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FLATWOODS MONSTER

One of the most bizarre UFO encounters of all time occurred on a hillside near Flatwoods, West Virginia (pop. 300), early in the evening of September 12, 1952.

At 7:15 P.M. three boys playing on a Flatwoods football field saw a slow-moving, round, bright red object

come around a hill and cross the horizon until it stopped above another hill. After hovering for a moment, it dropped abruptly behind the crest. Soon afterwards an orange light flared up from the other side of the hill, followed by a flashing red glow. Thinking a meteorite or a flying saucer had crashed, the boys set off toward the site. In the course of the 10-minute trip they were joined by beautician Kathleen May, her two young sons, a 17-year-old neighbor, Eugene Lemon, and a little boy named Tommy Hyer.

Another member of the party was Lemon's dog. As the party wended its way through the twisting paths that led to the site, the dog ran ahead toward the light and was lost to view. Then suddenly it barked furiously, turned tail, and shot past them. The searchers noticed that the ground was covered with a foul-smelling mist which caused their eyes to water. Then, turning the last bend, Lemon and Neil Nunley, who led the group, looked down the slope and to their right, about 50 feet away, saw a "big ball of fire"—the object they had seen in the sky a few minutes before—resting on the ground. Others who observed the object said it was "big as a house" (Barker, 1956).

Some of those in the rear of the group did not see it, however. Their attention was distracted seconds later by something else, an entity that the press would waste no time dubbing the "Flatwoods monster." At first it was nothing more than two small lights, apparently in the branch of an oak tree to their left and probably from an owl or raccoon. At Mrs. May's suggestion the flashlight was turned on the eyes.

Several days later naturalist and anomaly investigator **Ivan T. Sanderson** interviewed the witnesses, both alone and separately, for a newspaper syndicate. From their testimony he got this description:

The entity's top was level with a branch of the tree, and it seemed to end about some six feet below. It was about the size of an enormous man down to the waist. It did *not* [contrary to some reports] have any arms or anything else ... but it had a distinct "head". This was shaped like an "ace of spades" (they all repeated this). However, this "head" had a large circular window in it through which they could see (a) "darkness" and (b) two "things like eyes, which

you could look straight at it. We all did. It was the color of stainless steel ... but very, very bright." Soon "it spun around at a terrific rate and began to throw out great beams of light, all different colors.... This lasted for about five minutes." After a short cessation of movement it "began to spin round on itself." After stopping again, it started again, only this time turning from a "peculiar silver color" to a "deep blood red." It "seemed to detach itself from the firmament and came hurtling down on the heads of the people present.... Altogether, these events took from 20 minutes to half an hour, and finally the sun ... climbed back again in the same zigzag fashion, and then shone out as it normally does on a clear day. The clouds broke up quite naturally, and for the rest of the day the weather was fine" (Corliss, 1974).

This celebrated miracle of the "dancing sun" was first remarked on in the UFO literature in a 1962 French book, *Les Extraterrestres*, by Paul Misraki writing under the pseudonym "Paul Thomas." Misraki compared Fatima witnesses' testimony to that of modern UFO witnesses, making a superficially plausible case that they were identical but ignoring one salient difference: that the phenomenon at Fatima began and ended as the sun, which was seen to function normally at all times except for the bizarre interlude. No observers reported seeing both the spinning object *and* the sun. Moreover, only some members of the crowd saw, or thought they saw, anything out of the ordinary. Whatever happened at Fatima—miracle, vision, collective hallucination—it does not sound much like a UFO sighting.

Nonetheless, soon ufologists were speculating that either alien intelligences had disguised themselves as Roman Catholic deities (Ingfield, 1964; Vallee, 1969) or unlettered, naive country folk had interpreted their appearances to reflect their own supernatural world views (Ribera, 1964). In the 1970s and beyond another interpretation came into fashion: that Fatima-like religious visions and modern UFO encounters are hallucinatory events whose contents are determined by the dreamers' cultural environment and personal psychology (Clark and Coleman, 1975; Evans, 1984, 1989; McClure, 1983).

British UFO writer John Michell suggested that the beautiful supernatural women reported in religious

miracles and flying-saucer contacts represented pre-Christian goddess archetypes now re-emerging from the collective unconscious—a view echoed by Peter Rogerson, who cited the folkloric figure of the "Sun Maiden" (Rogerson, 1971). "Figures once universally known, but for long ignored or presented in purely Christian terms, are reappearing in their old form and with something of their old meaning," Michell wrote. At Fatima "the lady appears to have been one of those supernatural figures like the attendant of the Holy Grail who can appear to one person and be invisible to another. She revealed herself above or by a tree like the angels who visited Joan of Arc or like the legendary local goddesses of pre-Christian Portugal.... The works of the post-war American flying saucer visionaries are full of references to the erotic space woman, displayed in her pristine character and no longer as the conventional figure of angel or succubus. Since most of these works borrow deeply from the fantasy of their authors, their value is not strictly historical. But they are interesting as an indication of our renewed obsessions with beliefs long dormant, whose revival may help us to understand the great changes we must soon expect, and to adapt our way of thinking to meet them" (Michell, 1967).

There are echoes of Fatima and comparable visions in the claims of contactee **Howard Menger**, whose association with benevolent space people supposedly began in the 1930s, with youthful encounters with a beautiful woman in the woods near his home. In 1946 Menger, now an adult, returned to the site hoping to see the woman after 14 years' separation. After waiting for a time, he decided to leave, then suddenly saw a flash of light and felt heat on the back of his neck. He saw a huge, fast-moving fireball which "looked like a huge spinning sun, shining, pulsating, and changing colors.... The pulsating color changes diminished and the fireball turned into a metallic-looking craft" which shortly landed and from which his spacewoman friend and two male companions emerged (Menger, 1959). There is no reason to believe anything of this sort happened, even as a vision, in real life, but the coincidence is a striking one, perhaps indicating that both devout religious believers and secular yarn spinners are drawing up similar images from the well of the unconscious.

stayed fixed and shone straight out”.... [T]he witnesses agreed that these were two objects behind a translucent panel, that emitted light, pale blue in color, in the form of direct, fixed beams of about the dimensions of a standard three-cell flashlight. These, they all said, were focused way above their heads and to the south, and only moved with the entity as it began to glide around. This it finally did, first toward them, and then in the direction of an object which was still lying pulsing in the tall grass nearby (Sanderson, 1967).

When the entity moved toward them, it did so with an odd circling movement and appeared to be gliding rather than walking. “It moved evenly. It didn’t jump,” Nunley told another investigator, **Gray Barker**, who talked with witnesses a few days after the events.

It was in view for no more than seconds at best. But the sight was enough to cause Lemon to faint. The others dragged him with them as they fled the scene at dizzying speed.

Some of the witnesses had to be treated with first aid, and most were unable to speak coherently even half an hour later, when A. Lee Stewart, Jr., coeditor of *The Braxton Democrat*, tried to interview them. Eventually he was able to persuade Lemon to accompany him to the hill. There was nothing there, but when he leaned down to sniff the grass, Stewart smelled a gaslike odor which irritated his nose and throat. When he returned alone at seven o’clock the next morning, he saw “skid marks,” about 10 feet apart, coming down the hill from the tree where the “monster” had been sighted to the spot where the globe-shaped object had sat. There a large amount of grass lay flat as if crushed.

Barker tried without success to find an explanation for the skid marks. Locals were attributing them, falsely as it turned out, to tractor or pickup tracks, which in any case they did not much resemble. According to Stewart, the “skier” must have weighed little, since only the tall grass, not the ground beneath it, was pushed down.

At some point around the time of the encounter, Woodrow Eagle of Gassaway, about 10 miles southwest of Flatwoods, was driving to Sutton when he saw a flaming object cross the road in front of him and

crash into the trees on a hillside. He called Sheriff Robert Carr, who was investigating the incident when word came of the encounter at Flatwoods. Several other persons independently reported seeing the object, one even claiming to have noticed a “strong smell of the woods burning” (*ibid.*). Searches produced no evidence of a crash. The report is likely of a meteor unrelated to the monster story. Nonetheless other reports of slow-moving, globe-shaped objects seen in various places around Braxton County may be of genuine UFOs. For example, one witness, Bailey Frame of Birch River, allegedly observed a large orange ball, with a flat top and flames shooting out from the sides, as it circled over the area where the monster was reported. The sighting, which lasted 15 minutes, ended when the object shot toward the Sutton airport, where it was also seen.

The witnesses to the monster were so obviously terrified that even skeptics were disinclined to accuse them of consciously fabricating the story, and no evidence or confession of hoax has come to light since. Instead doubters have theorized that the incident grew out of hysteria generated by a meteor sighting and followed by a brief observation of an owl in a tree limb. This explanation is sustainable, however, only if one arbitrarily disregards most of the testimony. For their part the witnesses stuck to their story (Fitch, 1958), and investigators Barker and Sanderson, who interviewed the principals and dozens of other area persons, were inclined to take them at their word.

Another investigation, conducted by California ufologists William and Donna Smith shortly after the event, uncovered a report of the same or a similar creature from about a week earlier and 11 miles away. Allegedly a 21-year-old Weston, West Virginia, woman and her mother, while on their way to church, encountered the entity, which gave off the same unpleasant odor the Flatwoods witnesses would describe. The younger woman was so traumatized, according to the Smiths, that she was confined to the nearby Clarksburg Hospital for three weeks. This report did not make the newspapers, and there is no independent confirmation for it; it was, however, judged credible by the conservative Los Angeles-based **Civilian Saucer Investigation** (“More on the ‘Green Monster’,” 1953).

According to Donald E. Keyhoe, the Air Force sent two plainclothes investigators to the scene. They concluded that the Flatwoods witnesses had seen a meteor, and an owl's glowing eyes and hysteria had supplied the rest (Keyhoe, 1953).

The Joliette monster. The UFO literature records only one other sighting of a creature like the Flatwoods monster, but this one is said to have been only four feet high and to be devoid of accompanying odor. Nonetheless a sketch drawn by one of the witnesses shows an entity not just similar but virtually identical to the one May and her companions drew.

The incident occurred during a flurry of sightings in the Canadian province of Quebec. At 2 A.M. on November 22, 1973, a woman who lived with her husband in an isolated area on the outskirts of Joliette was unable to sleep, so she got up, went into the kitchen, and lit a cigarette. She did not turn the lights on. As she sat, she noticed a "white object" just outside the window. When she got up to investigate, she saw a figure with glowing eyes three times the size of normal eyes. Around its head or helmet there was a sort of halo. It had no shoulders in any conventional sense; they sloped down at a 45-degree angle from the head.

The woman (who asked reporters and investigators not to publish her name) was not at all frightened. After 15 seconds the figure withdrew. The witness alerted her husband, who quickly dressed and conducted a search of the outside, finding only a dog which seemed to be "scared to death." The next evening the couple's cat behaved oddly. It dashed around the house and kept returning to the window, which it looked through as if searching for something. All that night it tried to stay as close as possible to the couple as if it were afraid of something. A reporter who talked with the provincial police about the incident was told it was "taken seriously" (Macduff, 1976).

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FLORIDA SCOUTMASTER CASE

On the evening of August 19, 1952, a scoutmaster named D. S. "Sonny" Desvergers and three scouts from Troop 33 were driving along a rural road near West Palm Beach, Florida, when Desvergers reported glimpsing a "blur of light." The light descended to the ground at a 45-degree angle and a north-south direction.

Desvergers stopped the car and got out, declaring that either an airplane had crashed or a flying saucer had landed 200 or 300 yards away. Frightened, the boys prevailed on him not to go out into the woods to investigate. Desvergers resumed the trip, only to stop and say he *had* to check. He returned to the site and said that if he did not return in 10 minutes, the boys should alert the authorities. He set out in the darkness with a machete and two flashlights.

Subsequently one of the boys, 12-year-old Bobby Ruffing, told **Project Blue Book** investigators that he had seen a semi-circle of white lights going down into the trees the first time Desvergers stopped the car. The other boys saw nothing. Bobby also claimed that he could see Desvergers as he entered the trees. The others, Chuck Stevens and David Rowan, said they observed their scoutmaster, or at least the lights from his flashlights, in the trees. According to Bobby, "I could see about the top half of his body. Then the beam of his flashlight pointed up and reflected back on him like it had shined on a mirror. Then the reddish white ball of fire like a Roman candle came down toward him from the sky. Then he fell and disappeared. The flashlight fell, too. The ball hit the ground and bounced twice, and I saw a reddish mist shaped like a disc floating up above where Sonny fell.

There wasn't any sound at all" ("T.W.A. Pilot," 1956).

At this point the boys panicked, and they ran to a nearby farm. The farm couple phoned the Florida State Highway Patrol, which then notified the sheriff.

Half an hour to 45 minutes later Desvergers staggered out of the palmetto thicket and toward a car parked near his. Inside the car were a deputy sheriff, a local constable, and the three boys. The deputy later said he had never seen anyone so terrified as Desvergers, who blurted out a story of having been knocked unconscious by a flying saucer. The group went into the thicket and found a still-burning flashlight and flattened grass in the general shape of a human body. One of the flashlights was missing; it was never recovered.

On the way to the sheriff's office, Desvergers observed that his arms and face were burned, and soon he noted that his cap was also burned. The deputy phoned the Air Force.

Desvergers gave a statement which reads in part:

I walked approximately 300 yards in cleared ground through trees about 20 feet high. Then went through thick palmettos about 150 yards and came into another clearing and these were all small pine saplings.... I went another 40 or 50 feet into the clearing. At that time I suddenly felt the presence of something that shouldn't have been there. It was a hot sensation just like walking in an oven. I could feel a little cold sweat pop out on me—whether or not that was from being scared, I don't know....

Then I realized that the heat was coming from overhead. I shined the light up and I saw a flat surface of a round object about 30 feet in diameter, about eight or 10 feet above me. I guess I was absolutely paralyzed. I could not move a muscle. I was scared to death. It must have been a good minute that I was under this thing.... I had my machete in my right hand and my searchlight in the other hand still on the object which was about eight or nine feet above me. I wanted to strike it with the machete or throw the flashlight at it but somehow I just couldn't do it. My reflexes just wouldn't work.

Then I slowly backed out from under this thing, a couple of paces at a time. It seemed like an eternity. I got to the edge of it, and I saw the lower trailing edge was of a shiny nature like phosphorous in salt water at night.... The thickness at the edge was about three feet with portholes, exhaust ports, or openings continuously around the edge of it. Then I backed up a couple of more paces and I could see the dome or the top against the sky. At no time did this thing make any noise other than a slight hissing sound similar to air escaping from a compressed area.... At this time I heard a sound similar to a hatch being opened....

Then I was conscious of the fact that a ball of red fire was coming in my direction from the top of this object. It had no speed but seemed to float right straight for my face. I was still immobile. I couldn't move.... I did finally drop my flashlight and threw my arms up over my face and got the full impact of this red flash. It wasn't a solid substance. It felt more like a hot gush of air or something—blinding me momentarily and smelling something awful. It was worse than burning flesh. I slowly began to black out or pass out or something. I fell to the ground and was probably out about 25 minutes.

When he regained consciousness, Desvergers said, he was in a different spot from the one he had been in when the fire ball hit him.

The Air Force investigates. The next day Capt. **Edward J. Ruppelt**, Blue Book head, and Lt. R. M. Olsson flew to Florida from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base to conduct a preliminary investigation of the case. Desvergers had already been interviewed by a local Air Force intelligence officer, who took his account seriously. On September 8 Ruppelt and Olsson returned. By now Desvergers was complaining that he had been receiving threatening phone calls at his work place, from someone warning him not to discuss his experience. He had also hired a press agent.

After interviewing a number of persons who knew him, the Blue Book officers found that Desvergers possessed an unenviable personal reputation and was almost universally considered untrustworthy. One man remarked, "If he told me the sun was shining, I'd

look up to make sure" (Ruppelt, 1956). Two brothers, one of whom had been acquainted with Desvergers since 1941, remarked that they were deeply interested in flying saucers and had they heard the story from anybody but Desvergers, they probably would have believed it. One informant, according to a Blue Book internal memorandum, "stated that the general impression around the city of West Palm Beach was about 60% of the people were mad at DesVerges [sic] for coming in with such a story; about 5% of the people believed it; and the rest just laughed it all off" (*Memorandum*, 1952). As if to lend credence to the suspicions, Desvergers began telling ever more elaborate versions of the tale. At one point he hinted he had seen a "thing" too horrible to describe, at another claimed to have climbed to the rim of the saucer and fought with three "weak" humanoids in gray clothing.

Ruppelt and Olsson decided, according to the former, that "not even by standing *on top of the car* could you see a person silhouetted in the clearing where the scoutmaster supposedly fell." (This allegation was disputed by another investigator [Nash, 1957].) Thus they concluded that the scouts' imaginations had played a large role in their testimony; the lights they saw were from an arc welder and from airplanes landing at a local airport.

That, however, was not quite the end of the matter. Even though the principal claimant had a checkered reputation and the scouts' testimony was open to question, the physical evidence was difficult to account for. The laboratory that examined Desvergers' cap, the Clothing Research Division of the Medical Unit of Aero Med Lab, could conclude only that something like an "electric spark" had caused the burns on it. The scouts swore there had been no burns before the incident because they had played with the cap during the scout meeting that evening, and it had looked brand new then. Even more puzzling was the discovery that the roots of the grass at the site were mysteriously charred, although the surface grass was unaffected. No one could imagine how Desvergers could have hoaxed such an effect.

Hoax or horror? Even as he was characterizing the episode as the "best hoax in UFO history," Ruppelt, in his *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (1956),

took note of the strange effect and speculated that a UFO "generating a powerful alternating magnetic field was hovering over the ground.... To get an alternating magnetic field, some type of electrical equipment was needed. Electricity—electrical sparks—the holes burned in the cap 'by electric sparks'. UFO propulsion comes into the picture when one remembers Dr. Einstein's unified field theory, concerning the relationship between electro-magnetism and gravitation."

Two years after the alleged incident, Bill Nash, an airline pilot who had had a spectacular UFO sighting two years earlier (*see Nash-Fortenberry Sighting*), reinvestigated the case, interviewing Desvergers and others. According to Nash, "A few days after Desvergers had his experience, a 16 yr old high school girl with her Aunt, Uncle and two small children saw a lighted object descend into the woods and remain lighted near the Desvergers site" (*ibid.*).

The Desvergers case may be the ufologist's worst nightmare: a real experience which happened to an unreliable individual. Desvergers did his already tattered credibility no good when he proceeded to relate even more bizarre versions of the episode. In an interview published in the April 19, 1953, issue of *The American Weekly*, he hinted that he had seen a living creature aboard the UFO but would give no details. Around that time Desvergers told Donald Howell of Jacksonville, Florida, that he climbed onto the rim of the saucer and struggled with three gray-suited humanoids with a sweaty odor. When he hit them, their flesh felt soft. The beings seemed weak, and Desvergers felt he was winning the fight until the saucer moved and he fell off the rim to the ground. Howell felt that Desvergers's manner and suspiciously full recall put his sincerity into question (Gross, 1989).

In recent years, though no one has taken seriously the tale of the little men on the saucer's rim, there has been speculation (privately voiced by one prominent ufologist) that the scoutmaster's imperfect recall, plus his statement that with the recovery of consciousness he found himself in a different location from the one he had been when he passed out, may indicate that he was an early UFO-abduction victim. But if it were not for the physical evidence in the form

Years later, when Charles Fort came upon the story in the September 10, 1891, issue of the *Brooklyn Eagle*, he was suspicious, "convinced that there had probably never been a Rev. G. W. Switzer, of Crawfordsville." Curious almost in spite of himself, he investigated and, to his surprise, "learned that the Rev. G. W. Switzer had lived in Crawfordsville, in September, 1891." He wrote him at his present address in Michigan. Rev. Switzer replied that he would send a full account of his sighting as soon as he got back from current travels. Unfortunately, Fort added, "I have been unable to get him to send that account. . . . The problem is: Did a 'headless monster' appear in Crawfordsville, in September, 1891? And I publish the results of my researches: 'Yes, a Rev. G. W. Switzer did live in Crawfordsville, at the time.'"

But in time Vincent Gaddis, a Crawfordsville newspaper reporter and member of the Fortean Society, was able to do better than that. He interviewed the town's older residents, who said the story was true and told him about the September 6 mass sighting, which had not been reported in the press. Gaddis wrote, "All the reports refer to this object as a living thing" – in other words, one of the hypothetical atmospheric life forms that would figure in early theories about unidentified flying objects.

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Flying Humanoids

When a mysterious object passed over Mount Vernon, Illinois, on the evening of April 14, 1897, 100 citizens, including Mayor B. C. Wells, saw something that, as press accounts had it, "resembled the body of a huge man swimming through the air with an electric light on his back."

Reports of flying beings of human or generally human appearance are among the rarer anomalous phenomena, but they occur periodically. A "winged human form" was observed over Brooklyn on September 18, 1877, according to W. H. Smith in the *New York Sun* on September 21. Almost exactly three years later the *New York Times* of September 12, 1880, remarked on reports from Coney Island of a "man with bat's wings and improved frog's legs . . . at least a thousand feet in the air . . . flying toward the New Jersey coast . . . [with] a cruel and determined

er's mark, which meant that while strange phenomena were noted (the magazine reprinted Fort's notes and cited newspaper accounts), at least as much attention was paid to Thayer's social and political crusades against a wide variety of offending individuals (e.g., Franklin D. Roosevelt), groups (the American Medical Association), and practices (fluoridation).

Such attitudes did not endear Thayer to many society members. The science-fiction writer James Blish remarked on Thayer's proclivity for crazy notions, "the more asinine the better." Robert Barbour Johnson complained of the "distinctly juvenile" tone of the magazine (Johnson was particularly irritated by Thayer's adoption of a thirteen-month year, the added month being named "Fort"); nor did he approve of Thayer's attraction to the "always unintelligible" ruminations of cranks who were given free rein in *Doubt's* pages. In 1949 the San Francisco branch of the society was expelled because its members were more interested in Fortean phenomena than in what Thayer called "other rebellions."

The society's most lasting contribution was overseeing the publication of the omnibus *The Books of Charles Fort*, published in 1941 with an enthusiastic introduction by Thayer. Repeatedly reprinted, *Books* has kept Fort's name alive for future generations.

The last issue of *Doubt* (#61) came out in the spring of 1959. Thayer died of a heart attack on August 23 of that year, and on September 30, 1960, his widow formally disbanded the organization.

According to a story in the *Indianapolis Journal* for September 5, at two o'clock the previous morning a "horrible apparition" appeared in the western sky, where two men hitching up a wagon saw it. One hundred feet in the air, twenty feet long and eight feet wide, the headless, oblong thing – apparently some bizarre variety of living creature – propelled itself with several pairs of fins and circled a nearby house. It disappeared to the east for a short time and then returned. The two men, their curiosity exhausted, gave vent to an understandable impulse to take to their heels. They were not, however, the only witnesses. A Methodist pastor, the Rev. G. W. Switzer, and his wife also observed the phenomenon.

The creature was back the following evening, and this time hundreds of Crawfordsville's citizens saw its violently flapping fins and flaming red "eye." The creature "squirmed as if in agony" and made a "wheezing, plaintive sound" as it hovered at 300 feet. At one point it swooped over a band of onlookers, who swore they felt its "hot breath."

expression." In a 1947 book Russian writer V. K. Arsenyev recounted this July 11, 1908, experience in the Sikhote Mountains near Vladivostok in the far eastern region of what would be the USSR:

The rain stopped, the temperature of the air remained low and the mist appeared over the water. It was then that I saw the mark on the path that was very similar to a man's footprint. My dog Alpha bristled up, snarled, and then something rushed about nearby trampling among the bushes. However, it didn't go away, but stopped nearby, standing stock-still. We had been standing like that for some minutes. . . . Then I stooped, picked up a stone and threw it towards the unknown animal. Then something happened that was quite unexpected: I heard the beating of wings. Something large and dark emerged from the fog and flew over the river. A moment later it disappeared in the dense mist. My dog, badly frightened, pressed itself to my feet.

After supper I told the Udehe-men about this incident. They broke into a vivid story about a man who could fly in the air. Hunters often saw his tracks, tracks that appeared suddenly and vanished suddenly, in such a way that they could only be possible if the "man" alighted on the ground, then took off again into the air.

Four Silver City, New Mexico, children playing in a yard at twilight of a summer day in 1938 witnessed a bizarre sight. As one of the observers recalled it in 1980:

We all saw him. He was dressed all in gray and he even seemed gray; he was drifting or floating at tree-top level. The thing I remember the most about him was that he seemed to be wearing a belt which was wide and had points sticking out of it. He also seemed to be wearing a cap (a la Flash Gordon).

He drifted across the sky above us and we all stood and stared, speechless. It did not occur to us to question this phenomena [sic]; as children we accepted it. . . .

About fifteen years ago I was telling my husband about it. When I did, I questioned myself – perhaps I had had a dream. But just in case, I called my brother. By now I was about thirty-five and he about thirty-two. I prefaced my conversation by telling him that I had a strange story to tell and that perhaps it had all been a dream, but that I thought that in about 1938 I had seen a man fly over our heads. He stopped me and said, "It wasn't a dream." He went on to describe everything as I have described it here, including the belt and the cape.

One night in 1952 U.S. Air Force Pvt. Sinclair Taylor, on guard duty at Camp Okubo, Kyoto, Japan, said he heard a loud flapping noise. Looking up, he saw an enormous "bird" in the moonlight. When it approached, he got frightened and put a round into the chamber of his carbine. The "bird" now had stopped its flight and was hovering not far away, staring at the soldier.

Budd Hopkins

The author of two much-read books, a popular lecturer, and a frequent guest on television and radio talk shows, Budd Hopkins is probably America's best-known ufologist. His specialty is UFO-abduction reports that he, more than any other writer or investigator, has brought to wide publication attention.

Born in Wheeling, West Virginia, on June 15, 1931, Hopkins graduated from Oberlin College in 1953. Since the 1950s he has lived in New York City, pursuing a successful career as a painter and sculptor. Some of his works are in the permanent collections of a number of America's major museums; he has won fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and writes frequently for art magazines. Hopkins and his wife, art historian April Kingsley, have one daughter, Grace.

In 1964 Hopkins and two companions observed a daylight-disc UFO. Intrigued, he joined a UFO organization and sought out UFO literature. He did not become an active figure in ufology, however, until an acquaintance told of witnessing a UFO landing, with occupants, in a New Jersey park. Teaming up with veteran ufologist Ted Bloecher, Hopkins investigated the report and tracked down other witnesses to the event. His article on the case in the *Village Voice* attracted considerable attention. The resulting mail brought him letters from persons reporting some of their own experiences, including UFO sightings and periods of missing time that suggested their memories had in some way been tampered with.

"The thing, which now had started slowly to descend again, had the body of a man," Taylor recalled. "It was well over seven feet from head to feet, and its wingspread was almost equal to its height. I started to fire and emptied my carbine where the thing hit the ground. But when I looked up to see if my bullets had found home there was nothing there." When the sergeant of the guard came to investigate and heard the story, he told Taylor that he believed him because a year earlier another guard had seen the same thing.

An even more disturbing incident allegedly occurred in Falls City, Nebraska, one fall afternoon in 1956. The Hanks family (a pseudonym) had just returned from an outing, and all but John, the husband/father, had gone into the house. John Hanks was loading work equipment into the back of his pickup when a casual glance caught something in the air three blocks away. As it got closer, what Hanks had first taken to be a kite began to look more and more like something unimaginable: a large, winged human form. Soon he could see its "very frightening, almost demonic" face.

Years later, speaking with investigator Ray Boeche, he remembered its eyes as "very large, blue in color. They were shaped on his face almost like horse's

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Flatwoods Monster

On September 12, 1952, three boys in the tiny West Virginia town of Flatwoods (population 300) saw a slow-moving, reddish sphere sail around a hill, hover briefly, and drop behind the crest of another hill. From the other side a bright glow shone, as if from a landed object. On their way to investigate, the boys were joined by beautician Kathleen May, her two young sons, their friend Tommy Hyer, seventeen-year-old Eugene Lemon, and Lemon's dog.

The dog ran ahead of the group and was briefly out of sight. Suddenly it was heard barking furiously and, moments later, seen fleeing with its tail tucked between its legs. A foul-smelling mist covered the ground and caused the searchers' eyes to water. The two leading the group, Lemon and Neil Nunley, who got to the top first, looked down and observed a "big ball of fire" fifty feet to their right. Another of the witnesses reported it was the size of a house.

To the group's left, on the hilltop and just under the branch of an oak tree, were two small lights. At Mrs. May's suggestion, Lemon turned his flashlight on them. To everyone's considerable astonishment, the beam highlighted a grotesque-looking creature with a head shaped like the "ace of spades," as several of the observers independently described it. Inside the head was a circular "window," dark except for the two lights from which pale blue beams extended straight ahead. In their short observation of the creature, the group saw nothing that looked like arms or legs.

The creature, which appeared to be over six feet tall, moved toward the witnesses; it seemed to be gliding rather than walking. Seconds later it changed direction, turning toward the glowing ball down the hill.

ness, theories like Evans's are hardly more persuasive than Vallee's; psychosocial approaches suffer from an absence of empirical evidence and are open to the sorts of criticisms David Hufford, who demands that we acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge of some aspects of human experience, has made (see above).

In any case, links between UFO lore and fairylore are weak and require the theorist to read the respective literatures with great selectivity. Folklorist Thomas E. Bullard calls proposed connections "oblique and speculative" at best – a point readers can easily establish for themselves by comparing the contexts of two books coincidentally published in the same year (1976): Coral and Jim Lorenzen's *Encounters with UFO Occupants* and Katharine Briggs's *An Encyclopedia of Fairies*.

Another important difference is that at least some "close encounters of the third kind" have been well investigated and documented by civilian or official inquirers, whereas fairy "sightings," however provocative, are no more than simple anecdotes. No doubt this is so because those who heard them saw no reason to investigate; either they believed in fairies and so implicitly assumed the stories to be true, or they did not believe in fairies and so assumed the stories to be untrue, or they were collecting what they thought of as "folklore" whose reality status was irrelevant. In all of these cases, no further inquiry was deemed necessary.

Perhaps real investigation would turn belief or disbelief into a response based on information rather than on supposition. But fairy "sightings" are likely to remain where they always have been: at the fringes of human experience.

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Artist's
impression of the
Flatwoods
monster, seen by
Kathleen May and
others in West
Virginia, 1952.
*(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)*

All of this allegedly took place in a matter of seconds, during which Lemon fainted. The others dragged him away as they ran from the scene.

When interviewed half an hour later by A. Lee Stewart Jr. of the *Braxton Democrat*, most of the witnesses were barely able to speak. Some sought first aid. Stewart thought there was no question they had seen something that badly frightened them. Soon afterwards, he was able to get Lemon to accompany him to the hillside, where Stewart noticed an unusual odor in the grass that irritated his nose and throat. Returning to the site alone at seven o'clock the following morning, he found "skid marks" going down the hill and toward an area of matted grass, indicating the recent presence of a large object.

The encounter with what the press would quickly dub the "Flatwoods monster" took place during a flurry of sightings of unusual flying objects in the area. One man, Bailey Frame of nearby Birch River, told of seeing a bright orange ball circling over the area where the monster was reported. The object was visible for fifteen minutes before shooting toward the airport at Sutton, where it was also seen.

According to one account, a week before the Flatwoods event and eleven miles away, a Weston woman and her mother encountered the same or a similar creature as they were driving to church. Both reported it emitted a foul odor, and the younger woman was so frightened that she required hospitalization. This report, if true, never made the newspapers. It was uncovered by two investigators associated with the Los Angeles-based Civilian Saucer Investigation.

Some time later, in the 1960s, writer John A. Keel interviewed a couple who claimed that the night after the original incident and ten or fifteen miles to the southwest of it, they encountered a ten-foot-high figure emitting a sulfurlike odor. It approached their mysteriously stalled car before returning to the woods from which it had emerged. Moments later a luminous sphere ascended rapidly from out of the trees.

Skeptics theorized that May and her companions had seen a meteor and an owl, and only hysteria had caused them to think they had observed anything else. Nonetheless, when interviewed separately shortly after the incident, the witnesses told a story investigators found strikingly consistent. Skeptical hypotheses have necessarily had to reject *a priori* the witnesses' descriptions of what they saw.

When interviewed in the early 1990s, Kathleen May Horner recalled that two men, first identifying themselves as journalists, then acknowledging that they were government investigators, spoke with her. This is not hard to believe; it is known that the U.S. Air Force dispatched two plainclothes investigators to the scene. Like other disbelievers, they laid the incident to imaginations inflamed by a meteor and an owl.

Speaking with West Virginia reporter Bob Teets, however, Horner claimed that soon after her interview with the investigators, a man with a local newspaper (possibly A. Lee Stewart Jr.?) got a letter from "the government":

He . . . opened it up, and they had a five-by-seven picture in there of the thing that I described. They said I gave the best description of it, even of

Brad Steiger

Born Eugene Olson on February 19, 1936, Brad Steiger – first a pseudonym, then his legal name – would make his mark as the author of paperback books that introduced UFO and paranormal lore to hundreds of thousands of Americans in the 1960s.

Steiger grew up in rural Iowa and in young adulthood taught high-school English. In 1963 he became a literature and writing instructor at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. He began publishing short stories in pulp magazines but soon turned his entire literary attention to paranormal subjects, in which he had a long interest stemming from two events in childhood: one an encounter with a little man (whom Steiger would describe variously as a smiling elf and as a large-headed humanoid with “emotionless and detached” eyes), the other a near-death experience.

His early books were patterned after Frank Edwards's *Stranger Than Science* (1959) and *Strange World* (1964). Edwards collected accounts of “true mysteries” from *Fate* magazine and other sources, presenting them in short, easily read chapters that often placed more emphasis on wonder than on documentation. A small Chicago publisher produced the first of Steiger's books in this vein, *Ghost, Ghouls, and Other Peculiar People* (1965). By the next year he was placing such books as *Strangers from the Skies*, *The Unknown*, and *ESP: Your Sixth Sense* with New York paperback houses.

In the 1970s Steiger's writing started to appear between hard covers, with titles such as *Revelation: The Divine Fire* (1973), *Mysteries of Time and Space* (1974), and *Gods of Aquarius: UFOs and the Transformation of Man* (1976). *Revelation* and *Gods* dealt with New Age channelers and flying-saucer contactees, whose metaphysical message had great appeal to Steiger. By now he was more interested in the spiritual implications of anomalous events than in the events themselves. In 1977, after divorcing his first wife, he married Francie Paschal, a Schenectady, New York, contactee. Until that marriage broke up in the mid-1980s, the two wrote and lectured together, teaching an occult metaphysics based on the premise that many earthlings (including the Steigers) are secret extraterrestrials or “Star People.”

Now married to Phoenix metaphysician Sherry Hansen, Steiger is a popular lecturer on the New Age circuit and still writes an occasional book.

Invisible rock-throwers

One variety of phantom attack involves the tossing or dropping of stones by some seemingly invisible assailant.

An instance that attracted national attention occurred in Chico, California, in March 1922, though sporadic incidents actually dated from the previous

November. Most of the rocks fell on the roof of a grain warehouse. The *Chico Record* noted, "At almost any hour one can hear the impact of rocks striking the warehouse roof and they may be seen bouncing from the eaves to the ground." Despite massive police and volunteer searches no one was ever seen tossing the stones, and the affair ended after three weeks' worth of intense activity.

Parapsychologists associate these sorts of events with poltergeists, though the late D. Scott Rogo, who investigated and wrote about such cases, said they usually were unaccompanied by more typical poltergeist antics such as rappings and tossing of housewares. These phenomena have some considerable historical lineage. As early as A.D. 530, for example, the physician to King Theodoric of the Ostrogoths was said to have fallen victim to a diabolic infestation: showers of stones fell constantly on his roof. In a 1934 West Indies case, a resident of the house at which the stones were aimed recorded, "The stones continued falling for more than a month, day and night. Sometimes stones would fall inside the house even when it was closed."

In many cases the stones are reported to fall with a slowness that seems to defy the law of gravity, and they feel warm to the touch if retrieved soon after their fall. They may have other peculiar characteristics as well. Around the turn of the century W. G. Grottendieck, a Dutch traveler in Sumatra, recorded this experience:

I put on my bullsack and mosquito netting on the wooden floor and soon fell asleep. At about one o'clock at night I half awoke, hearing something fall near my head outside the mosquito curtain on the floor. After a couple of minutes I completely awoke and turned my head half around to see what was falling on the floor. They were black stones from 1/8 to 2/3 of an inch long. I got out of the curtain and turned up the kerosene lamp that was standing on the floor at the foot of the bed. I saw then that the stones were falling through the roof in a parabolic line. They fell on the floor close to my head-pillow. I went out and awoke the boy (a Malay-Pelambang coolie) who was sleeping on the floor in the next room. I told him to go outside and examine the jungle up to a certain distance. He did so whilst I lighted up the jungle a little by means of a small "ever-ready" electric lantern. At the same time that my boy was outside the stones did not stop falling. My boy came in again, and I told him to search the kitchen to see if anybody could be there. He went to the kitchen and I went inside the room again to watch the stones falling down. I knelt down near the head of my bed and tried to catch the stones while they were falling through the air towards me, but I could never catch them; it seemed to me that they changed their direction in the air as soon as I tried to get hold of them. I could not catch any of them before they fell to the floor. Then I climbed up the partition-wall between my room and the boy's and examined the roof just above it from which the stones were flying. They came right through the "kadjang" but there were no holes in the Kadjang. When I tried to catch them there at the very spot of coming out, I also failed.

Grottendieck reported that the stones fell with abnormal slowness, yet hit the ground with a loud bang as if they had descended swiftly.

In December 1983 Rogo investigated an in-progress stone-throwing episode in Arizona. The target was a house being built on the far reaches of Tucson's northeast side, in an essentially rural area. Events had begun the previous September and in time became daily occurrences. In the early stages the rocks landed on the rooftop, but soon they escalated in frightening ways. According to Rogo:

The missiles would start striking the house in brief flurries; five or so rocks would strike the front of the house or [the family's] van at two- or three-second intervals. There would then be a brief hiatus of about five to fifteen minutes, and then another flurry would begin. Sometimes these rocky barrages would be somewhat sporadic and brief, but on other occasions the attacks would go on for two or three hours.

In early November the family contacted the sheriff's office, and in the next month police agencies conducted surveillance of several kinds, including covert; not even the affected family members were aware of the observers. There also were repeated aerial searches. Nothing could stop the bombardment, however, and law-enforcement officers, reporters, professional trackers, and curiosity-seekers and their vehicles were struck with uncanny accuracy even in the deep darkness. The stones appeared to be coming from the brush that surrounded three sides of the house, but as Rogo found when he experimented, the stone thrower could not have thrown projectiles through the brush itself, which was too thick; he would have had to stand and throw over it. Yet even when flashlight and searchlight beams bathed the brushy area as the stones sailed toward their targets, no one was seen.

After December 7 the stone-throwing stopped. The police were stumped, but the family was merely relieved.

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Pterosaur Sightings

The flying reptiles known as pterosaurs, including pterodactyls and their cousins the pteranodons, lived from the lower Jurassic to nearly the end of the Cretaceous period – in other words, from approximately 160 to sixty million years ago.

About sixty million years later, on January 11, 1976, two ranch hands near Poteet, just south of San Antonio, Texas, sighted a five-foot-tall birdlike creature standing in the water of a stock tank. "He started flying," Jessie Garcia reported, "but I never saw him flap his wings. He made no noise at all."

Around the same time, two sisters, Libby and Deany Ford, observed a "big black bird" near a pond northeast of Brownsville, which lies along the Texas-Mexico border. "It was as big as me," Libby said, "and it had a face like a bat." Later, as the two girls looked through a book in an effort to identify the creature, they found out what it was.

Driving to work on an isolated rural road southwest of San Antonio, Texas, on the morning of February 24, 1976, three elementary school teachers saw a shadow cast cover the entire road. The object responsible for it, passing low overhead, looked like an enormous bird with a fifteen- to twenty-foot wingspan. "I could see the skeleton of this bird through the skin or feathers or whatever, and it stood out black against the background of the gray feathers," one of the witnesses, Patricia Bryant, said. According to David Rendon, "It just glided. It didn't fly. It was no higher than the telephone line. It had a huge breast. It had different legs, and it had huge wings, but the wings were very peculiar like. It had a bony structure, you know, like when you hold a bat by the wing tips, like it has bones at the top and in-between."

Never having seen anything remotely like it, the three witnesses went to the encyclopedia as soon as they got to school. After some searching they found what they were looking for. They learned that the animal they had observed was not unknown after all.



At 3:55 a.m. on September 14, 1982, James Thompson, an ambulance technician, was driving along Highway 100 four miles east of Los Fresnos, Texas, midway between Harlingen and Brownsville, on his way back from an inspection on South Padre Island. He suddenly spotted a "large birdlike object" pass low over the highway 150 feet in front of him. Its strange-looking tail almost literally stopped him in his tracks. He hit the brakes, pulled the vehicle to the side of the road, and stared intently at the peculiar object, which at first he had a hard time believing was a living creature.

"I expected him to land like a model airplane," Thompson said. Then "he flapped his wings enough to get above the grass. . . . It had a black, or grayish, rough texture. It wasn't feathers. I'm quite sure it was a hide-type covering." Its thin body, which ended with a "fin," stretched over eight feet; its wingspan was five to six feet. The wings had "indentations" on their tops and possibly their bottoms as well. At the back of the head it had a hump like a Brahma bull's. There was "almost no neck at all."

Pterosaurs, like these pterodactyls, have reportedly been seen in modern times.

(Courtesy Fortean Picture Library.)

Later he consulted books in an effort to identify the "bird." Like the Ford sisters and the San Antonio teachers over six years earlier, he had no particular trouble finding out what he had seen. The trouble was, however, that the books told him he had seen a pterosaur.

Out of Africa

In the early twentieth century a traveler and writer named Frank Melland worked for the British colonial service in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). While there he learned of a flying creature that lived along certain rivers. Called *kongamato* ("breaker of boats"), it was considered extremely dangerous. Native informants described it as "like a lizard with membranous wings like a bat." Melland wrote in his 1923 book *In Witchbound Africa*:

Further enquiries disclosed the "facts" that the wing-spread was from 4 to 7 feet across, that the general color was red. It was believed to have no feathers but only skin on its body, and was believed to have teeth in its beak: these last two points no one could be sure of, as no one ever saw a kongamato close and lived to tell the tale. I sent for two books which I had at my house, containing pictures of pterodactyls, and every native present immediately and unhesitatingly picked it out and identified it as a kongamato. Among the natives who did so was a headman (Kanyinga) from the Jiundu country, where the kongamato is supposed to be active. . . .

The natives assert that this flying reptile still exists, and whether this be so or not it seems to me that there is presumptive evidence that it has existed within the memory of man, within comparatively recent days. Whether it is scientifically possible that a reptile that existed in the mesozoic age could exist in the climatic conditions of to-day I have not the necessary knowledge to decide.

In 1942 Col. R. S. Pitman looked back on his African days in a memoir, *A Game Warden Takes Stock*:

When in Northern Rhodesia I heard of a mythical beast, alleged to have a similar death-dealing attribute, which intrigued me considerably. It was said to haunt formerly, and perhaps still to haunt, a dense, swampy forest region in the neighborhood of the Angola and Congo borders. To look upon it too is death. But the most amazing feature of this mystery beast is its suggested identity with a creature bat- and birdlike in form on a gigantic scale strangely reminiscent of the prehistoric pterodactyl. Where the devil does the primitive African derive such a fanciful idea?

A 1947 book, Frederick Kaigh's *Witchcraft and Magic in Africa*, refers to a spot on the "Rhodesian-Congo border near the north-eastern border of the Jiundu Swamp, a foetid, eerie place in which the pterodactyl is locally supposed to survive with spiritual powers of great evil."

Flying snakes and other terrors

In a dispatch out of Columbia, South Carolina, on May 30, 1888, the *New York Times* reported that three evenings earlier, at dusk, three women on a stroll through the woods of Darlington County “were suddenly startled by the appearance of a huge serpent moving through the air above them. The serpent was distant only two or three rods when they first beheld it, and was sailing through the air with a speed equal to that of a hawk or buzzard but without any visible means of propulsion. Its movements in its flight resembled those of a snake, and it looked a formidable object as it wound its way along, being apparently about 15 feet in length. . . . The flying serpent was also seen by a number of people in other parts of the county early in the afternoon of the same day, and by those it is represented as emitting a hissing noise which could be distinctly heard.”

Unfortunately no local newspapers carried this story, so – aside from its fantastic and implausible character – it is wise to be skeptical. Yet odd tales of airborne snakelike creatures are told from time to time.

For example, Izzet Göksu of Bursa, Turkey, reported his mother’s encounter with weird flying entities one day in 1947, when she was twelve years old and living in Bulgaria:

I used to go and fetch fresh water from the spring 200 meters [600+ feet] from our house. One lovely summer evening, I picked up two buckets and started to walk towards the spring. After about 40 meters [130 feet], I noticed what looked like branches on the path, but as I got closer I saw them moving. They were black, gray and white, thin and one or two meters [three to six feet] long. I stopped, thinking they might be snakes, but they were moving in a straight line, not like snakes at all.

As I got closer, something alarmed them or they noticed me. They gave the weirdest cry I have ever heard before taking off and flying two or three meters above the ground straight as arrows. They flew all the way to the spring about 150 meters [450+ feet] away and disappeared behind the trees. I don’t remember seeing any wings on them. Whenever I remember that cry, it makes the hair on my arms stand on end.

“As she told me this story,” Göksu wrote, “I clearly saw the hairs rising on her arms.”

The best documented, though still unproved, reports of flying reptiles come out of Africa.

In the late 1930s J. L. B. Smith, a South African chemist with a keen interest in ichthyology (the study of fish), and an associate, Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, entered zoological history as co-discoverers of the coelacanth, a large fish heretofore known only from the fossil record and assumed to have been extinct for some sixty million years.

Smith was also fascinated with other reports of animals generally assumed no longer to exist, and at one point he had correspondence (since lost but

referred to in his memoir of the coelacanth episode, *Old Fourlegs* [1956]) with members of a German missionary family. They told him that while living near Mount Kilimanjaro (in northeast Tanzania near the Kenya border), one member had had a close sighting of a “flying dragon.” This flying dragon was known prior to the incident through numerous reports native witnesses had given them.

For her part Courtenay-Latimer once investigated reports of similar creatures in southern Namibia (then South-West Africa). In one instance native shepherds had walked off their job after complaining that their employer, the white owner of a large ranch, did not take seriously their insistence that a large flying snake lived in the mountains nearby. With no one else to watch the livestock, the farmer dispatched his sixteen-year-old son to the site. When he failed to return that evening, a search party set out to the mountains to look for him. He was found unconscious.

Even after regaining consciousness, for three days the young man could not speak – owing, his attending physician said, to shock. Finally the son related that he had been relaxing beneath a tree when a sudden roaring noise, like a powerful wind current, startled him. As he looked up, he saw a huge “snake” flying down from a ridge. The closer it got, the louder was the roaring sound. All around the sheep were scattering. The creature landed in a cloud of dust. The boy noticed a strong odor reminiscent of burned brass. At this point he passed out.

Courtenay-Latimer, who arrived on the scene soon afterwards, interviewed witnesses, including other farmers and local police officers, and examined marks on the ground reportedly left by the creature. She was told that a police party had seen the creature disappear into a crevice in the mountain. Sticks of dynamite were heaved into the opening, from which a low moaning sound subsequently emanated, followed by silence. The creature was seen no more.

Cryptozoologist Roy P. Mackal corresponded years later with Courtenay-Latimer about the episode. Reflecting on it, he wrote, “A snake, even a very large one, hurtling or falling over a ledge or mountain precipice hardly would disturb the air as described. In fact, it is hard to attribute such a disturbance even to a large gliding creature, suggesting instead that some kind of wing action must have been involved.” Mackal asks, “Could some species of pterodactyl with elongated body and tail still survive?”

According to Carl Pleijel of the Swedish Museum of Natural History, a sighting of such a pterodactyl-like creature occurred in Kenya in 1974. The witnesses were members of a British expedition, Pleijel told journalist Jan-Ove Sundberg, citing as his source an unnamed person he deemed credible. Sundberg interviewed a “museum superintendent here in Sweden . . . whose name I don’t want to mention” and from him heard of an American expedition’s sighting over a swamp in Namibia in late 1975. No further details have ever been forthcoming.

If the rumors out of Sweden are vague and undocumented, continuing reports from Namibia seem more substantial. In the summer of 1988, Mackal traveled to that nation with a small group of associates. From an isolated private

desert area owned by Nambibians of German descent, he said, come continuing reports of "flying snakes." Witnesses whom Mackal interviewed said the animals indeed had wings – of thirty feet, no less – but no feathers. The creatures apparently live in caves and crevices in the many kopjes (small veld hills) that dot the landscape. Expedition members found ostrich bones in almost inaccessible spots atop kopjes, possibly evidence that the kills had been carried there by flying creatures. One expedition member who stayed on after Mackal had left to return to the United States reported seeing one from a thousand feet away. It was, he said, black with white markings and had enormous wings that it used to glide through the air. In 1995 a South African television documentary, *In Search of the Giant Flying Snake of Namibia*, reported the testimony of witnesses who estimated the creature's length to be nine to fifteen feet long.

Though the idea that pterosaurs may have survived tens of millions of years past their time is a fantastic and unlikely one, it is not entirely impossible. Whatever else they may be, the occasional sightings of huge winged reptiles by seemingly sane and sober individuals surely comprise the stuff of one of cryptozoology's most intriguing mysteries.

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Reptoids

In 1954 archaeologists on an expedition along the Amazon River encountered a bizarre aquatic biped with gills and scales. In November 1958 a Riverside,

California, man driving in a car near the Santa Ana River was attacked by a similar creature, with a "round, scarecrowish head," shiny eyes, and scales. It left long scratches on his windshield, and as he accelerated, he hit it and drove over it.

The first story is from a classic science-fiction film, Universal's *The Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954). The second is supposed to have happened in real life to an alleged witness named Charles Wetzel. The following evening another motorist claimed that the same kind of monster jumped out of the bushes at his car.

Though fairly rare, accounts of reptilian bipeds crop up from time to time, usually in brief sighting reports. But the idea of such creatures was current at least as early as 1878, when Louisville's Metropolitan Theater exhibited the "Wild Man of the Woods," described as six feet, five inches tall and covered with "fish scales." Presumably this reptile man was an ordinary man garbed for the occasion, which was the culling of cash from the credulous, but nearly a century later, in October 1975, residents of tiny Milton, Kentucky, north of Louisville, reported seeing a bipedal "giant lizard."

Both Milton and Louisville border the Ohio River. So does Evansville, Indiana, where on August 21, 1955, Mrs. Darwin Johnson was swimming when a clawlike hand gripped her knee from below the water and pulled her under. She struggled with the unseen grabber and managed to free herself, but no sooner had she come to the surface than she was dragged down again. She was able to lunge at a friend's inner tube, and the *thump* she made on contact with it apparently scared the attacker away. Though never observed, the creature left a green palm stain on Mrs. Johnson's knee and scratches and marks for which she sought medical attention.

Northeast of Cincinnati, in Loveland, Ohio, along the Miami River, reports of more or less reptilian bipeds have been made since at least 1955, when a driver returning home from work at 3:30 a.m. on May 25 reported that he had spotted three grotesque-looking creatures with lopsided chests, wide, lipless, froglike mouths, and wrinkles rather than hair on their heads. One held a spark-generating, bar-shaped device above itself. He watched them from his parked car for three minutes before leaving to alert Loveland Police Chief John Fritz. As he did so, he smelled a strong odor reminiscent of "fresh-cut alfalfa, with a slight trace of almonds." Fritz found nothing but was nonetheless convinced of the witness's sincerity.

Nearly seventeen years later, on March 3, 1972, at 1 a.m., two Loveland police officers encountered something comparable: a four-foot-tall, frog-faced biped with textured leathery skin. They saw it jump over a guard rail and descend an embankment leading to the Little Miami River. About two weeks later one of the officers saw the thing again, first lying in the road, then getting up to go over a guard rail. He took a shot at it but apparently missed. A local farmer also reported seeing such a creature.

In the summer of 1972, at Thetis Lake, British Columbia, there were two reports of a silver-colored creature that emerged from the water, in the first instance (on August 19) to chase a couple of young men from the beach. One supposedly suffered lacerations in the hand from six sharp points atop the thing's head. A witness to the second incident, on August 23, said it was "shaped like an

Opposite Page:
Sightings of
Ohio's "Loveland
frogs" have been
reported since
1955.

(Courtesy Ron
Schaffner/Fortean Picture
Library.)

(H)

hardly a book on Sasquatch failed to mention Jacko. In 1973 Dahinden and coauthor Don Hunter reported that, according to the grandson of a man who had been a judge in Yale in 1884, Jacko "was shipped east by rail in a cage, on the way to an English sideshow." No more was heard of him, and locals assumed that he had died in transit.

Primatologist John Napier thought "the description [of Jacko] would fit an adult chimpanzee or even a juvenile male or adult female gorilla, but unless it was an escapee from a circus it is difficult to imagine what an African ape was doing swanning about in the middle of British Columbia. At that time chimpanzees were still fairly rare creatures in captivity."

Meanwhile, Green was continuing his effort to get to the bottom of the matter. He learned that microfilms of contemporary British Columbia newspapers did exist, not in the British Columbia Archives, where McKelvie had looked, but at the University of British Columbia. In the July 9, 1884, issue of the *Mainland Guardian*, published in New Westminster, he found a story datelined two days earlier, from a reporter passing through Yale. "The 'What Is it' is the subject of conversation in town," he wrote. "How the story originated, and by whom, is hard for one to conjecture. Absurdity is written on the face of it. The fact of the matter is, that no such animal was caught, and how the *Colonist* was duped in such a manner, and by such a story, is strange." Two days later another paper, the *British Columbian*, reported that the Jacko story had sent some 200 persons scurrying to the jail. There the "only wild man visible was Mr. Murphy, governor of the gaol [jail], who completely exhausted his patience" answering questions about the nonexistent beast.

Though Green now was satisfied that Jacko was a piece of fiction, those unwilling to abandon the story of a captured Sasquatch could take heart from Russ Kinne's argument that rival newspapers were simply trying to discredit the *Colonist*. Green noted, however, that the *Colonist* did not dispute its critics. To all appearances it was as much a victim of the joke as its readers.

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Jersey Devil

The Jersey Devil's origins are a matter of dispute. The most popular version lists its birthplace as Leeds Point, New Jersey, and the year of its birth 1735. It

came into the world, it is said, when a Mrs. Leeds, learning she was pregnant for the thirteenth time, declared that her offspring might just as well be a devil, which it turned out to be. A grotesque creature possessing bat's wings, horse's head, cloven hoofs, and tail, it flew off into the remote pine barrens of South Jersey and has lived there ever since, as evidenced by mysterious livestock deaths, enigmatic footprints, eerie cries in the night, and – on rare occasions – sightings. First known as the Leeds Devil, by the nineteenth century the beast was being referred to as the Jersey Devil.

Stories of the Jersey Devil read more like a folk joke than anything meant to be believed, though this may be a misleading impression an outsider gets from the invariably tongue-in-cheek reporting of the legend by journalists and even folklorists. Still, the Jersey Devil is inherently even more unbelievable than other strange creatures chronicled here; at least these latter manifestations can lay claim to named witnesses and investigated reports. The Jersey Devil appears here only because of what two folklorists have called its "finest hour," when – if press accounts are to be credited – 100 persons in thirty different towns saw the thing as it rampaged through eastern Pennsylvania and southern New Jersey.

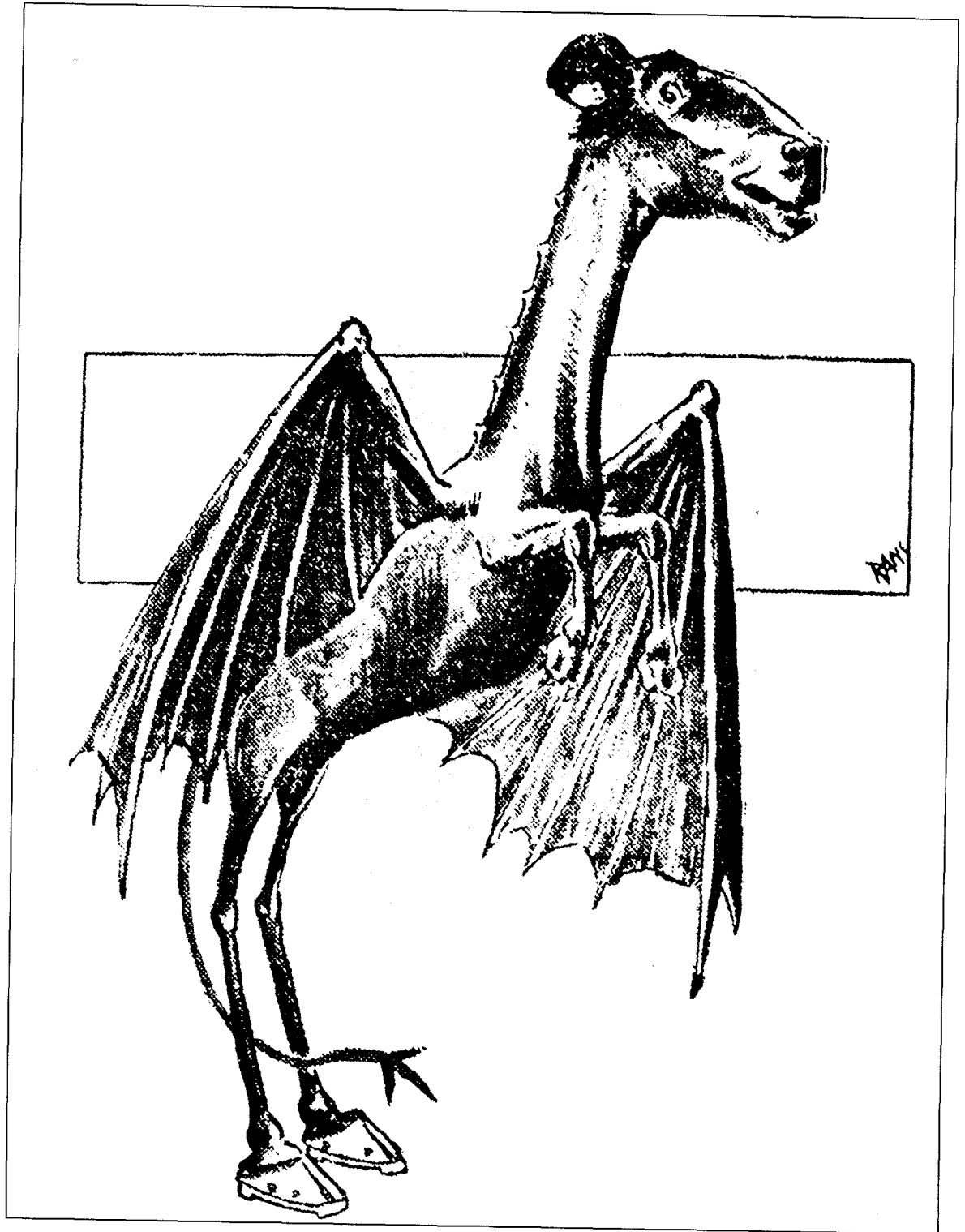
The first sighting reportedly took place at 2 a.m. Sunday, January 17, 1909, when Bristol, Pennsylvania, postmaster E. W. Minister saw a glowing monster flying over the Delaware River. It had, he said, a ramlike head, with curled horns, and stayed aloft with long, thin wings. It had short legs, the rear ones longer than the front ones, and it emitted cries that sounded like a combined squawk and whistle. Two other men, one a police officer who fired at it, also observed the creature.

On the eighteenth a policeman at Burlington, New Jersey, spotted a flying "jabberwock" with glowing eyes, and soon residents of neighboring towns were finding mysterious tracks in the snow. It was seen at six o'clock the following morning in Burlington, where it prowled through an alley. The witness, Mrs. Michael Ryan, said it had long, birdlike legs, a horse's head, and short wings. A day or two later, at 4 p.m., Mrs. Davis A. White said she encountered it in her backyard in Philadelphia. This time it had alligator skin and breathed fire from its mouth. Her screams alerted her husband, who dashed outside and chased the Devil to Sixteenth Street, where shortly thereafter a trolley car nearly hit it. That evening, at Salem, New Jersey, a police officer spotted a "devil bird" with one foot like a horse's, the other like a mule's. It had a horn on its head and an ostrich's tail, and it was eleven feet long.

A Moorestown fisherman allegedly encountered it the next evening. Now it was three feet high and, except for its dog's face and devil's split hoofs, monkey-like. A Burlington motorman saw something that looked like a winged kangaroo. On the twenty-first, at 2 a.m., Nelson Evans of Gloucester City heard something on the roof of the shed in his backyard. On investigating, he found (according to the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* of January 22) the following:

It was about three feet and a half high, with a head like a collie dog and a face like a horse. It had a long neck, [and] wings about two feet long, and its back legs were like those of a crane, and it had horse's hoofs. It walked

Opposite Page:
The Jersey Devil
may have
originated at
Leeds Point, New
Jersey.
(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)



on its back legs and held up two short front legs with paws on them. It didn't use the front legs at all while we were watching. My wife and I were scared, I tell you, but I managed to open the window and say, "Shoo!" and it turned around, barked at me, and flew away.

Several hours later Daniel Flynn of Leiperville, Pennsylvania, observed the Devil as it ran at a brisk pace along the Chester Pike toward Chester. It was six feet high, he said, and had skin like an alligator's. The next morning Mary Sorbinsky of Camden, New Jersey, ran outside after she heard her dog screaming. A huge creature rose up from the ground and took flight. It had taken, Mrs. Sorbinsky reported, a chunk out of her pet.

By now businesses and schools had closed down in response to the mounting hysteria. But the scare ended after a spectacular sighting on the evening of January 21, when firemen squirted water on the Devil as it perched atop a roof in West Collingswood. Enraged, the creature swooped down on them. They fled, and the Devil flew away. No further sightings took place until February 24, when Salem County farmer Leslie Garrison reported seeing a six-foot-long bird as it sailed over his property. Its feet were like a man's.

In the course of this brief scare, newspapers and zoos offered rewards for the Devil's capture, though presumably with no expectation that they would ever have to pay up.

Later years would record periodic sightings, including one of a "flying lion" allegedly seen by two ten-year-old boys, and others in 1930 and 1932 of variously described monsters.

Only the 1909 events give us cause to consider the Jersey Devil anything other than a legend or a running gag, and even here the evidence, such as it is, is in no way compelling. Decades later we have no way of determining what did or did not happen during that week in January. The scare, however, was not simply an invention of a sensationalistic press. In 1974 Jeremiah J. Sullivan wrote in *New York Folklore Quarterly* that "there are many South Jerseyites still alive who remember the Devil scare of 1909." Beyond that we can only guess what witnesses saw or thought they saw. Their testimony would be more impressive if they had reported the same thing, rather than an assortment of odd and absurd apparitions. Sullivan characterized the episode as "one of the few unexplored incidents of mass hysteria connected with folklore in American history."

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Martian Mummies

If we are to credit an account from the French newspaper *Le Pays* for June 17, 1864, scientists have had physical proof of visitation from other worlds for nearly a century and a half.

Two geologists, identified only as Paxton and Davis, working near "Pic James, Arrapahaya province, U.S.A." (sic), broke into an egg-shaped rock and discovered cavities inside. As they explored them, they found a white metallic jar covered with engraved hieroglyphics. Under the floor of this cavity was another hollowed-out space containing a jar looking much like the first. This one, however, had something inside it: a thirty-nine-inch mummified body "covered with a calciferous mass."

Paxton and Davis carefully removed the mummy from the container. Examination revealed that it had no hair on its head or face. Its skin was wrinkled. It could have been the remains of a human child except for the unsettling detail that a "trunk" grew out of the middle of its forehead.

An identical story was published in *La Capital*, a Rosario, Argentina, newspaper, on October 13, 1877. This time the discovery, again credited to Paxton and Davis, occurred near the Carcaraña River, near whose banks the egg-shaped object lay half-buried. The body and related artifacts were put on display in a local tavern and subsequently lost.

When the Argentine story was rediscovered a century later, at least two expeditions went to the site to investigate. Neither uncovered anything of interest. Sometime later ufologist Fabio Picasso happened upon the earlier French story, cited in a book by ancient-astronaut theorist Robert Charroux. Clearly the *La Capital* account was a plagiarism of the first, which itself was dubious. Many nineteenth-century newspapers routinely published outrageous yarns, often set in some distant place inaccessible to a skeptical reader who might seek verification.

Another tall tale set in South America describes a discovery allegedly made in 1878, just a year after its Argentine counterpart. One "A. Seraro, Chemist," wrote to the *South Pacific Times* of Callao, Peru, to report that he had found a huge aerolite (meteorite). As he dug through several layers of mineral in his excavation, he uncovered the body of a humanoid creature some four and a half feet tall. Alongside it was a hieroglyph-covered silver plate. The aerolite, he learned from his translation of the alien language, was a ship from Mars.

The story came to the attention of the *New York Times*, which reprinted it with this sardonic commentary in its August 17 issue:

Undoubtedly, the Peruvians mean well, and tell the best lies that they can invent. Indeed, it can be readily perceived that the heart of the inventor of the aerolite story was in the right place, and that his faults were those of the head. The truth is that the Peruvians have never been systematically taught how to lie. Very probably, if they had our educational advantages,

Strange Magazine

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Mark Chorvinsky, a Maryland magician and filmmaker, created *Strange Magazine* in 1987 as a sort of American counterpart to England's *Fortean Times*. In the introduction to the first issue, he wrote, "We range from wild theoretical speculation to cautious skepticism—including every shade of worldview in between. Some of us are philosophers, others investigators and researchers—surrealist scientists who catalog the anomalous, the excluded, the exceptional."

Following the model of its mentor, Charles Fort (1874-1932), *Strange's* focus is on physical rather than psychical anomalies. Thus the magazine's concerns include an array of topics, such as cryptozoology, ufology, archaeological enigmas, falls from the sky, crop circles, behavioral oddities, and anomalies in popular culture. Chorvinsky, who has a particular interest in hoaxes, has exposed a number of dubious claims, most notably those associated with English magician and trickster Tony "Doc" Shiels, whose widely reproduced photographs of the Loch Ness monster and a Cornish sea serpent many Fortean had thought to be authentic. *Strange* reflects its editor's attitude toward anomalous phenomena: open-minded but not credulous.

Published semiannually, each issue of *Strange* is sixty-four pages long, full of lively graphics and well-written, well-researched articles. It is essential reading for all committed anomalists. In 1992 it had a circulation of 10,000.

Chorvinsky also contributes a monthly column, "Our Strange World," to *Fate*.

they would lie with intelligence and effect, and it is hardly fair for us . . . to despise the Peruvians for what is their misfortune, rather than their fault.

These were by no means the only anecdotes about dead extraterrestrials to enliven newspapers of the nineteenth century. The most notorious of these came along in the spring of 1897, in the midst of the great turn-of-the-century mystery-airship wave discussed in the second chapter of this book.

In a dispatch out of tiny Aurora in north Texas, the *Dallas Morning News* of April 19 related that at 6 a.m. on the seventeenth, an airship collided with a windmill and "went to pieces with a terrific explosion." In the wreckage searchers came upon the "badly disfigured" body of a small being thought to be a "native of the planet Mars." Undecipherable "hieroglyphics" covered pieces of paper found on or near the body. According to the account:

The ship was too badly wrecked to form any conclusion as to its construction or motive power. It was built of an unknown metal, resembling somewhat a mixture of aluminum and silver, and it must have weighed several tons. The town is full of people today who are viewing the wreck and gathering specimens of the strange metal from the debris. The pilot's funeral will take place at noon tomorrow.

This is the sole record of this remarkable event, which ought to have alerted any reader then or now to the story's factlessness. In fact (or in fable anyway), just the day before, the *Morning News* had asked its readers to believe that residents of Kaufman County had observed an airship that looked like a "Chinese flying dragon . . . a monster breathing red fire through its nostrils. . . . The legs were the propellers." Elsewhere in the issue we learn that at Farmersville "eye witnesses" saw "three men in the ship and . . . heard them singing 'Nearer My God to Thee' and . . . distributing temperance tracts"; at Waxahachie an airship was "operated by a woman" at the controls of something "resembling a sewing machine."

In the mid-1960s ufologists looking for evidence of early UFO sightings stumbled upon the Aurora story. An investigator for astronomer and Project Blue Book scientific consultant J. Allen Hynek learned the obvious quickly: that the story wasn't true and may have been concocted to revive the fortunes of a dying town. Over the next several years, however, impressionable souls descended on Aurora, shovels in hand, determined to dig up the body of the dead Martian. The legend was even the subject of a 1985 Grade-Z science-fiction movie, *The Aurora Encounter*, available in any video store to those who have too much time on their hands.

Two weeks after the *Morning News* story, the *Houston Daily Post* published a long letter from John Leander of El Campo. Leander claimed to have his story from a local man identified only as "Mr. Oleson," a former boatswain in the Danish navy.

In September 1862, Leander wrote, Oleson had been among those cast adrift in the Indian Ocean when the brig *Christine* hit an uncharted island. As the storm raged, he and a handful of survivors awaited their inevitable doom on the barren rocky surface. Suddenly they witnessed an "immense ship" in the sky, clearly in trouble. It crashed into a cliff a few hundred yards away. Then, in Leander's words:

Speechless with fear, they crept toward the wreck. It seemed a vessel as large as a modern battleship, but the machinery was so crushed that they could form no idea as to how the power was applied to the immense wings or sails, for they could plainly discern the fact that it was propelled by four huge wings. Strange implements and articles of furniture could be seen jumbled in an almost shapeless mass. They found in metal boxes covered with strange characters what they afterward discovered to be very wholesome and palatable food which, with the water in the rocks, saved them from immediate death.

But their horror was intensified when they found the bodies of more than a dozen men dressed in garments of strange fashion and texture. The bodies were a dark bronze color, but the strangest feature of all was the

immense size of the men. They had no means of measuring their bodies, but estimated them to be more than 12 feet high. Their hair and beards were also long and as soft as the hair of an infant.

They found tools of almost every kind but they were so large that few of them could be used. They were stupefied with fright and one man, driven insane, jumped from the cliff into the boiling waves and was seen no more.

The others fled in horror from the fearful sight, and it was two days before hunger could drive them back to the wreck. After eating heartily of the strange food, they summoned courage to drag the gigantic bodies to the cliff and tumble them over.

Then with feverish haste they built a raft of the wreck, erected sails and gladly quit the horrible island. The sea had become as smooth as a lake and the experienced mariners made rapid progress. They tried as best they could to steer for Vergulen island, but fortunately in about sixty hours fell in with a Russian vessel headed for Australia. Three more of the old man's companions succumbed to their injuries and the awful mental strain and died before reaching port.

Fortunately as a partial confirmation of the truth of his story, Mr. Oleson took from one of the bodies a finger ring of immense size. It is made of a compound of metals unknown to any jeweler who has seen it, and is set with two reddish stones, the names of which are unknown to anyone who has ever examined it. The ring was taken from a thumb of the owner and measures 2 1/4 inches in diameter.

Anyone familiar with nineteenth-century adventure fiction will recognize all the elements here, starting with the wrecking of a ship in a storm and the marooning of its surviving crew on an unlocatable island. As Herman Melville said of Queequeg's fictional island home in *Moby-Dick* (1851), "It is not down on any map; true places never are." Of course we also have the amazing coincidence of a spaceship crash at the same improbable spot, not to mention subsequent madness, suicide, and escape in a raft made up of parts of the alien wreckage so conveniently provided. The final detail owes much to period science fiction (for example, the pterodactyl freed at Queen's Hall in London after scientists scoff at Professor Challenger's claims of surviving dinosaurs in A. Conan Doyle's famous *The Lost World* [1912]), in which "proof" is produced and sneerers silenced.

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Minnesota Iceman

One day in the fall of 1968, a University of Minnesota zoology major named Terry Cullen alerted Ivan T. Sanderson to an extraordinary story: an apparently authentic Bigfoot corpse was being shown around the country as a carnival exhibit.

Sanderson, a biologist who long had been interested in unknown animals and other anomalous phenomena, was understandably intrigued. So was Sanderson's houseguest, Bernard Heuvelmans, a Belgian scientist known as the "father of cryptozoology."

The two lost no time in getting to tiny Rollingstone, Minnesota, where they met one Frank Hansen on whose farm the body, frozen in a block of ice and encased in a refrigerated coffin, reposed over the winter months during the carnival off-season. Hansen led them to a tiny trailer where the "Iceman," as it came to be called, was stored. Sanderson and Heuvelmans spent the next two days studying, sketching, and photographing the figure. Heuvelmans described it as follows:

The specimen at first looks like a man, or, if you prefer, an adult human being of the male sex, of rather normal height (six feet) and proportions but excessively hairy. It is entirely covered with very dark brown hair three to four inches long. Its skin appears waxlike, similar in color to the cadavers of white men not tanned by the sun. . . . The specimen is lying on its back. . . . [T]he left arm is twisted behind the head with the palm of the hand upward. The arm makes a strange curve, as if it were that of a sawdust doll, but this curvature is due to an open fracture midway between the wrist and the elbow where one can distinguish the broken ulna in a gaping wound.

The right arm is twisted and held tightly against the flank, with the hand spread palm down over the right side of the abdomen. Between the ring finger and the medius the penis is visible, lying obliquely on the groin. The testicles are vaguely distinguishable at the juncture of the thighs.

The creature appeared to have been shot in the right eye. The impact apparently knocked the left eye out of its socket and blew out the back of the head.

Sanderson and Heuvelmans were soon convinced that the figure was what it purported to be: a body, not a model. They even examined what they took to be gas bubbles and odors from the creature's slowly decomposing remains.

Hansen claimed that the creature had been found floating in a 6,000-pound block of natural ice in the Sea of Okhotsk. The men who discovered it were Russian seal-hunters. (In a later version of the tale Hansen identified them as Japanese whalers. As one observer would note, Hansen "changes his stories like other people change shirts.") Eventually, according to Hansen, it turned up in Hong Kong where an agent of an anonymous California multimillionaire purchased it. In due course the purchaser rented it to Hansen, who began touring the country with it in May 1967.



Frank Hansen used this vehicle to exhibit the Minnesota Iceman. (Courtesy Fortean Picture Library.)

Heuvelmans published a paper in the February 1969 issue of the *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Natural Sciences of Belgium*. In it he gave the Iceman the scientific name *Homo pongoides*. Meanwhile Sanderson, too, endorsed the Iceman in articles published in the scientific journal *Genus* and in the popular magazine *Argosy*. In the latter he wrote, "I defy anybody to fool Bernard Heuvelmans in a case like this. You just cannot 'make' a corpse like this."

Early in February 1969 Sanderson contacted an old friend, John Napier, curator of the primate collections at the Smithsonian Institution, in an effort to encourage the Smithsonian's participation in the investigation. Sanderson provided Napier with his report and diagrams.

As Napier would write in his *Bigfoot* (1973), "My first reaction, based on the creature's anatomy, was extreme dubiety. . . . On the face of it, the Iceman is some crazy sort of hybrid . . . [combining] the worst features of apes and none of

the best features which make these two groups extremely successful primates in their respective environments." In other words, zoologically speaking, the Iceman did not make a lot of sense.

Still, the Smithsonian tried to secure the specimen from Hansen, who said he could not provide it because the anonymous owner had taken it away. Hansen said that when he went back on tour it would be with a model that would "in many respects resemble" the original. After further investigation the Smithsonian concluded that the story and the figure were a hoax.

Over the years Hansen would tour the United States with his Iceman exhibit, neither confirming nor denying its authenticity. In his promotional material, however, he quoted the views of "scientists" (apparently Heuvelmans and Sanderson) who had declared it the genuine article.

Mystery, myth, and model

In August 1981 C. Eugene Emery, a science reporter for Rhode Island's *Providence Journal-Bulletin*, wrote an article about the exhibit, which was on display at a Providence shopping mall. Soon after the story appeared, Emery learned of Howard Ball, now deceased, who made models for Disneyland. His specialty was prehistoric beasts such as the mechanical dinosaurs in the Ford exhibit at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

"He made [the Iceman] here in his studio in Torrance [California]," Ball's widow Helen told Emery. "The man who commissioned it said he was going to encase it in ice and pass it off, I think, as a prehistoric man."

Ball's son Kenneth helped his father build the figure. He says its "skin" is half-inch-thick rubber. "We modeled it after an artist's conception of Cro-Magnon man and gave it a broken arm and a bashed-in skull with one eye popped out. As I understand it, [the man who commissioned the job] took the creature to Mexico to have the hair implanted."

The Balls were much amused when they saw Sanderson's article in the May 1969 issue of *Argosy* and recognized their creation in the accompanying photographs. "I never thought it would get so carried away," Mrs. Ball said. Kenneth Ball remembered that the man who hired them "discussed with us some of the fun and some of the trials and tribulations with it."

Hansen admitted to Emery that Ball had made a figure for him but insisted that it "was discarded." When Emery pointed out that the Balls affirm that the figure and the one in *Argosy* were identical, Hansen replied lamely, "They can say whatever they want to."

Sanderson died in 1973, still convinced that the Iceman he and Heuvelmans had seen – unlike the one in subsequent circulation – was a real animal. Heuvelmans wrote a book defending it (published in French and never translated into English) and even today contends that the original Iceman was some kind of hominid.

In a 1989 lecture at an International Society of Cryptozoology conference at Washington State University, Cullen, now a herpetologist living in Milwaukee, said that he had had many chances to examine the exhibit while it was on display at a local fair in the late 1960s. By the time Sanderson and Heuvelmans saw it, the ice had frosted over, but it was relatively clear when Cullen viewed it originally. He said he could see numerous tiny features that persuaded him this was a biological specimen, not a model, and he had gotten excited enough by it to call Sanderson at his New Jersey home. This call, of course, set in motion the whole series of events that comprise the Minnesota Iceman saga. Cullen agreed that the figure now being shown is a model.

If there ever was an authentic Minnesota Iceman, the gods seem to have done their best to ensure that virtually nobody would believe it. Reasonable human beings do not seek truth in carnival sideshows. It may, of course, reside there on some exceedingly rare occasion, but even if we choose to ignore the Balls's apparently devastating testimony and allow ourselves to imagine that Hansen managed to pull off the greatest switch in the history of zoology, we cannot escape Napier's troubling observation that the Iceman, even when scrutinized before all the excitement began, looked not at all like anything that could ever have walked the Earth.

Interviewed in the 1990s, Hansen claimed that he had reason to fear legal trouble for possessing what authorities suspected to be an actual corpse. Shortly after the visit by Sanderson and Heuvelmans, Hansen told Ian Simmons, he sneaked the body to "a predetermined location down in Illinois." While he was there, the owner shipped the model to him and "took the original back to California."

Hansen recalled that his phony Iceman "made headlines wherever we went, and finally I found the carnies had decided that it was too good a deal to pass up and they started to put together mock-ups and fabrications. . . . After I ran into two or three of these, I decided it was the wrong business to be in and I came back in, pulled the plug, let it thaw out, and took the so-called fabrication to California where it is to this day." So, Hansen claimed, is the authentic original.

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ness and called by English ufologist Jenny Randles the "Oz factor," which she defines as the "sensation of being isolated, or transported from the real world into a different environmental framework . . . where reality is slightly different."

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Dover Demon

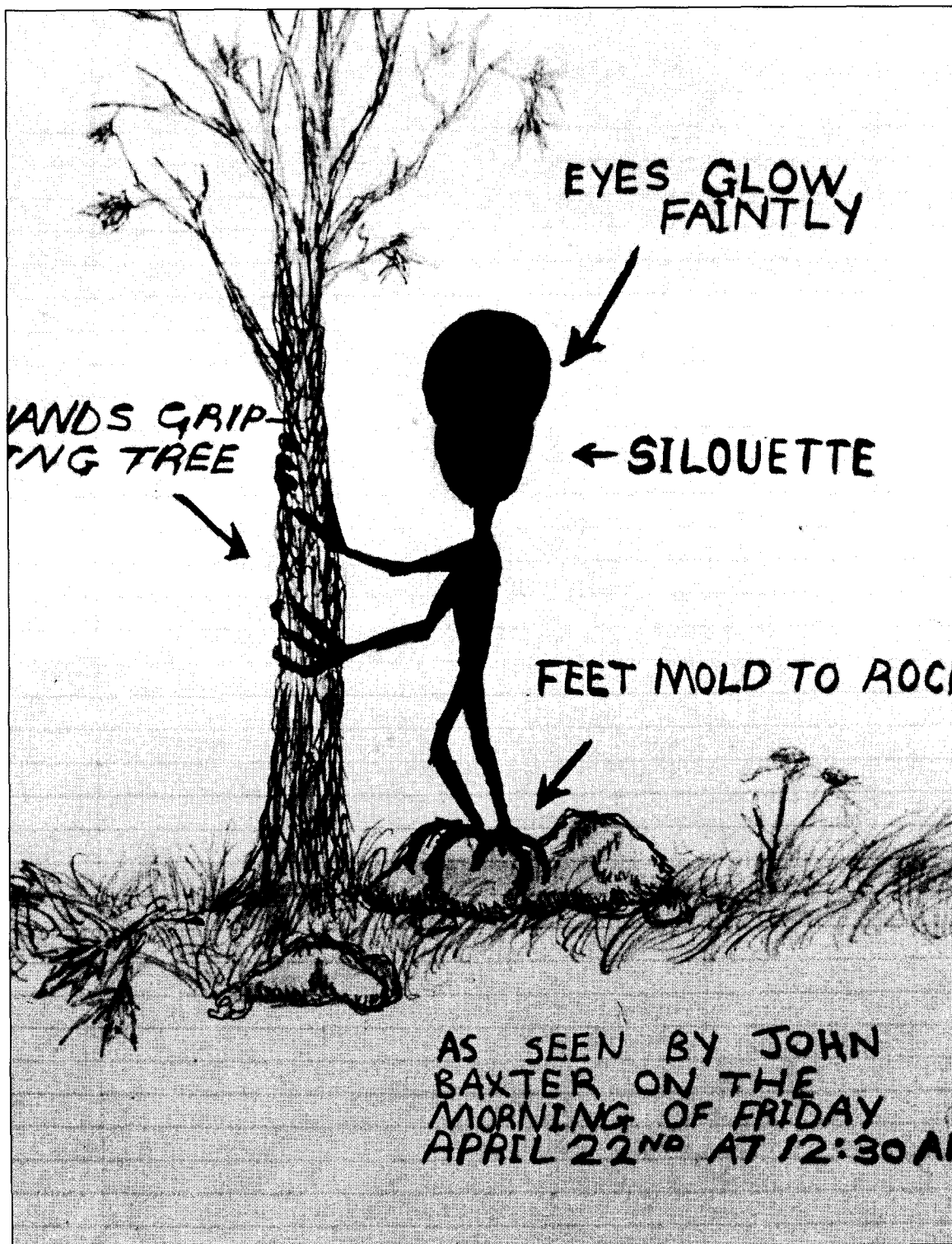
The scare began at 10:30 on the evening of April 21, 1977, as three seven-year-old boys were driving north through Dover, Massachusetts, Boston's most affluent suburb. One of them, Bill Bartlett, thought he spotted something creeping along a low wall of loose stones on the left side of the road.

As the figure turned its head and stared into the headlights of the car, Bartlett said he saw two large, round, glassy, lidless eyes shining brightly "like orange marbles." Its head, resting atop a thin neck, was big and watermelon-shaped and fully as large as the rest of the body. Except for its oversized head, the creature was thin, with long spindly arms and legs and large hands and feet. The skin was hairless and peach-colored and appeared to have a rough, sandpaperlike texture. No more than four feet tall, it had been making its way uncertainly along the wall, its long fingers curled around the rocks, when the car lights surprised it.

Neither of Bartlett's companions, whose attention was elsewhere, noticed the creature, which was visible for only a few seconds. They testified later, however, that their friend had seemed genuinely upset. When Bartlett arrived at his home, his father noticed his distraught state and heard the story from his son, who drew a sketch of what he had seen.

Around 12:30 a.m. fifteen-year-old John Baxter, walking home from his girlfriend's house, reportedly saw a short figure approaching him. Thinking it was a small-statured friend, he called out his name but got no response. When the figure got closer, it stopped, causing Baxter to do the same. Trying to get a better look, Baxter took one step forward, and the figure scurried off to the left, running down a shallow, wooded gully and up the opposite bank.

Baxter followed it down the slope, then stopped and looked across the gully. The figure – which looked like nothing he had ever seen or heard of – stood in silhouette about thirty feet away, its feet "molded" around the top of a rock a few



feet from a tree. It was leaning toward the tree with the long fingers of both hands entwined around the trunk. Though he would claim not to have heard of Bartlett's report at that point, his description of it would be exactly the same. Baxter backed carefully up the slope and walked quickly away from the scene.

The next day Bartlett told his close friend Will Taintor, eighteen, about his experience. That night, while Taintor was driving fifteen-year-old Abby Brabham home, Brabham said she spotted something in the car's headlights. On the left side of the road was a hairless creature crouched on all fours, facing the car. Its body was thin and monkeylike, its head large, oblong, and devoid of nose, ears, and mouth. The facial area around the eyes was lighter, and the eyes glowed green. Brabham insisted on this last detail even after investigators informed her that Bartlett had said the eyes were orange. Taintor said he caught only a brief glimpse.

Anomalist Loren Coleman, then living in the area, learned of Bartlett's report through an acquaintance who knew the teenager. Subsequently he, along with ufologists Walter N. Webb and Ed Fogg, interviewed Bartlett and the other witnesses, along with their parents, school officials and teachers, and police officers. They uncovered no evidence of a hoax; to the contrary, those who knew the teenagers described them as credible (though one teacher expressed some reservations about Bartlett). A local newspaper dubbed the creature the "Dover demon."

Martin S. Kottmeyer has suggested that the witnesses were seriously mistaken about what they saw, and he thinks he knows what the Dover demon may have been: a young moose. He points out that except for Baxter's, the sightings lasted only seconds. All occurred in darkness. He notes, "Bartlett's placing of the eyes matches the placement of eyes just above the hip of the muzzle on a moose's head. The lack of a discernable nose and mouth is easily laid to the fact that nostrils and mouth are very far down on the muzzle. A drawing of a young moose presents the ears swept back along the line of the head and would not discernably stick out, thus accounting for the absence of visible ears."

Because nothing like the Dover demon has reported since, Kottmeyer's theory that the incident grew out of a misperception – though not perfect – is hard to discount.

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Fairies

As he walked down an isolated country road near Barron, Wisconsin, one summer night in 1919, thirteen-year-old Harry Anderson saw something distinctly

Opposite Page:
John Baxter's
drawing of the
Dover demon.

(Courtesy Loren
Coleman/Fortean Picture
Library.)

odd. Twenty little men, trooped in single file and heading in his direction, were visible in the bright moonlight. Even as they passed him, they paid him no attention. Young Anderson noticed they were dressed in leather knee pants held up by suspenders. They wore no shirts, they were bald, and their skin was pale white. Though all were making “mumbling” sounds, they did not appear to be communicating with each other. Terrified, Anderson continued on his way and did not look back. The bizarre encounter remained vivid in his memory for the rest of his life.

To Americans, indeed to most people in the modern Western world, fairies are no more than figments of the sentimental imagination, suitable only for children’s entertainment, in which they are portrayed almost invariably as tiny, winged, and good-hearted. This version of the fairy is rooted in romantic literature, not in the worldwide folk traditions in which beliefs concerning hidden races that share the Earth with us have resided for most of human history.

The tradition and its mysteries

A century or two ago Harry Anderson, who knew no more than that the figures he encountered were strange in the extreme, would have had little doubt about their identity. This would be especially true if he had lived in a Celtic country, whose roads, rocks, caves, fields, rivers, lakes, and forests – so common opinion attested – were infested with entities of such volatile temperament that only the unwise and unwary called them “fairies,” for they did not like to hear their proper name spoken. Because one of them could be listening at any time, rural people employed various euphemisms – such as the “good people,” the “Gentry,” the “honest folk,” the “fair tribe,” and others – calculated to praise rather than to risk offense. As the Rev. Robert Kirk, a seventeenth-century chronicler of the fairy-faith, wrote, the “Irish . . . bless all they fear harm of.”

The fairy-faith populated the world with a bewildering variety of entities, even within a single region. Nonetheless fairies could be counted on to be more or less human in form, though sometimes taller or shorter (never, however, bearing wings), and much of their behavior was recognizably human. They had governments, societies, divisions of labor, art and music, and conflicts. They married, had children, waged war, and died. At the same time they possessed supernatural powers that made them, at best, unpredictable, and at worst, dangerous. Few people sought out the company of fairies, and most went out of their way to avoid it.

The origins of the fairy-faith are obscure and by now unknowable. (Stewart Sanderson characterizes belief in fairies as “one of the most difficult problems in the study of folklore.”) Folklorists and anthropologists have theorized that the original fairies were members of conquered races who took to the hills and whose descendants were sighted on rare occasion, to be mistaken for supernatural beings. It also has been suggested that fairies were remnants of the old gods and spirits whom Christianity displaced but who survived in popular belief as immaterial beings of a lesser rank than God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost. Some writers have suggested the fairy-faith is all that remains of an ancient cult of the dead; indeed, the dead sometimes were said to appear in the company of fairies. A fashionable

Opposite Page:
A knight comes
across fairies in
the forest.
*(Courtesy Mary Evans
Picture Library.)*



modern view, expressed by Alan Bruford, holds that fairies “represent in anthropomorphic form the mysterious and numinous in wild nature, the part of the world which is beyond mankind’s understanding.”

Aside from the speculations of scholars, folk explanation, especially in Christian countries, often associated fairies with fallen angels. All that is known with any certainty is that wherever they come from, fairy beliefs exist in every traditional society.

Fairies figure most prominently in myths, legends, and tales that folklorists have collected in the field or uncovered in archaic printed sources. One of the great early studies was Robert Kirk’s *The Secret Common-Wealth* (1691). Kirk, a Presbyterian clergyman who served in Scotland’s Highlands and who had a keen interest in the supernatural lore of the region, was convinced of the reality of fairies. After all, he asked, how could such a widespread belief, even if “not the tenth part true, yet could not spring of nothing?” He conducted his inquiries on the assumption that once he had enough information, he could accurately describe the nature of fairy life down to its smallest details.

According to Kirk, fairies were of a “middle nature between man and angel” with bodies “somewhat of the nature of a condensed cloud.” They dressed and spoke “like the people and country under which they live.” Sometimes passing fairies could be heard but not seen. They traveled often, frequently through the air, could steal anything they liked (from food to human babies), and had no particular religion. Mortals with “second sight” (clairvoyance) were most likely to see them, since they were usually invisible to the human eye. In fact, the word “fairy” comes from a much earlier word, *fai-erie*, which meant a state of enchantment rather than an individual supernatural entity.

Few modern scholars have admitted to a belief in fairies. The major exception was W. Y. Evans-Wentz, author of the well-regarded *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, originally published in 1911. Evans-Wentz, an anthropologist of religion with a Ph.D. from Oxford University, traveled through the British Isles and Brittany on France’s northwest coast and reported the results in a thick book that remains a classic of folklore studies. Besides documenting what remained of an oral tradition of fairy belief, the author, who was also interested in Eastern religion and Western occultism, declared that “we can postulate scientifically, on the showing of the data of psychical research, the existence of such invisible intelligences as gods, genii, daemons, all kinds of true fairies, and disembodied men.”

But even those possessed of the will to make this leap of faith – not a small one – usually find themselves brought up short by the fact that when considered in their entirety, fairy traditions are too wildly complex, various, and fantastic to add up to anything coherent. As one reads the vast literature of fairylore, one thinks more readily of the vagaries of the human imagination than of the mysteries of the invisible world. Moreover, anyone willing to embrace fairies also has to entertain the possibility, from “evidence” not a lot worse, that gods, mermaids, giants, shape-shifting monsters, werewolves, vampires, and other folkloric creatures may exist. Common sense warns us it may be better to draw the line sooner than later.

Yet mysteries remain. Even if these do not amount to evidence for the ultra-extraordinary and innately unbelievable claim that a fairy realm exists, they do not necessarily reduce to simple answers either. People see, or think they see, all kinds of strange things, and among the strange things people think they see are fairies. These "sightings" continue even in the absence of an accompanying fairy-faith, as Harry Anderson's story indicates. It is probable that in traditional societies fairies were believed in, at least in part, because they were "seen." Fairies did not exist, in other words, solely in stories; they also existed in what were believed to be experiences.

As the great Irish folklorist Douglas Hyde wrote, "The folk-tale . . . must not be confounded with the folk-belief. . . . The . . . story is something much more intricate, complicated, and thought-out than the belief. One can quite easily distinguish between the two. One (the belief) is short, conversational, chiefly relating to real people, and contains no great sequence of incidents, while the other (the folk-tale) is long, complicated, more or less conventional, and above all has its interest grouped around a central figure, that of the hero or heroine." What Hyde calls "beliefs" others would call "sightings."

To Evans-Wentz, to the poet W. B. Yeats (who wrote eloquently of Irish fairy traditions and encounters in *The Celtic Twilight* [1893, 1902] and elsewhere), and to modern occult historian Leslie Shepard, these "sightings" suffice to establish the existence of a fairy world, located in a kind of fourth dimension or parallel reality. To folklorists such as Stewart Sanderson and Katharine Briggs, "sightings" are shrugged off and passed on, without further printed reflection, to parapsychologists, who for their part have shown approximately zero interest in the question.

To behavioral scientist David J. Hufford, a radical skepticism, which sees even "scientific" attempts to explain supernatural beliefs as contaminated by unexamined cultural prejudices that may themselves be no more than expressions of faith, demands that we acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge of some aspects of human experience. In a critique of academic literature that seeks to debunk testimony about anomalous encounters, Hufford writes that "one readily finds appeals to authority, post hoc fallacies, ad hominem arguments and a whole host of other informal errors. Nonetheless, because this inductive dimension of scholarship is less often explicitly presented for scrutiny, and because so much of the work of framing questions and establishing the boundaries of scholarly discourse about 'the supernatural' were largely set anywhere from several generations ago . . . to a number of centuries ago . . . the systematic bias of this tradition operates almost invisibly today."

In short, no explanation, whether conventionally "credulous" or "skeptical," that purports to offer a blanket explanation for these accounts answers all the questions in a wholly convincing fashion. Even if we do not understand the underlying causes – be they psychological or paranormal – of these stories, there is nothing to stop us from marveling at them simply as stories. For now, after all, that is all we can do with them.

Sightings and hearings

One example of the kinds of first-hand accounts folklorists collected while the fairy-faith still lived was related to Lady Campbell by an old, blind Irish farmer. The farmer claimed that some years earlier he had captured a fairy, a two-foot-high figure wearing a red cap, green clothes, and boots and having a dark but clear complexion.

"I gripped him close in my arms and took him home," the farmer related. "I called to the woman [his wife] to look at what I had got. 'What doll is it you have there?' she cried. 'A living one,' I said, and put it on the dresser. We feared to lose it; we kept the door locked. It talked and muttered to itself queer words. . . . It might have been near a fortnight since we had the fairy, when I said to the woman, 'Sure, if we show it in the great city we will be made up [rich]. So we put it in a cage. At night we would leave the cage door open, and we would hear it stirring through the house. . . . We fed it on bread and rice and milk out of a cup at the end of a spoon."

Soon, however, the fairy escaped. Not long afterwards the man lost his sight, and the couple's fortunes further declined – a situation he blamed on fairy retribution.

Another, earlier fairy episode had a happier ending. The following is the text of a sworn statement by a seventeenth-century Swedish clergyman, P. Rahm:

In the year 1660, when I and my wife had gone to my farm, which is three quarters of a mile from Ragunda parsonage, and we were sitting there and talking awhile, late in the evening, there came a little man in at the door, who begged of my wife to go and aid his wife, who was just in the pains of labor. The fellow was of small size, of a dark complexion, and dressed in old gray clothes. My wife and I sat awhile, and wondered at the man; for we were aware that he was a Troll, and we had heard tell that such like, called by the peasantry Vettar [spirits], always used to keep in the farm-houses, when people left them in harvest-time. But when he had urged his request four or five times, and we thought on what evil the country folk say that they have at times suffered from the Vettar, when they have chanced to swear at them, or with uncivil words bid them to go to hell, I took the resolution to read some prayers over my wife, and to bless her, and bid her in God's name go with him. She took in haste some old linen with her, and went along with him, and I remained sitting there. When she returned, she told me that when she went with the man out at the gate, it seemed to her as if she was carried for a time along in the wind, and so she came to a room, on one side of which was a little dark chamber, in which his wife lay in bed in great agony. My wife went up to her, and, after a little while, aided her till she brought forth the child after the same manner as other human beings. The man then offered her food, and when she refused it, he thanked her, and accompanied her out, and then she was carried along, in the same way in the wind, and after a while came again to the gate, just at 10 o'clock. Meanwhile, a quantity of old pieces and clippings of silver were laid on a shelf, in the sitting-room, and my wife found them

next day, when she was putting the room in order. It is supposed that they were laid there by the Vettar. That it in truth so happened, I witness, by inscribing my name. Ragunda, the 12th of April, 1671.

Mari Sion of Llanddeusant, Anglesey, Wales, told a folklorist of her own early-twentieth-century experience with a fairy family. One moonlit night, she related, she, her husband, and their children heard a knocking at the door as they sat by the fire. The callers proved to be a tiny man, woman, and baby. The tallest of them, the man, was only two feet high. "I should be thankful for the loan of a bowl with water and a coal of fire," the woman said. "I should like to wash this little child. I do not want them at once. We shall come again after you have gone to bed."

Mrs. Sion left the requested materials before she and her family retired. During the night they could hear the comings and goings of the little people. In the morning the family found everything in order, except for the bowl, which lay upside down. Underneath it the family found four schillings.

Edward Williams, a prominent eighteenth-century British cleric, wrote that in 1757, when he was seven years old, he and other children were playing in a field in Wales when they saw, at a distance of 100 yards, seven or eight tiny couples dressed in red, each carrying a white kerchief in his or her hand. One of the little men chased the children and nearly caught one who, according to Williams, got a "full and clear view of his ancient, swarthy, grim complexion" just before effecting his escape. During the chase another of the figures shouted at the pursuer in an unknown language. The incident puzzled Dr. Williams all his life, and he concluded, "I am forced to class it among my unknowables."

The Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, the Victorian historian and folklorist, wrote that when he was four years old and traveling in a carriage with his parents, "I saw legions of dwarfs of about two feet high running along beside the horses; some sat laughing on the pole, some were scrambling up the harness to get on the backs of the horses." His parents saw nothing. Baring-Gould also recorded an encounter his wife experienced when she was fifteen and walking down a lane in Yorkshire. There she spotted a "little green man, perfectly well made, who looked at her with his beady black eyes. She was so frightened that she ran home." Fairy sightings evidently ran in the family. One of his sons had gone to fetch peapods in the garden when, so he informed his parents, he observed a "little man wearing a



Shui Rhys, a farmer's daughter, dances with fairies in South Wales.

(Drawing by T. H. Thomas, courtesy Forrean Picture Library.)

red cap, a green jacket, and brown knee-breeches, whose face was old and wan, and who had a gray beard and eyes as black and hard as sloes [blackthorn fruit]. He stared so intently at the boy that the latter took to his heels.”

T. C. Kermode, a member of the Isle of Man’s parliament, told Evans-Wentz, “About 40 years ago, one October night, I and another young man were going to a kind of Manx harvest-home at Cronk-a-Voddy. On the Glen Helen road, just at the Beary Farm, as we walked along talking, my friend happened to look across the river (a small brook), and said: ‘Oh look, there are the fairies. Did you ever see them?’ I looked across the river and saw a circle of supernatural light. . . . The spot where the light appeared was a flat space surrounded on the sides away from the river by banks formed by low hills; and into this space and the circle of light, from the surround sides apparently, I saw come in twos and threes a great crowd of little beings smaller than Tom Thumb and his wife. They moved back and forth amid the circle of light, as they formed into order like troops drilling. I advised getting nearer to them, but my friend said, ‘No, I’m going to the party.’ Then after we had looked at them a few minutes my friend struck the roadside wall with a stick and shouted, and we lost the vision and the light vanished.”

One night in 1842, according to an account he gave to a local historian, a Stowmarket, England, man was passing through a meadow on his way home when he saw fairies in the moonlight:

There might be a dozen of them, the biggest about three feet high, and small ones like dolls. Their dresses sparkled as if with spangles. . . . They were moving round hand in hand in a ring, no noise came from them. They seemed light and shadowy, not like solid bodies. I passed on, saying, the Lord have mercy on me, but them must be the fairies, and being alone then on the patch over the field could seem them as plain as I do you. I looked after them when I got over the stile, and they were there, just the same moving round and round. I ran home and called three women to come back with me and see them. But when we got to the place they were all gone. I could not make out any particular things about their faces. I might be 40 rods from them and I did not like to stop and stare at them. I was quite sober at the time.

Over a century later, on April 30, 1973, an educated London woman named Mary Treadgold was traveling by bus through the Highlands. Near the town of Mull, the bus pulled over to the side of a narrow road to let an oncoming car pass by, and Treadgold idly looked out the window to an expanse of peat. There, standing in front of a clump of heather, stood a “small figure, about 18 inches high, a young man with his foot on a spade, arrested (frozen like a bird or a squirrel on the approach of something alien) in the act of digging,” she reported. “He had a thin, keen face (which I would know again), tight, brown, curly hair, was dressed in bright blue bib-and-braces, with a very white shirt, with rolled-up sleeves. An open sack, also miniature, stood at his side. He was emphatically not a dwarf, nor a child, nor (last desperate suggestion of a skeptic) a plastic garden gnome. He was a perfectly formed living being like any of us, only in miniature.” The figure was lost to view after the bus resumed its journey.

"When I got home," Treadgold wrote, "I inquired from a Highland acquaintance who told me friends of hers had seen similar small people on Mull, and that Mull was known for this. She added the small people were generally pale (I don't recall this particularly) and very bright. This last I do recollect in the brightness of the hair and clothes, and the general appearance of energy and alertness."

On occasion folklore collectors have had experiences consistent with local fairy manifestations. Sir Walter Scott complained of an educated correspondent who, though "a scholar and a gentleman," had confessed that "frequently" he had seen the "impression of small feet among the snow" and once "thought I heard a whistle, as though in my ear, when nobody that could make it was near me." Scott laid these presumed delusions to the "contagious effects of a superstitious atmosphere. Waldron [the correspondent] had lived so long among the Manx that he was almost persuaded to believe their legends." John Cuthbert Lawson, who studied turn-of-the-century rural Greek traditions including beliefs in tall fairy women known as Nereids, remarked on the "wonderful agreement among the witnesses in the description of their appearance and dress. I myself once had a Nereid pointed out to me by my guide, and there certainly was the semblance of a female figure draped in white and tall beyond human stature sitting in the dusk between the gnarled and twisted boles of an old olive yard. What the apparition was, I had no leisure to investigate; for my guide with many signs of the cross and muttered invocations of the Virgin ordered my mule to perilous haste along the rough mountain path."

Many people claim to have heard fairy music. Manx fiddler William Cain swore he heard music emanating from a brightly lit glass palace that he encountered one night in a mountain glen. He stopped and listened, then went home and learned the tune that he thereafter performed widely. In the summer of 1922, while sitting on the banks of the Teign River in Dartmoor, England, composer Thomas Wood heard a strange voice calling him by his first name. Though he searched with field glasses, he could find no source. Then he heard "overhead, faint as a breath," then ever louder, "music in the air. It lasted 20 minutes," he told writer Harold T. Wilkins. "Portable wireless sets were unknown in 1922. . . . This music was essentially harmonic, not a melody nor an air. It sounded like the weaving together of tenuous fairy sounds." Listening intently, he wrote down the notes. In 1972, while strolling along the shore of a peninsula in Scotland's Western Highlands, American folk singer Artie Traum heard disembodied voices chanting "Run, man, run" in a strange harmony to the sound of fiddles and pipes. When Traum fled into a nearby woods, he heard crackling sounds and "great motion." All the while, he recalled, "my head was swarming with thousands of voices, thousands of words making no sense." The voices ceased once he found his way back to the open air.

Though nearly extinct elsewhere in the West, the fairy-faith in its most traditional form lives on in Iceland, where a University of Iceland survey a few years ago indicated that as much as 55 percent of the population considers the reality of elves (*huldufolk*, or "hidden people") certain, probable, or possible, and only 10 percent rejects the notion as flatly out of the question. Belief is so strong that construction and road projects are sometimes delayed to accommodate the wishes of

the invisible folk who dwell in fields, forests, rocks, and harbors. In such cases psychics are called in to negotiate. As with other fairies, the entities are not always invisible to normal perception. A 1990 *Wall Street Journal* article observes that "humans and huldufolk usually get on well. Midwives have told [folklorist Hallfredur] Eiriksson about delivering elf babies. Farmers say they have milked elf cows. Sometimes, the two peoples fall in love, though affairs of the heart often end badly."

Fairies or humanoids?

In 1938 Dublin's *Irish Press* reported, "Watching for fairies has leaped into sudden popularity in West Limerick." There a number of men and boys said they had seen groups of fairies and even chased them, to no avail; "they jumped the ditches as fast as a greyhound," one witness stated. All the while, "though they passed through hedges, ditches, and marshes, they appeared neat and clean all the time." The figures had "hard, hairy faces like men, and no ears."

The excitement began when a schoolboy named John Keely encountered a two-foot-tall man, dressed in red clothing, on a road. Asked where he was from, the gnome responded curtly, "I'm from the mountains, and it's all equal to you what my business is." The boy alerted friends and acquaintances, who the next day returned with Keely and hid in the bushes as he approached a company of fairies, letting one of them take his hand. They walked together for a short time until the fairies spotted the human beings in the bush and shot away.

If this incident had occurred a decade later and been reported somewhere other than Ireland, it probably would have been treated as an encounter with UFO occupants. (In November 1959, according to the *Belfast Telegraph* [November 9], a man moving a large bush with a bulldozer on a farm in County Carlow was startled to see a three-foot-tall red man run out from underneath the machine, "about 100 yards across the field, over a fence into the field adjoining." Three other men observed the fleeing figure. Only the Irish locale kept this from being treated as a UFO incident, though no UFO was seen.) Indeed, the UFO literature contains a handful of incidents in which someone conversant in the fairy-faith might find familiar elements. In April 1950 Kenneth Arnold, whose much-publicized June 24, 1947, sighting brought the UFO age into being, interviewed a Canby, Oregon, woman, Ellen Jonerson, who recently had seen a twelve-inch little man with dark features, stocky build, and a plaid shirt. Walking with a "waddling" motion, he passed under a car and disappeared.

Inevitably some writers have suggested that UFO phenomena and fairy manifestations are related. Sometimes, notably in debunker Robert Sheaffer's sarcastic *The UFO Verdict* (1981), the connection is made as a way of heaping ridicule on UFO reports. Other times, as in Jacques Vallee's *Passport to Magonia* (1969), it is made to support an occult view that assumes the reality of paranormal shape-shifting entities that can appear, depending on the observer's preconceptions, as fairies or extraterrestrials. More recent theorists, for example Hilary Evans in *Gods, Spirits, Cosmic Guardians* (1987), argue that all "entity" encounters occur in altered states of consciousness and are hallucinatory. But despite their surface attractive-

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Cottingley Fairy Photographs

In 1917 two young English girls, Frances Griffiths, ten, and her thirteen-year-old cousin Elsie Wright, shared a house in Cottingley, near Bradford, Yorkshire. Frances and her mother had moved there from Cape Town, South Africa; her father was serving as a British soldier in the Great War. One day Frances returned home soaking wet and offered the excuse that she had fallen into the brook while playing with the fairies they had befriended in a nearby glen. The parents were unmoved, and Frances was punished.

Feeling sorry for her cousin and best friend, Elsie hit upon an idea: they would borrow her father Arthur Wright's camera and photograph the fairies. After the parents believed them, the girls would announce that the picture was fake; they had lied about fairies just as their parents had lied to them about Father Christmas. Thus a kind of vengeance could be extracted for Frances's current misery.

Elsie approached her father and asked to borrow his camera, on the excuse that she wanted to take a picture of her cousin. He provided her with a single plate. An hour later the girls returned and said they now had proof of fairies. When the skeptical elder Wright developed the picture, he saw an image of Frances facing the camera as four miniature winged women dressed in filmy clothing danced in front of her.

The girls refused to admit that they had, as their elders were certain they had, photographed paper cutouts – or, as Elsie's father suspected specifically, "sandwich papers." Still, one month later Wright again reluctantly gave the girls access to a camera and a single plate, and they returned with a second picture, this one showing a sitting Elsie bidding a gnomish figure to jump up on her lap. Convinced that this was a joke that was getting out of hand, Wright forbade the girls further use of the camera.

The following year, when Frances's father returned from service, the Griffithses moved to Scarborough, Yorkshire. Just prior to the move, Frances wrote a South African friend and enclosed copies of the two fairy photographs. On the back of one, she noted, "Elsie and I are very freindly [sic] with the beck fairies. It is funny I did not see them in Africa. It must be to [sic] hot for them there." In the let-

ter she referred to the fairies only briefly and in passing. When rediscovered and published (in the *Cape Town Argus*, November 25, 1922), Frances's words would be cited as evidence of the girls' sincerity and of the photographs' authenticity.

The affair

What would prove to be one of the most bizarre controversies in the history of photography began in 1920 when Polly Wright, Elsie's mother, attended a lecture on folklore, including fairy beliefs. Afterwards Mrs. Wright mentioned the photographs, and the lecturer asked for prints, which subsequently she sent to Edward L. Gardner, a prominent London Theosophist. Gardner entered into correspondence with the Wrights. In time they loaned him the original plates, which he took to an acquaintance, H. Snelling, an authority on photography. Snelling's guardedly positive assessment of the pictures would be widely quoted for decades afterwards, though it would not be known until 1983 that he retouched the first photograph – badly overexposed – and transformed it into the clear one with which all who knew of the Cottingley photographs would be familiar.

Gardner showed the pictures at a public lecture in May, and an audience member alerted Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the prominent author, now an ardent Spiritualist. Doyle urged Gardner to take the photos to the Kodak laboratory in London. There, as Doyle would write later, "two experts were unable to find any flaw, but refused to testify to the genuineness of them, in view of some possible trap." (In fact, one of the consulted experts declared that "there is some evidence of faking.") Gardner finally met the Wrights that summer. He supplied Elsie with a modern camera, and subsequently she and Frances provided three more photographs of fairies.

In December *The Strand* magazine published Doyle's article on the first two pictures, and the following March a follow-up included the later three. The story received worldwide publicity, much of it unfavorable and centering on the question of how the creator of Sherlock Holmes could have fallen for what most saw as an obvious hoax.

Yet attempts to debunk it were not notably successful. A claim by Harry Houdini and others that the fairy figures were patterned after those in a certain advertising poster proved groundless once the poster was produced. By this time Doyle had written an entire book on the case, *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922). The



One of the Cottingley fairies with Elsie Wright.
(Courtesy Mary Evans Picture Library.)

previous year Theosophist and clairvoyant Geoffrey Hodson had visited the beck in the girls' company and reportedly saw numerous fairies (the girls saw nothing), though efforts to photograph them subsequently proved unsuccessful.

There would be no more Cottingley fairy photographs, but the controversy would live on. In 1945 Gardner published a book-length account of the case, and the photographs were revived periodically in newspapers and magazines. Elsie and Frances seemed to stand by the pictures, or at least refused to admit their phonicness. When asked, they responded with the ambiguous assertion that the photographs were of "figments of our imaginations," which believers interpreted as meaning "thought forms" (paranormal entities formed out of the perceiver's psychic energy) and doubters as a virtual admission that the girls had made them up. In 1972, however, Elsie sent the two cameras, along with other materials related to the case, to Sotheby's for sale; with them went a letter confessing for the first time ever that the photographs were inauthentic. Sotheby's returned the letter, apparently failing to understand what it had, on the grounds that it dealt only with antique documents.

Yet in 1975, when interviewed by a writer for *Woman* magazine, Elsie and Frances gave the impression (though without stating so explicitly) that the photographs were real. The following year, on a Yorkshire Television program, Frances snapped, "Of course not," when asked if she and Elsie had fabricated the photos.

The first public acknowledgement to the contrary appeared in a 1982 issue of *The Unexplained*. At the same time, the *British Journal of Photography* was in the early installments of a major reappraisal of the case, based on an extensive investigation by editor Geoffrey Crawley. Frances and Elsie complained that the confessions cited by Joe Cooper in his *Unexplained* article were "unauthorized" (Cooper had been working with Frances on her [never published] autobiography). Their first signed, formal confessions were given to Crawley in early 1983.

It was revealed that the two had agreed that the truth – that the pictures were a "practical joke" that "fell flat on its face" – be withheld until the deaths of the major advocates, Doyle, Gardner, and Gardner's son, Leslie. Elsie, a gifted young artist, had created the figures, using as her models fairies depicted in a popular children's book of the period, *Princess Mary's Gift Book*. According to Cooper, the first four photographs were all simple, single-exposure, open-air shots, but in Crawley's view the latter two were intentional double-exposures. The fifth, showing a "fairy bower," was an unintentional double-exposure. But even to the end the two women would not reveal the techniques they used, promising to reveal them in books they were writing. Both died, however, before finishing them. Interestingly, Frances (who died in 1986) would always insist, and reiterated her views in her communications with Crawley (perhaps unable to abandon the joke altogether), that while the photographs were bogus, she *had* seen real fairies in the beck.

In 1997 the story was revived in a well-received movie, *Fairy Tale: A True Story*, with Peter O'Toole playing Doyle. The following year British bookseller Simon Finch bought Frances's collection of the photographs for \$36,000, with the intention of selling them to a higher bidder.



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Frances Griffiths
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*(Courtesy Fortean Picture
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David Lang Disappearance

On the afternoon of September 23, 1880, David Lang of Sumner County, Tennessee, was crossing a field near his home. His wife was watching him from the porch while his children, George and Sarah, played in the front yard. A Gallatin lawyer, "Judge" August Peck, and his brother-in-law were approaching in a buggy. Suddenly Mrs. Lang screamed, and the two visitors gaped in disbelief. David Lang had just vanished in front of their eyes.

Extensive searches in the days ahead failed to find a trace of him. Nonetheless an irregular circle fifteen feet in diameter marked the spot of his disappearance for years afterwards. Nothing would grow there, and even insects avoided it. Once the children ventured into the circle and heard their father's tormented voice echoing from another dimension.

This is the substance of an enduring "true mystery" legend that attained its widest popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, owing largely to a story in the July 1953 issue of *Fate*. The piece, titled "How Lost Was My Father?", was supposedly a firsthand account of the event by Sarah Lang, based on a 1931 interview with writer Stuart Palmer. It further claimed that in April 1929 Sarah received a message via automatic writing. The message, in her father's handwriting, said, "Together now. Together now and forever . . . after many years . . . God bless you." To Sarah these words meant, "Mother and Father are together now in the World Beyond, after the nightmare years of separation."

Hershel G. Payne, a Nashville librarian who spent years trying to validate the story, found no archival evidence that a Lang family or an August Peck had ever lived in the area. Eventually he concluded that the tale's genesis was in a journalistic hoax engineered by traveling salesman Joseph M. Mulholland, who in the late nineteenth century contributed far-fetched yarns to various papers under the pseudonym Orange Blossom. In Payne's view, Mulholland probably had based his tale on a science-fiction story, "The Difficulty of Crossing a Field," by Ambrose Bierce. One later chronicler, Jay Robert Nash, added to the confusion by suggesting that Bierce's story (set in 1854 in Selma, Alabama, and concerning a "planter named Williamson") was the true one. In fact, there is no more reason to believe

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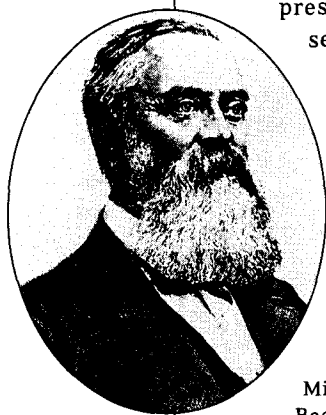
Hairy Dwarfs

During the fall of 1954, a worldwide UFO wave erupted. Among the many reports were a striking number involving humanoid occupants, sometimes described as hairy dwarfs. On October 9, for example, three rural French children out roller-skating reported that a "round shiny machine came down very close to us. Out of it came a kind of man, four feet tall, dressed in a black sack like the cassock M. le Cure wears. His head was hairy, and he had big eyes. He said things to us that we couldn't understand, and we ran away. When we stopped and looked back, the machine was going up into the sky very fast." Five days later a French miner encountered a humanoid with a squat, furry body and oversized, slanted, protruding eyes. It was wearing a skull cap and had a flat nose and thick lips.

In Venezuela in early December several reports recounted nocturnal encounters with three-foot-tall hairy dwarfs of aggressive disposition. In one instance, said to have taken place on December 10, four such beings stepped out of a hovering UFO and attempted to abduct a young man. His companion, who happened to be armed because the two were hunting at the time of the encounter, struck one of the entities on the head with his gun butt. The butt splintered as if it had collided with solid rock. The two men, bruised, cut, and clearly terrified, told

their story to the police soon afterwards. Nine days later, at Valencia, a jockey on a late-night training ride said he saw six hairy dwarfs hauling rocks into a nearby UFO. When they noticed him, one fired a beam of violet light and paralyzed him, even though he had been trying to flee. Police found footprints at the scene. They looked, they said, "neither human nor animal."

Though accounts of encounters with UFO occupants continue to the present, hairy dwarfs faded from the scene by the end of 1954 and were seen, or at least reported, no more.



Swedish scientist
and folklorist
Gunnar Olof
Hylten-Cavallius,
author of *On the
Dragon, Also
Called the
Lindorm*.
(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)

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Lindorms

In the mid-eighteenth century Erik Pontoppidan, the bishop of Bergen, Norway, and author of *Forsog paa Norges naturalige Historie*, remarked on a belief held by residents of the Nordic coast. Sea serpents, he wrote, "are not generated in the sea, but *on land*, and when they are grown so big that they cannot move about on the rocks, they then go into the sea, and afterwards attain their full growth." Many farmers, he went on, had seen land snakes of "several fathoms length." They called these "the Lindormen, or great snake." Similar creatures also lived in the freshwater lakes of Scandinavia, according to popular lore.

Such creatures, or at any rate beliefs in such creatures, persisted well into the nineteenth century. They figured not only in legends but also in a body of first-hand reports. In 1885 the Swedish scientist and folklorist Gunnar Olof Hylten-Cavallius, author of (in English translation) *On the Dragon, Also Called the Lindorm*, published forty-eight verbatim accounts, half of them involving multiple witnesses, and offered this summary:

In Varend [in southern Sweden] – and probably in other parts of Sweden as well – a species of giant snakes, called dragons or lindorms, continues to exist. Usually the lindorm is about 10 feet long but specimens of 18 or 20 feet have been observed. His body is as thick as a man's thigh; his color is black with a yellow-flamed belly. Old specimens wear on their necks an integument of long hair or scales, frequently likened to a horse's mane. He has a flat, round or squared head, a divided tongue, and a mouth



full of white, shining teeth. His eyes are large and saucer-shaped with a frightfully wild and sparkling stare. His tail is short and stubby and the general shape of the creature is heavy and unwieldy.

Hylten-Cavallius's reports indicated that the lindorm (sometimes spelled lindwurm) was powerful and ill-tempered. "When alarmed," he wrote, "he gives off a loud hissing sound and contracts his body until it lies in billows; then he raises himself on his tail four or six feet up and pounces upon his prey." The creature had large, protruding, hypnotic eyes and a head variously described as catlike or horse-like, with a mane. It was most likely to be encountered in wild, unpopulated areas such as marshes, swamps, caves, and lakes. Such encounters usually traumatized witnesses, often making them physically ill or afflicting them with nightmares for years afterwards. Lindorms, which could be slain only with great difficulty, gave off an appalling stench in death.

Model of a
lindorm on display
at the Zoological
Museum in
Copenhagen,
Denmark.

*(Photo by Lars Thomas,
courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)*

Convinced that these were reports of real animals – the witnesses included a member of the Swedish parliament and other presumably reliable individuals – Hylten-Cavallius distributed a poster that offered a reward for a lindorm's remains. From his perspective this was a perfectly reasonable approach with a good chance of success; after all, twelve of his reports concerned the killings of such creatures. But no takers stepped forward.

“There is no truly satisfactory explanation for these 19th-Century lindorm reports,” a modern Swedish writer, Sven Rosen, observed before suggesting they may arise from “hallucinations such as those caused by epileptic fits.” He added, “One major problem with this psychological explanation” is the multiple-witness accounts. “Many of the 31 additional cases with which I am familiar also had multiple witnesses. One can speak of ‘collective hallucination’ without effectively explaining anything.”

To folklorist Michel Meurger, the nineteenth-century lindorm reports were part of the “process of the naturalization of dragons,” blending “archaic and modern elements. The traditional attributes of the monster are preserved, but the creature is now conceived more as a snake than as a supernatural creature.” In his view witnesses may have been “projecting traditional fabulous creatures onto local animals [such as grass snakes] perceived as monsters under specific sighting conditions.”

If such is the case, we can only conclude that Scandinavians of a century ago harbored prodigiously gifted imaginations. At the same time, Hylton-Cavallius was certainly wrong in believing the lindorms to have been real animals. As with other claims in which fabulous, folkloric elements converge confusingly into “real” experiences, no explanation that convincingly addresses all aspects exists – or even seems possible.

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Little Green Men

“Little green men” is a phrase used as an affectionate appellation for the subject matter of science fiction. Less affectionately it is used to deride ufologists for their supposed gullibility in believing something absurd. In fact, relatively few persons reporting close encounters of the third kind (CE3s) – sightings of UFO occupants – claim to have seen little green men (LGM), a phrase that apparently goes back to a turn-of-the-century comic strip.

One of the rare LGM tales comes from Berriedale, in the Australian island state of Tasmania. A grown woman and her sister alleged that one evening in 1948,

as they were putting out the dog, they noticed a brilliant light in the sky. When it moved away from them, they saw "little green men sitting on a ledge on the side." They were singing unintelligible words to what sounded like a familiar melody: "Three Blind Mice." The story sounds like a joke, and that may well be exactly what it is.

Another tale, exposed as a hoax by an investigator for the 1950s UFO group Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New York, concerned a little green man who reportedly landed in an egg-shaped object on a farm near Everittstown, New Jersey, on November 6, 1957. The farmer claimed that the being wore "a green suit with shiny buttons, with a green hat like a tam, and gloves with a shiny object at the tip of each glove." Speaking in "broken English," the LGM declared ungrammatically, "We are peaceful people. We don't want no trouble. We just want your dog." When the farmer cursed the visitor and grabbed at him, the LGM fled in his spacecraft.

A very small number of CE3s involve green men of normal height. Stereotypes aside, LGM and UFOs have very little to do with one another.

LGM show up in fairylore and even in the occasional firsthand narrative (where someone claims a personal encounter with elves). More often, however, fairies are said to be clad in green, though not of that skin color. Green-clad UFO beings figure in some CE3s, notably one that occurred on the afternoon of June 24, 1947, north of Pendleton, Oregon, around the time Kenneth Arnold was witnessing nine shiny discs over Mount Rainier, Washington, and unwittingly ushering in the age of flying saucers. In the June 24 incident, farmer Bill Schuening saw a shiny, silvery sphere hovering several feet above the ground. Just below it stood "two little guys in green suits with white helmets." The figures, three feet high, suddenly vanished.

The most bizarre LGM story goes back well before UFOs and extraterrestrials were staples of American popular culture. It is said to have happened one morning early in May 1913 on the Latham farm two and a half miles west of Farmersville in northeastern Texas. Silbie Latham, twelve, and his brothers were chopping cotton when they heard the agitated barking of their two dogs. Their barking was unlike anything the boys had heard before. They sounded, Silbie Latham recalled in an interview many years later, "just like they was in a terrible distress."

The boys first ignored the dogs, but when the howling continued, they decided to investigate. The three started walking toward the animals, which were fifty to seventy-five feet away on the other side of a picket fence. Clyde, the oldest brother, got there first. With a stunned look he turned to the others and shouted, "It's a little man!"

"I got there, and I saw him," Silbie remembered. "He looked like he was resting on something. He was looking toward the north. He was no more than 18 inches high and kind of a dark green in color. He was the same smooth color all over.

"He didn't seem to have on any shoes, but I don't really remember his feet. His arms were hanging down just beside him, like they was growed down the side

of him. He had on a kind of hat that reminded me of a Mexican hat. It was a little round hat that looked like it was built onto him. He didn't have on any clothes. Everything looked like a rubber suit including the hat....

"He just stood still. I guess he was just scared to death.... Right after we got there, the dogs jumped him."

They tore him to pieces, reducing him to blood (red like its human equivalent) and internal organs. If the being made any sounds as he was being killed, the Lathams could not hear them because of the racket the dogs were making.

"We were all just country as hell and didn't know what to do about it," Silbie said. "I guess we were just too dumb to think about it."

The next day, when the boys returned to the site to look at the remains, they had completely disappeared. Not so much as a bloodstain could be seen.

This strange tale remained unknown to the larger world until January 1978, when Silbie Latham's grandson Lawrence Jones wrote the Chicago-based Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS). "My grandfather has a most solid reputation for truth and honesty but has never told of this because of fear of ridicule," Jones wrote. "He has agreed to tell this only after much prompting and encouragement from me, his history-oriented grandson.... There is no question in my mind that he is telling the truth." The story, he added, had been "discussed in my family for many years."

On April 28, at CUFOS's request, Larry Sessions of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History interviewed Latham at length. Sessions described Latham as a "neat old man. I wouldn't mind having him for my own grandfather. A remarkable man."

Sessions, however, could not bring himself to believe such a fantastic story. "There's no doubt he *believes* it happened," he acknowledged, but Sessions thought Latham had unconsciously embellished a more mundane experience – such as a sighting of an unusually big frog – over the years. When this was suggested to him, Latham emphatically rejected the theory. His grandson expressed his confidence in the story's accuracy.

Another LGM was reported by a Derry, New Hampshire, man to ufologist Walter N. Webb. As the witness was gathering Christmas greens late one morning, he supposedly encountered a two-foot-tall figure, a green-colored naked dwarf with a high forehead, floppy ears, and a face "like a bloodhound." Its eyes were lidless and reptilian, and its skin hung in folds over its body. It quietly studied the man for a few minutes, then "started for me with a kind of screeching sound, and I left there."

In late 1996 the Israeli press reported a highly improbable tale out of Moshav Amihud, a collective agricultural community in the northern part of the country. One day a thirty-four-year-old woman, Ziona Damatai, and her brother-in-law discovered an LGM in their barn. This one was a truly *little* green man: no more than two inches tall.

Those who said they saw it were especially puzzled by the greenish liquid that oozed from it continuously. There seemed more liquid than such a tiny body

Hidden Events

Ron Westrum, Eastern Michigan University sociologist of science, has written of anomalous phenomena: "If they are seen they are typically not reported, if reported they are typically not recorded, if recorded they are typically not transmitted, and if transmitted they are typically not believed." For this reason, Westrum says, he calls anomalies "hidden events."

He describes two incidents that exemplify the difficulty human beings have in communicating or receiving information about anomalies. In a case that occurred in Washington state, five persons witnessed a strange UFO event. Among them were a married couple. The wife refused to discuss the experience afterwards with her husband, and her silence contributed to their subsequent divorce. The wife and another female witness later married other men and did not talk about it with their new spouses. The first woman's former husband became obsessed with the experience and, according to his second wife, suffered regular nightmares.

Concerning the receiving end of the transmission, Westrum recounts an academic experience. While an undergraduate, he suggested to a professor, described as a "brilliant sociologist," that it might be interesting to study how society deals with UFO reports. The professor replied, "UFOs are only interesting if they have little green men in them, and anyone who thinks they have little green men in them is crazy." Westrum remarks, "This nicely summarizes much of the scientific community's attitude toward anomalous events generally: if they are really there, they are terrifically important, but since they are not, why worry? Or, looked at another way: If there was something that important, there is simply no way it could have been overlooked."

Westrum continues, "I have spent a considerable amount of time studying the generation, transmission, and evaluation of information about anomalies, and my conclusion is very different. It is evident that all kinds of events can be witnessed and even reported without the scientific community[']s knowing anything about it."

could be expected to contain. Finally someone touched it, causing the LGM's body to shatter into pieces.

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Mad Gassers

In the late summer of 1944, lasting notoriety came to Mattoon, Illinois, in the person of an elusive attacker who terrorized the small east-central Illinois town (population 15,827, according to the 1940 census) for two long weeks. By the time events had run their course, the attacker would be pronounced nonexistent. The "mad gasser of Mattoon" survives as a classic example of mass hysteria. Still, intriguing questions about the episode remain.

Mattoon's phantom attacker first made his presence known on August 31, when a resident woke up feeling ill. He managed to get to the bathroom before he threw up. On returning the bedroom, he asked his wife if she had left the gas on. She said she hadn't, but when she tried to get up to check, she found she could not move. Elsewhere in town a young mother who heard her daughter coughing in another room also tried to leave her bed, with similar lack of success.

At 11 p.m. on September 1 a "sickening sweet odor in the bedroom" roused another young mother, Mrs. Bert Kearney, from sleep. As the odor quickly grew stronger, she "began to feel a paralysis of my legs and lower body," she reported. "I got frightened and screamed." An hour and a half later her husband, who was coming home from work, observed a strange man standing at the bedroom window. Kearney described him as "tall, dressed in dark clothing and wearing a tight-fitting cap." Kearney gave chase, but the prowler escaped.

These events took place before anyone had heard of a "mad gasser" or "phantom anesthetist," and whatever inspired the stories, it cannot have been mass hysteria. Unfortunately, at this stage the *Mattoon Journal-Gazette* picked up the story, calling Mrs. Kearney the "first victim," which not only was untrue but which also implied that more "victims" would join her. As it happened, other alleged attacks did follow, all reported in the kind of overwrought prose that frightened more than informed.

Several other residents complained to police that the sudden infusion of a "sickly sweet odor" into their homes had paralyzed them for as long as ninety minutes. No one else had seen the gasser, but late on the evening of September 5, as one couple returned home, the wife noticed a white cloth by the front door. When she picked it up, she happened to sniff it. "I had sensations similar to coming in contact with an electric current," she recounted. "The feeling raced down my body to my feet and then seemed to settle in my knees. It was a feeling of paralysis."



**The Mad Gasser of
Mattoon.**

*(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)*

Soon her lips and face were burning and swelling, her mouth was bleeding, and she was throwing up.

These dramatic symptoms had subsided by the time police got there, but their visit produced what seemed to be the first physical evidence: a skeleton key and an empty lipstick tube near the spot where the cloth had lain. Even as officers were interviewing the couple, however, a woman elsewhere in town was hearing a prowler outside her bedroom window. Before she could sit up, a gas seeped into the room rendering her immobile for several minutes.

Near midnight a woman called police to report that a man had tried to force his way through her door. Her screams frightened him off. According to press accounts, the man answered the gasser's general description, whatever that means. Possibly the incident had nothing to do with the phantom anesthetist (if he existed), but it was the kind of story that fueled the growing panic. In another instance, two nights later, a woman and her eleven-year-old daughter said they heard someone trying to break open a window. They tried to get outside, but mysterious fumes overcame the mother and made her sick.

In a September 8 summary the *Herald*, published in nearby Decatur, noted, "Victims report that the first symptom is an electric shock which passes completely through the body. Later nausea develops, followed by partial paralysis. They also suffer burned mouths and throats and their faces become swollen."

As the days passed and the attacks continued, the community was outraged that the local police had not been able to catch the perpetrator. State authorities managed to dissuade local leaders who had planned a mass protest rally for the ninth. Meanwhile armed citizens prowled the streets at night, in defiance of the police commissioner's plea for them to get a grip on themselves. He said that a "gas maniac exists" but "many of the attacks are nothing more than hysteria. Fear of the gas man is entirely out of proportion to the menace of the relatively harmless gas he is spraying." Rumors were flying: the gasser was a lunatic, an "eccentric inventor" (the commissioner's pet theory, soon to be abandoned), or even an "ape-man." The reasons for this curious last notion are lost to history.

The scare climaxed on September 10, a Sunday night, with two attacks that felled a total of five persons. By the next morning police were talking more and more skeptically, pointing to the absence of solid evidence and stipulating that all further complainants undergo examination at Mattoon Memorial Institution. A chemical analysis of the cloth came to no particular conclusions. The next evening, when the police got calls from persons reporting attacks, the calls were dismissed as false alarms, even though in one case a physician who went to a victim's house smelled the gas himself.

At a press conference on the morning of September 12, the chief of police told reporters, "Local police, in cooperation with state officers, have checked and rechecked all reported cases, and we find absolutely no evidence to support stories that have been told. Hysteria must be blamed for such seemingly accurate accounts of supposed victims." Beyond that, he theorized, the odor of carbon tetrachloride

from a nearby chemical plant may have been carried on the wind. He did not explain why this had not been a problem for Mattoon residents prior to August 31.

Even in the face of this official denial of his existence, the gasser made one last house call. On the evening of the thirteenth a witness saw a “woman dressed in man’s clothing” spray gas through a window into Bertha Burch’s bedroom. The next morning Mrs. Burch and her adult son found footprints of high-heeled shoes under the window. For reasons that will be apparent shortly, this may be the single most interesting case to come out of Mattoon.

The Botetourt gasser

In 1945, writing in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Donald M. Johnson reviewed the Mattoon scare and concluded that the local newspaper’s lurid coverage was responsible for it from beginning to end. Johnson’s paper proved influential in future scholarly assessments of mass panics. Yet Johnson was no trained social scientist; he was only a freshman at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, and his analysis – though cited frequently in the literature of mass panics – does not withstand careful scrutiny.

In one of the rare skeptical examinations of Johnson’s theory, Willy Smith writes:

[T]he best documented cases of [mass hysteria] have occurred in enclosed spaces, such as workplaces or schools. The contagious behavior usually stems from a single case, or trigger event, and is characterized by a specific item, such as a bug bite or an odor. . . . For the Mattoon case there was no event that could have triggered a mass hysteria. The three initial incidents – August 31 and September 1 – were real but had no immediate influence, as they were not publicized until September 2. Even then, and in spite of the sensationalist headlines and the extensive newspaper coverage, they failed to generate new cases until September 5.

Unknown to Johnson and most other commentators on the Mattoon episode then and now, a strikingly similar series of events took place about a decade earlier in Botetourt (BOT-a-TOT) County, Virginia, in December 1933 and January 1934. Except for a brief item in the January 22, 1934, edition of the *New York Times*, the scare got only local (Virginia) coverage. It is highly unlikely that Mattoon residents were aware of it.

The first recorded attack occurred at a farm near Haymakertown late on the evening of December 22, when three separate infusions of gas into the house sickened eight members of a family and a visitor. Some of the victims thought they saw a man fleeing in the darkness. The gas caused nausea, headaches, facial swelling, and constriction of mouth and throat muscles. One victim, a nineteen-year-old woman, suffered convulsions for weeks afterwards. A police officer who arrived between the second and third attacks – after staying an hour, he left, and soon afterwards gas wafted through both floors of the house – found only one clue: the print of a woman’s heel under the window the gas was believed to have passed through.

Over the next two weeks other persons reported similar nocturnal attacks. In one case witnesses saw a 1933 Chevrolet, with a man and woman inside, passing back and forth in front of a house around the time its occupants experienced the mysterious gas. In another instance a young mother attending to her baby said she heard a rattling window shade and mumbling voices outside. Suddenly the room filled with gas, and her body felt numb. While on his way to summon police after a gassing at his farm, F. B. Duval saw a man run toward a car parked on a rural road and drive away quickly. Duval and an officer examined the site soon afterwards and found prints of a woman's shoes.

Amid growing panic, residents of the county armed themselves and prowled back roads in search of suspicious strangers. On one occasion a searcher fired on a fleeing figure. On another, moments after a gas attack, one of the victims dashed outside in time to glimpse four men running in the direction of the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains. By the time the witness returned with a gun, he could no longer see them, but he could hear their voices. Despite skepticism in some quarters concerning the gasser's (or gassers') existence, physicians who had called on victims were certain he was (or they were) real. County Sheriff C. E. Williamson was likewise convinced.

One of the last gassings was reported near Lithia in nearby Roanoke County. Afterwards the victim found discolored snow with a sweet-smelling, oily substance in it. When analyzed, it turned out to consist of sulfur, arsenic, and mineral oil – something like the components, authorities thought, of insecticides. A trail of footprints led from the house to the barn, but none away from the barn. They were, according to press accounts, a “woman's tracks.”

Michael T. Shoemaker, who investigated the episode in the 1980s, noted its many similarities to the later scare at Mattoon. “In both Mattoon and Botetourt,” he wrote, “the principal physical effects were the same: a sickeningly sweet odor, nausea, paralysis, facial swelling and unconsciousness. These effects were confirmed by doctors and, moreover, in both cases doctors smelled the gas. Both gassers made repeat attacks on one family, multiple attacks in one night and assaults on unoccupied houses. The pattern of explanation was also similar, progressing from pranksters to lunatics to hysteria. Tantalizing but useless clues were found,” including (Shoemaker's emphasis) “*a woman's print beneath a window.*”

Horror or hysteria?

Decades later, the true causes of these strange occurrences remain no more than conjecture. Even in their time they made little sense – which is hardly evidence in itself that they were not genuinely anomalous. The hysteria explanation filled the vacuum created by the absence of any more logical explanation. It also served the purpose (especially where Mattoon was concerned) of rationalizing the civil authorities' inability to stop the attacks. Hysteria is a classic blame-the-victim strategy.

It is, however, more than that. Gas attacks in some ways reminiscent of those at Mattoon and Botetourt still are reported from time to time, typically in



Three decades later, writing in his *Natural History of Norway* (1752-53), Bishop Erik Pontoppidan had this to say about merfolk sightings: "Here, in the diocese of Bergen, as well as in the manor of Nordland, there are several hundreds of persons of credit and reputation who affirm, with the strongest assurance, that they have seen this kind of creature."

A mer-family of ancient Greece.
(Courtesy Mary Evans Picture Library.)

The mythic background

Merfolk legends or their equivalents have an ancient lineage. The earliest one known concerns the Babylonian god Oannes, human to the waist and fish-shaped from there on, who rose from the Erythrean Sea to impart knowledge and culture to the human race. (In modern times Oannes would reemerge into prominence as a prime candidate for an early extraterrestrial visitor, nominated by no less than the late celebrity-astronomer Carl Sagan.) Merfolklike gods and goddess-

es were worshipped in Syria, India, China, Greece, and Rome. In later centuries they would figure in a nearly universal folklore. We know them as merfolk, mermaids, or mermen because of the Old English word for sea: *mere*. Such creatures by various names were known, and allegedly sighted, all over Western Europe and just about everywhere else.

Among the early chroniclers of the phenomenon was Pliny the Elder, a first-century naturalist who accepted their existence, remarking that "it is no fabulous tale that goeth of them . . . only their body is rough and scaled all over, even in those parts wherein they resemble a woman." He referred to a sighting by coastal residents who clearly saw one such creature, apparently more than once. Later they heard it dying, making a "piteous moan, crying and chattering very heavily." Bodies were found: "Many of these Nereides or Mermaids were seen cast upon the sands, and lying dead."

A variant of merfolk legends concerned the North European seal-folk or selkie, described succinctly in the classic folk ballad "The Grey Selkie of Sule Skerrie": "I am a man upon the land/ I am a selkie in the sea."

When repairing to land to pass themselves off as people, selkies simply removed their seal skin. In many folktales merfolk do the same, enabling them to marry landbound mortals and even produce children by these unions, until at last the inevitable homesickness for the sea overtakes them, and they are gone in a splash.

Sailors usually regarded the sighting of a mermaid a dire omen of imminent death, usually in the storm that follows such an encounter. In "The Mermaid," a traditional ballad, a ship's crew spots such a creature sitting on a rock with a comb and a glass in its hand. The captain speaks up:

*"This fishy mermaid has warned me of our doom
And we shall sink to the bottom of the sea" . . .
And three times around spun our gallant ship . . .
And she went to the bottom of the sea.*

Merfolk sighted

But mermaids figured in more than legend and lore. As one folklorist has remarked, "Medieval belief in the mermaid . . . was widespread and substantiated." The "substantiation," as already noted, consisted of claimed sightings, at least some of which were associated with individuals generally viewed as sane and sensible. Such "sightings" did not end, by any means, in the Middle Ages.

On January 12, 1809, two women standing on a beach at Sandside, Caithness, in remote northeastern Scotland saw what looked like the face of a young woman – "round and plump and of a bright pink hue" – in the sea. It then disappeared into the water, to reappear a short time later. When they were able to observe more of the top part of its body, they could see that it had well-formed human breasts. From time to time it lifted a long, thin white arm above the waves

to toss back its long green hair. ("It is interesting to note," twentieth-century Scottish folklorist R. Macdonald Robertson would write, "that whereas in all the traditional mermaid stories the maid-of-the-sea has golden hair, in eye-witness accounts it ranges in color from green to black.")

After one of the witnesses published her account, which understandably created a sensation, William Munro wrote this letter to the *London Times*, published in its September 8 edition:

About 12 years ago, when I was Parochial Schoolmaster at Reay, in the course of my walking on the shore of Sandside Bay, being a fine warm day in summer, I was induced to extend my walk toward Sandside Head, when my attention was arrested by the appearance of a figure resembling an unclothed human female, sitting upon a rock extending into the sea, and apparently in the action of combing its hair, which flowed around its shoulders, and was of a light brown color.

The forehead was round, the face plump, the cheeks ruddy, the eyes blue, the mouth and lips of a natural form, resembling those of a man; the teeth I could not discover, as the mouth was shut; the breasts and the abdomen, the arms and fingers of the size of a full-grown body of the human species; the fingers, from the action in which the hands were employed, did not appear to be webbed, but as to this I am not positive.

It remained on the rock three or four minutes after I observed it, and was exercised during that period in combing its hair, which was long and thick, and of which it appeared proud; and then dropped into the sea, from whence it did not reappear to me.

I had a distinct view of its features, being at no great distance on an eminence above the rock on which it was sitting, and the sun brightly shining.

Immediately before its getting into its natural element it seemed to have observed me, as the eyes were directed towards the eminence on which I stood. . . . [P]revious to the period I beheld this object, I had heard it frequently reported by several persons, and some of them persons whose veracity I never heard disputed, that they had seen such a phenomenon as I have described, though then, like many others, I was not disposed to credit their testimony on this subject. I can say of a truth, that it was only by seeing the phenomenon, I was perfectly convinced of its existence.

If the above narrative can in any degree be subservient towards establishing the existence of a phenomenon, hitherto almost incredible to naturalists, or to remove the skepticism of others, who are ready to dispute everything which they cannot fully comprehend, you are welcome to it. . . .

Apparently such creatures were active off the coast of Scotland during this period. In a long survey of mermaid and merman sightings, the *London Mirror* of November 16, 1822, gave this account:

In 1811, a young man, named John McIsaac, of Corphine, in Kintyre, in Scotland, made oath on examination, at Campbeltown, before the sheriff-substitute of Kintyre, that he saw on the afternoon of the 13th of October, in that year, on a black rock on the seacoast, an animal of the particulars of which he gives a long and curious detail.

He states, that the upper half of it was white, and of the shape of a human body; the other half, towards the tail, of a brindled or reddish-grey color, apparently covered with scales; but the extremity of the tail itself was of a greenish-red shining color; that the head was covered with long hair; at times it would put back the hair on both sides of its head; it would also spread its tail like a fan; and, while so extended, the tail continued in tremulous motion, and, when drawn together again, it remained motionless, and appeared to the deponent to be about 12 or 14 inches broad; that the hair was very long and light brown; that the animal was between four and five feet long; that it had a head, hair, arms, and body, down to the middle, like a human being; that the arms were short in proportion to the body, which appeared to be about the thickness of that of a young lad, and tapering gradually to the point of the tail; that when stroking its head, as above mentioned, the fingers were kept close together, so that he cannot say whether they were webbed or not; that he saw it for two hours, the rock on which it lay being dry; that, after the sea had so far retired as to leave the rock dry to the height of five feet above the water, it tumbled clumsily into the sea; a minutes after[,] he observed the animal above water, and then saw every feature of its face, having all the appearance of a human being, with very hollow eyes.

The cheeks were of the same color with the rest of the face; the neck seemed short; and it was constantly, with both hands stroking and washing its breasts, which was half immersed in the water; he, therefore, cannot say whether its bosom was formed like a woman's or not. He saw no other fins or feet upon it, but as described. It continued above water for a few minutes, and then disappeared.

Three prominent citizens, the Rev. Dr. George Robertson, Campbeltown minister Norman MacLeod, and lawyer James Maxwell, who were there when McIsaac delivered his testimony, stated that "we know of no reason why his veracity should be called into question; . . . from the manner in which he delivered his evidence, we are satisfied that he was impressed with a perfect belief."

Five days later, on November 2, another eyewitness made sworn testimony to Kintyre's Sheriff-Substitute Duncan Campbell. Katherine Loynachan stated that on the afternoon of October 13, as she was herding cattle near the sea shore, she saw a creature sliding off one of the rocks and dropping into the water, surfacing six yards out. It had long, dark hair, white skin on its upper part, and dark brown skin on its lower, which was fishlike. In Campbell's account of her testimony, it

turned about with the face of it towards the shore, where the declarant was standing, and having laid one hand, which was like a boy's hand,

upon another rock that was near the first rock it came nearer to the shore than it was; that at this time the declarant saw the face of it distinctly which had all the appearance of the face of a child and as white, and at this time the animal was constantly rubbing or washing its breast with one hand, the fingers being close together. . . . [A]fter this animal continued to look towards the declarant for about half a minute, it swam about and disappeared, but in a very short time thereafter she saw the head and face of this animal appearing above water again, and swimming away south toward the farm of Corphine, but soon after disappeared, and the declarant saw it no more.

The girl was so reluctant to credit the testimony of her own senses that at first she told herself this was a boy who had fallen out of a boat and was seeking rescue. Campbell interviewed, and secured sworn testimony from, the witness's father, who recalled his daughter's running home to tell him about a strange boy who was swimming along the shore. The father, mother, and daughter all went to look but saw nothing.

A series of sightings took place off Scotland's west coast in the summer of 1814. When a frightened boy reported seeing a creature half human and half fish, he got nothing but ridicule for his efforts. A month later a group of children saw what they thought was a drowning woman, whom closer examination revealed to be something else entirely. According to a letter from a local person in the *York Chronicle* of September 1:

The upper part was exactly like a woman, the skin appeared very white, and a good deal of color in the cheeks, and very long darkish looking hair; the arms were very well proportioned above, but tapered very much towards the hands, which were no larger than a child's of eight or 10 years old, the tail was like an immense large cuddy fish . . . in color and shape.

Some of the children had gone off to alert nearby farmers. By the time they arrived, the creature had swum close enough to shore so that one man, who bore a rifle, expressed his intention to shoot it, but the others dissuaded him from doing so. He contented himself with whistling at the creature. The whistle caused it to turn around and glance at him. It "remained in sight for two hours, at times making a hissing noise like a goose." It was seen on two subsequent occasions, "always early in the morning and when the sea was calm."

At Port Gordon, on August 15 of that same year, fishermen Thomas Johnstone and William Gordon were a quarter-mile from shore when they spotted, not far from them, a merman. The local schoolmaster, George McKenzie, interviewed them shortly afterwards and the next day sent an account to the editor of the *Caledonian Mercury*. The merman, he reported, was of "swarthy" countenance, with small eyes, flat nose, large mouth, and remarkably long arms. After fifteen seconds it dived under water, resurfacing farther away from the boat, now accompanied by "another, whom the men assumed to be female, as they could perceive she had breasts, and her hair was not curled, but reached to a little below the shoulders; the

skin of this last one too was fairer than the other's." Terrified, Johnstone and Gordon raced for the shore. The two creatures continued to gaze at them even after they made land.

Merfolk caught

In 1762 a French newspaper reported that "two girls on the island of Noirmontier," while searching for shells in rock crevices, encountered "an animal of a human form, leaning on its hands." One girl promptly stabbed it with a knife. It moaned and died. Afterwards a physician went to the site and examined the body, finding it "as big as the largest man" with the white skin of a drowned person's and "the breasts of a full-chested woman; a flat nose; a large mouth; the chin adorned with a kind of beard, formed of fine shells; and over the whole body, tufts of similar white shells. It had the tail of a fish, and at the extremity of it a kind of feet."

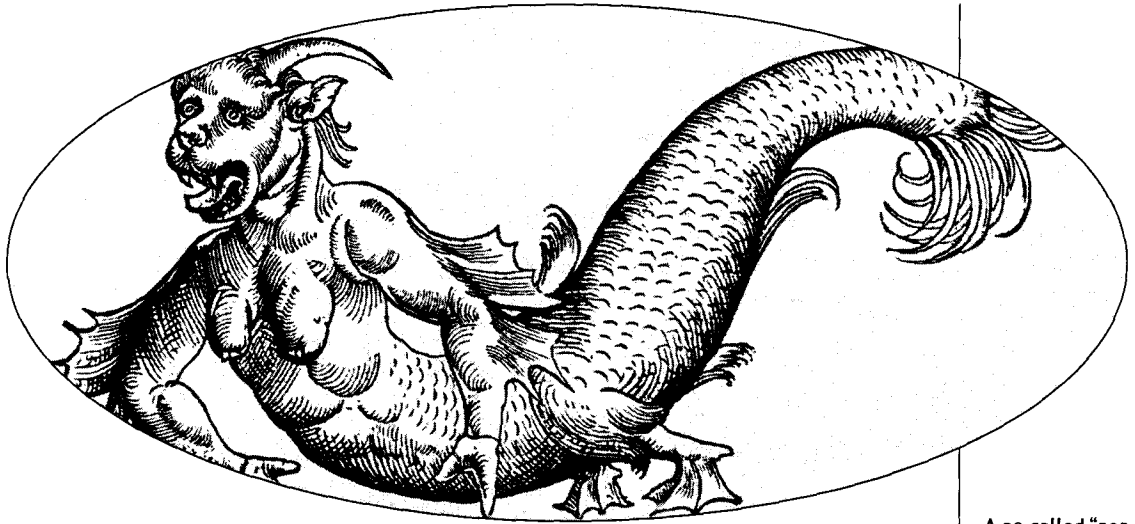
Around 1830 persons at work along the shore of Benbecula, one of the islands in the Hebrides chain (off Scotland's northwest coast), spotted a small creature, half woman and half fish, in the water a few feet away. It was turning somersaults in the water as if at play. When some men tried to capture it, it evaded them. Finally a little boy hit it on the back with some stones, and it disappeared. A few days later the body washed up on shore two miles away.

According to Duncan Shaw, the district sheriff, who examined the body carefully, "the upper part of the creature was about the size of a well-fed child of three or four years of age, with an abnormally developed breast. The hair was long, dark and glossy, while the skin was white, soft and tender. The lower part of the body was like a salmon, but without scales." It was "interred in the presence of a large assemblage of the Hebridean people in the burial-ground at Nunton, where the grave is pointed out to this day," R. Macdonald Robertson stated in 1961. "I have seen it myself."

An affidavit records the alleged capture of a mermaid – or something like one – in the Shetland Islands north of Scotland:

In the presence of Arthur Nicholson of Lochend, J.P. – William Manson, Daniel Manson, John Henderson, residing in Cullivoe in the parish of North Yell, who being sworn deposit – That, in the beginning of July last [1833], they at the deep-sea fishing from 30 to 60 miles from land, and about midnight took up a creature attached by the back of the neck to a hook, which was about 3 feet long, and about 30 inches in circumference at the broadest part, which was across the shoulders. From the navel upwards it resembled a human being – had breasts as large as those of a woman.

Attached to the side were arms about 9 inches long, with wrists and hands like those of a human being, except that there were webs between the fingers for about half their length. The fingers were in number and shape, like those of a man. The little arms were close on the outsides of the breasts and on the corner of each shoulder was placed a fin of a round form which, when extended, covered both the breasts and the arms.



A so-called "sea devil" caught by sailors in the Adriatic, 1530.
(Courtesy Mary Evans Picture Library.)

The animal had a short neck, on which rested a head, about the length of a man's but not nearly so round; and somewhat pointed at the top. It had eyebrows without hair, and eyelids covering two small blue eyes, somewhat like those of a human being – not like those of a fish. It had no nose, but two orifices for blowing through. It had a mouth so large that when opened wide it would admit a man's fist. It had lips rather thicker than a man's of a pure white color. There was no chin, but they think the lower jaw projected a little further than the upper one. There were no ears.

The whole front of the animal was covered with skin, white as linen, the back with skin of a light-grey color, like a fish. From the breasts the shape sloped towards the tail, close to which was only about 4 inches in circumference. The tail was flat, and consisted of two lobes which, when extended, might be 6 inches together in breadth, and were set at right angles with the face of the creature; it resembled the face of a halibut.

The animal was very nearly round at the shoulders. It appeared to have shoulder bones and a hollow space between them. The diminution of size increased most rapidly from the navel, which might be 9 inches below the breasts. There was between the nostrils a thing that appeared to be a piece of gristle about 9 inches long, and which resembled a thick bristle. There was a similar one on each side of the head, but not so long, which the animal had the power of moving backwards and forwards, and could make them meet on top of the skull.

When the men spoke the animal answered, and moved these bristles, which led them to suppose that the creature heard by means of them. They did not observe what sort of teeth the creature had, nor the parts of generation. There was no hair upon any part of its body which was soft and slimy.

There is an old opinion among fishermen that it is unlucky to kill a mermaid and therefore, after having kept it in the boat for some time, they slipped it.

All of which is the truth, so help me God.

A man who interviewed the boat's skipper as well as the crewmen forwarded an account to Edinburgh University's Natural History Department:

Not one of the six men dreamed of a doubt of its being a mermaid. . . . The usual resources of skepticism that the seals and other sea animals appearing under certain circumstances operating upon an excited imagination and so producing an ocular illusion cannot avail here. It is quite impossible that six Shetland fishermen could commit such a mistake.

Reports of merfolk in the seas off Scotland continued through the rest of the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth. In August 1949 fishermen off Craig More claimed to have had several sightings.

New World merfolk

Of all purported sighters of mermaids (or sighters of purported mermaids), Christopher Columbus is easily the most famous. On his voyage of discovery into the West Indies, he saw three of them "leaping a good distance out of the sea" and found them "not so fair as they are painted." In fact, this vague description, if we can draw any conclusion from it at all, is consistent with the behavior of dugongs.

A more detailed, if less plausible, story comes from the seventeenth-century explorer of America, John Smith. Smith, sailing through the West Indies in 1614, noticed what he first took to be a young woman in the water. In Smith's appreciative but not uncritical appraisal she had "large eyes, rather too round, finely shaped nose (a little too short), well-formed ears, rather too long, and her long green hair imparted to her an original character by no means unattractive." Just as Smith began to "feel the first pains of love," she moved in such away as to reveal that "from below the waist the woman gave way to the fish."

"One may be inclined to question the veracity of the susceptible Captain Smith," Sir Arthur Waugh, a scholarly authority on merfolk lore, observes, then adds, "It is much more difficult to doubt the detailed reports of . . . sober and responsible people," among whom he numbers a Capt. Whitbourne. In 1610, while sailing a small boat into harbor at St. John's, Newfoundland, Whitbourne spotted a strange creature swimming in his direction and "looking cheerfully as [if] it had been a woman, by the Face, Eyes, Nose, Mouth, Earse, Necke and Forehead." It did not get a cheerful reception. Deeply alarmed, Whitbourne backed hastily away. The creature then turned around and attempted to board a companion boat belonging to William Hawkrige, who banged it on the head. It disappeared under the water. Hawkrige later offered this laconic comment: "Whether it was a mermaid or no . . . I leave it for others to judge."

The mermaid should have considered itself lucky that it did not suffer the fate of a merman who that same century tried to get into a boat in Casco Bay, off the coast of southern Maine. The boat's occupant, a Mr. Mitter, is said to have slashed off one of its arms. It sank, "dying the waters purple with its blood," in the words of a contemporary chronicler.

A second sighting, not long after that in the waters off Nova Scotia, occurred to the crews of three French vessels. This time they chased and attempted to capture a merman with ropes, but to no avail. "He brushed his mossy hair out of his eyes which seemed to cover his body as well – as much as seen above water, in some places more, in others less," the captain of one of the ships recorded. The merman dived, never to be seen again, "to the great dejection of the fishermen."

Another of Waugh's "sober and responsible people," the celebrated New World explorer Henry Hudson, noted the following in his journal on June 15, 1610:

This evening one of our company, looking overboard, saw a mermaid, and, calling up some of the company to see her, one more of the crew came up, and by that time she was come close to the ship's side, looking earnestly on the men. A little after a sea came and overturned her.

From the navel upward, her back and breasts were like a woman's, as they say that saw her; her body as big as one of us, her skin very white, and long hair hanging down behind, of color black. In her going down they saw her tail, which was like the tail of a porpoise, speckled like a mackerel. Their names that saw her were Thomas Hilles and Robert Rayner.

Of this incident the eminent Victorian naturalist Philip Gosse remarked, "Seals and walruses must have been as familiar to those polar mariners as cows to a milkmaid. Unless the whole story was a concocted lie between the two men, reasonless and objectless, and the worthy old navigator doubtless knew the character of his men, they must have seen some form of being as yet unrecognized."

In 1797 a Dr. Chisholm visited the tiny island of Berbice in the Caribbean. He spent time with Governor Van Battenburgh and others who told him of repeated sightings, in the island's rivers, of strange creatures known to the Indians as *mene mamma* (mother of waters). In his 1801 book *Malignant Fever in the West Indies*, Chisholm wrote:

The upper portion resembles the human figure, the head is smaller in proportion, sometimes bare, but oftener covered with a copious quantity of long black hair. The shoulders are broad, and the breasts large and well formed. The lower portion resembles the tail portion of a fish, is of immense dimension, the tail forked, not unlike that of the dolphin. . . . The color of the skin is either black or tawny. . . . They have been generally observed in a sitting posture in the water, none of the lower extremity being discovered until they are disturbed; when by plunging, the tail appears, and agitates the water to a considerable distance round. They have been always seen employing in smoothing their hair, or stroking

their faces and breasts with their hands, or something resembling hands. In this posture, and thus employed, they have been frequently taken for Indian women bathing.

And finally, this from an 1820 issue of the *American Journal of Science*:

Extract from the log book of the ship Leonidas, sailing for New-York towards Havre [France], Asa Swift master; May 1817. Lat. 44 degrees, 6 degrees north. First part of the day light variable winds and cloudy; at two p.m. on the larboard quarter, at the distance of about half the ship's length, saw a strange fish. Its lower parts were like a fish; its belly was all white; the top of the back brown, and there was the appearance of short hair as far as the top of its head. From the breast upwards, it had a near resemblance to a human being and looked upon the observers very earnestly; as it was but a short distance from the ship, all the afternoon, we had a good opportunity to observe its motions and shape. No one on board ever saw the like fish, before; all believe it to be a Mermaid.

The second mate Mr. Stevens, an intelligent young man, told me the face was nearly white, and exactly like that of a human person; that its arms were about half as long as his, with hands resembling his own; that it stood erect out of the water about two feet, looking at the ship and sails with great earnestness. It would remain in this attitude, close along side, ten or fifteen minutes at a time, and then dive and appear on the other side. It remained about them six hours. Mr. Stevens also stated that its hair was black on the head and exactly resembled a man's; that below the arms, it was a perfect fish in form, and that the whole length from the head to the tail [was] about five feet.

Explanations

In the summer of 1978, Filipino fisherman Jacinto Fetalvero let slip the secret of his recent fishing success. One moonlit night he had met a beautiful mermaid, with “amiable bluish eyes, reddish cheeks, and green scales on her tail.” She helped him “secure a bountiful catch.” A torrent of ridicule ensued, and Fatalvero thereafter refused to discuss the subject.

If merfolk are still “seen,” whatever that means, we may be confident that few are so naive as Fetalvero about their certain reception. Popular opinion, after all, still cannot bear even such relative commonplaces as sightings of UFOs. Even the (relatively speaking) mundane sea serpents and lake monsters – which, whether they exist or not, are in no sense zoologically out of the question – remain objects of merriment to most, and proof of mass “credulity” and susceptibility to “pseudoscience” to humorless others.

So what chance have merfolk? It is undeniably true that they appear biologically preposterous. It is also true that belief in them has given rise to numerous hoaxes, some quite amusing. Folklorist Horace Beck tells us of the eccentric Robert S. Hawker who in the mid-1820s, “before he donned the holy robes of the

ministry, used to disguise himself as a mermaid, sit on a rock and sing in the moonlight – much to the awe of the villagers round about.” In the mid-nineteenth century Japanese fishermen supplemented their incomes by manufacturing mermaid corpses by attaching the top halves of dead monkeys to the bottom halves of fish. P. T. Barnum and any number of sideshow hustlers since him have separated fools from their money by offering views of dead and living mermaids.

Probably very few people today are even aware that their ancestors, or some of them anyway, believed they had actually *observed* merfolk. As we have seen, published accounts in respected newspapers, magazines, and journals insisted on the credibility of witnesses, who sometimes gave sworn testimony. Modern analysts of this testimony – scientists and folklorists mostly; anomalists and paranormalists have almost universally shied away from it – take it seriously and agree that it poses questions that merit better than a mere hooting down. Among the proposed solutions have been sea cows, manatees, and dugongs, which in the words of scientist Richard Carrington “became ‘transformed’ into a mermaid by the expectant attention of the superstitious mariners who saw it.” Science journalist Richard Ellis, who pays little attention to witnesses’ descriptions, deems the explanation so certain as to merit the linking of the words with a slash mark: “manatee/mermaid.”

Such identifications suffer from two immediate problems:

(1) According to a sighting survey by Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh, nearly three-quarters reportedly occurred far from areas where sea cows, dugongs, and manatees are known to exist.

(2) Moreover, though plausible in cases of long-distance sightings where perceptual errors may be expected to occur, these animals (the latter two, incidentally, found only tropical climes) in hardly any way resemble the creatures described in the most interesting sightings, which characteristically claim not only a close view but an extended one. As Benwell and Waugh put it, “It is asking a lot of a maritime race to believe that sailors, with the trained powers of observation which their own safety, and that of their ship, so often depend, could commit such a blunder” of monumental perception.

That, however, is not quite reason to abandon such explanations in all cases. Consider the following:

In a 1927 *Illustrated London News* article naturalist W. P. Pycraft remarked on a recent mermaid sighting:

A journalist brought me a letter for my comment, written by a lady who, in passing quite recently down the Red Sea, had seen a “veritable mermaid.” Hitherto, she averred, she had regarded such creatures as mere figments of the imagination; but now she no longer doubted, for had she not just seen one with her own eyes? It was some nine feet long, very much like a woman, but emphatically ugly. Its face was hideous; its hands looked as though they had been thrust into some fingerless glove; but it had no legs. The body terminated in a great ground, flat tail, and its skin,

Sourcebook Project

In 1951, browsing through a tableful of used books in Berkeley, California, a young physicist named William R. Corliss picked up a copy of George McCready Price's *Evolutionary Geology and the New Catastrophism*. It would be, he recalled years later, "my first encounter with 'outlaw science'." Price, a geologist, devout Seventh-Day Adventist, and relentless foe of evolution, is best remembered as the scientific authority most often cited by William Jennings Bryan during the Scopes "monkey trial" of 1927. Corliss was struck less by the book's underlying theological premise than by its description of a variety of anomalous phenomena that Price believed undermined conventional geology.

Hooked on both unconventional occurrences and unorthodox theories, Corliss sought out other books in these areas. In 1953, at the University of Colorado library, he found *The Books of Charles Fort*. Charles Fort, who died in 1932, was the first great collector of physical (as opposed to psychic) anomalies. "My first contacts with Fort," Corliss has written, "were identical in psychic content to my first heady encounters with idealized Baconian science. It took but a short while for me to realize that honest science and honest Forteanism are one and the same."

Though many Forteans and other heterodox thinkers tend to view establishment science with suspicion or, in extreme cases, reject it altogether, Corliss (who holds an M.S. in physics from the University of Colorado, 1953, and has written a number of books on rocketry and space travel) is essentially conservative in outlook. When he embarked on a search for published references to abductions, he devoted the bulk of his attention to the scientific literature.

Over the years he collected thousands of accounts of unusual natural and physical phenomena, only a relatively small number of the sort of fantastic nature that has traditionally attracted the attention of Forteans. Corliss was more interested in unusual weather, ball lightning, geophysical oddities, extraordinary mirages, and the like — in short, anomalies that, while important in their own right, are far less likely to outrage mainstream scientists than those that delight-

which was bare, was dark-grey in color. But there it was, an indubitable "mermaid"! The letter was apparently written in all seriousness.

Pycraft rightly deduced that the woman had seen a dugong. From that he concluded, less convincingly, that it was now established that dugongs are the cause of mermaid sightings. Unfortunately, he failed to give any thought to this not-irrelevant consideration: that while the woman's identification of the animal was absurdly mistaken, her description of it was accurate, and she had not described a mermaid.

ed Fort, such as UFOs, monstrous creatures, or other sorts of extraordinary events and entities. Even so, no one before Corliss had catalogued them systematically.

In the 277-page *Strange Phenomena* (1974), the first work in what he called the Sourcebook Project, Corliss began reprinting some of the articles he had uncovered. A second *Strange Phenomena* volume followed, and then two volumes each of *Strange Artifacts*, *Strange Universe*, and *Strange Planet* and one volume each of *Strange Life* and *Strange Minds*. The Sourcebooks were loose-leaf pages inserted in a ringed binder.

The first bound volume of the Handbook series, *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena*, appeared in 1977. Other Handbooks, concerned with specific areas of anomalous phenomena or experience (for example, *Incredible Life*, on biological mysteries, and *Mysterious Universe*, on astronomical enigmas), came after.

In 1982, with *Lightning, Auroras, Nocturnal Lights, and Related Luminous Phenomena*, Corliss launched a Catalog series. "Under the aegis of the Sourcebook Project," he wrote in the introduction, "I have already published 16 volumes, comprising well over 7,000 pages, of source material on scientific anomalies. . . . As of this moment these 16 volumes represent only about 20% of my collection of scientific anomalies. New material is being added at the rate of about 1,200 new articles and items per year, 300 of which are from the current literature. These rates could easily be multiplied several times over by spending more time in the libraries. After ten years only the scientific journals of the United States and England have received my serious attention. There remain the English-language journals of the rest of the world, those publications in other languages, university theses, government reports, bulletins of scientific research facilities, conference papers, and not the least, books and newspapers. The cataloging task is just beginning, for the anomalies in the world's scientific and semiscientific literature seem nearly infinite in number."

By any standard the Sourcebook Project is a towering achievement of immeasurable value to students, lay or scientific, of nature's mysteries. Corliss also publishes a newsletter, *Science Frontiers*, which reports on current anomalies.

On the other hand, the people of New Ireland, an island province of Papua New Guinea, *did* describe merfolk. Called *ri* (and pronounced *ree*), these creatures were said to look like human beings down to their genitals; the legless lower trunk ended in a pair of lateral fins. Or so native informants told a visiting American anthropologist, Roy Wagner, in the late 1970s. The native witnesses claimed that the creatures reminded them of the mermaids on tuna-fish cans, though they did not regard them as intelligent beings. On one occasion Wagner himself saw a "long, dark body swimming at the surface horizontally." His companions identified it as a *ri*.

Though Wagner was positive these creatures were not dugongs, in fact people who lived farther north on the island considered *ri* just another name for dugong. A February 1985 expedition by American cryptozoologists produced underwater photographs of a *ri* – an unambiguous dugong – and solved at least part of the puzzle. Expedition member Thomas R. Williams pondered the remaining mystery, for which he had no answer, of “how myths of merfolk can arise and persist in the face of the obvious reality of the dugong.”

We have no way of knowing how widely the lessons from this episode can be applied, for the simple reason that in our time no one else has ever mounted a scientific investigation of merfolk sightings as they were occurring. Nearly all commentary on the matter focuses on reports from the distant past to the nineteenth century, and therefore the theories can only be speculative.

Perhaps the most ingenious is that proposed by two *Nature* writers who tied Norse merman reports to optical effects produced by a “moderate [atmospheric] inversion,” showing how the resulting distortions on the ocean surface could make killer whales, walruses, and jutting rocks look much like what the sailors reported they saw. The authors respected the witnesses’ testimony, including their assertion that storms followed merfolk appearances. As behavioral scientist David J. Hufford remarks of this study, “an improved understanding of naturally occurring atmospheric optical anomalies did result from a serious consideration of an apparently fabulous medieval belief”; furthermore, the scientists “were able to document with a high degree of confidence the role of accurate observations in the development of a medieval tradition, and the accurate correlation of these observations with impending storms, apparently achieved by properly performed inductive reasoning and empirical generalization.”

This sort of explanation will not necessarily enable us to unravel the enigma of the Scottish and New World sightings recounted earlier. If anything, cloudy matters only get foggier. If we assume that these sightings are not outright fictions – and few scholars of the subject believe they are – we must also assume that the observers were wildly mistaken, that what they thought they saw was only vaguely related to what they really saw. Remember, some of these sightings are supposed to have been from a distance of no more than a few feet.

If misperception under these circumstances seems inconceivable, remember the *ri*. But don’t remember *only* the *ri*; remember, too, the Norse mermen that, if they did not exist as the sailors thought they did, were described precisely enough for scholars centuries later to discern their cause.

In short, to the vital question of whether we ought to trust the reports, no sure answer leaps up to satisfy us with its certainty. Some observations are precise and credible. Others are startlingly at variance with reality. Beyond this, the paucity of modern investigations frustrates further understanding. It forces those who take up the question to dump a mountain’s worth of theory on a mole hill’s worth of solid information.

Merfolk as unknowns

Michel Meurger, a French folklorist and authority on the lore of fabulous water beasts, derides biological explanations of merfolk sightings as naive and reductionistic. He considers them "visionary experiences," or vivid hallucinations that take their shape from images out of popular superstition. He is almost certainly right in a number of cases, but such a hypothesis begins to look a bit labored when placed against the testimonies of multiple witnesses.

Another problem is that the merfolk of experience and the merfolk of popular superstition are manifestly different entities. The latter, intelligent beings with supernatural powers, can speak like normal human beings and even shed their fishy bottoms to live on land and romance or wed dwellers on the land. The merfolk of sightings neither speak nor communicate anything but animal-like sounds, if that; for that matter they give no particular indication of possessing more than an animal's level of intelligence. (As Robertson notes, as we have already seen, even their hair color is different from that of their folkloric counterparts.)

So *are* they animals of some unknown type? Addressing the issue only reluctantly after dismissing it virtually out of hand in his earlier writings, Bernard Heuvelmans, the father of cryptozoology, stated in a 1986 paper, "Only a still-unrecorded species of recent Sirenia [dugongs, manatees, sea cows], or possibly – though much less likely – an unknown form of primate adapted to sea-life, could explain the abundance and persistence of merfolk reports in certain seas up to modern times." Benwell and Waugh, authors of the best modern book on merfolk lore, *Sea Enchantress* (1965), come to essentially the same conclusion.

Even if not supernatural, such an animal would be extraordinary indeed. It is hard to believe any such thing exists, not only because *a priori* it seems beyond zoological reason but also because no bodies have washed ashore and found their way into scientists' hands. These would not be, it should be emphasized, creatures living in remote depths, from which remains would not surface, but animals that cavorted frequently in shallow off-shore waters. If merfolk were real, flesh-and-blood citizens of the oceanic regions of consensus reality, we would have more than sightings to document them.

Which does not explain everything, of course. One could argue that merfolk reports have as much claim to our attention as the Flatwoods monster, Mothman, flying humanoids, hairy bipeds, and reptile men, none of which makes much sense either. But someone else could retort that at least with these, there are living witnesses to interview and, sometimes, a tantalizing fragment of what may be physical evidence – a footprint, a hair, a blurry photograph – to take into account, not to mention a laboratory.

Yet it is in the nature of such things that huge claims are nearly always married to small evidence. The evidence for merfolk, consisting of the words of long-dead men and women, is even more minuscule, and it shrinks with each passing year. In the end it does not permit us – if, at any rate, we demand scrupulous intellectual honesty of ourselves, even in the face of the unthinkable – to laugh

into oblivion the questions that remain. Neither, however, does it compel us to reinvent the world so that merfolk may comfortably occupy it.

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NORTH DAKOTA ABDUCTION CASE. See Larson Abduction Case

NORTH DAKOTA CE3

A bizarre incident said to have taken place on the Great Plains in late November 1961 would never have come to light but for the fact that Donald E. Flickinger, an agent for the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Division of the U.S. Treasury Department, was working in Minot, North Dakota, a few years later and learned of it through local rumors. (In the 1970s Flickinger in his official capacity was to lead a federal investigation into reports of allegedly mysterious cattle deaths. See **Animal Mutilations and UFOs**.) In January 1968 Flickinger, who had a private interest in UFOs and headed the North Dakota subcommittee of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP), was able to speak with S and two other participants. The fourth no longer lived in the area. S worked in a supervisory capacity at the Minot Air Force Base hospital. The others were a small-town high-school superintendent, an active-duty Air Force sergeant, and a college professor—all “extremely reliable and responsible,” in Flickinger’s estimation (Flickinger, 1969).

As the story went, S and his friends had been hunting in the Harvey, North Dakota, area, southeast of Minot. By the time they started home, it was cold, dark, and rainy. Two of the party, including S, were dozing in the back seat when the two men in the front noticed a descending glowing object in the sky ahead of them. The object was lost to view near the ground half a mile away and to their right. Assuming that they were witnessing a plane crash, the men rushed to the scene, where they saw—at about 150 yards’ distance—a “silo-appearing type craft which was sticking in the ground with this glow around it,” in S’s words. S himself learned of this part of the incident only later; he remained asleep for a few more minutes.

In an effort to get a better look, the men in the car plugged a hand spotlight into the cigarette lighter and shined it on the object. At that point they saw four human-looking individuals standing around it.

Suddenly, S said, “it was just like there was an explosion, sort of, and everything went out.” The “explosion” (“just like a WHOOF”) led the onlookers to believe the presumed airplane had blown up, burning the crew or passengers they had just seen. S was roused from his sleep when he discovered that the small car in which they were traveling had left the road and was trying, not very successfully, to navigate a soggy field in search of the no longer visible aircraft.

Soon they returned to the road and headed back to the spot from which they had seen the aircraft initially. On the way back they spotted the craft. Using the spotlight again, they observed one of the figures. They could make out few details beyond the figure’s apparel (something that “looked like white coveralls”) and its height, just over five feet. The witnesses were startled when the figure, who was standing near a fence, waved them away just as they were getting out of the car. Why would the victim of an airplane crash decline help? The men discussed what they should do next, and presently two of them decided they would get closer, the figure’s negative gesture notwithstanding. One of the group then picked up a rifle. S thought this was a bad idea; what if the “silo” was a silo and they ended up shooting a farmer?

Eventually the men agreed to go back to a tiny town (believed to be Martin, North Dakota) 11 miles away where they had seen a police officer sitting in a car. He was still there when they arrived. After listening without enthusiasm to their story, he took down their names and was finally persuaded (once he had established to his satisfaction that they were not drunk) to accompany them. When they got to the site, there was nothing to see—at least at first. As the five men stood outside their cars talking about the situation, they suddenly noticed what looked like tail lights from a vehicle moving in the field where they had first seen the object and its accompanying figures. Both cars raced in pursuit, and as the police car, which was in the lead, pulled right behind the lights, they went out, leaving nothing behind. There were no tracks in the muddy ground.

Puzzled but doubting that anything more could be done, the police officer left, and the four hunters resumed their homeward trek. Two miles down the highway the glowing silolike aircraft reappeared, land-

ing gently less than 150 yards away. A few moments later the men saw two of the figures watching them. They quickly plugged in the spotlight. S told Flickinger what happened then:

Two individuals got out of the car at this point. . . . [O]ne of these individuals from the car . . . went to the left and one went to the right. The one to the right was carrying this .22 Hornet rifle with the scope. . . . I don't know . . . what we were thinking of, but the two men in the car were holding the light on the two forms from the vehicle. They were . . . about 10 yards apart; one was a little forward of the other one. . . . They were just standing watching, so by this time the fellow on the right knoll dropped down on his knees, then down to a prone position with the rifle. This person looked in the scope and went from the knees on up. . . . Anyway, at this point there was a shot fired. It hit . . . one of the forms, high in the right shoulder. When the individual was struck he spun around, down to his knees, and then he got up with the other guy's assistance, and he looked over and said, or hollered, "Now what the hell did you do that for?"

Even over six years later S was to remark, "To this very day I still maintain that it could have been USAF or somebody from this country, because they *were* human beings," albeit "shorter than average." It is by no means clear why gunfire entered the equation at all. ("The shot," S said, "definitely hit something. . . . [There was] a thud sound, just like shooting any animal" [*ibid.*].) Though the encounter was undeniably unsettling, nothing in the figures' behavior could have been interpreted as threatening. The question asked by the wounded figure will surely occur to any reader. Even S did not know the answer. According to Flickinger, "the only explanation he could offer was that they apparently thought that here was something 'unearthly' or unnatural and . . . if they could bring down one of these individuals with a shot they'd have proof" (Flickinger, 1969).

The shooter was S. Though he admitted as much to Flickinger, he would not render such potentially incriminating testimony on tape. S spoke as if he were someone else when he said "he's a fairly good shot

and would never shoot at anything he wasn't sure of or unless he knew what it was, and why the trigger went off I don't know or why the rifle was even taken out of the car, I don't know."

But *was* the rifle taken out of the car? Weirdly, as soon as the two thoroughly shaken men reentered the vehicle, the two who remained inside insisted that the weapon had *not* been removed and no shot had been fired. When S and his companion incredulously insisted the contrary, they were told they were "crazier than hell." Possibly the two onlookers were so frightened of the implications of what they had just witnessed—which made them accomplices to attempted murder—that they denied the evidence of their own senses. This is just one of the many odd aspects of this complex and perplexing account.

S had "no recollection" of what happened to the craft and the figures. All he recalled was a heated discussion inside the car, followed by a hasty departure and a curiously belated arrival:

[Judging by] the time that we started this trip, we figured it was earlier, and by the time we got home, it was just daylight. The wives were all sitting and waiting for us. We all knew it took too long for us to come back. We hadn't spent that much time chasing this thing around, and all of us knew or had the feeling that there was something missing there, and to this day we don't know what it was.

A few hours later, around noon, S was at work when his supervisor notified him that he was to go downstairs to meet some callers. They proved to be three well-groomed, official-looking men. Though they introduced themselves only by name, their manner led S to assume they were Air Force intelligence officers, their civilian dress notwithstanding. They told him they had a "report" about the event of the previous night. According to S:

[T]hey wanted to know the type of clothing I was wearing. They asked a few questions about this object we had seen, and most of their questions were just like they knew what we had seen and wanted to find out how much we had seen. . . . I just took it for granted that they had this report from this law officer down there,

and they were just checking this thing out to see if we'd seen it. Of course I was still pretty shaky over the events that had happened the night before, especially the last part of it, but the law officer didn't know anything about this part of it. He'd already gone back to town by that time. So I figured this is USAF, and being as we had given this officer our names, I figured they knew just who the people were that shot the Air Force people. So they asked me the type of gear I was wearing. I told them hunting clothes. They asked me if I'd gotten out of the car in the field where the first sighting was made, and they're strictly talking about the first sighting, and I told them yes. . . . [T]hey never asked anything about the shooting. . . . I think they probably knew more than they said, but I don't know.

Not long afterwards the strangers drove S to his house in a car S remembered as a 1961 Plymouth. There

they . . . look[ed] at my hunting gear and my boots. They never did say why they wanted to see these things. The only thing they asked was if I got out of the car into the muddy field, and I said yes, and that's when I showed them the type of boots that I had on. They asked me if I had any other type of boots. I said yeah, I had a pair of wader type boot. Of course I told them that I hadn't been wearing them, but they still wanted to see these too, so I produced the boots. They thought on it a little more and said, "Okay, that's enough for now". . . . [T]he one guy, in fact the only one who did all the questioning, said, "We want to thank you," and he called me by my name, "for your cooperation." He said, "We want you to keep this quiet," that "you'd better not say anything about this to anyone from now on." I assured him I wouldn't. So they got in their car. I then got pretty upset as they'd left me at home with no way back to work [*ibid.*].

S never saw or heard from the mysterious men again.

We know of this incident largely from S's testimony, inasmuch as only he permitted himself to be taped. Flickinger, an experienced lawman, felt that S's sincerity was not open to question, and several years

later New Jersey psychiatrist/ufologist Berthold E. Schwarz, who interviewed S, found him still distraught over the incident.

In a letter to J. Allen Hynek, Flickinger reported on the subsequent fate of the Air Force sergeant:

[W] was honorably discharged from the USAF a short while after this incident, after serving his 4 year hitch. He re-entered the AF again in 1964 after having some trouble finding jobs on the outside. He told me that he was placed back in his old job classification, photo-reconnaissance, and that before leaving the Air Force, he had a Top-Secret Clearance. His commander told him upon his return to photo-recon in 1964 that his clearance would be reinstated but to the astonishment of [W], his commander and fellow workers not only did he not receive the expected top secret clearance but did not receive any clearance whatsoever. He has inquired on numerous occasions as to why, but the AF has not seen fit to answer him as of yet. He did put one Congressman to work on it and the Congressman came back with the answer from the Air Force that this man was unstable and unreliable and not the type to hold down high-level clearances. I asked [W] what reason they based this opinion on and he stated that they never gave him or the Congressman any answers as to this. I talked with [W] at length and the last thing he seems to me is unreliable or unstable. Quite the opposite in my opinion.

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