

HUMANOIDET



erfolk ysteries



by Jerome Clark

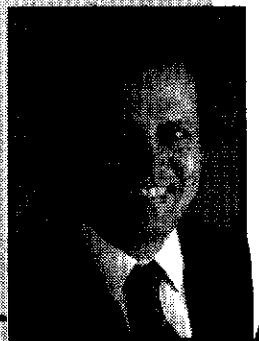
In 1723, in an effort to put a raging debate to rest, a Danish Royal Commission set out to solve a mystery. If the mystery proved to have a mundane explanation, anyone who contended otherwise could face legal penalties. The authorities of this Scandinavian nation had lost patience with a controversy that had gone on endlessly and annoyingly.

As it happened, the commission didn't get the explanation it expected. In the sea off the Faroe Islands north of Scotland, witnesses on the commission's ship saw the form of a male figure who, as the ship approached, sank beneath the water. It resurfaced soon afterward, glaring at the vessel's startled occupants. The ship pulled away, and the starrer puffed out his cheeks, roared, and dived beneath the surface, to be seen no more—at least by members of the Royal Commission. Now it was official, at least in Denmark: mermen and mermaids existed, and one could talk about or even see them with impunity.

Three decades later, in his classic, multi-volume *Natural History of Norway*, Bishop Erik Pontoppidan wrote, "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."

As a twentieth-century folklorist notes, among people of earlier centuries, belief in merfolk was "widespread and substantiated." Merfolk existed not just in rumors, ribald humor, and folktales but in actual sightings by persons whose testimony was regarded as credible. Sightings of such zoologically unlikely creatures are far rarer today (or at least reported far less often), but even as late as the first part of the nineteenth century they were recounted and discussed seriously in re-

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spected periodicals, including *American Journal of Science*.

All of this seems utterly incredible to us who, living in the 1990s, like to think we dwell in a world defined by reason and common sense, a world in no way like the magical place our unenlightened ancestors inhabited, where anything that could be imagined could be experienced. Indeed most merfolk lore can be characterized as imagination, and it presents no challenge to conventional understanding.

The lore of the fish-gods

The idea that the ocean harbors intelligent beings formed like humans to the waist and fish below goes back thousands of years. One of the first known expressions of this belief was found in Babylonia, whose people worshiped a god named Oannes, Lord of the Waters. Though he lived in the earthly sea, Oannes came from the "cosmic ocean," bringing with him knowledge which he used to teach and civilize the Babylonians. The remarkably interesting myths surrounding this fish-god have inspired speculators from celebrity-astronomer Carl Sagan to Sirius Mystery author Robert K.G. Temple to suggest that Oannes may have been an extraterrestrial visitor.

Be that as it may, Oannes and his wife Damkina, a fertility goddess, brought forth fish-tailed children who populated the world's waters. Fish-gods also figure in religious traditions from Syria, India, China, Greece, and Rome.

Even those who did

not think of such creatures as gods accepted them as real phenomena of the natural world. The first-century naturalist Pliny the Elder wrote of sightings made by coastal residents of "Nereides or Mermaids" sometimes "seen cast upon the sands, and lying dead." He asserted 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." Pliny's words indicate that even 2,000 years ago at least some people considered merfolk to be no more than "fabulous tales."

Merfolk are well represented in folklore the world over. The name by which we English-speakers know them comes from the Old English word for sea, *mere*. Sailors, of course, were more likely than anyone else to see them, but such encounters were dreaded because of a widespread belief that disaster, usually a deadly storm, would follow soon after.

The merfolk of tradition, usually female, are lovely but untrustworthy, even treacherous, creatures. Sometimes they can assume wholly human form and live among normal people, at least for a time, and folklore records many doomed marital unions between men and mermaids. Mermaids also are credited with achingly beautiful singing voices which so distract sailors that they crash their ships on the rocks and perish—a belief documented as early as Homer's *Odyssey*.

Merfolk in real life

Beliefs are one thing, experiences another. As a popular superstition, merfolk are a mere curiosity. As things allegedly seen, they are a considerably stranger, more puzzling question, and comprise a heresy of such enormity as to inspire little but laughter and ridicule. Those who have taken the trouble to examine the sightings, however, nearly all agree that they

deserve a hearing and call for an explanation. Marine biologists and folklorists have proposed several solutions to the mystery. We shall consider them later in this article.

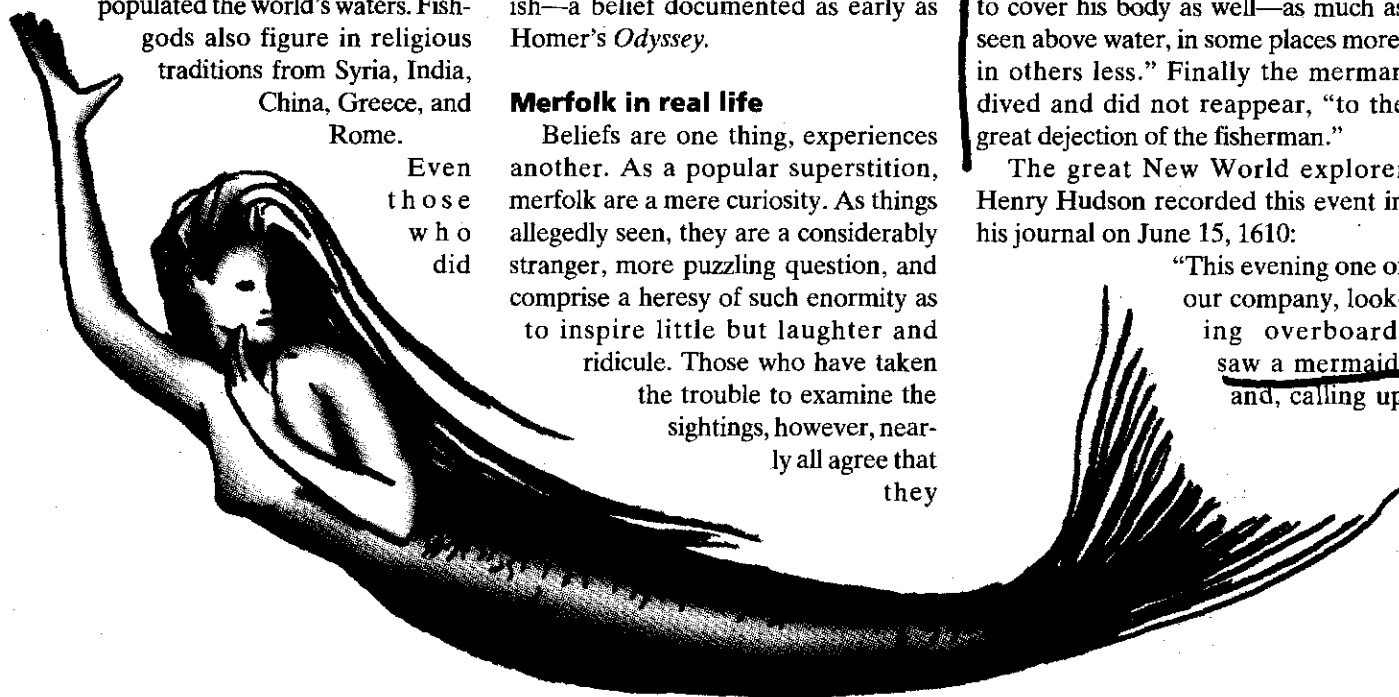
In 1610, as several small boats sailed into the harbor at St. John's, Newfoundland, their occupants saw something swimming in the water not far from them. Their captain, a man named Whitbourne, also saw it from the shore. He subsequently wrote that it looked like a "woman, by the Face, Eyes, Nose, Mouth, Earse, Necke and Forehead;" its lower half, however, was fishlike. When it tried to board one of the boats, a frightened crew member struck it on the head and drove it away. It stayed in the area for a while longer. The sight so terrified the sailors that they refused to land until it was gone.

According to a similar account from the same general period, a merman tried to climb into a boat on Casco Bay, off the coast of southern Maine. A contemporary chronicler reported that the boat's occupant, one Mr. Mitter, slashed off one of its arms, and it sank back into the ocean, "dying the waters purple with its blood."

Around the same time the crews of three French vessels off Nova Scotia chased and attempted to capture a merman. The captain of one of the ships noted that the creature "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." Finally the merman dived and did not reappear, "to the great dejection of the fisherman."

The great New World explorer Henry Hudson recorded this event 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."

This report fascinated Philip Gosse, an eminent Victorian naturalist, who remarked of it, "Seals and walrus must have been as familiar to these 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."

Merfolk in Scotland

Some of the most interesting merfolk reports have been made along the coasts of northern Scotland.

One of them took place on January 12, 1809, at Sandise, Caithness, in a remote area in that nation's northeast. The witnesses, two women, saw in the sea what they first took to be the face of a young woman, "round and plump and of a bright pink hue." It briefly vanished under the water, but on its reappearance they could see more of the upper part of its body, which had well-formed human breasts, thin white arms, and long green hair, which it continually tossed back.

Publication of this story in British newspapers caused something of a stir. One reader, William Munro, was inspired to write the *London Times*, which published his strange story 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 appear-

ance 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 shining brightly.

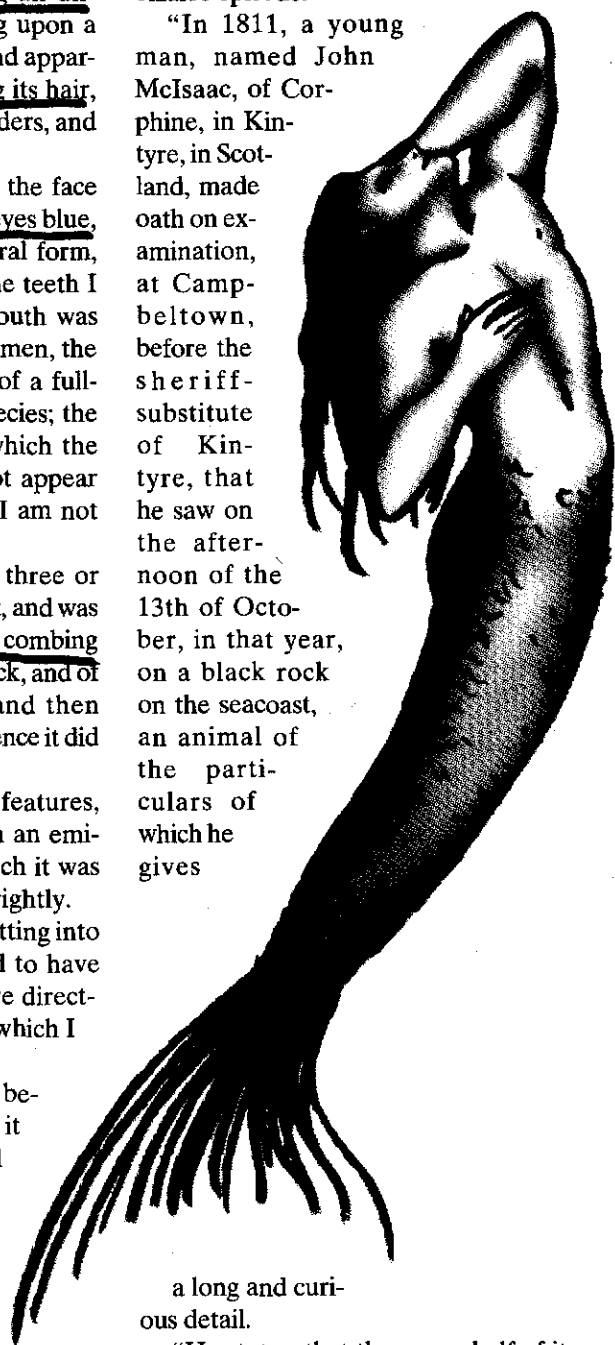
"Immediately before its getting into its natural element it seemed to have observed me, as the eyes were directed towards the eminence on which I stood...

"Previous 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 this phenomenon, I was perfectly convinced of its existence."

Naturally even the testimony of so credentialed and (presumably) sober an informant did not do much to change the disrepute into which merfolk had fallen in an age of rationalism, but there seemed no doubt that people were seeing something off Scotland's coasts. In the fall of 1822 the *London Mirror* ran a series of articles on merfolk sightings. Among those it reported was this

bizarre episode:

"In 1811, a young man, named John McIsaac, of Corphine, in Kintyre, in Scotland, made oath on examination, at Campbelltown, 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



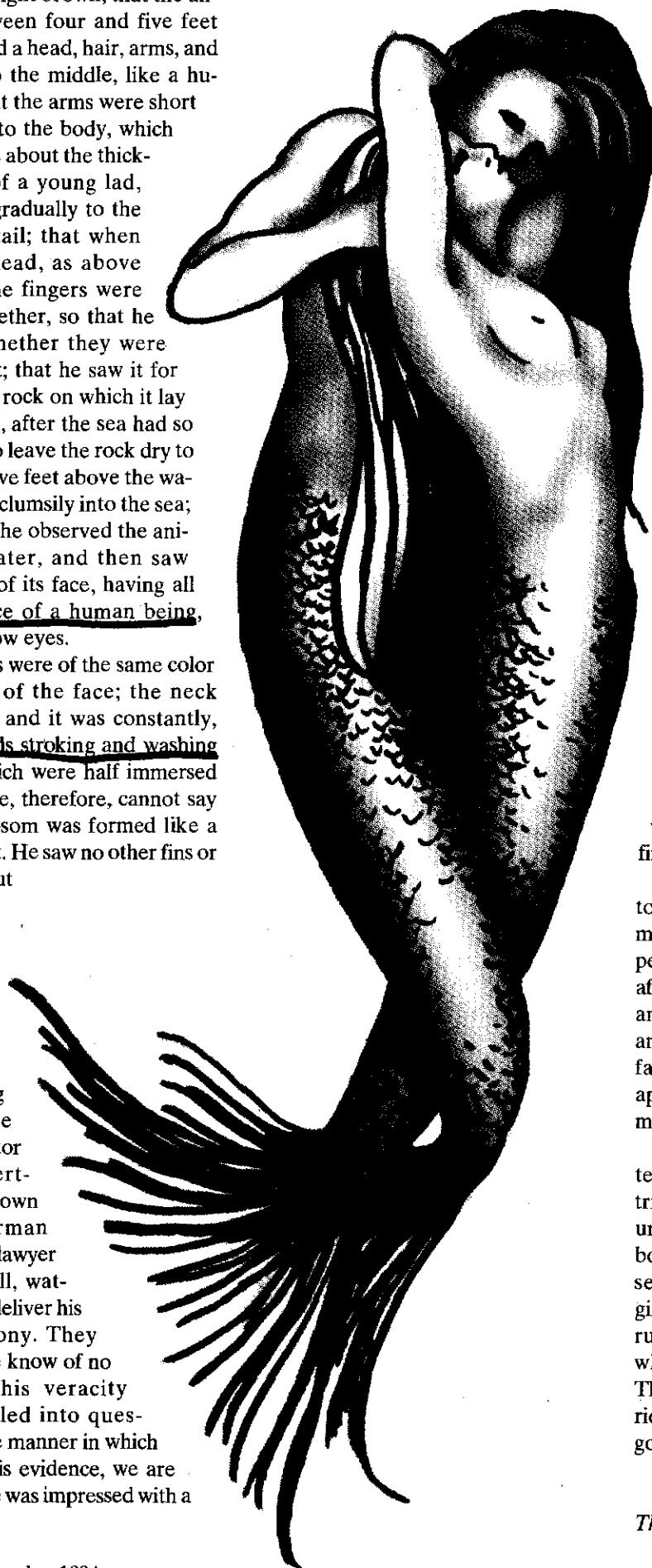
a long and curious detail.

"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-gray 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 minute 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 were 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 leading citizens, the Reverend Doctor George Robertson, Campbeltown minister Norman MacLeod, and lawyer James Maxwell, watched McIsaac deliver his sworn testimony. They 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."



Moreover, McIsaac's would not be the only report. On November 2 another individual, Katherine Loynachan, stated under oath in front of sheriff-substitute Duncan Campbell that on the afternoon of October 13, while herding cattle near the seashore, she observed a strange creature as it slid off a rock and dropped into the water, to resurface six yards out. It had dark long hair and white skin on its top half and was dark brown and fish-like on its lower half, according to Campbell's account of her testimony.

The creature, "...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..."

"After 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."

In defiance of what her senses were telling her, the dumfounded witness tried to persuade herself that the figure was a boy who had fallen out of a boat and needed rescuing. Campbell secured sworn testimony from the girl's father, who related that she had run home to tell of the strange boy who was swimming near the shore. The father, mother, and daughter hurried to the site, but by the time they got there, the figure was gone. ■

This is Part One of a two-part article.

HUMANOIDES Merfolk Mysteries



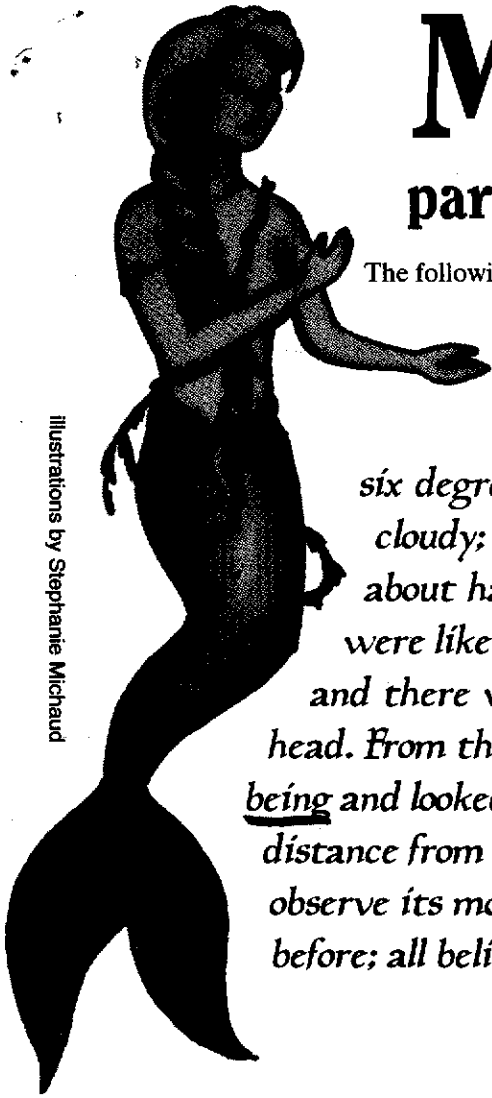
part II

by Jerome Clark

The following account was published in an 1820 issue of the *American of 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, six 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.

Illustrations by Stephanie Michaud



"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, 10 or 15 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."

A detailed account of a merman sighting in Wales was published in a book titled *A Tour to Milford Haven in the Year 1791*, based on the author's interview with the witness, Henry Reynolds, described as a "simple farmer," held by all who knew him to be a truthful man. The incident allegedly occurred in late December 1782, when Reynolds happened to be passing along the cliffs that bordered his land, and he saw the upper half of a young man in the water at the west end of the bay.

Surprised to see someone in such deep water, he walked closer to investigate. On inspection he saw something immediately under the figure and thought for a moment that it was sitting in a tub. A second look revealed that the tub was a tail. The human half resembled a 16- to 18-year-old with "very white skin." The book's author, who signed herself Mrs. Morgan, paraphrased what Reynolds told her and a local physician, George Phillips:

"From the bottom there went down a tail much resembling that of a large Conger eel. Its tail in deep water was straight downwards, but in shallow water it would turn it on one side. The tail was continually moving in a circular manner. The form of its body and arms was entirely human, but its arms and hands seemed rather thick and short in proportion to its body. The form of the head, and all the features of the face, were human also, but the nose rose high between its eyes, was pretty long, and seemed to terminate very sharp.

"Its head was white like its body, without hair; but from its forehead there arose a brownish substance, of three or four fingers breadth, which turned up over its head, or neck, or back, for the creature lifted it up from its neck and washed under it. It washed frequently under its arms and about its body. It swam about the bay, and particularly round a little rock which Reynolds was within 10 or 12 yards of.

"He stayed about an hour looking at it. It was so near to him, that he could perceive its motion through the water was very rapid, and that, when it turned, it put one hand into the water, all the time he [Reynolds] was looking at it. It looked attentively at him and the cliffs, and seemed to take great notice of the birds flying over its head. Its looks were wild and fierce; but it made no noise, nor did it grin, or in any way distort its face. When he left it, it was almost [a] hundred yards from him; and when he returned with some others to look at it, it was gone."

A straightforward account of the capture of a mermaid appeared as late as 1839 in Robert Hamilton's *History of the Whales and Seals*. Hamilton had the story from a Mr. Edmonston, "a well-known and intelligent observer," who had communicated it to the author, a professor of natural history at Edinburgh University. The incident supposedly occurred in 1833, when six Shetland fishermen untangled a mermaid from nets which they had cast in the waters off the island of Yell.

Later Edmonston interviewed the captain and a crew member, from whom he learned that the creature was three feet long and its face and neck were monkey-like in appearance—a far cry from the standard beautiful mermaid. The fingers, attached to small arms which the creature kept folded across its breast, were unwebbed. It had no gills, fins, scales, or hair, though a "few stiff bristles were on the top of the head, extending down to the shoulders, and these it could erect and depress at pleasure, something like a crest." The bottom part resembled a fish.

The creature never uttered an intelligible word, but its plaintive,

ceaseless moans so unnerved the fishermen that after three hours they put it back into the water and watched it dive "in a perpendicular direction." Edmonston told Hamilton, "Not one of the six men dreamed of a doubt of its being a mermaid...[T]he usual resources of skepticism that the seals and other sea-animals appearing under certain circumstances operating upon an excited imagination and so producing ocular illusion cannot avail here. It is quite impossible that six Shetland fishermen could commit such a mistake."

Sightings of merfolk off the coasts of Scotland and surrounding islands continued well into the 20th century.

Merfolk explained

If merfolk are marvelous, as zoological entities they are preposterous. Moreover, would-be believers have to explain why specimens of such creatures—that dwell, according to reports, at least part of the time in shallow water and whose bodies would thus wash up on shore—have not long since been studied and classified by marine biologists. Or have they?

A number of zoologists and folklorists have conceded what ought to be obvious—that the sighting reports demand some sort of explanation. None of them argues that every report is a hoax or a joke.

Any effort to understand what is being seen is seriously limited by the unhappy fact that most of the reports known to us are old and the witnesses are long dead. Few were satisfactorily investigated at the time of their occurrence. On the plus side, we have sworn statements, some detailed, but even these cannot answer all the questions a modern inquirer would pose. After all, what is being proposed here is as fantastic as anything one can imagine, and the resolution of the question demands the best possible evidence.

In the absence of such evidence, we can only speculate from a few thin, suggestive items. In our time only one serious probe into ongoing mermaid sightings

has

been conducted. We shall consider the results shortly.

Most zoological writers on merfolk sightings lay them to sea cows, manatees, and dugongs that, as Richard Carrington theorizes in *Mermaids and Mastodons* (1957), "became 'transformed' into a mermaid by the expectant attention of the superstitious mariners who saw it."

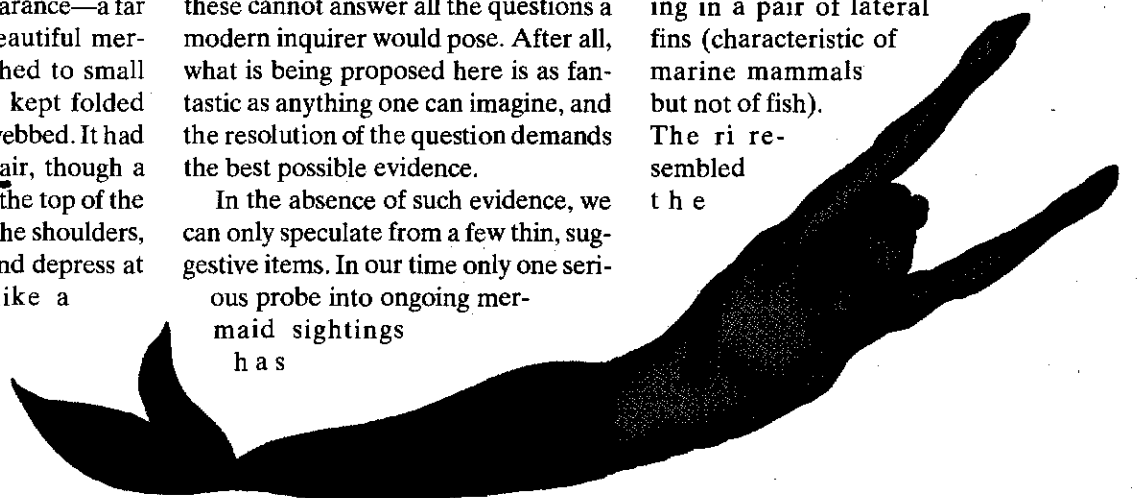
Carrington's theory has the virtue of being testable, but it falls woefully short in practice. Folklorists Gwen Benwell and Arthur Waugh, authors of the best modern book on merfolk beliefs, *Sea Enchantress* (1965), found that nearly three-quarters of the sightings took place far from areas where sea cows, manatees, and dugongs live.

Benwell and Waugh also question the sorts of mammoth perceptual errors theorists such as Carrington envision. These may work in some distant sightings but do not do much to explain the close-range, extended observations. "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," they argue.

A modern investigation

While doing field work in Papua, New Guinea's New Ireland province in the late 1970s, University of Virginia anthropologist Roy Wagner learned of a strange creature called the *ri* (pronounced ree). Native informants told him that the animals—not regarded as intelligent beings—looked like humans down to the waist, with the legless lower trunk ending in a pair of lateral fins (characteristic of marine mammals but not of fish). The *ri* resembled

the



mermaids on tuna fish cans, local people said. On one occasion Wagner observed a "long, dark body swimming at the surface horizontally." His companions informed him he had seen a ri.

New Guinea's ri

Reporting on this strange matter in the 1982 issue of *Cryptozoology*, Wagner discounted one proposed explanation: that the ri were dugongs. In 1983 he returned to New Ireland as part of an expedition sponsored by the International Society of Cryptozoology (ISC). The investigators saw a ri and tried unsuccessfully to capture it. Though they did not get a close look at it, its unusual diving pattern led them to doubt it was a dugong.

In February 1985 another ISC expedition managed to obtain a clear underwater picture of a ri. It was a dugong. Interestingly, Papua residents who lived up the coast from New Ireland had always considered ri just another name for dugong, even as their southern neighbors claimed they were two unrelated kinds of animals. Expedition member Thomas R. Williams was left to ponder the perplexing question of "how myths of merfolk can arise and persist in the face of the obvious reality of the dugong."

How far can we generalize from this one episode? Does it permit us to assume that eyewitness testimony everywhere is similarly meaningless?

Probably not. An ingenious investigation, conducted by scientists W. H. Lehn and I. Schroeder and published in *Nature* (289, 1981), came to an opposite conclusion—eyewitness testimony in merfolk sightings may be amazingly accurate. As they surveyed Norse merman sightings, Lehn and Schroeder treated with great respect the testimony of the experienced sailors who made them. That testimony enabled them to establish what caused the sightings: distortions from a "moderate [atmospheric] inversion" which made killer whales, walruses, and jutting rocks look much like what the sailors reported seeing.

In short, the small amount of empirical investigation thus far brought to bear on the question of merfolk sightings has shown us that 1) eyewitness tes-

timony can be wildly unreliable, or 2) it can be startlingly reliable.

We ought also to give serious consideration to those close-up, extended merfolk observations that could not possibly have resulted from optical effects. After all, if someone can describe an atmospheric inversion accurately, could he or she not also give a good description upon encountering a genuinely unknown animal?

Merfolk experienced

To those who would prefer not to answer this question in the affirmative, French folklorist Michel Meurger provides an out. Deriding scientific explanations of merfolk sightings as naive, he says such things are

"visionary experiences," vivid hallucinations that take their contents from images suggested by popular superstition. Unfortunately such conjecture is stretched to the breaking point when it is applied to multiple-witness testimony.

Meurger also misses one of the most intriguing aspects of merfolkery, namely that the merfolk of experience is not the same entity as the merfolk of legend. The merfolk described by those who have sighted them are devoid of magical powers and neither speak nor interact intellectually, emotionally, or romantically with humans. In fact, to all appearances they possess no more than an animal's level of intelligence. Were it not for its bizarre appearance, so similar to our own, it would be an unremarkable resident of the

ocean, no more noticeable than any of the other large marine mammals.

Of course there is no way to overlook that bizarre appearance, which alone discourages any further consideration of the possibility that merfolk exist in a conventional sense. Still, some brave writers have made the attempt to convince us.

Do merfolk really exist?

After once refusing even to consider merfolk reports, Bernard Heuvelmans, the father of cryptozoology and the world's foremost authority on unknown animals, eventually relented when faced with the huge number of eyewitness accounts.

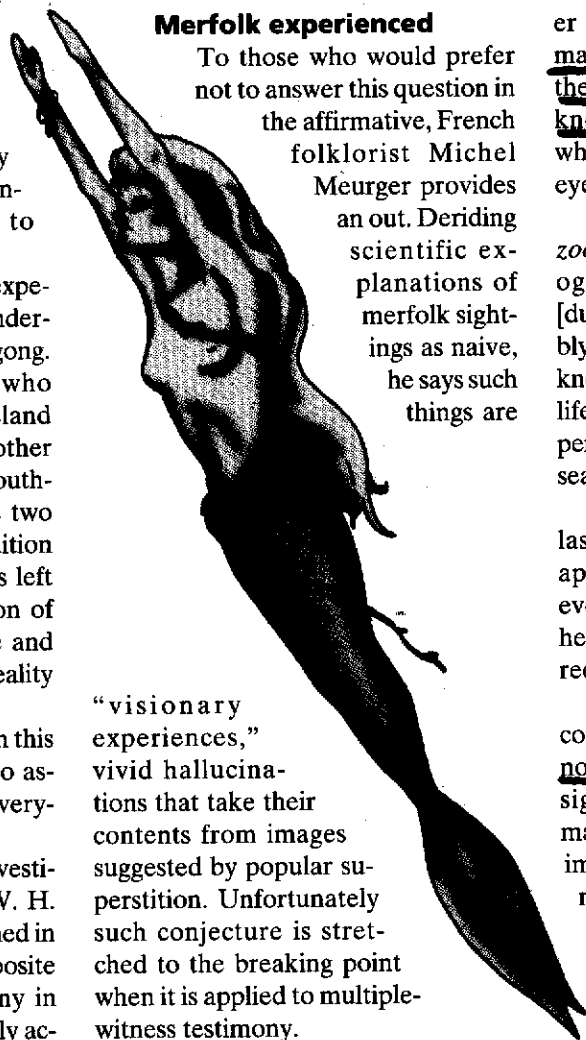
In a 1986 paper published in *Cryptozoology*, he wrote, "Only a still-unrecognized species of recent Sirenia [dugongs, manatees, sea cows], or possibly—though much less likely—an unknown form of primate adapted to sea-life, could explain the abundance and persistence of merfolk reports in certain seas up to modern times."

Benwell and Waugh favored this last explanation, apparently without appreciating its improbability. Still, even the skeptic cannot help thinking here of the Shetland fishermen's story recounted above.

But unverified anecdotes about recovered merfolk, living or dead, aside, no physical evidence corroborates the sightings, however impressive they may sound, or proves the reality of animals that absurdly fuse fish and human features. If such things shared the oceanic parts of our world with us, we would have physical proof and know about them as certainly as we know about whales and giant squids.

We still have not explained everything. Perhaps questions remain only because real efforts to provide answers—through on-site investigations of sightings—have been rare, and fear of ridicule has kept modern sighters silent.

Perhaps the problem is the nature of the question. Some aspects of experience are so peculiar that they resist efforts to rationalize them into conformity with current—or even imaginable—knowledge. ■



The Search for Ancient Aquanauts

by Harry Lebelson



A GLIMPSE of another world may lie hidden among the myths of our earliest civilizations. A number of scientists and authors have been exploring these myths in detail. Although the investigations give little credence to ancient myths as proof of ETI contact, they confirm such tales as the Sumerian legend of the Oannes. These fish-like beings, resembling men, visited the ancient cultures from time to time over a span of 1,500 years.

Berosus, a priest who lived in the city of Babylon during the reign of Alexander the Great, preserved for posterity accounts of early Babylonia (Sumeria) and the visitations of the



Dale Russell's
'Dinosauroid'

Oannes. In his documents, Berosus recalls that "There made its appearance from the Persian Gulf during an early time in Babylonian history, an animal endowed with reason, called 'Oannes'." The historian went on to describe the animal as fish-like: "The whole body was like that of a fish, with a fish head and the feet of a man joined to a fish tail. Its voice, too, and language were articulate and human." This being, the priest claimed, was amphibious: "It conversed with men in the daytime; when the sun set, it would plunge into the sea and remain there for the night."

Berosus tells how the population at that time was primitive and, until the Oannes came, lived like beasts of the field. The Oannes were described as teachers who gave the people insight into letters, the sciences and art. Referring to cuneiform and pictographic records compiled several thousand years before his time, Berosus describes how the Oannes taught the people to found temples and codify laws; they taught the principles of geometrical knowledge and "everything to humanize mankind," as Berosus put it.

Carl Sagan seems in agreement with this ancient documentation: "I support the contention that a major cultural change did take place with the advent of the Oannes," says the Cornell astronomer.

Existing records show that in addition to the Oannes, Berosus chronicled the appearance of a succession of sea creatures over the course of several generations. Sagan goes on to say in his book *Intelligent Life in the Universe*, that "these beings were interested in instructing mankind. Each knew the mission and accomplishments of his predecessors. When a great inundation threatens the survival of this knowledge, steps are taken to insure its preservation. Thereby, the access of Berosus to antediluvian records is formally explained."

As far back as 1966, concepts regarding the existence of amphibious beings with high intelligence were being considered by some serious



Composite Model
'Aquanaut'

scholars. In their book *Intelligence in the Universe*, Roger MacGowan and Frederick Ordway state that humans, being land animals, tend to think in terms of land animals when considering intelligence. "A liquid environment," claim the authors, "provides more buoyancy and support for animal bodies than does atmospheric gas. For this reason, a marine environment may be expected to develop many species that are larger than most land-animal species." They propose that if larger bodies can support larger brains, one might expect to find superior intelligence among larger marine animals. MacGowan and Ordway are tempted to

assume that because of the potential for larger size, the great variety of life, the stable environment of the oceans and the competition among species, most intelligent extrasolar life may be marine as opposed to land-dwelling.

Why should these creatures have come from the sea? Dr. Dale Russell, curator of fossil vertebrates at the National Museum of Canada, Ottawa, offers some observations about the evolution of non-human intelligence. "Perhaps high intelligence may be a natural result wherever life evolves in the universe, and maybe man's general body form is no accident," he speculates. Russell goes so far as to suggest that man could have evolved from a species of dinosaur, had dinosaurs not become extinct.

If, in fact, these creatures did evolve as fish-like beings, perhaps they found our planet hospitable, since 90 percent of it is covered by ocean.

Robert Temple, author of *The Sirius Mystery*, supports the theory that earth may have been visited by intelligent beings from the stars, though he can't say for sure whether we were visited by survivors of an aquatic planet whose sun went supernova. He does confirm that he has found certain startling myths in the ancients' view of the universe.

In *The Sirius Mystery*, he explores the origin of the Legend of the Nommos—those intelligent amphibious creatures allegedly come from the Sirius star system to set up society here on earth. This ancient myth had been handed down orally from generation to generation among members of the Dogon tribe in Mali, West Africa. In his book, Temple credits responsibility for the preservation and recent resurrection of the tale to two French anthropologists, Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen. In an article published in the French anthropological journal, *Journal de la Societe des Africanistes* in 1950 entitled "A Sudanese Sirius System" (referring to the French Sudan area of that time), the anthropologists reported on four Sudanese tribes which had information about the Sirius star system so specific that it seemed impossible for any primitive tribe to know. The tribes were the Dogon in Bandiagara, the Bambara and the Bozo in Segou, and the Mirianka in Koutiala. The main investigations,

however, were carried out among the Dogon people between 1946 and 1950 when four major informants (priests of the Dogon) were interviewed.

"The Dogon legacy imparted to Griaule and Dieterlen is primarily oral, though there are many related physical objects which constitute important physical evidence," states Temple. He notes that the Dogon had a system of 11,616 written ideogrammatic signs to express concepts and things, which they used with immense subtlety and complexity. The Dogon did not, however, use written characters to represent sounds or to form sentences.

The Dogon's most secret religious tradition was their knowledge of the Sirius star system. It consisted of Sirius A, presently the brightest star in the sky; Sirius B, a white dwarf and the tiniest form of visible star in the universe; and the possible presence of a Sirius C (its existence has yet to be proven). The anthropologists, in recording the Dogon beliefs, make clear that the bright star of Sirius A is not as important to the Dogon as the tiny Sirius B: this star, named Digitaria by the tribes, is claimed to be the home of the amphibious beings called "Nommos."

Temple points out how the Dogon compared the heavenly motions within our Milky Way to the circulation of the blood. The planets and their companion bodies were considered the blood; how they traveled around each other was symbolically thought to be the circulation. The African tribesmen likened both the star system of Sirius and our own solar system to a cosmic placenta. Our solar system is referred to as 'Ogo's placenta', the word Ogo meaning "the fox" or impure earth. Sirius and its companion stars are referred to as 'Nommo's placenta', Nommo being the collective name for those amphibious creatures who set up society on earth and who thus became the traditional equivalents of the Sumerian/Babylonian Oannes. The landing of the Nommo on our earth is called 'the day of the fish', and the planet they came from in the Sirius system is known as the (pure) earth of the day of the fish . . . not (our) impure earth.

"Their religious beliefs tell how Ogo represents man in all his cosmic impurity, and how Nommo came to earth, crushed the fox (Ogo-man) and

ended feudal development, leaving the best elements of civilization in its wake for us to possess," says Temple. According to the legend, the Nommo will once again come to earth and study the progress made by mankind. These native beliefs were among those recorded by Griaule and Dieterlen along with other astronomical and scientific theories. Some of the information revealed a native perception of the earth and the solar system so advanced as to defy explanation. The Dogon knew that the earth turns on its axis, revolves around the sun, has a calendar year of 12 months, and that 365 days go to make up one calendar year.

In addition to their scholarly article, "A Sudanese Sirius System," anthropologists Griaule and Dieterlen produced a book-length publication, "The Pale Fox," published in Paris in 1965. Their joint findings do not draw any definitive conclusions of extraterrestrial contact with the Dogon but merely suggest the possibility. In *Le Renard Pale* (The Pale Fox), they discuss in detail Dogon belief and knowledge as it relates to astronomy and the Sirius system. The Dogon also recounted to the anthropologists specialized data regarding the nature of the planets in our solar system and the coming to earth of the Nommos. Temple, in *The Sirius Mystery*, confirms the accuracy of that information: "Of the moon, they say it is dry and dead, they know Saturn has a ring around it and that the planets are stars that turn around something." He adds that the descriptions given these scholars as to the Nommos' descent to earth were reminiscent of a large object with a thunderous exhaust leaving in its wake a whirlwind of dust and dirt. "The violence of the impact roughened the ground as it skidded along," the Dogon noted as they likened the noise to "the echoing of four large stone blocks being struck with stones by our children." The ark or object landed on the earth north-east of Dogon country, in the direction of Egypt and the Middle East.

The tribesmen also spoke of the Sigi ceremony: Identified by the Kanaga sign, in the form of our letter H, the sixty-year ritual celebrated the re-creation of the world by the

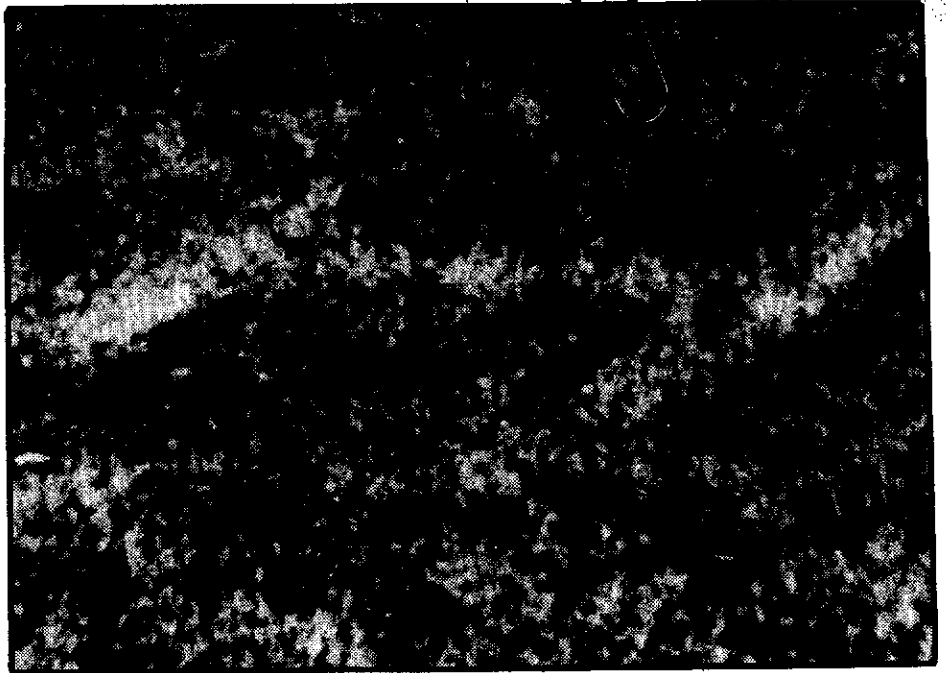
Harry Lebelson is well known to Pursuit readers for his frequent contributions to OMNI magazine.

in the Dogon god Amma and the instructions of that world by Nommo, his son. Robert Temple implies that the knowledge of such a cycle attests to a continuing tradition of observation by a priesthood with astronomical inclinations. He then details the influence and importance of the Sirius star system to Egyptian culture as evidenced by the Egyptian calendar with its "star clocks" or risings of the stars by which the months, weeks and days were counted. The main focus of attention, Sirius, formed the basis of this calendar, with the last star of the constellation Orion rising above the horizon one hour before Sirius.

Orion also became significant in Egyptian mythology and religion; it was the companion of both Sirius and the constellation of the Great Dog of which Sirius was a part. "If Orion was the companion of Sirius," Temple reasons, "it could then be considered interchangeable with Osiris, a known companion of Isis, and chief Egyptian god." This information was ascertained through Profs. Otto Neugebauer and Richard Parker, co-authors of *Egyptian Astronomical Texts*, who identified the star Sirius with the famous goddess Isis. Temple continues: "We know that the 'companion of Sirius' is in reality Sirius B; therefore, it is conceivable that Osiris-as-Orion, 'the companion of Sirius', is a stand-in for the invisible true-companion Sirius B."

Professor Wallis Budge, an Egyptologist, tells us in *The Sirius Mystery* that the oldest and simplest form of the name Osiris is a hieroglyph of a throne and an eye, the eye positioned either above or below the throne or seat. This interpretation by the Egyptians views Sirius B or Osiris as revolving around Isis or Sirius A. The Bozo tribe in Mali, one of the four interviewed by anthropologists Griaule and Dieterlen, related that Sirius B was known to them as the eye star; they also described Sirius A as seated. What they said parallels the findings of Professor Budge and, according to Robert Temple, seems to indicate that "the Sumerians from whom the Dogon inherited their information about Sirius, and the ancient Egyptians, derived their primeval gods from some common but exceedingly ancient source which could not have been the result of borrowing."

Professor Budge refers also to ancient Egyptian texts which speak of



UFO 'imprint' at Mulhouse-Riedisheim, France, 1971

holy emanations coming from Sirius and Orion which vivify gods, men, cattle and creeping things, and are a pouring-out of the seed of the soul. Temple says the Dogon express the same thing in almost precisely the same terms: "To them the seed which energizes the world pours forth from the Sirius system."

Scholar Zecharia Sitchin, like Robert Temple, attempts to go beyond unanswered speculation to show that the earth has been visited by advanced beings from another planet. In his book *The 12th Planet* he attempts to decipher clues left by ancient Sumerian texts, the Bible, and Mesopotamian legends. His analysis of these documents and the ultimate conclusion of his book suggest that the earth was settled by the 'Nefilim' or eagle-men, anthropomorphic beings wearing uniforms, who brought civilization to the planet in the area known to us as ancient Mesopotamia. Sitchin uses these sources to show how the beings came to earth from a planet as yet undiscovered. While Sitchin, with over 30 years of scholarship behind him, advocates visitation to earth by astronauts from another planet, Sagan and Temple cautiously present their information in an atmosphere of reserved skepticism.

"A lot of people who will enthusiastically receive my researches with open arms are the sort of people one least wants to be classed with," states Temple. "That doesn't bother

me, though. There's still a lot about ancient history that we don't know." Interestingly, certain patterns associated with the Oannes and Nommos mythology persist in contemporary reports and in the media:

► In 1971, on a grassy field at Mulhouse-Riedisheim, France, a large circular imprint with the letter H inside it was found burned into the grass shortly after a rumored UFO sighting. (See photo above.)

► It was during the evening of October 17, 1973 that Early Patterson, a Vietnam vet residing in Eupora, Mississippi, claimed an encounter with a UFO. At the intersection of Highway 82 and Grady Crossing the witness observed an object lying across the highway obstructing traffic in all directions. Patterson's automobile, with its electrical system dead, came to a stop less than 300 feet from the object, described as resembling a coffee cup and saucer, or saucer with a bubble top. From the bubble a fish-like creature emerged. Early Patterson described the creature as having the head of a catfish with a large suction-type mouth breathing air. Its arms tapered down to accommodate two fins instead of hands. The being's tight greenish-blue skin covered a human-like torso with two legs ending in webbed feet. Patterson was not the only witness; six people in the automobile directly behind him also glimpsed the phenomenon. The

creature was in view for approximately five minutes before reappearing inside the object and leaving the area. [Later

the same evening, witness Patterson was interviewed by Jack King, manager of radio station WROB, West

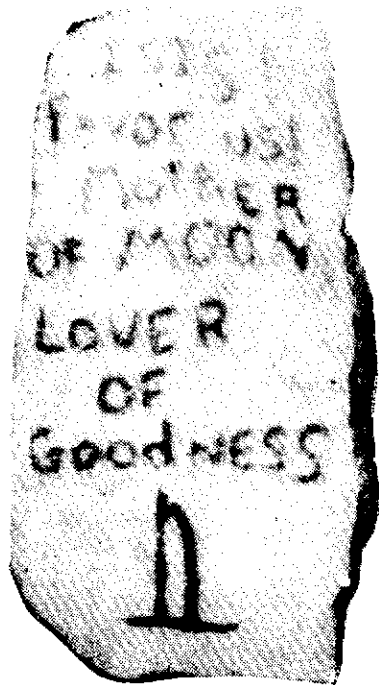
Point, Mississippi. A verbatim transcript of the broadcast is printed in adjacent columns. —Ed.]



► On December 15, 1974 at 12:30 p.m., Jorma Viita, a shipyard worker, walking in an open field near his home in Odense, Denmark, spotted and

photographed an unidentified flying object at a distance of 350 meters. The object bore a mark or symbol on its underside similar to the letter H with a

vertical line through the crossbar. On a previous occasion, Viita photographed two similar objects with identical markings.



► On April 14, 1976, in a remote area visited by law officers who were investigating a rash of cattle mutilations in north-central Montana, stones were found bearing strange inscriptions. These stones, along with smaller rocks, landscaped a pit 61 feet in circumference. The pit was believed to have been used as a ceremonial site by cultists. The largest stone slab bore the inscription "ISIS! FAVOR US!

MOTHER OF MOON, LOVER OF GOODNESS." Beneath this inscription was a drawing of the ancient symbol of Isis, the throne or seat. Adding to this bizarre find was the report, at that time, by an Idaho forest ranger of two strange hooded figures dressed in black robes, seen in a heavily forested area carrying a bag. The ranger noted that the hoods of both robes were pointed and had a partial opening. He was unable to get a look at their faces; as they walked, they continually looked straight ahead, never once turning their heads.

The Cascade County sheriff's office in Great Falls, Montana, received numerous letters and suggestions as to the possible cause of the cattle mutilations. One such letter, from a Ma-comb, Illinois, psychic, proposed a scenario similar to that presented by Robert Temple and hinted at by Carl Sagan in their respective books. The psychic claimed to be in touch with beings from a UFO who claimed responsibility for the cattle mutilations. He described them as purplish-black smooth-skinned, fish-like beings. Their mouths were like suction cups, the cheeks smooth but bony. Dressed in rubbery suits, they wore cloth-like capes over their heads and shoulders. Their gait was deliberate, head and shoulders moving simultaneously as if devoid of neck. They were here, the psychic asserted, to monitor the pro-

gress of mankind. Their mission was supposedly to be accomplished by obtaining specimens of our animal life, and also human beings.

This provocative sampling of events, along with others, stands as an outpost on the borderland of science. Even today, as anthropologists continue to discover possible new explanations for man's early acquisition of knowledge and development, much skepticism prevails.

More than 20 years ago British marine biologist Sir Alister Hardy proposed that man might be descended from an aquatic ape. Since that time, others have elaborated on Hardy's ideas. In a recent article about Alister Hardy in Science Digest magazine, author Lyall Watson suggests that there is plenty of room for an alternative explanation of evolution. He notes: "The fossils that decorate our family tree are so scarce that there are still more scientists than specimens." He also points out that all the physical evidence we have for human evolution can still be placed, with room to spare, inside a single coffin!

Even if it is proven that man is not descended from an aquatic ape, he may very well have been helped along the evolutionary road by aquatic beings from the stars.



HUMANOIDS

More Clues in the Search for Ancient Aquanauts

by Harry Lebelson

IN the previous article I mentioned two French anthropologists, Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlin, who suggested the possibility of prehistoric visitations to the Dogon tribe in Male, West Africa, by intelligent, amphibious extraterrestrial beings. These creatures, known as "Nommanes," were the equivalent of the Sumerian/Babylonian "Oannes," legendary fish-like beings somewhat resembling men. Recent research has uncovered additional documentation which indicates these cultures were not alone in experiencing alien contact.

In his book *Spacemen In The Ancient East*, W. Raymond Drake* draws evidence in support of these contentions from Tibet's Sacred Books of Dzyan, in which the Lhas of the High (known as the Dragons of Wisdom), interacted with men who had fish-like bodies. Tibetan history, veiled in myth and legend, describes the Lhas as ancient Asiatic "spirits" who built the Celestial City of Lhasa. The Lhasa of legend was located on a mysterious island in central Asia; it was inhabited by the "Sons of God" who worked magic and dominated Earth and Sky with wonders.

The ancient aquanaut theme persists amid much contemporary spec-

*Neville Spearman, London, 1968.

ulation about the possibility of extraterrestrial visitations by reptilian creatures. In an article titled "Life in Darwin's Universe," in the September 1979 issue of *Omni* magazine, author Gene Bylinsky tried, through a combination of biological and physiological methods, to examine the probabilities and improbabilities of the appearance that alien beings are likely to take. Among his conclusions: "If reptiles became a planet's dominant life form, there is no reason why they could not develop superior brains."

The famous Early Patterson encounter of October 17, 1973* involved much more than the ex-Vietnam pilot's description of a "thing" about 15 to 20 feet high, "shaped like a saucer and a coffee cup" which he said "filled up the highway from one side to the other and was hanging off the shoulder on both sides" of Rt. 82 near Eupora, Mississippi. Thousands of reports more or less like his have zapped across the airwaves and pulsed the world's phone lines periodically during three decades. What gave Patterson's sighting special significance was a second "thing" that "came out of the top" after the first "thing" landed: a creature about 6'3" tall that "looked like a catfish" from the waist up, had two arms with two hands that "looked like fish or seal fins" —and it had webbed feet! Most remarkable of all was the "one big eye in the center of the head" which, as Patterson put it, "glowed like a flashlight."

On a summer night in June 1970, tractor-trailer driver Chuck Henderson experienced a somewhat similar phenomenon. Henderson and his friend, Walter Harlock, both of Clinton, Iowa, were walking early one evening in a field known as Bulger's Hollow, close by the Mississippi River some four or five miles north of town, when they encountered a six-foot-tall humanoid creature.

"We had a head-on confrontation after the being walked up the riverbank and stood facing us at a distance of about ten feet," said Henderson. The creature had a large head with glowing red eyes and a slit for a mouth. It was broad-shouldered, had dark, dull-gray skin of a scaly nature

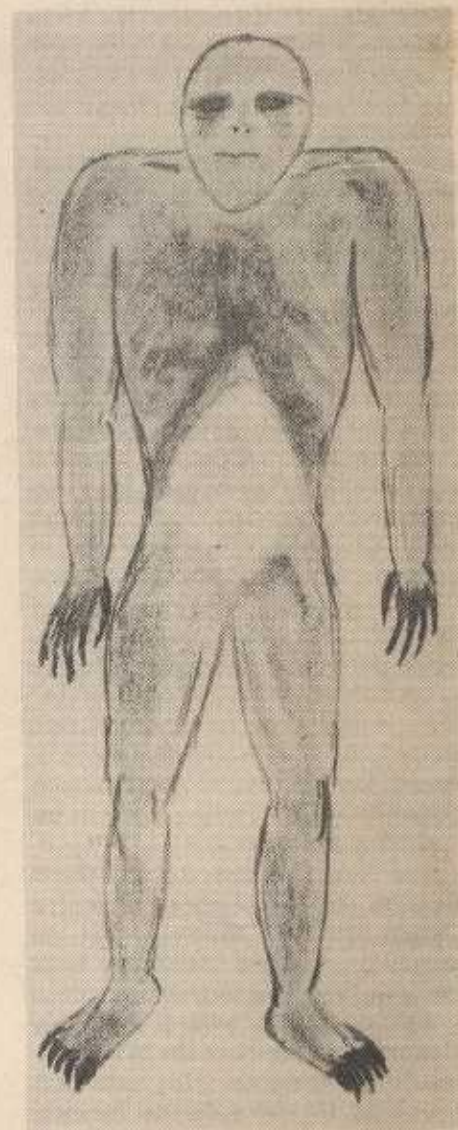
*Early Patterson described his encounter in detail in a taped interview with station manager Jack King at radio station WROB, West Point, Mississippi, a few hours after the sighting. A verbatim transcript of the tape was published in *Pursuit* No. 58, Second Quarter 1982, page 61.

A sequel to Harry Lebelson's article "The Search for Ancient Aquanauts," published in *Pursuit* No. 58, Second Quarter 1982, pages 57-61.



and appeared to weigh about 250 pounds. The creature stood facing the two startled men for approximately one minute, after which time it scampered down the embankment and disappeared into a wooded area along the river. Although no UFO was seen at the time of the encounter, reports of UFO activity had been circulating in the vicinity of Clinton for at least five years.

Petrified Forest National Park, which encompasses 93,493 acres of desert badlands in northern Arizona, is an apparently inexhaustible store-



From a distance of 10 feet the creature's eyes seemed to "glow."

house of new knowledge for paleontologists. During the summer of 1982 a team headed by Robert Long of the University of California, Berkeley, discovered three species of fossilized animal skeletons from the Triassic period previously unknown to science. One of the species was the *Placerias*, a mammal-like creature about the size of an adult rhinoceros. It had huge tusks, probably traveled in herds and is believed to be the largest plant-eating reptile ever to roam the Petrified Forest. Most notable were the creature's three eyes, one of which was conjectured to be a light-sensing organ located in the middle of its forehead. Whether the third eye had reflective qualities or "glowed like a flashlight" as did the one big eye seen by Early Patterson, we will never know; the tissue of *Placerias*'s eye dessicated eons ago. When asked to speculate, paleontologist Long replied: "I hesitate to guess the properties of the third eye of the *Placerias*. The delicate quality of its fossil pieces makes evaluation slow."

Biologists conjecture that highly intelligent, land-dwelling life-forms would possess a body shape with many humanoid features, regardless of the basic evolutionary stock. In his article "Probing the Cosmic Haystack" in the Canadian magazine *Equinox*, scientist Terence Dickinson reasons that a certain similarity should be evident among these life-forms because of the strong chemical and biological evidence for life-molecules everywhere in the universe being substantially the same size as life-molecules on Earth. He argues: "This is simply the best utilization of the key connecting-element carbon, which is the required link for life as we know it." Dickinson also believes that for a being to operate on land, there seems to be no effective alternative to paired, jointed legs and arms; muscles cannot be fully effective without an anchoring framework.

The late biologist Robert Bieri* thought that intelligence required a certain size. He believed that an animal must have a sufficiently large body to support a large brain. Small brains, he said, as evident in earthly creatures, do not have the brain connections necessary for abstract reasoning. He also notes that the location of the central nervous system and

*Quoted by Terence Dickinson



Modeled head of the *Placerias* showing the "third eye" centered in forehead.

the main sensory organs close to the brain has been the logical pattern of development for all higher forms of life on Earth; he sees an evolutionary advantage in having a head with the important things placed in it.

Another recurrent question posed by the Early Patterson report and other well-documented sightings has to do with the honeycombed structural design of the UFO. Patterson said: "It appeared to have a funny



Formerly described as exotic, fiberglass and other new-age substances are now formulated, fabricated and applied to maximize heat-loss from critical outside surfaces of air and space vehicles. Photo above shows honeycomb core of heat-resistant phenolic (HRP) fiberglass being removed from uncured adhesive. This type of fiberglass protects as it ventilates the sensitive electronic equipment inside the nose radome of most heavy aircraft, including the F-14.

look. It looked like a honeycomb effect with a spider web going all through it. It had all sharp-cut corners like a beehive effect all over." His description closely matches one given by Oscar Magocsi, a Canadian electronics technician who encountered a UFO while on vacation in 1975. He observed the pearl-gray honeycomb pattern throughout the craft and said it looked more like fiberglass than metal.

Do fish-like reptilian-type creatures really exist? Are there highly intelligent, amphibious, extraterrestrial beings here today, with sophisticated vehicles made of honeycomb-sandwich core material like that used in such military aircraft as the Navy's F-14? Or are the ancient myths and recent eyewitness accounts of alien visitations the recycled product of overcharged imaginations? Could the fish-like creature witnessed by Early Patterson have been a visiting counterpart of an earthly crewman dressed in protective gear?



Members of a nuclear accident control team dressed in protective gear for a training exercise at Fort Ord, California.

Was the vehicle from which the creature emerged perhaps a prototype U.S. military aircraft, forced by some (classified) malfunction to abort its test mission and make an emergency landing on a Mississippi highway?

It may be just as well that answers to these questions seem likely to develop slowly. We need time to ponder a suggestion from astronomer Robert Jastrow: "If in fact extraterrestrials do exist, perhaps occasionally they might look in on Earth to glimpse the latest tribal squabble and wonder when we will emerge to seek our place in the galactic community."