



## BAD MOON OVER **BARNSELY**

THE YORKSHIRE  
**WEREWOLF** HUNTER

THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT! POSSESSION AND DEMONIC MURDERS  
A TRIP IN BERLIN WHEN ALDOUS HUXLEY MET ALEISTER CROWLEY  
RULES OF ATTRACTION DOES COVID MAKE YOU MAGNETIC?

BIRDS AREN'T REAL • ELEPHANT TREK • SEVENOAKS JACKAL • DRUG-CRAZED FISH

THE  
WORLD'S  
WEIRDEST  
NEWS

THE WORLD OF

STRANGE PHENOMENA

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# ForteanTimes

FT409 SEPTEMBER 2021  
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## “THE STRANGEST EXPERIMENT OF OUR TIME”

HOW A 1930s NEW  
YORK CULT RAISED  
A CHILD TO LIVE  
FOREVER...

## BEYOND BLUE BOOK

THE PENTAGON UFO  
REPORT IN CONTEXT

## AVIAN ART ENIGMA

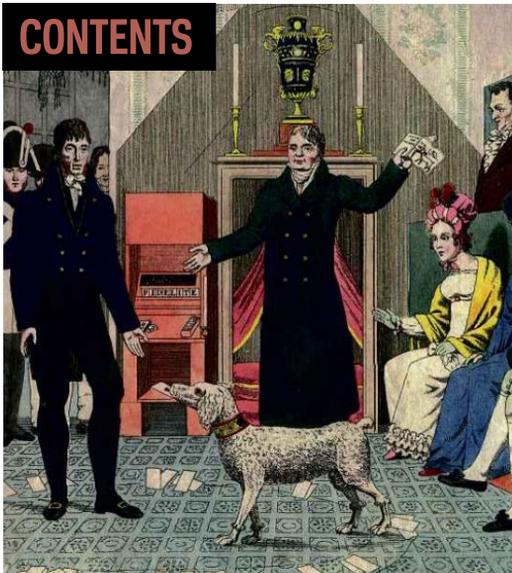
IDENTIFYING  
GAUGUIN'S  
MYSTERY BIRDS



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**FORTEAN TIMES 409**  
**Why fortean ?**  
 Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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# EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESCLOUIS

## ONE BORN EVERY MINUTE



**WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BABY JEAN?**

In this issue's cover feature (p34), Brian J Robb tells one of the strangest stories to come out of America in the first half of the 20th century. The tale of how a group of wealthy New Yorkers were suckered by a smooth-talking conman into bankrolling an experiment to raise an "immortal baby" may be largely forgotten, and is extremely strange, but arguably it fits into a long American tradition where supposedly progressive experiments in alternative living shade into hucksterism, snake oil and confidence tricks. The saga of James Schaffer, the Master Metaphysicians and "Baby Jean" – the little girl taken from "indigent parents" to be reared in a luxurious mansion on a strictly vegetarian "eternity diet" – reads like something Sinclair Lewis or even Scott Fitzgerald might have come up with as the subject for a novel; but the strangely uncritical newspaper and magazine articles of the time attest to the truth of this bizarre scheme. These days, alarm bells would undoubtedly start ringing if a secret fraternity of rich society types – the men calling themselves "Storks" and wearing "diaper pins" in their lapels – decided to take an infant from its mother and attempt to transform it into an "immortal" child; in the late 1930s, the Master Metaphysicians seem to have been viewed as just another bunch of harmless eccentrics, the latest in a long line of self-helpers, crank dieters and fitness fanatics.

**ERRATA**

**FT405:56:** Dr Paul Stott wrote in with a correction to Cathi Unsworth's "On the Trail of Jack the Stripper" article. "She refers to tensions in the 1950s involving immigrants and 'Oswald Mosley's British Unionist Party'. Mosley's party at the time was actually called the 'Union Movement'. I think the author has made a conflation of the Union Movement with his pre-war party, the British Union of Fascists."

**FT406:59:** We apologise to Peter McCue for an error in his Forum article "Misleading Obfuscation" in which we introduced some misleading obfuscation of our own. The caption for the photo at the top right of the page is given, incorrectly, as "Newton of Falkirk in Fife." The location in question should have been "Newton of Falkland".

**NEW ADDRESS FOR FT NEWS CLIPPINGS**

Please note that we now have a new address to which you should send your clippings. The old PO Box is now defunct, so email your stories to [news@forteanimes.com](mailto:news@forteanimes.com) and address your envelopes to:

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JAMIE MOLLART

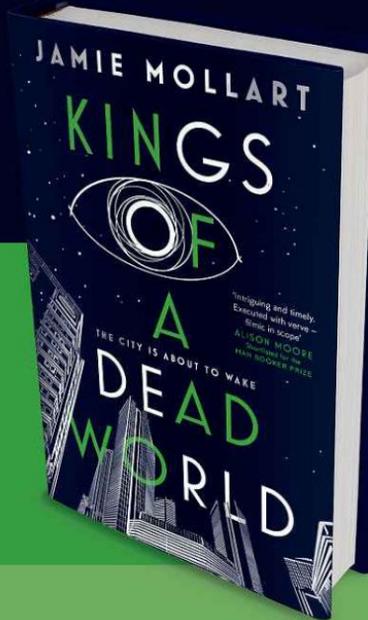
# KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD

THE EARTH'S RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING. THE SOLUTION IS THE SLEEP.

INSIDE A HIBERNATING CITY, BEN STRUGGLES WITH HIS LIMITED WAKING TIME AND THE DISEASE STEALING HIS WIFE FROM HIM. WATCHING OVER THE SLEEPERS, LONELY PERUZZI CRAVES THE FAMILY HE NEVER KNEW.

EVERYWHERE, DISSATISFACTION IS GROWING.

THE CITY IS ABOUT TO WAKE.



'THIS IS A FRIGHTENING, THOUGHTFUL VISION EXPLORING WHERE POWER LIES WHEN EVEN THE ACT OF BEING AWAKE IS REVOLUTIONARY'.

**ALIYA WHITELEY**, SHORTLISTED FOR THE ARTHUR C. CLARKE AWARD

'I WOULD LIKE TO SEE *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* MADE INTO A "CLI-FI" FILM, MARKETED AS BOTH A CAUTIONARY TALE AND SATIRE'.

**JULIET BLAXLAND**, SHORTLISTED FOR THE WAINWRIGHT PRIZE

'A HAUNTING VISION OF THE NEAR-FUTURE WITH EXPERT WORLD-BUILDING AND RICH COMPLEX CHARACTERS, *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* KEPT ME GRIPPED FROM BEGINNING TO END'.

**TEMI OH**, WINNER OF THE ALEX AWARD

'MOLLART'S INTRIGUING AND TIMELY PREMISE IS EXECUTED WITH VERVE - *KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* IS FILMIC IN ITS SCOPE'.

**ALISON MOORE**, SHORTLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE

'*KINGS OF A DEAD WORLD* INTRIGUED ME WITH ITS TITLE AND HAD ME ON PAGE ONE. MOLLART'S DYSTOPIAN VISION IS AS DISTURBING AS IT IS BRILLIANT'.

**GILES KRISTIAN**, SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF LANCELOT

AVAILABLE NOW

ON AMAZON, WATERSTONES AND ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS



A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

# STRANGE DAYS

## ELEPHANT ODYSSEY

Chinese herd's 500-kilometre trek wreaks havoc and captivates country

On 15 March 2020 a group of 16 Asian elephants set out from their nature reserve in the mountainous Xishiangbanna region in China's southwest, near the border with Burma and Laos, heading northwards in the direction of Pu'er City, a major urban area. While it is not unusual for elephants to range far and wide in search of food and water, this group's trek has taken them further than most. By December, they were still heading north, reaching Mojiang County, where they discovered some fermented grain that resulted in two elephants getting so drunk they dropped out of the trek; but by then their numbers had been swelled by a baby born on the way.

The remaining 15 headed on into the heart of Yuxi City in Yunnan, where they roamed the streets, turned over bins, ate plants in parks and even paused to drink from a tap in someone's yard that they manage to turn on. It was also reported that a retirement home resident had to hide under his bed while trunks reached in through his window to probe for food. By then, the herd was estimated to have caused more than £1million worth of damage, including eating 60 hectares of crops, squashing chickens, and forcing thousands of people to temporarily flee their homes. They then headed straight for Kunming, population 6.6 million, resulting in a team of 400 people being deployed to put out 18 tons of corn, pineapples and other food to distract the elephants. In early June 2021 they were north of Kunming, where a drone took a photo of



TOP: Elephants on parade: the herd move through a village near Kunming on 8 June. ABOVE: The elephants snuggle together while taking a break from trekking.

*They roamed the streets, turned over bins and ate plants in parks*

the elephants sleeping on their sides nestled up to each other, and this brought the herd to international attention. By this time, they had migrated over 500km (310 miles). However, here the relentless northward advance that had earned them the official title of "Northbound Wild

Elephant Herd" faltered and the beasts turned south again, being spotted in Shijie township, back near Yuxi, southwest of Kunming. By then, one of the males had broken away from the herd and set out on his own, prompting authorities to round him up and return him to the original nature reserve; they are also hoping that this change of direction will enable the rest of the elephants to be led back home as well, but their journey is still the longest ever recorded for any Asian elephant herd.

As elephants are a protected species in China, considerable effort has been put into ensuring the herd's safety. A team of eight conservation officers has been monitoring them full-time; and, as the herd travelled, they have been followed by hundreds of police officers, 60 emergency vehicles and a drone swarm, diverting the herd where possible to try to avoid clashes with humans. As to why the elephants embarked on such an epic journey, scientists are divided. Some attribute it to a lack of food in their original home, while others suggest that it is the result of having an inexperienced leader who lacks the ability to turn the group round; it has even been suggested that the Earth's magnetic field might be responsible. The journey has made the elephants massive stars on TV and social media and countless videos of them have been posted on Douyin, the Chinese TikTok, and other platforms, striking a chord with China's slacker millennials following the "lying flat" philosophy. "I don't want to work," one posted, "I just want to watch all the 15 elephants content". *BBC News*, 3 June; *New York Times*, 8+29 June; *Guardian*, 8 June; *Times*, 9 June; *D.Mail*, 10 Jun; *npr.org*, 12 June 2012.

VOG / VOG VIA GETTY IMAGES



## PANDEMIC POWERS

Can catching Covid-19 make you magnetic?

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## WINGS OVER THE WORLD

The mysteries of bird and insect migration

PAGE 16



## PIONEERING YETI HUNTER

Marie-Jeanne Koffmann remembered

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# NESSIE NOT A DICK

Comedian resurrects the 2005 "sea monsters are whale penises" theory



ABOVE LEFT: The penis of a grey whale breaks the water. ABOVE RIGHT: The iconic "Surgeon's Photo" of the Loch Ness Monster.

CHICO SANCHEZ / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A Twitter thread by comedian James Felton suggesting that the Loch Ness Monster was actually a whale penis caused a significant flurry of media interest during May, with many of the UK's tabloid papers running the story. The comment was prompted by a paper published in 2005 in the *Archives of Natural History* by cetacean researcher (and sometime FT contributor) Charles Paxton and colleagues that concluded that many classic sea monster sightings were most likely of erect whale penises (see FT200:16).

When mating, male whales often break the surface with their phalluses which are long and sinuous and do indeed look a lot like drawings and descriptions of sea monsters from the past. Paxton's paper, however, makes no mention of Loch Ness. Felton's tweet explicitly makes the connection though, pairing an image of a whale penis with the famed "Surgeon's Photo" picture of the Loch Ness Monster and remarking on the similarity. As might be expected, the tabloids had a field day with the story, but

monster researchers reacted with scepticism, pointing out that while the theory might work for sea monsters, it would be almost impossible for a whale to get into the loch and that sightings occur all year round, not just in whale mating season. Further complicating the matter is the fact that the 1934 Surgeon's Photo is known to be a hoax cooked up by the photographer Robert Kenneth Wilson and two friends, Christian Spurling and Marmaduke Wetherall, and shows an 18-inch clay model mounted on a toy submarine, not a monster.

2021 has been a good year for Loch Ness Monster sightings so far, paradoxically largely due to the lockdown preventing people from leaving their homes. Up to June, seven sightings had been reported to the Official Loch Ness Monster Sightings Register (<http://www.lochnesssightings.com/index.asp?pageid=717286>), all but one of which had been made via the 24-hour Loch

Ness webcam, which has many dedicated watchers viewing it from home in the hope of a sighting.

Three sightings were made by Eoin O'Fagan and two by Kalynn Wangle in this way, all involving anomalous black shapes on the Loch in the absence of boat traffic, while Roslyn Casey spotted a hump-like shape on the webcam. Photos and video captures of their sightings are on the Register site.

The first actual physical sighting of the year was on 2 June when a young man visiting from Cambridge saw an unidentified creature close to the castle in Urquhart Bay. The sighting lasted two seconds and took place on a sunny day with excellent visibility. The witness told the Register that he saw a hump come up, going against the waves; it looked like a turtle's back, black in colour with a green tinge to it. *Sun*, 24 Mar 2021; *Daily Star*, 23 May 2021; *Snopes.com* 27 Apr 2021.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### MYSTERY TREE BEAST TURNS OUT TO BE CROISSANT

BBC News, 15 April 2021.

### Rollers star Les 'struggled with demons'

D.Express, 26 April 2021.

### PUTTING MAKEUP ON SPIDERS DOES NOT CHANGE THEIR CHANCES OF BEING EATEN BY A PREDATOR

physorg, 23 June 2021.

### Saints allegedly involved in Catholic abuse scandal

Morning Star, 25 Jan 2020.

### APPEAL AFTER SUSPECT FLEAS ATTEMPTED BURGLARY IN COLCHESTER

Essex County Standard, 27 June 2021



## THE SUPERNATURAL IN AMERICAN ART

*Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art* is the first major exhibition to examine the relationship between American artists and the supernatural in all its forms. From the Salem Witch Trials to the 1848 spirit rappings reported by the Fox sisters, and from William Mumler's spirit photographs to personal and official government reports of UFOs, American culture is filled with accounts of anomalous experiences and strange



visitations. Featuring artists from James McNeill Whistler and Kerry James Marshall to artist/mediums who made images with spirits during séances, the exhibition (and accompanying catalogue) covers more than 200 years of American art's encounters with the weird.

*Supernatural America: The Paranormal in American Art*, edited by Robert Cozzolino, is published by the University of Chicago Press, price \$50/£40, ISBN 9780226786827.

The exhibition is at the Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, Ohio, until 5 September, before travelling to the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, from 7 October to 2 January 2022. Finally, it will appear at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, Minnesota, from 19 February to 15 May 2022.

### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

John Quidor, *The Headless Horseman Pursuing Ichabod Crane*, 1858, oil on canvas. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC.

Renée Stout, *The Rootworker's Worktable* (detail), 2011. Karen and Robert Duncan Collection, Lincoln, NE.

Macena Barton, *Untitled (Flying Saucers with Snakes)*, 1961, oil on canvas. M Christine Schwartz Collection.

Chholing Taha, *Healing: nanätawihawin*, 2017, acrylic on paper. Courtesy of the artist.

*Male sitter with spirits and automatic writing*, ca. 1875, albumen silver print. Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections.



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**IMPORTANT ROOTS:**

- JOHN THE CONQUEROR, All Purpose
- LUCKY HAND (MAMA-BILLING HAND)
- LITTLE JOHN CHEW
- OBISID ROOT (AMA-LOVE ROOT) QUEEN
- ELIZABETH ROOT (S)

**MEMORABLE TO GATHER:**

- GAMING - RED & WHITE CLAY
- BLOOD ROOT - WADSWORTH
- GOLDEN SEAL - FER
- BASIL - VIOLET LEAF
- ROSEMARY - SCULL
- SASSAFRASS - MA

**RESINO CLEAR:**

- LEGBA
- OGUN
- OGUN
- YEMOJA
- AGUIE
- CHANGING

**THE PROPERTIES OF HIGH JOHN THE CONQUEROR ROOT**

- book for
- mallo
- HEART
- RUB
- WITHOIL AND
- CRACK FOR TROT
- CASKET TO PLAY
- THE LOTTERY

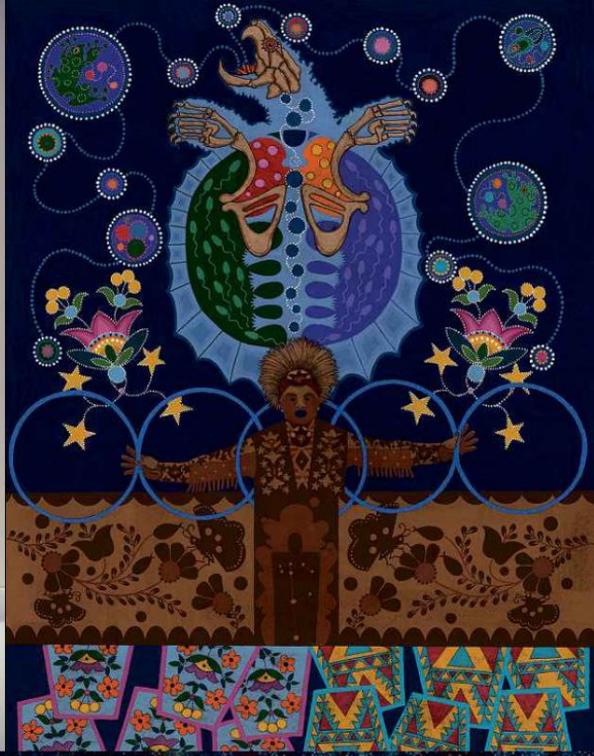
**SIX THINGS I'LL NEED FOR THE SEDUCTION:**

- ADAM'S EYE ROOTS
- FINGER GRASS
- LADY'S SUTTER
- SAFFRON
- BLACK EASY
- ORA & PANTHER

**NOT STERLING ROCHAMBEAU:**

- BLUESKY
- GRAYE
- ORANGE
- YELLOW
- WINDY
- WINDY
- WINDY

the number of love.



## SIDELINES...

### DRUG-CRAZED FISH...

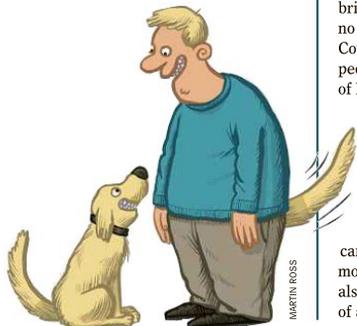
Ecologists from the Czech University of Life Sciences tested brown trout with water containing the same levels of methamphetamine found in many rivers; drugs excreted by users are not removed from sewage by water treatment plants. They found that, given the choice between drug contaminated water and clean water, the fish would always go for the water containing meth, suggesting they were becoming addicted. There is a concern that this will disrupt river ecology, with trout congregating round sewer outfalls to get their hit. *BoingBoing.net*, 7 July 2021.

### ...AND CRAYFISH

It seems water treatment plants don't remove antidepressants from the water either. Scientists at the University of Florida have found that when exposed to levels of selective serotonin uptake inhibitor antidepressants found in rivers, crayfish came out of hiding more quickly and spent more time foraging. This also resulted in more algae in the water as it increased the amount of sediment the crayfish stirred up. *Guardian*, 16 June 2021.

### HUMAN TAILS

A few humans are born with tails, but for people who weren't and feel the lack, The Tail Company is coming to the rescue. They are running a Kickstarter for a product called mITail, a Bluetooth connected animatronic tail that can be controlled by a phone app allowing the wearer to express emotions such as "frustrated and tense" or "calm and relaxed". The tail can also do the Short Wag, the Happy Wag and the Erect Tremble. *Nerdist*, 13 May 2021.



MARTIN ROSS

## COVID CORNER | Magnetic people, Kim Jong-un's pigeon panic and Canada's scary Covid Queen



HOUKOKUJI AZUJI BETSUIN

ABOVE: A 57m (187ft) tall statue of the Buddhist goddess of mercy in Aizuwakamatsu, Japan, in the process of being masked.

### STATUE MASKS UP

In Aizuwakamatsu in central Japan, a 57m (187ft) statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, has been given a giant face covering. Temple managers intend to keep the statue masked until the pandemic is brought under control. *BBC News*, 17 Jun 2021.

### STOP THE PIGEON!

Officially, North Korea claims to have had no cases of Covid at all, but that has not stopped Kim Jong-un from announcing extreme measures to keep the disease from spreading. Fearing that pigeons flying in from neighbouring China could be bringing in the virus (despite no evidence that birds spread Covid), he has decreed that people in the border districts of Hyesan and Sinuiju should shoot every pigeon they see, prompting international media to compare his efforts to the 1970s Dastardly and Muttley cartoons, which revolved around the villains' attempts to stop a carrier pigeon. With slightly more justification, Kim has also ordered the elimination of all cats – they have been

shown to be able to catch the virus, but not to transmit it to humans. Allegedly a family in Hyesan have been detained in an isolation camp for telling the authorities their cat had died while secretly keeping it alive. *Sun*, 29 May 2021.

### DOG DETECTORS

It has long been known that animals can detect some diseases in humans through smell (see FT393:8-9) and recent research has shown that trained dogs are more effective than the widely used lateral flow tests at detecting Covid infection, even in people showing no symptoms. Researchers at the University of Durham and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine found that under experimental conditions dogs could detect Covid in body odour samples from patients' clothing with 94 per cent accuracy after eight weeks of training and were able to do so very quickly. Lateral flow tests are, at best, 77 per cent accurate, while the most accurate lab tests using PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) are 98 per cent accurate. The success of the dogs raises the possibility of using them at airports and other public

buildings to rapidly screen large numbers of people, identifying likely infections which could then be confirmed with PCR. Scientists are now moving on to the next phase of the trials which will see if the dogs can reach the same level of success in real-world situations. *D.Mail*, 24 May 2021.

### ANAL INNOVATION

In Japan, researcher Takanori Takebe has come up with a way to get oxygen to Covid patients with breathing difficulties by oxygenating them anally, allowing the gas to diffuse into the blood through the intestinal lining. Her research showed that mice being infused with oxygen anally survived for up to 50 minutes in low oxygen environments and that while that particular method would not be possible for humans, using oxygen-rich liquids known as oxygenated perfluorocarbons anally would be feasible. *D.Mirror*, 15 Apr 2021.

### COVID QUEEN OF CANADA

A woman who has announced that she is in fact the Queen of Canada has rapidly gained an active following of several thousand in Qanon-linked circles



there, some of whom have taken to the streets to harass health workers and others involved in the fight against Covid.

Romana Didulo, a British Columbia woman in her 50s, is the self-proclaimed leader of the Canada1st Party. She started posting videos about her policies in late 2020, but did not get much traction until she crafted her rhetoric to more closely match Qanon tropes. After that, she was promoted by well-known Qanon figures Charlie Ward and Whiplash347, gaining 20,000 followers on Telegram. In February, she distributed a video saying: "Hello, Canada, I'm Ramona Didulo. I'm the founder and leader of Canada1st. As of February this year, 2021, I am the head of state and commander in chief of Canada, the Republic. The people who appointed me are the white hats and the US military, together with the global allied troops and their governments – the same group of people who have helped President Trump." In the video, featuring her sitting on an old sofa in front of a blank beige wall, she goes on to explain that she is also the "Queen of Canada, replacing Queen Elizabeth II of England who has now been executed for crimes against humanity." Followers feel this is corroborated by "Romana Didulo" being an anagram of "I Am Our Donald."

Having claimed leadership of the country, she began using her position to fight the vaccine rollout in Canada, rousing her followers to file hundreds of "cease-and-desist" notices demanding that government,

police and businesses stop all anti-Covid measures. Supporters have formed local groups that email out their demands, send them through the post, or hand them out at shops, schools and police stations.

In her videos Didulo has backed up the cease-and-desist orders with threats to execute anyone who ignores them, saying, "Let's keep this simple – death is the penalty for crimes against humanity," and threatening the health care workers and politicians behind the vaccination rollout. One of her videos makes her intention clear: "At the firing squad, the military firing squad, you will receive not one, but two bullets on your forehead for each child that you have harmed as a result of injecting this experimental vaccine." Her followers believe she is carrying out executions in secret. Didulo does not yet seem to have attracted police attention for issuing such threats of violence. *Vice*, 17 June 2021.

## MAGNETIC VIRUS

Videos of people demonstrating how they can now stick magnets to their arms after having a Covid vaccine have been doing the rounds on social media (hashtag #magnetchallenge), with the claim that this demonstrates that the vaccines contain tracking microchips. As has been demonstrated in some previous cases of claimed "magnetic people", it is perfectly possible to stick quite substantial items to your body with sweat or adhesive, so it is unlikely to be the result of any vaccination, particularly as: a) it would be

difficult to fit a functioning microchip transmitter into the volume of vaccine that is routinely administered, and b) microchips do not contain magnetic components anyway.

In a further mutation of this meme, antivaxxer Sherri Tenpenny explained in evidence to the Ohio House Health Committee that Covid vaccines make you magnetic so that you can stick cutlery to your head, saying: "I'm sure you've seen the pictures all over the Internet of people who have had these shots and now they're magnetised. They can put a key on their forehead. It sticks. They can put spoons and forks all over them and they can stick... people have long suspected that there's been some sort of a yet to be defined interface between what's being injected in these shots and all of the 5G towers." *Forbes.com* 18 May; *BBC News*, 22 May; *boingboing.net*, 9 June 2021.

## FURTHER ZOOM DISASTER

After the zoom faux pas in which he accidentally undressed in front of colleagues (FT407:9), one would have thought that Canadian MP William Amos would have learned to be more careful on video calls. However, he followed up his previous slip by being caught on camera urinating into a cup mid-meeting. He described this latest incident as "unacceptable" but "accidental" and has said he will step away from some of his duties temporarily to "seek assistance", although without saying what this would involve or exactly what the assistance is for. *BBC News*, 28 May 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### TELEPORTED?

Firefighters in Santa Ana, California, had to work for more than two hours to free a naked woman stuck upside down between two buildings, a car body shop and an audio store, in a space just eight inches (20cm) wide, eventually extracting her by cutting through a concrete wall. As to how she managed to end up there or why she was nude and upside down, Orange County Fire Authority Captain Thanh Nguyen said: "That's a mystery to all of us here right now." *BoingBoing.net*, 14 July 2021.

### I'LL HAVE SAUCE WITH THAT

Staff at Tiggywinkles Wildlife Hospital in Aylesbury were called out to rescue an exotic-looking bright orange bird from the side of the A41. On washing it, they realised it was actually just a seagull covered in turmeric and curry sauce. The bird, dubbed "Vinny" (after vindaloo), was otherwise unharmed and was released after his bath. In 2016, in Wales, another gull had to be rescued after it fell into a vat of chicken tikka masala. *Metro*, 8 July 2019.

### BALD CHEEK

Two men were arrested at Chennai airport in southern India after customs officers became suspicious of their absurdly ill-fitting toupees. Under these, Magroob Akbarali and Zubair Husain, returning from Dubai, were found to have bags of gold paste weighing 698g (1.5lb) glued to their heads. They had more gold hidden in their socks and what reports describe as "elsewhere". The haul was worth £278,000 in all. *D.Mail*, 24 Mar 2021.

### WHOOOPS

The town of Brooksville, Florida, accidentally sold businessman Bobby Read the town water tower for \$55,000 after it was mistakenly included with a parcel of land he was buying to build a personal training studio. Read only discovered the mistake after the transaction, that included the tower and several thousand gallons of water, had been completed. "I don't know where the blame falls here," said a confused city council member. *eu.usatoday.com*, 16 June; *D.Mirror*, 19 June, 2021.



ABOVE LEFT: Arvind Sonar claims to have turned magnetic since his Covid jab. ABOVE RIGHT: 'Queen of Canada', Romana Didulo.





## SIDELINES...

### STUDENT SHARK

Shark researchers in Australia were baffled when the tag they were using to track a 1.95m (6ft) bull shark showed it was roaming the grounds of the University of Wollagong, even visiting one of the dorm rooms. Fish Thinkers Research, the organisation tracking the animal, traced it to a student who had picked it up on the beach after it had parted company with its shark but wasn't sure what to do with it, so kept carrying it around. *www.news.com.au, 8 May 2021.*

### COLLARED

Equally puzzled was cat owner Andy Kindell who was trying to find the £130 GPS tracking device lost from his cat's collar. Visiting locations shown on the tracker app, Andy could find nothing but kept following the trace as it zig-zagged invisibly across the local area. He eventually twigged the tracker was underground, having probably been swallowed by a rat, as the tracks on the map were following the sewers. *Sun, 21 Mar 2021.*

### GONE ASHTRAY

A passer-by in Ketelbey Rise, Basingstoke, was surprised to find an abandoned cremation urn containing ashes sitting on the pavement and handed it in to police. On investigation, they found the ashes were of those of someone named Paul Ash. They are trying to find a family member to return them to. *D.Mirror, 19 June 2021.*

### CHEESY DOWNFALL

Carl Stewart, 39, who used an encrypted messaging service to arrange drug deals under the pseudonym "Toffeeforce", also posted a message about his love of stilton with a close-up of his hand holding a chunk of the cheese. Police, who had cracked the encryption, identified Stewart from his fingerprints in the picture and arrested him. *BBC News, 25 May 2021.*



MARTIN ROSS

## SUPER CENTENARIANS | Celebrating the oldest of the old

In May, the world's oldest man, Bob Weighton from Alton in Hampshire, died in his sleep at the age of 112. He had briefly held the record after the death in February of Chitetsu Watanabe from Niigata, Japan, who was also 112. Weighton was born in Hull on 29 March 1908, coincidentally the same day as Britain's oldest woman, Joan Hocquard, who lives in Poole, Dorset. Weighton's successor was confirmed by Guinness in June as 112-year-old Emilio Flores Marquez of Puerto Rico, who puts his longevity down to an abundance of love and living life without anger. <i>26 Feb; Times, 20 May; upi.com, 30 June 2021.</i>

The oldest person currently living is Kane Tanaka from Fukuoka, Japan, who is 118. The world's second oldest person is Lucile Randon, a French nun known as Sister Andre, who survived a coronavirus infection to celebrate her 117th birthday on 11 February. The Bishop of Toulon celebrated a Mass in her honour and the care home where she is a resident put on a sumptuous birthday feast for her. The menu included foie gras, capon with mushrooms and baked Alaska, Sister Andre's favourite dessert. It was washed down with red wine, one of the things to which Sister Andre credits her longevity, and champagne. <i>12 Feb 2021.</i>

Robert Marchand, a French cyclist who held several world records for centenarians, died aged 109 in May. He held the world record for cycling 100km (62 miles) in the 100-105 and the over 105 categories and the world record for the distance cycled in one hour in both categories. He won the 100km record in 2012, completing 300 laps of the Lyon velodrome in four hours, 17 minutes and 27 seconds at an average speed of 23.305 km/h (14.481 mph). His friend Gerard Mistler described him as "an example



LEFT: Robert Marchand, who pedalled his way into the record books.

father's longevity down to his simple outback lifestyle, but Kruger himself has other ideas. "Chicken brains. You know, chickens have a head. And in there, there's a brain. And they are delicious little things," said Mr Kruger. "There's only one little bite." *Irish Examiner, 17 May 2021.*

In Kashmir, a door-to-door Covid vaccination programme turned up

a woman who appears to be 124. When asked about her age, Rehtee Begum was vague, only able to say she was more than 100, but an entry for her on her son's ration card listed her as 124. If true, Begum would not only be the oldest living person, but the oldest person known to have lived, a record currently held by Jeanne Calment, who died at 122 years and 164 days. Begum does not have any additional documentation proving her age, so it is unlikely that she will be accepted by Guinness as a record holder. *D.Mirror, 5 June; ndtv.com 2 June 2021.*

*"In there, there's a brain. And they are delicious little things."*

for humanity who gives people hope." *road.cc, 23 May 2021.*

Dexter Kruger from Queensland, Australia, who is 111 and a retired cattle rancher, is the oldest living Australian man. His 74-year-old son Greg puts his



The world's oldest known bird, a 70-year-old Laysan albatross known as Wisdom, hatched a chick on 1 May 2021 in the Midway Atoll national wildlife refuge, three tiny islands 1,000 miles north of Hawaii. Wisdom has produced more than 30 offspring during her long life after first being ringed as a young bird in 1956. She has outlived several partners, as well as Chandler Robbins, the ornithologist who first ringed her, and has survived tsunamis and extreme weather conditions. Researchers are not sure whether Wisdom's longevity is exceptional or whether they simply don't have enough data about the lifespan of albatrosses. <i>6 Mar 2021.</i>

JOEL SAGET / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

JON BRACK / FREEDOM OF MIDWAY ATOLL NWR



## LUCKY ESCAPES | Two terrifying whale encounters, plus a plummeting paratrooper

## SIDELINES...

### POSSESSED TREES

Police in Dickson City, Pennsylvania, were called to a branch of Home Depot after staff reported an exorcism taking place in the store. On arrival they found two men dressed in black "chanting and moaning" in the lumber aisle, apparently in an attempt to exorcise dead trees, and escorted them out of the building for disorderly behaviour. *BoingBoing.net*, 24 June; *globalnews.ca*, 25 June 2021.

### MYSTERY CIRCLE

Cresting the brow of a hill near Rottingdean, Sussex, cyclist Christopher Hogg, 47, saw a vast, perfect circle shape on the side of a hill half a mile away. "It was saucer-shaped, like an alien ship. It was beautiful," he said. "I cycled closer and then realised the circle was sheep." Hogg was unnerved by their behaviour. "The sheep are usually noisy, but that day they were very still and calm. It was like they were in a trance... very eerie." *D.Star*, 11 April 2021.

### UNFORTUNATE ALGORITHM

Calls have been made for Google to be censored after the site's advertising algorithm responded to searches for terms relating to suicide by offering adverts for discounted rope. This happened multiple times both on the main site and on YouTube, which Google also owns. *S.Times*, 4 April 2021.

### DESPERATE

Lonnie J Hutton, 49, was arrested in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, after walking into a bar, dropping his trousers and attempting to have sex with a cash machine. Bar staff escorted Hutton outside, where he once again dropped his trousers and this time attempted intercourse with a wooden picnic table. The arresting officer said Hutton appeared intoxicated and smelled of alcohol. *eu.tennessean.com*, 3 July 2021.

### NAZISH\*†

When police were called to Kid Rock's Honky Tonk Rock 'n' Roll Steakhouse in Nashville, Tennessee, to deal with a drunk, they arrested Nicholas Newhart, 39. Newhart, who has a confederate flag tattooed on the back of his head and a neo-Nazi symbol on his forehead, responded by removing a full colostomy bag from his pants and swinging it at officers, hitting two of them with faeces. *nzherald.co.nz*, 5 May 2021.



ABOVE LEFT: Lobster fisherman Michael Packard recovering in hospital. ABOVE RIGHT: The para who landed in a California kitchen.

### MODERN-DAY JONAH

Michael Packard, a lobster fisher from Provincetown, Massachusetts, got a good deal more than he bargained for when he jumped off his boat, the *Ja'n J*, for a routine dive to check lobster pots in June. At a depth of about 45ft (14m), Packard, 56, said he "felt this huge bump and everything went dark." Initially he thought he had been attacked by a great white shark, but he could feel no teeth, at which point he realised, "Oh my God, I'm in a whale's mouth and he's trying to swallow me. This is it; I'm going to die. Then all of a sudden he went up to the surface and just erupted and started shaking his head." Packard said: "I just got thrown in the air and landed in the water. I was free and I just floated there. I couldn't believe... I'm here to tell it." Packard's shipmate, Josiah Mayo, saw the whale spit him out, hauled him back onto the boat and took him to Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis, where he was treated for a dislocated knee and soft tissue damage.

Whale expert Peter Corkerton of the New England Aquarium said that humpback whales are "gulp feeders [which] slurp up as much as they can and then swallow it down." He believes the whale had no intention of swallowing Packard and just scooped him up by accident with a mouthful of fish, and that humans actually being swallowed by whales is something that "just never happens". He also says there is evidence that humpbacks can be altruistic towards humans,

which would explain why the whale swam to the surface before spitting Packard out. Wildlife photographer Rainer Schimpf, who was scooped up by a humpback whale off Port Elizabeth in South Africa in 2019, was also taken to the surface before the whale ejected him.

Not everyone was convinced by Packard's story; a doctor at Hyannis Hospital who was not involved in his treatment said that if Packard really had been swallowed by the whale and hurled toward the surface, he would have had more injuries, including hearing loss due to the rapid change in pressure: "He reportedly ascended from a 45-ft depth in 20 to 40 seconds and didn't have any evidence of barotrauma?" An anonymous fellow local lobster fisher was also sceptical, saying that in the 44 years he'd worked the area, "it's a first-ever that this would happen." *huffingtonpost.co.uk*, 11 June; *BBC News*, 12 June; *yahoo.com*, 13 Jun; *Jerusalem Post*, 13 June 2021.

### WHACKED BY A WHALE

An Australian teenager was fighting for his life after his encounter with a humpback whale off the coast of New South Wales. The 18-year-old was out fishing with another man when the humpback breached and crashed down onto their boat. The craft was extensively damaged but managed to limp back to land where paramedics were waiting for the teenager, who had suffered spinal injuries and a suspected fractured skull. John

Moore, a former charter boat operator, said: "Situations like this are very, very rare. Whales are incredibly intelligent and aware of the areas around them." *Times*, 9 June 2021.

### NEAR DEATH FROM ABOVE

A British paratrooper on an exercise with the US military in California escaped with minor injuries even though his parachute failed to open on a jump. The unnamed soldier was carrying out a High-Altitude Low Opening (HALO) jump, a technique used by special forces, near Camp Roberts in Atascadero, but lost control as he neared the ground. Local residents saw the parachutist spiralling in the air as he hurtled towards a house and crashed through the roof, smashing into the kitchen in a burst of insulation and roofing material. "Came through the roof, through the trusses and there's not that much damage in the house. It's amazing," said Linda Sallady, the homeowner's mother. "It's mostly the ceiling, the sheetrock. He missed the counters, appliances, everything." Photos of the scene taken by neighbours who rushed to the house showed a hole in the tiled roof of the home and a soldier in SAS uniform dazed amid the debris in the kitchen. Police said the SAS man was "conscious, but stunned, with complaints of pain but no visible serious injuries." He was taken to hospital for a check-up and treated for minor injuries. *guardian.co.uk*, 13 July; *Eve Standard*, 12 July, 2021.

## SIDELINES...

### WHALE JACKPOT

A group of fishers from Yemen, one of the world's poorest countries, found a dead sperm whale floating in the Gulf of Aden. On cutting it open, they found its stomach contained ambergris worth \$1.5m. Ambergris is made only by sperm whales, to protect their stomachs from the beaks of the squid they eat, and is prized by the perfume industry where it is used to stabilise scents. *BBC News, 1 Jun 2021.*

### COMPLETELY DENTAL

Back in 1992, someone was breaking into people's homes in poor areas of Munich to fix their teeth. He put them under anaesthetic before filling cavities and polishing teeth, and then leaving without stealing anything. By the time of the report, the rogue dentist had done an estimated £10,000 worth of work for free. *D.Mirror, D.Record, 19 Oct 1992.*

### LOST IN A LABYRINTH

Lyndsey Kennedy, 43, decided to explore a tunnel on 3 March while swimming in a Florida canal. Twenty days later, she was rescued from an 8ft (2.4m) storm drain under a sidewalk in Delray Beach after a pedestrian heard her cries. Too weak to stand, she had been lost underground in the sewer network. She was unhurt apart from minor cuts and bruises. *Metro, 26 Mar 2021.*

### DISAGREEABLE CLOTHING

In early May, Haywards Heath police were called out when a man was seen arguing with his jacket in the middle of the road. "No idea what the jacket had actually done, but the team managed to take the male home for his own safety," said Inspector Darren Taylor. *Mid Sussex Times, 12 May 2021.*



# AVIAN MYSTERIES | Racing pigeons vanish en masse... but are birds real?



**ABOVE:** The mass disappearance of racing pigeons on 19 June has left pigeon breeders baffled. **BELOW:** Perhaps the birds were really feathered drones controlled by the US Government, as the "Birds Aren't Real" conspiracy theory suggests.

### PIGEON PUZZLE

19 June 2021 has been described by racing pigeon breeders as "one of the very worst racing days in our history". Nearly 50 races were held across the UK that day, involving over 250,000 birds, but only about 10 per cent of them made it back to their lofts. Sometimes bad weather disrupts races and scatters birds, but 19 June was fine and clear. Initially, each race organiser believed it was just a problem with their particular event, but Welsh pigeon breeder Dene Simpson said: "When we looked on social media, we saw that lots of other federations around the UK had experienced something similar." Over the following days a few stragglers limped home, while other birds turned up as far afield as Holland and Majorca, but most seem to have vanished completely.

The problem was not confined to Britain: racers across Europe reported that their birds too had vanished in large numbers. Pigeon racers remain mystified as to the cause of this chaos, but as homing pigeons rely on the Earth's magnetic field for navigation, they suspect some kind of solar storm or other event that disrupted the magnetic field may have confused the birds and led them astray. Records of solar and geomagnetic activity for the day show that there were low levels of solar



activity and no disruptions to the Earth's magnetic field – so whatever it was wrecked the birds' navigation, it wasn't these. *Coasttocoastam.com, 29 June; spaceref.com, 20 June 2021*

Research on the proteins in birds' eyes has shown that they use the Earth's magnetic field to navigate by exploiting quantum physics. The research looked at a protein called Cryptochrome 4 (CRY4) which was known to play a role in birds' magnetic sense. Using CRY4 from the retinas of European robins, scientists showed that the protein was magnetically sensitive, with any blue light hitting it setting off a cascade of reactions that produce two lone electrons that act like magnets due to a quantum property of electrons known as "spin". These are then affected by the Earth's magnetic field. While the research identified the mechanism by which CRY4 can detect a magnetic field, it is not yet known how this is sensed by the bird. *Sciencenews.org, 28 June 2021.*

### BIRDS AREN'T REAL

A lot of this could be explained by the "Birds Aren't Real" conspiracy that contends that all birds in the United States have been killed and swapped with drones operated by the federal government, and that this has been going on since the 1950s. "I think the evidence is all around us, birds sit on power lines, we believe they're charging on power lines, we believe that bird poop on cars is liquid tracking apparatus," said movement leader Peter McIndoe. The organisation, which has been alerting the public at protests, social media, and on a SubReddit with nearly 400,000 members, is now taking a rally on the road round the US to get the message across, dubbing the secret "Poultrygate".

McIndoe started the movement when a student at the University of Memphis in Tennessee in 2017 by holding up a sign at the local Women's March reading, "Birds are a myth; they're an illusion; they're a lie. Wake up America! Wake up!" Pictures of this went viral and a movement was born.

The Audubon Society, the leading bird conservation organisation in the US, says that while the campaign is political satire to many of its followers, to others, it is "no more unbelievable than QAnon." *BoingBoing.net 25 June; thehill.com, 28 June 2021.*



# CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

## 262: KILROYUS WAS HERE

There are 11,000 or so graffiti on the walls of Pompeii – such scribblings were not, of course, unique to this town, and they are also a motif in some classical literary texts. They are collected in volume 4 of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Various websites provide selections in English. Greater abundance in Jack Lindsay's *The Writing on the Wall* (1960) and Matteo Della Corte's *Loves and Lovers in Ancient Pompeii* (tr. A. Van Buren, 1960). Best modern analysis by Kristina Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii* (2014). Robert Reisner's *Graffiti: Two Thousand Years of Wall Writing* (1971) entertainingly encapsulates their generic history.

The Pompeian scribblings are classifiable under various, largely distinct categories. They speak for themselves. On occasion, some brief scholia may help. One unsurprising feature is their frequent errors of grammar and spelling, naturally evoking the *Romani Eunt Domus* scene in which John Cleese corrects the errors in Graham Chapman's graffiti in *Life of Brian*.

Multifarious sexual matters come first, naturally. TRIGGER WARNING: this segment contains 'adult language and themes'. Another, transitional caveat. It is not always clear whether the rooms and buildings adorned with these graffiti are brothels or inns or private houses.

Heterosexual and homosexual activities run roughly 50-50. In both, there is an erotically charged 'Kilroy-Was-Here' atmosphere, an almost universal naming of participants, matter-of-fact anatomical observations, some ambiguous descriptions, and a deal of individual braggadocio: "I shagged the barmaid"; "I've fucked a lot of girls here"; "Staphylus was here with Quiaeta"; "Staphylus was here with Romula" – he evidently put it about a bit. "Here I penetrated her open buttocks, though should not be admitting this" – Martial (Epigrams, bk11 no105) begs his wife to allow him this as a special treat.

"I have buggered men"; "Secundus likes to bugger boys"; "Weep, girls. My prick no longer wants you. Now, it goes up men's bums" – Rufinus (*Greek Anthology*, bk5 no19) turned the other way. "Amplificatus, I know Icarus is buggering you. Salvius wrote this" – early case of 'outing'? "Hermeros screwed here with Phileterus and Caphisus" – a three-way male orgy, or with female partners?

But, there could be health problems. The following graffiti vividly highlights this

danger: "Chie, I hope your hæmorrhoids rub together so much that they hurt worse than ever before" – in Roman slang, piles were called figs, a complaint of adult passives much ridiculed by the likes of Martial.

"Restituta, take off your tunic, please, and show us your hairy privates"; "It is much better to fuck a hairy cunt than a smooth one; it both retains the warmth and stimulates the organ" – no vajazing here. The age-old debate between 'Brazilians' and a good 'minge-fringe' (I gather) continues.

"Floronius, privileged 7th Legionary, was here. Only six women showed up, too few for such a stallion"; "Celadius the Thracian gladiator is the delight of all the girls"; "Crescens the net-man [special style of gladiator] is the doctor who cures

the morning girls, the night girls and all the others" – I've more than a sneaking feeling these accolades were put up by the macho honourees themselves. There's also a gay one – "Let Damoetas surrender to me and he'll be happier than Pasiphæ" (sc. the Cretan queen who had herself done by a bull, thus producing the Minotaur.)

A shittier topic frequently crops up: "To the one defecating here, beware of the curse"; "Lesbianus, you defecate here and write 'Hello, Everyone'"; "Secundus defecated here, three times on one wall" – case of 'Roman tummy?'; "Apollinaris, doctor of emperor Titus, defecated well here" – a royal medico on the same level as a street yobbo.

How much did women feature in Roman rhyparography? – a topic lavishly explored by Sara Levin-Richardson, *Classical Journal* 108 (2013), 319-45. Thanks to Latin case-endings, there are several clear cases: "I was fucked here"; "I was ruined here"; "I, Felicia, fucked here"; "Serena hates Isidorus"; "Lucilia made a lot of money from her body" – there are many advertisements by prostitutes for their specialised services and the exact cost, such as: "Attice costs four sestertii"; "Glyko licks cunts for two asses" – also written up is a bar-cum-brothel operated by the bawd Asellina, whose girls included a multiracial crew: Palmyra the Oriental, Aglaë the Greek, Maria the Jewess, Zmyrina the Exotic.

Other graffiti are ambiguous, for example: "Midusa the cock-sucker"; "Amaryllis is the blow-job babe"; "Ionis sucked Philetus off here"; "Fortunata sucks".

Not just sex. A godly number disclose tenderness of spirit, affections, love required

or thwarted: "Successus the weaver loves Iris the barmaid, but she cares not for him, and the more he pleads the less she cares"; "Cruel Lalagus, why do you not love me"; "Let him perish who knows not love"; "Figurus loves Idaia"; "Marcus loves Spendusa"; "I wouldn't sell my husband for all the gold in the world"; "Vibius slept here alone, and missed his darling Urbana"; "May I die if God wishes me to live without you" – many more in this vein.

Election slogans are another common graffiti theme. There are about 2,500. For municipal ones only; nobody elected emperors or senators. Both individuals and 'special interest groups' put them up. Unlike modern ones, there is little in the way of 'negative campaigning'. Humour is welcomingly prominent – were there Roman Monser Raving Loonies?

"The late drinkers ask you to vote for Vatia"; "All the dead-beats support Vatia" – he sounds like a Roman Screaming Lord Sutch. "Isis worshippers support Sabinus"; "His anxious grandmother Tedia begs you to vote for Secundus"; "Aselina's girls are all for Lollius" – these are the prostitutes mentioned above – campaigner for sex workers?

Miscellaneous other messages abound, from commercial advertisements to personal utterances: "Cheap drink here" – detailed price list appended; "Damn you, landlord, selling us water, keeping the best stuff for yourself"; "Nuceria has better drink" – this neighbouring town is often mentioned. In AD 59 (Tacitus, *Ann.* bk14 ch17), many of its gladiator fans were killed by the home crowd in the first-ever recorded sports riot. "Sorry, mine host, we wet the bed, no chamber pot"; "Abascantius sells the best garum" – a common ad for this basic Roman fermented fish stock; "There'll be gladiators fighting on May 31. Sun awnings provided"

As said, many graffiti contain grammatical and spelling mistakes, thus offering some insight into local educational standards. By contrast, there are a fair number showing literary sophistication, quoting and/or parodying classic Roman poets.

Plutarch (*On Curiosity*, paras 520D-E) deprecated graffiti as "containing nothing useful or pleasing, all quite ridiculous".

He was wrong. They all add up to a panorama of clues that would enrich the still unwritten history of Roman emotions and popular morality.

One final graffiti concludes and sums up this survey:

"O, Wall, I'm amazed you haven't fallen down under the weight of all this rubbish."



## PAUL SIEVEKING unearths the latest finds: lost cities, phallic carvings and a very old butterfly

### SHIGIR IDOL GETS OLDER

A larchwood 'totem pole' found in a Siberian peat bog is even older than estimated in our earlier report [FT371:14]. It is by far the world's oldest surviving work of ritual art. Scattered among the geometric patterns (zigzags, chevrons, herringbones) carved into it are eight human faces, each with slashes for eyes. Svetlana Savchenko, the object's curator, speculates that the eight faces may well contain encrypted information about ancestor spirits, the boundary between earth and sky, or a creation myth.

The Shigir Idol, named for the bog near Kirovgrad in which it was found by gold miners in 1890, is presumed to have rested on a rock base for perhaps two or three decades before toppling into a long-gone palaeo-lake, where the peat's antimicrobial properties protected it like a time capsule. Now housed in a museum in the Ural Mountains, not far from the Siberian border, it was originally 17ft (5.3m) long, but parts went missing during the Soviet era. Now only 9ft (2.8m) remains along with sketches drawn by Vladimir Tolmachev in 1914.

Carbon dating in 1997 indicated it was 9,500 years old, but in 2014 a team led by Thomas Terberger, an archaeologist and head of research at the Department of Cultural Heritage of Lower Saxony, used accelerator mass spectrometry to push the date back to 11,600 BP, a time when Eurasia was still transitioning out of the last Ice Age. It was more than twice as old as the Egyptian pyramids and Stonehenge. Now a new study by the same researchers, reporting in *Quaternary International*, has pushed the date back a further 900 years.

Written with an eye toward disentangling Western science from colonialism, Dr Terberger's latest paper challenges the ethnocentric notion that pretty much everything, including symbolic expression and philosophical perceptions of the world, came to Europe by way of the sedentary farming communities in the Fertile Crescent 8,000 years ago. Although the Idol is unique, Dr Savchenko sees a resemblance to the stone sculptures of what has long been considered the world's oldest temple, Göbekli Tepe in southern Turkey, some 1,550 miles (2,500km) away [FT220:46-51, 289:23, 310:18]. The temple's stones were carved around 11,000 years BP, which



LEFT: One of the faces of the Shigir Idol.

BELOW LEFT: The small tortoiseshell butterfly found pressed in a 17th-century book. BOTTOM: The phallic millstone unearthed in Cambridgeshire.

makes them 1,500 years younger than the Idol. Both were the work of hunter-gatherers, before the advent of agriculture. *nytimes.com*, 22 Mar 2021.

### ANCIENT BUTTERFLY

A butterfly found pressed between the pages of *The Theatre of Insects* in the Jerwood Library of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, could be 387 years old. The college acquired the book in 1990 and said the butterfly's preservation could date back as far as 1634 when the book was published. *The Theatre of Insects*, also known as *Insectorum sive Minimorum Animalium Theatrum*, was the first book published in England to be exclusively about insects. The small tortoiseshell butterfly was found next to its accompanying printed image.

"There is a striking similarity between the woodcut and butterfly," said librarian Jenni Lecky-Thompson, who made the discovery. "It is relatively common to find botanical specimens inside old books, but unusual to find an insect specimen." *BBC News*, 28 Mar 2021.



### PHALLIC MILLSTONE

During an upgrade of the A14 between Cambridge and Huntingdon in 2017-18, more than 300 querns (hand mills) and millstones were recovered. One broken millstone had been revered and used as a bedstone. It has now been put back together revealing a carved penis, one of only four known examples of Romano-British millstones, out of around 20,000 found nationwide, decorated this way. Archaeologist Steve Sherlock said phalluses were "seen as an important image of strength and virility in the Roman world, with it being common practice for legionaries to wear a phallus amulet, which would give them good luck before battle... There were known associations between images of the phallus and milling, such as those found above the bakeries of Pompeii, one inscribed with 'Hic habitat felicitas' – 'You will find happiness here'".

The millstone is the latest in a list of finds on the route of the upgrade to be made public by Highways England. They include the earliest evidence of beer





**ABOVE:** Egyptologist Zahi Hawass at the Aten site near the Valley of the Kings. **BELOW:** A building complex uncovered near Scarborough has been described as “the most important Roman discovery of the last decade.”

brewing in Britain, dating back to as early as 400 BC, only the second gold coin to be found in the country depicting Roman emperor Lælianus, who reigned for about two months in AD 269 before he was killed, and woolly mammoth tusks and woolly rhino skulls. *BBC News, 17 Feb 2021.*

### CITIES UNEARTHED

Zahi Hawass, the ubiquitous Egyptologist, has announced the discovery of the largest ancient city, known as Aten, ever uncovered in Egypt. The excavation near the Valley of the Kings, on the west bank of the Nile opposite Luxor, which began in September 2020, has already revealed a large number of objects, such as jewellery, coloured pottery, scarab beetle amulets and mud bricks bearing seals of Amenhotep III, one of Egypt’s most powerful pharaohs, who ruled from 1391 to 1353 BC. The city continued to be used by subsequent pharaohs Ay and Tutankhamun. Several areas or neighbourhoods have been uncovered, including a bakery, an administrative district and a residential area. Hawass said his team “expects to uncover untouched tombs filled with treasures”. Amenhotep III and his wife Queen Tiye were among the mummies recently transferred to the new National Museum of Egyptian Civilisation [FT406:11]. *BBC News, 9 April 2021.*

A ruined city 5,300 years old has been discovered in central China. The huge settlement on the outskirts of Zhengzhou was the highest-level residential complex of its time ever found along the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River. The ruins, with an area of 1.17 million square metres (12.6 million square feet) lie 2km (1.2 miles) south of the Yellow River at Shuanghuaishu in the township of Heluo, Gongyi city. The

ruins are one of the largest settlements of the middle and late phases of Yangshao Culture, emerging around 7,000 years ago during the Neolithic. More than 1,700 tombs, neatly arranged in three blocks, have been uncovered, along with the remains of three sacrificial platforms standing in the residential area. Some unearthened objects showed “the aura of kings”. A set of clay pots arranged like the Big Dipper was believed to represent nobility. Other key findings include a silkworm statuette made of boar teeth.

Previous discoveries in Henan province include Erlitou, generally considered to be the site of the capital of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC), Yinxu, the ruins of the last capital of the Shang

Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), and several other major cities of the two dynasties – the beginning of China’s united central kingship ruling a vast territory.

The newly unearthened city’s appearance and location echo some historical records in the *I Ching*. According to Li Boqian, professor of archaeology at Peking University, the possibility of the city being the seat of Xuanyuan, a legendary king in early Chinese history, cannot be ruled out, but it is still too early to draw any conclusions. “At least it shows a period of time when the earliest China was being incubated,” Li says. “As other types of civilisations like Liangzhu disappeared in history, the one of Zhongyuan has been continuous. Shuanghuaishu was the starting point of that uncut line.” *China Daily, 12 May 2020.*

### SCARBOROUGH SETTLEMENT

The remains of a Roman settlement believed to be the first of its kind discovered in Britain – and possibly in the whole Roman empire – has been uncovered at Eastfield near Scarborough in North Yorkshire, with Historic England describing it as “easily the most important Roman discovery of the last decade”. The large complex of buildings – approximately the size of two tennis courts – includes a cylindrical tower structure with a number of rooms leading from it and a bathhouse. As excavations and analysis continue, historians believe the site may have been the estate of a wealthy landowner, which could have later become a religious sanctuary or even a high-end “stately home cum gentleman’s club”. Historic England will recommend the remains be protected as a nationally important scheduled monument. *theguardian.com, 14 April 2021.*





# Swallows from the Moon

DAVID HAMBLING contemplates the mysteries of bird and insect migration

A new study has shown that the Painted Lady butterfly makes a migratory journey of more than 6,000km (3,700 miles) to Africa each year. The study, from the University of Reading, found that the familiar British garden butterflies cross the Sahara Desert in the process, an impressive feat for an insect weighing no more than a paperclip. This is the longest insect migration yet discovered, beating the previous record held by the famed migration of Monarch butterflies between the US/Canada and Mexico. And there is much still to discover about the amazing seasonal voyages of seemingly humble creatures around us.

Ancient Greek philosophers noted the seasonal presence of birds such as swallows, which disappear during the winter months and reappear in spring. However, where they went was always a puzzle.

Dormice were known to hibernate and it was thought that birds might hibernate too. Nobody ever found a hibernating swallow, but in 1555 German philosopher and proto-scientist Albertus Magnus suggested that, as swallows were often seen dipping into water, in autumn they must plunge into the depths, sinking to the bottom and hibernating in the mud. He claimed this was well known to fishermen, who sometimes hauled up the birds. Perhaps the fishers were having a joke with the learned man, or perhaps he somehow confused swallows with frogs, which do pass the winter in pond mud in this way.

To others it was obvious that swallows flew away, although nobody ever reported seeing where they went. In 1680 English scholar Charles Morton believed he had the answer. Galileo had reported mountains and seas on the Moon 70 years earlier, and theologians agreed the Creator would not go to the trouble of making uninhabited worlds. The Moon seemed to be a logical destination for wintering birds. "Now, whither should these creatures go, unless it were to the Moon?" Morton asked.

One of Morton's arguments was that sailors sometimes encountered land birds far out at sea, and rather than coming from any particular compass direction they always seemed to arrive from above. Ergo, he reasoned, the birds were returning from space.

This argument was apparently taken seriously for many years. It was only in the colonial era when British residents in India and Africa noted the seasonal arrival of birds at times that corresponded to their



LEFT: A Painted Lady butterfly.

disappearance in Europe that the puzzle was solved conclusively.

Bird migration often takes place at surprising altitudes, which is why migrating flocks are rarely seen. A 2021 study from Lund University in Sweden discovered that migrating snipe typically fly at over 4,000m (13,100ft) during daytime, with one individual observed at over 6,700m (22,000ft). This may also account for Morton's description of migratory birds descending from a great height.

This author has witnessed the mass migration of bee-eaters from Spain. Although only visible as tiny specks through binoculars, flocks of them can be easily heard on the ground.

Many other birds are not seen migrating because they fly at night to avoid predators. These migratory patterns were not observed until the modern era; now anyone with microphone and an app can join in. Enthusiasts record and analyse the calls of nocturnal migrants each year, which even occur in Britain's urban centres, in an activity known as noctmig, or night flight call recording.

Insect migration was not appreciated until later. It was only in 1857 that the yearly and very visible spectacle of Monarch butterflies migrating in the US was noted in a scientific journal. Many more species, even the tiniest ones like aphids, migrate less noticeably. They do not have such powerful wings as butterflies, but can travel vast distances by gaining height and riding the winds. Again, until the modern era there were no instruments to detect them.

Much of the pioneering work in this field was carried out by the UK's Overseas Development Administration, which

developed the first specialist entomological radar in the 1960s. Initially used to track desert locust swarms in East Africa, the equipment later tracked the migrations of other pest species including army worms (a type of moth with destructive larvae), leafhoppers and mosquitoes, which are seasonally migratory in some parts of Asia.

More insects migrate than you might think. A 10-year study by the University of Exeter published in 2016 used narrow beam radar to count the number of insects passing more than 150m (490ft) overhead, and determined the species with the aid of capture nets carried by balloons. According to their estimates, around 3.5 trillion insects migrate to and from southern England each year.

It was initially assumed that insect migration was a largely random process, relying on luck and weight of numbers to ensure that enough made it to a favourable environment. Further research has increasingly revealed that insects are masters of their own fate. The *Autographa gamma* or Silver Y moth (named for its wing markings) only flies on nights when the wind will take it in the right direction, suggesting that the moths sense direction when airborne and land when the wind is wrong. The same moths have also been found to use seasonally changing winds for back-and-forth journeys between summer and winter sites.

Even the tiny aphid turns out to be a sophisticated navigator. Winged aphids ascend to catch the wind and travel long distances, but they do not land at random as first thought. Aphids can control where they come down, and show what researchers call "visual responsiveness to plant-related wavelengths" – in other words, they aim for the right shade of green landscape. Interestingly, aphids avoid landing where there is a strong ultraviolet reflection, presumably because of the risk of ending up in water, and reflective foil turns out to be a useful repellent against seasonal aphid invasions.

The latest observations on the Painted Lady migration were made with the help of volunteer recorders, satellite wind data and computer modelling. As the techniques for tracking them improves, there are likely to be further surprising discoveries about migrations. However, confirmation of the lunar travel theory still seems unlikely.

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## Double takes

ALAN MURDIE examines stories in which individuals appear to project apparitions of themselves

At a time when there have been plenty of emergencies of one sort or another being announced, one welcomes the news that the police do not consider being visited by a ghost as a top policing priority. This emerges from a story accompanying the headline “Haywards Heath woman calls 999 accusing a neighbour of ‘sending a ghost to haunt them’”, which appeared in the *Mid Sussex Times* (22 May 2021), apparently later the same day.

Shortly after midnight that morning, Mid-Sussex police received just such a call summoning them to confront a ghost persecuting the unnamed woman. According to Inspector Darren Taylor, the caller readily shared her supernatural concerns with attending officers. In response they proceeded to reassure her “about the nature of ghosts” and then issued a warning message about only using the 999 number for real emergencies.

Referring to how the police get all kinds of “weird and wonderful calls” Inspector Taylor stated: “It’s absolutely key that we allow people who need the police straight away to be able to get through” and that “for non-emergency incidents, the public are advised to call 101 or email Sussex Police.”

Not that the criminal law would be much assistance in any event, presuming such a claim to be true. The plea for help came three centuries too late to expect much in the way of any official response. Witchcraft and conjuring up evil spirits to go and persecute people have not been deemed crimes in law since 1736, save for the exception of falsely pretending to conjure spirits, which survived until 1951.

Contrary to much popular confusion concerning the elastic and nebulous concept of ‘hate crime’ (hate crimes being actually a qualitative way of labelling and recording a complainant’s perceptions of crime not actual chargeable offences in themselves), some kind of physical act contrary to law is required, together with a material human offender, for the police to be engaged. Even when the police arrive at allegedly haunted premises to witness strange physical events themselves – one thinks of the police officers called out in the early stages of the Enfield poltergeist case in 1977 – there is little they can do in practical terms. As one-time crime journalist Philip Paul stated in the context of a haunted council house in West Norwood attended by nine constables in 1951, “police regulations do not extend to poltergeists”



ABOVE LEFT: French police officer Emile Tizané, who wrote of his experiences with poltergeists.



ABOVE RIGHT: Inspector Darren Taylor suggests that ghosts are beyond Sussex Police’s remit.

SUSSEX POLICE

### Police officers proceeded to reassure the caller “about the nature of ghosts”

(*Some Unseen Power*, 1985). A French police officer, Emile Tizané, acknowledged the same problem with repeated poltergeist visitations as a puzzle detectives could not solve or prevent (*Sur la Piste de l’Homme inconnu* (*On the Trail of the Unknown Man*), 1951).

I sympathise with the Mid-Sussex police, though it would be fascinating to learn what provoked the call and the view taken on ghosts by the attending officers. The police have long experience in receiving desperate calls from troubled members of the public which, when investigated, reveal nothing more than a vulnerable, lonely or paranoid individual in need of social and psychological help or referral to the Samaritans, rather than law enforcement. Many ghost hunters will have found the same. These are reports of domestic hauntings which have to be treated with great sensitivity, ones where ghost hunting equipment consists of “a notebook, a pencil and a sympathetic ear”.

At the same time, one should also be open to the possibility that signs or symptoms of psychological distress or illness may potentially also be intertwined

with paranormal experiences. In any such case, it is crucial that professional medical opinion is sought first, before embarking upon any such assessment, the concept of ‘clinical parapsychology’ being one still at its early stages. Even then there would be justifiable reluctance in attributing any phenomena or manifestations to an external entity.

Outside the UK, things can be very different. Allegations of the practice of black magic can still lead to arrest and prosecution in a number of Islamic countries and a number of Commonwealth nations retain anti-sorcery provisions, a legacy from British colonial days. Across Brazil and much of Latin America, it is widely believed evilly disposed individuals can summon spirits to wreak havoc on personal enemies. A vindictive person may hire a sorcerer or voodoo practitioner to invoke an evil spirit, which is then dispatched against the chosen target. The victim may be a neighbour, a love rival, a business associate or former partner against whom a grievance is held. The victim will then suffer accidents, misfortunes and weird disturbances resembling poltergeist activity caused by the spirit. Commenting on the beliefs in modern Brazil, Guy Playfair referred to such spirit entities being perceived “as inferior discarnates, living in a low astral plane, who are close to the physical world, not having evolved since physical death... are known as ‘exus’, spirits who seem to have no morals at all, and are equally willing to work for or against people. Like Mafia gunmen,

they do what the boss says without asking questions.” (*The Flying Cow; Exploring the Psychic World of Brazil*, 1975, 2011.) Visiting Bogota, Colombia, in 1998, I encountered the popular view that you could procure such services from ‘los brujas’ (witches) for the peso equivalent of between £15 and £25, about half the then going rate for white magic.

Whether individuals have the ability to summon ghosts and pack them off to annoy their neighbours is destined to remain a source of debate; with reason, this psychic hitman theory of hauntings is not readily endorsed by many psychical researchers and clearly not by police in Haywards Heath, which is probably a good thing.

But more widely, the idea that a living person might consciously or unconsciously create a ghostly double of themselves that can be seen as an apparition by others or cause manifestations at a distance does deserve further attention.

This overlaps with the large literature on out-of-the-body experiences, reported by many people over the years, from William Wordsworth to Ernest Hemingway. A survey of Oxford students in 1967 revealed 34 per cent reported seeing themselves from a physical viewpoint, but these forms were not seen by external witnesses (“Exosomatic Experiences and related phenomena”, *SPR Journal*, Sept 1967). However, though latterly neglected, with apparitional researchers focusing on alleged sightings of the dead within haunted properties, it is a topic that deserves fresh scrutiny. At its simplest: can people project their own phantoms?

The idea of projecting one’s apparitional double or *doppelgänger* was a popular theme during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The classic Victorian tale is that told by professional gossip-gatherer and lounge-lizard Augustus Hare in *The Story of My Life* (1900). He states that in 1891 a certain Mrs Butler, residing in Ireland with her husband, experienced a vivid dream of herself walking around a very beautiful house furnished with all imaginable comforts. As a dream it made a deep impression upon her and proved the start of a series of identical dreams on successive nights, to the amusement of her family with whom she excitedly shared the details on waking. In 1892 the Butlers decided to move to England and began searching for a new home, using lists of country houses from various estate agents. Having heard of an attractive house in Hampshire, they went to see it. Arriving at the gate-keeper’s lodge, Mrs Butler exclaimed: “This is the

gate-house of my dream.” They proceeded to be shown the main house by the woman in charge, with Mrs Butler recognising all the details, save for a certain door which had been added six months earlier. Though keen to buy the property, the Butlers then became a little worried at it being offered to them at what seemed a considerably reduced price. They communicated their concerns to the estate agent who admitted the house enjoyed a reputation for being haunted. However, the Butlers had no need to worry, he assured them, for Mrs Butler herself was the apparition which had appeared in the house!

This story may have turned into the equivalent of an urban legend. Anthony Hippisley Coxé (1912-1988), in his introduction to his classic *Haunted Britain* (1973), called it his favourite ghost story. He believed it to be true, “because as a small boy I read it in some magazine and was so excited by it that I rushed to tell it to my mother, only to find that she knew the people to whom it actually happened.” However, his mother’s version differed significantly, in that the lady who experienced the dreams of the house was the wife of a naval lieutenant stationed in Hong Kong. Hippisley Coxé drew attention to other versions, including a second-hand one of a Mrs Boulton who appeared at Ballachulish House, Glencoe, as “the little lady... who has haunted my house for years”, according to its owner (recorded by Alisdair Alpin MacGregor in *The Ghost Book*, 1955) commenting it would be suspicious if it only happened once.

The starting point with the evidence must be when the SPR collected hundreds of



ABOVE: Augustus Hare recorded a classic tale of an apparitional double in his memoirs.

stories from responsible people of forms appearing in times of great danger or at the point of death: the hypothesis being advanced that these were ‘phantasms’ of the living coming out from the mind of the transmitter. The person whose image was seen was unusually concentrated at the time, or suffering great stress or trauma (often fatal, leading them to be later known as ‘crisis apparitions’ (*Phantasms of the Living* (1886), vols I & II, by E Gurney, F Myers, and F Podmore).

Some cases suggested individuals had succeeded in deliberately projecting a ‘phantom double’ seen by others under certain circumstances. These experiences gave the impression the figure perceived was not wholly subjective, it being claimed more than one person could witness such appearances at a time (*SPR Journal*, vol.1, pp.104-09; pp.292-96). Efforts were later made to encompass such projection experiments in wider apparitional theories (See GNM Tyrell, *Apparitions*, 1938). Onetime Professor of Logic at Oxford, Professor HH Price – not to be confused with ghost hunter Harry Price – proposed in his theorising over apparitions that a phantasm might be a “vehicle of consciousness” (*Proceedings of the SPR* vol 50, Part 185, 45, May 1956). Dutch researcher George Zorab speculated that some partly formed apparitions such as phantom hands and limbs might be generated by living mediums and that the collectively viewed apparition of a deceased person should not necessarily be considered good evidence that this person’s ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, or ‘ego’, was condensed itself into some physical appearance. (“Reckoning with a Special Phantom-forming Predisposition?”, *SPR Journal*, vol.48, Mar 1975).

Some stories are distinctly odd. On 31 May 1859 at 8.30pm, the Revd. Spencer Nairne (or Naim) was on his way to join a cruise ship when he saw a long-standing friend, a Miss Wallis, walking down Union Street in Aberdeen. She passed close by him and when he tried to speak with her she vanished. In the latter part of July, Miss Wallis herself was in Union Street and saw a phantom form of the Revd Nairne at the same spot. Miss Wallis was not there on the first occasion, nor the Revd Nairne on the second. A detailed account reached Lord Halifax for inclusion in *Lord Halifax’s Ghost Book* (1936). Did this involve an apparition, a timeslip or precognition, also doubling as retrocognition?

Most ghost hunters are likely to pick up a few stories like this involving living doubles seen in circumstances that might exclude simple instances of mistaken identity.



# GHOSTWATCH



PETER MACDONALD / GETTY IMAGES



KAMEL LAMIA / AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Canterbury Cathedral, where in 1987 a woman visitor saw kidnapped Anglican envoy Terry Waite (right) – at the time being held hostage in Beirut.

Dennis Bardsen mentions in *Ghosts and Hauntings* (1965) how his wife once saw his double standing at the end of the bed before realising his physical body was lying next to her.

In 1995 I spoke with a resident canon at Westminster Abbey about a contemporary ghost sighting at the Abbey. He mentioned that monk-like figures were occasionally glimpsed in the cloisters, but rather than historic ghosts of the past, far more striking to him was an apparition appearing one night in 1993 in the bedroom he shared with his wife. He recognised the figure as his own adult son, then in his early 20s and travelling around the Middle East at the time. It transpired he had been undergoing a particularly stressful time, but ultimately returned unscathed. This brings to mind another story reported a few years earlier, in 1987, of the appearance of kidnapped Anglican envoy Terry Waite at Canterbury Cathedral, perceived by a woman visitor. This occurred at the time Waite was being held as a hostage in Beirut by Islamic Jihad. Her report is mentioned in *Haunted Kent Today* (1997) by Andrew Green (1927-2004).

Green himself often expressed the opinion that visual hauntings might stem from a living agent hypothesis, sometimes proposing this as the explanation for up to 40 per cent of claimed hauntings. One case where he had personal knowledge that authenticated the record also occurred in Sussex. An old bakery which had been operated for several generations by a local family was sold. Shortly after moving in, the wife of the new owner reported that she could “feel the presence of someone in the bakery”.

This phenomenon developed to a stage

## The new owner reported that she could “feel the presence of someone in the bakery”

where doors were seen to open, baking equipment move and the woman felt “the entity push past her on numerous occasions”. Both her husband and son began to experience the haunting. Disturbed, they visited the former owners in an attempt to find out more about the ghost, but were assured that the premises had never been haunted during the entire occupation of the original family. It was noticed during the visit that the “old man” of the family had said little during the conversation and “seemed half asleep most of the time”. Such incidents continued “unabated for some two years”, distressing those involved. Then, suddenly, one Tuesday, “the place seemed different”, the phenomena ceasing entirely and never resuming.

Green added in his book *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide* (1973, 2016): “Is it really surprising to learn that the old man died suddenly that Tuesday morning?” Having retired from the business, he had nothing to occupy his mind apart from recollecting his days spent producing high-quality bread. He would visualise himself back in the shop kneading the dough at a certain time, cutting and shaping it, then putting it on to the trays and sliding the unbaked loaves into the oven. This would coincide with the times at which his successor was carrying out

identical operations.”

Curiously, Elliot O’Donnell, though not a credible source, tells a similar story about an elderly man who stimulated child-like manifestations in his old family home by picturing himself once again as a small boy playing happily there (*The Midnight Hearses and Other Ghost Stories*, 1965, edited by Harry Ludlam).

With trying to deliberately project his own ghost, this was one class of psychic experience where, unusually for him, O’Donnell claimed to have enjoyed little in the way of positive results, though he had once projected himself to appear before his wife. However, he considered, “it is quite possible to separate the superphysical from the physical body, and for the former to manifest itself either visually or auditorially, or both, at any distance from the latter. The accomplishment of this act – which is called projection – is entirely a question of concentration, but of a concentration so intense that it cannot be reached – at least, such is my experience – without absolute physical quiet and total absence of mental disturbance.” (*Ghostly Phenomena*, 1912). Occult theories speculate such apparitions are travelling astral bodies or spirits that have dreamed they were visiting certain localities. In contrast, Green eschewed spiritual explanations, considering them as generated purely as a mental and telepathic phenomenon, perhaps electromagnetic in nature.

Whatever the case, apparitions of living people absent from the scene may be a field ripe for review and experimentation – though the future implications long-term for eyewitness evidence and police identity parades might be profound!

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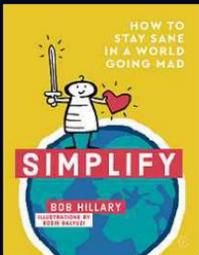
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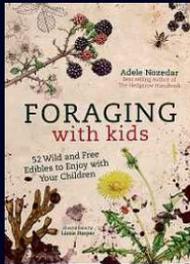
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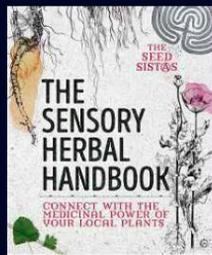
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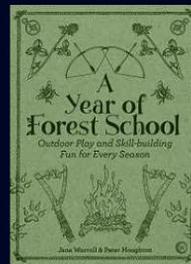
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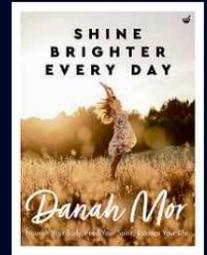
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## SPACE NEWS

The latest astronomical oddities – including a star that mysteriously dimmed for 200 days – plus a British space suit from the 1940s

### BIS SPACE SUIT

The National Space Centre in Leicester has recently opened an exhibition on Britain's contribution to the space race, with a recreation of a lunar space suit designed by two members of the British Interplanetary Society (BIS) in 1949 as its centrepiece. The BIS was founded in 1933 for people to consider and plan for interplanetary exploration and included luminaries such as Arthur C Clarke and Patrick Moore (see FT309:50-51). Harry Ross headed up the committee considering the possibility of a lunar landing and he collaborated with fellow BIS member Ralph Smith to come up with a suit for the job, publishing the design in the society's journal. Until now, that was as far as the designs went but the National Space Centre commissioned model maker Stephen Wisdom to construct a life-size suit from the plans using only materials available in the 1940s. The suit would not keep someone alive on the Moon, the design has too many flaws to actually work, but it was one of the first attempts to think about how a working space suit might function and has many revolutionary features well ahead of its time. <https://spacecentre.co.uk/>

### FAST RADIO BURSTS

Since their discovery in 2007, Fast Radio Bursts (FRB) have mystified astronomers. Lasting on average just a millisecond, each FRB releases as much energy as our Sun produces in three days in the radio frequency band of the electromagnetic spectrum. Until recently, they have proved extremely elusive; while astronomers believe up to 1,000 FRBs could be detected from Earth every day, their extremely short duration and apparent origin in random points across the Universe has made it very difficult to actually observe them, with only 140 being seen in the decade after their first discovery. Kiyoshi Masui, assistant professor of



*The space suit has revolutionary features well ahead of its time*

physics at MIT, says: "You have to have your radio telescope pointed at just the right place at just the right time and you can't predict where or when that will be." All

galaxy. Previous sources have only been seen in other galaxies. Having so many more FRB records to look at, and several repeaters that they can observe over longer periods, will make it far easier for astronomers to work out what exactly causes an FRB.

Although scientists suspect that the repeating and single FRBs have different origins, the leading candidate for their source is magnetars. These are super-dense stars, with massive, intense magnetic fields, whose origins are also mysterious. One theory is that they result from the collision of a white dwarf – the planet-size leftover core of a star like the Sun – and a neutron star. Neutron stars are also the leftover cores of stars, but much more massive, highly dense ones, composed almost entirely of neutrons compressed into a ball no bigger in size than a city. It is thought that when the two collide they form a magnetar, releasing a massive burst of energy which we see as an FRB.

Intriguingly, astronomers Avi Loeb and Manasvi Lingam at Harvard University have suggested an alternative possible origin for FRBs: energy beams produced by advanced civilisations to power starships using lightsails. These ships would have enormous, very thin sails that accelerate the ship using the force of photons, particles of light, hitting the sail. Beams of electromagnetic energy, such as radio waves, generated on a planet's surface would be focused on a ship's sail accelerating it to close to light speed. The leakage from such a beam sweeping across the sky would appear as an FRB when it was fleetingly aligned with the Earth. The technology is known to be feasible, and indeed Earth scientists have built and tested light sails to drive small probes, with the Breakthrough Starshot project aiming to use the technology to send tiny robotic probes to nearby star systems. Loeb and Lingam have calculated

that changed in 2018 when a Canadian radio telescope known as CHIME (Canadian Hydrogen Intensity Mapping Experiment) came online. CHIME can detect such bursts over a wide area of sky, and a paper presented at the American Astronomical Society Meeting in June documented findings from its first year of operation when it recorded more than 500 FRBs. These included 18 repeating ones, which between them were responsible for 61 bursts, and one source in our own



**FACING PAGE:** The British Interplanetary Society lunar space suit, on display in the National Space Centre. **LEFT:** Artist's impression of radio satellite dishes receiving a Fast Radio Burst. **BELOW LEFT:** Artist's impression of the mysterious "blinking giant" VVV-WIT-08.

that FRB-like signals, currently out of the reach of Earth technology, would be able to accelerate a craft of up to one million tons to nearly the speed of light, capable of carrying passengers across interstellar or even intergalactic distances. While they aren't exactly claiming FRBs are the results of alien tech, they do say that in the absence of a satisfactory origin for the bursts, the hypothesis is worth considering. Even if this were the origin of FRBs, with almost all of them coming from millions of light years away there would be no possibility of communicating with such civilisations, not least because they would probably be long gone by the time their FRBs reached Earth. *space.com* 9 Mar 2017; *news.mit.edu*, 9 Jun; *CNN*, 10 Jun 2021.

## NEW WEIRD STAR

Astronomers sifting through data from a project known as the VISTA Variables in the Via Lactea (VVV) survey that categorises stars in the Milky Way found one that took a very weird turn in 2012, almost disappearing completely for 200 days – data showed that its brightness abruptly fell by 97 per cent and, 200 days later, just as abruptly returned to normal. Initial examination of the VVV data had indicated that something odd was going on, so the star was named



VVV-WIT-08, with WIT standing for "what is this?". It is at least 25,000 light-years away from us, towards the centre of our galaxy and is an eight-billion-year-old giant some 100 times larger than our Sun but much cooler.

Researchers have now had a chance to look at the data more closely and have published their findings in *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*. They are, however, not really any closer to satisfactorily resolving the conundrum despite sifting through many possibilities. Attempts to pin down why the star disappeared have been hampered by the fact that in 17 years of observation it has only

gone dark once – which means that if it is a repeating phenomenon, it doesn't happen very frequently. Whatever did blot out the star has to be huge – much bigger than the star itself – and seems to be completely opaque and to have a hard edge. The paper's author, Leigh Smith, an astronomer at the University of Cambridge, said: "It's unusual for a star to dim in brightness by this much and for this long, and it immediately caught my eye."

Among the causes researchers considered were that VVV-WIT-08 was being blotted out by a dark disc of material orbiting a nearby black hole, or undiscovered dust-shrouded companion

stars, but these rely on as-yet unobserved phenomena. Follow-up observations only confused things; pinning down the precise size of, and distance to, the star, turned out to be harder than expected, and its motion was also found to be very peculiar: it is travelling almost fast enough to escape the Milky Way. Smith and colleagues ruled out fluctuations in the brightness of the star itself and also the possibility that it could have been obscured by a dark object much closer to Earth. For that to work, Smith says: "We'd need a huge number of these dark floating objects, that's a pretty unlikely scenario – we should have seen many more of this kind of thing nearby." Smith and colleagues think that whatever it is must be gravitationally bound to the star, as is the case with Epsilon Aurigae, which is partially eclipsed by a giant, dust-enshrouded companion every 27 years. This can't fully account for the disappearance of VVV-WIT-08, though, as whatever obscured it blocked all visible and infrared wavelengths of light throughout the eclipse; but dust clouds always let some through, and they don't have sharp edges.

Emily Levesque of the University of Washington says dust is still the most likely cause of VVV-WIT-08's vanishing act, as it was with Tabby's Star, which caused a stir in 2015, although she notes: "But dust does not look this neat, and it would certainly imply something very unusual about how that dust is distributed." While there is the possibility that we saw some kind of alien megastructure cross in front of the star, Jason Wright of Pennsylvania State University said of the idea: "It's premature at this point; there's so much about this star that we don't know." *National Geographic.com*, 16 June; *BoingBoing.net*, 22 June 2021.

DANIELLE TUTSELAR

AMANDA SMITH / CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

# THE CONSPIRASPHERE

Is someone bumping off the leaders of developing nations sceptical about WHO Covid vaccination programmes? **NOEL ROONEY** logs the strange deaths from Tanzania to Haiti.

## DEAD PEOPLE'S TALES II

The Angel of Death has likely been no busier than usual recently, but observers of the Conspirasphere might be forgiven for thinking otherwise. The emphasis has shifted from mavericks to mainstream leaders now, with much energy spent on the assassination of Haitian president Jovenel Moise (pictured right), shot to death in his apartments in the presidential palace by a ragtag goon squad of Colombian mercenaries and Haitian Americans. The ease with which a truckload of armed men gained entrance to the palace has raised eyebrows everywhere, and not just those lurking under tinfoil hats.

You don't have to live in the C-sphere to be suspicious about this incident, of course. The recent history of Haiti is a tragic story of interference by regional powers, to the point where one might reasonably refer to the country's corrupt and complex web of power structures as government by conspiracy. Moise made enemies in high places, among the Haitian elite at home and in exile, and among those countries that see themselves as having vital interests in the area; he was suspected of embezzling millions from a dysfunctional oil deal with Venezuela, and his friendly overtures to Turkey and Russia probably put him in the cross-hairs of more than one three-letter agency.

So far, so geopolitically normal. But Moise's death was not the only notable demise among third-world leaders in recent times: John Magafuli, the president of Tanzania; Hamed Bakayoko, the prime minister of Cote d'Ivoire; Ambrose Dlamini, prime minister of Eswatini (formerly Swaziland); and Pierre Nkurunziza, president of Burundi, all shuffled off their mortal coils in what some



## *A goat and a pawpaw tested positive for Covid-19*

would describe as unusual circumstances; and Andry Rajoelina, the president of Madagascar, recently survived an alleged assassination attempt by yet another motley crew of foreign actors.

Now, as the Angel would affirm, the law of large numbers allows for the possibility of some quite curious clusters in the demographics of death, even a cluster as eerily specific as "head of state of flexible virtue in less developed nation" (and no doubt some would argue that the likelihood of sudden death while in control of a country is probably written into the JD for third-world leaders in modern times). But keen-eyed conspiracists have noted yet another connection between these eminences that perhaps strains the bounds of randomness; all, allegedly, had refused, or were openly sceptical about, the efforts by the WHO (an august body no right-thinking citizen would refer to as Bill Gates's other little hobby) to vaccinate the entire world against the quite obviously apocalyptic threat of coronavirus.

Magafuli was in the news last year in connection with coronavirus. He claimed he

had ordered the Tanzanian military to conduct an experiment on the PCR test, the results of which included a goat and a pawpaw testing positive for Covid-19. And he had been talking to Andry Rajoelina, who was reported to have discovered a simple herbal cure for Covid that Magafuli was keen to import (see **FT394:50-54**).

Hamed Bakayoko was widely reported to have died of cancer in a German hospital. But reports in some African publications suggest that he and his butler, Nestor, fell ill suddenly, at the same time, and there were rumours they had been poisoned. The fact that his death was reported as occurring on two different dates may have added to suspicions. Plus Bakayoko was the second Ivorian leader to die suddenly in under a year; Amadou Gon Coulibaly, his predecessor, died just eight months earlier.

Ambrose Dlamini reportedly died of Covid-19, at the age of 52, the first world leader to succumb to the disease. He had tested positive for the virus (so had President Magafuli's goat) but some sources in Eswatini suggested that he had in fact been poisoned – the victim of an internal power struggle in the world's only remaining absolute monarchy. And the country had refused the Astra-Zeneca form of the vaccine, at least.

Pierre Nkurunziza had been president (some might say dictator) of Burundi for 15 years, after coming to prominence in the Hutu-Tutsi civil war. He was a sports enthusiast, and apparently very fit. His death, reportedly from a heart attack, was greeted with confusion in the country; again, there were rumours of poisoning. And again, some claimed he had died of Covid. The mysterious disappearance (and sudden reappearance) of his wife only

added to the rumours.

Andry Rajoelina (he of the herbal cure) did, at least initially, refuse to involve Madagascar in the vaccination programme. So despite cheating the Angel, he fits the conspiracist profile.

And there's another strand to the story, at least as it concerns Moise. A report appeared in several online outlets claiming that he had been investigating the role of the Gates Foundation in the events around the pandemic; moreover, the Dutch investigative journalist Peter de Vries, who was shot just hours before the Haitian president, was alleged to have been in touch with Moise in connection with a similar investigation. Quite why Moise (or de Vries) would be doing this is not explained; but perhaps he had found a good use for the missing millions from the Venezuela oil debacle after all.

Is there enough evidence to suggest that Big Pharma or its allies in the deep state are stalling the corridors of power, bumping off third-world leaders for not towing the coronavirus line? Or has the Angel of Death turned vigilante, and decreed that political corruption is a capital offence? And why did mainstream fact checking agencies feel the need to debunk the story? In a world where there are no coincidences, nothing, apparently, can be left to chance.

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## WEREWOLF NEWS | A werewolf panic in Nigeria, a Yorkshireman haunted by a dog-faced monster and some literary lycanthropy from the USA

### TERROR IN NIGERIA

In mid-June Nigeria was seized by a werewolf panic after a video allegedly taken in the south-east of the country showing a highly detailed bloodied corpse of a werewolf, resembling the one from *American Werewolf in London*, went viral. In a voiceover in the local language, Hausa, a man could be heard claiming that the military had killed it during an operation codenamed “Whirl Stroke”.

Social media swiftly spread the video and story round Nigeria, sounding the alarm and warning locals to remain vigilant. Almost as quickly, though, it was debunked by BOOM, an Indian fact-checking site, that did a reverse image search on stills from the video and found that it was actually a clip from a Portuguese horror short called *Lobisomem Morto a Tiro* (“Werewolf Shot to Death”), with the werewolf itself being the work of freelance special effects sculptor Joseph-Rob Cobasky. Cobasky had previously posted a photo online of himself posing with the same werewolf while working on the film in November 2020. This prompted the Nigerian military to circulate a warning stating “Di Press Release and video making rounds on social media of one mysterious beast wit human body Killed by troops of operation whirl stroke na Fake” and telling people to disregard the video. *ngnews.com*, 20 Jun; *bbc.com/pidgin*, 21 Jun; *Boomlive.in*, 21 Jun 2021.

### WEREWOLF HUNTER

In April, Yorkshireman Colin Keelty, 54, talked to the *Sunday People* about his quest to track down werewolves after he encountered what he believes to be one in Hatfield, South Yorkshire, under a full Moon in October 1990. “I could see something running in the distance,” he said. “It was too big to be a fox. Initially I thought it was a cow or a deer until I got closer and it stood up. It was too big to be a dog.” In those pre-smartphone days, he was unable to take a picture of the creature, but he shared a drawing of what he saw, showing a



LEFT: Special effects sculptor Joseph-Rob Cobasky with the creation that appears to have sparked a werewolf panic in Nigeria. BELOW LEFT: Yorkshireman Colin Keelty has spent the last 30 years hunting for werewolves.



dog-faced beast crossing a stile on two legs.

As a result of his experience, Colin has spent much of the last 30 years trying to prove the existence of werewolves, and even had a second encounter in Sep-

tember 2015 in Hornsea – once more under a full Moon. He didn’t directly see the creature this time but said that he could hear thuds and found the whole experience terrifying. “I shouted out ‘hello! I then ran for my life as I had a

horrible feeling,” he said. This time the werewolf left a trace, a three-fingered handprint on his car window, although Colin has now lost the photo that he took of it. Undeterred, he continues to seek werewolves and collects sightings that he says come in from all across the UK, with 12 arriving this year alone. Jemma Waller reported encountering one in Halsham, East Yorkshire, when driving with two friends in 2016. She said: “It looked like a big dog, probably bigger than my car, but it had a human face.”

“All these people can’t be lying,” said Colin. “Something incredible is out there and I am going to find it.” *S. People*, 11 Apr 2021.

### STEINBECK’S FORGOTTEN WEREWOLF NOVEL

In May, Professor Gavin Jones, a specialist in American literature at Stanford University, called for the publication of *Murder at Full Moon*, an unseen werewolf novel by John Steinbeck, best known for the classic *Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck wrote three novels that were turned down for publication and never made it into print. Two were destroyed by Steinbeck, but the 233-page typescript of *Murder at Full Moon* has survived unseen in the archives of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin. Very different from the novels for which Steinbeck became known, *Murder at Full Moon* takes place in a fictional Californian coastal town gripped by fear as gruesome murders take place whenever there is a full Moon, leading investigators to fear that a werewolf has emerged from the local marshes. “There would be a huge public interest in a totally unknown werewolf novel by one of the best-known, most read American writers of the 20th century,” said Professor Jones. *Observer*, 22 May 2021.

JOSEPH ROB COBASKY / INSTAGRAM

CATERS NEWS



## STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the latest weirdness from Europe, including hospital ghosts and mystery runes

### HERMIT GIVES UP

Sometimes, adventures are right on your doorstep – as in the story of the modern Robinson Crusoe who lived on a deserted Italian island. In 1989, Mauro Morandi set sail from Italy in a catamaran to live in the Pacific Ocean, but his journey brought him only as far as Budelli, an island famous for its pink beaches, part of the Maddalena archipelago in the northeast of Sardinia. He decided to stay there, explaining: “I never was a Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe wanted to return to civilisation; I just wanted to stay away from it.” He got a job as the caretaker of the island, but soon ran into trouble with local authorities as he kept enlarging his house without permission. Now, after 32 years, the 82-year-old, originally from the northern Italian city of Modena, has decided to quit his self-imposed solitude. He will return to a small flat in Modena, where his children live, and the tiny island will be turned into a research centre. *Die Rheinpfalz*, 29 Apr 2021.

### WEIRD WEATHER

In May, a meteorological tsunami – a tsunami caused by the sudden release of high air pressure on a marine or lake surface which results in the whole water being seasawed into waves – flooded the port of Bonifacio in Corsica. The wave was some 5ft (1.5m) high and left the promenade under water and restaurants and cafés in the harbour flooded. Such meteorological tsunamis are not rare (I once witnessed a very violent one in Turkey), but rarely make the press because no one wants to scare away tourists. *wetter.de*, 25 May 2021.

The Böblingen area of Germany reported a “rain of frogs” on 21 June. Thousands of tiny frogs, each just the size of a thumbnail, were seen hopping



ABOVE: Mauro Morandi has given up the life of a hermit after 32 years and will be trading his life of solitude on the island of Budelli for a flat in the city of Modena.

across the road between Weissach-Flacht and Perouse. It was not the archetypal fortean event, just the typical movement of freshly born common toads and common frogs. “The whole ground seems alive,” said environmentalist Roland Krebs. “This phenomenon is also known as a rain of frogs.” Of course, Krebs is wrong: such mass movements have often been used to explain rains of frogs but, a rain of frogs means amphibians falling from above, and not just a mass movement from a pond. *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 22 June 2021.

### ANTI-MOB JUDGE BLESSED

In what has to be regarded as a major change in ecclesiastical policy, Pope Francis, in the Cathedral of Agrigento, in Sicily, officially proclaimed as “blessed” the anti-Mafia judge Rosario Angelo Livatino on 9 May. Livatino, a very pious man, was the first to dare impose harsh sentences for Cosa Nostra-related crimes and was assassinated on 21 September 1990, aged just 37, by a mob hit squad. Pope Francis called the judge a martyr who was killed “in hatred of the faith”.

On the very same day he created a working team for the excommunication of the Mafia. In Sicily, local priests are said to support the Mafia, even devoting masses to the health of bosses. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 13 May 2021.

### BELGIUM GROWS

A Belgian farmer removed a border stone which got in the way of his ploughing and threw it into a forest at the border between the Belgian town of Erquennes and Bousignies-sur-Roc in France, thus changing the frontier after 200 years. “He enlarged Belgium and made France smaller,” said Erquennes mayor David Lavaux. “I was happy initially, as my town grew in size.” Yet Bousignies mayor Aurélie Welonek said she could not accept the unilateral border change. Jokingly, she said: “I hope we will be able to avoid a war over the border.” The Belgian authorities have asked the farmer to return the stone to its original location – otherwise the Franco-Belgian border commission, which has lain dormant since 1930, might have to spring into action again! *Die Rheinpfalz*, 6 May 2021.

### VANISHING CATS

Almost annually, in some part of Europe, there is a panic that cats are being stolen. In the last decade, I heard that either the Romanians or the French caught cats in specially equipped lorries to sell them to the Chinese for the production of anti-rheumatic blankets; before that, Chinese restaurants were regarded as the culprits.

Now, new fears have emerged. Animal protection activists from Bernkastel-Wittlich, on the banks of the Moselle, Germany, have warned pet owners that animal thieves are harvesting moggies. In a social media post that was soon shared over 2,300 times, it was claimed that criminals collected European Shorthairs and other pedigree cats. The theory was that cats were selected, caught, and then sold on the Internet black market. The animal protectors asked owners to keep their cats in the house and said that a large number of missing cats had been reported to them – sometimes as many as three cases a day. However, Bernkastel-Kues police said they had not received any complaints, and no other animal organisations in the region had received a single report of a missing cat. *Wochenspiegel Bernkastel*, 14 May 2021.

### CREATURES ON THE LOOSE

While the number of anomalous big cats seen on the continent this summer has so far amounted to zero, other strange animals have filled the gap.

For a start, an “object shaped like a bird” and glowing red and orange was observed by a witness smoking a cigarette on his balcony, at Hörstel, North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, at 11.45pm on 1 May. The thing was faster than a jet airplane and completely noiseless, The



observer also spotted “soft blue points of light” around it. *Personal communication.*

Two days earlier, two lamas escaped from an agricultural farm at Waghäusel, Germany. One was quickly caught, but the other ran away and blocked the Mannheim to Stuttgart railway line, halting all traffic on this major route while police tried to capture the animal. It took several hours until the animal was apprehended and returned to its owner. *Kölnner Stadt-Anzeiger, 30 Apr; RNZonline, 29 Apr 2021.*

Also in Germany, in early May two Macaque monkeys escaped from an animal park in Friesoythe, Friesland, and made their way away across the rooftops of nearby homes. The electricity had failed in the fence surrounding the animals’s enclosure, and they took advantage of the opportunity. Alarmed by phone calls from the public, police and fire fighters rushed to the scene to capture the missing monkeys. They soon found them on the roof of a house and in a tree, but were unsure how to handle the novel situation and catch the agile fugitives. They soon decided not to use a tranquilliser gun, but closed the road instead. When there were no longer any people to scare them away, the monkeys came down by themselves to get food, and were returned to captivity. *t-online.de, 3 May; Die Rheinpfalz, 4 May 2021.*

## RUNE AWAKENING

The discovery of a sixth century runic inscription in a clearly Slavic context has archaeologists puzzled and nationalists shocked. The runes were discovered at Breclav, in the Czech Republic, near the Austrian border. The letters, carved awkwardly into a cattle bone as if by an untrained hand, are of the Elder Futhark series (as the runic “alphabet” is called), and read “t, b, e, m, d, o”. Taken singly, that would symbolise heaven and the god of war, birch twig or birch tree, horse,



human, day and property. Neither Germanic nor early Slav languages know the word “tremdo”, but it appears to be a corruption of the eight last letters of the letter row with two characters missing. Scientists are undecided whether the inscription was written by an incompetent Germanic carver or by a Slav who had appropriated the foreign script. What is clear from the find, though, is either that early Slavs used Teutonic runes before the introduction of Cyrillic letters, or else Teutonic and Slavic peoples mixed in the border region of South Moravia. Before the find, it had been assumed that the Germanic tribe of the Lombards had vanished from the area some time before the Slavic tribes entered it.

Linguist Robert Nedoma, who studied the inscription and is co-author of a paper in the *Journal of Archaeological Science*, thinks the author may have been a Lombard who did not join the migration of his own tribe to Italy. “But it cannot be ruled out that the runes were scratched by a Slav who learned the script through cultural contact from the Lombards,” he said. He (or she) would have learned to write for “reasons of prestige”.

This, naturally, has Czech nationalists hopping mad, as they want their ancient people as neatly separated ethno-linguistic groups so that they can claim their own prehistory. German right-wing alternative archaeologists will not be happy, either, to find that the Slavs learned writing

at practically the same time as the Teutons, even if they did so from contact with them, as it contradicts their dogma of Slavic inferiority. And for the rest of us, the case is still a huge mystery: this is one of the most eastern finds of Elder Futhark runes in a region where none had been expected by conventional wisdom. *Tagesspiegel, 24 May 2021.*

## HAUNTED HOSPITAL

In 2018, after 104 years, the desolate remains of the Lilienfelder Kinderspital children’s hospital in Vienna, Austria, were removed by diggers. Just before the demolition, a group of local ghost hunters visited the empty buildings after hearing the site was haunted. People had reported moving shadows, felt watched by an invisible presence, heard voices, or saw objects moving on their own. “Vienna Ghosthunters” came to investigate. “In particular, on the first floor one could repeatedly observe shadows going round a corner, clearly, and not, as we are used to, out of the corner of the eye,” says Wilhelm Gabler, spokesperson for the ghost hunters. “We didn’t hear any footsteps, but picked out voices clearly. They varied between typical male voices and children’s voices. We managed to tape some of them.” One member of the team felt something he perceived as child-like pulling at his coat. “We found one moment especially frightening. We were about to leave the building when we heard a muffled thud and saw an old child’s shoe falling down in front of us out of the blue.”

While the events took place in 2018, they have only now been reported in the press in a series of articles on the mysteries of Austria. *meinbezirk.at, 10 June 2021.*

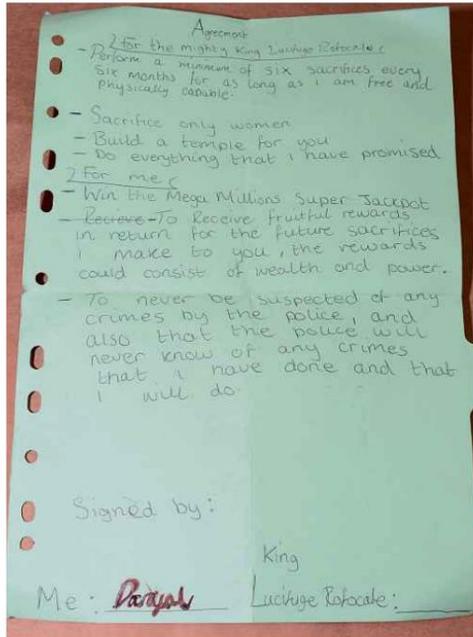
## THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT

Demons, djinn, dark spirits and the man who turned his cellmate into a necklace

### DEMONIC LOTTERY

Sisters Nicole Smallman, 27, and Bibba Henry, 46 were found stabbed to death in Fryent Country Park, Wembley, where they had been celebrating Henry's birthday on 6 June last year. They had been killed in a frenzied attack in which Henry was stabbed 8 times and Smallman 28. Their bodies had been dragged into bushes and left lying head to toe with their limbs entwined. CCTV and DNA evidence soon led to the arrest of Danyal Hussein, 19, from Blackheath in south-east London for the killings.

Extensive traces of Hussein's DNA were found on the murder weapons and in blood found at the scene, and CCTV showed that he had entered the park wearing latex gloves and carrying a large rucksack. He had also purchased several knives and strong duct tape at Asda shortly prior to the killings and had bought a military entrenching tool from Amazon. After the murders, he visited a hospital for treatment of cuts on his hands, which Hussein claimed happened when he was robbed. When police searched Hussein's home, they found a note in his bedroom detailing a pact with the demon Lucifuge Rofocale in which he agreed to sacrifice six women every six months in exchange for winning the Mega Millions Super Jackpot lottery and not being suspected of any crime he committed. There were three lottery tickets wrapped up in the note, none of them containing winning numbers. At the opening of Hussein's trial, Prosecution QC Oliver Glasgow said: "As it turned out, the demon did not come good on the bargain, since not only did the defendant not win the lottery but the police identified all the evidence that links him to these two murders." Hussein had clearly done his homework though. Lucifuge Rocale is, appropriately for a pact intended to make money, the demon in charge of Hell's treasury according to the Grand Grimoire.



LEFT: The note found in Danyal Hussein's bedroom detailing his unsuccessful lottery pact with the demon Lucifuge Rofocale.

*There were three lottery tickets, none with winning numbers*

Hussein denied that he played any part in the murders of Smallman and Henry, claiming that he was a victim of a conspiracy to frame him. He also denied that it is him in any of the CCTV footage, or that it is his blood or DNA in the samples found at the crime scene. He also claims that the card used to purchase the knife and other incriminating items had been stolen from him some days before, despite CCTV showing him using it in a Tesco days after the supposed theft. *MyLondon, 9 June; BBC News, 10 June 2021.*

### VOICE OF THE DEVIL

At his trial at Salisbury Crown Court, Jonathan Keal, 37, blamed the Devil for the frenzied attack he launched on his sleeping family. Keal stabbed and beat his parents, Lynda, 65, and Robert Keal, 64, and his grandmother, Marjorie Blacker, 90, at their home in Sandleheath, Hampshire, on 26 September 2018 using a knife, cricket bat, scissors and dumbbells. As Robert Keal phoned the police during the attack, the operator heard him say, "You're killing me. Stop it. What are you doing?" Jonathan Keal was heard replying, "I know I am. I'm sorry, Dad." After inflicting serious injuries on his victims, all of whom survived, Keal was found by police in Station Road, Fordingbridge, "covered in blood from head to toe and only wearing his underwear". The court heard that Keal struggled with mental health issues and had

recently returned to live with his parents due to concerns about this and his long-term illicit drug use. Prior to the attack he had stopped taking prescription medicines and had been admitted to hospital after attempting suicide. Andrew Campbell-Tiech QC, Keal's defence barrister, said: "He heard the voice of the Devil telling him what to do. It overpowered him completely and he sought the destruction of those he loved the most." He said that his client was not guilty by reason of insanity. *BBC News, 9 June 2021.*

### DEAD MAN'S NECKLACE

Guards at Corcoran State Prison in California failed to notice that prisoner Jaime Osuna had killed his cellmate Luis Romero, or that he was wearing a necklace made of Romero's body parts, falsely reporting that both inmates were alive after supposedly making regular checks on their cell. Osuna, 31, a self-styled Satanist with complex occult-inspired facial tattoos, was serving a life sentence for the torture and murder of Yvette Pena at a motel in Bakersfield and had a history of attacking his cellmates. Having created a makeshift knife from a razorblade attached to a handle, he used it to kill and dissect Romero, torturing him first. Kings County Executive Assistant District Attorney Phil Esbenshade said: "We do believe that the victim was conscious during at least a portion of the time." Osuna decapitated Romero and sliced his mouth open on either side to create an extended "Joker" smile. He also removed an eye, a finger, and a portion of his lung, fashioning them into a necklace he was found wearing by guards. Osuna had draped the cell bars with a sheet to hide his activity from the rest of the cell block and it is thought likely that it took him some hours to



FELIX ADAMO

complete what Esbenshade described as the most heinous slaying he had ever seen. Romero, who had spent 27 years in prison after being convicted of second-degree murder as a teenager, was nearing parole eligibility when he was killed. After the murder, Osuna was transferred to Salinas Valley State Prison's psychiatric inpatient programme. There he was diagnosed with unspecified schizophrenia spectrum, antisocial personality disorder and borderline personality disorder. As a result, a judge ruled that Osuna was not competent to stand trial for Romero's killing but he is likely to remain in prison for the rest of his life. [AP] 28 May; BoingBoing.net, 29 May 2021.

## POSSESSED BY DJINN

During his trial at Preston Crown Court for the murder of Dr Saman Mir Sacharvi, 49, and her daughter, 14-year-old Vian Mangrio, Shahbaz Khan, 51, said that he now believed that an unknown person had killed them, rather than the djinni he had initially believed to be responsible. Arrested for the murders after CCTV evidence showed him at the victims' house, Khan



told police that he had been possessed by a 620-year-old spirit named Robert, who he believed to be a djinni, and that Robert was responsible for the killings. When in custody, CCTV had shown Khan throwing himself across the cell, which he claimed was, in fact, the djinni holding him by the throat and banging his head against the wall; when interviewed, he spoke in the djinni's voice and told detectives he was called Robert, was 620 years old and lived at Dr Sacharvi's address. Khan said that whenever he visited Dr Sacharvi he saw Robert and a second spirit named Rita there, and that the doctor had told him Robert had broken a mirror because he

was angry that an extension Mr Khan had built was in "his area". He said that when he last saw Dr Sacharvi she was in her kitchen, chatting to Robert and Rita. In court, Khan pleaded not guilty, but now accepted that djinn were not responsible; he added that he was now "taking eight to 10 tablets a day, so my brain feels slightly better." *BBC News*, 15 + 24 June 2021.

## DAYBELL'S DARK SPIRITS

Christian doomsday author Chad Daybell has pleaded not guilty to murdering his first wife Tammy Daybell, and his two stepchildren Joshua Vallow, seven, and Tylee Ryan, 17, a year after the children's bodies were found buried in his back yard. Tammy died mysteriously in her sleep just two weeks before Daybell married Lori Vallow-Daybell and moved to Hawaii, but after the children were found police exhumed her body for testing. Vallow-Daybell was committed to a psychiatric hospital for 90 days by a judge in the hope of making her competent to stand trial along with her husband. It is alleged that the couple carried out the killings because they be-

lieved that Tammy Daybell had been possessed by a demon and that the two children had been taken over by dark spirits who turned them into zombies and that the only way to rid a person of these entities was to kill them. Daybell has written several books about the end of the world and Christ's return to Earth and claimed to receive visions from "beyond the veil", while Lori Vallow-Daybell believed she had lived numerous lives on other planets before her current life. For the full story, see FT395:4, 7. *Huffpost.com*, 6 June 2021.

## CANNIBAL MATRICIDE

When police arrived at the apartment of Maria Soledad Gomez, 66, in Madrid, their knocks were answered by her son Alberto Sanchez Gomez, 26, saying: "My mother's here. She's dead." On entering the apartment, they found Maria's dismembered body, with parts spread around the flat and some packed into food containers in the fridge. Alberto confessed to strangling his mother during an argument and cutting up her body with kitchen knives and a saw. "The idea was to make her body disappear," he said, admitting that as well as throwing out body parts with the rubbish and feeding some to his dog, he had eaten some himself. He still had blood stains round his mouth and flesh under his fingernails when arrested. Alberto Gomez had a history of assaulting his mother and a record of arrests for violating the restraining order that was supposed to prevent him approaching her. In court, he claimed he heard voices telling him to kill and dismember his parent, but the judge deemed him fit to stand trial. He was imprisoned for 15 years and five months for murder and desecrating a corpse and was ordered to pay his brother £52,000 in compensation, *D.Telegraph*, 16 June 2021.

## NECROLOG

We say goodbye to a Russian cryptozoologist who fought in WWII and endured six years in a gulag, and a physicist who bridged the worlds of science and faith



### MARIE-JEANNE KOFFMANN

Marie-Jeanne Koffmann spent four decades in the mountains and forests of the former USSR in search of the Russian wild man known as the almasty.

Born in Paris, she spent most of her life in Russia. She obtained an MD at Moscow University in 1941 and worked as a surgeon in the city. In her spare time she became interested in mountaineering. She served in the Red Army during World War II, attaining the rank of captain, and fought in the Battle of Moscow and the Battle of the Caucasus, during which she was second-in-command of a battalion of mountain rangers. She received seven Soviet battle citations.

After the war, she participated in the first expeditions to previously unexplored mountain ranges, including the Pamirs in 1947. Later she was accused of being a spy for France and was imprisoned in a gulag from 1948 to 1954. She was eventually acquitted and released.

In 1957, Marie saw an article on the yeti in a Russian magazine. It covered the early expeditions in search of the creature and gave the views of mountaineers, several of whom she knew personally. This piqued her interest and she began her own research into the subject – research that she would carry

on well into the 1990s. In 1988, she was elected to the Society of Geography of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

She joined the Soviet Union Snowman Commission, a group of scientists based at the Darwin Museum in Moscow and dedicated to researching these creatures. The Commission members included scientists like Professor Pitor Smoline, Professor AA Machkovtsev and Dmitri Bayanov.

Marie's first fieldwork was in the Pamir Mountains, where she was the doctor for the first Snowman Commission expedition. Later she concentrated on the Caucasus.

She spent decades in the Caucasus mountains searching for the 'almasty', as the locals called the wild man. She interviewed hundreds of witnesses and gathered copious notes on the creature's habits, and once even glimpsed the creature from a distance. Her impressive and substantial body of work on the subject sadly remains mostly unpublished. Despite never writing a book about the almasty, she published a synthesis of her fieldwork and research in the French journal *Archeologia*, including details of the creature's appearance, diet, behaviour and tool use.

She also established the Russian Society of Cryptozoologists, based at the Darwin Museum in Moscow, and remained active in the field into the 1990s. Gregory Panchenko, the Ukrainian biologist who was the guide for the CFZ's 2008 almasty expedition (see FT246:46-52) worked with her on some of her later trips.

Dr Koffmann left Russia in 2009 at the age of 90. She lived at the Gautier Wendelen retirement home in Paris. Despite suffering a stroke, she remained comfortable and sharp of mind. In 2020 she was named cryptozoologist of the year by Loren Coleman and the

International Cryptozoology Museum.

Marie-Jeanne Koffmann died on 11 July, just 11 days shy of her 102nd birthday. She was a trailblazing and inspirational figure in the field of cryptozoology, and we can only hope that her lifetime's collection of notes is preserved for future researchers. See also FT4:16, 67:32-34, 298:32, 315:43.

*Marie-Jeanne Koffmann, surgeon, mountaineer, cryptozoologist and almasty researcher, born Paris, 22 July 1919; died 11 July 2021, aged 101.*

**Richard Freeman**

### REV CANON JOHN POLKINGHORNE

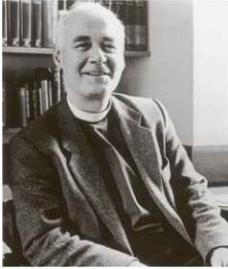
Rev Canon John Polkinghorne, who has died aged 90, was damned with faint praise by Richard Dawkins as one of the three British scientists who are also sincerely religious that crop up with the "likable familiarity of senior partners in a firm of Dickensian lawyers". Polkinghorne was in many ways the anti-Dawkins: a highly regarded scientist and theologian who did the utmost to bring the worlds of science and faith together. He said "debating with Dawkins is hopeless, because there's no give and take. He doesn't give you an inch. He just says no when you say yes." For his work on reconciling science with faith, in 2002, he received the £1m Templeton Prize, awarded for exceptional contributions to affirming life's spiritual dimension.

John Charlton Polkinghorne was born in Weston-super-Mare on 16 October 1930 to George Polkinghorne, a post office worker, and his wife Dorothy, the daughter of a groom. He was educated at Elmhurst Grammar School, Street, Somerset, and, after his family moved to Ely, the Perse School, Cambridge, going on to read mathematics at Trinity College. He followed this with a doctor-

ate in high energy physics and became a Fellow of the college in 1954. A variety of academic posts at Cambridge and elsewhere followed and he began to make a name for himself in the field of quantum physics, resulting in his appointment as Professor of Mathematical Physics at Cambridge in 1968 and election as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1974. In 1979 he surprised his colleagues by resigning to take holy orders. A practising Christian throughout his career, he said that "theoretical physics, like most mathematically based subjects, is something you don't get better at as you grow older"; approaching his 50th birthday, he felt it was time for a change.

Polkinghorne's Church career turned out to be no less distinguished than his scientific one. He served as a curate in Cambridge and Bristol, then as vicar of Blean, near Canterbury, from 1984 to 1986, after which he was appointed Fellow, Dean and Chaplain of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, then in 1989 the President of Queens' College. During his scientific career he had published several books on physics and in 1983 took on the task of exploring the connection between science and religion, beginning with *The Way the World Is*, which he described as "what I would like to have said to my scientific colleagues who couldn't understand why I was being ordained". He followed this with many other books considering the synergy between the two seemingly opposed fields. He was knighted in 1997, but as a reverend he did not use the prefix "Sir".

Polkinghorne believed that the increasingly mechanistic explanations of the world favoured by Dawkins and the like should be replaced by the understanding that most of nature is more like a cloud than a clock, with mind, soul and body being seen as different aspects



of the same underlying reality. He believed this reality can occur in two contrasting states, creating our perception of mind and matter as different things. He took the view that standard physical causation is not adequate to explain how things and people interact and coined the term “active information”. He used this to describe how, when several outcomes are possible, there may be higher levels of causation that choose which one occurs and believed that God is the ultimate answer to Leibniz’s great question “why is there something rather than nothing?” He saw the anthropic fine tuning of the Universe (i.e., it being exactly suited for the development of humans) and its intelligibility to us as indications that God existed, but also cited Gödel’s incompleteness theory, saying: “If we cannot prove the consistency of arithmetic, it seems a bit much to hope that God’s existence is easier to deal with.” This, he suggested, explained why scientists found belief in God so problematic. His critics accused him of using primitive arguments and poor philosophy, but pioneering physicist Freeman Dyson said Polkinghorne’s arguments on theology and natural science were “polished and logically coherent”, while science writer and novelist Simon Ings, writing in *New Scientist*, said that his argument for the proposition that God is real is cogent and his evidence elegant.

*Rev Canon John Charlton Polkinghorne KBE, FRS, scientist and theologian, born Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, 16 Oct 1930; died Cambridge, 9 Mar 2021, aged 90.*



## FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

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

### TOLKIEN’S FAIRY DRAMA

In his 1947 essay ‘On Fairy-stories’ JRR Tolkien offered several interesting passages on the possible reality of fairies. His views are reminiscent of a tolerant mediæval theologian. For instance, he calls ‘elves’ “inherent powers of the created world”. However, one passage seems more fortæan than Catholic. Tolkien introduces the idea of what he calls ‘Faërian Drama’: “those plays which according to abundant records the elves have often presented to men”.

Tolkien means here, I think, formulaic scenes that we associate with fairies: fairy battles, fairy markets, fairy hostings and, of course, fairy dancing and fairy carousing. He goes on: “If you are present at a Faërian drama you yourself are, or think that you are, bodily inside its Secondary World [a fantasy]. The experience may be very similar to Dreaming and has (it would seem) sometimes (by men) been confounded with it.”

Tolkien seems to be saying that when a human being strays into a fairy scene he is actually straying into a ‘play’ that the fairies have put on. In other words, the fairies are not, say, fighting a battle to decide which fairy faction will dominate the valley. Rather they are *pretending* to fight a battle for any humans who stumble into their natural amphitheatres. This reminds me of other fortæan happenings. Occasionally in descriptions of alien-

encounters, witnesses report having the sense that a show was being put on for them. It was not just 10 small astronauts collecting plants, but 10 small astronauts *acting out* collecting plants for the benefit of the humans in the bushes. I included, inspired by reports like this, a question in the Fairy Census: did you (the witness) have “a sense that the

experience was a display put on specially for you?” Many ticked the relevant box. Tolkien continues about the human in a Faërian drama: “You are deluded – whether that is the intention of the elves (always or at any time) is another question. They at any rate are not themselves deluded. This is for them a form of Art... They do not live in it, though they can, perhaps, afford to spend more time at it than human artists can.”

Here Tolkien is not so much a mediæval theologian as he is a New Age mystic. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas Anderson, in their excellent edition of *On Fairy-stories* (Harper-Collins 2014) write: “So vivid and immediate is Tolkien’s report on these extraordinary conditions that readers may find it hard to believe that he was not speaking out of his own encounter with the phenomena he describes.” Tolkien’s words are so unusual and so unnecessary in the broader structure of the essay that I wonder whether they are not right.

Simon has edited *Sheridan Le Fanu’s Scary Fairy Tales: Four Tales of Fairy Horror* (2020).

“THE EXPERIENCE  
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AND HAS BEEN  
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WITH IT”



## T is for Trinity and Tic Tac

NIGEL WATSON surveys the latest sightings and ufological news from around the world

### ANOTHER TIC TAC

E-4 Petty Officer John Baughman, of the US Navy, has revealed that he saw a 'Tic Tac' object from the flight deck of the *USS Carl Vinson*, a Nimitz-class supercarrier, off the coast of Haiti in January 2010. He described it as definitely a solid, white object, some 20ft (6m) long, that darted into the depths and appeared to collapse on itself and disappear. Baughman felt empowered to mention this after the recent interest in UAPs, although he admitted that what he saw could have been caused by a shark, whale or moving flotsam. The story does reinforce the idea, promoted by ufologist Gary Heseltine in the *Sun* (3 June 2021) that there are alien bases under the sea. In any case, it seems that Tic Tacs have replaced triangular 'Dudley Dorito' UFOs, and we are now in danger of snack attacks from both air and sea. Ryan Sprague, "New Navy Witness Says He Saw a 'Tic Tac' Operating Underwater," [: medium.com/on-the-trail-of-the-saucers/new-navy-witness-says-he-saw-a-tic-tac-operating-underwater-92344d29ac1](https://medium.com/on-the-trail-of-the-saucers/new-navy-witness-says-he-saw-a-tic-tac-operating-underwater-92344d29ac1).

### BLAST FROM THE PAST

The recently published book from Jacques Vallee and Paola Harris, *Trinity: The Best-Kept Secret*, promised to reveal hard evidence from San Antonio, New Mexico, of a crashed saucer and its occupants. The story goes that its secret retrieval by a US Army detachment in mid-August 1945 was spotted by two boys who also collected two metal parts from the craft. An analysis of the parts showed that they were of terrestrial origin; but a 'scientific' report apparently gets around this by saying that the aliens could be time travellers from our future; or that they have bases on Earth where they could use local materials to build their craft; or other solar systems could have isotopic ratios of the elements similar to our planet; or the parts are from a secret terrestrial craft. So, basically, any old bit of ironmongery could be from an ET ship if you are disposed to believe in aliens. The assertion by Paul Hynek that one piece is a windmill tailbone is far more likely.

Rather than being a new case, the story was first disclosed in the Hallowe'en edition 2003 of the *Socorro-Magdalena Mountain Mail* by Ben Moffett, and in 2011 one of the boys, Remigio Baca, published a book about it: *Born on the Edge of Ground Zero: Living in the Shadow of Area 51*. Paola Harris wrote a long article about the case in 2010, where she also makes much of the fact that the first 'Trinity' nuclear bomb was tested a month earlier, 20 miles (32km) from the crash site. In this manner, aliens are linked with their



LEFT: A visualisation of the Blackpool theme park

fear of our weaponry; which, Paola suggests, "put humanity and possibly other dimensional visitors in danger of total destruction."

On Twitter, Chris Mellon, formerly of the US Department of Defense and the To the Stars Academy, gives this glowing plug for the book: "Thanks to the meticulous research of Dr Jacques Vallee and co-author Paola Harris, there is fresh reason to believe – unrelated to the famous Roswell case – that our government could be concealing physical proof of ET life and/or technology."

That "meticulous research", though, presents no new or hard evidence; but it does fit in with the agenda of aliens as a threat presented by the likes of Kean, Cameron, Mellon and Elizondo; and, somewhat frighteningly, it indicates the gullibility of high-ranking intelligence personnel in relation to what is essentially a Hallowe'en tale based on Roswell. Even more shockingly, Dr Vallee's legacy is severely tarnished by being associated with this tosh. [www.theblackvault.com/casefiles/analysis-two-metallic-parts-purportedly-crashed-unidentified-aerial-object-san-antonio-new-mexico-august-16-1945/](http://www.theblackvault.com/casefiles/analysis-two-metallic-parts-purportedly-crashed-unidentified-aerial-object-san-antonio-new-mexico-august-16-1945/); [www.theufochronicles.com/2010/11/1945-san-antonio-ufo-crash-witness.html](http://www.theufochronicles.com/2010/11/1945-san-antonio-ufo-crash-witness.html).

### CHARIOT PARKS

A "Chariots of the Gods" theme park in Blackpool has been renamed because the developers, Nikal and Media Invest Entertainment, decided it didn't resonate with a younger audience. Instead, it will be called the 'Blackpool Central Indoor Entertainment Park', which sounds about as exciting as a cardboard factory in Slough.

The £300m visitor attraction will still use the Ancient Aliens theme, but first a multi-storey car park, followed by a food hall, hotel and pub, will be built on the 17-acre site. Lastly, three indoor entertainment venues and a public square will be completed by 2029. At The Erich von Däniken Legacy Night at the Princess Anne Theatre, London, on 15 October 2016, it was announced that

three theme parks were being planned. The parks would contain ancient lands and 4-D rollercoaster rides with the theme of ancient wars in the 'heavens' and the influence of ETs on human civilisation. There were immediate plans for a site in Berlin, and a much larger one in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, scheduled to open in 2020. There were also plans for one in the UK – presumably a reference to the Blackpool project. Blackpool should be warned that the first 'Chariots' theme park was opened in Jungfrau Park, Switzerland, in 2003 (see [FT169:30-35](https://www.ft.com/content/169-30-35)) and closed down three years later due to lack of visitors.

A bigger issue might be what many argue is the inherent racism of the Ancient Alien theories. Palaeontologist Julien Benoit asks: "Why is it so hard for some to acknowledge that ancient non-European civilisations like the Aztecs, people from Easter Island, ancient Egyptians or Bantu-speakers from southern Africa could create intricate structures? The answer is unfortunately as simple as it seems: it boils down to profound racism and a feeling of white superiority that emanates from the rotting corpse of colonialism. Colonial powers saw their 'subjects' in Africa, South America and Southeast Asia as exotic, fascinating – but ultimately primitive."

Given the slow progress of the Blackpool project I don't see it coming to fruition; a far better bet is to invest in my non-racist foo fighter factory scheme. [www.placenorthwest.co.uk/news/chariots-of-the-gods-ditched-at-blackpool-central/](http://www.placenorthwest.co.uk/news/chariots-of-the-gods-ditched-at-blackpool-central/); [theconversation.com/racism-is-behind-outlandish-theories-about-africas-ancient-architecture-83898](http://theconversation.com/racism-is-behind-outlandish-theories-about-africas-ancient-architecture-83898); [www.skeptical.org.uk/2021/02/blackpools-new-chariots-of-the-gods-park-is-sadly-built-on-racist-assumptions-about-the-past/](http://www.skeptical.org.uk/2021/02/blackpools-new-chariots-of-the-gods-park-is-sadly-built-on-racist-assumptions-about-the-past/)

### PIE IN THE SKY

On 8 May, this was posted on Facebook: "I, Michael H Rogers, make an open apology to Travis C Walton for anything negative I may have said against him within the last few years." Not long after, Travis's old co-worker announced he was co-writing a book with the famous abductee. Then, on 10 July, Rogers posted about the proposed remake of *Fire in the Sky*: "I tell him that his supposed remake should be called, 'Pie in the Sky'. He kept telling me there was a remake and that Robert Patrick was going to play my part again. Only a week later Travis told me in person that there will be no remake, but now he says it's in production??? Something is wrong with this picture!?!\*?\*@> <@\*?\*!?"



# No laughing matter

Sharing a UFO sighting is never easy, says JENNY RANGLES, especially if you're a comedian

It's never easy explaining to someone that you have just seen a UFO. Most people will assume that you are telling a tall tale, though in my experience with hundreds of witnesses over the years, that is rarely true. Now imagine how much more difficult it is if you are not, say, a doctor or a policeman, but a comedian. Very funny – tell me another! Except, of course, you're not delivering a one-liner but relating a genuine experience that you wish to share.

But such people do tell their stories. It is not rare for those in the public eye to witness a UFO – after all, seeing one is just a question of being in the right place at the right time, and there a lot of UFOs to be seen (most eventually identifiable, of course).

Perhaps it started with Jackie Gleason, the US comedian who starred in one of the first major TV sitcoms, *The Honeymooners*, which ran in various forms through the 1950s. He played a New York bus driver, having worked for real for another part of the city transit system. Gleason was fascinated by fortean phenomena, notably UFOs, and he had gathered a collection of every UFO book published, which he read late into the night. He even built a 'fleet' of houses in Peekskill, New York, that resembled flying saucers (he called the main one 'mother ship'); one recently went on the market for \$12 million. There have long been claims that his friendship with President Richard Nixon meant Gleason was privy to big secrets. These tales were shared by his wife, not Gleason himself. He allegedly told her what happened only because he was so dumbstruck and could not hide it from her, but he never confirmed nor denied the story up to his death in 1987.

If we are to believe it, Gleason played golf with Richard Nixon on 19 February 1973 in Florida, where they both had homes. They talked about UFOs. Hours after that golf game, the President allegedly showed up at Gleason's home in the middle of the night and took him to nearby Homestead Airbase; here, Nixon showed him the battered remains of a UFO and some 2ft (60cm) tall, bald-headed alien creatures recovered from the crash site and now secreted at the facility (see "The President, the Entertainer and the Aliens", **FT366:30-36**).

Tales about cover-ups of an alien presence on Earth involving a disgraced president and a famous comedian will not be seen as proof of extraterrestrial



LEFT: Jason Manford had a close encounter in 1995.

life by many: a good legend perhaps, but a believable event? Actress and comedian Fran Drescher – best known for the 1990s TV sitcom *The Nanny* and the earlier *Spinal Tap* movie – caused a stir in 2012 by claiming that both she and her husband had small scars on their hands in much the same spot and that aliens were responsible. A joke you might think – her husband seemed unconvinced that ET matchmakers inspired their romance, suggesting a mundane cause for her blemish – but Fran apparently did have a UFO encounter to back up her story. One witness who recalled the same incident from the 1970s says it involved traffic on Queens Boulevard in New York coming to a standstill as a 'mother ship' and several 'baby' UFOs were seen moving across the sky. If this is what Drescher saw, it matches several other such cases later traced to mid-air refuelling exercises where military jets connected to a tanker plane are given top-ups in flight without the need to land. Having witnessed such an event, for many people the retelling of it can turn the misperception of an unusual aerial display into something much bigger as the memory is relived. UFO investigators are familiar with the problem of researching cases that occurred years earlier.

More recently, funny man and BBC game show host Jason Manford shared an encounter he had as a teenager in Manchester while playing with his younger brother. This story caught my attention as it happened in Whalley Range, where I went to school (as did Jason). Indeed, I lived a short walk from where the Manfords saw their UFO, and I edited early editions of *Northern UFO News* and started writing *UFOs: A British Viewpoint* there (co-author Peter Warrington also lived nearby). The incident occurred around the summer of 1995 when Jason was 14 and living in a council house where his family were struggling to survive (which is why he later took a job at the local

Southern Hotel, where his showbiz career would begin). He and his brother Stephen (now a magician) saw a strange object in the south Manchester skies. Stephen freaked out as they watched it pass overhead; Jason helpfully suggested it might come back to look for him in his bedroom. Unfortunately, we know little else, other than that the object moved one way and then took off in the opposite direction as no aircraft could do.

1995 was an interesting year for UFO sightings in Manchester. On 6 January, a British Airways Boeing 737 heading to the airport from Milan reported a very near miss with one. This was an unidentified wedge-shaped object that flew past in "close proximity". The case provoked a major investigation, but only the cockpit crew saw the object. I suspect it was a large fireball meteor far above them. The sky was overcast and nobody on the ground would have seen it. The control tower at the airport confirmed that only the Boeing was on radar.

Closer in time to when the Manford boys saw their UFO, there was a wave of activity between 8 and 13 July. The secret MoD files on these events are now declassified. Something not dissimilar to what the Manfords saw was reported to the airport near Baguley Hall as a stationary object which then moved off at speed around midnight on 9 July. Baguley is 4km (2.5 miles) south of the Manford home, across the Chorlton marshes over the River Mersey. This object was mushroom-shaped and acted similarly to what the Manfords reported. Earlier that day in Newton, near Hyde, a man walking his dog saw another glowing object that he said was standing still and then accelerated away, making his dog's hair stand on end. He added: "I had NOT been drinking!" Even more remarkably the caller, who reported this event to Manchester Airport control tower, phoned back later to advise them that in the hours following he suddenly "had a dark surtan and white hair". Remarkably, this aftermath is not unique, and I have looked into other very similar claims.

These events may or may not be connected in any way with what the Manford brothers saw, but if either of the witnesses happen to be reading this magazine – please do get in touch with us. You will find that we are a respectful audience.

# THE ROYAL FRATERNITY OF MASTER METAPHYSICIANS & THE IMMORTAL BABY

In 1930s America, a bizarre self-help cult set out to make an innocent baby immortal. It was all to end in tears, with embezzlement, law suits, jail terms, and suicide, as BRIAN J ROBB reveals...

Who wants to live forever? Well, going by the interest in immortality from time immemorial, just about everybody. There was one man, though, who actually set out to try and achieve it. As the head of a little-remembered American cult of the 1930s, James B Schafer took an otherwise ordinary child and through a combination of specialist diet, constant love, and the power of positive thinking attempted to turn her into an immortal being. It might have begun as a well-intentioned endeavour, but it was to end in legal complications, jail terms, and – ultimately – suicide. What would the price be for immortality? James B Schafer's Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians did everything they could to find out.

## THE MASTER METAPHYSICIANS

Established sometime in the mid-1920s, the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians was founded by James Bernard Schafer, a con man who found his niche in the new 'self-improvement' movement. The organisation didn't really prosper until the 1930s, when they set up home in Oak Dale, Long Island, close to New York City. Schafer was born around 1896 (accounts differ on the precise date) in Fargo, North Dakota, and had come from Michigan, where he'd qualified as a medical doctor, to New York on a Holy mission. A charismatic speaker, Schafer had developed a series of stirring speeches about the "spiritual potential" concealed within the material world. Between the wars, people were searching for meaning, and Schafer was more than ready to welcome them to his Fraternity. He billed himself as simply a "messenger" whose sole purpose was "the joyous work of helping others to help themselves".

Every Sunday morning, he gathered huge crowds at New York's Carnegie Hall, where he sought to persuade his audience that everything material could be affected by the power of the human mind. For Schafer, anything anyone could imagine – from good health to a million bucks – could be made real through the power of thought alone, as long as the supplicant was willing to master secret techniques only he could teach them – for a price. It has been estimated that Schafer was able to gather around 10,000 dedicated followers before the decade was over.

Joining the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians was easy enough. If anyone were so inclined, all they had to do was cough



## EVERYTHING MATERIAL COULD BE AFFECTED BY THE POWER OF THE MIND

up the \$250 fee (about \$4,000 in today's money). This cash donation was labelled a "love offering" to be freely given by the faithful. Younger members could join the "cosmic network" by making donations of stamps. In return for their hard-earned cash, those who joined were issued "fellowship certificates" in the name of the Inexhaustible Bank of the Infinite Universal Mind, but these could only be cashed in "Ideas and Everything Desired With no Limitations" rather than actual money. Through this and other methods, Schafer was able to raise a fortune from his rich followers. Like many a guru, he resented paying any of this in taxes to the government, so he applied for tax-exempt status as a religious organisation. This was one battle Schafer lost, as the judge ruled there was little that was religious

LEFT: James B Schafer, founder of the Royal Fraternity of Master Physicians, attracted large crowds of New Yorkers to his Sunday morning lectures at Carnegie Hall. RIGHT: Schafer and Baby Jean.

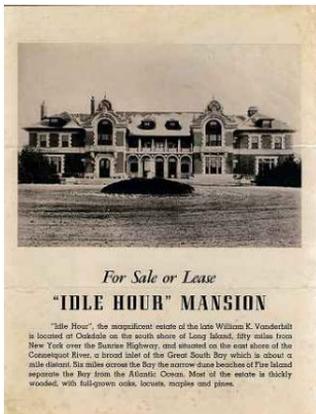
about the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians other than their approach to "the solicitation and receipt of funds".

By the start of 1938, Schafer had amassed sufficient cash (about \$350,000) to buy the then rundown 110-room former Vanderbilt Mansion on Long Island, previously the home of philanthropist and horse-breeder William K Vanderbilt, who'd made the family's money from the development of America's railroads. Schafer renamed the property "Peace Haven" and moved in between 50 and 100 of his key followers, many of them unmarried middle-aged women; described as "half souls" under Metaphysician philosophy, they required "completion". A core group of male acolytes who also lived there were known as The Storks, and they would have a special role to play in the great work that was to come. Other regular members who wished to visit the Metaphysicians' Mansion could do so, as long as they could afford the \$100 entrance fee (about \$1,800 today).

The local Long Island community regarded the newcomers as little more than a group of unthreatening eccentrics whom they were happy to leave alone as long as nothing untoward went on. They even seemed to be improving the long-neglected 800-acre property with the addition of an outdoor swimming pool replacing the distressed tennis court. In the area of a healthy diet, if little else, the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians were ahead of their time. They believed eating meat and drinking coffee and tea were bad for your health (as some doctors now agree), and that smoking and drinking alcohol should also be avoided in order to live a healthy life. That seems like basic good health advice now, but back in the 1930s their vegetarian stance was radical and occasionally frowned upon. They did have some weird dietary rules; spices, vinegars, and mustard were firmly ruled out, so their vegetarian diet also had to be rather bland.

Exactly what went on within the walls of Peace Haven wasn't clear to outsiders. Curious journalists who visited have left partial accounts, but most seem to have fallen for whatever pabulum the ever-wily Schafer of-





For Sale or Lease  
**"IDLE HOUR" MANSION**

"Idle Hour", the magnificent estate of the late William K. Vanderbilt is located in Oakdale on the south shore of Long Island, fifty miles from New York over the Sunrise Highway, and situated on the east shore of the Coney Neck, a broad inlet of the Great South Bay which is about a mile distant. Six miles across the Bay the narrow cause beaches of Fire Island separate the Bay from the Atlantic Ocean. Most of the estate is thickly wooded, with full-grown oaks, locusts, maples and pines.



ABOVE LEFT: "Idle Hour" was the estate built by William K Vanderbilt at Oakdale, Long Island. Bought by Schafer in 1938, it was renamed "Peace Haven" and used as the Master Metaphysicians' headquarters. BELOW: The 110-room mansion became home to a "red-haired, blue-eyed child called Jean", according to a 1938 report.

ferred up. Those living at the mansion were said to be "truth students" who set out to become Adepts before they could progress to the status of "Master Metaphysician", a process that could take up to 18 months (and a lot of money).

Their creed was described as a mixture of faith healing, Rosicrucianism and Christian Science – basically, Schafer came up with a benign sounding amalgam of anything spiritual that was vaguely popular at the time. They believed in reincarnation and healing through the laying on of hands by Schafer himself. Schafer even claimed he could dematerialise things or people that stood in his way. Members wandering the grounds were trained to greet each other with the blessing "Peace". "Our organisation is unorganised," Schafer happily told one writer. "You can't define a thing like that. People think we're a lot of nuts."

### THE BABY JEAN SCAM

For almost a year, everything was quiet around the Peace Haven of the Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians in Long Island. Then, in November 1938, the cult unexpectedly announced to the world that they intended to raise an "immortal". It was Schafer's contention that given the right conditions, through the power of the mind alone, a human being could effectively live forever. It was an ambitious plan and it required the one thing Schafer himself didn't then have: a baby. Schafer targeted new parents who were finding the raising of their child difficult, largely for economic reasons. He settled upon New York waitress Catherine Gaunt (sometimes given as 'Gaunt'), whose five-month-old (some sources say three-month), red-haired, blue-eyed child "Baby Jean" suited Schafer's mystical needs.

The parents agreed they were not then best suited to raise their child, and saw Schafer and his organisation as offering her a brighter future. The Master Metaphysician

## SHE WOULD HAVE AN "ETERNITY DIET" AND BE SURROUNDED BY POSITIVE THOUGHTS

### Adopt Baby To Prove Theory

#### Metaphysicians Will Try To Prove Humans Can Live Forever.

OAKDALE, N. Y., Nov. 25 (AP).—A five-month-old baby has been adopted by the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians in an attempt to prove their belief human beings can live forever.

Central figure in the strange experiment is a red-haired, blue-eyed child named Jean, who James B. Schaeffer, leader of the Metaphysicians, said would be reared to demonstrate "that man is an immortal being."

Schaeffer said the baby's poverty-stricken parents, whose identity he did not disclose, had asked him to adopt her. He said she would be fed a vegetable diet and her training rigidly controlled with no one permitted to speak to her of death or disease.

The child, he said, is being cared for by a private nurse in the old 110-room Vanderbilt mansion on Long Island obtained by the fraternity in January, 1938, and christened "Peace Haven."

Schaeffer and his fellow Metaphysicians believe illness and death result from destructive thoughts.

organisation informally adopted Baby Jean, meaning they simply took on all responsibility for the child. It is unclear if any money changed hands in this transaction, but Gaunt appears to have agreed only to see her child when the Metaphysicians allowed it.

Schafer was putting his beliefs into practice in the most spectacular way. The child would be raised to live forever simply because Schafer and his followers believed it was possible. Their ultimate aim was for her to become their leader, presiding over the organisation forever. She would have a strict vegetarian "eternity diet" and would be surrounded only by "positive thoughts". Shielded from the evils of the world and given the kind of communal cult upbringing her mother could never have imagined, Baby Jean would be the forerunner of a new kind of perfect human, one who would in the future (it was hoped) offer solutions to the problems facing mankind. Schafer claimed "Ignorance is death. Education is life." He argued that Jean would be taught to comprehend the forces of evil abroad in the world and the way they worked on humanity. She would be raised to be on constant guard against them. As, in Schafer's understanding, death and disease were the result of "destructive thinking", Jean would be coached to avoid such mental traps.

Little Jean was secluded in a private nursery within the Peace Haven property and her every need was catered for by a private nurse whose sole obligation was to the celebrity baby. The nurse, named Louise Kerfs, was on call 24 hours a day and had been briefed to only entertain positive thoughts whenever she was around the child. Those cult members resident at the former Vanderbilt property were instructed to keep an eye on Nurse Kerfs to ensure she never slipped into "negative thoughts" while around their precious immortal child. "A baby has an empty brain," claimed Schafer in one report. "We'll keep impressing on it the beauty of life and

the side of life that we are trying to live. If a child doesn't think anything that is bad or destructive, it can't be torn down. I can think of no child outside of royalty who might have had a better start in life." Schafer concluded by quoting the Bible: "The last enemy to be overcome is death."

The baby was certainly treated like royalty and was showered with gifts from Schafer, his inner circle, the cult's acolytes and curious visitors, many of whom paid handsomely for an audience with the tiny tot. Many of the gifts offered were not particularly suitable for a child not yet one year old – but items such as diamond rings and pearl necklaces were gratefully received by Schafer, who could, of course, exchange them for ready cash, which he'd no doubt claim would be spent entirely on Baby Jean's upbringing.

A report in the *Milwaukee Journal* of 10 July 1940 was headlined "First Year of 'Immortality' Shows Baby Jean is Normal". It chronicled the child's extravagant birthday party, a "two-day affair" with 200 visitors that "crowded the 100-room mansion with scores of presents". Reporting that Baby Jean appeared to be a normal, healthy, but easily distracted one-year-old with spinach in her hair, the newspaper decided that "thus far she doesn't seem to have taken the philosophy of the Metaphysicians very much to heart." Initially, Jean had attended Schafer's regular lectures, but as she was minded to disrupt them with singing and attempts to play "patty cake", her attendance had been discontinued in favour of pursuits more suitable for a one-year-old. The newspaper continued: "Attendance at [Schafer's] Steinway Hall lectures has increased so much since

Baby Jean joined the colony with a flood of attendant publicity, that admission to some of them is limited to those with invitations." Baby Jean was prepared for birthday photographs in a new pink dress with white ribbons, her face cleaned up, red hair brushed, and cake frosting cleaned from her new white shoes. One well-wisher was reported to have exclaimed: "Wouldn't you just love to see her on her 5,000th birthday!"

For Schafer, his acolytes and supplicants, Baby Jean was simply the most important person on Earth. That being so, he demanded that a time capsule sponsored by

Westinghouse and buried as part of the 1939-1940 World's Fair in New York be dug up so that Baby Jean's precious footprints could be added to the items to be preserved for posterity. Others didn't view the Master Metaphysicians' immortal baby experiment with quite the same awe as Schafer, and officials refused his request. He immediately took the high road, claiming he didn't need to add a Baby Jean artefact to the time capsule after all, as she'd be the only one still walking the Earth when the capsule was retrieved in the astonishingly far off year of 6940.

## Started On 'Immortality' Road, Baby Jean Just Coos At Idea



## CHOSEN FOR IMMORTALITY TEST



## 'Immortal' Baby Has Natural Taste for Easter Finery



**TOP:** Baby Jean celebrates her first six months of immortality, as reported by the *Fitchburg Sentinel* (6 Jan 1940). **ABOVE LEFT:** The *San Bernardino County Sun* (28 Nov 1939) carried a report on Baby Jean, here seen with (left to right) Master Metaphysicians Eleanor Shehr, Charlotte Schmidt and Nurse Louis Kerfs. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (22 Mar 1940) reported that while looking "like any ordinary little girl", Baby Jean had "been attending classes in metaphysics" at Peace Haven.



ABOVE LEFT: Schafer plays with Baby Jean. ABOVE RIGHT: Baby Jean in her nursery at Peace Haven, attended by Nurse Kerfs. BELOW: Baby Jean in her pram.

## THE CON IS ON

If a person can be defined by the company they keep, James Schafer was clearly a con man. One of his strongest supporters was the brilliantly named Napoleon Hill, a pioneering self-help guru who'd penned one of the Master Metaphysicians' key texts, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937). Born in a one-room cabin in the Appalachian mountains, Hill had briefly attended business school before embarking upon a lifetime of failed ventures, including a lumber company, an "Automobile College", a candy store, and an Institute of Advertising, where he set out to teach the principles of self-confidence and success. This was to be Napoleon Hill's future, one of publishing magazines, establishing correspondence schools, and writing books, all instructing his readers on how to think themselves to wealth. His philosophy fitted right in with that of the Master Metaphysicians, so it's no surprise that he was a fully paid-up member. So impressed with Hill's ideas was Schafer that he appointed the positive thinking guru as godfather to immortal Baby Jean. Hill and his second wife, Rosa Lee, attended the celebrations for Jean's first birthday.

One major source of information about life within the Long Island cult at that time is a 1940 report in the *New Yorker* magazine, written by E.J. Kahn. Invited to spend 24 hours with them, Kahn wrote up a fairly benign account of the cult's activities, marking them out as harmless kooks who largely kept themselves to themselves. He took note of their adherence to widespread "self-help" tendencies, pointing out that *Think and Grow Rich* was one of their central texts, "written by member Napoleon Hill and which many Metaphysicians regard as a sort of Gospel".

Kahn was even given an audience with the Metaphysicians' celebrity of the moment, Baby Jean herself. He described her striking red hair and bright blue eyes (commented upon by all who met the child) and the nervous, hovering presence of nurse Kerfs. It was Schafer's intent to document every phase of Jean's development, and inviting

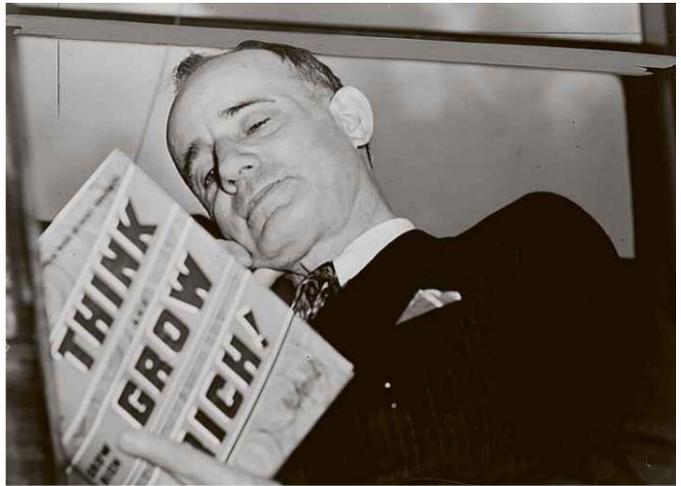
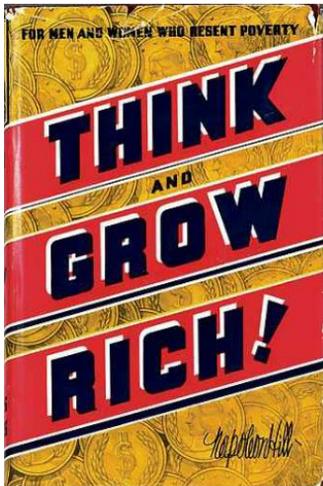
## MEMBERS OF THE STORKS WOULD WEAR A DIAPER PIN ON THEIR LAPELS



Kahn to Long Island was the first stage in that endeavour. Many photos and moving film images were taken of the child, many by Schafer himself. Kahn revealed that Schafer had the one-year-old pose with a copy of Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* as if she were engrossed in reading it.

What was driving Schafer? It appears, at heart, to be the old standbys of money and women. Those who saw him speak, however, reported that he seemed to believe everything he was saying: that he could reshape the world around him through the power of thought alone. Of course, there is little evidence of anything ever actually being significantly materially changed, by Schafer or any of the Master Metaphysicians. He certainly attracted money, but that was through the use of tried-and-tested confidence trick methods, as also employed by Napoleon Hill. He also attracted women, many of them those middle-aged unmarried "half souls". He was a married man, and there is little evidence of affairs with his followers, often seen as one of the 'benefits' of being a cult leader. There was, however, much hugging and kissing among the Metaphysicians, with Schafer claiming of his followers: "I can't deprive them of that. It's their aspirin."

There was another strange aspect to the Master Metaphysicians – an obsession with babies beyond the notorious Baby Jean. The inner circle of Storks was a sub-section of the Metaphysicians that charged an additional \$500 for membership and was open only to men. Schafer, of course, styled himself the "Chief Stork". Others had titles such as "Stork Entertainment, Second Assistant Chairman". Although the Storks were supposed to be a secret group, members would wear a diaper pin on their jacket lapels and would spend much of their time making layettes (a small package of baby clothes and other items for a new-born) that would be distributed to unwed mothers in the city. While this activity could be seen as a philanthropic gesture for the community, it is suggestive of something oddly sinister and weirdly psycho-



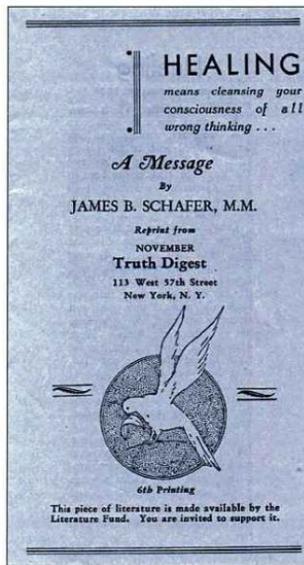
ABOVE LEFT: One of the Master Metaphysicians' key texts, *Think and Grow Rich!* by self-help guru Napoleon Hill. ABOVE RIGHT: Hill, here seen enjoying his own book, was appointed baby Jean's godfather. BELOW: One of Schafer's own self-help tracts. BOTTOM: The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (26 Dec 1940) reports on the 'Storks'.

sexual. Again, however, while the Storks were involved in the care and support of young unmarried mothers and their children, there seems to have been no overt sexual motive behind their activities.

### THINGS FALL APART

Much as they appeared innocent and harmless on the surface, the grace period for the Master Metaphysicians in Long Island didn't last too long. By the early 1940s, the tide began to turn against them and the outlook looked increasingly bleak for James B Schafer and his acolytes. The first sign of brewing trouble was a lawsuit pursued by a former cult member, Anna Weber. She won a court judgement against Schafer and his organisation for the repayment of a loan she had made of \$2,500. Schafer promptly paid up (more than likely using cult members' funds to do so), but it was indicative of the cult's somewhat cavalier approach to money and valuables. Schafer continued to sell 'shares' in his organisation to the membership for between \$100 and \$400 a time. There was a steady stream of rich visitors to the former Vanderbilt estate headquarters in search of enlightenment. Instead, many of them would find their jewellery had gone missing during their stay. One woman complained of having lost a pair of rings worth about \$5,000 each. Schafer simply informed her that, "Nothing is lost in the infinite. You can think them back in your experience."

By the end of 1941, the cult's experiment to create an "immortal child" had also come to an ignominious end. Baby Jean's mother, waitress Catherine Gaunt, set out to reclaim her daughter that December. She implied that Schafer and the cult had coerced her into giving up the infant in the first place, and she now felt better able to take care of her baby herself. Gaunt



### 'The Storks,' a Diaper Brigade, Bared as Offspring of Cult Head

James B. Schafer, leader of the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians, headed a group of men known as "The Storks," who devoted themselves to making layettes for needy, expectant mothers, Attorney General John J. Bennett's investigation of the society has revealed.

According to Assistant Attorney General Ambrose V. McCall, in charge of the investigation which continues today, members of "The Storks" sported miniature diapers in their lapels. Mr. Schafer, he said, boasted the title "Chief Stork." Other members of the group had long compounded titles such as "Stork Entertainment-Second Assistant Chairman."

Mr. McCall asserted that the probe had revealed that the initiation fee to Shangri La, the former Vanderbilt estate at Oakdale, operated as a country club by the fraternity, had been increased during the last three years from \$100 to \$500.

cleverly used the press to make her case, painting Schafer and his gang in a poor light and forcing them to return Baby Jean to her rightful mother. Schafer tried to put a positive spin on this development: "Now the parents have adjusted themselves and they want her back." No actual legal moves were required (although Gaunt had employed a lawyer), as Schafer had been so lax that he'd never bothered to arrange for formal adoption of the baby.

At a vital period in her development, young Jean Gaunt was separated from the woman who had tended to her day after day for the better part of 18 months – her nurse, Louise Kerfs. She was returned to a mother she could have had no recollection of. It was hardly the ideal "royal" start in life that Schafer had promised the child, although he continued to try and exert influence on her by offering Gaunt detailed instructions for the "eternity diet" and the Metaphysicians' planned upbringing. "Whether Jean goes on being immortal is for her parents to decide," Schafer told the press.

Worse was yet to come. There were fights over Baby Jean's belongings, especially the diamond ring she'd been given, supposedly worth \$50,000 (which would be just shy of \$1 million today). Reporting on the situation in December 1940, the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* revealed: "Yesterday an indecorous note was brought into proceedings by the baby's mother, Mrs Catherine Gauntt (sic), who mentioned a ring variously valued up to \$50,000 said to have been given as a gift to her 18-month-old girl, and where was the ring now? Chief Metaphysician Schafer pooh-poohed the suspicious question." However much he might have liked to, Schafer couldn't "pooh-pooh" the other legal actions brought against the cult by former members for the return of



**THE IMMORTAL BABY** STRANGEST EXPERIMENT OF OUR TIME has been undertaken by American Master Metaphysicians in adopting a baby and training it in an attempt to achieve immortal life. Here lies the little lady on a satin rug bearing the emblem of the Fraternity; a dove in a circle, signifying, "Life, Truth, Happiness." On this helpful slogan is based Baby Jean Gaunt's hope of everlasting earthly life—if she still hopes for it when she is grown up enough to consider the matter. Just now, little Jean is a happy baby who never heard of Freud or Peter Pan.



ABOVE LEFT: In February 1940, *Pix* magazine devoted a two-page spread to the "strangest experiment of our time". Baby Jean is seen lying on "a satin rug bearing the emblem of the Fraternity; a dove in a circle, signifying, 'Life, Truth, Happiness'." ABOVE RIGHT: Baby Jean and Nurse Kerfs in the mansion. "When all this material magnificence shall have crumbled to dust, Baby Jean will live serenely on in the splendor of never-ending youth. This is the confident hope of the Masters, who fully believe that a man can be anything he can think." BELOW: Master Metaphysicians assembled in the Peace Haven mansion. (*Pix*, Vol 5 No 8, 24 Feb 1940).

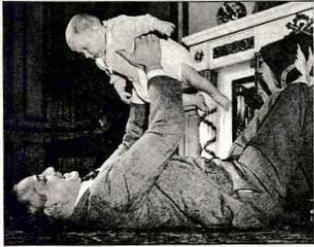


**Tiny Ward Of Mental Giants** Baby Jean Gaunt is being trained from infancy to live for ever. In regal surroundings she makes pontifical gesture to assembled giants of metaphysics. Whether their mental concentration will extend her natural span remains to be seen. Mystic word on mantle means nothing more than its initials, "Lord I Do Give Thee Thanks For The Abundance That Is Mine."

misappropriated funds. There were various lawsuits, including from Manhattan's Lynne Crider Associates who had not been paid for \$1,000 worth of publicity material, and an action by Gaunt in respect of the return of the valuable ring, a process thwarted by donor Ann Tomlinson, a "sad-eyed woman of 70" who claimed the ring was "without any particular monetary value" after all.

The Baby Jean fiasco had seen the membership of the Master Metaphysicians collapse, many leaving over their disgust with the venture but just as many others quitting as they were disappointed by its apparent failure. Schafer's income dried up; without followers to soak for cash, he had no money coming in. The cult's headquarters, the "palatial retreat" at Peace Haven, once said to be valued at \$1.5 million, was sold off for just \$22,000 in September 1941 in a foreclosure. Schafer had failed to make payments on the \$50,000 mortgage and had failed to pay the property taxes due on the estate. The buyer was a Manhattan attorney and the building is now part of a college property. However, when a con man sees one source of income disappear, he can always create another. That was what Schafer did, under the guidance of experienced con artist and Master Metaphysician Napoleon Hill.

The Master Metaphysicians had been publishing a magazine called *The Truth Digest* since 1940, but Hill saw strong financial possibilities in expanding the cult's publishing empire; after all, that was how he'd made much of his money. However, Schafer seems to have been a man who was happier to take short cuts than to put in even the minimal amount of work, regardless of the potential returns. He and Hill solicited investment in their would-be magazine empire, raising considerable funds from the handful of wealthy members the cult had left. Schafer, however, simply pocketed the



**IMMORTALITY OFF.** When Jean Gaunt was adopted by handsome James B. ("The Messenger") Schafer, his Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians set out to give her immortal life (PIX, February 24, 1940). Recently, Baby Jean's immortality was off. Schafer sent her back to her waitress mother. For The Messenger was busy explaining money matters to U.S. police.

money rather than produce any magazines.

It appeared that the failure of the Baby Jean gambit had taken the wind out of his sails.

In 1942, one of these investors, Minna Schmidt, complained to the police that she'd been promised profits of \$25,000 per annum and had sunk \$9,000 into the venture with no apparent return. Schafer found himself brought up on charges of Grand Larceny by Attorney General John J Bennett, Jr. Finally, the law was catching up with James B Schafer, and this time he couldn't just quietly pay back the funds. Given little choice in the matter, Schafer pleaded guilty and was sentenced to five years in Sing Sing. For the judge, Schafer was simply "a thief, an ex-Klansman who swindled his own organisation, a spiritual faker, and a religious hypocrite who's been loose, preying on misguided women, too long."

Faced with the reality of a jail term, Schafer suddenly sprang into new life, claiming he didn't know his lawyer was planning to plead guilty and that he was actually innocent and the entire thing was the fault of Napoleon Hill. His deposition, that formed the basis of his appeal to the Superior Court, firmly blamed Hill, with Schafer claiming it was his partner's idea to invest in the ill-fated magazine project. "[I] told him that I hadn't the money," said Schafer. "I decided, however, to try to borrow \$2,500 to go into the venture and with that in view, approached Minna Schmidt for the loan. I clearly stated to her the purpose for which I wanted the money, what I had been told by Mr Hill."

James Schafer's attempt to throw himself on the mercy of the court and blame his own stupidity for his actions didn't work, and he spent the next five years in jail, starting on 5 May 1942. Newspapers reported he was aged 41, but he was probably actually nearer 45 or 46 at the time. He was reported to have "wept silently" as he was sentenced by Judge Owen W Bohan.

Rather than emerging from his time in Sing Sing a changed man, Schafer returned to society more convinced than ever before that it owed him a living. He continued to follow the Napoleon Hill playbook by immediately founding a new correspondence course school in metaphysics, based in upstate New York and, ironically, established a magazine whose contents focused on metaphysical issues. This time around he had few followers and little access to the ready cash that his formerly devoted supplicants had given him, resulting

## Just an Ordinary Mortal Again



in a somewhat reduced lifestyle for Schafer and his wife Cecilia.

There was a definite, if tragic, end to his story. After several years of trying to make a go of his new school of metaphysics, financial and other issues got the better of both Schafer and his wife. On 26 April 1955, the couple were found dead in their car on a woodland road within the school's grounds in West Nyack, New York State. They had killed themselves by running a vacuum cleaner hose from the engine through the car's floorboards and had died of carbon-monoxide poisoning.

## LEADER, WIFE BELIEVED SUICIDES

### Cultist Who Claimed Secret Of Eternal Life Found Dead

CLARKSTOWN, N. Y. (AP)—Three months after he had the baby in his custody "to be sure," Schafer, 50, a cult leader who claimed he could bestow eternal life, and his wife were found dead today under strange circumstances.

Schafer, who also described himself as the "chief messenger" of the Royal Fraternity of Master Metaphysicians, was once sentenced to Sing Sing prison for 2½ years for embezzling \$8,000 from a follower.

Member Ku Klux Klan Schafer, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, also operated "The Black Club"—no relation to the New York night club—set up assembly to address expectant mothers.

Lajettes were made by male members of the club who were charged for 4,000 disciples on a Long Island estate.

**FAR LEFT:** By 15 March 1941, *Pix* could report that the immortality experiment was over and Schafer under investigation by the police. **LEFT:** Baby Jean is reunited with her mother in a newspaper from 19 Dec 1940. **ABOVE:** A report on the double suicide of Schafer and his wife, found dead on 26 April 1955.

There was a suicide note beside the bodies that instructed their surviving daughter on how to take over and continue running the school. The note concluded that the Schafers could see "no other way out" of their troubles but suicide. At the time of their deaths, Cecilia was reported to be aged 55 while Schafer's age was recorded as 59, which seems more accurate than previous claims. For them there would be no immortality, just endless infamy.

And what of the would-be "immortal baby", Jean Gaunt? It was reported as recently as 2002 that she was still living, married and with children of her own, but that she consistently refused to discuss her past life as the immortal Baby Jean of Master Metaphysicians fame. There might be only one way to tell if Baby Jean is indeed immortal and that is to watch for any relevant death notice; but by that time we might all be long gone, too...

◆ **BRIAN J ROBB** is the author of books on silent cinema, Philip K Dick and Walt Disney, as well as an award-winning guide to Tolkien's Middle-earth. He is a Founding Editor of the Sci-Fi Bulletin website and a regular contributor to FT.

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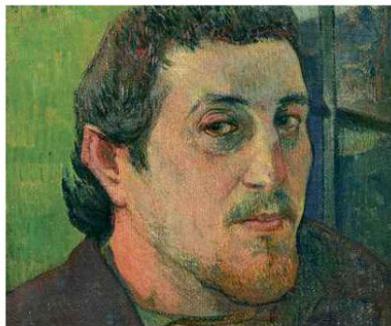


# Painting Mystery Birds

with Paul Gauguin, in three easy lessons

KARL SHUKER RETURNS TO THE ART OF CRYPTO-TWITCHING IN AN ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE AVIAN ENIGMAS FOUND IN TWO MASTERPIECES OF POST-IMPRESSIONIST ART

In May 2007, FT published an article of mine (“The Art of Crypto-Twitching”, FT222:42-44) in which I revealed that several paintings by various world-famous artists contained mysterious birds that have never been formally identified and may constitute species still undescribed by science. One such example was a very intriguing multicoloured bird closely resembling a purple gallinule (aka the swamphen, related to moorhens and including New Zealand’s famous flightless takahes). It appeared in one of the last paintings produced by the celebrated post-impressionist



Paul Gauguin (pictured at left) while residing in the Marquesas, a group of tropical Pacific islands owned by France. Here is what I wrote about it:

No less celebrated an artist than Audubon is Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), though his fame lies far more with paintings of dusky South Sea Island maidens than with ornithological subjects. Having said that, however, it may well be that one of his paintings has considerable crypto-twitching significance. One of his last works was painted in 1902 while on the small Pacific island of Hiva Oa in French Polynesia’s Marquesas group, and is now at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in

COLLECTION OF MR AND MRS PAUL MELLON



ABOVE: "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" (1897-98)  
LEFT: "The Sorcerer of Hiva-Oa" (1902).

Liege, Belgium. Entitled "The Sorcerer of Hiva Oa", it depicts a tall man in a striking red cape standing near a forest – but what is most intriguing from a cryptozoological standpoint is the brightly plumaged bird portrayed in the painting's bottom-right corner, and seemingly held in place by one wing by a dog.

"Remarkably, this bird looks very like the famous New Zealand takahe *Porphyrio mantelli*, the large flightless gallinule thought to be extinct until rediscovered on South Island in 1948...<sup>4</sup> In recent years, specimens of this greatly endangered species have been transferred to, and have successfully bred on, the small island bird sanctuary of Tiritiri Matangi, which I visited in November 2006 and where I was greatly privileged to see wild takahes at close range. Hence I can confirm that Gauguin's bird does indeed look very like – though not identical to – a takahe; the main difference is that the mystery bird's head is green, whereas the takahe's is dark blue. But what could any such bird be doing far from New Zealand, on the tiny South Pacific island of Hiva Oa? No such species is known to exist here.

"Nevertheless, two aspects of the painting clearly indicate that the bird was indeed native to this island. Firstly, the sorcerer depicted in



1902 was a famous Hiva Oa local of that time called Haapuani. Secondly, there is a distinct suggestion that the bird had been newly captured on the island during a hunt, because

Gauguin depicted it gripped by the jaws of a hunting-type dog.

"What makes this painting so important cryptozoologically, as brought to attention by French researcher Michel Raynal in a number of his writings, is that Gauguin's *rara avis* compares very closely with descriptions of a still-undescribed, uncaptured species of bird reported on several occasions from Hiva Oa (it was even briefly spied there by the famous Norwegian voyager Thor Heyerdahl in 1937) and known locally here as the koao. Moreover, subfossil remains of an officially extinct gallinule, *Porphyrio paepae*, have been uncovered on Hiva Oa, leading to the exciting possibility that this species and the elusive koao are one and the same. And perhaps, unknowingly, Gauguin has left us a unique portrait of this bird."

Incidentally, in 2014 I received an email from Michel, who had been continuing his researches into the koao and this intriguing Gauguin painting, in which he claimed that although the tall human figure in it is indeed



ABOVE: The mystery birds from "The Sorcerer of Hiva-Oa" (left) and "Where Do We Come From?" (right) exhibit similarities in shape and size, if not colour.

generally assumed to be Haapuani, he had discovered that in reality it was Haapuani's wife, Tohataua, thus explaining why there were flowers in this person's noticeably long hair. Unfortunately, however, he did not provide any confirmatory sources for this identification. Also, although I agree that the figure does have a somewhat feminine appearance, why is the painting's original French title "Le Sorcier d'Hiva-Oa", i.e. labelling the person as masculine, not feminine?

### GAUGUIN'S THREE BIRDS

More than a decade has passed since my crypto-twitching article was published, but I too have continued to investigate mystery birds in art, and I am now delighted to reveal two further examples painted by Gauguin. Moreover, both of these further examples appear in the same painting, but neither has previously been brought to cryptozoological notice.

"Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" is considered not only by art aficionados but also by Gauguin himself to be his masterpiece. It was painted in oils on canvas during a month of incessant work between December 1897 and January 1898 on the French Polynesian island of Tahiti – located 932 miles (1,500km) southwest of the Marquesas, and separated from them by the Tuamotu Islands. Measuring approximately 12ft x 5ft (3.6m x 1.5m), it is his largest canvas; it contains numerous humans, animals, and symbolic figures arranged across a Tahitian landscape, and is currently housed in The Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston, Massachusetts.

Gauguin's own description of this spectacular artwork includes the following details: "To the right, below, a sleeping baby and three seated women. Two figures dressed in purple confide their thoughts to each other. An enormous crouching figure which intentionally violates the perspective, raises its arm in

*He referred to  
a strange white  
bird holding a  
lizard in its claw*

the air and looks in astonishment at these two people who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the centre is picking fruit. Two cats near a child. A white goat. An idol, both arms mysteriously and rhythmically raised, seems to indicate the Beyond. A crouching girl seems to listen to the idol. Lastly, an old woman approaching death appears reconciled and resigned to her thoughts. She completes the story. At her feet a strange white bird, holding a lizard in its claw, represents a futility of words."

The first – and potentially the most noteworthy – of the two mystery birds to be considered here is the one that Gauguin referred to above as "a strange white bird, holding a lizard in its claw". As can readily be seen by comparing the close-up view of it with that of the mystery bird in "The Sorcerer of Hiva-Oa", the two specimens are very similar indeed in shape and size, and share a very sturdy red or orange beak – all features, moreover, that readily align them morphologically with the purple gallinules (swampens). In fact, the only noticeable difference between them is the pure white plumage of the former bird versus the multicoloured plumage of the latter.

Initially, therefore, I wondered if the white mystery gallinule portrayed by Gauguin in "Where Do We Come From?" might simply be a freak albinistic or leucistic individual of whatever species is represented by the mul-

ticoloured mystery gallinule in "The Sorcerer of Hiva Oa", especially as there is no gallinule species known from Tahiti (nor from the intervening Tuamotu Islands). If so, I think it more likely that this pallid individual is albinistic, which would explain its uniformly snow-white plumage, because true, complete albinos are indeed characterised by a total absence of pigmentation. In leucistic individuals, conversely, pigmentation is merely reduced rather than absent, thus bestowing upon leucistic birds a faded, washed-out plumage appearance rather than a pure white one.

However, in recent years a third colour-related condition has been recognised, known as progressive greying, which could be very pertinent here. Indeed, there is a notable precedent on file relating to this latter condition.

### LORD HOWE'S ISLAND

Named after Richard Howe, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Howe, First Lord of the British Admiralty at the time of its discovery and subsequent settlement by Europeans in 1788, the previously uninhabited Lord Howe Island is situated in the Tasman Sea; it lies 320 nautical miles east of New South Wales in Australia, and is officially an Unincorporated area of that state. Approximately 6.2 miles (10km) long, 1.24 miles (2km) wide at its widest point, and 3,600 acres (1,457ha) in area, prior to the arrival of the first Europeans this island was home to a considerable diversity of avifauna (over 200 species have been recorded here), which included no fewer than 13 endemic species and subspecies. Tragically, however, only four of these latter birds still survive today, the remaining nine having been wiped out variously by introduced rats, hunting and habitat destruction.

One of these now-extirpated birds was a very striking species of gallinule, known officially as the Lord Howe swamphen *Porphyrio albus*, but also as the white gallinule. The latter name and also its taxonomic binomial



ABOVE: "Representation of a Bird of the Coot kind, found at Lord Howe Island". BELOW: A further contemporary image shows "Three stages" of the now extinct Lord Howe swamphen. Does this illustration represent the phenomenon of 'greying'?

name refer to its most conspicuous feature. For apart from its red legs and red beak, this swamphen was almost exclusively white – as depicted in a number of illustrations and described in verbal accounts by European visitors to the island between 1788 and 1790. 1790 also saw its formal scientific description, by Irish surgeon and botanist John White in his book *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*, which included a colour illustration. White formally named it *Fulica albus*, thereby including it within the coot genus, *Fulica*, which at that time also contained the purple gallinules.<sup>2</sup>

White also recalled in his book the first sighting made of this species by sailors from the fleets landing on Lord Howe Island, in March 1788: "They also found it [the island], in great plenty, a kind of fowl, resembling much the Guinea fowl in shape and size but widely different in colour, they being in general all white, with a red fleshy substance rising, like a cock's comb, from the head, and not unlike a piece of sealing wax. These not being birds of flight, nor in the least wild, the sailors, availing themselves of their gentleness and inability to take wing from their pursuits, easily struck them down with sticks."

This brief passage contains some very significant information relating to this now-vanished form. Firstly, the principal aspects of its morphological appearance. Secondly, the fact that it was unable to fly. Thirdly, the way in which it met its demise – killed off by humans, for which it had no fear, because prior to their arrival on Lord Howe Island this species evidently had no predators to be afraid of. This in turn explained its flightlessness – birds inhabiting islands that lack predators have no need of flight and therefore often eventually evolve into flightless forms. The last reports of living white swamphens on Lord Howe Island



occurred during the 1830s, since when it has been deemed extinct.

Pertinent here is the concise yet detailed description of the Lord Howe swamphen penned in 1789 by Admiral Arthur Phillip, the first Governor of New South Wales, in his tome *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay; With an Account of the Establishment of the Colonies of Port Jackson & Norfolk Island*: "This beautiful bird greatly resembles the purple Gallinule in shape and make, but is much superior in size, being as large as a dunghill fowl. The length from the end of the bill to that of the claws is two feet three inches [68cm]; the bill is very stout, and the colour of it, the whole top of the head, and the irises red; the sides of the head around the eyes are reddish, very thinly sprinkled with white feathers; the whole of the plumage without exception is white. The legs the colour of the bill. This species is pretty common on Lord Howe's Island, Norfolk Island, and other places, and is a very tame species. The other sex, supposed to be the male, is said to have some blue on the wings."

Again, this succinct account contains some very noteworthy information concerning the

Lord Howe swamphen. Namely, its relatively large size relative to typical purple gallinules; the apparent presence of some blue shading on the wings of the male; and this species' supposed existence not only on Lord Howe Island itself but also on Norfolk Island as well as unnamed "other places". Norfolk Island is an external territory of Australia, located approximately 560 miles (900km) northeast of Lord Howe Island and 877 miles (1,411km) due east of Australia's New South Wales-Queensland border. Today, most ornithologists believe that Phillip's claim that this species existed in Norfolk Island and elsewhere is in error. However, just like Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island was once home to a fair number of endemic birds that were mostly extirpated following contact with European sailors and colonists. So perhaps such a bird really did exist there but was wiped out before its existence had been scientifically confirmed.

Indeed, other than by virtue of some still-existing written accounts like those quoted above and a selection of illustrations by various artists and actual eyewitnesses, even the Lord Howe Island swamphen's own erstwhile reality is scarcely substantiated scientifically. Just two physical specimens of it exist – one a former taxiderm mount later converted to a study skin and housed at Liverpool's World Museum, the other a skin preserved in Vienna's Naturhistorisches Museum.

## GOING GREY

All very interesting, but of what direct relevance is Lord Howe Island's white swamphen to the white swamphen in Gauguin's Tahiti-set "Where Do We Come From?" After all, whereas Tahiti and the Marquesas are located fairly close to each other, they are both far removed from Lord Howe Island (over 3,000 miles/4,800km and over 4,000/6,440km

miles respectively), so it seems implausible that these two white but zoogeographically discrete forms could be one and the same species. The answer stems from a phenomenon only recently recognised and which I alluded to earlier in this article – progressive greying.

Previously confused with albinism and leucism, progressive greying, as its name suggests, is an inheritable condition in which melanin-producing cells decrease in number as an individual exhibiting this condition ages. Consequently, as a juvenile it is normally pigmented, but becomes progressively paler as it matures until by adulthood it is completely white. In the case of the Lord Howe swamphen, there is a key illustration (see previous page) that seems to confirm that this phenomenon was actually responsible for its ostensibly unique white coloration. Produced by an unknown artist at a time when this species was still alive, the painting (now housed in London's Natural History Museum) depicts three specimens of this species. It also includes the handwritten caption: "Three stages of this Bird, taken at Lord Howes [sic] Island, before it arrives at maturity."

As seen here, the bird resting is very dark blue all over, almost black, whereas the bird standing on the right has a brighter blue chest, throat, and neck, and the bird standing on the left is entirely white as in other depictions of the Lord Howe swamphen. As all of them are juveniles, and as all known adults of this species were white, it would seem that this species actually began life as a dark-plumaged bird, but became progressively lighter as it aged until eventually it was entirely white – exactly as occurs with progressive greying.

Consequently, in an extensive monograph on the Lord Howe swamphen published in 2016 by the *Bulletin – British Ornithologists' Club*, Hein van Grouw and Julian P Hume declared that this phenomenon is indeed the explanation for this species' coloration. Moreover, they also note that it possessed various morphological attributes that confirmed it was a valid species in its own right.<sup>3</sup>

But what has all of this to do with Gauguin's mystery gallinules? Possibly quite a lot – inasmuch as it occurs to me that perhaps a similar phenomenon involving progressive greying once occurred on Tahiti and Hiva Oa, with Gauguin's paintings providing visual proof. Could it be that the multicoloured mystery gallinule in his sorcerer painting was a juvenile version of the white gallinule in "Where Do We Come from?" In other words, did Tahiti and Hiva Oa once share a species of gallinule that began life as a normal multicoloured phase but via progressive greying ultimately transformed by adulthood into a white phase, and therefore was comparable in outward appearance throughout its life with the Lord Howe swamphen?

If – and I confess that it's a big 'if' – Gauguin's paintings depict real birds, rather than wholly imaginary ones, it would certainly be more parsimonious to proffer the scenario of a single species that exhibits progressive greying as an explanation for its existence, rather than to suggest that Tahiti and Hiva



ABOVE: The mysterious waterfowl-like bird seen near the centre of Gauguin's "Where Do We Come From?"

Oa were collectively home to not one but two entirely separate species of mystery gallinule – a Tahitian white one and a Marquesan multicoloured one respectively. However, as I am unaware of any gallinules (white or otherwise) being reported from Tahiti today, even if such a species did indeed exist there in Gauguin's time, it apparently no longer does so. Equally, his Marquesan mystery gallinule (which may – or may not – have been one and the same as the aforementioned fossil Marquesan species *Porphyrio paepae*) is quite possibly extinct too, with the koao briefly spied by Heyerdahl in the late 1930s possibly being one of the last living specimens.

I am not aware of any specific scientific search for Hiva Oa's enigmatic koao ever having been made, so it is high time that one was conducted, just in case, against all the odds, it still lingers on, in order to determine once and for all the taxonomic identity and morphological range of this intriguing bird. Moreover, as it is undoubtedly highly endangered if it still exists, the launching of a conservation plan to secure its continuing survival is warranted.

## FOWL PLAY?

Now, turning at last to the second mystery bird in "Where Do We Come From?": this can be spied just to the left of the loincloth of the painting's main human figure, who is standing centre-stage, arms stretched upward, hands holding a fruit, and effectively dividing the painting into two almost equal halves. Observing the bird in close-up, its head and neck can be seen to be dark green, merging into deep blue on its underparts. Its wings and tail tip are a ruddy brown, the remainder of its tail is grey, as is the distal portion of its beak, with its beak's base red, its legs a pale yellow, and its eye dark.

In overall appearance, this bird recalls a species of waterfowl, possibly a *Tadorna* heldiver, but not one that I am familiar with, and certainly not from Tahiti (which boasts only a single waterfowl species, the Pacific grey duck *Anas superciliosa*, which looks nothing like it). Nor does it even remotely resemble any other avian species known from this island or neighbouring ones. This leaves three options. It is a species once native here but now extinct; it is a non-native species that I do not recognise (but if so, why did Gauguin depict such a bird

in a painting directly influenced by Tahitian culture?); it depicts an entirely imaginary bird created by Gauguin (but if so, the previous question once more comes into play).

Of course, if Gauguin's mystery waterfowl is an invented bird, this lends weight to the possibility that so too are one or both of his two mystery gallinules. Arguing against this prospect, however, is what in such a circumstance would be the truly extraordinary coincidence that a near-identical bird in terms of plumage colour phases is known beyond any doubt to have existed elsewhere (Lord Howe Island), occurring by virtue of a confirmed pigmentation phenomenon in birds.

So, the ultimate mystery here – one that currently remains unsolved – is this. Was Gauguin, albeit unknowingly, the world's most successful painter of cryptozoological birds? Or did his artistic creativity spill out into the creation of birds that never existed? Sadly, we will probably never know – unless, that is, there is some hitherto overlooked documentation pertaining to these birds awaiting discovery – perhaps in an academic library or a newspaper or journal archive. Or is there someone reading this article with additional knowledge concerning them? If so, I'd love to hear from you!

*I wish to offer my sincere thanks to longstanding Danish correspondent Philip H Jensen for kindly bringing Gauguin's "Where Do We Come From?" painting and its two mystery birds to my attention via an email in 2017.*

## NOTES

1. Nowadays, it is split into two species, the still-extant South Island takahe and the extinct North Island takahe, originally housed in their own genus, *Notornis*, but subsequently rehoused in *Porphyrio*, the genus consisting of the purple gallinules or swamphens, whose several species collectively exhibit a near-global zoogeographical distribution.

2. When they were later assigned to *Porphyrio*, the Lord Howe swamphen became *Porphyrio albus*.

3. Countering suggestions that it was nothing more than a mutant colour variety of *Porphyrio melanotus*, the Australasian purple gallinule (which is a known straggler to Lord Howe Island and since 1987 has become an established breeding bird there).

➤ KARL SHUKER is a zoologist and world-renowned cryptozoological expert. The author of more than 25 books and numerous articles, he writes FT's regular 'Alien Zoo' column.

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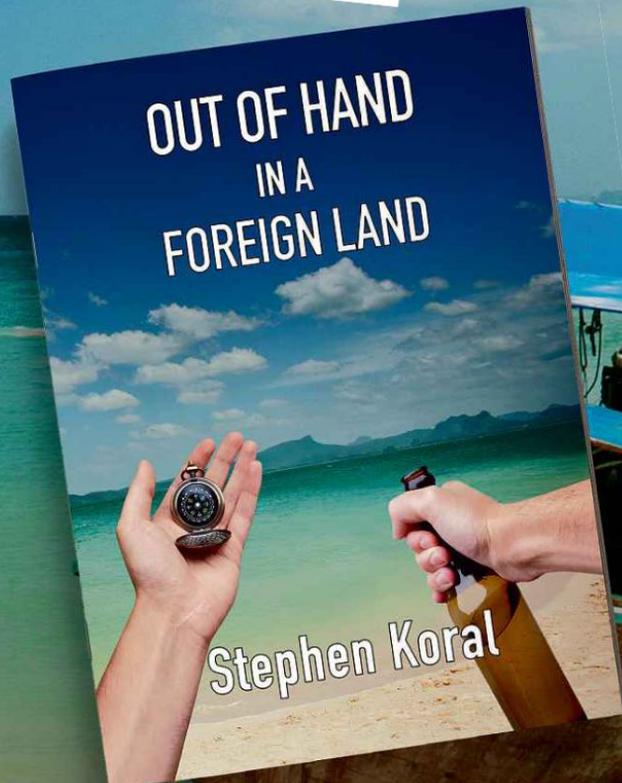
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# BEYOND BLUE BOOK

## THE PENTAGON UFO REPORT IN CONTEXT

The release of the Pentagon's highly anticipated intelligence report on UFOs has brought military attention to a subject once shunned by Western governments. **DAVID CLARKE** examines the US government's newly-found interest in 'unidentified aerial phenomena' – and asks what happens next.

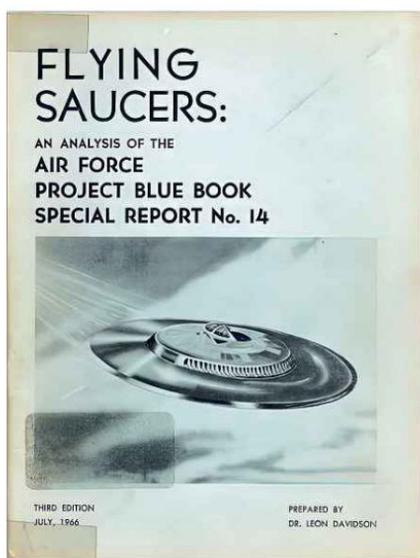
**T**he US Director of National Intelligence released a 'Preliminary assessment' of the UAP mystery (see FT408:2) almost 74 years from the day that Kenneth Arnold's sighting gave birth to the modern UFO mystery. Running to a mere six pages, excluding the cover and appendices, the brief unclassified summary is the same length as that produced by the British MoD's Flying Saucer Working Party, with CIA input, at the height of the Cold War. This was used to reassure Prime Minister Winston Churchill after the USAF launched jet fighters to intercept unknown objects on radar over Washington DC in the summer of 1952 (see FT372:35-7).

But while earlier official studies tried to dismiss or debunk the subject, this new assessment breaks new ground by making UAPs, defined as "aerial objects not immediately identifiable", a potential threat to national security. Despite this paradigm shift, the report received a mixed reception from the UFO disclosure movement, some of whom expected the US to announce it possessed hard evidence of advanced alien technology (see Nigel Watson's summary in FT408:30).

Inevitably, attention has now turned to the content of a classified appendix that has been seen only by those with security clearance. But intelligence agencies need to protect their secret sources, so it is likely that only heavily redacted versions of this longer document will be released.

### REAL PHENOMENA

Public expectation has been building since December 2017 when the *New York Times* first revealed the existence of a secret Pentagon study (see FT363:28-29). The release of Navy cockpit video clips of UAPs added to the pressure being piled on the US government by UFO-friendly senators and the media for more revelations. In one of his last acts as President, Donald Trump signed off a request for a report on 'Advanced Aerial



LEFT: The UAP Task Force is not the first US Government investigation into UFOs; the United States Air Force's Project Blue Book ran from 1952 to 1969, replacing earlier efforts like Project Sign and Project Grudge.

who in the complex US intelligence structure had overall responsibility for UAPs, the tasking called for a streamlined reporting structure reporting to a named official. The current director of the US Navy's UAP Task Force, Brennan McKernan, leads the new project, which follows in the footsteps of earlier US government investigations. The best known of these was the USAF's Project Blue Book, which closed in 1969 after it found no evidence that UFOs posed any threat to national security (see FT392:57). Since that time, military personnel who reported UAP experiences have been told that their employers had no interest in the subject, with no agency openly involved in the investigation and analysis of data.

Unsurprisingly, the report makes no explicit mention of extraterrestrials or other exotic theories. The identification of *terrestrial* threats to defence and potential hazards posed by intruders to air traffic remain the primary focus of all intelligence interest in UFOs. Leaks to the media in advance of the release were keen to play up the fact that the report *did not rule out* aliens as an explanation. But as it

is impossible to prove a negative, the Task Force have learned

that adopting preconceived ideas will not help them evaluate the small number of cases where UAPs "appeared to display unusual flight characteristics or signature management".

What is refreshing to read is the statement in the Executive Summary that

## UNSURPRISINGLY, THE REPORT MAKES NO MENTION OF EXTRATERRESTRIALS OR OTHER EXOTIC THEORIES

Threats' as part of the Covid relief bill last December. The tasking, that forms an appendix for the report, demanded a detailed analysis of UAP data to be delivered to the congressional armed services committee by the end of June. Given earlier confusion as to





NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

**ABOVE:** UFO evidence, old-style: two photos from the Project Blue Book files, showing a 'flying saucer' over Riverside, California, 23 November 1951 (left) and a picture taken by a US Coast Guard photographer that allegedly shows unidentified flying objects flying in a "V" formation at the Salem, Massachusetts, air station on 16 July 1952. **BELOW:** UFO evidence, new-style: a frame taken from one of the US Navy cockpit videos of UAPs.

UAPs clearly represent real phenomena that must be taken seriously by the military and intelligence services. The report says they "probably represent physical objects given that a majority... were registered across multiple sensors, including radar, infrared, electro-optical, weapon-seekers and visual observation." A similar conclusion was

reached by the UK MoD's UAP study, completed by its defence intelligence branch DI55 in 2000. This said it was "indisputable" that UAPs existed, and listed similar puzzling characteristics, namely "the ability to hover, land, take-off, accelerate to exceptional velocities and vanish, they can reportedly alter their direction of flight suddenly

and... exhibit aerodynamic characteristics well beyond those of any known aircraft or missile – either manned or unmanned" (see **FT211:4-6**).

As was the case with the MoD study, the unclassified version of the US report avoids detailed references to any specific UAP case. But the DNI assessment reveals the UAP Task Force, set up by the US Navy in March 2019, collected 144 reports from US Government sources, of which 80 involved "observation with multiple sensors". Just one has been identified "with high confidence" as a large, deflating balloon. The period selected for the study begins in November 2004, when US Navy F-18 pilots operating from the carrier *USS Nimitz* reported multiple encounters with a 'tic-tac' UFO that appeared to rise from the ocean off the southern California coast (see **FT403:40-42**).

Fortunately, the Task Force now recognises that "disparagement" of service personnel who report seeing UAPs is one of the main obstacles they face in their investigations. But it has taken a series of close encounters, including 11 where aircrew have reported near misses with UAPs, to force the US government to take notice (see **FT406:38-42** for examples). Media interviews with aircrew such as David Fravor and Alex Dietrich, who were part of a training flight from the *Nimitz* diverted to investigate unusual radar echoes, have done much to bring credibility to the issue. Both were subjected to ridicule from their peers at the time and their mission report "was not forwarded to anyone up the chain of command" according to a US Navy summary. Their willingness to talk publicly about the experiences has done much to change what the report calls "sociocultural stigmas" that have discouraged



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE



DIETRICH FAMILY PHOTO

**ABOVE:** Retired US Navy Lieutenant Commander Alex Dietrich encountered a UAP on a routine training flight from the *USS Nimitz* back in 2004.

military personnel from making reports of their sightings. The DNI admits that the taboo associated with UAP reporting in the military has seriously hampered the Task Force's ability to obtain good quality data.

Another issue relates to the lack of a clear procedure that military observers can use to quickly flag up their sightings for investigation before the scent goes cold. The report reveals the majority of incidents in the database date from the last two years, when a formal reporting mechanism was launched by the Navy's UAP Task Force in 2019. That system has since been adopted by the USAF, the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) and other military and intelligence agencies on the orders of Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks. In a press statement following the release of the report, Hicks says she wants to ensure that the Task Force is notified "within two weeks of an occurrence".

The DNI study admits that in a "handful" of cases UAPs appear to demonstrate what it calls "advanced technology", but this is qualified by the possibility that some detections might have been caused by faulty sensors, observer misperceptions and deliberate 'spoofing' of military radars via electronic warfare techniques. The Task Force's efforts have been further hampered by the fact that radars on US ships and planes "are not generally suited for identifying UAPs", as was clear from the US Navy's summary of the *USS Nimitz* flap (FT204:40-42).

In 18 incidents, described in 21 separate reports, observers reported "unusual UAP movement patterns or flight characteristics". These include the ability to remain

## IN A "HANDFUL" OF CASES, UAPs APPEAR TO DEMONSTRATE WHAT THE REPORT CALLS "ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY"

stationary and move against prevailing winds, manoeuvre abruptly or at speed without any obvious means of propulsion. In a smaller number of cases "military aircraft systems processed radio frequency (RF) energy associated with UAP sightings" that may indicate spoofing is indeed a factor.

Most of the future effort by the UAP Task Force's resources will be devoted to a "rigorous analysis" of the best data by teams of technical experts who will have to decide if this contains any evidence of what they call "breakthrough technologies". The report says there is no doubt that, whatever they are, UAPs pose a hazard to aircraft and may pose a threat to national security.

### CATEGORISING UAP

But a key passage brings speculation firmly down to Earth in re-stating the conclusions of earlier government-sponsored studies in the US, UK and elsewhere. An overview suggests "the possibility there are multiple types of UAP requiring different explana-

tions", a conclusion that will be familiar to many seasoned UFO researchers across the world. Long experience has found that when individual UAP incidents are investigated, they tend to fall into one of five categories of potential explanations.

The first is what the UAPTF call 'airborne clutter' that cause hazards for both military and civilian aircrews. This category includes birds, stray balloons and even airborne debris like plastic bags and sky lanterns carried aloft by air currents that have been reported as UFOs by aircrew including police helicopter pilots. In the last two decades a new hazard, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) or drones operated by a variety of private individuals and organisations have been added to the list. In 2018 a sighting of two drones within Gatwick Airport caused unprecedented disruption including the cancellation of 1,000 scheduled flights (see FT406:38-43)

The second category, Natural Atmospheric Phenomena, includes a range of rare phenomena familiar to fortetees including ball lightning and 'earthquake lights'. Ron Haddow, author of the *Mod's Condign* report, believed that atmospheric plasmas created by meteorite impacts were the source of some unexplained sightings by pilots. Also included are the phantom echoes nick-named 'angels' by military sensor operators that have plagued military and civilian systems since the invention of radar (FT403:43).

In the third category the Pentagon places US government or industry "development programs" that include its own classified hypersonic reconnaissance aircraft and



BRYAN BEDDER / GETTY IMAGES FOR BREAKTHROUGH PRIZE FOUNDATION

ABOVE: Harvard University astrophysicist Avi Loeb is one high-profile figure who has offered to lead a "scientific enquiry" into the UAP Task Force's data. BELOW: The current director of the UAP Task Force, Brennan McKernan. The Task Force's findings formed the basis for the Pentagon's 'UFO report'.

unmanned platforms. Despite media reports to the contrary, the report does not rule out these systems as the source of some unresolved UFO mysteries (see pp52-53).

The fourth category covers "foreign adversary systems" and reveals US intelligence is concerned that some of the UAPs detected by its pilots and radars may be advanced technologies deployed by Russia, China – or even a "non-government entity" (shades of James Bond super-villains). But the assessment admits this would only be possible if those countries had achieved a technological breakthrough that had eluded the considerably greater resources of the US, generally considered to be the world's only real superpower. However tempting this might appear, the DNI says the UAP Task Force lacks proof and continues to seek evidence, particularly as some UAPs have been detected near to sensitive military facilities and by US aircraft carrying some of its most advanced radar sensors.

The fifth and final category, which the assessment calls "catch-all", is even more intriguing. The Task Force says most of the UAPs in the first four categories remain unidentified due to limited data or problems with processing or analysis; but in the small number of cases where a UAP "appeared to display unusual flight characteristics" and/or other unusual attributes they require "additional scientific knowledge to successfully collect on, analyse and characterise". These UAPs may remain unexplained, "pending scientific advances that allowed us to better understand them".

### REAL-TIME REPORTING

In summary, this is a 'preliminary' assessment that sets out a clear, sober argument for increased US government resources to be allocated for a more detailed investigation, drawing upon what appear to be intriguing data. And for the first time the intelligence agencies appear to invite input from interested scientists working outside the secretive military-industrial complex. This new openness has already encouraged Harvard University's astrophysicist Avi Loeb to offer to "lead a scientific inquiry" into the UAP Task Force's data and report the findings to the US Congress (*Scientific American*, 8 June). Its most important purpose, he said, "would be to inject scientific rigour and credibility into the discussion".

One of the most promising aspects of the new US project is the UAP Task Force's move to investigate events in real-time as they occur rather than wasting time on historical cases that rely upon uncorroborated, anecdotal evidence. Loeb agrees that it would be "far better to deploy state of the art recording devices... at the sites where the reports came from and search for unusual signals". One proposal is to use advanced algorithms to search data captured and stored by air defence radars to

provide a baseline of 'standard' UAP activity. This resembles an idea mentioned in the MoD report from 1951 that concluded no progress could be made by trying to make sense of what it called "unco-ordinated and subjective evidence" provided by witnesses long after the reported events. "Positive results could only be obtained," it said, "by organising throughout the country, or the world, continuous observation of the skies by a co-ordinated network of visual observers, equipped with photographic apparatus, and supplemented by a network of radar stations and sound locators." At that time both the MoD and CIA regarded an expensive, resource-heavy study like this as "a singularly profitless enterprise". It remains to be seen if the UAP Task Force can overcome past obstacles and draw upon advances in artificial intelligence and data analytics to detect a signal in the noise that has eluded earlier government investigations.



like this as "a singularly profitless enterprise". It remains to be seen if the UAP Task Force can overcome past obstacles and draw upon advances in artificial intelligence and data analytics to detect a signal in the noise that has eluded earlier government investigations.

➤ DR DAVID CLARKE is an Associate Professor at Sheffield Hallam University, a consultant for The National Archives UFO project and a regular contributor to *Fortean Times*. He is the author of *How UFOs Conquered the World: The History of a Modern Myth* (2015) and *The UFO files: The Inside Story of Real-Life Sightings* (2009).

# THE JOX FILES WAS A US 'SPECIAL PRO

The Pentagon's UAP Task Force predict that most sightings, when resolved, will fall into five categories that include "classified programs" developed by the US government. The DNI report claims it is "unable to confirm" that experimental projects account for any of the 144 reports from military sources.

But a set of photographs that show a diamond-shaped UFO escorted by Allied aircraft, taken in Scotland just days after Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait, is one example according to a source who works for the Ministry of Defence.

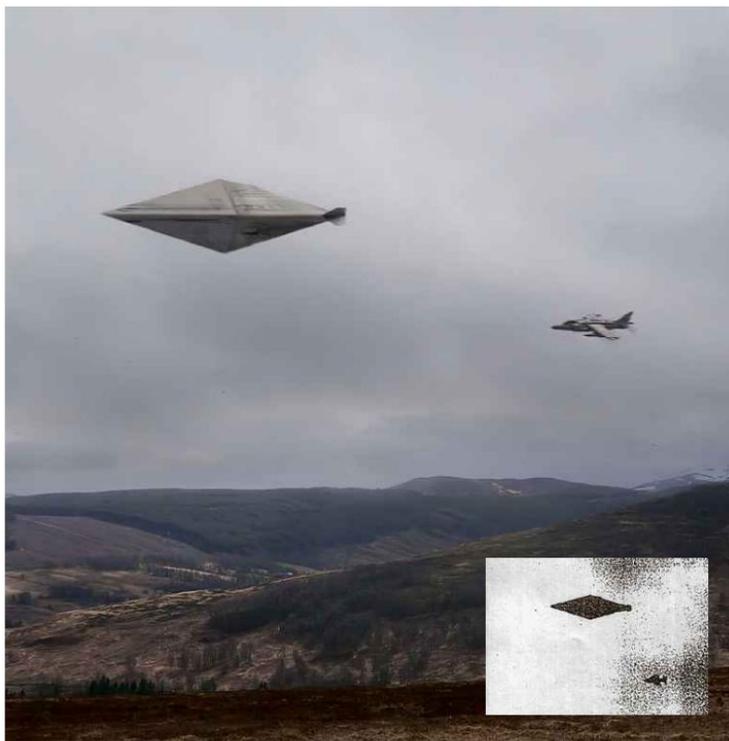
The so-called 'Calvine photographs' are often listed by the media, alongside the Rendlesham Forest and Cosford incidents, as Britain's best evidence for UFOs. Last year the *Sun* quoted ex-MoD UFO investigator Nick Pope as saying "they showed a structured craft of unknown origin, unlike any conventional aircraft."<sup>1</sup> But my source says he smiled when he saw artist impressions of the object published by the tabloid as "Britain's most significant UFO sighting".

"There was nothing extraterrestrial about what was seen in Scotland. No one else other than the Americans had anything like it at the time," he said. "We were of course not allowed to say exactly what it was. *But we knew what it was.*"

The British government continues to deny that its US ally has ever been authorised to operate experimental aircraft in UK airspace; but documents I obtained using the Freedom of Information Act corroborate my source's claim that a dossier of evidence was shared with US intelligence after the British expressed "concern about a possible stealthy platform flying in UK airspace".

A letter from the British Defence Staff in Washington DC reveals how, early in 1993, officials flew to the USA to discuss a photograph "taken from the ground with very blurred images of what could be two aeroplanes" with opposite numbers in the CIA. My source says the Americans "went ballistic" when they saw the images.

The originals were taken on 4 August 1990 by two men who



## SCOTTISH DAILY RECORD - PHOTOGRAPHS OF UFO

### DEFENSIVE LINES TO TAKE:

- Have looked at photographs, no definite conclusions reached regarding large diamond-shaped object.
- Confident that jet aircraft is a Harrier.
- Have no record of Harriers operating in location at stated time/date.
- No other reports received by MoD of unusual air activity or sightings at location/date/time.

were stalking deer in a rural part of Perthshire often used by the RAF for low-flying practice. As they snapped away, posing alongside their kill, a diamond-shaped object appeared in the sky. According to a MoD account of the incident, the UFO hovered for 10 minutes "before ascending vertically upwards at high speed". Both men also saw what they believed was a Harrier jump jet make a number of low-level passes, as if the crew had also seen the 'UFO'. The photographer sent his negatives to the

Glasgow-based *Daily Record* newspaper, who passed them to the RAF.<sup>2</sup>

Two days earlier, Saddam Hussein's forces had crossed the Kuwait border, triggering Operation Desert Storm, the first Gulf War, in which US forces used F-117A Stealth fighters to attack targets deep inside Iraq.

My source claims an investigation by the MoD concluded the US 'research vehicle' was flying from RAF Machrihanish airfield on the Mull of Kintyre peninsula.<sup>3</sup> Scrutiny of the Calvine images

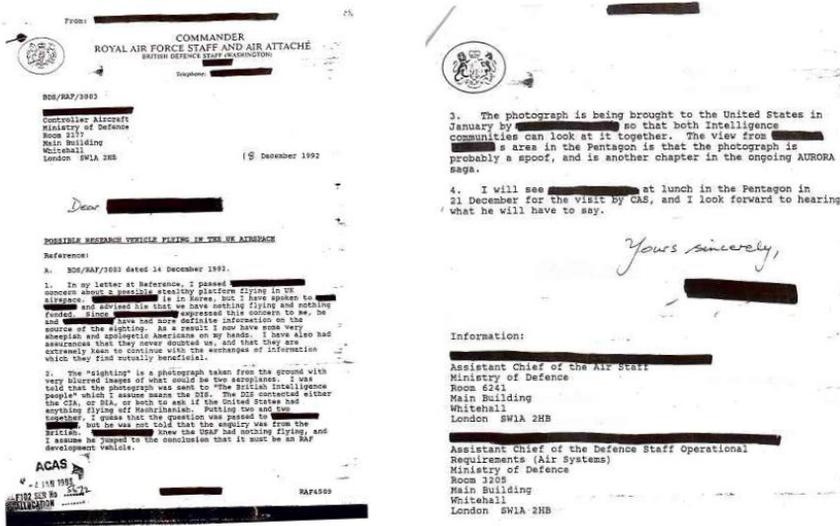
ABOVE: The artist's impression used in the *Sun* story, and (inset) a poor quality photocopy of one of the original photographs.

LEFT: A 1990 Ministry of Defence briefing on the photos.

by defence intelligence officers identified a Harrier and a "barely visible second aircraft, again probably a Harrier". My source says this was a British Harrier and the second was a US escort aircraft.

The MoD claim that prints and line-drawings taken from the negatives have been destroyed. Poor quality photocopies of one, showing the object and the Harrier, were in UFO files released by the MoD to the UK National Archives in 2009. But in his 1996 book *Open Skies Closed Minds* Nick Pope claims that he kept a "poster-sized" print of another on his office wall when he took over UFO desk duties from his predecessor, Owen Hartop, in

# JECT' CAPTURED ON FILM IN SCOTLAND?



ABOVE: A 1992 letter from the British Defence Staff in Washington DC reveals that one of the Calvin photos was brought to the US by British intelligence officials to be examined by their American counterparts. BELOW: How the *Sun* newspaper covered the story on 17 October 2020.

1991. Pope has said the object visible in the prints was grey, against a background of a lighter grey sky and "clearly visible as a 3-D craft".

My source confirms that better quality images exist and "they [the US intelligence services] have cleverly kept them away from the public" for three decades. "Thirty years is nothing," he said. "It takes a very long time to go from a drawing on the back of a cigarette packet to operational capability."

The MoD papers released in 2009 reveal that acetates of the images were sent to the RAF's Joint Air Reconnaissance Centre (JARIC) who were warned that "sensitivity of the material suggests very special handling". Experts there were tasked to produce calculations such as height above ground and distance from camera to determine the true "diameter, size and dimension [of the UFO] where possible".<sup>4</sup>

The files also included a "defensive briefing" prepared by Owen Hartop one month after the photographs were delivered to MoD. He claimed they had "no record of Harri-



ers operating in the location" at the time and confirmed that experts had reached no "definite conclusions" regarding the large stealthy object.

In his briefing, Hartop says the negatives had already been returned to the *Daily Record*. But the newspaper never published the story and the photographs have disappeared without trace. This has prompted some UFO researchers to speculate that a D-Notice was used by the MoD to persuade the paper not to publish them.<sup>5</sup>

In his book, Pope claims that expert analysis had revealed the photos "were not fakes, but nei-

ther the experts nor I accepted the Aurora theory." He said his poster was later removed by his head of division who "convinced himself – despite US denials – that it was Aurora." Aurora is the code-name used for a hypothesised hypersonic US reconnaissance aircraft that some commentators claim was developed as a replacement for the SR-71 Blackbird. Two of these long-range, high altitude Mach 3 aircraft operated from the USAF base at RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk from 1982, with permission from Margaret Thatcher's government. But the last aircraft departed in January 1990. Others believe Aurora was a cover name for a group of black projects, some of which may remain under development at Area 51 where earlier secret aircraft such as the U2 spy-plane were test-flown.

The MoD's Condign report on UAPs, completed in 1996 and released under FOI in 2006, admits that "certain unfamiliar, friendly aircraft may be authorised for covert entry into UK controlled airspace" and could be reported as UFOs because of their unfamiliar shapes.

## NOTES

- 1 'The Jox Files: 1990 report to be secret for extra 50 years', *Sun*, 10 Oct 2020.
- 2 The name of the photographer has been redacted from the report in the National Archives file DEFE 24/1940, despite the fact he made his initial report to a newspaper. MoD has asked that 'personal details' in this file and others released after 2005 should be withheld under the Data Protection Act for up to 84 years. Under the current rules the redactions will be lifted on 1 January 2076.
- 3 Machrihanish was home to a US Navy commando unit at the time and has the longest runway in Scotland. It became known as 'Britain's Area 51' following a flurry of unexplained radar and visual sightings of fast-moving aerial objects during its time as a joint US Navy-NATO training base reported in *The Scotsman*, 10 Feb 1992.
- 4 DEFE 31/180/1 opened in 2009.
- 5 D-Notices, known since 2015 as Defence Security Media Advisory (DSMA) notices, are official requests to news editors not to publish or broadcast items on a list of published subjects for reasons of national security. Standing D-Notices can be downloaded at: <https://dsma.uk/>

THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

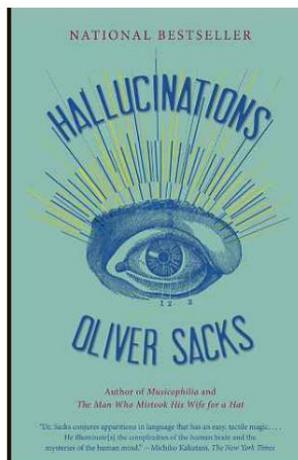
# BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

## NO 59. DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

There's a standard, somewhat dismissive, sceptical explanation of anomalous phenomena that characterises them all as the product of misperceptions, hoaxes or hallucinations. Certainly there are plenty of reports of strange phenomena that can be accounted for under one of these three labels (although something as outlandish as spontaneous human combustion might struggle to fit). Our chosen volume for this entry is *Hallucinations* by the late neurologist Oliver Sacks, whose survey of the subject, its circumstances, types and causes, makes one wonder just how plausible an explanation "hallucination" is for many fortean events.

Throughout, Sacks makes the important point – which can bear endless repetition – that hallucinations are emphatically not a sign of madness (see FT408:57 for more on 'everyday' hallucinations). Indeed, he proves it – partly by noting the various diseases and afflictions that render people susceptible to hallucinations, which may differ according to the ailment, and by pointing out which area of the brain is involved, whether it's simply activated, or is generating an illusion because of an injury. Even so, it's clear that there's still a widespread, semi-automatic association of insanity and "seeing things". Hence the umbrage and affront that people display when it's suggested that the ghost, or flying saucer, or winged humanoid that they saw was an hallucination. That's not to say that some forms of mental breakdown don't involve hallucinations – schizophrenia and dementia spring to mind – but that generally these phantasmagorical visions, or sounds, or smells, are not unfailing indications or symptoms of mental disarray. As Sacks put it: "Hallucinations don't belong wholly to the insane. Much more commonly, they are linked to sensory deprivation, intoxication, illness or injury."

One characteristic of an hallucination is that it's indistinguishable from reality. What's seen seems irrefragably *there*, solid and three-dimensional. Modern neuroimaging techniques show that when this occurs, visual centres in the brain light up in exactly the way they do when one looks at something that is indisputably there – a cat, a parrot, an apple tree. This does not happen when one imagines something; and after all, when you imagine a tiger, say, one doesn't suddenly acquire a large stripey feline bounding



round the drawing room. The brain, in other words, treats the hallucination as objectively 'out there'. Sacks has a fine example. He reports that poet Richard Howard, in a post-operative delirium, saw around his room a frieze of small creatures with the body of a mouse and the head of a deer. That he was hallucinating didn't cross his mind, and he became a bit shirty when his partner insisted they weren't there. None of which explains the source of any such images. Sacks's patients constantly say they do not recognise the people they see, and it's rare but by no means unknown for hallucinatory figures to speak to or otherwise interact with the perceiver. Exceptions to this general rule are "visits" from dear but deceased relatives or pets (see FT398:40-45).

Sacks approaches his subject from various angles, devoting a chapter to each. Some deal with the by-products of various afflictions, such as Charles Bonnet syndrome (see FT125:14, 184:46-49, 321:54-55), Parkinson's disease, narcolepsy and epilepsy, as well as the aftermaths of brain surgeries. Others deal with the effects of circumstances, such as sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, and indulgences in various drugs. Sacks indulges himself with a long chapter on his own drug-taking days, which mostly serves to illustrate his own recklessness – piling on with the amphetamines, for example, at the weekend, and then having to down 15 times the recommended dose of chloral hydrate to get any sleep. He seems (from our limited experience) to have been unusually sensitive to cannabis – two tokes and he was seeing his own hand "stretched across the Universe, light years or parsecs in length", which "somehow also seemed like the hand of God." This is considerably more extravagant than the state of fatuous giggling euphoria that was the most our youthful friends and ourselves achieved, and then only after rather more than a couple of drags on the joint. Either way, the distinction between imagination and hallucination could not be more stark – as is yet more evident in what followed: for Sacks suffered from aphantasia, the inability to create mental imagery.

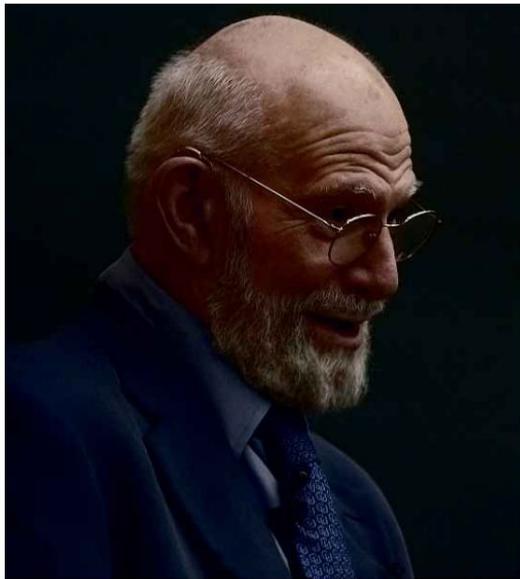
Sacks next tried 20 tabs of Artane (used in treating parkinsonism). Soon after taking them, a couple of friends turned up, and they went into his living room while he made them all ham and eggs. That done, he went to fetch them and found the living room empty. They had never been there. Sacks consumed three times his expected breakfast. Then he heard a helicopter approaching his house. He *knew* (just as one 'knows' such things in dreams) that on board were his parents: they had flown from London to LAX and chartered a chopper from there to his house – which had a handy landing spot close by. He had a lightning-quick shower and change of clothes, by which time the throb of the helicopter was deafening. He legged it outside to find no helicopter – its noise had ceased abruptly – and no parents. One more hallucination. Sacks burst into tears. Then, while making a restorative cup of tea, he noticed a spider on the wall. When he stepped closer to it, it said "Hello", to which

he replied “Hello yourself” (as one does). The spider then launched a long discussion about analytical philosophy by asking if Sacks thought that “Bertrand Russell had exploded Frege’s paradox?” The punchline to this came many years later when Sacks recounted the experience to a neurologist friend. “Ah yes,” said he, “I know the species well.”

From his account, it seems Sacks realised he was hallucinating only once the episode was over. One of the revelations of his book is how often people realise that what’s happening to them is an hallucination, while it happens, whereas the general (lay) assumption would appear to be that the experience is so real that only much later does this recognition occur, if at all – and so when that recognition doesn’t present itself, we have tales of ghosts, headless coachmen, alien visitations, timeslips, and the like.

Hallucinations aren’t limited to the visual field (as is apparent from Sacks’s experience with the throbbing helicopter). Phantasmagorical smells as well as sounds may plague or entertain percepts. Illusory smells bear a certain parallel with the visions related to Charles Bonnet syndrome, which occurs to people with partial or complete blindness. Objects, animals and people appear smaller than in real life, but blind people see them nonetheless. Olfactory hallucinations likewise occur to people who, for one reason or another, have lost their sense of smell. And they seem rarely to be pleasant. Sacks quotes one correspondent for whom lettuce smelt of turpentine, meat and other vegetables seemed to be rotten, and bread “tasted rancid; chocolate like machine oil”. Another was haunted one day by a grim reek combining those of “shit, puke, burning flesh and rotten eggs. Not to mention smoke, chemicals, urine and mould.” She added wryly: “My brain had truly outdone itself.” (Apart from sensors in the mouth for salt, bitter, sweet, savoury and sour flavours, the full range of tastes is detected in the sinuses: hence, a compromised sense of smell will affect what things taste like.) Others were more fortunate: one man described how if he called to mind a specific instance of a rose, or a lilac, or any other scented flower, he would find himself sniffing the appropriate fragrance.

Hallucinatory sounds are surprisingly common. We’ve probably all heard a disembodied voice call our name (usually when we’re on the verge of sleep), for instance. Other phantom voices may be more persistent: schizophrenics,



LEFT: Oliver Sacks speaks at Columbia University in 2009.

him with simple commands, and was tormented by them. Torture of another kind comes to some who, rather than voices, hear music, which you might think altogether more bearable. But not for those who are treated to only a few bars of “Come All Ye Faithful” before the tune begins again (and again and again). Another woman was afflicted by endless repetitions of “White Christmas”, although with practice she could alter the tempo, harmonies and even the lyrics, which must have been a relief. Sacks says that musical hallucinations tend to “spread” – that is, the number of tunes that are heard tends gradually to increase over time. One man found he could make selections from his

“intracranial jukebox”, but not turn the “machine” off. Clearly, this can be disruptive, and sometimes the music is so loud it makes ordinary conversation hard to hear. That may not be as distracting as violinist Gordon B’s experience: he “sometimes hallucinated a piece of music while he was actually performing an entirely different piece at a concert.” Wouldn’t that make your eyes cross?

In some circumstances auditory hallucinations may be positively beneficial. Sacks recounts how, struggling down a mountain with a “bucking and dislocating knee”, he was tempted to stop for a nap. A “strong, clear, commanding voice” put paid to that bright idea: “You can’t rest here – you can’t rest anywhere. You’ve got to go on. Find a pace you can keep up and go on steadily.” Sacks did as he was told. Freud, intriguingly, had a couple of similar experiences.

Sacks’s book isn’t just a collection of strange-but-true tales. He gives us relevant autobiographical, medical and neurological backgrounds, and certainly demonstrates the extraordinary variety of both hallucinations and their causes. And given his own experiences, as well as his habitual vast range of references, he knows whereof he speaks. If one has a grump about the book, it’s that it lacks a map or three of the brain: it would help to know where are such esoteric areas (or clumps) as the basal ganglia, inferotemporal cortex, amygdala, uncinate gyrus, to name but a few. But this is still one for your library – and you get a provocative insight into *Alice in Wonderland* as well!

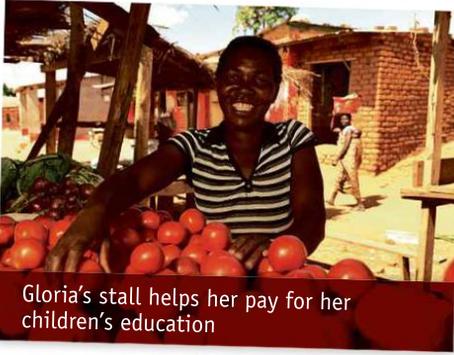
Oliver Sacks, *Hallucinations*, Picador, 2012.

“LIFE IS TOO  
SHORT TO WASTE  
TIME ON BOOKS  
THAT END BADLY”

*Jane Ann Krentz*

notoriously, are chattered at constantly with usually accusatory utterances (although not everyone who hears voices is crazy, by any means). An example: “When the patient is eating, he hears a voice saying, ‘Each mouthful is stolen.’ If he drops something, he hears, ‘If only your foot had been chopped off.’” The voices heard by the schizoid may be localised, coming from anywhere – the walls, the ceiling, the cellar, the nose, the abdomen. Sometimes they are visualised: one man’s voices “perched above each of his ears. One voice is a little larger than the other, but both are about the size of a walnut, and they consist of nothing but a large ugly mouth.”

Many (sane) ‘hearers’ report having to listen to conversations between people that have nothing to do with them – compare the complete strangers who appear in visual hallucinations. One woman said she “felt like I’m a radio, tuned in to someone else’s world.” Reactions to hearing voices can differ vastly. Grandfather Smith found his hugely entertaining, and tried unsuccessfully to get them to give him hot tips for the races. He had better luck when he conscripted their help in card games. His son too heard voices, which pestered



Gloria's stall helps her pay for her children's education

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## Munito, the Wonderful Dog

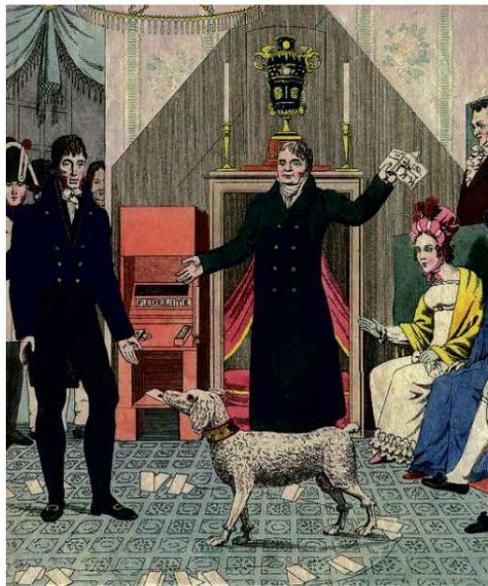
**JAN BONDESON** recalls the career of a most accomplished dog, and welcomes a new book about this clever canine.

In late May 1817, there was a series of advertisements in the London newspapers that cannot have pleased the exhibitors of ‘learned pigs’ and other performing animals, since they announced that a formidable competitor had set foot, or rather paw, in the Metropolis:

“The Celebrated Dog Munito. Signor Castelli having just arrived from Paris, begs leave to inform the Nobility and Gentry, that he intends to EXHIBIT the EXTRAORDINARY FEATS of his WONDERFUL DOG MUNITO at Saville-House, Leicester-Square; who will play at cards, write, and cast accounts with the most astounding accuracy.”

Munito was an instant success with Londoners, although the shows, set at two and four on all weekday afternoons, cost as much as three shillings. Later in 1817, the dog-trainer Signor Castelli had to rent a larger exhibition room, at 23 New Bond Street, since their old accommodation in Leicester Square had proved far too small for the throng of people wanting to see Munito perform. In an exhibition poster, Castelli could boast that both the Prince Regent and the Duke of York, and a great number of the Nobility, had already beheld the Wonderful Dog with astonishment and the most unbounded applause.

Originally hailing from Milan, Munito had made his debut in Paris in early 1817, taking up residence near the entrance of the Cour des Fontaines. In the evenings, Signor Castelli was always available if some wealthy gentleman wanted to entertain his guests with a private dog-show to enliven a party. Later,



Munito performed at the Cabinet d'Illusions near the Palais Royal. According to an early exhibition pamphlet, the Wonderful Dog was visited by many scholars and journalists, and was the subject of conversation in many salons. It was hoped that seeing Munito perform would stimulate the ambition of the indolent children of Paris; surely it would injure their *amour propre* to be outclassed in spelling and mathematics by a dog! The Parisians were particularly fascinated by Munito's skills at dominoes. They bet bonbons or cakes in their games against the Wonderful Dog; a nobleman bet five louis d'or instead and lost them all. In 1820, the Wonderful Dog made an extended tour of France. In 1821 and 1822, Munito toured Germany, visiting Munich, Berlin and Augsburg among other places, before returning to Strasbourg in October 1822. In early 1824, he was performing in Mannheim before going to

the Hague. But for several years thereafter, there are no records of the original Wonderful Dog.

In early 1827, Munito resurfaced in Paris after several years away from the limelight. He was advertised as the same celebrated dog that had appeared all over Europe for more than 10 years. But an engraving shows a startling development: Munito is no longer the rather large, muscular dog that had been performing in Paris and London a decade earlier, but a small poodle! Clearly Signor Castelli had trained another dog to take the place of the original performer. It would have been embarrassing for him if some sarcastic Frenchman had come up to him and pointed out that his dog must be wonderful indeed to have shrunk in size in such a remarkable visit to Paris. But there is no record of any such untoward incident; in fact, the French nation once more took Munito to their hearts, with

extensive tours following. Later in 1827, Munito toured Germany, before going to St Petersburg. In April 1830, he came to Stockholm, where the success story continued. In his *Gamla Stockholm*, August Strindberg wrote that “a poodle-dog named Munito was very much noted for his great cleverness and unsurpassed skill in performing.” This dog's career appears to have gone on until late 1830, with a third Munito taking over from that date until 1836, and a fourth of that name surfacing at Hobart Town, Tasmania, in 1842.

Although Munito was mentioned in the late Ricky Jay's *Journal of Anomalies*, and more thoroughly discussed in my 2011 book *Amazing Dogs*, it is not until 2021 that the Wonderful Dog has found his proper biographer: the French historian M Thibault Ternon, who has published the 147-page book *Munito, Le Chien Savant*, covering all aspects of the Wonderful Dog and his remarkable pan-European career. It is illustrated throughout in full colour, with many images emanating from the valuable collections of the Bibliothèque Nationale. There is a supplement chronicling the endless travels through Europe of the three Munitos, which unaccountably does not mention the little-known Hobart Town Munito of 1842-1847. Nicely produced and exhibiting impeccable scholarship, the book belongs in the library of every francophile fortean with an interest in performing animals. Since the first edition is limited to a mere 100 copies, it will also be of interest to the book collecting fraternity.

***Munito, Le Chien Savant* is only available from [lecabinedillusions.fr](http://lecabinedillusions.fr) and costs 45 Euros plus shipping.**

◆ **JAN BONDESON** is a retired senior lecturer and consultant physician at Cardiff University. He is a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of many books on fortean subjects. His latest book is *Murder Houses of Edinburgh* (2020).

## Crowley and Huxley: a trip in Berlin?

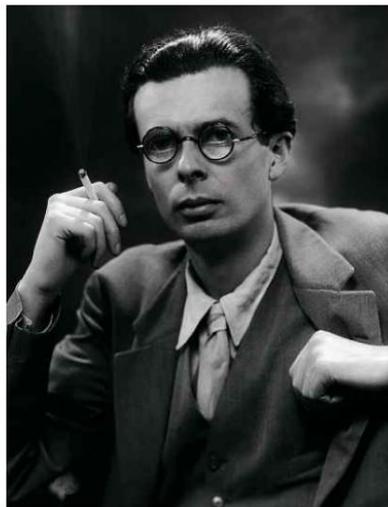
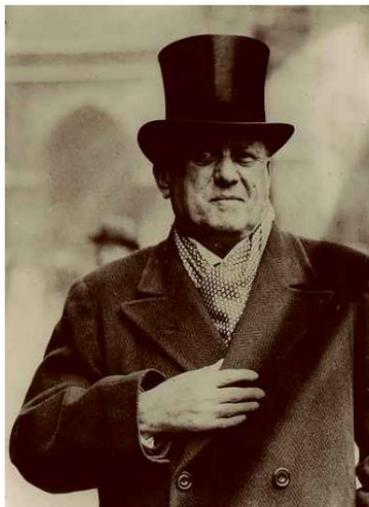
**RICHARD C McNEFF**  
wonders if psychedelic experiments were on the menu when Aleister met Aleister on a 1930 visit to the German capital.

In 1977 *International Times* published 'Sybarite among the Shadows', a short story I had written based on Aleister Crowley initiating Aldous Huxley into the use of mescaline in Berlin in the 1930s.<sup>1</sup> For good measure, I spiced things up with a reference to Hitler using the drug. The story went on to be widely circulated, often without my knowledge. A doctored version appeared in Russia, and it was cited and quoted in books on conspiracy theory and occult Nazism, invariably presented as being true.<sup>2</sup>

The story was based on a couple of lines I had found in a book by Francis King called *Sexuality, Magic and Perversion*. So widespread had the idea become that the Huxley Estate felt impelled to deny it: "There is no evidence to support Francis King's assertion that Aleister Crowley introduced Huxley to mescaline [sic] in Berlin in the 1920s [sic]."<sup>3</sup>

Despite this, Huxley's alleged psychedelic encounter with the Beast has taken on the dimensions of an urban legend, and a quick perusal online will find it cited as fact on several websites, including those hosting the burgeoning number of academic books and papers devoted to Crowley. So, what did happen? Two recent, meticulously researched works by Tobias Churton<sup>4</sup> and Patrick Everitt<sup>5</sup> help provide an answer. Both offer tantalising evidence that if conscious expansion did not actually take place in practice, it was almost definitely explored in theory.

From the 1890s on Crowley



ABOVE: Did the Great Beast (left) introduce the future psychonaut to mescaline? Or did Huxley (right) stick to beer?

had been interested in finding a "pharmaceutical, electrical or surgical method of inducing Samadhi", as he put it in *The Confessions*. Of all the drugs he experimented with, the psychoactive alkaloids extracted from the peyote cactus most closely fitted the bill. The active component is mescaline, known when Crowley started using it as *Ahalonium lewinii*. Other members of Crowley's magical order, the Golden Dawn, also experimented with it, notably Yeats and Maud Gonne. Yeats was impressed and found peyote more conducive to the production of visions than hashish, though he did not like the effect on his breathing.<sup>6</sup>

Crowley went on to become something of a proselytiser for the drug. In the debate that raged in the 1960s between those who believed in the wholesale distribution of psychedelics, led by Timothy Leary, and those, like Huxley, who advocated confining their use to a circle of adepts, Crowley would probably have

### *Crowley found that Huxley "improved on acquaintance"*

belonged to the former camp. In his Rites of Eleusis, held at the Caxton Hall in 1910, the paying audience were given a drink spiced with mescaline. The hapless – or happy – spectators were then entertained with magical ceremonies, poetry, dance, incense, and music. Between 1913 and 1917 Crowley hosted "Anhalonium parties" in London and New York in which he gave peyote to many figures from occult and literary circles, including the New Zealand writer Katherine Mansfield and the American writer Theodore Dreiser. According to the account left by Crowley's friend Louis Wilkinson, the Beast decided

Dreiser merited three times the usual dose. Displaying great bravado, Dreiser drank this down in one gulp. He then had second thoughts and enquired if there was a doctor in the neighbourhood. Crowley was not sure, but reassured Dreiser that there was a very good undertaker nearby.<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson himself saw visions in bright colours and found the drug "surprising and exciting" but the fact it made him sick afterwards restricted his use of it.

Crowley described Thelema, his belief system, as having the "aim of religion; the method of science" and he kept detailed records of hundreds of experiments with peyote which in 1919 he advertised would appear in a forthcoming issue of his journal, *The Equinox*, along with an explanatory essay titled "The Cactus". It was never published, apparently destroyed by British Customs in the 1920s. Crowley got the fluid extract of peyote from the American company Parke-Davis. He was actually



given a tour of their “wonderful chemical works” in Detroit in 1915, where they made up a batch of the drug customised to his specifications. By 1920 they had stopped producing. However, peyote buttons, protrusions cut from the top of the cactus where the mescaline is concentrated, can in a dried form maintain their potency for decades.

On Thursday 2 October 1930, Huxley visited Berlin with the popular science writer JWN Sullivan. This was at the behest of the *Observer* for which they were compiling a series of “Interviews with Great Scientists”. Sullivan was a friend of Crowley, who was also in Berlin, focusing on his career as a painter. Crowley found out they were arriving and the next day wired Einstein, who was then residing in a central Berlin loft apartment, in order to track them down. He eventually located them via the physicist Erwin Schrödinger, celebrated for his contribution to quantum theory and the “Schrödinger’s cat” thought experiment. Strange company indeed for a magician to be keeping!

Crowley dined with Sullivan and Huxley that night and then took them to the Mikado drag club to sample the local nightlife. The Beast got on well with Huxley and believed he had roused the latter from his usual apathy. Crowley spent the evening of the next day with the visitors in a beer hall, finding Huxley “charming” and that he “improved on acquaintance”. Sullivan drank too much iced beer and had a bad hangover on the Sunday, which Crowley spent with him and Huxley. The Beast was interviewed for the great men of science series, but it was not used, probably because such views as “every phenomenon ought to be an orgasm of its kind”<sup>8</sup> were a little too advanced, even for *Observer* readers of the period. The Beast painted the portraits of both men, which have been lost.

After their visit Crowley wrote to his secretary Israel Regardie, who was in London. He described the three days he had spent with Huxley as “gorgeous” and asked Regardie to set up a figure for



ABOVE: Berlin, 1930 – everyday life on Potsdamer Platz.

the horoscope he was making for Huxley, who had supplied the time and place of his birth. He also asked Regardie to send Huxley some of his poetry.

The book was called *Clouds without Water* and was published in 1909 when Crowley was experimenting with both hashish and peyote. It contains two references to cannabis and associates the drug with astral projection. Interestingly, in the letter and two cards that have survived from Huxley to Crowley there is a joke about astral projection, a magical practice that Crowley linked with both drugs. In an undated postcard from Provence, Huxley refuses an invitation from Crowley “for geographical reasons which I’m not yet far enough advanced in the Black Arts to nullify!” This suggests to Patrick Everitt that the two writers may have discussed Crowley’s early experiments with both drugs and, by extension, consciousness expansion.<sup>9</sup> An intriguing anecdote in Churton’s book lends support to this. A few months after Huxley and Sullivan’s visit, Karl Germer, the Beast’s German associate, wrote to “Crowley’s recently dismissed treasurer, Gerald Yorke, in London, suggesting Yorke persuade Aldous Huxley to return to Berlin to give a promotional talk

about Crowley’s consciousness-expanding work”.<sup>10</sup>

The first known instance of Aldous Huxley taking mescaline was on 5 May 1953, when he was 59. The following year he brought out *The Doors of Perception*, which elaborated on the experience. Crowley had died in 1947. In 1954 his reputation was probably at its lowest ebb. John Symonds’s biography, *The Great Beast*, had appeared in 1951. While Symonds was instrumental in bringing Crowley back into the public arena, the biographer’s personal distaste for his subject, which he expressed in person to me, did little to mitigate the facile popular image of the Beast as a sex-and-drug-crazed Satanist. Hardly the right ally for Huxley’s controversial advocacy of psychedelics as legitimate facilitators of mystical states with profound potential benefits for science, art and religion, his own use famously extending to the two injections of LSD-25 he received on his deathbed. Even if the Beast had supplied him with peyote during the three “gorgeous” days, it is hard to believe Huxley would have publicised the fact. Unless new evidence emerges, there probably was no trip in Berlin. Nevertheless, there were very likely to have been exchanges which helped seed Huxley’s later exploration of the psychedelic

realms in which the Beast was a seasoned traveller. If so, Huxley and Crowley’s encounter represents a milestone in the history of entheogens and their impact on our times.

#### NOTES

- 1 www.richardmcneff.co.uk/
- 2 See, for example, Michael Howard, *The Occult Conspiracy* (Inner Traditions, 1989) or Paul Roland, *The Nazis and the Occult* (Arcturus, 2007).
- 3 Aldous Huxley, *Moksha: Aldous Huxley’s Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience*, ed. Michael Horowitz and Cynthia Palmer (Park Street Press, 1999), p.3.
- 4 Tobias Churton, *The Beast in Berlin* (Inner Visions Bear & Company, 2014).
- 5 Patrick Everitt, “The Cactus and the Beast” (MA in Western Esotericism Thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2014-16).
- 6 Everitt, p.27.
- 7 Louis Marlow, *Seven Friends* (The Richards Press, 1953), pp.57-59. ‘Louis Marlow’ was Wilkinson’s pen name.
- 8 Yorke Collection, NS 18, “Questions put to EAC by JWN Sullivan”.
- 9 Everitt, p.44.
- 10 Churton, p.225.

◆ RICHARD C McNEFF is the author of two works of fiction, *Aleister Crowley M15* and *The Dream of Boris*, as well as the memoir *With Barry Flanagan: Travels through Time and Spain*.

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# REVIEWS / BOOKS

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## The allure of knowledge

**Ross MacFarlane** praises a crystal clear study of the history and philosophy of science showing how explorations in magic were an integral part of the development of modern science

### Magic, Science and Religion in Early Modern Europe

Mark A Waddell

Cambridge University Press 2021  
Pb, 232pp, £19.99, ISBN 9781108441650

Reading Mark Waddell's excellent book brought back to mind the time I gave a tour of my workplace for some self-declared members of the "skeptical" community.

"Well, I just don't understand," pronounced the most vocal member of the group, "why you have anything on *alchemy* in a history of science library."

That gentleman would really hate this book; those with a more open mind will be enthralled by it.

Although written to be a student coursebook, this is no dry chronology of the period 1400 to 1750. Instead, Waddell sets out to show how magic, religion and natural philosophy (to give the more period-specific term than science) were concepts that overlapped and intermingled with each other, regardless of more recent "never-the-twain-shall-meet" categorisation of knowledge modern "skeptics" prefer.

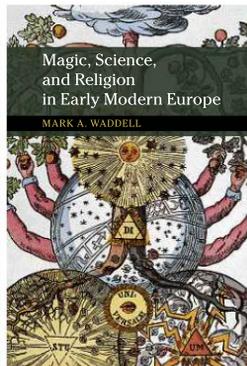
Such interconnectedness is to Waddell one of the four major strands that underpin the early modern European mind he sets out to explore: the others being the allure of knowledge from classical antiquity, the changing nature of the relationship between God and nature, and the puzzle of the hidden workings of the Universe.

All of these strands come into focus from the outset. In his first chapter, Waddell illustrates how the drive to rediscover lost knowledge was predicated on the

desire to bring truth seekers as close as possible to God.

Such an ambition underpinned the translation of the supposed ancient Egyptian knowledge of Hermes Trismegistus, the ancient Jewish lore of the Kabbalah and even John Dee's conversations with angels. In Waddell's words such a search promised "both the wisdom of antiquity and the promise of new innovations to come".

Such a search could of course bring dangers: the learned Dee was cognisant that his research had led him to encounter demons *impersonating* angels. Could the less educated be more easily fooled by darker forces? Perhaps, but even here, Waddell argues that the darker side of magic was used to support the search for



God; if witches were proved to be entering into pacts with the Devil – especially during a time when God's authority and even existence was starting to be questioned – then existence of the Devil therefore made it easier to prove God's authority, and if need be, existence too.

Waddell is alert to how beliefs changed during his period: how

### *The actions of Copernicus and Galileo do not reflect simplistic fables of science vs religion*

thinking around witchcraft was cumulative, with ideas continually being added and reshaped during this period.

Adaptability is key to his reading of the "weapon salve", for example: originally a cure based around notions of sympathetic magic, it evolved "in parallel with changing philosophical explanations until it shed its magical connotations altogether". As Waddell states, the example "provides a hint as to the ultimate fate of many other magical ideas in this period."

As you might expect for the era under discussion, developments in understanding the place of Earth in the Universe are dealt with in depth. In Waddell's reading, though, the actions of Copernicus and particularly Galileo do not reflect simplistic fables of science versus religion but explore the authority of the individual to investigate and re-evaluate the workings of the natural world.

Waddell here makes a telling present-day comparison: would we really believe that one individual with one piece of new(ish) technology was right and millions of people over thousands of years were wrong?

From such discussions around the workings of the Universe, Waddell moves to philosophical developments led by Pierre Gassendi and René Descartes, who prompted the ultimate question of whether there was room for

God in a more "mechanical" Universe.

Here again his three themes interlock, as evidence for miracles and supernatural events begins to be studied through more "scientific" and rational means, particularly in the person of Joseph Glanville, Fellow of the newly formed Royal Society, and seeker of evidence on the existence of witchcraft.

Waddell explores the growth of such new methods – closer to our present-day notions of "evidence-based" understanding – which formed around the ideas of Sir Francis Bacon.

However, he goes on to show how their proof of success relied on the presence of trustworthy witnesses, and how such trust was built upon the social status of the witness, rather than their knowledge of what they were witnessing.

The author shows how such new methods started to produce a decline in belief in alchemy, before exploring the work of Isaac Newton – who for him embodies the title of the book – and how his interest in lost knowledge of the biblical world is now recognised as forming the basis of his "scientific" discoveries.

Waddell's book is a brilliant work of synthesis and, in effect, he performs his own kind of alchemy, transforming heavyweight theories in the history and philosophy of science into crystal clear, accessible prose, creating a rich summary of his topic in just over 200 pages.

*Magic, Science and Religion in Early Modern Europe* will be a staple on student reading lists for years to come. It deserves a place on the bookshelves of every fortean – and every "skeptical" – too.

★★★★★

# Poltergeist phenomena

**Bob Rickard** examines exhaustive accounts of two classic cases of anomalous activity

## The Sauchie Poltergeist

And other Scottish ghostly tales

Malcolm Robinson

Amazon 2020

Pb, 334pp, £9.99, ISBN 9789650294658

## The South Shields Poltergeist

One Family's Fight Against an Invisible Intruder

Darren W Ritson

History Press 2020

Pb, 384pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780750994520

For two months in 1960, a poltergeist-like disturbance in the central Scottish town of Sauchie became the biggest such case to have been recorded in Scotland in modern times. Psychical researcher Dr Alan RG Owen said at the time that it “establishes beyond all reasonable doubt the objectivity of poltergeist phenomena”.

Malcolm Robinson's near-exhaustive account follows “Virginia Campbell” – the young girl, then aged 11, at the centre of the phenomena – and records interviews with some of the principal witnesses, including two local doctors and several Church of Scotland ministers. The typical phenomena included unexplained noises, moving furniture and doors that opened and closed seemingly without any discernible cause, and were equally disruptive at home and in “following” the girl to school. Like some other “poltergeist girls” (as Fort called them), Virginia's life had recently been disrupted, in her case by relocating from Ireland to Scotland.

In 1987 Robinson, who lived not far from Sauchie and grew up aware of the story, traced and interviewed several of Virginia's classmates who confirmed to him that they had “witnessed some amazing paranormal

happenings in the classroom”. Renewed efforts in 2019 and 2020 resulted in important new testimony from the doctors and ministers. This book is a valuable addition to the original investigation reports.

As the veteran psychical researcher Guy Lyon Playfair observed, books about poltergeists written by people who personally witnessed the phenomena are “very rare”. In June 2006, Darren Ritson – a seasoned writer and investigator of paranormal phenomena in the north-east of England – learned that a young South Tyneside family had endured months of persecution by something malevolent. All the “usual” poltergeist phenomena

were present: voices, movements and “arrangements” of objects, smells, communications, apparitions and even physical assaults.

Fortunately, Ritson and his colleague Mike Hollowell were able to call on the experience of the SPR and (via correspondence) Colin Wilson and the Ghost Club's Peter Underwood. The result – as endorsed in the foreword by Playfair and preface by FT regular Alan Murdie – is that rare thing, a thoroughly documented record of months of intensive study and investigation of anomalous phenomena in which, for once, the investigators were able to be present while it was ongoing, complete with interesting photographs and (in the appendix) witness statements.

This third edition includes a new chapter and also marks Hollowell's request to have his name removed as co-author due to a “change in his religious faith”. Nevertheless the South Shields case, as Murdie notes, is “one of the most significant in the last 50 years”. All it lacks is an index.

Sauchie Poltergeist ★★★★★  
SouthShieldsPoltergeist ★★★★★



## Pluckley was my Playground

A boyhood memoir 1919-26

Frederick Sanders

Carterley Publishing 2020

Pb, 218pp, £10, ISBN 9781916498150

The village of Pluckley in south-east Kent has for some 50 or more years been styled “the most haunted village in England”. This reputation has stemmed from a number of sources – a *TV Times* article from the 1950s, Usborne's *World of the Unknown: Ghosts* in 1973 (see FT385:32-37), and being “officially” awarded the accolade by the *Guinness Book of World Records* in 1988.

Despite a paucity of contemporary sightings, and rumours that Pluckley resident and Radio 2 DJ Desmond Carrington fabricated a number of the now-canonical hauntings in his interview with Bill Evans in *TV Times*, the stories have endured. The village website lists upwards of a dozen ghosts scattered across the area, and boasts a healthy ghost-hunting tourist industry to this day.

*Pluckley was my Playground* is something of an ur-text for those interested in the growth and development of these stories. Written by the son of an Army sergeant whose family returned to Pluckley in 1919, it details Sanders's childhood time in the village until 1926. It was first self-published in 1955, before slipping out of print.

It is ostensibly a memoir of the Kent countryside, full of the rose-tinted glow of England's rural idyll remembered: tramping through fields, exploring ponds and forests, playing games and building dens, and local characters, such as Dusty Buss, who lived in a wheeled hut in the woods and trapped and trained wild birds.

Of note to forteans is that among these recollections are some early published accounts of the Red Lady of St Nicholas's Church, the White Lady of Surrenden Dering, the Watercross Lady, the phantom carriage, the Colonel of Dering Woods, the Hanging Schoolmaster and the Old Miller.

Most are presented as “local lore” rather than contemporary hauntings, with two exceptions.



In the Hanging Schoolmaster, Sanders recalls a recent tragedy of a local teacher from a neighbouring village who took his own life in a stand of trees to the north of Pluckley. There is a graphic description of the discovery of his decaying body by a local miller, Richard “Dicky” Buss, and some details of the late man's friendship with Sanders's schoolmaster, Henry Turff. While Sanders himself writes of the bay-laurel tree plantation where the unnamed teacher was found (“To these great and gloomy evergreens a terrible happening clung”), the haunting itself is not explicit – there's no mention of a ghost that anybody's seen – but rather allegorical, recording the trauma of a recent event in the community and its inscription in a liminal part of the village.

Similarly, the story of the Watercross Lady recounts the death of a woman who sold watercress at a small bridge to the south of the village. “Within the memory” of Sanders's grandmother, Francis Pile, an accident took place in which the woman had fallen asleep, dropping her pipe and igniting her clothing. Here the account is almost verifiable, while also already slipping into folklore.

The hauntings at Pluckley have blurred during the intervening periods. Ghosts move location, and take on one another's narratives. Sanders's memoir allows for a certain degree of triangulation of these different accounts. For the Pluckley completist, or anyone interested in examining how hauntings take on a life of their own as part of a sociocultural process, this book is recommended. However, for those seeking “hard evidence” of hauntings, the truth will remain elusive.

Simon Moreton  
★★★★★

## Ridley Scott

A Retrospective

Ian Nathan

Thames & Hudson 2020

Hb, 240pp, £30, ISBN 9780500023822

Ridley Scott made his name making television commercials, most notably his 1973 “Boy on the Bike” Hovis bread advert, set in a picture-perfect village, and still regarded as the most iconic UK television commercial of all time.

Like other commercial direc-



tors of his generation, Scott was able to use his command of cinematic technique to send us into the realms of unconscious and romantic, mythic landscapes. His fascination with art, music, writing, philosophy, history, technology and photography have all helped contribute to his ability to instill his feature films with well-observed realistic detail and knowledge.

Scott's first feature, *The Duellists*, set in the period of the Napoleonic Wars, has continued to gain critical appreciation but it was not a commercial success on release in 1977.

Like the rest of the world, Scott was impressed by *Star Wars* and in its wake he got the opportunity to direct *Alien*. This gave him the chance to film a "realistic" science fiction story that would be in complete counterpoint to the glitzy *Star Wars*, and would draw on the powerful influence of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

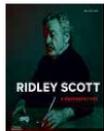
The impressive visuals, tight script by Dan O'Connell, Jerry Goldsmith's score, strong casting (notably Sigourney Weaver as Ellen Ripley), plus the input of HR Giger's disturbing biomechanical alien creations, turned *Alien* into a stylish SF horror film that exploits our fears of what lurks in the bleak infinity of outer space.

Tellingly, the ship's computer is called Mother and she literally brings the crew back to life from their state of suspended animation. This alerts us to the fact that the whole of *Alien* has the theme of motherhood, birth, survival and death.

*Alien* helped found the "tech noir" genre, which Scott put into full effect with *Blade Runner* in 1982. Both films are obsessed with entities (aliens/replicants) different in mind and form from human beings, and take us far, far away from the universe of *Star Wars*.

Ian Nathan explores the progression of Scott's career through all his films, which encompass a wide variety of genres and include such highlights as *Thelma and Louise*, *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down*, *American Gangster*, *Robin Hood*, *The Martian* and two additions to the *Alien* franchise, *Prometheus* and *Alien: Covenant*.

Through his films Scott gives



us his unique view of history, the future and the tensions that separate us or bring us together against a common enemy. This large-format book is a welcome and engaging overview of Scott's approach to film-making accompanied by colour illustrations that remind us of his skill and versatility. For those who want to see or study more of his work a helpful filmography and list of sources is included.

Nigel Watson  
★★★★★

## A Series of Fortunate Events

Chance and the Making of the Planet, Life and You

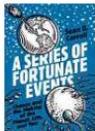
Sean B Carroll  
Princeton University Press 2020  
Hb, 213pp, £18.99, ISBN 9780691201757

Humans are notoriously poor at grasping probabilities, to the continuing relief of the gambling industry. This is also at the root of Creationist thinking which cannot accept that humans are the product of chance events. While Sean Carroll does not explicitly lock horns with Creationism, this entire book acts as a rebuttal to that way of thinking.

*A Series of Fortunate Events* is an amusing and discursive wander through the role chance has played in the formation of our planet, evolution and human life, taking in the perils of gambling, Kim Jong-Il's highly dubious golf scores, Soviet efforts to breed human/chimp hybrids, Roy Sullivan's unfortunate affinity for lightning and the delightfully named "ejaulatome".

His meandering and discursive style does not prevent Carroll from also being admirably clear and focused when it comes to looking at the role chance has played in our evolutionary history – we wouldn't be here if the meteorite that killed the dinosaurs had arrived 30 minutes earlier or later as it would have missed the planet and so mammals would never have had the opportunity to diversify as they did.

While Carroll is dealing with complex and challenging science, particularly when it comes to genetics and evolutionary biology, he still makes it comprehensible



to the non-specialist reader. He makes it possible to grasp how chance mutations create variation that natural selection can seize upon to drive evolution, but can also lead to genetic defects and cancer under different circumstances. His message is that we are all here by luck, both individually and as a species, and he puts this over with charm and clarity, without ever losing sight of the possibility that if it wasn't us that made it, something else might have instead.

Given his delight in the peculiarities of chance, he has not been able to resist the call of serendipity beloved of fortune tellers. He points out that we would not have the film *Ted*, about an animate, foul-mouthed teddy bear, had not its script writer Seth McFarlane and star Mark Wahlberg both, separately, missed a crucial plane on 9/11. Indeed, his appreciation of the potential of writers and comedians to throw light on the absurdities of chance have led him to include an afterword that involves a constructed conversation with several people (including a couple, such as Kurt Vonnegut, who are no longer with us) that explore their experiences of chance and its role in their lives.

The result is a short and charming book that will give you a new appreciation of the vagaries of life and their influence.  
Ian Simmons  
★★★★★

## How Zoologists Organise Things

The Art of Classification

David Bainbridge  
Quarto/Frances Lincoln 2020  
Hb, 256pp, £20, ISBN 9780711252264

This book is so much more than an explanation of the title; it is a visual feast. Every page has carefully chosen and beautifully reproduced illustrations. The author has selected from a huge range of zoological material and has included medieval bestiaries from as early as the 1200s, to present-day genetics diagrams which are in themselves a visual delight, to subtly coloured electron microscope photographs of chromosomes.

The text is well written and concise, giving a clear interpretation of the illustrations and

enough background to enable one to understand something of the many zoologists who created numerous ways to understand the natural world of animals.

Many of the early accounts of the animal kingdom concentrate on land animals. The early Noah's Ark pictures, in particular, allow a neat arrangement of Earth's known terrestrial biodiversity all in one place. The Noah's Ark arrangements of life must have been a great temptation for taxonomists to use and with males and females of all the species, they are an impressive early example of conservation.

Early illustrations of marine animals show how the artist has struggled to portray a stranded and perhaps decomposing whale as a living animal. In the bestiaries, illustrations of elephants and camels show how the artist never saw the animals in life, whereas paintings of unicorns and other mythical beasts are quite convincing.

Throughout the book, representations of the animal kingdom as a "tree of life" are shown, starting with the Great Chain of Being. Early attempts to show the origins of life as complete charts and diagrams are fascinating, as are charts to represent the diversity of groups of animals, including man. Sadly towards the end of the book such charts of diversity are shown to document the decline of species; the "Impending extinction crisis of the world's primates" from 2017 is particularly depressing.

All chapters include whole animal illustrations, including birds and fossils, often by the most famous illustrators of the time. Also there are drawings of skeletal material, birds' eggs, invertebrates, insects, crustaceans, diatoms and several pages on molluscs, shells and cephalopod bodies. There are pages on embryonic development and anatomy, including brains. Reconstructions of past environments feature as well.

This is a worthwhile account covering the work of many of the scientists, from a Western perspective, who have over the ages attempted to illustrate the order in Earth's animal biodiversity.

Ray Heaton  
★★★★★



# Stricken by sleep

**Mark Greener** explores a new study of the psychosomatic condition where groups of people are afflicted by the same illness

## The Sleeping Beauties

and Other Stories of Mystery Illness

Suzanne O'Sullivan

Picador 2021

Hb, 336pp, £16.99, ISBN 9781529010558

Forteanes are fascinated by culture-bound syndromes, outbreaks of functional neurological disorder (previously called mass hysteria) and exotic, emerging and enigmatic diseases. Many of these “mystery” ailments are psychosomatic: real symptoms with roots in psychology or behaviour, rather than physical changes.

Indeed, up to a third of patients attending neurology clinics suffer from psychosomatic conditions. Neurologist Suzanne O'Sullivan regularly sees patients lose consciousness because of their psychological distress.

In this lively book, part travelogue, part case history compendium, part polemic, O'Sullivan offers insightful examples of the way in which social and cultural factors affect biology and psychology to generate psychosomatic and functional neurological disorders.

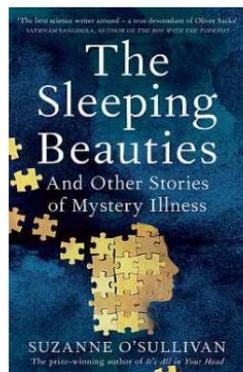
The title refers to children in Sweden, generally girls, who fall into a seeming coma and show “a total indifference to pain and pleasure, a complete freedom from emotion of any kind”. Yet doctors find nothing neurologically amiss and tests show that the children's brains respond to stimuli.

These *Sleeping Beauties* were, however, refugees with an uncertain future. Even those too young to recall their homelands heard horrific stories of brutality and persecution. Deprivation, uncertainty, stress and fear leave children vulnerable. They hear the “folk medical” view that they will not recover until they are granted asylum, which becomes a self-fulfilling prognosis. The children, O'Sullivan says, “are

*unconsciously* playing out a sick role that has entered the folklore of their small community” (italics in original). Resignation syndrome allows children “to tell their story. Without it, they would be voiceless.”

Meanwhile, a dark stranger, usually wearing a hat, stalks the Miskito people, who are indigenous to Central America's Mosquito Coast. The Miskito émi-grés that O'Sullivan interviews in Texas explain that the stranger is the Devil come to abduct a victim. The reports are laced with eroticism, and young women, which the Devil prefers, are especially susceptible. The victim develops a condition called *grisi siknis* (“crazy sickness”; try saying it).

*Grisi siknis* begins with headaches, tiredness and dizziness, which develop into irrational behaviour. The afflicted experience seizures, report hallucina-



tions and can become violent. Nevertheless, the hallucinations' content varies between people and often reflects the person's circumstances. One person eloquently describes *grisi siknis* as “like a dream that cleans from the inside”.

To make her point, O'Sullivan offers other striking illustrations, such as the supposed sonic attack on American embassies, and communities in parts of Colombia who link a spate of seizures among young women

with the vaccine against human papilloma virus, which causes cervical cancer.

The moving comments O'Sullivan recounts remind us that most people concerned about vaccines don't see a conspiracy behind every jab. They want to do the best for themselves and their children. But they don't know what that is. Tellingly, misleading emotional messages bombarded the Colombians. It's easier for non-scientific audiences to empathise with, say, an autistic child or young woman in a seizure's grip than appreciate statistical analyses showing that vaccines are very safe.

Throughout the book, O'Sullivan explores the intersection between biology, anthropology and medicine. The “spiritual” Miskito blamed the Devil; people in the more “materialist” USA and post-Communist Kazakhstan blamed government and environmental poisons for their “mystery” illnesses.

O'Sullivan draws important lessons for healthcare professionals (HCPs) about reductionism's limitations. Medicine is applied rationality. Yet rationality too often jettisons spirituality, which remains central to many people's life experience, in the UK as much as on the Mosquito Coast. The Miskito tend to consult traditional healers rather than conventional medics to treat *grisi siknis*. Western HCPs experience problems “when something ... doesn't fit the disease pattern they are trained to treat”. She argues that oversensitive diagnostic criteria mean that asymptomatic people undergo “regular check-ups and tests that they almost certainly didn't need”.

I hope HCPs will listen to her eloquent clarion call. Indeed, *The Sleeping Beauties* is essential reading for fortunees, HCPs and anyone feeling that medicine has yet to get to the root of their ill health.

★★★★★

## The Book of the Magical Mythical Unicorn

Vakasha Brenman & Alfonso Colasuonno

O Books 2020

Hb, 132pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781789042535

For the last few years the unicorn has been galloping to the forefront of our cultural consciousness; from stationary to soft toys, cushions to clothing, little has been left untouched by its magical hoofprints. This well researched little book covers more than 4,000 years of lore, legends and mythic or religious significance from the unicorn's ancient beginnings to its presence in current popular culture, though with a focus very much on the former. (An interesting potential chapter could have looked at the uni-



corn's relevance to contemporary LGBTQ+ culture.) It spans the Lady and Unicorn Tapestries to Lady Gaga, crossing continents and cultures to uncover rich seams of unicorn history and mystery, including some detailed retellings of stories from Scotland to the Russian steppes.

As well as common knowledge about the unicorn, such as the apparent ability of its horn to purify water, the book explores more obscure beliefs, such as the unicorn's significance in Chinese communication or how Christians saw it as an allegory for the Cross or even the embodiment of Christ himself. It follows myths as they cross heritages, from mediaeval Russia to Africa, from the Ancient Greeks to the Celts, noting significant cultural differences. In European myths the unicorn was hunted for its powerful alicorn, whereas in Arabic societies it was not seen as a mere commodity but was instead revered.

This is a useful book for folklorists and storytellers. Whether or not you subscribe to its New Age beliefs, it has a heartfelt positive message that the “universe abounds with overflowing love for you” which is always nice to read, especially now. And if you only take one thing away from this book, perhaps it should be “never play leapfrog with a unicorn...”

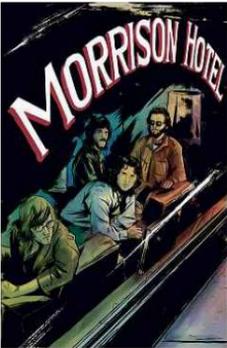
Olivia Armstrong

★★★★★



# COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

STEVE TOASE PRESENTS HIS LATEST PICKS FROM THE WORLD OF SEQUENTIAL ART



## Morrison Hotel

Leah Moore, various artists  
ZZ Comics, 2021  
Pb, 144pp, ISBN 9781940878362

The *Morrison Hotel* graphic novel tells the story of the groundbreaking album, but it's more than that. It's a roadhouse, with a different story behind every door, but it's more than that. It's an album in its own right, weaving together social history, poetry, personal events and imagination, but it's more than that.

With *Morrison Hotel* Leah Moore has written a remarkable exploration of The Doors' music, capturing the spirit of both the songs and the band without being literal or lecturing the reader. Each story is distinctive. Creating something new around a piece of art that already has a strong identity is a daunting project, but Leah has succeeded in making a story that hangs together as well as any album.

Part of the book's strength comes from the different artistic teams responsible for the artwork and colouring on each story, giving each its own atmosphere, whether that's the Bacchanalian dreamworld of "Waiting for the Sun" by artist Mike Oeming and colourist Taki Soma, the water-colour psychedelia of "Indian Summer" (artwork by Jill Thompson), or the tear-gas-soaked brutality portrayed in "Peace Frog" (artist Sebastián Piriz).

The stories in this book can be enjoyed separately, but for the full effect I would recommend reading them in the order they appear, just as you would

listen to the tracks on a classic, era-defining piece of vinyl. Highly recommended.

## Animal, Vols 1-4

Colo  
Dibbuts, 2021 (available via Europe Comics: [www.europecomics.com/author/colo/](http://www.europecomics.com/author/colo/))  
Pb, 52pp per volume, £4.79 each

At the heart of *Animal* is a philosophical question: what makes us human, and can we renounce our humanity? Over the four volumes, the central character is silent as he progresses from a member of society to giving up that status and the consequences that follow from that decision. Throughout, other characters, including lawyers, relatives, friends and hospital workers, discuss encounters, opinions and decisions that unfold along the path taken by the artist who no longer wants to be human.

Within Colo's script and evocative artwork there are echoes of similar philosophical questions raised by ideas of being an outlaw in mediæval societies (i.e. outside the protection of the law rather than outside its control), and conceptual pieces such as *Rhythm O* by performance artist Maria Abramović.

*Animal* tackles a complex issue with heart and empathy, both of which are captured in Colo's excellent artwork. This is a complex debate presented in a very well written and well illustrated story. At its heart, I think, is a very forteen discussion about categorisation, inclusion and exclusion.

## Crashpad

Gary Panter  
Fantagraphics, 2021  
pp80, £25.99, ISBN 9781683964162

*Crashpad* is a comic very much in the tradition of underground comix, in terms both of style and content. The artwork is incredibly psychedelic, with nods to early Max Fleischer animations and later artists like Robert Crumb, Gilbert Shelton, and Pete Loveday here in the UK. The storylines are loose explorations of acid-soaked reality, barely holding together during encounters with the

normal world. The pen and ink artwork is complex and easy to lose yourself in. If you're a fan of the psychedelic comic classics, then you'll definitely enjoy this.

## Frank at Home on the Farm

Jordan Thomas and Clark Bint  
Scout Comics, 2021  
[www.scoutcomics.com/collections/frank-at-home-on-the-farm](http://www.scoutcomics.com/collections/frank-at-home-on-the-farm)

*Frank at Home on the Farm* starts with a simple premise. Frank returns to his home village, but at the family farm he finds his mother, father and brother missing. Stranger still, no one in the village even remembers them. Frank's nights are plagued by graphic dreams of the Western Front, and his days haunted by disembodied voices.

This is a masterful comic series that over four volumes explores the unsettling space where paranoia and reality collide. Clark Bint's artwork is perfect for the storytelling, capturing the grotesque without descending into caricature or parody, and the twists when they come are perfectly rendered in all their tooth-and-claw detail. Jordan Thomas is excellent at revealing just enough to keep you reading until giving the game away.

A dark and graphic comic that creates unease with superb skill.

## Kill 6 Billion Demons

Abbadon (Tom Parkinson-Morgan)  
Ongoing web comic  
<https://killsixbilliondemons.com/comic/kill-six-billion-demons-chapter-1/>

Where to start? *Kill 6 Billion Demons* is a sumptuous explosion of colour, theology, myth and storytelling that teeters on the edge of being overwhelming while dragging you further and further into the strange. Over the years, readers have drawn parallels with China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*, and there are also echoes here of Grant Morrison's epic *The Invisibles*.

The story starts with Allison, who is spending some time with her boyfriend when a figure appears and places an artefact in her skull, causing her to be dragged to the city of Throne. Here, she meets 82, an angel manifesting in a stone body, and

is led into a chaotic and entertaining world of complex intercutting philosophies, tribes, deities, demons and obligations. Cities exist in the petrified corpses of gods, slaves wear temporary faces, and demons are grown to be consumed in order to convey the power of understanding all speech.

The best advice I can give is just to dive in and let Abbadon's creation fill your brain; then, explore the liturgies and wiki on the website, because there is a vast amount of adjacent information and always something new to discover here.

## Monsters

Barry Windsor-Smith  
Jonathan Cape, 2021  
Hb, 328pp, ISBN 9781787333413

*Monsters* is an epic of a comic, though in some ways its subject is precise and focused: how do we create monsters? The story starts with a horrific act of parental violence, then jumps forward to the now teenage protagonist, Bobby Bailey, joining the army, where his claim that he has no family leads to terrible consequences. There are literal monsters here – no coincidence that the military programme at the heart of the story is called Prometheus – but there are also monsters created by trauma, who in turn shape others into something monstrous.

*Monsters* isn't an easy read, covering PTSD in many forms, whether caused by domestic violence or military conflict, and childhood trauma. Some of the most heart-breaking sequences are when the now adult Bobby returns to his family home and relives his early life. The black and white artwork is incredibly detailed, capturing the grotesque, both in the medical experiments that are catalysts for the events, and the behaviour that creates monsters in other settings. Throughout, the lettering is especially effective, for example capturing the damage carried from the battlefield to the family home.

*Monsters* is a big book dealing with difficult subjects, and one that I would recommend.

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## Nothing new under the Sun

Trouble in paradise in M Night Shyamalan's latest, but not for the first time an intriguing high-concept idea ends up feeling like a weak episode of *The Twilight Zone*



**Old**  
Dir M Night Shyamalan, US 2021  
On general release

M Night Shyamalan is known by most as the filmmaker behind titles featuring big twists and gratuitous cameos of himself, but he is first and foremost a storyteller, and a rather impressive one at that. While his resumé is full of both hits and misses, it is nonetheless always interesting to see what he will think of next.

Regrettably, being known as the guy with the twists has also proven to be something of a millstone around the filmmaker's neck, as audiences will always be eagerly waiting to experience something that will trump *The Sixth Sense*. With this early box office hit being what all his subsequent efforts are compared to, Shyamalan's work has frequently left audiences unimpressed and even laughing involuntarily when his narratives occasionally go to some rather niche places.

Which brings us to *Old*, in which a family of resort guests have some unsettling experiences on an idyllic beach that harbours a dark secret – they age rapidly and undergo a lifetime's worth of traumatic events in a very limited amount of 'real' time. I'd say it sits somewhere in the middle of the Shyamalan filmography, with a viewing experience that could

*The film could be seen as an exercise in expectation management*

be considered an exercise in expectation management.

There are certainly some good ideas at play here, and a handful of solid performances to boot, but whether one finds the film to be a worthwhile bit of imaginative film-making or an overworked waste of the audience's own precious time will probably come down to how the individual viewer feels about Shyamalan's work as a whole.

To some, the speeded-up experience of aging and the themes this explores will possess a certain degree of intrigue, while others will undoubtedly find it woefully ham-fisted, especially in the way certain narrative elements are seemingly only added for immediate shock value, to then be entirely abandoned for the rest of the film.

Similarly, the way the cinematography and sound design is used to convey how the aging and decay affects various individuals will, for one viewer, be an interesting and creative way of using the film medium, whereas another will find it frustrating and convoluted.

However, all will likely agree that the film is tragically underserved by its American PG-13 rating, as this has resulted in *Old* being filmed and edited to purposefully avoid lingering on anything upsetting, instead using camera pans and close-ups of characters reacting to something horrific. While not devoid of terrifying imagery, the majority of horrors are simply not present, and the sense of urgency and dread one should associate with the premise of the film is severely undermined as a result.

In this regard, *Old* is hardly among Shyamalan's best efforts; thankfully, neither is it quite on the level of *The Happening* in terms of sheer ridiculousness. However, the film will undoubtedly be polarising: your response will boil down to your interpretation of what constitutes a well-crafted supernatural mystery thriller. With that in mind, lowering one's expectations before giving *Old* a watch is advisable, as many will feel themselves ageing as they sit through it.

Leyla Mikkelsen



### Lake Mungo

Dir Joel Anderson, Australia 2008  
Limited edition Blu-ray, £29.99

*Lake Mungo* is arguably the best found footage/documentary horror film since *Blair Witch* and has been gathering plaudits ever since it was first released over 10 years ago. I saw it at the time and for this review watched it again recently. My opinion hasn't changed: it's a beautifully constructed mystery story that sends shivers down the spine.

The premise is that a documentary film team is making a feature about the tragic death of a teenager in a swimming accident. Or rather, they're making a feature about the series

of troubling events that befell that girl's family after she died. Mum, Dad, and brother are interviewed extensively, as are other relatives, friends, the police and, ultimately, a psychic investigator.

The story is genuinely gripping, which is in no small part due to the skill of director Joel Anderson (whose first and only feature this is to date), who knows exactly when to dial things down and then ramp them up again. Just as you think a loose end has been tied up, there is another discovery, which means you have to reassess all that has gone before. It works not only as a mystery and as a horror film, but also as an examination of secrets, confessions, and what lies beneath the surface of suburbia.

Unlike most horror films of this century, *Lake Mungo* relies not on jump scares (although there is one doozy) or frenzied editing but on establishing and sustaining an atmosphere of doom. It has echoes of many fine films, many of them less to do with outright horror than with themes of witnessing and experiencing. For instance, there is a fascinating emphasis on photography and hidden images, which recalls *Blow-Up* and a sense of premonition, as in *Don't Look Now*. Of course, as a faux documentary, *Lake Mungo* doesn't set out to achieve the artistry of those two classics, but it does include images of the Australian landscape, which lends itself almost uniquely to the horror film; there's a sense of dread and the unknown about it that has inspired film-makers for decades.

This limited edition Blu-ray from Second Sight comes with a mountain of extras, the usual commentaries, interviews, making of, and booklet. Worthy of consideration for those who've seen the film before, but essential for those who haven't. I really can't praise this film highly enough.

Daniel King





## TELEVISION

FT's very own couch potato, STU NEVILLE, casts an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings



### In Search Of...

History Channel

Long regarded as the daddy of all fortean series, the original *In Search Of...* ran for five years and covered most of the greats – UFOs, Nessie, New Hampshire discovered by the Welsh – and was hosted by *Star Trek* favourite, Leonard Nimoy. Given the recent resurgence in interest, a rebooted *In Search Of...* was perhaps inevitable: with the original Spock sadly gone (and William Shatner's phenomenal talents being employed elsewhere; see FT408:67) there was only one candidate to host: the rebooted Spock, Zachary Quinto.

The original series was cut to the pattern of

documentaries of the time, with Nimoy appearing at the top and tail of each episode and narrating, the rest of the footage consisting of testimony and re-enactments. The reboot is somewhat more immersive, with Quinto, who like Nimoy before him somehow manages to look even more like Spock when not in costume, actually rolling his sleeves up and hefting a shovel, nodding thoughtfully when listening to an ever

*He teaches Quinto how to break a wooden staff over his own head*

so slightly crazed witness and manfully resisting the temptation to declare it “illogical, Captain”. In episode two of the first series, “Superhumans”, he meets the usual suspects: a man impervious to pain, people who have found sudden immense strength in crises and a Shaolin monk who can unflinchingly accept kicks to the groin, bend steel bars with his nostrils, etc, who in turn teaches Quinto how to break a wooden staff over his own head without staggering about afterwards clutching his bone and swearing.

In episode five, “Time Travel”, we visit Geneva for CERN, Washington State, Liverpool, and in Seattle we meet Andrew Basiago, founder of Project Pegasus, who claims to have teleported to Mars, where he met Barack Obama. To Quinto's credit, he once again conducts the interview without clutching his head or swearing, although

he does express a degree of disbelief regarding Basiago's claims. He's less dismissive when visiting Liverpool's Bold Street, which has triggered many reports of timeslips. The fact that multiple witnesses claim to have experienced a similar effect over a significant period of time is fully acknowledged, with a good deal of thought put into potential explanations: the theories *du jour* are electromagnetic waves and/or infrasound combined with the environmental properties of the street affecting the brain in a certain way. The claims are not dismissed out of hand merely because they sound fantastic. This approach – balanced, respectful and entertaining – works well, with Quinto providing a strong but unobtrusive focus and old favourites and new cases appealing to veteran forteans and newbies alike. You even stop thinking about Spock after a while. More, please.

## THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot!

### Censor

Dir Prano Bailey-Bond, UK 2021

On general release from 20 August

When I was researching my non-fiction book *The Frighteners: Why We Love Monsters, Ghosts, Death and Gore*, I spent a fascinating afternoon in London, exploring the warren-like corridors of The British Board of Film Classification. One of the aims of the BBFC is to help protect children from “inappropriate content” in movies. A reasonable goal. Yet I grew up during the video nasties era, when the Board was accused of treating everyone who owned a video recorder as, essentially, a child. For years, I'd pictured the BBFC as a sort of faceless machine that somehow got to choose what I watched at

the weekends.

Yet when I toured the place that day, I didn't see computers with algorithms deciding how many eyeball gouging's were “acceptable”. I saw normal people with coffee and notepads, assessing films from surprisingly small offices. Sometimes they'd even pause specific scenes to get a second opinion from colleagues. They were movie fans too – some had John Carpenter posters up – and they told me of the challenge of straddling the line between public wellbeing and public liberty.

Perhaps that's why new indie-horror *Censor* resonated with me. It puts a human face into those rarely seen viewing rooms of the 1980s, where the job could (and still does) include

*A serial killer starts copying the murders in the films she's passed for release*

sitting through scenes of rape and murder while trying to figure out what is “okay”. Niamh Algar plays Enid, a seasoned censor who has seen plenty of death through her huge, vintage glasses. But when a serial killer starts copying the murder methods of the films she's passed for release, reality and unreality start to blur. Retro film fans should prep themselves for wistful sighing when they see VHS clamshell boxes on screen, or the clips of Mary Whitehouse warning the nation against the corrupting power of the rewind button.

It would have been all too easy to take the obvious story route with this: woman protects public from being warped by

sadistic filth... by watching sadistic filth... and ends up being warped herself. However, that would have meant agreeing that the ‘nasties’ were evil after all. *Censor* knows better. It takes a more complex and unsettling route, in which both the ‘party-poopers’ censors and the ‘depraved’ film makers might just be normal people of sound mind, simply doing their jobs. And there will always be people who, for whatever reason, lose their grip on normal life and can no longer censor their own behaviour. Or as the poster puts it: “You can't edit reality.”

*Censor* is a well-shot and thought-provoking experience, as ominous as it is nostalgic, and as the credits rolled I thought back to my afternoon in London. I wondered if I'd met the BBFC viewers who had since sat in their little viewing rooms watching Enid sitting in hers. Would that have been fun for them... or slightly creepy?

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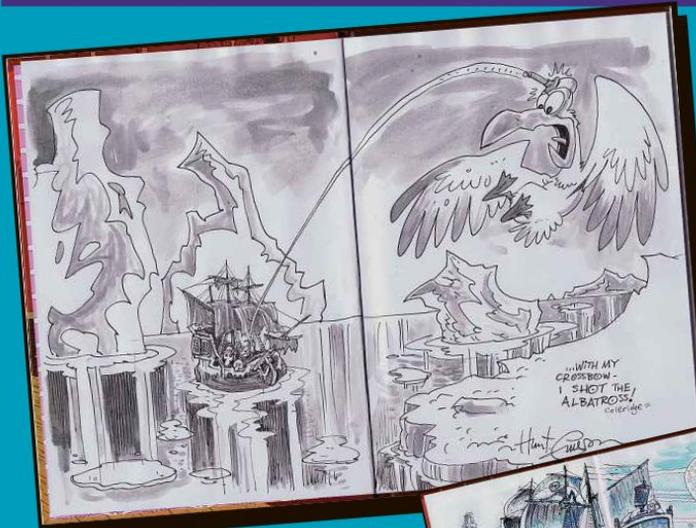


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# SPECIALS!

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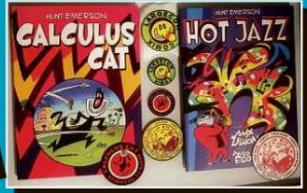
### THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER SPECIAL "ART" EDITIONS.

Going through a newly delivered box of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* recently, I came across a few copies which have extra pages accidentally bound into them. This gives each book two extra blank spreads at the front and back, as extra flyleaves. I've drawn full size sketches on these extra pages, and so I have two unique copies (Book 2 and Book 3) to sell, containing these original drawings. Pictured here are the drawings in Special Book 2 - look online to see those in Book 3. These Special Editions are priced at £200. For the next month I'm charging **£170**.

All my books in print are in the Shop, and for this month I'm discounting a couple - *Blokes Progress* (priced at £12.99, it's £11 this month) and *Dante's Inferno* (usual price £11.99, this month £10).

### SPOOF COVERS OF GREAT CLASSIC COMICS!

Drawn to amuse myself and totally unpublished, I like these Comic Cover Lampoons. There are four of them in the Shop - two are shown here. As they're outside of my normal work you may have overlooked them. But go and look again! I'm doing a special price on them for a month. They're usually £250. For one month they're **£220**.



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# LETTERS



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## Past lives and daimons

Children who remember past lives [FT405:25] may be explained most simply by reincarnation, but also by temporary displacement of a child's consciousness by another entity or recurring hallucinations mingled with clairvoyance and telepathy. In *Beyond the Occult*, Colin Wilson summarises the case of a girl who volunteered to let a dead girl take over her body for a few months, so this is plausible. It is also possible another entity takes over the child's body and is displaced by the growing consciousness of the child and its ability to eject the outsider.

• The list of conspiracies involving Prince Phillip [FT406:18] reminded me that around 2018 I saw it stated on social media that Prince Philip had died and was being preserved on ice till the announcement of his death was politically convenient. I forget if the same posters claimed the Queen had also died and been replaced by a lookalike. Further down page 18 the reported involvement of a 'Mr Janus' led me to speculate whether, if asked, he would have said his first name was Hugh.

• Merrily Harpur's article on ABCs [FT406:32-36] started me thinking of the MIB (Men in Black) as daimons. I then remembered a report in an early issue of FT about contact with a MIB who claimed to be from the Uranus Peanut Company. Mr Janus and this snippet make me feel I am onto something fundamental, but may also be on the verge of getting sucked into a rabbit hole. I wondered what evidence we have that Prince Philip or the rest of the royal family ever existed. A few days later I saw an advertisement of a lecture by an academic who claims to prove the world is not real, at which point I heard the Beatles singing "Lucy in the Sky With Daimons" inside my head followed by "Nothing is real" from "Strawberry Fields". I have no desire to turn into a walrus.

**Alex Kashko**  
Edinburgh

## SIMULACRA CORNER



Nika Blazer photographed this rock in La Serra de l'Obac, northwest of Barcelona. "It is known as La Falconera," he tells us, "but the fortuitous growth of two bushes has made it look like a pleasant-faced person."



We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH or to sievek@forteanimes.com.

## Teeth and drones

Further to Classical Corner's piece on teeth [FT406:14]: although the general view is that white teeth are a sign of their health, teeth blackening was practised historically in South-east Asian and Oceanic cultures, to help preserve the teeth. Even today, many Japanese geishas still do this. I believe that it was practised in Tudor England as well. In this case it was as a result of the introduction of sugar. This expensive substance could only be afforded by the very wealthy, and led to extensive tooth decay, so the less wealthy artificially blacked their teeth to imitate their 'betters'.

• I am sure that many of the drones sightings covered in 'Close Encounters of the Drone Kind' [FT406:38-41] are military hardware from the West's 'adversaries', gleaned technical information about our responses. I also think it quite likely that the West's military know more about these drones than they are saying. I wouldn't expect them to be saying, "Oh yes, we know what these are. They're from Country X. We're using the same technology on them".

• I read the sideline 'Gaia Survival Strategy' [FT407:11], and the original *Guardian* article, with some interest. The *Guardian* suggests a potential fertility crisis, which could threaten human survival. I tend to side more with the FT view, that over-population is the real threat. As regards Gaia's strategy, I believe that certain animal species moderate or increase their reproduction based on local conditions, such as the availability of food, and perhaps the same mechanism has started to operate in humans. If so, I see this as a good thing rather than another crisis.

**Dave Miles**  
By email

## Lon Chaney Jr

About 10 years ago I bought my late father a copy of *Universal Studios Monsters* by Michael Mallory, a hardback covering the history of the classic monster movies and the actors. Following his death, I put the book in my bookcase and occasionally read a chapter or two. A few days ago, I reached the chapter on lesser-known minor series, which included a section on the *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, a

six-part film series, all starring Lon Chaney Jr in either a horror or mystery role. As I had never heard of this series, I wondered whether it was available on DVD. The following day, the new *Fortean Times* arrived. My eye alighted on the Reverend's Review, which contained a review of the *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*, now released on Blu-ray [FT402:65]. The Cosmic Joker certainly put a smile on my face that day.

**Gareth Daw**  
Llantrisant, South Wales

## Digging rules

As a professional archaeologist I feel moved to respond to Dave Miles's letter [FT404:72] about the excavation of human remains. It's a subject that often crops up on the social media site Quora, though frequently in rather more inflammatory language suggesting archaeologists are simply grave robbers and archaeology should be illegal. I hope I can shed some light, at least as far as archaeology in Britain is concerned.

Contrary to popular belief, archaeologists don't seek out well-stocked burials for material gain. I've excavated many burials over the years and gained nothing but experience. There is in fact a law against disturbing graves: the Burial Act of 1857, which has been partially repealed and amended since then, but remains in force. When remains are found unexpectedly, whether by archaeologists or not, the police and Coroner have to be informed in case they are recent. If they are judged to be historic/archaeological, then whenever possible they are left in the ground. If they have to be moved, for example if the area is being redeveloped, then a licence is applied for from the Ministry of Justice before they can be lifted. The remains must be treated with respect, and screened from public view during excavation. A period of time for analysis is permitted, and increasingly the remains are re-buried after examination, rather than sent to stock a museum. Personally I hope to be excavated one day, and would like to be

# LETTERS

buried with a random assortment of artefacts of various dates, along with a metre scale and an arrow pointing north. Future archaeologists will thank me for the last two.

**Liz Mordue**  
Northampton

## Ted Holiday

I must take issue with the Loch Ness and Morar Project for calling Ted Holiday a “crackpot” [FT407:45]. He was a far-sighted investigator of the paranormal well ahead of his time. Although he first thought the Loch Ness creature was flesh and blood, his dogged investigation eventually led him to the conclusion that it was part of the paranormal spectrum. I found his book *The Dragon and the Disc* to be truly a breakthrough book in paranormal research on a par with John Keel’s

*Operation Trojan Horse*, an equally breakthrough book on UFOs.

Both books put me on a course to view most fortan occurrences as paranormal. Holiday was a great investigator of the paranormal (lost to us too soon).

**John Kain**  
London

## Muons and Indridi

• Re David Hambling’s reportage on the Large Hadron Collider [FT406:16], I am very grateful to know what the Compact Muon Solenoid detector looks like. I remember when people believed that turning the LHC on would create a mini black hole and spell doom for us all. And the awesome urban legends out there about CERN staff mysteriously disappearing through cracks in the fabric of reality, and sacrifices taking place in front of a large

statue of Shiva dancing in the wheel of time that just so happens to be there on the forecourt. A favourite reality bomb I like to drop is that MRI scanners would never have been invented had we not been on the hunt for the God Particle.

• Ryan Shirlow [FT406:76] might appreciate knowing that Indridi Cold’s main contactee was Woodrow Derenberger, according to that man’s 1971 collaboration with Harold W Hubbard: *Visitors from Lamulos*. The isomorphism with Icelandic mystic Indridi Indriason’s name is very probably coincidental. Indeed, that mystic seems to have been obliviously giving himself an honorific right up there on the imagination scale with “Boaty McBoatface.” I’d like to see someone trying to conjure oceanic awe in the 21st century with just a silly name! Hardly go-

ing to happen, is it?

Ryan Shirlow may be comforted to know that there are still extant screengrab snapshots of the Wuhan Fact Sheet, evolving over the period from 20 January 2021 to 26 May 2021, here: Wayback Machine (archive.org) <[https://web.archive.org/web/\\*/https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html](https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://2017-2021.state.gov/fact-sheet-activity-at-the-wuhan-institute-of-virology/index.html)>

• Martin Jenkins is absolutely correct about the Sagan Standard [“Who says?” FT406:71]. Extraordinariness is subjective, so if people are going to go and get evidential about it, they should get on a level playing field first.

**James Wright**  
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

## Patrick Stewart

I feel I would be failing in my duty to collectors of synchronicities if I didn’t point out that in FT407 Patrick Stewart appears on three consecutive pages (15, 16 & 17) about two completely different subjects: Roman iconoclasm and ghostly goings on at the Haymarket. And could the ghost he saw in the wings actually have been a tulpa of Godot called into being by the script’s urgent pleas?

**Graeme Kenna**  
By email

## Place ghosts and gypsies

Jeremy Harte seems to contradict himself in his article on gypsy ghosts [FT407:32-39]. “There is no phenomenon to explain”, he says, “because place ghosts are a convention of settled culture. *Gorjers* (settled peoples) see them because they expect to see them. Gypsies don’t expect, and don’t see.” This is after he lists numerous examples, in fact a whole strand of gypsy ghost lore, where ghosts of particular places are identified by non-gypsies as people well known to have died in the locality.

Gypsies experience place ghosts. The fact that different cultures report ghosts in different ways does not invalidate the

## Grey promotion

Here are further products that appear to follow the “Grey aliens are cute” idea.

**James Watson**, by email

For other extraterrestrial-themed products photographed by James, see FT399:72, 403:70.





phenomena. Because different cultures have different views of gender, or crime, or sexuality does not mean those phenomena are not real. While standing between cultures gives us perspective, it does not make our views objective, or allow us access to some sort of chilly otherworldly certainty. Anthropology is an artefact of our particular culture, and conclusions reached by it are still the conclusions of our culture, not “the truth”. Mr Harte concludes with the idea that place ghosts, an artefact of our culture, are not real, because gypsies don’t see them (even though he has already told us they do), but following the fashion of current popular anthropology, does not infer that gypsy *mullos* (ghosts or revenants) are not real because we settlers don’t see them. In an earlier age, when anthropology’s job was to justify our culture rather than vilify it, he might have made the latter assertion rather than the former. Neither trend is evidence of ‘Truth’, just of fashion.

**Dean Teasdale**  
*Gateshead, Tyne & Wear*

*Jeremy Harte responds: A place ghost, to me, is a sequence of past events that replays at the same location automatically, like a scene in a film. Ghosts of this sort are culture-bound: some communities see them and others, like Gypsies, don't. Nevertheless, they are real, i.e. factual, because they happen regardless of the individual that sees them; but they aren't real, i.e. objective, because objective things are the same everywhere, and don't change their form to fit in with different societies. I don't think that ghosts are something natural that have been interpreted differently by different cultures, in the way that a rainbow is always a rainbow, whether we've been trained to see it as three colours or seven. I think they're more like stories or songs, which have common features throughout the world but can be quite different from one culture to*



## Golf double

When a couple of friends and I were playing miniature golf in Florida in 2019, they took this photograph of me putting with my friend Rich watching. I cannot believe what the iPhone did with the image. There was no technical trickery of any sort. Did the iPhone somehow capture some alien version of me? It was just *creepy*.

**Ray Steele**  
*Southfield, Michigan*

*another. Except that stories are thought up by human minds, whereas ghosts are independent of them. If we knew how that could happen, we wouldn't spend so much time fretting over whether what happened was real or not.*

## Not lizards

The report on the discovery of fossils in England previously classified as shark remains but now discovered to be remains of pterosaurs has pterosaurs down as “flying lizards” [Sideline FT406:7]. While they were – as far as we know – flying reptiles, pterosaurs were not flying lizards. The Squamata – including lizards, snakes, amphisbaenians, monitors, Komodo dragons, iguanas and turtles – diverged from the reptiles that became the archosaurs – including birds, crocodiles, dinosaurs and (according to current thinking) pterosaurs somewhere between the late Permian and the end of the Triassic.

The pterosaurs are a different branch of Reptilia, a “crown group” of the class Reptilia separate from the lizards. Flying lizards, also known as gliding lizards, of the genus *Draco*, are lizards that have membranes joining their front and back legs, with the back legs flattened to assist flight. They can't manage flapping flight like the pterosaurs could; they can

just glide using the membrane between their legs. They're nothing to do with the pterosaurs.

**Matt Salusbury**  
*By email*

## Showman Randi

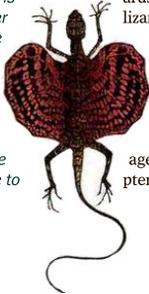
As I was about to leave a *Fortean Times* UnConvention in London a few years ago, I came across a parapsychology group carrying out some dowsing experiments and volunteered to take part. The first rig I walked over had no effect, but over the second, in one of those life-changing moments, the dowsing rods I was holding came to life. The next day I reformed two metal coat hangers from the wardrobe and experimented. It was clear that their movements were not random. I plotted the reaction points on a plan drawing of my ground and first floor. I found that straight lines on the ground floor were mirrored on the first floor. Online, I came across a sceptic site debunking dowsing, and left a few comments saying that I believed they might be missing something by being so dismissive. I explained that I was an electrical engineer and detailed my recent experience with dowsing rods.

A couple of days later I was sent an email by James Randi and entered the strange world of the ‘Sceptic and the Believer’, much stranger than anything to do with dowsing: two sides

only interested in taking swings at each other. I can only describe the ensuing email exchange with Randi as slightly abusive and not really displaying any interest in understanding the dowsing experience. The emails almost shouted in capitals accusing me of being a follower of pseudoscience and magic. I said I had no views on dowsing other than what I had recently experienced. Randi was clearly not interested in discussing the subject and kept inviting me to take his Million Dollar Challenge, while I kept pointing out that I was not making any claims, only sharing my experience. I eventually agreed with him that I should design a test rig to demonstrate whether I could repeatedly detect water flowing down a pipe. He then referred me to a trusted sceptic colleague in England to agree a design/test protocol. We agreed that the test rig would have four plastic pipes into which water would be randomly introduced by hosepipe, not viewable to the dowser. To pass this preliminary test, we agreed I would have to be correct 12 times out of 20. By chance I should achieve a correct guess five times out of 20. He then went back to Randi and confirmed it all.

Some days later I received an email from Randi saying he had carried out his own calculations and was changing the pass level to 17 out of 20, overriding his colleague. This was just to pass the preliminary test; goodness knows what the pass level would have been to pass the actual test to win the challenge.

*Continued on page 76*



MARTIN ROSS

# It Happened to Me...

## Strange episodes

At the back of the houses where we lived in Flint, North Wales, there was a high wire fence between concrete posts, beyond which was a very overgrown embankment with the railway line on top. On a late autumn morning in 1964, when I was 12, I was in the back garden. Noticing that the wire had become free at the base of one of the posts, I decided to wriggle through and see what was on the other side. I must have walked for about 10 minutes going past the rear of neighbours' and friends' houses. I came to a clear patch and sat down. As I looked around I realised that the familiar was now the unfamiliar. It all seemed somehow "reversed". My left hand was resting on the ground and I felt something smooth under the palm of my hand. Looking down there was something white just beneath the soil. I pushed my fingers in and brought out the skull of some creature no bigger than the palm of my hand. I looked again and saw another white shape. I brought this out and it was another skull.

Then from behind me I heard a woman's voice say "You've found the little dragons". Startled, I turned around and saw two women smiling down at me from the top of the embankment. My next recollection is arriving home feeling very tired. My mother had been very worried because I had been gone nearly five hours. As soon as I could I went to bed. I dreamt there was a huge dragon crashing through the trees at the bottom of the garden. In the morning when I went out onto the street I was surprised to see police cars and fire engines. Later I discovered that a freight carriage had come off the rails in the middle of the night. It had come to rest where the little dragons were buried.

● Between September 1966 and December 1967 Mr



*Her father said:  
"Mr Adams is  
dead, his body is  
still in the car"*

Adams taught at our school in Flint. He was a fantastic charismatic teacher and was much missed when he left. In July 1968, when I was 16, the summer holidays were about to start. Richard, a school friend, and I walked into the Year 5 classroom. I noticed Pam was sitting with some of her friends, looking very upset. She said that she had dreamed she was in her kitchen and her father came in, sat next to her and said "Mr Adams is dead, his body is still in the car." Then her father pointed to the Scrapper, an abandoned scrap yard just outside the village. It was the sort of place our parents warned us never to go; advice of course we ignored.

We arranged to meet there that evening at 6pm. When I arrived, Richard was already there with Pam and two of her friends. A huge solid metal gate blocked our entry, but the hinge at the bottom of the gate was rusted away, so it was relatively easy to push your way inside. The yard was quite big, about half the size of a football field. Thousands of tons of metal lay around us. There were five derelict cars. The least derelict, which could have been a Ford, was to our left. It had windows and doors but no wheels. There was a partial registration that read ADM 5. We got within 10ft [3m] of this car and stopped. Through the front passenger window we could see something sitting in the driver's seat. Richard suddenly dashed forward and flung open the front passenger door. In the driver's seat was a black plastic bag, which was moving. Suddenly it fell over onto the passenger seat and a black rat jumped out of the car. It ran between us and

disappeared under the scrap metal.

Then something changed. It was as if the yard was watching us. It became silent. There were three loud metallic "cracking" sounds, seeming to come from the back of the yard. We made our way back to the gate. Again, there were three loud cracking sounds, this time closer. I turned around and saw the front passenger door of the car was now shut. I heard Pam crying. When I looked I saw her nose was bleeding. A friend gave her a tissue. Another three loud cracking sounds, closer still. We got to the gate and Richard pushed at the rusted hinge. It wouldn't open. We both pushed and it remained shut. Pam was now covered in blood. I picked up a metal bar lying a few feet away and we wedged it in the gate to try and lever it open. It wouldn't move. Again three loud cracks but this time the sound seemed to be above us.

Richard never swore, but now he did and I looked where

he was looking. Something was moving under the scrap metal. We saw it lift and undulate. We levered the gate again and this time it opened. The girls went through then Richard held it for me to go through. This I did and pushed at the gate to hold it open for Richard. As he came through I heard a snapping sound and Richard cried out in pain. There was a deep cut on the back of his leg. The next day I saw Richard. His mother had taken him to hospital and he had needed 12 stitches in his leg. While there he saw Pam with her parents. Pam had needed treatment to stop her nose bleeding.

By the way, Mr Adams was not dead. We found out he had got married and was teaching in London.

● The upturned boat had been lying on the sand and shingle in Wrexham, North Wales, for as long as I could remember. It had no name. It was the size of a single deck bus bleached white by the sun and salt air. In the summer of 1977 I was 25, waiting on the quayside for my girlfriend, and looking out onto a wide expanse of sand and sea. An elderly man and his dog came to stand a few feet away. The dog ambled over and I bent down to scratch its head. When I looked up there were three children playing in the surf – a girl of about five or six who appeared to have rags tied in her hair, and two older boys who were running in the sea with their trousers rolled up. The girl looking intently at the sand, then reached down and picked something up. She showed it to the boys who came running over to get a better look. Then they ran around the girl obscuring her for a second. Then I watched the girl looking intently at the sand, reach down and picked something up, and show it to the boys who came over to get a better look. Then they ran around the girl obscuring her for a second. Then I watched... I realised the scene was repeating and repeating. I turned to look at the man next to me. "They're always there," he said, indicating the upturned boat. "That's where they're from." He walked off

with his dog. When I looked again the children had gone. My girlfriend arrived and I said, "I've just seen something really weird!" to which she replied, "You are really weird. Let's go for a drink."

● We had a dog, very much a part of the family. She was 17 years old when she died in 1985. Many years later, I had parked the car and was walking to work in Mold, North Wales. It was a bright sharp spring morning and my mind completely blank. Suddenly she was with me. I could see her, I could feel her, I could smell the musk of her coat. Then she was gone. Maybe she just came to say "Hello"...

● It was February 2016 and I was driving to work in Barrow, Cumbria. I went onto the dual carriageway, which was about five miles [8km] from my destination. Up ahead I saw a cyclist. He was wearing a very distinct bright yellow cape with an Aztec design and a bright orange helmet. I was gaining on him very quickly so I kept him in view. Then he disappeared. I slowed down in case he had fallen off his bike, but he was nowhere to be seen. Minutes later I was driving up the main road into town. There he was again. Same cape and helmet! Feeling a little uneasy as I drew close, I moved my car to the extreme right of my carriageway. Inexplicably, he moved his bike to the space in the road where my car would have been. Had I not moved my car to the right he would have been under it.

**Stephen Roberts**  
*Levens, Cumbria*

## Silent flashes

I live in the middle of Richmond, Virginia, a small city in the USA. This house faces east-west, within about two degrees. To the west, behind the house, is a large cemetery on the other side of an unpaved alley. Within an eight-block radius, I have about 67,000 neighbours, 64,000 of whom are dead. The truly odd thing about the cemetery is that there are very few ghost stories arising from it, even though it has been in place

since the middle of the 19th century.

One evening at about 11, the cat and I got into bed and I started reading Dr John E Mack's *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*. At about 11.30 I turned the lights off. I can see the cemetery and the alley behind the house through the one bedroom window on the west wall. I noticed a small white light in the cemetery. That's usually the light of the security service car that will investigate reports that someone is in the cemetery after hours. A few seconds later the white light – really just a white disc; it didn't radiate light – was visible, moving in the alley. There's no way to get from the cemetery to the alley in a few seconds.

A few seconds later, there was a huge flash outside the house, which I assumed was distant lightning. At 11.46 I saw an intense spot of light, about five inches [13cm] in diameter, on the top of the bookcase on the west wall, which lasted for about a second. Another such spot appeared for a second or so in the corner of the room on the same wall. The cat reacted to the lights, so it wasn't just me (she left the room). One way to create this event is to have a very bright light that would be precisely aimed through the one bedroom window to reflect off the mirror. I saw nothing like that outside the house. For lights to appear in those places, the source could have been at the door to the bedroom, but nothing was there. I went downstairs and looked through the entire house. When I got back to the bedroom, another spot of light

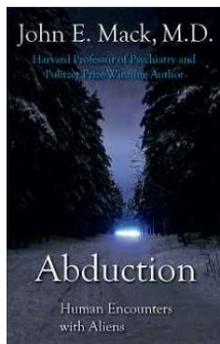
appeared at the ceiling plate of the chandelier, mere inches away from me, I touched the place and felt no warmth or electricity.

I decided to wait in bed for whatever might be next. I felt my skin crawl, as described in horror stories. The bed 'buzzed'. It vibrated rapidly, probably about the same as the 60Hz power in the house, although the bed is not connected to any power line. I've felt the bed vibrate from the effects of distant earthquakes, but this was not like any earthquake. Next was a spot of light on the wall opposite the one on which the first lights appeared. It looked like a physical thing, a yellow shaft coming from the very back of the house, through the bathroom window, through the dressing room, and into the bedroom where it struck the east wall. I don't know how that happened because, while there's a direct line from the window on the back of the house, there was a closed door between the window and the wall. After this, there were flashes outside – bigger than a camera flash. Nothing more happened. I fell asleep but woke at 3.30am shouting about something.

There was no wind and no branches had fallen during the night. There is a power line behind the house, parallel to the cemetery fence. That circuit is connected to the cemetery only, but no one who lives on the circuit (in the old cemetery-keeper's cottage) has complained about interruption to their power. That night, thunderstorms were forecast all night, but they never arrived where I live. I can see lightning if it's within about 12 miles [19km] to the west and about five miles [8km] to the south. Nothing was visible. In spite of this, I assume that what I saw was ball lightning.

A most curious aspect of that night is that there were no outside noises. Normally in an American city, there are sirens frequently, traffic noises, the sounds of voices, boom boxes in cars, and loud motorcycles. But this night, there was none of that. This event remains unexplained. Explanations are hereby solicited.

**Michael Holt**  
*Richmond, Virginia*



# LETTERS

## Divine leg-show

Responding to Matt Salusbury's letter [FT404:73], Tina Rath doubts his identification of a small headless statue seen in Walthamstow as a Madonna, on the grounds that "the young lady is exposing her right leg from the thigh to the ankle" [FT406:73]. This is a telling example of how easily an image can be misinterpreted, even by a viewer with a pretty good idea of what they're looking at.

The statue shows the Virgin Mary in a pose typical of the symbolic, non-narrative subject of the Immaculate Conception (not the same thing as the Annunciation, though it sounds as if it should be). This represents the dogma that Mary, though conceived and born by the usual method, was uniquely granted freedom from the taint of Original Sin. Being a somewhat abstract concept, the pictorial iconography for this idea didn't find a definitive, immediately recognisable iconographic type until the 17th century, when it became a popular motif in Counter-Refor-

mation Spanish art. In painting, the subject is visualised as the figure of the young Virgin Mary seen elevated against the sky, often with the Moon beneath her feet and the Sun behind her. The usual panoply of Heaven seems to be added to taste, so billowing draperies, clouds, cherubs and rays of light may make it look more or less Baroque – but these aren't an issue with a free-standing statue. The Virgin wears a white or pink/red robe with a blue mantle over it, sometimes topping this off with a crown or having the mantle over her head. Her hair is loose, indicating her unmarried, virginal status. Sometimes she clasps her hands in prayer and looks upwards, but in more recent versions, especially in mass-produced images and figures, she is more likely to extend her arms downwards,



palms open, and now almost invariably wears a white dress beneath her blue (or sometimes white) robe.

I suspect this slight shift in iconography can be accounted for by the vision of Mary as the Immaculate Conception received and described by Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858. Her Virgin isn't raising her eyes to Heaven but appearing to, and welcoming, someone on Earth. Since Lourdes has become a major pilgrimage destination, the open-hand pose has become canonical, characterising a mighty horde of souvenir figures. Different versions, however, do still exhibit some variety as to the folds and loops of her drapery. Mary's robe sometimes falls in straight lines to her feet, producing a rather static effect and incidentally de-emphasising the body beneath it. Other versions, though, show softer, more

fluid folds of drapery, implying that she is, rather more naturalistically, taking her weight on one forward-thrust leg, bent slightly at the knee and pressing against her robe. This pose, while continuing to cover her modestly, inevitably reveals the shape of the thigh beneath the fabric.

This looks to be what's been misread in the Walthamstow figure – seen from a certain angle and without the helpful addition of colour to indicate that the leg is fully covered by her enveloping white garment, it might appear that she's thrust that limb through a saucy slit in her dress. It occurs to me that in several decades of lecturing on Christian pictorial iconography, though I could point to many depictions of Mary's bosom, I've rarely seen even a glimpse of her legs.

I've borrowed this current advertising photo (from a site called YF Sculpture, selling Christian statuary) just to show what I mean. There are many more such, with more or less emphasis on that leg!

**Gail Nina Anderson**  
By email

It became clear this was not related in any way to a fair, scientifically based challenge, not even to a spirit of fairness or curiosity, only to publicly debunk a subject. The more militant brand of scepticism was only interested in closing subjects down. 'Scepticism' had become a kind of religion with entertaining characters like Randi and other prominent debunkers as the church leaders. Paradoxically from this experience I discovered a community of British sceptics via attending a number of talks organised by Chris French at Goldsmiths University and made some great friends and had many great discussions.

I have mixed feelings about all this. I know Randi did some good things and exposed some undesirable characters, and many good people hold him in high esteem.

However, I came to see him as an articulate charismatic showman who in so many ways mirrored the people he chased. It was certainly entertaining at times but very little to do with science (and sometimes cruel).

**John Roberts**  
Romford, London

Did I like James Randi? No. He was a condescending old fart whose 'challenge' may have been as harmful as helpful (dangling a million dollars might take care of the frauds, the crackpots, the scientifically illiterate... but for those of us that know better, who are of the opinion that whatever 'actual' paranormal phenomena are, they are too weak and fleeting to be of any use other than as a subjective experience, the offer of that much money is insulting.

Did I respect the man? God and Goddess, Yes. Because of him, fake faith healers, evange-

lists, spiritualists, etc. received permanent damage to their reputations and careers. While many have rebounded and are again fleecing the gullible, they know we're onto them. They will never again have quite the power they once enjoyed.

**Kevin Alan McDougall**  
Victoria, British Columbia

## Salt sprinkler

Regarding war ghosts [FT405:76]: many years ago, my then mother-in-law related a strange experience she had during WWII. She was in the Women's Royal Naval Service, and she and her colleagues were allocated accommodation in the spacious attic of an old country house. She recalled being woken up in the night – on more than one occasion, I think – by a shadowy black monk-like figure sprinkling something over her that seemed to be salt. The extraordinary circumstances of

the time, when so many people were being moved around the country and needed to be accommodated, must have meant that many an owner of an historic house did their bit for the war effort by opening up rooms that had been vacant for years or decades... if not for centuries.

**Julie Speedie**  
York

## London wildlife

A retired friend of mine used to work for Thames Water and had to go down into London's sewer networks, where he often saw turtles and crocodiles swimming – presumably abandoned pets that had been simply flushed down lavatories. He was adamant about this, echoing the classic New York urban legend of alligators in the sewers. Have any other readers heard of this London parallel?

**Phil Brand**  
London



# PECULIAR POSTCARDS

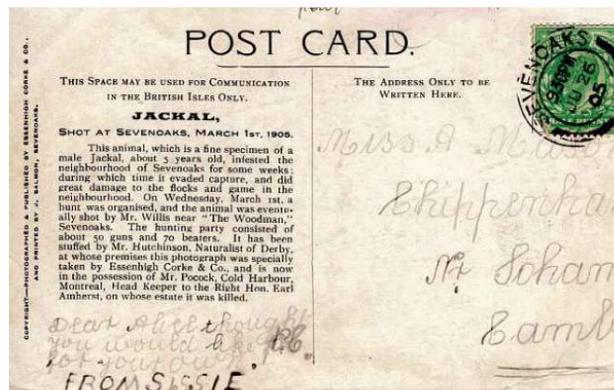
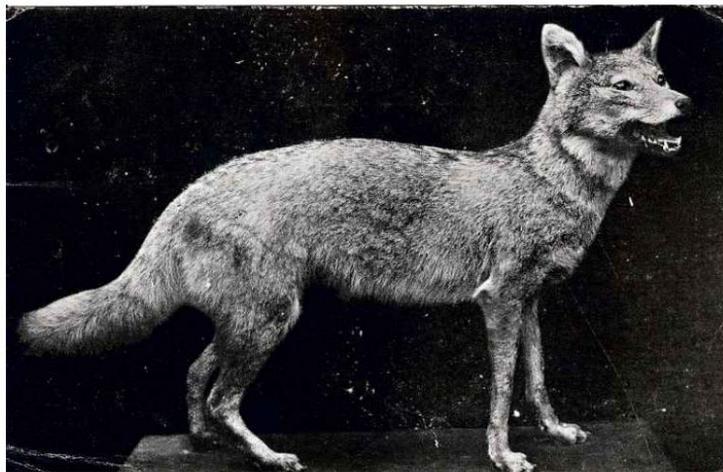


**JAN BONDESON** shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past recalls the curious case of an out-of-place predator prowling the Kent countryside

## 19. THE SEVENOAKS JACKAL

In February 1905, many farmers in or near Sevenoaks, Kent, were losing livestock to some mystery predator that had been killing and maiming sheep on almost every farm in the neighbourhood. It was decided to hunt down this 'wolf', as it was presumed to be, and on 1 March a party of 30 guns went scouring the Weald to run the beast to earth. A navy saw a large, dog-like creature come running with half a lamb in its mouth, entering Earl Amherst's estate. The huntsmen followed the predator and it was shot dead by Mr Willis, gamekeeper to Mr RK Hodgson Esq. It was soon clear that this was no wolf or dog, but a jackal, although no person could comprehend how such an exotic beast could have come to Kent. The dead body of the creature was photographed by Mr Essenhigh Corke, of Sevenoaks.

The Sevenoaks Jackal safely disposed of, a debate was begun about how to recoup some of the expenses caused by the depredations of the animal. It was decided to send the cadaver to Mr AS Hutchinson, the celebrated Derby taxidermist, who had been responsible for the preservation of the head of another out-of-place predator, the Allendale Wolf, after this animal had been run over by a train in 1904 (see "The Last Wolf in England", by John Reppion, FT375:50-53). It was remarked that the teeth of the Sevenoaks Jackal were in good working order: strong and sharp, and much more formidable than those of a fox. The *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote that "It begins to look as if England were reverting to the conditions picturesquely described in the early pages of English history, when wolves and other



ABOVE: The front and back of a postcard featuring the Sevenoaks Jackal, posted in 1905.

interesting creatures were not confined to the zoo." Any person applying for the skin, claiming to be the owner of the jackal, should be forced to pay for the killed sheep in exchange.

In his 1931 book *Lo!*, Charles Fort briefly discussed the

Sevenoaks Jackal, claiming that: "There is no findable explanation, nor attempted explanation, of how the animal got there." These views of the great occult philosopher have been quoted, with approbation, in many modern books about

out-of-place animals and paranormal aspects of Kent. No travelling menagerie had been in the neighbourhood for many months. It is notable, though, that the educated zoologists who examined the mystery animal described it as an Indian jackal, raising the possibility that a soldier or officer serving in India might have taken the young creature home with him as a pet, only to have it escape from his custody or release it into the wild once its fierce nature and morose character became too much for him to bear.

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# WHY FORTEAN?



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

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

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal 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.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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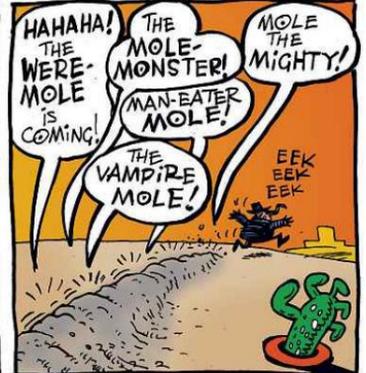
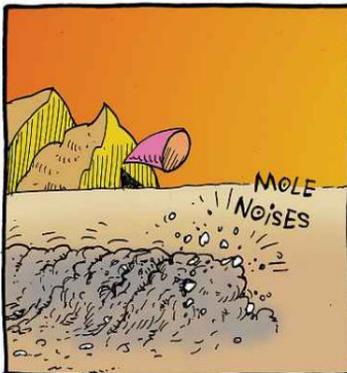
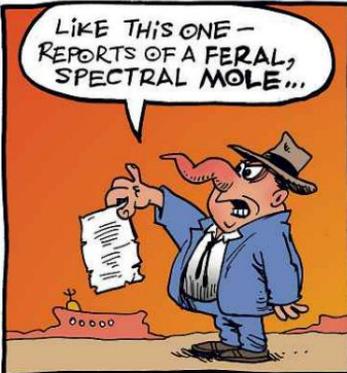
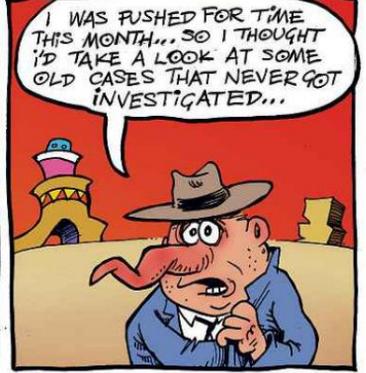
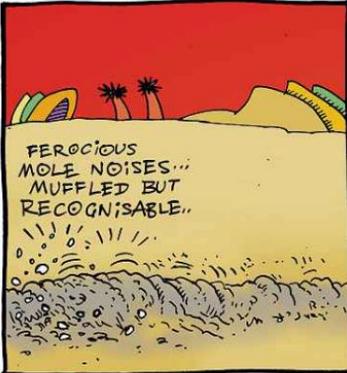
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# FORTEAN TIMES 410

ON SALE 9 SEPT 2021

# STRANGE DEATHS

## UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Waiting at the altar for his bride, Paul Wynn, 57, became breathless and slumped into a chair moments before Alison, 38, started to process down the aisle. Family and guests administered CPR and used a defibrillator on Wynn but were unable to revive him. The couple, who had been together for 21 years and had five children, planned to get married in July, but had bought the wedding forward to 25 June after Paul was given a diagnosis of terminal cancer and had been given between six weeks and two months left to live. "By the time I got to him I called his name a couple of times, [but] he didn't turn round, he didn't look at me and I realised there was something wrong", said Alison, "If I had known we didn't have long I would've tried to arrange the wedding for the beginning of the week." *D.Express, 3 July 2021.*

At a Hindu wedding in Uttar Pradesh, India, the bride, named only as Surabhi, was exchanging garlands with the groom, Manjesh Kumar, when she collapsed with a heart attack and died. After doctors had failed to revive her and had pronounced her dead, the families met to discuss what to do and decided that the wedding should go ahead, with Kumar marrying Surabhi's younger sister Nisha instead. "It was a bizarre situation as the wedding of my younger sister took place while the dead body of my other sister was lying in another room," said Saurabh, Surabhi's brother. "We have never witnessed such mixed emotions," Surabhi's uncle Ajab Singh told *News 18*. "The grief over her death and the happiness of the wedding has yet to sink in." *Sun, 3 June; usatoday.com, 3 June 2021.*

25-year-old Iraqi chef Issa Ismail was stirring a giant vat of chicken soup for a wedding party in Iraq's northern district of Zakho when he slipped and fell into the boiling broth. He was pulled out by colleagues at the Hazel Hall for Weddings and Events and rushed to hospital in the nearby city of Dohuk, but he had sustained third-degree burns over 70 per cent of his body and died five days later. *Independent.co.uk, 1 July 2021.*

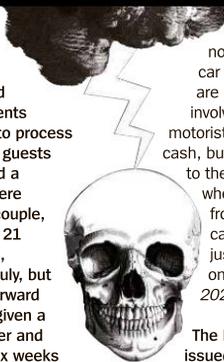
Marco Querino, 56, was hit and killed by a car driven by an 84-year-old woman on a busy road outside Rome as he tried to retrieve more than 1,000 euros in 50 euro

notes that had blown from his car window into the road. Police are unsure how much money was involved in total as several other motorists stopped to grab the fluttering cash, but only one turned his haul in to the police. They also don't know where Querino's money had come from and why it was loose in his car. They are assuming he had just received it and had placed it on the dashboard. *Times, 15 Mar 2021.*

The Russian Orthodox Church has issued a set of approved procedures for expelling demons after a spate of deaths caused by DIY exorcisms. In 2019 a nine-year-old boy died after being gagged and whipped by his father to cast out a demon, while a middle-aged man was suffocated by his mother after she discovered his interest in the occult. In 2011, a 26-year-old woman died after being forced to drink five gallons (22.7 litres) of holy water by her parents when they became convinced her husband was the Devil. Patriarch Kiril of Moscow said that only spiritually strong clergy should carry out exorcisms. *Times, 12 April 2021.*

Eighteen people were killed by lightning on 11 July when taking a selfie atop a watchtower at the 12th century Amer Fort in Jaipur, one of the city's most popular tourist attractions. There were 27 people on the tower at the time and others were injured jumping to the ground. The day saw extensive thunderstorms and heavy rain across northern India and lightning caused nine more deaths in Rajasthan state, where Jaipur is located. At least 41 people also died in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, as well as seven others in Madhya Pradesh. Lightning strikes have killed on average 2,000 people a year in India since 2004, partly because the country has a large rural population who are working outdoors when storms strike. The number has doubled since the 1960s though, and it is thought that this is due to the increase in number and severity of storms due to the climate crisis. *standard.co.uk, 12 July; nypost.com, 12 July 2021.*

Geraldo Freitas of Araci, Brazil, was arrested as prime suspect after his friend Andrade Santana was shot and his body dumped in a river. He was, however, temporarily released from custody a week later in order to be a pallbearer at Santana's funeral. *Metro, 2 June 2021.*



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