the illness of the supplicant faded.

Many of the items left at wells today however are made from plastic – polythene and artificial fibres. According to the old lore, the diseases represented by these non-biodegradable offerings will take a long time, if not a lifetime, to heal. **FI**

NOTES

- 1 www.snh.org.
- 2 www.catholicpilgrims.com.
- 3 www.lourdes-water.org.
- 4 John 9 vv6–7.
- 5 Janet Bord: *Holy Wells in Britain – A Guide*, Heart of Albion, p161.
- 6 Jens Chr V Johansen: "Holy Springs and Protestantism in Early Modern Denmark: A Medical Rationale for a Religious Practice", *Medical History*, 1997, 41:59–69.
- 7 *Living Spring Journal*, Issue 2, Nov 2002.
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TED HARRISON is a former BBC religious affairs correspondent and author of many books, including *Diana: Making of a Saint* (2007). He also produced and directed the documentary *And Did Those Feet?*

YOU'VE BEEN TRUNKOED!

What exactly was 'Trunko', the bizarre creature reported off the South African coast in 1924 and later washed ashore dead after a battle with a pair of killer whales? **Dr KARL SHUKER** solves a long-running cryptozoological puzzle and provides an identity for this white-furred, proboscis-endowed sea monster. **MAIN ILLUSTRATION: RENÉ FOLLET.**

Back in early September 2010 (see **FT268:19**), I and German colleague Markus Hemmler jointly solved one of the most perplexing of all cryptozoological mysteries by revealing, almost 86 years after the remarkable events surrounding it had taken place, the much-speculated identity of Trunko and discovering no fewer than three hitherto unpublicised photographs of its beached carcass.

This truly bizarre entity (which I light-heartedly dubbed 'Trunko' in my 1996 book *The Unexplained*, never suspecting for a moment that this would ultimately become universally adopted as its formal name) was of course the infamous white-furred, proboscis-endowed sea monster from the early 1920s that had allegedly battled two whales out to sea at Margate, in Natal, South Africa, before its lifeless carcass had washed ashore on Margate's beach. There it had remained for 10 days before being carried back out by the tide, without ever having been examined by scientists or even photographed, and never to be seen by anyone ever again. That,



at least, had long been the official Trunko story.

However, in uncovering Trunko's identity and the photos, Markus and I also discovered that almost everything that had been written about this surreal specimen in the cryptozoological literature was wrong. Indeed, to put it bluntly, for the past 80-odd years, cryptid investigators everywhere had been well and truly Trunkoed! So now, for the very first time anywhere, here is the true, complete history of Trunko – or as true (or complete) as anything regarding such a creature of contradiction can ever be.

MAKING A DATE WITH TRUNKO

Even the year when Trunko made its famous debut had formerly been unclear. The most commonly cited date for its whale battle and subsequent



TOP: Artist's impression of Trunko's epic battle.

LEFT: Penny Miller's sketch of Trunko stranded on the beach, from *Myths & Legends of South Africa* (1979).



beaching had been November 1922 (or sometimes even as precise a date as 1 November 1922 – as in *Living Wonders* by John Michell and Robert Rickard, for example). However, several other dates had also been claimed. According to veteran cryptozoologist Dr Bernard Heuvelmans, for instance, the Trunko saga had occurred sometime *prior to* 1 November 1922. Conversely, a London *Daily Mail* report of 27 December 1924 gave the date in question as 25 October 1924 (quoted wrongly as 26 October 1924 by Charles Fort in 1931 in his book *Lo!*). Mid-November 1924 was yet another date cited, this time in a *Wide World Magazine* article of August 1925 that consisted for the most part of a detailed account of Trunko penned by Johannesburg photographer AK Jones.

Moreover, it was our very discovery in September 2010 of that long-overlooked article containing Jones's account and two of his three equally neglected published photographs that enabled me to identify Trunko. For until then, no one had realised that any photographs, or Jones's first-hand eyewitness account and examination of this entity, existed. The cryptozoological world

No one had realised there were photos of Trunko

had only been able to speculate blindly concerning its identity and history.

TRUNKO – THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY

Before presenting the principal text of Jones's rediscovered report, however, let us first examine three key Trunko accounts that have collectively yielded what until now had been widely considered to be the standard version of events.

First and foremost of these is the report referred to by Fort that had appeared on 27 December 1924 in the *Daily Mail*. This classic account contains many of the basic elements of the Trunko saga's standard version:

FISH LIKE A POLAR BEAR.

A FIGHT WITH TWO WHALES. ESCAPE AFTER 10 DAYS' SLEEP.

"On the morning of October 25 I saw what I took to be two whales fighting with some sea monster about 1,300 yards [1,200m] from the shore. I got my glasses, and was surprised to see an animal which resembled a Polar bear, but in size was equal to an elephant. This object I observed to back out of the water fully 20ft [6m] and strike repeatedly at the two whales, but with seemingly no effect." This is an extract from a letter sent to a Natal newspaper by Mr HC Ballance, Margate Estate, South Coast, Natal.

BODY LIKE A BEAR

The letter continues:

"After an hour the whales made off and the incoming tide brought the monster within sight, and I saw that the body was covered with hair 8in. [20cm] long, exactly like a polar bear's, and snow white."

Next morning, Mr Ballance found the carcase lying high on the beach. He measured it and found it was 47ft [14m] from tip to tail. The tail was 10ft long and 2ft wide [3m by 60cm], and where the head should have



ABOVE: AK Jones's photo of Trunko, published in the *Rand Daily Mail*.

been the creature had a sort of trunk 14 inches [36cm] in diameter and about 5ft [1.5m] long, the end being like the snout of a pig. The backbone was very prominent, and the whole body covered with snow-white hair.

"For 10 days," continues Mr Ballance, "this mass lay inert. On the eleventh day there was not a sign of the creature."

"I met some natives who told me that while fishing they had seen the monster out at sea, going up the coast, and that is the last we have seen of it."

Coincidentally, the end of the *Mail* report was followed by a brief mention of another titanic sea-battle spied off the Natal coast at around the same time as Trunko's and previously reported in the *Mail* on 16 December 1924. However, this confrontation featured a whale and a giant squid, whose tentacles were clearly observed when it was later washed ashore. (Nevertheless, that incident has been confused with the Trunko case in some published coverage of the latter.)

The only major discrepancy in this early report from the modern-day standard version of the Trunko saga is its intimation that Trunko had not died, but that after being beached for 10 days had made its way back out to sea. However, this was not observed by Ballance, merely claimed by some locals who spoke to him about the creature. Also, the *Mail*'s wording is sufficiently imprecise to lend an alternative interpretation – i.e. that Trunko was merely being carried up the coast passively, by the sea – were it not for the unambiguous subtitle: "Escape After 10 Days' Sleep".

Having said that, some much later newspaper accounts have even alleged not only that Trunko wasn't killed by the whales but, rather, that the whales were killed by Trunko! However, as will be seen, none of

...two whales fighting with some sea monster...

the key Trunko accounts includes such a dramatically conflicting claim – which can instead be satisfactorily discounted as mere journalistic hyperbole.

Ballance's account was summarised and repeated in many subsequent media reports worldwide during the following 12 months or so, but not everybody accepted its veracity. Fort was particularly sceptical. After devoting just two sentences to the *Mail* report, he dismissed the entire subject as follows: "I won't go into this, because I consider it a worthless yarn. In accordance with my methods, considering this a foolish and worthless yarn, I sent out letters to South African newspapers, calling upon readers, who could, to investigate this story. Nobody answered."

The second key Trunko account was by Dr Bernard Heuvelmans, who documented this seemingly unclassifiable marine creature in his seminal tome *In the Wake of the Sea-Serpents* (1968). Curiously, however, Heuvelmans's account and the *Daily Mail*'s disagreed on a number of important issues, and Heuvelmans's source for Ballance's testimony was a report in an unnamed South African newspaper, not the London paper's report:

On 1 November 1922, three years after he

bought the farm of Margate in Natal which has since become the seaside resort of that name, Hugh Ballance told the South African press a very strange tale:

"I saw what I took to be two whales fighting with some sea monster about 1,300 yards [1,200m] from the shore. I got my glasses and was amazed to see what I took to be a polar bear, but of truly mammoth proportions. This creature I observed to rear out of the water fully twenty feet [6m] and to strike repeatedly with what I took to be its tail at the two whales, but with seemingly no effect."

A gigantic Polar Bear with a tail long enough to use as a whip is clearly no ordinary bear – especially as the Polar Bear is never found in the southern hemisphere – it is also something quite new even for the most incorrigible of sea-serpent hunters.

The battle lasted three hours and was watched by crowds on the shore, after which the two whales made off, leaving the monster floating lifeless on the surface.

The next night the tide threw the great carcase on the beach. It was described thus by TV Bulpin in his book, *Your Undiscovered Country* [1965], about the beauties of South Africa:

"It was certainly a giant of a creature, forty-seven feet long, ten feet in breadth and five feet high [14 x 3 x 1.5m]. At one end it had a trunk-like appendage about fourteen inches [36cm] in diameter and five feet [1.5m] long. The creature was covered in snow-white hair and seemed to be devoid of blood."

This incredible carcase lay on the beach for ten days. Many people came to stare at it. But no zoologist took the trouble to examine and identify it before the spring tide washed it away, for it has never been classified.

Heuvelmans's account introduced several elements that subsequently became fundamental components of the standard version of the Trunko saga. (Some of these, moreover, contradicted – and directly replaced – their respective, earlier equivalents in Ballance's testimony.)

Namely: the change of Trunko's date of appearance from Ballance's claim of 25 October 1924 to an unspecified date prior to 1 November 1922 (even though it is evident from the *Mail* report of 27 December 1924 that Ballance's sighting had taken place in October of that same year, *not* two years earlier); additional dimensions of the beached carcase, and its apparent lack of blood; the claim that the carcase attracted no scientific interest or examination; and, most significant of all, the statement that it was lifeless and was finally washed back out to sea by the tide (rather than being still alive and making its own way out to sea, as ostensibly claimed by the locals who had spoken to Ballance).

But were any of these marked deviations from Ballance's statement correct? Not until our own discoveries took place in September 2010 could this query be answered.

The third key Trunko account was by South African writer and illustrator Penny Miller in her book *Myths and Legends of Southern Africa* (1979). Although her coverage of events included the version of

Ballance's testimony quoted by Heuvelmans, it gave the date of Trunko's appearance and beaching as 1 November 1922 (rather than *prior to* 1 November 1922). However, far from repeating Ballance's claim that this entity did not die but made its own way back out to sea, Miller's account reiterated Heuvelmans's statement that it was washed up dead onto Margate's beach, and specified that the actual site was beyond the aptly-named Tragedy Hill. In addition, Miller's became the first key account to emphasise the stench of decomposition:

As recently as 1922 a dead monster was washed up on the golden beach of Margate. It was a nine-day wonder until the hot weather accelerated decomposition and the stench made its weird bulk unapproachable... For ten days it lay on the beach; even a span of 32 oxen failed to move it! The stench became more and more putrid until finally, the spring tide had pity on the inhabitants of Margate, and overnight the carcass vanished, leaving nothing behind but a cloud of mystery and speculation.

Miller's book also saw the debut of her now-iconic, frequently-reproduced/adapted line drawing of a huge, hairy, limbless, elephant-trunked creature lying dead on the shore with a couple of onlookers standing beside it (shown here on p42).

This, then, was the trio of key accounts from which the modern-day standard version of the Trunko saga had evolved, resulting in all manner of speculation (not to mention a rich diversity of imaginative illustrations) relative to the possible existence (or otherwise) somewhere in the vast oceans of a still-undiscovered, yet zoologically inconceivable, species of sea creature resembling an enormous hairy polar bear, yet sporting the trunk of an elephant, but with no recognisable head, and a conspicuous absence of limbs. Or, to put it another way, a beast so outlandish that nothing even remotely similar was known either from the present day or from the fossil record.

TELLING IT LIKE IT WAS: THE JONES ACCOUNT

But now, allowing us to compare and contrast with those key accounts, it is time to unveil AK Jones's extremely informative and enlightening first-hand report of the Trunko carcass as directly examined and photographed by him. Published in the August 1925 issue of *Wide World Magazine* but inexplicably overlooked afterwards for more than eight decades, it provides a wealth of morphological details as well as a previously unreported claim that after the carcass had been washed out to sea following 10 days' lying on the beach, it was subsequently washed ashore again.

Before I present his description of the carcass, however, I should point out that Jones's account began with a short summary of Trunko's offshore battle and its subsequent beaching, but that the dates

given by him for these events were only approximate – yet very intriguing. He gave the date of Trunko's beaching as “about the middle of November last” (i.e. mid-November 1924), and the date of Trunko's whale battle as “about three weeks previously” (i.e. the last week of October 1924). The latter date thereby corresponds with Ballance's testimony in the *Daily Mail* report. However, Jones's account is the only one to claim that a time period of about three weeks had elapsed between the battle and the beaching. All others had claimed that the beaching took place just hours after the battle.

A second noteworthy discrepancy was Jones's claim that “...a terrific struggle had been witnessed out at sea by residents of Margate, between what they took to be a whale and some other animal which they could not clearly distinguish”. Again, Jones's account is the only one to claim the involvement of just one whale, and also that Trunko was not clearly discernible by its shore-based observers (though this might explain a lot!).

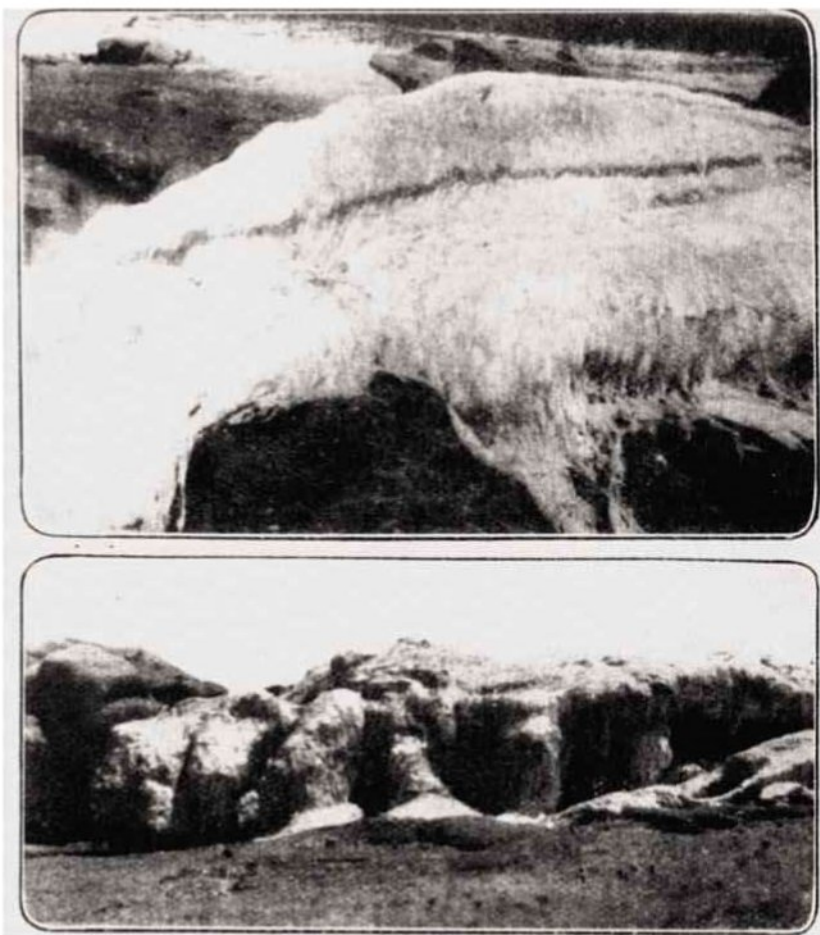
So is Jones's account the correct one in either or both of these instances? Alternatively, can its unexpected discrepancies with all other key accounts be safely ascribed to nothing more mysterious than an imperfect recollection by Jones of events that he had not personally experienced, and which in any case had occurred

and been reported by the media a full year before he had got around to writing about them himself? As yet, we simply do not know.

However, what we do know, and what is much more important anyway, is what he did experience personally – the beached Trunko carcass:

About the middle of December [1924] it was discovered that the monster had been washed up a second time, and was now lying on the rocks about three miles farther up the coast. I happened to be spending a holiday at Margate at the time, and secured three photographs of the creature, taken from different angles. No one here is able to identify it, but perhaps some of your scientific readers may be able to throw some light on its identity.

As the photographs clearly show, the monster is covered with slimy hair about four or five inches long [10–13cm], under which lies what I should take to be a very tough hide. The whole thing has the appearance of a huge sheepskin that has been thoroughly soaked. The body seems to be composed of extremely firm flesh; there is little 'give' in it when poked with a stick. There are probably bones in the monster, but no actual bone can be felt, as the whole thing is so firm that even if there is bone it cannot be distinguished by touch. However, I should say that there is a bony framework, or else the hollow which runs the whole length of the back, clearly



ABOVE: More of AK Jones's Trunko pictures, from *Wide World Magazine*, August 1925.

AK JONES c. 1924

shown in the first photograph, would not still be so clearly defined as it is, considering the rough handling to which it must have been subjected by the sea.

At one end there is a round lump about two feet [61cm] in diameter, which might be taken for a head, but there are neither eyes, mouth, ears, nor anything else visible. There are, moreover, no limbs, flappers, tentacles, tail, or any other features which would help to identify it. The measurements are as follows: About fifteen feet long, six feet broad, and two feet thick [4.6 x 1.8m x 61cm]. The carcass, at the moment of writing, has already begun to decompose, and there can be little doubt that it is composed of flesh of some sort. Probably, if it is allowed to rot and the skeleton becomes visible, it will be possible to identify it by this means.

It's worth noting here that whereas Jones stated that the carcass lacked a tail, Ballance's description of it as quoted in the *Mail* report referred specifically to a 10ft-long (3m) tail (another newspaper even described the tail as lobster-like). As Ballance had viewed the carcass when it was originally beached, however, whereas Jones had only viewed it after it had been re-beached, the tail had probably dropped off during the carcass's intervening period at sea. Supporting this theory is Jones's failure to include any mention of Trunko's eponymous proboscis either, which therefore must also have been lost by then, explaining why the carcass was now much smaller than when viewed earlier by Ballance.

Jones ended his article by speculating that an underwater earthquake that had been recorded near Margate just before Trunko's appearance may have perhaps dislodged this entity from the ocean-bed and thrown it up to the surface of the sea, in a manner similar to what had occurred some time previously when a sea monster had been washed ashore on South America's east coast following a nearby seaquake. (Interestingly, it is certainly plausible that the Margate seaquake was responsible for the surfacing, sighting, and subsequent whale battle off the Natal coast of the giant squid – normally a deepwater species – noted by the *Mail* at the end of its Trunko

report.)

In his account, Jones noted that he took three photos of the Trunko carcass. Two were published alongside his account, but it was the third photo, the one that didn't appear there, which initiated the chain of discoveries made by Markus and me last autumn that finally unmasked Trunko. I have already described these in detail in my ShukerNature blog posts and my Alien Zoo report, but they can be summarised and updated here as follows.

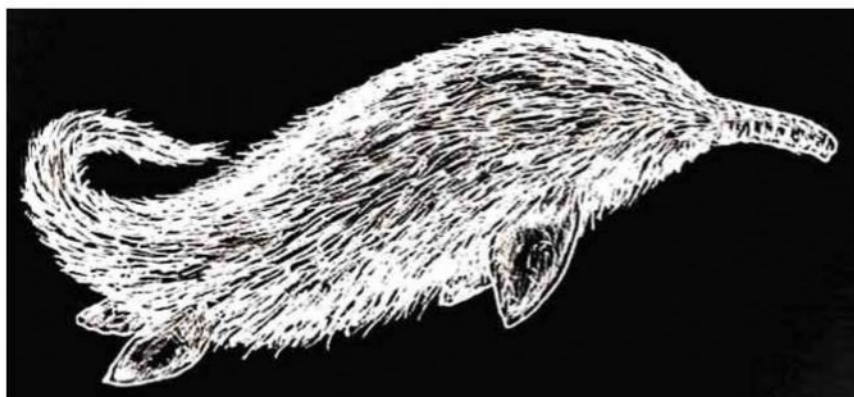
TRUNKO IDENTIFIED

In early September 2010, Markus drew my attention to a page (<http://bit.ly/gXSvdt>) devoted to Trunko on the website of the Margate Business Association (MBA).

Uploaded on 19 October 2009 and entitled "The Legend of Trunko" [sic], much of its information was nothing new, and not entirely accurate either. However, there were two very notable exceptions. One was a brief extract from a letter about Trunko by Johannesburg photographer AC [sic] Jones – who was also credited there as the author of a *Wide World Magazine* article on Trunko from July 1925 (in fact, August 1925). And the other, to our great astonishment, was a black-and-white photograph snapped by Jones of Trunko's beached carcass!

Moreover, I was shocked to realise that I'd already seen an extremely similar image. The *Mail* report of 27 December 1924 documenting Ballance's eyewitness testimony had contained a very small sketch of a long but largely featureless white carcass on a beach with the silhouette of a human figure standing in front of the carcass at its extreme left-hand end, looking down at it, with one arm

The photo resembled classic hairy 'globsters'



ABOVE: A reconstruction by Markus Bühler when Trunko was still envisaged as a living, hairy-trunked cryptid.

outstretched. This sketch had simply been labelled "A sea monster", and so provided no hint that it might be directly related to the Trunko report. However, looking at Jones's photo of the Trunko carcass, it was immediately obvious that the sketch had been based directly on this photo as every discernible detail was the same: the carcass's shape and pale colour, the skyline, the precise location, shape, and orientation of the human figure, even the angle of its outstretched arm.

This was clearly no coincidence, and as Jones had snapped his photos during the same month, December 1924, as the *Mail* report had been published, I can only assume that the *Mail* had somehow seen this particular Jones photo somewhere and had prepared a sketched version of it for inclusion. Confirmation of this notion may well exist in a statement on the MBA's Trunko page that Jones's Trunko account had been published not only in the *Wide World Magazine* but also in the *Rand Daily Mail* (a Johannesburg newspaper).

No date of publication was mentioned for this *Rand Daily Mail* report (which no doubt included Jones's photos as well as his account), and neither Markus nor I have so far been able to trace it. However, if this report had been published prior to the publication of the London *Daily Mail*'s own, separate Trunko story (which is more than likely, given the much greater newsworthiness of a South African sea monster to a South African newspaper than to a London one), then it well may be that the *Rand Daily Mail* report would have been seen by at least a few reporters and artists at London's *Daily Mail*. In turn, this may conceivably have inspired the latter newspaper to produce its own Trunko report, complete with a sketch of a photo from the *Rand Daily Mail*'s version.

What the photo of the Trunko carcass shows bears a striking resemblance to classic hairy 'globsters' reported from beaches all over the world down through the decades. The zoological identity of these huge, amorphous, hairy masses formerly incited considerable controversy in scientific circles, but recent DNA analyses of tissue samples taken from various specimens have confirmed that a globster is merely a massive, tough skin-sac of blubber containing collagen (and occasionally an isolated bone or two) that is sometimes left behind when a whale dies and its skull and skeleton have separated from the skin and sunk to the sea bottom. Moreover, its external surface is usually covered in exposed connective tissue fibres that resemble pale, shaggy, scraggy hair or fur, and there is no trace of blood as this has long since drained or been washed away.

Despite numerous attempts, Markus and I had both failed to elicit any reply from the MBA concerning this remarkable photograph. Consequently, the only way to determine whether it was a genuine image of the Trunko carcass was to locate Jones's *Wide World Magazine* article, and see if

it contained this or any further photos (or at least a detailed description) of the carcase. Happily, in just four days Markus and I had independently succeeded in doing precisely that. There before us were the two additional Jones photos and his in-depth description, which confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt that the Trunko carcase had indeed been a globster. As for its famous trunk, this was probably an isolated bone encased in blubber (or else a long tubular evagination of blubber; possibly even the remains of a throat pleat if the pre-globsterised whale had been a baleen species).

But as this meant that it had never been alive in the sense of being an exotic, trunk-bearing, snowy-furred mystery beast, how could its lively sea battle with the two whales be explained?

In fact, long before I had discovered Jones's photos and article, I had documented what I believed to be the answer to this riddle. While preparing the Trunko section for my book *Extraordinary Animals Revisited* (2007), I had come across a meticulous examination of the Trunko phenomenon undertaken and posted by American cryptozoological investigator Lance Bradshaw on his Kryptid's Keep website at: <http://bit.ly/e7dt5l>.

In his account, Lance had postulated that the Trunko battle could be reasonably explained as an optical illusion. That is, observers on the shore looking some distance out to sea thought that they were watching some bizarre furry mega-beast battling two whales, but what they were really seeing was two whales repeatedly throwing into the air a huge but already dead carcase, playing with it in an animated manner already on record for certain cetaceans (particularly killer whales, which are indeed native to South Africa's coast). It is even possible (as I've already proposed for the *Daily Mail*-reported giant squid) that this carcase had originally been propelled from the sea depths up to the surface by the recent Margate seaquake mentioned by Jones.

And now, with our discovery that Trunko as a living snowy-furred, trunk-sporting cryptid had never existed, and in reality had been nothing more than a long-dead, globsterised whale carcase, Lance's theory had finally been confirmed. Needless to say, this also explained why the body of a supposedly battle-scarred, fatally-wounded cryptid had not been pouring (or at least copiously stained) with blood.

And so, finally, the true history of Trunko would appear to be that in late October 1924, various onlookers present on Margate's beach had observed at least one whale (but most probably two) some distance out to sea boisterously playing with a globsterised whale carcase that was later washed ashore onto the beach. There it lay for 10 days, decomposing very odiferously before being carried out to sea by the tide, then washed ashore again in December 1924, where it was closely



ABOVE: "1922 Margate, South Africa", a 2005 etching by printmaker Todd Freeman.

observed, photographed, and examined by AK Jones before the tide took it back out, after which it was not seen again.

SON OF TRUNKO

Moreover, while investigating Trunko, Markus also solved a longstanding mystery concerning the identity and whereabouts of a smaller but no less intriguing white-furred, long-snouted sea monster carcase. Discovered washed ashore on Alaska's desolate Glacier Island, the discovery date of this 'Son of Trunko' was traditionally thought to have been November 1936, but was later found to have been 10 November 1930. And after it had been examined by a scientific team, cryptozoologists had traditionally assumed that the creature's remains had not been preserved and that its zoological identity remained a mystery. Markus, however, discovered not only that it had been formally identified, as a minke whale *Balaenoptera acutorostrata*, but also that its complete skeleton had eventually been donated to the National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC, where it remains to this day, officially labelled as USNM 256498.

As for Margate's erstwhile cryptozoological mega-star: Trunko would not of course be Trunko without leaving behind some still-unanswered questions. In particular, how can the notable discrepancies between the details in Ballance's account and those in Heuvelmans's be explained? Having said that, however, now that Trunko has been conclusively exposed as a globster, it is evident that Ballance's claim that it made its own way out to sea again after having been beached earlier was nonsense. For almost a century, it may indeed have acquired the mystique of a veritable maritime *mirabilis*, but even the indefatigable Trunko was incapable of resurrecting itself from the dead! **T**

I wish to thank most sincerely Lance Bradshaw, Markus Bühler, Jonathan Downes, Richard Holland, Tim Morris, Richard Muirhead, Michael Newton, Mark North, Spencer Thrower, and, above all others, Markus Hemmler, for their much-valued assistance and encouragement during my Trunko investigations.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DR KARL SHUKER is a long-time regular *Fortean Times* contributor and the author of many books on cryptozoology and other fortan topics. *Karl Shuker's Alien Zoo* was published by CFZ Books in 2010.



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Constantine's vision

PATRICK MALONEY questions Constantine the Great's heavenly sighting – was it cooked up after the event to bring history in line with the Emperor's conversion to Christianity?



PATRICK MALONEY is an actor and writer living and working in Lancashire. He has long been fascinated by all things fortean. This is his first piece for *FT*.

Outside the south door of York Minster, there is a statue of a seated man. He looks pensively at the sword he holds, point down, in his left hand. The tip has broken off. The sword has become a cross. The man represented is Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus, who was, on 25 July 306, declared Emperor of Rome within a few yards of his modern statue. He was the man who converted Rome to Christianity, the man who would be declared both a saint and a god after his death.

On the base of the statue are the words "Constantine. By this sign conquer". This refers to one of the defining moments in the history of Western civilisation: the vision that led Constantine to victory at the battle of Saxa Rubra, when his forces defeated those of one of his rival emperors, Maxentius. This in turn led to Constantine's acceptance of Christianity and his imposition of it on the whole Roman Empire.

This is such an important moment that it bears closer examination. There are two sources for the vision of Constantine. One is Lucius Cæcilius Firmianus Lactantius, the Christian tutor of Constantine's eldest son, Crispus. The other is Eusebius Pamphilus of Cæsarea.

The most famous and dramatic account is that of Eusebius, who relates in his panegyric to the deceased Constantine, *Vita Constantini*, that the day before the battle of Saxa Rubra (27 October 312), Constantine was praying, and begging God to reveal Himself. As he prayed, at around midday, a "most marvellous sign" appeared in the sky. A cross of light appeared, above the Sun with the inscription *In hoc signo vinces* (By this sign, conquer).



Constantine and his entire army of close to 100,000 men were amazed at the sight.¹

That night, Eusebius reports, Constantine had a dream. In his dream, Christ appeared to him and ordered that Constantine make a "likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens" and use it as a protective in all his future battles.

So what was it that Constantine saw? Artists through the ages have attempted to depict the scene, but have done so in only the most fantastical way. The most obvious solution is that it was a particularly bright parhelion (a Sun dog or mock Sun). The specific association that Eusebius makes with the Sun might support this. These images are caused by ice particles high in the atmosphere and are relatively common. Given clear skies, they can be seen on average about twice a week, if looked for carefully.² Very bright parhelia are rarer, yet should still have been known to Constantine, who would have spent far more time outdoors than we do today, and would consequently be more familiar with aerial phenomena.

Recently, the drama-documentary TV series *Ancient Rome*³ espoused the theory that Constantine and his army

witnessed a meteorite strike, the smoke from the blast curling into a slight (and unconvincing) Chi-Rho shape. Both armies would surely have witnessed either event – signs in the sky are not meant for one man, but for all.

There are two other versions of the events of that day, both written closer in time to the actual events, neither of which refer to a vision, and one of which was written by Eusebius himself. Eusebius's first account appears in his *Ecclesiastical History* (c325). Here, the battle is described in somewhat mystical terms, the hand of God being more visible than the sword of Constantine. Maxentius is accused of sorcery, but there is no mention of a vision or a dream.⁴

The final account is that of Lactantius. In his book *On the Death of the Persecutors*, he writes: "Constantine was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be delineated on the shields of his soldiers, and so to proceed to battle."⁵

No mention of any vision. But note the use of the phrase "heavenly sign" – usually taken to mean the Chi-Rho monogram. Could Eusebius have interpreted this as a "sign" actually seen "in the heavens"? For despite his claiming that Constantine saw a vision, there is simply no mention of it anywhere else, not even in his own works. Only the *Life*, written some time after Constantine's death, mentions it.

Interestingly, however, Constantine *did* once claim to have seen a vision. This was much earlier, before a battle in Gaul, and was of Sol Invictus, the martial emperors' god of choice.⁶ Here again we find a close association with the Sun.

The conclusion seems clear. Eusebius, living in a time when visions and miracles were an accepted part of everyday life, saw that Constantine's momentous turn towards Christianity *should* have been accompanied by a suitably dramatic divine vision. It is a slight matter to transpose Constantine's earlier vision of a false god to where it *should* have happened, and to modify it to a vision of the *true* God; and yet that association with Sol remains as a tantalising hint of the origins of the story. All the ingredients of the vision story preceded its first telling – it just took Eusebius to 'correct' history to suit the new Christian regime. **FT**

NOTES

¹ Eusebius: *Life of Constantine*, bk 1, ch 28. The dream reference is in ch 29.

² Atmospheric Optics website: <http://bit.ly/y7rho> (atoptics.co.uk).

³ *Ancient Rome* – Constantine, BBC, 2006.

⁴ Eusebius: *Ecclesiastical History*, bk 9, ch 9.

⁵ Lactantius: *On the Death of the Persecutors*, ch 44.

⁶ John Julius Norwich: *Byzantium: the Early Centuries*, Penguin, 1990, p42.

Capron and the crop circles

MARINUS ANTHONY VAN DER SLUIJS examines some early scientific reports of strange formations in cornfields.



MARINUS VAN DER SLUIJS is a historical linguist, researching archaeoastronomy and mythology. He was once struck by lightning and while he has never seen a ghost he is dying to see one.

Back in the 1980s, when the crop circle phenomenon was widely considered a novelty, natural explanations still carried some clout. The British physicist and meteorologist, Dr Terence Meaden, notably fingered a species of electrified whirlwind dubbed a 'plasma vortex' as the most likely agent responsible for crop formations. By now, the increasing complexity of the patterns and the disclosure of the identities of many of the 'hoaxers' – or perhaps we should say 'ostenders' – render such thought experiments hopelessly dated. Or do they?

As crop circles have turned into an artistic genre of their own, the little evidence for a genuine atmospheric cause has simply been drowned out, or so it seems. Yet as rare phenomena are every bit as real as common ones, it is worth rescuing this wheat from the chaff of cases due to human intervention. Searches for records of crop circles antedating 1980 or occurring outside the Western world – recently joined by Russia, Japan and India – have ended in a sonorous silence, with the single exception of the renowned woodcut pamphlet of the 'Mowing Devil' published in 1678, which sees the Devil constructing a perfect oval in the field of a farmer who refused to mow it himself (FT264:30–31). While even this potential testimony has been discounted by many a sceptic, the devil is in the additional details, overlooked in most modern treatments of the subject.

In July 1880, the English solicitor and amateur astronomer and spectroscopist John Rand Capron (1829–1888) published a letter in *Nature* reporting on an unprecedented disturbance of fields in the vicinity of Guildford, Surrey. For its historical value, it is worth repeating the piece in full:

"The storms about this part of Surrey have been lately local and violent, and the effects produced in some instances curious. Visiting a neighbour's farm on Wednesday evening (21st), we found a field of standing wheat considerably knocked about, not as

Crop circles have turned into their own artistic genre

*an entirety, but in patches forming, as viewed from a distance, circular spots. Examined more closely, these all presented much the same character, viz., a few standing stalks as a centre, some prostrate stalks with their heads arranged pretty evenly in a direction forming a circle round the centre, and outside these a circular wall of stalks which had not suffered. I send a sketch made on the spot, giving an idea of the most perfect of these patches. The soil is a sandy loam upon the greensand, and the crop is vigorous, with strong stems, and I could not trace locally any circumstances accounting for the peculiar forms of the patches in the field, nor indicating whether it was wind or rain, or both combined, which had caused them, beyond the general evidence everywhere of heavy rainfall. They were to me suggestive of some cyclonic wind action, and may perhaps have been noticed elsewhere by some of your readers."*¹

The description of these scattered circles sounds like a genuine precursor to modern crop formations, occurring in the proper 'crop circle season'. Capron's hopes for corroboration from other readers may have been squashed, but his report was not entirely forgotten. Whereas violent storms may have had little to do with the event, Capron's hunch that "some cyclonic wind action" could have been the culprit may well have planted the seeds for the plasma-vortical theory in Meaden's inquisitive mind. And as recently as June 2010, a prominent scientist harked back to Capron's note in another article in *Nature*, albeit dismissively. Richard Taylor, a professor of physics, psychology and art at the University of Oregon, recognised Capron's contribution as the "first formal scientific comment on crop circles", yet



ABOVE: In 1880, John Rand Capron described disturbances of field crops in Surrey which suggest an early example of crop circle-like effects.

FACING PAGE: Ball Lightning – "Globe of Fire Descending into a Room" in Dr G Hartwig: *The Aerial World*, London, 1886, p267. Library Call Number QC863.4 H33 1886.

went on to offer the human art of crop-circle making, pioneered by Douglas Bower and David Chorley, as "a simpler explanation".² Fair enough, but Taylor's failure to account for Capron's evidence borders on intellectual lassitude. Is the idea that Capron's circular patches were the result of a 19th-century hoaxer? This is *a priori* unlikely, as hoaxers generally have a point to make in a specific socio-cultural context – the 'Pitdown Man', for instance, was put together at a time when the origin of modern man remained hotly disputed. If Capron witnessed a fabrication, it would have been one utterly meaningless to its intended audience. On the other hand, if hoaxers take their cue from veritable phenomena, a process referred to as 'ostension', the likes of Bower and Chorley could have seized upon the rare appearance of natural formations in the crops to substantiate the idea that extraterrestrials visit the planet or to "drive the emerging organic movement".³

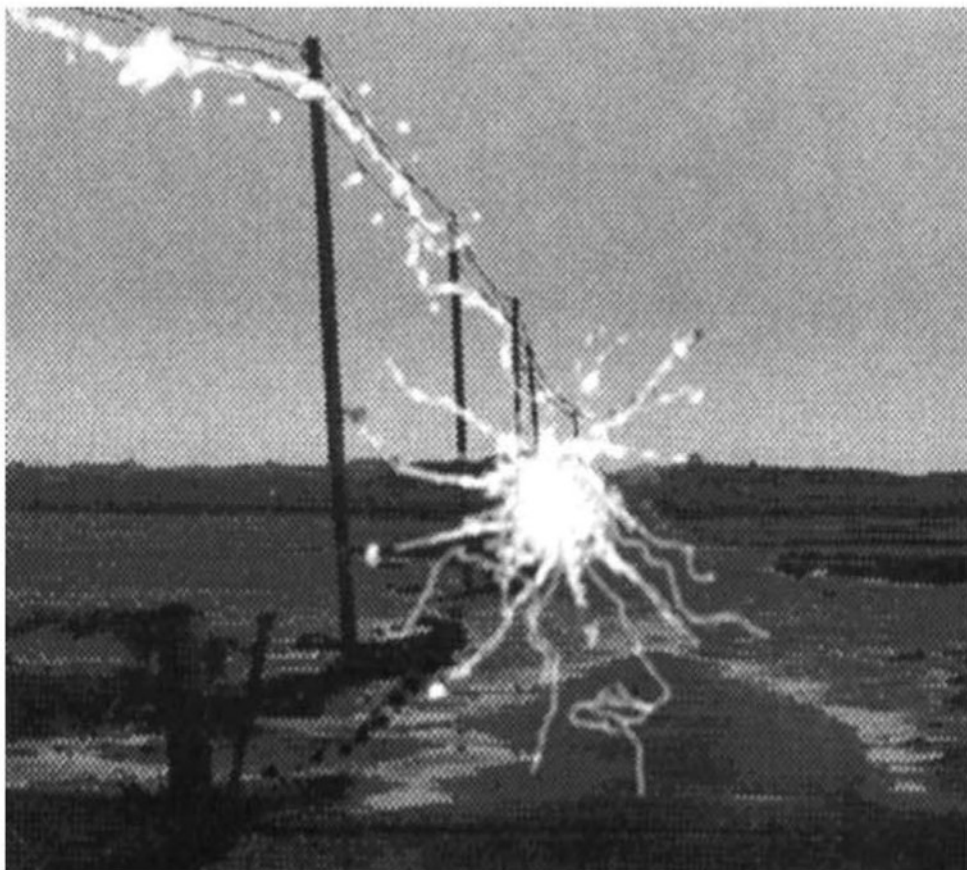
At any rate, Capron's credentials were impeccable. A regular correspondent to the science journals of his time, he penned three monographs on scientific issues as diverse as photographic spectra, rainbands and auroræ. One of his lasting contributions to science was his demonstration that magnetic forces control the forms, motions and probably even the spectrum of the northern lights. Writing in 2000, Peter van Doorn, director of the Ball Lightning Division of the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation (TORRO), based in Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, opined: "There can be no doubt that he was a strictly objective witness and his report must be regarded as reliable evidence. Notice that he enclosed a sketch of the 'most perfect' of the circles, which the journal, unfortunately, did not publish [...]. In other words, this could be a good 19th-century case of crop circles formed by electromechanical vortical effects. [...] It independently confirms the fundamental character of the simple crop circles which were investigated in the late 1970s and the 1980s also in Southern England."⁴

It is worth scouring the annals of science for other early cases. Though this came too late for Capron, van Doorn

drew attention to a second instance, again reported by an amateur astronomer in a notable science journal: in *New Scientist*, 8 August 1963, (Sir) Patrick Moore described “circular and elliptical depressions in wheat fields adjoining the site of the famous ‘Charlton Crater’ in Wiltshire”,⁵ a full decade and a half before pranksters Bower and Chorley stepped forward.

Meagre though this cull is, it is hard to sweep aside and the search for a transient atmospheric force capable of ‘saving’ these phenomena is still on. For all its ingenuity, the evidence for Meaden’s magnetohydrodynamic vortices is rather thin on the ground. Much more promising is van Doorn’s seemingly ignored suggestion that exploding bolides or ball lightning (right) can exert sufficient force in fields and meadows to carve out rings, dots and lines; after the bursting of such a ‘fireball’, “a series of energetic ‘darts’” would shoot out “in various directions before earthing with a vortical motion”.⁶ In support of this mechanism, van Doorn adduced an ‘invasion’ of the City of London by a number of fiery bodies on 7 August 1794, provoked by “one of the most awful and tremendous” thunderstorms within living memory and producing a scene of disaster matched by few suicide-bombers today. At a pub called The Cock at Temple Bar, a “flash [...] was seen to come down in an immense body, a few yards east of Temple bar, it wheeled about with great velocity, and struck the street with immense force. Fortunately, the heavy rain had driven every person from the street, and no coach was passing. The first effect observed was similar to that produced by an explosion of gunpowder; every particle of straw, mud, and even the water, was completely swept from the street, and the doors and windows of the houses, particularly on the north side of the street, were shaken – some of them driven open.”⁷ Would the same plasma orb have produced a crop formation had it descended in a field?

Van Doorn placed much confidence in what he called a “definite nexus between ‘ball lightning’ phenomena and certain vortical phenomena”.⁸ The few examples he cited to bolster that claim are ambiguous at best, however. The “tornadic phantasm viewed by Ezekiel, with its concomitant plasmic globes and ‘wheels’” almost certainly described a display of the *aurora borealis* rather than a bolide.⁹ And the ‘comet of Typhon’, mentioned in a handful of classical sources, was indeed *spirae modo intorta* or “twisted like a coil” according to Pliny,¹⁰ but was characterised by others as a globe with thin hair attached¹¹



TOP PHOTO / FORTEAN PICTURE LIBRARY / SUFOI / HENRIK KLINGE PEDERSEN

or as sickle-shaped.¹² Van Doorn might be pleased to learn that a late astrologer held the appearance of this body responsible for “the destruction of crops and kings in the East and West”,¹³ but there is no argument that at least the later authorities regarded Typhon as a comet following the same direction as the Sun, not a bolide. Although nothing in the prosopography of this Typhon flies in the face of a cometary interpretation, it is worth entertaining the possibility that the original Egyptian observation sprang from an encounter with a bolide or indeed an auroral ray, known to be vortical in composition. But whatever the conclusion, none of this sheds much light on the crop circle enigma. Crop circle literature itself almost certainly yields a much greater harvest of indications for a relation with ball lightning, but of course it does not help that ball lightning, too, continues to baffle scientists (FT163:32–35; 242:44–47; 246:14, 44–47; 249:14). For now, perhaps, a mere consensus that crop circles can be natural would mark an important stride forward. With apologies for the corny turn-of-phrase, it is hoped that other early eye-witness accounts will continue to crop up. **FT**

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Wiseman goes cherry-picking

GUY LYON PLAYFAIR gives a serial sceptic a dose of his own medicine.



GUY LYON PLAYFAIR is a member of the Scientific & Medical Network, the SPR and the College of Psychic studies. He has written widely on such topics as poltergeists, twin telepathy and hauntings.

Richard Wiseman is fond of hurling the phrase ‘cherry-picking’ at parapsychologists whom he accuses of selecting evidence that suits their cause and ignoring evidence that doesn’t. In “Dreaming the future?” (FT273:36–39) he gives a classic demonstration of precisely this reprehensible practice. The two cherries he picked – the apparent predictions of the Aberfan tragedy and the murder of Abraham Lincoln – are both cases in which a normal explanation is, as he shows, possible if not wholly convincing. “For those who want to believe in the reality of the paranormal,” he concludes, “the findings from the science of sleep are a nightmare”.

Well, it depends on which cherries you decide to pick. Wiseman is a former holder of the Perrott-Warrick fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, which entitled him to spend tens of thousands of pounds intended for serious research into psychic phenomena, and was also a member of what is now the Koestler Parapsychology Unit at Edinburgh University. So he can hardly fail to have been well aware of the tightly controlled laboratory research into dream telepathy at the Maimonides Medical Center in New York, which included a study specifically aimed at *precognitive* dreaming and produced results that cannot be dismissed lightly – 14 of Malcolm Bessent’s 16 dreams containing clear signs of awareness of target material shown to him only *after* his dream reports were recorded, in the opinions of three independent judges. The probability of these results being due to chance alone is microscopic.

After one of his dreams, Bessent stated: “I just have a feeling that the next target material will be about birds”. Several hours later he was shown a slide sequence featuring birds and nothing else. Lucky guess? Maybe, if this was a one-off, but to make lucky guesses 14 times out of 16 is, shall we say, suggestive of another explanation. The

Maimonides research should certainly not be ignored in what purports to be an impartial and unbiased study of the subject. To imply, as Wiseman does, that there is no scientific evidence for precognition is simply not true.

But then Wiseman does not do impartial and unbiased studies. Instead, he does publicity stunts, and he does them very well. With his expertise in misdirection gained as a member of the Magic Circle, he does experiments carefully designed to come up with the negative results he wants, aimed at reinforcing his image as the great debunker of all things paranormal. Now and then, however, something goes wrong and he gets a positive result, which he manages to transform, with well-rehearsed sleight of hand, into a negative one. To give just two of many possible examples:

In 1994, Austrian TV showed the result of one of Rupert Sheldrake’s first experiments with a dog named Jaytee, who always seemed to know when his owner Pamela Smart was coming home (FT265:52–53), as they demonstrated on split-screen film. This attracted considerable publicity, and Wiseman predictably popped up all over the media with all kinds of explanations other than telepathy. So Sheldrake asked him to do some experiments of his own. He lent him his video camera and Pamela lent him her dog.

After just four experiments, one of which was seriously flawed, Wiseman proudly announced, in an article for the *British Journal of Psychology*, that he had failed to replicate the results obtained by Sheldrake (who by then had done some 200 filmed experiments). This led to whoops of delight from the media. In fact, as Sheldrake had no difficulty in showing, Wiseman *had* in fact replicated them and *pretended* that he hadn’t. The *BJP* denied Sheldrake the right to reply.



ABOVE: Richard Wiseman – the great debunker?

In 2004, Wiseman and fellow sceptic Ray Hyman took part in the alleged debunking on Channel 4 TV of Natasha Demkina, the ‘girl with X-ray eyes’, who claimed to be able to diagnose people’s diseases just by looking at them [FT182:4–5; 194:15], a claim easy to test. In a preliminary off-screen trial, she had a look at six patients and satisfied five of them that her diagnosis was accurate. “Unbelievable but true,” said one. “Amazing,” said another. “She picked up on that right away,” said a third, referring to her migraine.

This is not what the inquisitors wanted, so they decided to move the goal posts and ask Demkina to do something she had not done before – match seven previously made diagnoses to the right patient. Ignoring the laws of probability, they decided that she would only pass the test if she got five right. Although clearly not comfortable with the conditions, and possibly still suffering jetlag after her 23-hour journey from Russia, she did her best and got four right. The probability of this being due to chance was one in 78 (p:0.014), a figure of one in 20 (p:0.05) being generally accepted as statistically significant. Success?

Well, no – failure. “She had the claim, we tested it, she didn’t pass the test,” Wiseman crowed smugly, adding with startling candour: “It’s not about results, this is about belief.”

It certainly is. For those with a strong and evidence-based belief in the reality of scientific anomalies, Wiseman’s attempts to make them disappear at a wave of his magic wand are indeed a nightmare. **fi**

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WORLD'S WEIRDEST NEWS STORIES



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The book cover is red with white torn-paper-style headlines. At the top, it says 'WORLD'S WEIRDEST NEWS STORIES' in large red letters, followed by 'FROM THE PAGES OF FORTEAN TIMES' in smaller white letters. Below this is a small globe. The first headline is 'THE BURGLAR WHO HID IN A TV' with an illustration of a person inside a television set. The second headline is 'GONAD-GRABBING GRANNY' with an illustration of an elderly woman in a green dress. The third headline is 'FINED FOR KEEPING A PET GHOST...' with an illustration of a man holding a dog and a small house with a ghost inside. The bottom headline is 'AND MANY MANY MORE'. The Fortean Times logo and website are at the bottom.

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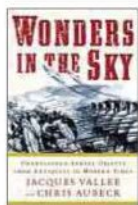
This month's books, films and games

reviews



UFOs from prehistory to today

A 'star' that attacked a Bronze Age army is the first of hundreds of well-sourced and contextualised reports – and a wide range of hoaxes – in this valuable survey



Wonders In The Sky

Unexplained Aerial Objects From Antiquity To Modern Times

Jacques Vallee and Chris Aubeck

Tarcher Penguin 2000

Pb, 508pp, illus, ind, bib, £19.99, ISBN 9781585428205

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.99

Most of today's UFO books are either credulous rubbish about abductions and alien crossbreeding or glib general histories that rehash the same famous sightings starting with Kenneth Arnold's 1947 one that kick-started the modern UFO era.

Fortean with a serious interest in UFOs will know that sightings pre-date 1947: 'ghost rockets' and 'foo fighters' of the mid-1940s, mystery planes in the 1930s and 1920s, and waves of extraordinary airships over various countries in 1912, 1909, 1897, etc. Some researchers and writers point to apparent evidence of UFOs in the Bible and prehistoric cave art.

Wonders In The Sky is the first popular book to systematically record and examine UFO evidence from very early times up until 1880 (when powered earthly craft first took to the skies).

Jacques Vallee is an internationally renowned UFO researcher and author of many excellent books on the subject. He was an astronomer and is now a computer scientist. Chris Aubeck, though less known, has

researched and written numerous articles on fortean topics. In 2003, he cofounded (with Rod Brock) the online Magonia Project dedicated to documenting pre-1947 reports of UFOs and related phenomena. Vallee and Aubeck have joined forces to write the most important UFO (or even fortean) book so far this century.

Two-thirds of part one of *Wonders In The Sky* is a chronological catalogue of 500 UFO events, from a 'star' that fell and attacked the Nubian army in 1460 BC to a mysterious balloon or airship over Dubuque, Iowa, on 10 October 1879. All the reports are sourced. There is generally little or no commentary. I have read criticism of this; but it would have been impractical to comment in detail on each case.

This lack is more than made up for in several ways. There is an identifying symbol for each report to classify it by type (unidentified aerial light, unidentified aerial object, abduction, phenomenon with physical evidence, entity alone case, entity with aerial phenomenon, communication). Pre and post comments about historical events, inventions, religious and social attitudes and so on bookend each time period and contextualise each sighting.

Recognising that "human observers were often confused by atmospheric effects, optical illusions, meteors, and comets" (reports caused by these are included in Part II), the authors have tried to keep only "truly intriguing descriptions suggestive of actual physical anomalies." They have been aided by the lack of many modern sources of explanation for UFO sightings. During the period covered by *Wonders In The Sky*, there were no

"Observers were often confused by atmospheric effects, optical illusions, meteors and comets"

aircraft, searchlights or satellites.

Part II covers a wide variety of hoaxes, religious visions, astronomical phenomena and atmospheric effects that have been added to the historical UFO canon over the last 50 years or so. This invaluable section digs back to original sources and unearths the (often unpalatable) truth concerning 85 mostly well-known cases including the 12,000-year-old Droa tribe's stone disks which allegedly recorded details of visits by an alien race; the Tulli papyrus depicting UFOs over ancient Egypt; the Emperor Constantine's UFO sighting in AD 312; the disc that supposedly flew over Byland Abbey in 1290; a flying "hat" over Tibet in 1661; and many more. Those cases that are not hoaxes are clearly misinterpretations of auroras, false suns and moons, meteors, meteorites etc.

Part III provides details about the reliability of sources and the data selection rules. Generally, only cases whose original source gave a specific date and place plus a named witnesses were used. There are informative commentaries about accounts of dragons and their relationship to historical UFO reports, crashed UFO tales, biblical accounts and classical artistic representations of UFOs.

Finally, the conclusions section

answers tough questions about the historical data and provides some statistical analysis. The authors admit there was an unavoidable bias in the amount of material from specific periods and areas. However, that does not affect the statistics for the duration of sightings, nor the time of the day or year they happened. Only one of the five major annual meteor showers coincides with a peak in sightings by time of year.

Vallee and Aubeck did not always agree on the data selection, evaluations and conclusions for the book. That is human nature. Their combined efforts have created a vital resource that provides invaluable insights into historical UFO and forteana reports and how they should be assessed.

If any FT readers are interested in helping the Magonia project to unearth pre-1947 UFO, cryptozoology and fortean reports from online or physical book, magazine and newspaper collections, they should contact Chris Aubeck (caubeck@gmail.com). I am a member, and it is sobering that many thousands of previously unknown pre-1947 UFO reports have been unearthed by fellow members since 2003. Even now, I think we are not fully aware of the extent of the UFO phenomenon and its impact on human history. This book is a big leap forward in our understanding.

This is an absolutely essential volume for every fortean's bookshelf. My only regret is that there is no leather-bound limited edition with colour plates!

Peter Hassall

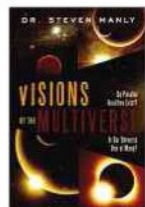
Fortean Times Verdict

A MUST-READ FOR FORTEANS
WITH AN INTEREST IN UFOLOGY

10

Big Crunches

Wishful thinking, oscillating Big Bangs and many worlds pretty well explained



Visions of the Multiverse

Do Parallel Realities Exist?

Dr Steven Manly

New Page Books 2011

Pb, £13.99, 270pp, illus, ind, bib, notes, ISBN 9781601631299

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

If anything in physics makes me want to take a long lie-down in a dark room every time I have to deal with it, it is the idea of the multiverse. It tends to ball up the most taxing bits of quantum theory, string theory, relativity and one or two other monsters, and then throw them at you in one crazed lump.

Steven Manly, though, has taken the bull by the horns and decided to tackle making all this comprehensible to the lay reader without resorting to the horrific equations that comprise the actual theories. He does a pretty good job of it.

The key to his success is that he does not worry too much about the actual multiverse stuff and instead tries to make sense of the science which leads us to think that some kind of multiverse exists. Once you get to grips with these ideas, understanding flows logically from what he's set up in advance. Achieving this is no mean feat and he has a lot of fun doing it.

He takes time along the way to take well-deserved swipes at the use of quantum physics in New Age tosh like *The Secret* that wilfully misunderstands the role of the observer in the process.

He reveals that there are a surprising number of multiverse theories and handily sums them up in an appendix. He describes

not only the ones that are separated by space and time, such as the Oscillating Big Bang Multiverse (Big Bangs are eventually followed by Big Crunches as everything collapses, then by another Big Bang and a new universe), but also those that are in different dimensions, such as Everett's Many Worlds Multiverse (all the possibilities in any quantum situation occur, and as they do so, new universes are constantly spilling off and coming into existence) and, entertainingly, faith-based multiverses. These include what he rather deliciously terms the 'Multiverse of Wishful Thinking', the kind you get when you subscribe to the New Age "believe it and you'll make it happen" approach. He is at pains to point out that it is entirely without empirical foundation.

Manly generally manages to write in an accessible style, but he often tips over into the inappropriately matey, which tends to undermine his analogies. He tries too hard to make them entertaining and the humorous situations he creates take too long to explain; it becomes difficult to follow the ideas. I really have no wish to hear funny stories from his student days. Nor about his wife's panty-liners, for that matter.

The book would also have been improved if the figures had been drawn professionally, as many seem to have been put together by a nine-year-old with only modest graphic skills.

I quibble.

Manly, by and large, succeeds at what he set out to do, and has created a guide to multiple universes that is accessible to non-physicists, if not perhaps those without no science knowledge, which would be a tall order indeed.

Ian Simmons

Fortean Times Verdict

A GOOD ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE ALMOST INEXPLICABLE

8

Circus and Carnival Ballyhoo

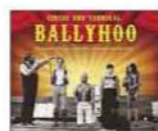
Sideshow Freaks, Jaggers and Blade Box Queens

AW Stencell

ECW Press 2010

Pb, 391pp, illus, bib, £22.95/£17.99, ISBN 9781550228809

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.19



Roll up! Roll up! This history of American and Canadian sideshows is a fortean feast. I am a fan of early forms of mass entertainment. I thought I knew all there was to know about circus life. I was wrong.

Who would have guessed that today's tattoo culture can trace its roots directly to the 19th-century sideshow? Who knew that gay performers were not only tolerated, but that it was considered bad luck to go on tour without at least one in the cast?

Once they advanced beyond dime museums, sideshows were set literally on the sides of established circuses and carnivals. Often they were operated by independents who were similarly sidelined, socially, because of their physical impairments. It's a form of entertainment whose context has vanished.

We still have ventriloquists, escape artists and other sideshow fare. We even have hipster performance artists who try to recreate the sideshow in more upscale settings. However, we just no longer thrill to those stricken by birth defects. That's good, of course, but an odd sort of loving, insular brotherhood is being lost. Stencell documents this fellowship, essentially preserving it in what is a naïve but valuable study in cultural anthropology.

And it's all wildly entertaining. The book is something of a sideshow itself, mixing history, personal interviews and what is almost too much artwork; on some pages, there are so many photos that captions run longer than text. But who would ever want to give up images of midget weddings, Sealo the Seal Boy or Sesrad the Psychic Scientist?

The major surprise is just how sordid sideshows actually were. Gambling, bribery and con games

were all part of the sideshow budget. And between the plate-spinners and dog-faced boys, there was sex and more sex.

A minor complaint is that the author – a sideshow vet – often gets bogged down in jargon. While a glossary is included, not all the deliciously strange terms are defined there.

A special joy to forteans is the lengthy account of the Minnesota "Ice Man", complete with rare photos. Almost certainly a hoax, the frozen Bigfoot-style "corpse" met the approval of leading cryptozoologists Ivan Sanderson and Bernard Heuvelmans.

Jay Rath

Fortean Times Verdict

CARNIE DELIGHTS FOR SIDESHOW AFICIONADOS EVERYWHERE

8

Paranormal Media

Audiences, Spirits and Magic in Popular Culture

Annette Hill

Routledge 2010

Pb, 224pp, £21.99, ISBN 9780415544634

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £21.99



The paranormal is an increasingly prominent – and profitable – part of modern culture, so it is not surprising that the mass media feed on and stimulate interest in it.

Annette Hill's aim is to provide a "popular cultural ethnography" of the subject, and her analysis covers a range of products, primarily television 'reality' shows, some magazine publishing, Derren Brown's paranormal-inflected stage shows, ghost walks, and the activities of ghost-hunting groups. It feels somewhat partial in its coverage and seems to rely on what caught the author's eye.

Hill looks at a few magazines, mostly in the Mind Body and Spirit genre, and omits other kinds of periodicals; most notably absent is *Fortean Times*, without which no survey of the subject could be complete. The many websites and blogs devoted to the paranormal are also neglected.

There is a sampling of paranormal fiction and a puff for Hay House, but no sense of the growth in other areas of print publishing,

-ranging from academic texts to regional gazetteers.

There is a brief run-down of the historical context of the paranormal in mass culture which outlines continuities and changes over the last couple of centuries, but television programmes from the recent past which have had an influence on current attitudes – Arthur C Clarke's series from the 1980s and 90s, Michael Aspel's *Strange But True?* and Robert Stack's *Unsolved Mysteries*, for example – are ignored. There may not have been as much of this type of programming then as there is now, but its impact was greater and echoes today. There is little sense either of the impact of cinema depictions.

Where it gets more interesting is in the reception studies approach. The strength of the book lies with the extracts from interviews and focus group discussions which show the variety of ways in which individuals engage with paranormal media, how they shape and reinforce beliefs, and meet social and emotional needs.

Further examples would have permitted a more focused discussion.

Hill has used participant observation to help her understand the experience of engaging in paranormal activities, what draws people to them, and how attendees decode events in the light of their exposure to the media and their underlying attitudes. Such activities can be consumed as entertainment, as supporting evidence for spiritual beliefs, or as an amalgam of the two.

One's suspicion that Hill's knowledge of the subject is not as extensive as it could be is aroused by the preposterous statement that "The paranormal is unexplored territory, like deep space". The former has been mapped more extensively than Hill seems to think.

This is a useful foundation for further work, but it is to be hoped that subsequent studies will deepen the analysis.

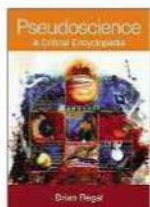
Tom Ruffles

Fortean Times Verdict

SOFT-FOCUS, BUT A LAUNCHPAD FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Where science ends

A sceptic asks whether we should accept anarchic ideas in the hope that even false knowledge has something to teach us



Pseudoscience

A Critical Encyclopedia

Brian Regal

Greenwood Press 2009

Hb, £58.99, 191pp, illus, ind, bib, ISBN 9780313355073

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £58.99

I pay as much attention to good sceptical publications as to more partisan ones, so I'm pleased to see this encyclopædia, presenting the sceptic's view of 124 fortean topics, being pitched at a more general readership. It is the sort of book many libraries will take: militant 'skeptics' brand themselves as "the voice of reason" which sounds, to a hard-pressed local library, like a synonym for "a balanced view".

But is it? The entries are well written (as we have come to expect from Regal, a professor of science in New Jersey), wide-ranging and competently researched (with recommendations for further reading) but – if you look closely – not too consistent. Some fall back on the useful but ambivalent "it is said that...", others are more didactic ("Getting bitten by a radioactive spider would have killed Peter Parker, not turned him into Spider-Man"), and still others come close to sweeping generalisations ("While they may be romantic figures, werewolves are not flesh-and-blood animals"). But then, space is short; Regal couldn't cover everything; and an encyclopædia is, by nature, pedagogic.

There are two flaws in the book. Amateurish monochrome drawings detract from the whole. If the cost of printing in colour is an issue, why not use black and white photographs instead? There are wonderful woodcuts in mediæval

bestiaries, so why not use them instead of, for instance, a bizarre drawing of a "monk calf"? Surely, absurd depictions of the werewolf, a stigmatic's hand or Symmes's model of the Hollow Earth will give new or young readers a narrow and possibly wrong idea of the subject matter, and one easy to demolish?

While that may be the publisher's doing, the second flaw is Regal's own. He has included one false entry, without explaining why, except that we are now quite used to skeptics who try to make their relentless war on 'pseudoscience' seem like 'fun'. It took me about 10 minutes to locate the fake entry, but will the general reader be able to? Not knowing which of the seemingly erudite entries is false undermines the book's usefulness as a serious sceptical reference work.

That said, Regal's introductory essay on the nature of 'pseudoscience' and why it should be studied is the best thing in the book. He defines it as "any intellectual or technological pursuit that purports to use scientific methodology or philosophy to study or prove some temporal or physical reality". All the topics from Acupuncture to Zombie are judged against that criterion.

One can see why a good number of 'paranormal' subjects are missing: they are outside science and don't involve appeals to scientific methodology. (Yet a subject such as Remote Viewing – on which there is a considerable body of not very favourable test data – surely merits including; instead, it only

gets a throwaway line in the entry for Second Sight.)

The scientific method is examined here, along with the migration of topics which fall between science and pseudoscience as arguments about the nature of evidence change over time. Regal touches, too, on the intractability of scientists who refuse to accommodate new data or new subjects, acknowledging that closed-mindedness is a characteristic of the pseudoscientist.

He ends with a challenging question: should we accept all ideas "as Paul Feyerabend argued, no matter how anarchic they seem" in the hope that "even false knowledge has something to tell us"? He doesn't write off some pseudoscience, such as seekers after Bigfoot, aliens or experimenting with "new machines and new techniques" in their pursuits, because if they discover a provable method "this is how pseudoscience can sometimes evolve into real science".

The point is, he says, to learn to ask questions and to evaluate – to think properly about observations and data. "The tricky problem is how to determine just where science ends and pseudoscience begins."

He hopes these entries will provoke such discussions, and that makes this something more subversive than just another reference work.

Bob Rickard

Fortean Times Verdict

INVESTIGATING THE SCIENCE/PSEUDOSCIENCE BORDERLANDS

8

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Elementary

A science enthusiast vividly explains the periodic table for non-specialists



The Disappearing Spoon

And Other True Tales of Madness, Love, and the History of the World from the Periodic Table of the Elements

Sam Kean

Doubleday 2011

Hb, £20.00, 393pp, ind, illus, notes, ISBN 9780857520265

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £18.00

The Disappearing Spoon is a collection of anecdotes about chemical elements, framed using the structure of the periodic table. The title comes from a classic chemists' practical joke: gallium looks like aluminium but melts at 84°F. So, a gallium spoon melts as you stir your tea.

The book is the literary equivalent of a prime-time documentary on the Discovery Channel or BBC1: populist, accessible, and elementary (boom-boom!), without being simplistic. You don't need to know your *p* from your *d* electron orbitals to understand, enjoy and learn from a book carefully written by an author keen to share his enthusiasm with a wider audience.

Kean comments that most people "remember the [periodic] table with a mix of fascination, fondness, inadequacy, and loathing". It was "the one piece of scientific information that [...] you were encouraged to consult during exams".

(Times have changed. I had to learn great swaths of the bloody thing. Thirty years later, some of the mnemonics remain inexorably etched on my memory, such as Foolish Clerks Brew Ink Actually, for the halogens.)

But as Kean shows, the

periodic table should engender fascination rather than fear.

He tells much of his story using a cast of well-drawn character sketches, such as Maria Goeppert-Mayer, who overcame science's then entrenched sexism to develop profound insights into the structure of nuclei. Yet when she received science's greatest accolade in 1963, the local paper in San Diego, where she then worked, headlined the story "S.D. Mother Wins Nobel Prize".

More recently, Stan Jones, "a survivalist and fierce Libertarian" ran for the US Senate in 2002 and 2006 despite being tinged grey-blue after distilling and drinking "heavy-metal moonshine" of colloidal silver to counter the predicted lack of antibiotics in the wake of Y2K. Kean quotes Jones as saying: "Being alive is more important than turning purple". (Silver, copper and certain other metals are effective antibiotics.)

Then there's David Hahn, who as a teenager tried to build "a nuclear reactor in a potting shed in his mother's backyard" and help solve the energy crisis.

Inevitably, Kean's populist approach may make the text too 'academically' light as a 'serious' read for most scientists. Yet even for those of us with science backgrounds, *The Disappearing Spoon* remains diverting and entertaining: ideal for whiling away a train journey or plane trip.

More importantly, the cast of characters makes it entertaining and accessible for a popular culture weaned on reality TV and 'true-life' journalism.

Given the lamentable state of education about science among the general public, we should applaud Kean's ability to bring chemistry to the masses.

Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

A POPULAR ELEMENTARY GUIDE TO CHEMISTRY

9

Real Enemies

Conspiracy Theories and American Democracy, World War I to 9/11

Kathryn S. Olmsted

Oxford University Press 2011

Pb, 336pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780199753956

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.49



If I was being generous, I would say "Close but no cigar" to Prof. Olmsted's account. She identifies a central issue in her final para-

graph: "Since the First World War officials of the US government have encouraged conspiracy theories... They have engaged in conspiracies and used the cloak of national security to hide their actions from the American people [and] promoted official conspiracy theories, sometimes demonstrably false ones, for their own purposes... If antigovernment conspiracy theories get the details wrong – and they often do – they get the basic issue right: it is the secret actions of the government that are the real enemies of democracy."

But why should I be generous? She has the time, the academic tenure (at the University of California) and access to the material, and *still* hasn't done a half-decent job.

For the first third of the book, she guides us through the conspiracy theories generated by the US entry into WW1 (led by a president who promised not to join the war and did so against the population's wishes) and WW2 (ditto), and into the Cold War and through the McCarthy period. So far, so unexceptional.

But when we move through the Sixties towards the present day, it goes off the rails. Oswald, Sirhan and Ray are presented as the assassins of the Kennedys and King. None of the more substantial research which suggests they were innocent is even hinted at. Olmsted says that her "goal is not to prove or disprove the conspiracy theories discussed", but by her choice of which version to present, she judges them. Had she presented the minutely documented and cautious views on JFK's death of, say, Professor Peter Dale Scott or former CIA

officer John Newman, she could not have so blithely dismissed the JFK researchers as "amateurs".

Iran-Contra is sketched in and she flunks the central issue of the CIA's role in facilitating the wholesale importation of cocaine. She notes that CIA officers (she calls them 'agents') "turned a blind eye" to the import of cocaine if the dealers contributed to the (illegal) war against Nicaragua. But it's worse (or better) than that. In 1982, the Agency went to the US Attorney General to get his permission to ignore drug-dealing. In effect, the CIA – with government permission – gave cocaine dealers in Central and South America a 'get out of jail free' card: for a few thousand dollars of support for the Contras, they could fly their product in unhindered. And so the guns-out and drugs-back pattern began. Iran-Contra is all too frequently short-handed as weapons-for-hostages. More significantly, it was guns-for-coke.

The MJ-12 theories about alien-government contact are presented, but Olmsted neglects to tell her readers that the whole thing was cooked up by the USAF. Rather than the more considered views of the better, academic or professional (pilots, engineers, architects) 9-11 sceptics, she devotes most of her attention to the Internet documentary, *Loose Change*, and the group of 9-11 widows, the so-called "Jersey girls". She quotes Hillary Clinton's 1998 reference to a "vast right-wing conspiracy" against her husband without mentioning that it has been documented in detail and one of its leading members has written a memoir about his role in it. And so on.

Because she hasn't read the material, she gets some of the post-1963 stuff wrong; and her presentation of the other material reduces its impact. Her central thesis – that state conspiracies have produced conspiracy theories – is true; it would have had more oomph if she had looked in the face the covert nature of American politics since the Cold War.

Robin Ramsay

Fortean Times Verdict

COULD AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERABLY BETTER

5

ALSO RECEIVED

Roaring Dorset

Merrily Harpur

Roving Press (rovingpress.co.uk) 2008
Pb, pp115, index, bib, illus, £4.99
ISBN 9781906651015

In 2002, the cartoonist Merrily Harpur set up the 'dorsetbigcats.org' website to record sightings of alien big cats (ABCs) in her home county of Dorset and the bordering country. Building on its success, she published her bestselling *Mystery Big Cats* in 2006. This little book is a further fruit of that enterprise, being essentially a gazetteer of 223 reports of sightings, eerie growling and other, possibly related, local ABC phenomena. The accounts, many observed very closely, are full of detail told in an engaging, everyday tone that captures the local and personal flavour of each event, and these form the core of the book. In a substantial and helpful introduction, Merrily provides a context for the sightings, discussing the reactions of other animals, where ABCs might have come from and where they might be going during the 'quiet' period, the different types of ABCs and their sounds. The closing section sets out 12 theories of what ABCs might be. It all makes an excellent introduction for the young as well as anyone interested in this long-running mystery of the British rural landscape.

There's Something in the Woods

Nick Redfern

Anomalist Books (anomalistbooks.com) 2009
Pb, pp165, index, refs, illus, £9.99
ISBN 9781933665320

What links the thousands of mysterious mounds in Midwest America and the earthworks of Britain? Redfern, a veteran fortean writer with interests in ufology and cryptozoology, here explores the connections between ancient monuments, wild places and phantom creatures. Taking his inspiration from the 1945 novel *The Lurker at the Threshold* by HP

Lovecraft and August Derleth (who had read Fort's books), Redfern delights us with accounts of winged horrors, werewolves, Black Dogs and other scary 'things' that lurk in woods, thickets and old ruins. Here are (mainly British) tales of 'nameless dread', suggesting that Derleth (at least) might have presented "arcane knowledge in fictional form".

The Book of the Gods

Chas Saunders and Peter Allen

History Press (thehistorypress.co.uk) 2010
Hb, pp312, illus, £12.99
ISBN 9780752458045

The authors – founders of the 'Godchecker' website – publish here their 'Holy Database' of 600 gods from 20 pantheons (with many more omitted for lack of space). It is written, tongue firmly in cheek, with an extremely broad and flexible interpretation of what makes a deity. While some of the commentary – not "explanation" as they claim – is witty, the relentless sarcasm becomes tedious after a while. "Not one single god has complained," they smirk. Sadly, as a reference, it is worthless.

History's Greatest Deceptions

Eric Chaline

History Press (thehistorypress.co.uk) 2010
Pb, pp256, colour illus, £12.99
ISBN 9780752457710

It's been a while since we had a good round-up of scams and hoaxes, but – fortunately for us – greed, pride, credulity and malice have not gone out of supply. In this lavish production, Chaline obliges with a satisfying selection of 50 old and new deceptions; nice to see the 'Tibetan' Lobsang Rampa and the Patterson Bigfoot rubbing shoulders with Adamski and 'Jesus's kid brother'. Among other delights, cross-dressers and 'wrong-sex' athletes jostle with fakers of maps, historical diaries and relics; while believers in crop circles, the 'alien autopsy' and

BOB RICKARD leafs through a small selection of the dozens of books submitted to Fortean Towers in recent months...

Nessie mingle with a clutch of misguided scientists (cold fusion, cloning, Piltown Man). There is much more besides: well written with just the right balance of scepticism and compassion, it would make a great present to an inquiring mind.

Dark Intrusions

Louis Proud

Anomalist Books (anomalistbooks.com) 2009
Pb, pp278, bib, £12.99
ISBN 9781933665443

This is an intensely personal book. At the age of 17, young Louis began to suffer bouts of sleep paralysis (SP), during which the mind wakes from dream sleep but the body remains immobilised. During these episodes of unnatural wakefulness (not dreaming, he stresses), he experienced all sorts of paranormal phenomena, including communications from discarnate beings and trips out-of-the-body. Often he would be aware of a weight upon his chest or thighs, interpreted as some sort of spirit entity pressing down on him; occasionally he would wake to find himself having sex with a female spirit (not a succubus, he says, because there was no 'vampiric' element) ... and that's pretty personal. The first half of the book explores his Recurrent Isolated Sleep Paralysis (RISP), particularly the entities or spirit beings (sometimes frightening) that he encountered. The second half tries to put RISP in the general context of psychical phenomena, Shamanism and Spiritism. Forewords by Colin Wilson and David Hufford – author of the seminal work on 'supernatural assault', *The Terror That Comes in the Night* (1982) – both of whom endorse Proud's sincere, lucid and bold account. Hufford, who was 'hag ridden' himself as a young man, calls Proud's extensive experience with RISP "badly needed" for better understanding and study of its attendant strange state of consciousness.

The Trinity Secret

Marie D Jones and Larry Flaxman

Career Press (newpagebooks.com) 2011
Pb, pp.224, index, \$15.99
ISBN 9781601631459

In most cultures, the number three invokes some of the most powerful and enduring symbols. From archetypes and folklore to cosmology and mathematics, trinities and triads of deities, numbers, spirits, sounds, ages, comedy, etc., abound. The authors rush headlong through religion, psychology, popular culture and even the sciences, pointing out 'triple' imagery wherever they see it. Their enthusiasm for building up a rather New Agey theory they call "a code of creation" is catching, but leaves the reader unsatisfied. This is 'Jung lite' without a deeper and more meaningful noetic and folkloric underpinning.

Temple Antiquities

Odvar Olsen, ed.

O-Books (o-books.com) 2010
Pb, pp230, illus, chapter bib, refs, £11.99
ISBN 9781846943256

This anthology of writings about the ancient Order of Knights Templar and their still-vital cultural legacy of symbols, legends and mysteries, is a sequel the author's *The Templar Papers*, both being culled from the pages of his periodical *The Temple*. The papers range from historical and biographical studies; critiques of their literary appearances; meditations on 'head worship' and other liturgical and ritual aspects of Templar lore; and analyses of monuments (such as mazes and temples) associated with the Templars. The well-written material engages and satisfies our curiosity; even when the grimmest doings were so long ago, the well qualified contributors show that Templar-hunting through the libraries and antique landscapes of European countries is a lively and productive pursuit. **JR**

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The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec

Dir Luc Besson, France 2011
On UK release from 22 April

Luc Besson's adaptation to screen of Jacque Tardi's comic book series might come as a surprise to many because of its humorous lightness and its period costume sumptuousness.

Adventurous journalist Adèle Blanc-Sec (Louise Bourgoin) is commissioned to explore the Andes but swans off to Egypt instead, draping herself decorously over a camel in pursuit of the tomb of Ramses II and, more specifically, the whereabouts of his physician's sarcophagus, in the hope of reviving him and freeing her paralysed sister from the shackles of a freak accident in which her skull is spiked through (revealed later in one of the film's funniest, if wince-inducing, scenes). It's a task that also involves the aid of Marie-Joseph Espérandieu (Jacky Nercessian), a mystical savant dabbling in necromancy. Espérandieu's nocturnal efforts only succeed, at first, in hatching a pterodactyl egg, and the resultant offspring across the rooftops of Paris. Not only does Adèle have to fend off the irksome advances of local museum geek Andrej Zborowski (Nicolas Giraud) but that of her

nemesis the archaeologist Dieuleveult (Mathieu Amalric, looking for all the world like an even more desiccated version of Tom Waits).

Besson clearly enjoys the early 20th-century setting, with a France on the eve of World War I and a pooch-loving Président Armand Fallière putting the blame for everything – including the pterodactyl – on Anarchists. Besson parades the flotsam and jetsam of colonial empire, and serves it up with a large slab of Ancient Egyptian romanticism familiar to everyone from the *Mummy* film franchise. But whereas they rush with good-natured, and eventually tiresome, crassness towards would-be belly laughs and budget-busting CGI, Besson breezes along a path of whimsy and gorgeous *mise-en-scène*. Something that applies equally to Louise Bourgoin as to Adèle, be she bustling with fresh air hauteur through stuffy French patriarchal bureaucracy in frills and stays or lounging naked in the bath, cigarette dangling with attitude from her mouth; there's a languorous, cool clarity in the lighting and the framing of Bourgoin that gives the moment the allure of a portrait. This is the best looking film to appear in a very good while, festooned with gorgeous interiors and a gallery of rogues who look like Sergio Leone grotesques after being scrubbed up, pomaded, coiffured and a thorough

combing given to their monstrous moustaches, as with the gourmand Inspecteur Albert Caponi. If you are looking for the rollicking noise of a female Brendan Fraser being goosed by vast CGI this is probably not the film for you. Without any particular jaw-dropping climax, there is always incident in each scene or striking visual eye-candy to entertain.

With a last act busy with death and resurrection, Ancient Egyptian kings on Parisian sightseeing tours, and that pterodactyl loose over the Parisian skyline, *The Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec* leaves enough silk ribbons untied for a second outing. This film is a delight, one in which the humour is *très drôle* rather than dry; and far from drawing a *blanc*, Besson's direction abounds in intoxicating colour and visual verve.

Nick Cirković

Fortean Times Verdict

BESSON IN HIS ELEMENT, WITH ESCAPED PTERODACTYLS TOO

8

13 Assassins

Dir Takashi Miike, Japan 2010
On UK release from 6 May

Takashi Miike's subject is violence. For this film, a remake of Eiichi Kudo's 1963 original, we travel back to feudal Japan for our bloodbath. An evil lord, the Shogun's sadistic young brother Naritsugu, is growing in power. As Naritsugu's

favourite activities are rape, slaughter, and shooting children in the back, bad times are clearly ahead. Someone must stop him – and so our small band of samurai set off, tracking Naritsugu and his men through the mountains, until they reach a small village where they set their booby traps and wait.

The period setting is nicely grim and muddy, the central performances are charismatic, and there are flashes of sick horror, but this film is really all about the final showdown. In a 45-minute frenzy employing swords, arrows, rocks, explosions and pointy bits of fence, the 13 samurai dispatch Naritsugu's hundreds of men; it's gripping, high-adrenaline and brilliantly choreographed stuff. Violence, in *13 Assassins*, is chaos; but, for Miike it's inevitable too, the state that everything ultimately tends to.

Jen Ogilvie

Fortean Times Verdict

MASTERLY TALE OF HEROISM AND HORRIBLE WAYS TO DIE

8

Monsters

Dir Gareth Edwards, UK 2010
Vertigo Films, £17.99/£19.99

It's hardly *Citizen Kane*, but as feature debuts go *Monsters* is a pretty impressive feat by another multi-talented *wunderkind*: Gareth Edwards wrote the script, directed the film, was his own director of photography and did all the CGI on a computer in his bedroom, bringing the film in for cinematic peanuts. It certainly looks as if it cost a whole lot more, making the most of its Central American locations with some impressive cinematography and seamless, understated effects work. Looks, though, aren't everything, and one of the film's surprises is its refusal to rely on visual effects to tell its story; they are subtle, sparing and never used for their own sake. Likewise, the film isn't over-directed, over-written or over-acted, achieving a kind of quiet naturalism not usually associated with the SF/horror genres.

The story is simple: after a NASA probe crash-lands in Central America with its cargo of extraterrestrial samples, strange new life forms begin appearing. Six years later, a stretch of country – half of Mexico through to the US border – has been cordoned off as an 'infected zone' where the military try to

contain the aliens. Cynical photojournalist Andrew Kaulder (Scott McNairy) and daddy's little rich girl Sam (Whitney Able) are caught up in the chaos and must make their way through the infected zone to the safety of the US. It's a journey that brings them together, and the film is as concerned with following their developing relationship as with their dangerous journey through alien-infested jungles. It's an updating of Capra's *It Happened One Night*, with McNairy and Able reprising Gable's reporter and Colbert's spoiled heiress making their way across 1930s America. But, by replacing screwball comedy with an omnipresent sense of tentacled menace and forcing the film's odd couple to imagine what the US looks like from the outside (it's now separated from Mexico by a bloody great wall), Edwards produces a pleasantly surprising generic mix that, while reminiscent of *District 9*'s political metaphors, harks back to the adventure movies of the past. The lack of gratuitous sex or violence means the kids can watch it too.

David Sutton

Fortean Times Verdict

ACCOMPLISHED DEBUT FROM ONE-MAN-BAND EDWARDS

8

Dark Star

Dir John Carpenter, US 1974

Fabulous Films, £15.99

Dark Star is John Carpenter's first film, effectively his graduation piece from the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts and extended for cinema release in 1974.

It's a spoof on *2001: A Space Odyssey* without any gung-ho attitudes, or glitz and glitter, or thrills and excitement. And without the antiseptic cleanness of *2001* and its ilk; *Dark Star* has been called "Truckers in Space". The ship is grubby; the crew are unkempt. Without *Dark Star*, there would have been no *Red Dwarf* and certainly no curry-stained Lister. It's also, in Carpenter's description, *Waiting for Godot* in Space; a study in ennui: not a lot happens, at length. And in places it's hilarious.

The concept is simple. The spaceship *Dark Star*, with a surviving crew of four (the captain is dead, frozen but still vaguely

aware), has been wandering the universe for 20 years dropping nukes onto unstable planets. The control room is cramped; the kitchen is a tip. They're bored out of their skulls. To call them dysfunctional would be a compliment.

Two highlights make the film a joy. First is the wonderful 15-minute scene with Sgt Pinback chasing a mischievous pet alien (a beachball with claws) which has escaped from its locker and is intent on tickling him to death in the liftshaft. The second is the sentient bomb that is determined to carry out its one mission in life – to explode – despite not having separated from the ship due to a malfunction. Lt Doolittle's "phenomenological" discussion with the bomb on the nature of self-identity and the trustworthiness of your senses should be a compulsory part of every undergrad philosophy course. Special mention must be made of the film's inspired use of cheap or free odds and sods: the beachball; ice-cube trays with lights under them for buttons on the control console; a muffin tray for the front of a spacesuit. And it all works.

Carpenter's original version of the film on 16mm was only 45 minutes long. Producer Jack H Harris transferred it to 35mm and bumped it up to 83 minutes for a total cost of just \$60,000. This DVD contains both versions, digitally restored, and a host of extras, including interviews with Brian Narelle (Doolittle) and Alan Dean Foster (who wrote the novelisation) and a long and fascinating 'making of' documentary. What comes through here is the huge contribution made by the late Dan O'Bannon, who co-wrote it, was responsible for most of the special effects, edited the film and played Pinback; he went on to write *Alien* and co-write *Total Recall*, and to work on the special effects on *Star Wars*. Carpenter himself not only co-wrote, produced and directed the film; he also wrote the music.

It's no masterpiece, but it's a vital part of SF film history – and it shows what can be done with a few dollars and a hell of a lot of youthful imagination and energy.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

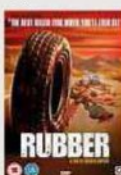
SHOESTRING STUDENT FILM THAT LAUNCHED SF CAREERS

8

SHORTS

RUBBER

(Optimum Home Entertainment, £9.99/£12.99)



Quentin Dupieux's film about a killer tyre on the loose in the Californian desert might sound like the daftest B-picture imaginable, but *Rubber* happily confounds such expectations, emerging as an absurdist deconstruction of genre tropes and viewing practices that owes as much to Luis Buñuel (the expiring cinemagoers stuck in the desert can't help but recall the likes of *The Exterminating Angel*) as it does to its more obvious reference points and targets: Hitchcock, slasher movies, Romero, Cronenberg and even *King Kong*. The mysterious rubber fiend, with his *Scanners*-like psychokinetic powers, is both psycho killer and ultimate outsider, whose dual obsessions with watching television (tortoises, tropical dancers, workout shows and, finally, motor sports) and a traditional female object of desire teach him nothing in the end other than his own distance from the human world. Despite its deliberate pointlessness and slightness, *Rubber* is nicely made, cleverly constructed and really quite charming – a homage, as one of its characters says, to the power of "no reason" in the cinema. **DS 6/10**

PRIMEVIL

(Revolver Entertainment, £12.99)



This direct-to-DVD effort starts out as a *Lost*-type affair, with a group of disparate and unlikeable characters shipwrecked on a desert island, but soon veers in another direction to rip off *Predator* as well. After discovering the remains of an anthropologists' camp, our anti-heroes discover that they're sharing this picturesque spot with a tribe of primitive, flesh-eating hominids. The predictable developments are

barely enlivened by the appearance of Lance Henriksen as a gun-toting bad-hat tasked with wiping out anyone who knows about this 'lost tribe'. Turns out he works for the Catholic Church who are worried that this new discovery will prove the truth of evolutionary theory! Now, I was under the impression that they already knew about that.

DS 3/10

EXORCISMUS

(Entertainmentone, £15.99)



A rum do, this. A Spanish-made effort with British actors that purports, at least in its UK DVD release, to be set in some impossibly leafy bit of London (a posh suburb of Barcelona, I'd guess), *Exorcismus* carries, perhaps as a result, a curious sense of unreality throughout its length. Strangely, the attention-seeking cinematography – relying on lots of quick-cut steadycam and shallow depth of

field – would normally be associated with a TV-like realism, but here it merely adds to the strange sense of dislocation. The actors do their bit, too, seemingly delivering their performances in a sort of Valium-induced daze (with the honourable exception of the priest who looks like Kieran from *Coronation Street*'s older brother). There are no surprises for three quarters of the film's running time, as we tick off the usual cinematic marks of the Devil (potty-mouthed abuse of one's parents, levitating, head-turning and funny white eyes). Then we discover that the exorcist is a priest with an agenda, and the film takes a distinctively Spanish anti-clerical twist that doesn't make an awful lot of sense. Ho hum. **DS 4/10**

Total War: Shogun 2

PC £39.99, SEGA/Creative Assembly

We've been engaged in *Total War* for over a decade now. Anyone with a love of real time strategy games will have plunged in during Medieval, Roman, Colonial Empire or Napoleonic times. The mix of turn-based strategy and real time action has been a compelling mix from the off. Stir into that mix economic decisions, religious and political affiliations, assassinations, your own bespoke growing military might, increasingly detailed campaign maps across which you can plot your military domination, and the *Total War* series has been heaven for those of us old enough to remember the pitting of boxes of plastic Airfix soldiers against each other on the kitchen table. Times change, but since time immemorial boys with toys love playing soldiers, and any RTS stands or falls on whether it can scratch that warring itch.

One of the characteristics of the original *Total War: Shogun* was the ability to choose from a number of clans in Feudal Japan, and this is one of the aspects revisited in this latest incarnation. What

does that mean? Well, it means a strong replayability factor for starters. Given that there are nine different clans here, each with its unique starting position in the conflict as well as unique attributes and objectives, there is plenty to keep you occupied. Even a short campaign – one that will stretch across three decades – will take well over a dozen hours to complete in your quest to dominate Feudal Japan and become Shogun. Oh, and there are Buddhist monk archers and Ninjas, too! In the RPG element of the game, assassination is a strategic decision to be factored in. The Ninjas are just one of the agent units with which you can make crucial strategic decisions on the map. Whether your chosen Ninja succeeds in croaking an enemy general or blows it can be in the lap of the gods. The cut-scenes of the game inform you of your progress in this respect in cinematic detail. Succeed, and your Ninja levels up. The cut-scenes are just one element that helps make the game look as good as it plays. The menus have a real beauty about them, decked with decorative Japanese

calligraphic and woodblock art, the fully rotational campaign map is in 3D, and the battle fascia when real time war is raging avoids the pitfall of an incomprehensible multiplicity of command prompt buttons.

Every incarnation of the game has had its strengths and weaknesses; longbows, gunpowder and firearms have all profoundly affected the outcome of warfare. Frankly, I found the naval battles in *Napoleon* clunky and confusing. Here, the naval battles are slicker because they are more simplistic – no steam or sail, just feudal sailors rowing for their lives.

The land-based battle is as good as it has ever been, although nothing is ever perfect when it comes to virtual war; it's possible to hit upon a marshalling of forces and formations that can have you winning almost every time on the easier settings. Terrain and weather conditions, as always, are a telling factor in the resultant victory or ignominious defeat. There are alliances to be built (and broken when you renege on them), sons and daughters to marry off, and provinces to fortify and expand.

But the game really is all about the battles. There is an extensive

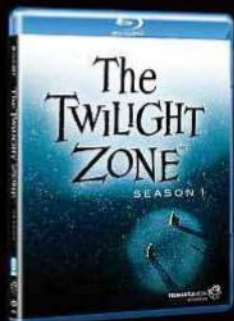
tutorial and stand-alone battles to develop your military chops (and online multiplayer, to boot). Archers, swordsmen, spearmen, cavalry – how you arrange your forces on the battlefield then launch them into the fray is where the heart of the game lies, the exhilarating release of tension after all that strategic build-up. Simply hurling all your troops *en masse* against the opposing force will be bloody and brutal for sure, but there won't be anything much left when it's over. With a succession of difficulty levels, the real time combat can be as sophisticated as you have hours and inclination to make it. You can run it with a fairly modest modern rig and it still looks gorgeous; if you've got the dog's bollocks allied to DX-11 capabilities, the scaling and detail for a real time strategy game enter into the realms of the stunning. The best *Total War* ever? Well, I'm a *Medieval* man, through and through. But to paraphrase a more than half-decent general of old: it's the nearest run thing to the best you'll ever see.

Nick Ćirković

Fortean Times Verdict

BUDDHIST MONK ARCHERS!
WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

8



WIN! THE TWILIGHT ZONE ON BLU-RAY

One of the most iconic and celebrated TV shows of all time, *THE TWILIGHT ZONE* is coming to Blu-ray! Over the course of 2011, all five complete seasons of the series (originally broadcast between 1959 and 1964) plus the complete 1980s revival series will be coming to Blu-ray and DVD in the UK.

Season 1 is released on 2 May, RRP £49.99 (£34.99 on DVD).

Thanks to SHOCK ENTERTAINMENT and FREMANTLE MEDIA ENTERPRISES we have FIVE copies of *THE TWILIGHT ZONE* SEASON 1 on Blu-ray to give away. For your chance to win, just tell us:

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF THE 1958 TELEPLAY INTENDED BY ROD SERLING AS A PILOT FOR *THE TWILIGHT ZONE*?

A. TIME ENOUGH AT LAST B. NICK OF TIME C. THE TIME ELEMENT

PLEASE MARK YOUR ENTRY 'CFT275'. CLOSING DATE 1 JULY 2011.

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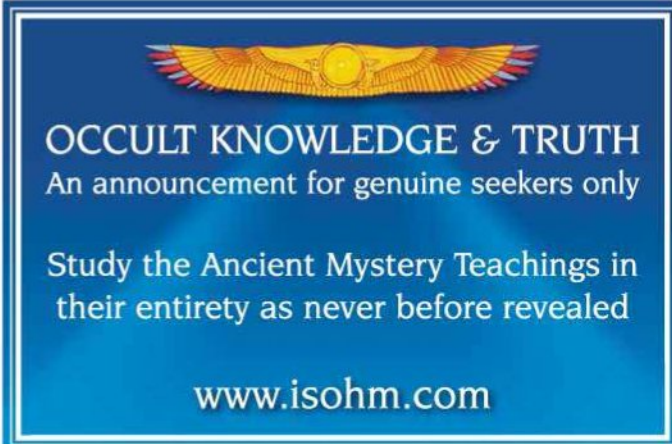
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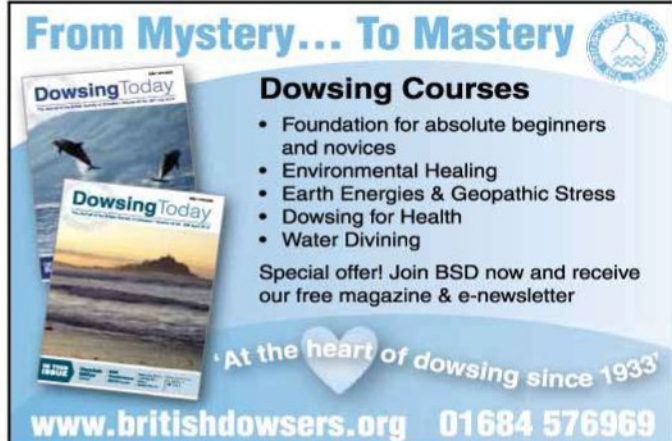
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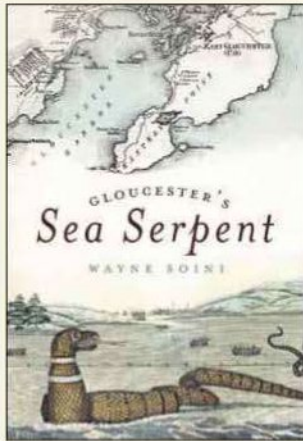
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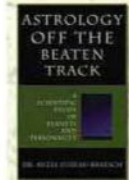
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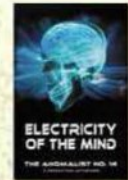
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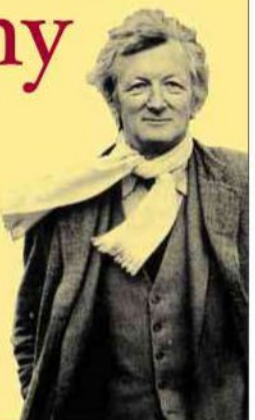
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Dear FT...

letters



Aurora and Bible

In 'Flying Saucers of the Gods' [FT270:34], Ted Harrison endeavoured to dismantle "the idea that contact with extraterrestrial beings explains many ancient and modern religious movements". He laudably attempted to offer intellectual alternatives for such mysteries as Ezekiel's vision or the star of Bethlehem, yet to substitute close encounters with UFOs for visitations by aliens or gods really explains little.

As has long been recognised in the scientific literature, manifestations of the aurora or the 'northern and southern lights' offer a much more viable explanation for many biblical apparitions, from Ezekiel's fiery wind coming from the north, carrying wheels and 'beings' that looked like animals, to Zechariah's vision of a flying scroll. One could hardly think of a more classic description of an auroral curtain than that. What is more, scientists have found that the period between about 800 and 600 BC was marked by an extraordinarily high level of auroral activity visible in the ancient Near East and the Mediterranean region. This is because during this period the geomagnetic dipole inclined more than 10° towards the east, taking it to approximately 81.4° N, 45.1° E, just to the northeast of Spitsbergen. Auroræ cannot, of course, account for all phenomena examined by Harrison, or indeed von Däniken or Sitchin, but they certainly go a long way. The details are laid out in a number of publications I have in preparation.

Marinus Anthony van der Sluijs
New Malden, Surrey

Richard III

I must applaud Paul Taylor's scepticism concerning the prevailing myths about Richard III's supposed wickedness and deformity ("Homeless Bones", FT273:58-59). The Richard III Society wasn't referenced in the article (the statue photographed in Leicester was commissioned by them), but readers might like to visit the Society's website (www.richardiii.net), where they can learn more about the life,

Odd mist



I photographed this mist in a field near Chelmsford, Essex, at 7am on 18 October 2009. What could explain the odd hump in the middle? **D Sayers**, By email

reign, death and burial of the last of our Plantagenet warrior kings. Amongst all the non-fiction books and biographies about Richard, there are few that make the effort to tell the full story of his reign from his point of view. One of these is my book, *Richard III: The Maligned King*, which also covers his death and burial. There's also an entire chapter, complete with illustrations, on the bones that Mr Taylor rightly says have never been proved to belong to the "Princes in the Tower". Disinformation has been alive and well for many centuries, and those bones may just be one of history's best examples.

Annette Carson
By email

Not meteorites

I enjoyed the article about Otto Rahn and the Cathars – but those "meteorites" that yield a red liquid [FT273:34] look very much like hæmatite or bloodstone – hydrated iron oxide (Fe_2O_3). I don't think they fell from the sky.

Ian B Dunne
By email

Trundle Hill

I was interested to read Peter Hassall's account of his investigation of the story of The Mystery of Trundle Hill [FT272:28-29]. I knew the same story from an earlier IPC Magazines book: *Thunder Annual* 1972. It contained three stories under the general heading "When Midnight Chimes" in which a wizened old storyteller recounted supposedly

true stories "to chill the blood and quicken the heart". The other stories were The Spectre of Rosewarne Hall and The Haunting of Harrison's Castle.

I often wondered if these stories had been written especially for the book or whether they were based on actual traditional tales or 'true' accounts. Some years later, I came across the original version of the Rosewarne Hall story. It is summarised in *A Dictionary of British Folk Tales* by Katharine M Briggs (part B, vol.1, p.470, 1971). The full account is found in *Popular Romances of the West of England* (1865) by Robert Hunt.

Since one of the three tales in the *Thunder Annual* was based on a traditional story, I wonder if the other two (Trundle Hill and Harrison's Castle) are as well.

John Simpson
Helmshore, Lancashire

Fossil explained?

I can offer an explanation for the mysterious impression in a flint nodule found by Peter Jenkins [FT271:74]. It appears to be the fragment of a cross-section of a belemnite fossil or similar fossilised mollusc. I have found numerous examples of these while beachcombing and fossil-hunting. The hollow shape and rod are simply the result of this particular method of fossilisation. The hollow area is where the creature's shell or solid part once was, and the 'rod' is where it has filled in with surrounding

sediment. After millions of years, the sediment became chalk, and chalk became flint. Anything that wasn't flint decomposed with time.

• In the obituary for the late Stan Gooch [FT272:24] Noel Rooney mentions that Gooch "always afforded a special significance to Monday the thirteenth". Not only was it the day he died, Monday 13th September (as mentioned), but also the day he was born: Monday 13th June 1932 – which would make him, rather befittingly (considering his recent theories), a Gemini.

Josh Allsopp
By email

Hedgehog strategy

I doubt the logic as to why it is better for a hedgehog to roll up in a ball rather than run when in danger from a car [Mythconceptions FT263:15]. In my opinion, the primary driver for risk in this situation is the exposure time. Taking things to extremes (which of course does not always give a sensible answer), a stationary hedgehog will be certain to be hit if it stays stationary on a road for a long enough time. A moving hedgehog will have the lowest (but never zero) risk when it is moving fast. Hence, I'd argue that its best option, on average, assuming it can't actually decide when the road is clear and trot across then, is to move as fast as possible and keep moving.

Alan Drysdale
By email

Riverside reptoid



RENE FOLLET

Regarding the oft-told story of the bipedal reptoid that allegedly accosted Charlie Wetzel in 1958 beside the Santa Ana River in Riverside, California [FT39:44–45]: I can't help wondering if a science-fiction movie featuring such a creature had been released about that time. After all, Riverside is the town where all Hollywood-made movies are "sneak-previewed" before their release. Could that incident have been a publicity stunt? **Greg May, Orlando, Florida**

Sea stories

After reading "Shetland Mystery" [FT273:73], I was reminded of a story told to me by an elderly neighbour in 1997/98, when I was four or five. The neighbour had been an amateur diver and recalled diving around the Scottish islands and seeing the ruins of a large town. He was also adamant that he had seen a humanoid creature patrolling the town. He was a sane, reliable man and until I read Mr Steisant's account I presumed that it was a story to entertain me in childhood. Unfortunately, I will never know if this tale is true or just a story that coincidentally fits with Mr Steisant's account as my neighbour has since passed away. **Charlotte Holmes Prudhoe, Northumberland**

I have a twist on the notion of "fish falls" being the result of tornadoes out at sea. My late father was skipper of his own fishing boat for 30 years. He occasionally reported waterspouts, but once told of a "mini-tornado" touching down on the deck of a boat and sucking up the catch from the boxes thereon. Was he just repeating an old fisherman's tale, or did he see this with his own eyes? Sadly, I am no longer able to ask him.

Claire Gannon
Canterbury, Kent

Party levitation

I can confirm that the party levitation trick [Mythchaster FT271:17] is genuine. I have been both the lifter and the liftee on several occasions. A 'victim' (it is more impressive if a larger person is selected) sits on an armless chair and four people put their hands together with their index fingers extended (as in the children's mime for "steeple"). Two people put their fingers under the knees of the seated victim, and two under the armpits, and try to lift. Usually there is little movement, or a very slight lift with much grunting and groaning.

The next stage is where variations occur. In one version, a lifter places one hand on the liftee's head, and then, in turn, each other lifter puts one hand on top. Then the other hand is placed on top of this pile in the same order. At a command, each lifter presses down hard for a count of 10, and then immediately they put their hands back together with the index fingers extended and try to repeat the lifting process. Another version requires that no contact is made and a gap is left between the head and each of the hands and that the lifters concentrate on the column of hands for a count of 10. Again, immediately after the count, each resumes their lift position. And they lift. Easily. It feels

quite bizarre when the previously immovable seated object suddenly floats upwards with barely perceptible effort.

I have no idea how it works, but I do know that it does. I suppose it shouldn't really be too difficult for four people to lift one person, so perhaps it's just a matter of concentration.

Glen Robins

By email

I took part in a few such levitations at my Hampshire school in the late 1960s. A lad (for the sake of modesty) would lie on his back with his head in a girl's lap. Three or four other people would kneel either side of him. The girl would start a chant – "He looks ill," and each of us would repeat it one at a time. Then it would be: "He is ill". Following the same pattern, we would then say: "He looks worse," and so on, and finally: "He's dead".

At this point, we would raise the lad up using our forefingers. This definitely worked, although I don't claim there was anything supernatural about it. I do recall one occasion where the lad being raised appeared to come out of his "trance" and started moving about, and we couldn't hold him up. Perhaps the chanting helped to induce a state of relaxation.

Dave Miles

Basingstoke, Hampshire

For the purposes of a book that I am writing on the "endemic public ignorance of physics", I have traced the trick of "party levitation" back, beyond Pepys, to a manuscript that was already old in AD 1200. However, I despise your magazine and will certainly not be giving you the fruits of my research.

David Frazier

By email

Editor's note: Thanks to the many readers who sent in broadly similar replies to that of Glen Robins, all of whom had first-hand experience of 'party levitation', including Ian Fullbrook, Rob Geukens, Guy Haley, Paul Jackson, Jim V1, Hal C Pattee, Patrick Sheehy, James Silvers, Gary Stocker, and Mr/Ms Winter. Thomas Pollard was introduced to 'party levitation' in 1938 at Aylesbury Grammar School. Some specified single index fingers rather than two

together: Adrian Blow, John Ford, Mark Graham, Martin Gross, Alan Hooker, Mark Sumption and Mary Worrall. Andy Pearson specified the index and second finger of each hand; Valerie Martin said the lifters' right-hand index fingers were placed under the seat of the chair; Robert McMinn specified little fingers; Adrian Lord mentioned the variation of the liftee lying down with seven lifters chanting a sequence something like: "She's not well / she's ill / she's dying / she's dead".

Neonatal trauma

I was surprised to read that Alvin Lawson had formulated a birth trauma hypothesis [FT270:28], as I had already come to a similar conclusion, although my hypothesis is neonatal trauma rather than birth trauma. In the US, it has been the norm for decades to remove the new baby from its mother and put it into a sort of tank with dozens of other newborns around, each in their own tank. Could this be the reason so many of their citizens think they have had an alien encounter? The description of medical tests, helplessness, probing, and the appearance of the "typical" alien – alarmingly like a scaled-up newborn baby – could be accounted for by this treatment, which appears quite barbaric to me. As their range of vision is only about 18in/46cm, the only thing the baby will see most of the day except at feed times is another baby. A baby would thus not need to know what it looks like itself, just how the others do.

In the UK, by contrast, the baby is kept near its mother in hospital unless there is a specific reason to remove it to the nursery (where, as there are so few of them, they probably get extra attention from the nurses). We are also less likely to perform Caesarean sections, a chief reason for caring for the baby in the nursery.

This might also explain why Jenny Randles's tests on UFO-naïve subjects did not elicit the same responses as Alvin Lawson's – presumably hers were done in the UK and his in the US, where his subjects were more likely to have been in newborn incarceration and been traumatised by it.

Georgina Skipper

By email

Field spirits

Theo Paijmans's article on "Those Damned Invisible Things" [FT269:30-31] brought to mind tales of the "field spirit", or "spirit of vegetation", a nearly worldwide belief system in which it was thought that the personification of a growing crop dwells in, and guards, the field throughout the growing season. This spirit, it was said, would manifest in a number of different animal forms, and evidence for its existence could be seen in the way in which the wind would set the crops into waving motion. Various epithets such as "The Cat sits there", "The Steer is running in the corn", "The Goats are chasing each other", "There runs the Horse", "The Boar is rushing through the corn", "The Mad Dog is in the corn", or "The Wolf sits in the corn, and will tear you in pieces" were all meant to dissuade the unwary (especially children) from running afoul of the "Corn-Cock", "Corn-Cat", "Corn-Steer", "Oats-Goat", "Oats-Stallion", "Rye-Boar", "Rye-Dog", "Rye-Wolf", or any other variation of crop animal, which would "get" them if they ventured too close. (Sir James Frazer: *The Golden Bough*, Dover, New York, 2002, pp447-62.)

The dangers of encountering the field spirit were perhaps best demonstrated in Silesia where, in a certain harvesting festival custom, the reaper who had cut the last stalk of the season was arrayed in rye stalks and given a long, plaited tail. Called the 'tom cat', he was sometimes joined by a second man who was similarly attired and called the 'she-cat'. Thus costumed, and mimicking the spirit(s) of the field, they were charged with giving chase to anyone they could catch and thrashing them with a long stick.

The potential violence that these invisible spirits could dole out on the unsuspecting child or farmer seems eerily in keeping with the kamaitachi reports from Gifu Prefecture or the thing that Dennis Sullivan encountered on his farm in Brookville, Kansas ("...when he entered the field he noticed a movement in the grass, as of some animal"). Perhaps it's not that these stories were, ahem, "planted" as promotional

pieces to gauge public reaction to a particular topic, as Mr Paijmans briefly wonders, but that they were always there among the wind-blown crops, waiting for someone to rediscover them.

Trevor Ouellette
North Bay, Ontario

Demolition 9/11

I was rather disturbed by Konspiracy Korner [FT269:25]. Robin Ramsey reports the latest 9/11 theories in wide-eyed "Truther" fashion, as though they are all gospel. Thermite, (or Thermate, or Nanothermite, or Nanothermate, whatever the latest "buzz word" is) was not found in WTC rubble. Iron microspheres were found in certain dust samples from around Ground Zero, and these can be formed by Thermite reactions. But they are also formed by steel-welding and flame-cutting. And rather a lot of steel-welding occurs in New York, in building construction, and many thousands of tonnes of steel was flame-cut in the Ground Zero site as the rubble was cleared. Also, this dust was collected from several areas, months after 9/11, without any proper custody log.

Mr Ramsey's other classic is that large skyscrapers are routinely wired up for demolition. He obviously has no idea of the quantities of explosive needed, and the vast amount of wiring and Det chord. And explosive has a sell-by date: it "goes off". After a time, explosive either becomes dangerously sensitive or becomes useless, failing to explode. You can't just leave it for years; it would need regular replacement. And how would all this high explosive survive the aircraft impacts and the fires intact, to detonate when needed? Let alone what would happen if lightning struck the towers and charged up all this wiring. Early, unplanned demolition!

Finally, if you are going to mention experts, architects, engineers and scientists, look at the tiny number who support the "Truthers", then look at the millions employed in these fields, just in the USA alone, that say it's all tosh! They are a pee in the ocean.

Simon Watts
Shooters Hill, London

Robin Ramsay responds: Regarding thermite: no scientist, me – I was thinking of the article "Active Thermite Material Discovered in Dust from the 9/11 World Trade Center Catastrophe" by Steven E Jones *et al* in *The Open Chemical Physics Journal*, which is online. That there are other explanations for the presence of the 'thermite material' is interesting. I am well aware of the difficulties in wiring skyscrapers for demolition (it would take weeks), let alone having explosives permanently *in situ*. In a short article, I had no room for them. I offered the notion as a possible explanation of what are three *prima facie* demolitions without positing an enormous plot by forces within the US government, which I find implausible. I'm sorry if I sounded more certain than I am.

Fairness doctrine

Robin Ramsay mentions that in the USA there is an 'absence of obligation on the media to tell the truth or be 'balanced'' [FT273:23]. There was once, however, a 'Fairness Doctrine' in the US, imposed by the Federal Communications Commission in 1949, but vetoed by Ronald Reagan in 1987 because it supposedly constrained 'free speech' (<http://bit.ly/4mWRkk> / museum.tv).

This is mentioned by Naomi Oreskes and Eric M Conway in their book *Merchants of Doubt*, which provides a forensic dissection of sabotage by the American right of evidence-based arguments it found unpalatable. Interestingly, Oreskes and Conway claim the Fairness Doctrine was consistently exploited by the right to gain airtime, which it used to subvert evidence mandating regulatory action in relation to issues such as smoking and cancer, acid rain and ozone depletion.

Perhaps, with 1980s deregulation, the right decided it had sufficient control of the media not to require such assistance and the Fairness Doctrine could safely be abandoned.

Ian Godsland
Slapton,
Bedfordshire

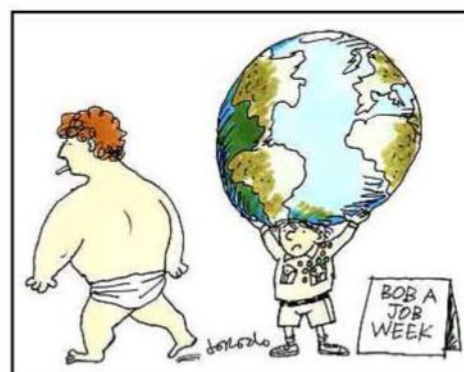
Redundant columns

Re "Wren's redundant columns" [FT271:17]: This particular Myth-conception rang bells with me. I remember this story from my childhood in London – but with the redundant columns attached (or not) to the dome of St Paul's Cathedral. I think I must have read it somewhere, because I have a strong recollection of a line drawing of a man in 18th-century clothes, standing at the top of a ladder with a lantern – peering at the column tops and looking startled to see that every other column around the dome was an inch or two short. The story attached was again to do with Wren getting his revenge on timid patrons who did not believe half the number of columns would do the job.

Allan Frewin Jones
Herne Hill, London

Another example of redundant architectural columns cropped up in the "Climbing Great Buildings" series shown on BBC 2 last year. In the episode dealing with the Glasgow School of Art (aired 20 September 2010), it was revealed that the wooden pillars that appear to hold the roof up are not actually supporting anything. The capitals that supposedly form the top of the pillars are in fact hanging from the roof, while the pillars themselves are purely decorative. The architect in this instance was Charles Rennie Mackintosh, described by the programme's presenter Jonathan Foyle as a "joker" and a "showman" whose aim here was "to have fun with traditional architectural styles".

Andrew May
Crewkerne, Somerset



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First-hand accounts from *FT* readers and browsers of www.forteantimes.com

Radio interference

In the early morning of 26 January 2011 at approximately 2am, my wife and I were awoken by strange noises emanating from our radio (which had been left on as my wife finds it helps her to get to sleep). At first, I thought the phone was ringing, as the radio was emitting a noise resembling an old-fashioned trim phone. However, this was followed by a series of tones of varying pitch with the phone ringtone sounding intermittently.

After perhaps two minutes of this, there was a long tone very similar to the old 400hz tone sometimes employed in conjunction with a 'test card' graphic by television companies in the 1970s. It all sounded very eerie and my wife asked me to turn the radio off at that point. It had previously been tuned to Radio 4 and should have been transmitting the BBC World Service during the early hours. We live within the Calder Valley; very near the small town of Mytholmroyd and not far from the UFO 'hotspot' of Todmorden (although I am inclined not to infer a connection). The radio itself is a Bush TR82BLU with analogue tuner, approximately five years old, and is positioned on the window-sill of our bedroom.

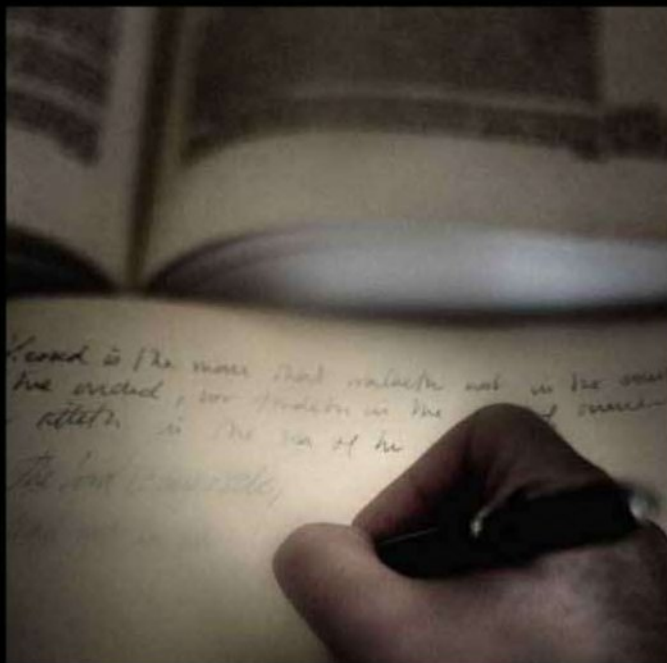
Did anyone else experience this interference or is anybody able to explain what happened? Does the BBC sometimes use ambient tones if there is a break in transmission and if so, why make the noises sound so unsettling?

Alistair Moffatt

Luddenden Foot, West Yorkshire

Last words

I am now retired, but some 20 years ago I was a uniformed patrol sergeant in the Surrey police, working in a well-heeled area of that pleasant county, and quite content with my lot. What follows is a true account of a strange incident that took place one summer day sometime between 1986 and 1988. I was on patrol driving a police car, with a young probationary WPC as my passenger. I shall refer to her as Christine. A call came over the radio instructing me to attend an address on the edge of St



George's Hill, an exclusive estate in Weybridge, home to the rich and famous of our country, where there was a concern for the occupant's safety.

The address was a first-floor apartment with balcony in a small but rather nice development. An elderly couple had lived there for some years. Both were in good health, but something seemed to be amiss. The wife had gone away for a few days visiting relatives in another part of the UK, and arranged to ring him each morning to check that all was well. This worked flawlessly for two days, but on the third, the day I was sent to the home address, she got no reply. She became alarmed when she contacted a friend and golfing partner of her husband and found he had failed to attend a regular foursome at the local club. Could I check that he was OK? So there we were.

Repeated banging on his door and shouting through the letterbox elicited no response. The door was a very solid hardwood and would have taken a lot of battering, so it would have to be the balcony. A neighbour found a ladder, and in a few seconds, I was up, leaving Christine to make her way to the front door again to await my letting her in. The patio doors on the balcony were locked; so was the kitchen window, but it was a lot smaller. So, to cause minimum

damage, I smashed a pane, pulled the window open and clambered in. The man was not in the kitchen, bathroom or bedroom.

Down a short corridor, I could see a light shining through an open doorway. It was a study, and there was the man fully clothed, leaning on his forearms over a desk lit by an anglepoise lamp. In his right hand was a fountain pen, and he had been copying in small neat script from an open Bible. His handwriting had tailed off into a final squiggle as Death found him. In the study were many books, religious in nature, including several by Mary Baker Eddy. I leant over his shoulder to see what he had been writing when his time came. I recall the last words as clearly as if it were yesterday: **"The Lord is my rock, I shall not be moved"**.

I called Christine back to the door from making further enquiries with neighbours, and returned for another look at his rather forlorn last entry. Then I was stunned to see that his last words had disappeared. I have since discovered that they are not an exact quotation from the King James Bible, though close.¹ A feeling of floundering unreality overcame me, and I confess that I was happy to see Christine, and a nurse she had found from somewhere, who confirmed life was long extinct. I didn't tell anyone exactly what I had seen, because I was worried I would be

thought to be losing my grip on reality. Perhaps I was. For a long time I didn't care to call it to mind. I have written this partly to lay the unquiet ghost of the thing, and partly in the hope that someone might be able to advance a credible explanation. I would like that very much.

NOTE

¹ "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer" (2 Samuel 22:2, and Psalm 18:2).

Richard Skerten

Edgeley Park, Surrey

Lewes SLIder

After reading the article on SLIders [FT273:52-55], I thought I'd pass on my recent experience. I belong to one of the largest bonfire societies in Lewes, Sussex. On 5 November, I dress as an American Indian and process around the county town of Lewes as part of the Lewes Bonfire Celebrations. To the uninitiated, the evening could be described as a mediæval-looking carnival parade with fireworks. This year while processing along a road, I became aware that every time my group (or rank as it is officially known) was about to walk under a street lamp, it stopped working. This happened the entire length of just one road, which is a fairly quiet road on the outskirts of town. The section we walk is approximately half a mile (800m) long with trees and a footpath on one side and a high wall at the end of back gardens on the other.

The way in which the lights extinguished as we reached exactly the same distance to each lamp appeared to me a little unusual, and yet so precise in the timing of the outage that it almost could be considered a pre-planned occurrence. This would certainly not be an officially planned part of the evening. I actually thought no more of it, figuring it was just a coincidence, until reading the article on SLIders, which described almost the exact phenomenon that I witnessed. I have never had such an experience before or since, and therefore wonder if one of my fellow members was unwittingly having an influence over the street lamps.

Jamie Gates

Lewes, East Sussex

simulacra corner

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A selection of rude woodland imagery sent in by FT's observant readers.



The above rock bottom was sent in by David Gamon and Kurt Wenner sent us the "woodpecker" shown at right. The locations are unknown.



"When you walk a dog, you spend a lot of time looking at its hind quarters", says Paul Revans, who sent us the above photograph.

The wooden bottom at left was photographed in Somerset by Alan Pringle.

Victor Lange took the picture at right of a phallic tree while hiking the Long Trail in Vermont.



FORTEAN TRAVELLER



mouldy shower-room with the rat that peered out of the drain seemed so... exotic!

What really rattled us, though, was Ion hammering on our room door just several days after we'd left him in London. While we wanted time to ourselves, it seemed churlish to send him away; instead, he took us on a memorable tour of the Chinese clan houses that cluster in the centre of Georgetown. On this latest occasion, Sam and I thought we'd revisit some of those places. As we wandered, we kept an eye open for what Ion had declared was his "favourite opium den", gesturing towards a seedy alleyway. It was quite credible that he had a number to choose from; however, in the interim, Georgetown has become a World Heritage site and much has been 'cleaned up'. There were still seedy alleys in abundance, but nothing that evoked any memories.

Chinese and Hindu temples are everywhere here, even on street corners,¹ but two have a strong curiosity element. The otherwise dull 'Snake Temple' in the airport/Bayan Lapas area is filled with pit vipers. They dangle languidly from frameworks of old tree branches provided inside for them, and lurk in nooks or coil on the altars. It sounds daunting but, so we are told, no one has ever been bitten there. Some guides say that the huge clouds of incense smoke keep them subdued; the faithful, however, put it down to the posthumous influence of Chor Soo Kong, a renowned Buddhist healer to whom the shrine is dedicated. One Chinese acquaintance told us that

74. Penang, Malaysia

BOB RICKARD takes a favourite journey East of Suez to Penang, Malaysia, a land of legendary heroes, giant footprints and even bigger temples.

We were on our way to Penang – the most Chinese of Malaysia's states – when word reached us that

Ion Will, a founding member of the Gang of Fort, had died (see Necrolog, FT274:24–25). My wife Sam and I try to spend a few days on the island whenever we are in Malaysia, but this was an uncanny coincidence, as we first came here on our honeymoon 34 years earlier, at Ion's insistence. He also recommended we stay in a small Chinese-run back-packers' hotel on Chulia Street. It had seen better days, but we didn't mind; being woken in the early hours by the call to prayer from the nearby Kapitan Keling mosque, or sharing a



TOP: A late 19th-century postcard showing the original entrance of the Snake Temple at Bayan Lapas, which dates to the 1850s. It has since been completely rebuilt.

ABOVE: A giant statue of bodhisattva Kuan Yin looms over the Kek Lok Si temple complex on Crane Hill at Air Itam, said to be the most extensive in Southeast Asia.

there is a huge python somewhere in the smoky gloom... and that it is only ever seen on the feast day of Chor Soo Kong. He said that he himself had watched on such a day as the python slid out of the main entrance to cross a road and bask in the morning sun, until later retiring back into the temple depths.

The grandest temple is the *Kek Lok Si* on Crane Hill at Air Itam, said to be the most extensive temple in Southeast Asia. It was founded in 1890 with a gift from the Qing emperor Guangxu of 70,000 volumes of Buddhist sutras copied from the Imperial Library. It is a huge complex and includes prayer halls, pavilions, and a large monastery. The towering octagonal 'Pagoda of 10,000 Buddhas' in the Chinese style is topped by a Thai-style crown – its foundation stone set in 1930 by King Rama VI – symbolising the practice there of two schools of Buddhism. On the hilltop overlooking the whole island is a giant bronze statue, 30.2m (100ft) high, of the bodhisattva Kuan Yin (completed in 2002), sheltering under an octagonal canopy supported by 16 dragon-pillars (completed in 2009).

At the heart of old Georgetown are the *kongsis* (clan houses) that Ion loved, built to house the benevolent societies formed by overseas Chinese clans. Workers have been brought here from India and China by various powers since the 15th century; and the Chinese at least continued to come from the provinces of Fujian, Guangdong Guangxi and Hainan up to the 20th century. There are local legends of an old network of secret tunnels below the town that linked some of the *kongsis* to the sea to further their smuggling activities.

Some of the richest of the old clans in Georgetown maintained their own compounds, the grandest of these being the Khoo Kongsi.² It is a tiny village hidden away among the city streets, its narrow, defensible alleyways leading to a sizeable enclosure containing houses, shops and admin rooms. Across its courtyard, an opera stage faces the majestic clan temple, the Leong San Tong. The old cellars below the temple are being converted into a museum tracing the Khoo clan history back more than six centuries to a handful of villages in China. (The surname Khoo was not the common factor; any who could trace their ancestry to those villages could 'belong' here.)

The clans and their secret societies frequently warred against each other over profitable enterprises, including mining and farming opium for the British. Cannon Street, the main alley leading into the Khoo Kongsi, gained its name during the Penang riots of 1867. When a vicious nine-day street battle broke out between two *kongsis* – the Hokkien Hai San and the Red Flag Society on one side, the Cantonese Ghee Hin and the White Flag Society on the other, each with their own affiliated Malay cohorts – British residents were given shelter in the Khoo enclave and



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Local legend tells of secret tunnels used by smugglers

TOP: The magnificent frontage of the Khoo Kongsi enclave.

ABOVE: You can easily believe there are 10,000 Buddhas in the pagoda's halls.

LEFT: The roof tile dedicated to the late John Michell.



defended with cannons until relief troops came from Singapore. The holes in the masonry made by bullets and cannonballs can still be seen there today.

We were also in Penang in 2009 when John Michell died. At that time, the monastery at Kek Lok Si was raising money for a new roof for their library. For a donation, a monk would write a requested name on a newly glazed tile to be installed later. The names of John Michell and Steve Moore's brother Chris are up there now; we'll do something for Ion on another visit.

On our last full day in Penang, Sam and I decided to check out the island's association with the Ming Dynasty Admiral and Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho (Mandarin: Zheng He). Cheng Ho's fleet of several hundred ships dominated the 'Western Ocean' as far as Aden for much of the 15th century. In this time, he made five visits to Penang and established a huge warehouse complex, called Guan Chang, on the mainland at the Melaka River estuary.³

Cheng Ho came from a line of practising Muslims. At the age of 11, he was castrated and sent to the Imperial court, where he became a trusted advisor to the *Yungle* emperor and was given the court name 'San Bao' (Mandarin), which becomes 'Sam Poh' in Cantonese (the dominant dialect throughout Malaysia). However, 'San Bao/Sam Poh' also refers to the 'three treasures or refuges' of Buddhism – the Buddha, the teaching and the community – to which a great many temples are dedicated. This strange pun has led to some confused claims that temples are dedicated to Cheng Ho. Most *Sam Poh Tongs* ('Hall of Three Treasures') on the mainland have no association with Cheng Ho at all. The largest, built into limestone caverns near Ipoh, is well worth a visit. However, there is some historical evidence that after the



Portuguese colonised Malacca in 1511, many of the Chinese Muslim mosques (probably founded by Cheng Ho's crew or passengers) "became San Bao Chinese temples commemorating Zheng He", which probably started all the confusion.⁴

The tourist literature mentions a *Sam Poh Tong* at Batu Maung, a small fishing village to the south of the international airport on the south-eastern tip of the island. This one boasts an unusual Cheng Ho connection: it is built around "a giant footprint" said to have been stamped into the rock by Cheng Ho himself. It proved very difficult to find. After a 90-minute bus ride (from the Komtar terminus) we were unsure about where to get off. No one on the bus seemed certain about the whereabouts of the 'footprint temple'; so we decided to disembark, have lunch and ask the locals. The smell of freshly frying *char kueh teow* from a roadside restaurant was too good to resist and, when we'd done, we asked the cook... who asked his helper, who asked someone else. Soon a small crowd had gathered as more diners joined in a noisy, but good-natured disputation. To our delight, one of the diners declared that, if we didn't mind waiting while she finished lunch, she'd take us there... which she did. Malaysians are friendly like that!

Up a rough lane we went, past a spooky temple on a hill and a sinister-looking pack of dogs. A huge rock loomed on the edge of a company car park, narrow steps winding around it to a makeshift altar at the top. It looked promising. Going around by the car park, we saw an enormous modern painting on the east face of the rock, instantly recognisable as depicting



Cheng Ho and his mighty fleet. A typical Chinese gateway led into an ornamental courtyard and a well-kept temple no bigger than a single garage.

Before the elevated altar, was what looked like a well; it was quite shallow and at the bottom was the famous footprint. It clearly wasn't an *actual* footprint, but a slight depression in the rough shape of a large humanoid left foot, about 13in (33cm) long. The shape was enhanced by damp, but whether the water was applied by worshippers or seepage from underground, I couldn't tell. The Western practice of tossing coins into the well for luck was evident too. The veranda gave a good view of moored fishing boats, but the site was deserted with no indication of who looked after the place. We later learned that the simulacrum also attracts Hindus to this Chinese temple in the belief that it was made by Hanuman, the monkey hero of the *Ramayana*, in a great leap across the ocean.

On the Internet, I stumbled upon the researches of Himanshu Bhatt,

TOP: Our search for the "stone footprint" led to a small car park at Batu Maung. A huge mural depicting Admiral Cheng Ho and his famous exploration fleet has recently been painted on the rock face.

ABOVE: At the bottom of the "well", the "giant footprint" said to have been stamped into the rock by Cheng Ho himself is clearly defined by a damp patch in the otherwise dry rock floor. It was about 13in (33cm) long and dotted with coins tossed in for good luck.

a staff writer for the 'Exotic Penang Heritage' website, who grew up locally. In 1993, when he asked around, two elderly Malays told him that the Batu Maung footprint had been there for hundreds of years and was said, in a Malay myth, to have been made by a giant called Gedembai. There were three other footprints, they said, and Bhatt set out to find them. One was "a complementary right foot print of the same size in jungle in Bayan Lepas", known as *Tapak Gedembai* (Gedembai's footprint), writes Bhatt. The other two "prints are said to exist on the nearby islets of Pulau Aman and Pulau Jerejak." His photos of the simulacra show them in 1993 at the time of their rediscovery. Nothing much is known about them since then.

Gedembai seems to be some sort of protean pre-Islamic nature spirit – more Medusa than 'manimal' – and can be described quite differently in legends from other Malay states. A fairly common characteristic, though, is its ability to petrify; as a result, stone simulacra throughout Malaya are typically attributed to the Gedembai (aka Galemбай or Kelembай). On the island of Langkawi for example, there are legends in which Gedembai (or Sang Gadembai) is a beautiful female, a ghost, or a vampire. She is also a humanoid giantess who was ousted from her limestone cave by the arrival of Garuda (the giant eagle-companion of Vishnu), suggesting her origins might even pre-date the advent here of Hinduism.

In Penang state, Gedembai was described as a huge Wildman. Interestingly, Walter Skeat's *Fables and Folk Tales from an Eastern Forest* (1901) notes that the forest-dwelling Malays of Kuantan, a state on the east coast, feared "a race of gigantic spirits named Gedembai" who could turn people into wood or stone. Unbelievably stupid, these forest beings were outwitted by wily natives so often that they fled this world. Even now, old trees overhanging rivers are said to have once been people who refused to follow the Gedembai in their flight. In the Kinta Valley, in Perak state, however, they have a legend of forest-dwelling, "small pixie-like creatures" called Sang Gedembai, who have lived there "since the world was young". Curiously, this lore does not seem to have attracted much scholarly attention. **FT**

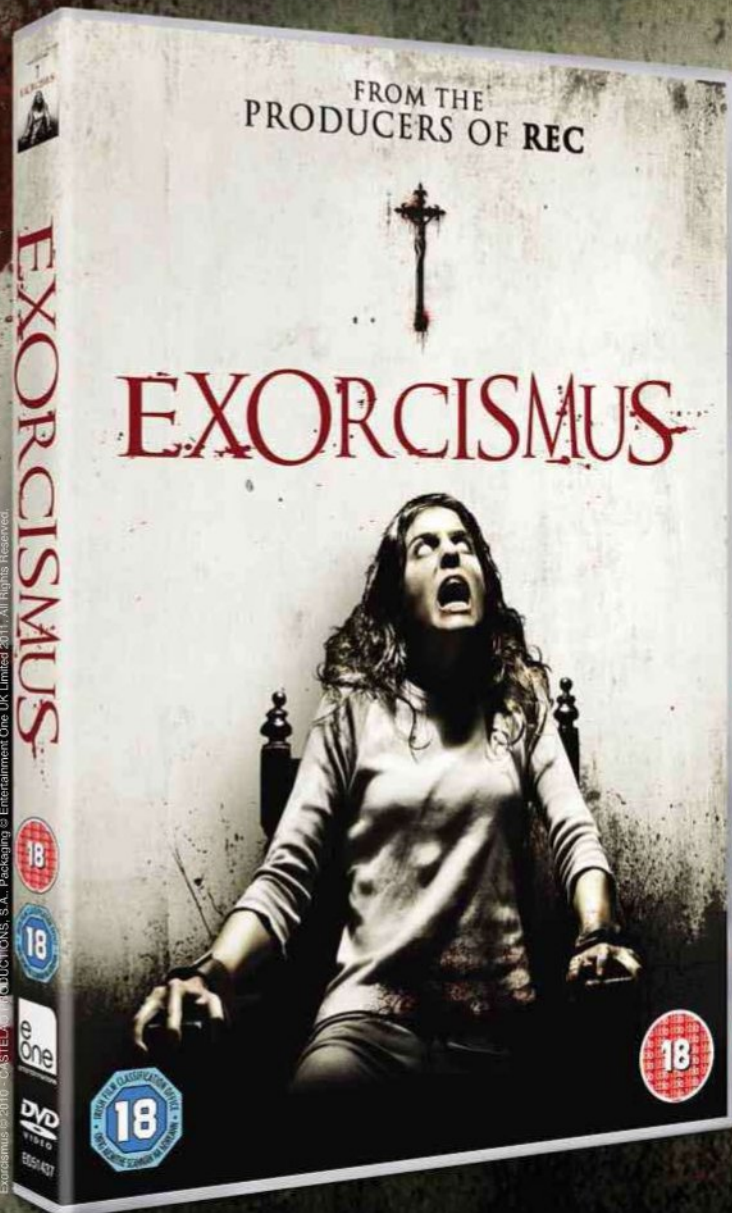
NOTES

- 1 <http://bit.ly/gX1ptk> (penang-traveltips.com).
- 3 <http://bit.ly/eA5Fwf> (chengho.org).
- 4 <http://bit.ly/7ZGC5b> (wikipedia).
- 5 <http://bit.ly/fVG4a4> (neosentuhan.com).



BOB RICKARD founded *FT* in 1973 and remained coeditor until 2002. He continues to contribute to *FT* and runs the photo library signs-and-wonders.com.

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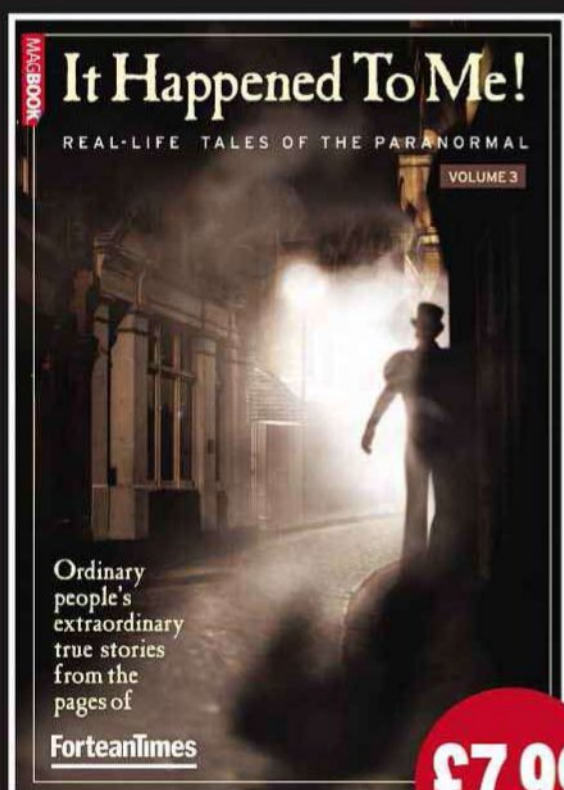


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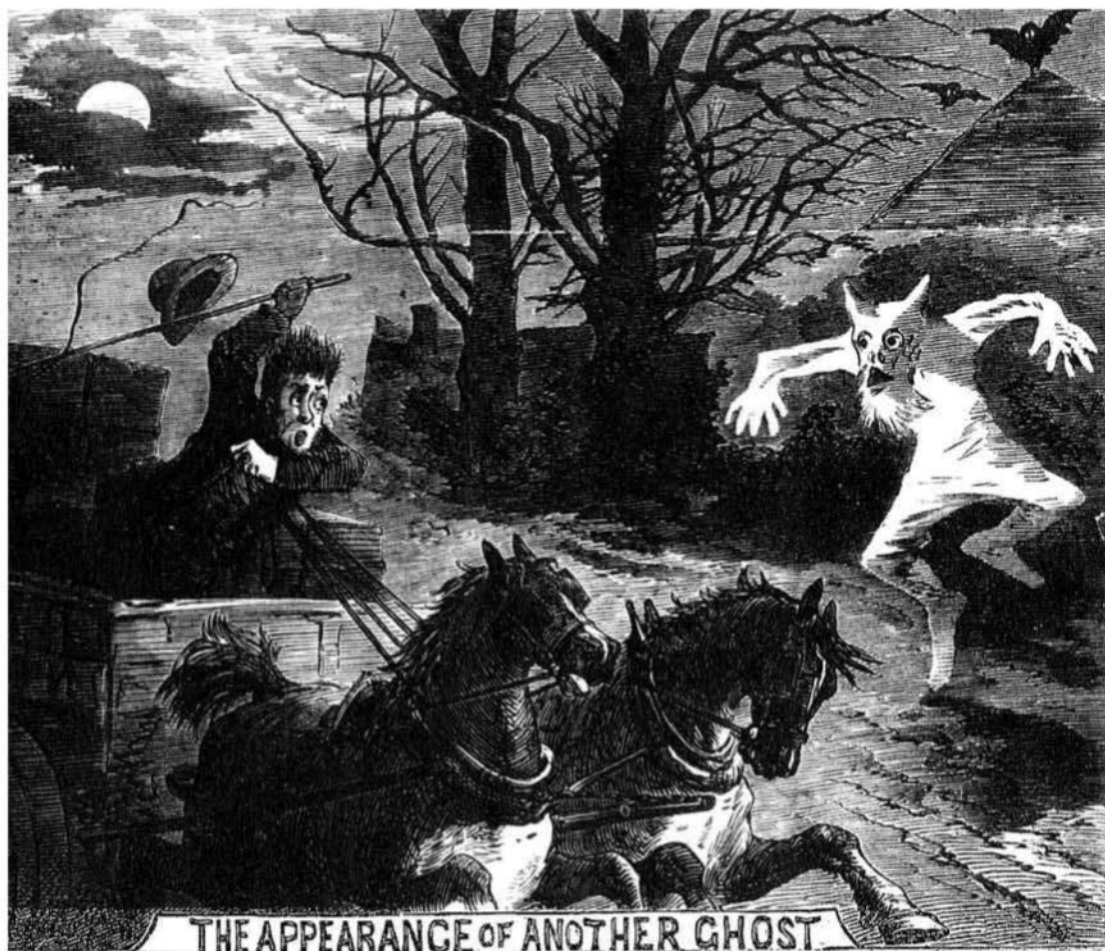
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3. THE JUMPING GHOST OF PECKHAM

In 1871 and 1872, there was a series of ghost scares in Peckham, south London, and its vicinity. In November and December 1871, a ‘ghost’ had been breaking windows at night, but this vandalism ceased after the arrest of a ‘foreigner’ with a catapult. In April and May 1872, there was another window-breaking epidemic, which was blamed on a 13-year-old girl named Nott, who was caught red-handed and severely fined the month after.

On October the same year, there were several sightings of a figure dressed in white, who prowled the Peckham lanes, frightening women by making spooky noises, or grabbing them from behind. Quite a few people saw the ghost, which was described as very tall, between six and eight feet (1.8–2.4m) depending on the witnesses’ level of intoxication, and with a most forbidding countenance. Some accredited the ghost with horns, others were

certain it had luminous breath; yet others believed it had boots fitted with springs, enabling it to leap like Spring-heeled Jack. The ghost screamed and gibbered in a weird, penetrating voice; it jumped high fences, and ran at near-superhuman speed. In early November, the two daughters of Dr Carver, headmaster of Dulwich College, were so badly frightened by the ghost that several days later the youngest had not fully recovered.

A vigilante Anti-Ghost Fund was established, and the ghost was burnt in effigy by the local inhabitants. Nevertheless, there were several new sightings of the figure in white, and many reports of windows being broken. Some people were convinced they were dealing with a proper ghost; many believed some prankster was at work; some rationalists thought it was just a case of mass hysteria.

On 27 November, a lad named Arthur Ridgway was carrying home a stone flask containing half a gallon of beer. A figure dressed in dark clothes sneaked up to him, spread his arms to reveal a white suit, and uttered “some

dismal cries”. Terrified, Ridgway dropped his beer and ran home. The very same evening, 13-year-old Matilda Ayers was also confronted by the ghost: he spread his arms, uttered some strange sounds, and greatly alarmed her.

There was quite an outcry in Peckham, with people milling about looking for the ghost. A group of workmen turned vigilante decided to catch the man frightening the children. They saw an odd-looking cove nearby, throwing peas at the shutters of a house just like the ghost was supposed to have done. They pursued him to a house, where he was later taken into custody by a police constable. The suspect turned out to be the homeless, unemployed Joseph Munday, described as a singular-looking man wearing a large curly wig. A number of peas were found in his pockets; he said he had bought them to eat. He had no explanation

for the strange garb he was wearing, with “a white slop” inside a dark cloak. The lad Ridgway and the girl Ayers both identified him as the ‘ghost’ they had seen, and since the destitute Munday was unable to find bail, he was sentenced to six months in jail.

When Munday was carted off to prison on 7 December, calm was restored to Peckham and its environs. But 10 days later, a man named James Sanson, driving a cart outside Bury, Lancashire, very far from Peckham, was dismayed to see a tall, white figure approaching his vehicle. According to the *Illustrated Police News*, the ghost “twisted itself about and performed a number of antics fearful to witness; it shrieked and gibbered at once discordant and appalling”. Although Sanson whipped up his horses, the ghost kept up with him for several minutes, before it disappeared with a final wild shriek. Was this the original Peckham Ghost, or ghost impersonator, enjoying another of his pranks after finding Peckham too hot for him following the arrest of the copycat Munday?



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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MOST PEOPLE HAVE HEARD OF NOSTRADAMUS AND HIS FAMOUS PROPHECIES. BUT FEW REMEMBER THAT BRITAIN HAD ITS OWN PROPHET - URSULA SOUTHILL OR SOOTHELL, (1488 - 1561) LATER KNOWN AS MOTHER SHIPTON!



MOTHER SHIPTON WAS SPECTACULARLY UGLY! SHE WAS HIDEOUS!! GROTESQUE!!!

YES-THANKYOU... THAT WILL DO...



IT'S LIKELY THAT SHE IS THE ORIGIN OF THE MODERN PANTOMIME DAME...



OH NO! I'M NOT!

OH YES SHE IS!

IN HER OWN LIFETIME SHE WAS KNOWN LOCALLY FOR HER SPELLS AND PREDICTIONS. SHE DIDN'T SHOOT TO NATIONAL FAME UNTIL 1641, WHEN A COMPILATION ALBUM OF HER PROPHECIES WAS FINALLY PUBLISHED!



READ ALL ABOUT IT!

ALL THE NEWS THAT HASN'T HAPPENED YET!

SHE'D BEEN DEAD FOR EIGHTY YEARS BY THEN, WHICH MADE PROMOTIONAL APPEARANCES A BIT TRICKY...



MOTHER SHIPTON
SIGNING
TODAY

SAMUEL PEPYS REPORTS IN HIS DIARY THAT MANY LONDONERS BELIEVED MOTHER SHIPTON HAD FORSEEN THE GREAT FIRE!

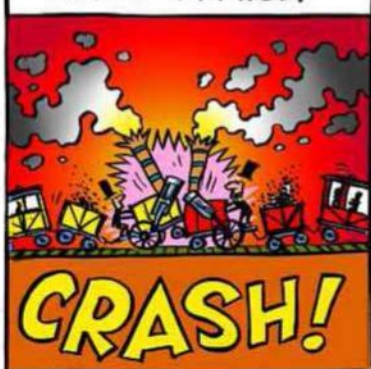


IT'S ALL IN MOTHER SHIPTON!

SHUT UP AND GET A BUCKET!

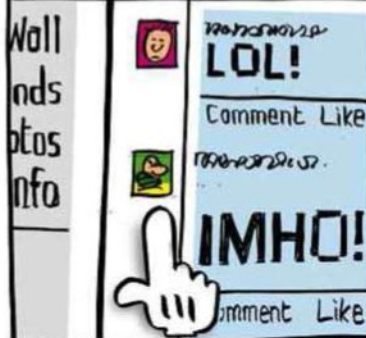
HER FAME GREW IN THE VICTORIAN PERIOD, WHEN READERS WERE ASTONISHED BY THE ACCURACY - OR SHEER WILDNESS - OF HER PREDICTIONS!

"CARRIAGES WITHOUT HORSES SHALL GO, AND CRASHES FILL THE WORLD WITH WOE!"



CRASH!

"AROUND THE WORLD THOUGHTS SHALL FLY- IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE!"



BUT SHE WASN'T ALWAYS SPOT ON...

"THE WORLD TO AN END SHALL COME IN EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY ONE!"



HEAD FOR THE HILLS!

THIS MAY HAVE BEEN BECAUSE SHE DIDN'T WRITE THAT VERSE... IT, AND MORE, WAS THE WORK OF A FAKER, ONE CHARLES HINDLEY!

TODAY YOU CAN VISIT MOTHER SHIPTON'S CAVE IN YORKSHIRE, BUY MOTHER SHIPTON MUGS AN TEA-TOWELS, AND DRINK MOTHER SHIPTON'S ALE...



BUT HER FINEST AND MOST FORTEAN MEMORIAL IS THAT HER FACE IS IMPRINTED ON THE WINGS OF THE MOTHER SHIPTON MOTH OF YORKSHIRE!



SHE IS MY HERO!

I WEAR HER WITH PRIDE!



AND I'D HAVE GOT AWAY WITH IT IF IT WASN'T FOR YOU AND YOUR PESKY DOG!

COMING NEXT MONTH



TRUE GIANTS

COULD GIGANTOPITHECUS STILL BE ALIVE AND WELL?



STARLITE MAN

WHAT HAPPENED TO MAURICE WARD'S AMAZING INVENTION?



EUREKA MACHINE,
MIRACLE WORKERS,
PHANTOM TIME,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 276

ON SALE 26 MAY



HUGO PIETTE

TALES FROM THE VAULT

EACH MONTH WE SEND *FORTEAN TIMES* FOUNDER BOB RICKARD DOWN INTO THE DARKEST, COBWEB-RIDDEN DEPTHS OF THE VAULTS OF FORTEAN TOWERS IN SEARCH OF STORIES FROM *FT*'S PAST.

MAY 1981

The otherwise unremarkable town of Reddish, in Greater Manchester, experienced a shower of coins on the 28th. It was noticed first by a girl who said she had seen a 50p coin "fall from nowhere" in front of her as she walked through the graveyard of St Elizabeth's Church. Through the day, several pounds' worth of copper and silver coins were gathered by a growing crowd of children. They'd hear tinkling sounds behind them and turn to find coins on the ground. *FT* spoke to the vicar, Rev. Graham Marshall, who said he himself had collected two pounds' worth. He said he had investigated and ruled out the obvious theories, but then mentioned an odd detail that, to our fortean ears, didn't seem the sort of thing a hoaxer would bother to do. Some coins were found embedded in the ground edge on. They could not have fallen from a great height because the tinkling sound was "gentle". **FT36:26**

FT39 carried Larry Arnold's article on the case of Jack Angel, whose body spontaneously and unaccountably burned in various places while he lay unconscious for four days amid unsinged bedding. Angel's right forearm was ruined and had to be amputated, prompting Arnold to mention two other cases of mysteriously smouldering arms. One happened in this month to a Chicago woman. On two separate occasions "dense odourless smoke" billowed from one sleeve of her blouse as though her arm were burning. In terror, she quickly doused her arms with water. Oddly, there was no sign of any fire or damage to the blouse. **FT39:12-15**

MAY 1991

Pensioner Arthur Pettifor, 82, was planting onions in his garden at Glatton, Cambridgeshire, at around midday on the 5th, when he heard a loud "swooshing" above his head. Something crashed through a hedge just 20ft (6m) away from him. Hearing the unusual noise, Arthur's neighbour came out and together they located the object. It was a warm, stony lump, weighing about a pound and a half (680g). A mineralogist from the Natural History Museum confirmed it was a meteorite. Howard Miles of the BAA's British Fireball Survey suggested it had broken off a larger object that had streaked across

the sky unnoticed in the daylight. Much of the heat and momentum of Arthur's lump "would have dissipated in free fall", Miles told *FT*, allowing Arthur to pick it up safely from a shallow crater. **FT58:8**

Despite the official crackdown on superstition in China, venerable rural practices have not only survived but show signs of reviving. This month, we learn these included posthumous weddings, banned since 1949, which ensured that people who die unmarried have a partner in the afterlife. The *Daily Telegraph* told of a 65-year-old man who had spent his life-savings on buying a female corpse. On his death, they were to be married and buried together. That may sound questionable to us, but he was praised by his community for his foresight. **FT59:40**

USAF 'Flight 19', which disappeared off the Florida coast on 5 December 1945, has been a staple of the notorious Bermuda Triangle theory since its inception in the 1960s. The flight of five Avenger torpedo bombers took off from Fort Lauderdale for a navigation training flight off Bimini and vanished, leaving only confused radio messages. Interest in the long-dormant mystery was revived on the 17th, when the Science Search Project (SSP), a high-tech salvage team, announced they had found the wreckage of five planes 10 miles (16km) off the Florida coast. Two weeks later, SSP declared that, "despite the coincidences" they "had not found Flight 19 at all" but the remains of a floating target range last used in 1945. **FT58:12-13**

MAY 2001

A 100-ton rock that was being transported from the Indian state of Karnataka to a temple in neighbouring Tamil Nadu became stuck in Theranya, a small village, after it fell off its 96-wheel transporter. It was destined to be carved into a head for a giant statue of the monkey god Hanuman, hero of the *Ramayana* epic. Refused permission to move the rock on the national highways, its owner resorted to crawling down poor country roads at three miles (5km) a day, and houses had to be demolished to allow it to creep past. Now, the villagers of Theranya have claimed this unexpected providence, adorning the huge block with red paste, flowers and lamps, and setting up souvenir stalls. **FT149:8**

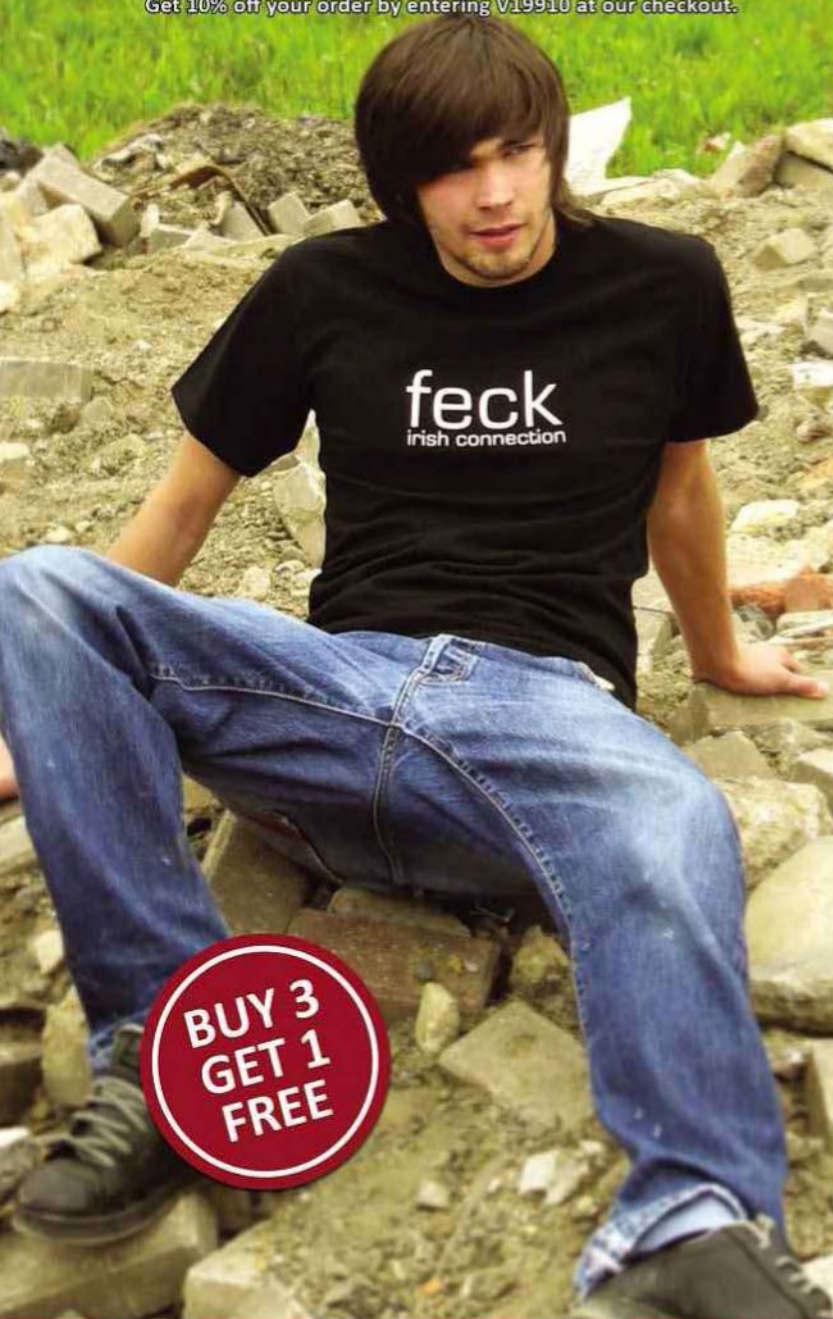
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E	SOLEMN NIGHTS	TR302237	XL L M S	LATIN BOATNECK	£17.99	L	LITTLE ROCKER	TR304520	M S XS	BABYGROW	£9.99
F	STONE COLD	DT197700	XXL XL L M	LONGSLEEVE	£13.99	M	GAME OVER	TR260964	35CM DIA	GLOW IN DARK CLOCK	£19.99
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