

Where Monsters Roam

Strange phenomena in Latin America

by Scott Corrales

El uñudo puts in an appearance.
from *De Veras Nos Visitan Los OVNIS?* by Antonio Ribera (1974)

Monster lore may not have reached the level of intricacy in Latin America that it has displayed in the United States and in Europe, but the Spanish-speaking countries of the Americas (and Spain) have made significant contributions to the storehouse of Fortean lore. In some of these regions, sightings of bizarre entities or outright monsters have been closely linked with the practice of so-called “black magic”—a be-

lief that is particularly strong in the nations of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile, and Brazil), in the Caribbean, and in southern Spain. We shall presently examine some of these strange and unnerving events.

Claws in the Night

In April 2004, Argentina’s *Diario de la República* newspaper ran the sensational story of a child who had been attacked by an unknown entity that received the popular moniker of *El uñudo* (The Clawed

One). Even though the youngster experienced little more than a good fright, the manifestations of this creature caused a stir in the community of Justo Daract and its surroundings. *El uñudo* had already appeared before some young women, prompting one of them to pass out.

The women left their night school classes at 11:00 p.m. They reported being confronted by a frightening entity wearing a black mask and with long nails on its fingers—a creature capable of climbing up the flagpole in the town square with the ease and elegance of a squirrel.

Maura Avila, a reporter for a local radio station, conducted several interviews with local witnesses and made the following statement to the press:

“I was informed that there was a great deal of movement in Barrio Norte, near the hospital, and we headed there just as the police arrived. We learned that *El uñudo* had appeared—a character who has gained notoriety in Justo Daract because he/it has been appearing for several days now, and has now terrified an 11-year-old on the corner of Liniers and Los Andes.... Those who claim having seen *El uñudo* [say] that it doesn’t have human form, rather an animal one, adding that it walks on four legs and hops, being capable of very swift movements.” Avila added that the locals had discussed the existence of “black magic cults” in the area and feared that *El uñudo* could have been an entity summoned during the course of some unspeakable ritual—especially as the timing of these manifestations coincided with Easter week.

Search brigades were hastily formed to go on a monster hunt reminiscent of the 200-man posses that scoured the Puerto Rican countryside in 1995 hoping to find the chupacabras. The good people of Justo Daract, aided by the local police and members of the neighborhood watch, found themselves walking along the train tracks in the dark due to a report that claimed the creature had climbed to the very top of the grain silos by the rails. The dangerous climb to the top of these structures revealed nothing of interest.

Later on that same week, neighborhood watch volunteers reported seeing *El uñudo* climbing up trees in a residential neighborhood after having seen it cross a soccer field. “It jumped over the barbed wire fences with remarkable agility and moved with such long strides that it appeared to be floating on air, and was impossible to reach,” reported the witnesses.

On April 8, another young woman returning home at 3:00 a.m. on her bicycle reportedly saw the strange character jumping from one rooftop to the next at the 331 Viviendas neighborhood of Justo Daract. Terrified beyond words, the girl pedaled furiously back to the local bus station—ten city blocks away—in order to take the bus home. Drivers and workers at the terminal attested to her distraught condition. Something strange—whether human or not—was scaring the hell out of the locals.

Descriptions of *El uñudo* now ranged from “large and with a mask and horns; small and apelike, black or brown, with a

nude upper torso and covered with tattoos; walking upright or on four legs; leaving goat-shaped hoof prints; climbing trees, pipelines, or metal silos; jumping over wire fences and large lagoons, swift and elusive," according to *El Diario de la República*.

Other sources reported that despite their failure to locate the supernatural intruder at the grain silos, officers had managed to apprehend the creature at some point, but that it eluded capture in a display of inhuman strength and "the slippery nature of its body"—a quality it shared with the Malaysian *orang minyak* or "oily man" who became a focus of mass hysteria in the 1960s.

Descriptions of *El uñado* ranged from a Springheel Jack-like figure, draped in dark clothing and with its face covered by a mask, owing its name to a pair of black gloves with long metallic nails. This caused many to believe that the night stalker of Justo Daract was merely a teenager trying to act out his own variation of the character Wolverine from the movie *X-Men*, which had been a hit throughout Argentina.

Were people in this region superhero-happy? Yes, if other news accounts were to be believed. Another bizarre character, dubbed *El cuervo* (The Crow) due to its resemblance to the bird, had been reported in 2003. Yet many insisted on *El uñado*'s paranormal credentials, despite the words of the local priest. "If it is a supernatural force," cautioned Padre Fabián, "it would evidently be some game of the devil to con-

found people, since at this time of the year their attention should be fixed on Christ."

Manifestations of *El uñado* became fewer toward the end of April and vanished altogether in May. Did some local joker hang up his costume until the next bout of superhero mania graces the silver screen, or did the Clawed One return to the nether region that houses similar entities, like Springheel Jack and the Mattoon Gasser?

Roadside Apparitions

On Saturday, November 13, 1983, Eusebio Sánchez, 56, was returning to his home in the Spanish village of Vegas de Coria, walking alongside his mule with a cargo of cabbage. As he approached the bridge of Cruz de Animas, he noticed a shadowy figure creeping behind him. Unsure if it was one of his fellow villagers, Sánchez waited for the figure to come within range. It was entirely black, "tall and thin like a statue," with enormous arms. Ominously, the dark apparition asked him: "Don't you know me?" and proceeded to jump—à la Springheel Jack—across the bridge and into the night.

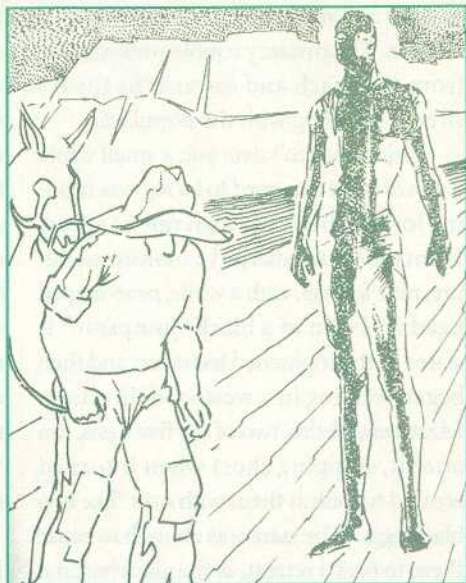
Vegas de Coria was in the grip of a supernatural phenomenon. The tiny village in the Extremadura region of Spain was barely a speck on the map, and far from any major city. Journalist and crack UFO investigator J. J. Benítez drove to Vegas de Coria in order to investigate the phenomenon first hand. The end result was a superb document entitled *La Quinta*

Columna (The fifth column), which appeared in 1990.

Sánchez was not the only witness to the dark figure's frightening maneuvers: Two days before, Nicolás Sánchez (no relation) was about to open the door to his house when he heard a moan issuing from the middle of the street. He turned to look and noticed a small black "bundle," as he described it. His curiosity piqued, he walked over to it. It was 9:45 p.m.

"When I was four or five steps away from it, that 'thing' began to grow, getting bigger. Before I knew it, I was standing in front of a figure some six feet tall or more, advancing toward me with a sound like the gnashing of teeth. I got goosebumps. I began walking backward a few meters, and the 'giant' followed me. Jesus! I was so scared I couldn't speak. I wanted to call out to my parents, but it was impossible. I still don't know where I found the courage from, but I crouched and picked up two stones from the house wall, one in each hand, and I was willing to defend myself. I never got to raise my arms, though: just as I was about to hurl the stones, I shouted, 'Take this, Satan!' and the creature stopped. It did an about-face and headed up the road. Before it went out of sight, there was a large, lightning-like flash, which made no sense, since the weather was good."

All of this coincided with an outbreak of UFO sightings and landings in well over a dozen locations throughout Spain, in-



The Vegas de Coria incident.

Courtesy J. J. Benítez

cluding a sensitive military installation on the straits of Gibraltar. Benítez went on to examine other UFO-related monster sightings elsewhere in Spain, such as an electrifying sighting on the beaches of Conil, not far from the city of Cádiz, in October of 1989: A group of teenagers on the beach one early evening witnessed in terror the sudden appearance of two majestic, luminous figures after having observed the maneuvers of UFOs in the skies above them. The teenagers ran away in panic, regrouping some 30 meters away from the entities, which proceeded to transmute into a human male and female, dressed in street clothes. Through the aid of binoculars, the teens were able to observe the transfor-

curred in the Dominican Republic.

The locality of Barahona, a small town in the Caribbean nation's sugarcane producing region, was beset by two terrifying entities that were allegedly responsible for a large number of mutilations of farm and domestic animals. In December 1978, a creature resembling a large black dog (similar to the "Black Shuck" of Great Britain) repeatedly mutilated small animals such as dogs, cats, chickens, and rabbits under cover of darkness and with chilling finesse: it made its way into chicken coops and pens, somehow opening the gates without destroying them. Local residents believed that the otherworldly creature had some sort of "intelligence" that allowed it to elude their best efforts at catching it.

In a matter of months, the murderous phantom dog was joined by an even more fearsome manifestation: a cadaverous being resembling a human female. Those who managed to see it closely noted that its face "appeared to be covered with cotton." (Some sort of ectoplasm?) The entity was blamed for a number of mutilations.

Barahona is almost on the border of voodoo-ridden Haiti, and it is, in fact, an area that has received much negative publicity in recent years on account of the suffering experienced by Haitian sugarcane cutters at the hands of Dominican taskmasters. Locals were much more willing to believe that the entities were the product of sorcerous lore than UFOs, even though the entire island happened to be

in the grip of a small "flap" for a number of weeks preceding and following the mutilations.

While Barahona was victimized by its two monsters, UFO occupants were seen in a suburb of Santo Domingo. Five women sitting on the porch one evening watched as a brilliant object in the sky fired two beams behind a nearby hill before disappearing. The women believed that it was an airplane, until they noticed two lights advancing toward them from the darkness. The lights turned out to be three conical humanoids with what appeared to be lanterns fastened to their chests.

The women began screaming for help, drawing the attention of other neighbors. In retaliation, the three creatures began to make loud noises "similar to the rapid opening and shutting of a metal door." By the time the nearest neighbor had responded to their call for help, the beings had disappeared.

In the same suburban area, a watchman was confronted by a robed, cat-eyed entity. With a prayer on his lips, the watchman swung his heavy machete at the thing, which tried to duck the blow and proceeded to vanish instantly. Startled by the unexpected outcome, the watchman proceeded to inspect the dark, wooded surroundings all by himself. Of such stuff are real heroes made. ✕

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ation and render accurate descriptions
ter on. The mystery couple walked away
om the beach and toward the town's
reets, mingling with the populace.

Things weren't over yet: a small white
atch of what appeared to be fog was head-
g for the shore at a high rate of speed.
om the cloud emerged a monstrous fig-
re, nine feet tall, with a white, pear-shaped
head and clad in a black "jumpsuit." It
ared at the frightened teenagers and then
egan walking in a westward direction.
izaro and Pedro, two of the five teens, ran
fter it, stopping short when it turned
round to look at them with eyes "like two
black eggs." The stare was enough to cause
men to beat a retreat, as the giant became
lost in the darkness. All the while, the
right-hued UFOs continued to execute
their aerial maneuvers. It would seem as
ough the sudden appearance of the nine-
foot tall giant was somehow geared toward
keeping the five witnesses from following
the creatures that turned into humans by
reinforcing their fear.

Monsters in the Dark Lagoon?

Puerto Rico, well known for its heavy
UFO activity from 1988 through the mid
0s, has also been a source of strange crea-
ture reports. While witchcraft is prac-
ced under many guises on the island, not
all the sightings are connected to the dark
arts. Some relate to the nocturnal activity
of UFOs: unusual birds, ranging from
pterodactyl-like creatures to small, fanged
predatory avians have been reported since

the 1970s, when the UFO activity began in
earnest. A 1988 report from the Laguna
Cartagena area stated that the witness saw
two humanoids "in what appeared to be
uniforms" guiding a large, hairy simian
being. The trio "disappeared into the
ground." Reports in a local tabloid, *El Vo-
cero*, point to the depredations of a "man-
drill" among the livestock of many farms
on different parts of the island, an expla-
nation sanctioned by the authorities as the
reason for the strange mutilations. It is
more than likely that the real culprit is a
"big hairy monster," as opposed to an itin-
erant mandrill.

Mexican investigator Dr. Rafael A.
Lara suggests in an issue of *Terra Incog-
nita*, the journal of the Center for the
Study of Paranormal Phenomena (CEFP),
that all monsters—ranging from the
BHMs to Nessie and the UFO monsters
seen by the adolescents at Conil—are lit-
tle more than "distortions of space-time
(which is to say, the past projected to
the present or the future to the present)." He
shares the opinion of other researchers
that these creatures could well be "ra-
tionalizations of the evil dwelling within
our unconscious." The big hairy monsters
have been identified by some Mexican re-
searchers with humans that were turned
into apes according the Aztec tradition in
another "age of the sun," which ended
with enormous winds destroying life on
earth.

Another outbreak of UFO-related
monsters that went largely unnoticed oc-

Bumps on the Time Track

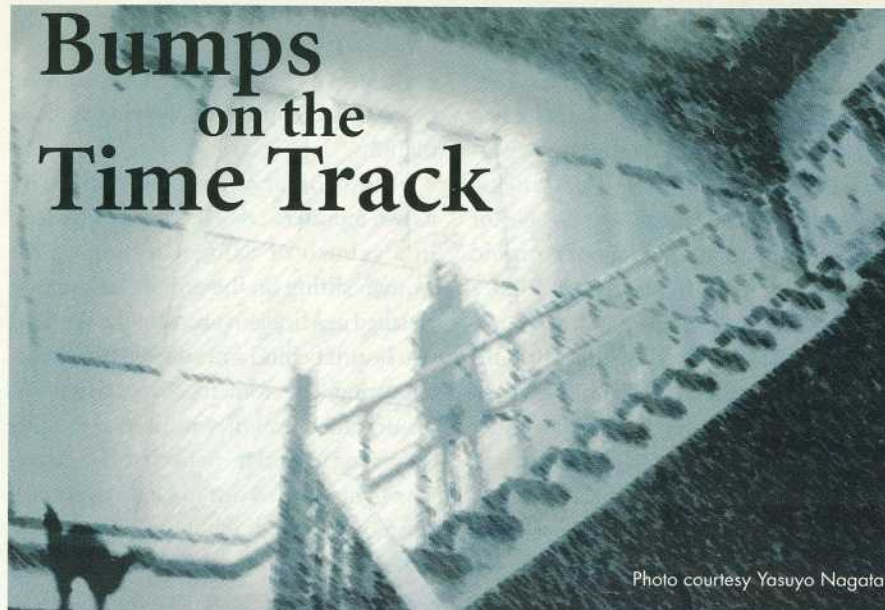


Photo courtesy Yasuyo Nagata

Did they encounter ghosts—or slips in time?

by Brad Steiger

Some years ago, a friend of mine from
Aurora, Illinois, told me of the time
that he had stayed overnight in a
haunted house on a dare from his
fraternity brothers.

"I was about to write to whole
thing off as the dulllest night in my life," Bill
said, "when I heard noises in the front hall-
way. At first I thought it was some of my
frat brothers sneaking around to scare me.
I stepped away from my sleeping bag in a
front room to come face-to-face with a
man in a belted smoking jacket about to
start up the stairs."

The man seemed as startled as Bill. He

blinked his eyes, shook his head as if to clear
his senses, then continued on his way up
the staircase.

"When he was almost at the top, the
man slowly turned around and looked
down at me. We had eye contact for sev-
eral seconds before the man resumed his
movement up the stairs and walked
through a wall."

Bill was confident that he had seen a
real ghost. Later he learned that there
had once been a door to a bedroom at
the very spot where the phantom had
walked through the wall.

I agreed that he may have seen a ghost,

but I suggested that Bill may also have briefly stepped into another dimension in time (possibly the early 1900s, judging by his description of the man's clothing) and encountered a former resident on his way to bed. Apparently, the startled gentleman in his era also saw a "ghost," and he may have talked for the rest of his life about the wraith of a tall, thin youth with shoulder-length hair and a beard that he encountered one night at the foot of the stairs.

In numerous cases that I have investigated, I have often wondered if the witnesses have truly encountered ghosts or if they suddenly stepped into a restored scene from the past—and for a time they, themselves, became "ghosts" out of time and space.

In other instances, witnesses may have met the spirit of someone who remains as attached to a place in death as he or she was in life, thus by will defying the mortal limitations of time and space.

Encounter in the Mountains

Neville, one of my correspondents from Australia, told me of the time when he took his friend Angie to see Mushroom Rocks, a place situated halfway up Mt. Erica in the state of Victoria:

"One has firstly to drive up a winding road to a parking area, then hike up a narrow pathway for another hour to reach the huge boulders of Mushroom Rocks. When we reached the parking area on the climb up the mount, we were surprised to see an early model car sitting parked to the side. I was driving a four-by-four,

and it was a difficult enough trip for me, yet this old model car managed to get up there apparently without a problem. I also noticed that the car was in pristine condition. It was raining that day and we had had several days of driving rain prior to that day—yet this car was totally clean."

Suddenly an elderly gentleman appeared just ahead of Neville and Angie on the walking path. He was dressed in a clean brown tweed suit and wore brown leather shoes. Neville remembered thinking how inappropriately his clothing seemed for a hike up to Mushroom Rocks.

"Angie and I were dressed for hiking in heavy boots, jackets, and hats, plus both of us were carrying backpacks and walking sticks. The hike ahead of us was treacherous, to say the least."

The elderly man in the brown tweed suit told the couple that he had just been to the dentist and had some teeth removed. He had decided to go on a hike in the mountains to help himself recover from the trauma.

"We were at least 40 miles from any dentist, way out in the forest, halfway up a mountain, yet here he was," Neville said. "Why would anyone who wanted to recover from a visit to the dentist travel so far in the bush and to such a strange place as this?"

The man then went on to advise Neville and Angie about the damage that the bad weather had done to the walking path, and he warned them about a tree that had fallen across the trail.

"I kept looking at his shoes and noted

just fine in Amarillo and that I should drive into town and take some time to look around."

Rick thanked her for the advice, and as he got up to leave, she followed him out to his car. "You'll do just fine in Amarillo," she said again. "You'll settle here for a good long while and you'll start a new life."

Touched by her motherly concern and inspired by her confidence, Rick drove into Amarillo. On his second day in the city, he got a great job with Bell Helicopter Company and he rented a house. The company was located at the Amarillo Airport off I-40 on the city's east side.

"After several weeks on the job, I decided one day that I would drive out to the diner and see the nice old woman who had been so kind and who had offered me so much encouragement when I needed it most. I wanted to thank her for her inspiration and tell her how things had worked out so great, just as she had predicted."

Since he had lived in Amarillo for quite some time at this point, Rick knew his way around the city. He drove east until he found the spur of old Route 66 where he knew the diner was located. At first he thought he had somehow missed the quaint diner with its antiquated gas pumps, so he drove about 20 miles east, then drove back again, looking for the place.

"All that I could find was an old road that had once been part of Route 66, but there were no structures left on it," Rick said.

Discouraged, Rick drove home. The next day at work, he asked a couple of friends who had grown up in Amarillo about the old diner east of town. Both of his friends agreed that there hadn't been any businesses open east of town since the early 1960s.

"I looked again and again, but I never found that diner and I never got to thank that sweet, cherubic old woman. I think, though, in some way, she knows how things turned out. I stayed in Amarillo for seven years, and I did start a new life."

Lost in the Museum

Dogma has no place in our investigations into the paranormal. Sometimes we encounter cases in which the witnesses themselves disappeared, reappeared, and may have encountered entities from another dimension in their sudden and unexpected journey. At this moment in time and space, no one can fully explain such experiences as the following:

In February 2004, Jean and her husband Bob stopped to visit a tourist attraction in a Midwestern city. They arrived at the small museum at 3:00 p.m., and they each went off in a different direction so that they might enjoy the displays at their own individual pace. Jean said that she had it timed mentally so she would be finished reading the placards and examining the exhibits by 5:00 p.m., just as the museum was closing.

As she neared the last of the exhibits, she was approached by a man dressed in a