

MYSTERY FIRES

Feel the Heat

by Scott Corrales

As night settles over the Pampa—the vast expanse of Argentinean flatland that transcends the confines of the province named after it—strange sights are seen by those who make it their business to be up after dark: hunters lying in wait for large boars to appear out of the darkness, lonely truckers making their way along unlit roads to make much-needed deliveries in small towns, and farmers looking for stray ani-

mals. The farms known as *estancias* pepper the emptiness much like stars filling the night sky, separated by many miles between and invisible to each other.

Sometimes, the impenetrable cloak of darkness is broken by an unearthly sight: the sudden appearance of a large dome of light that emerges from the short, scrub trees, casting a blood-red glow over the emptiness, suggesting the sudden start of a prairie fire that will devour the scrub veg-

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(both animal and grain) that we read of in ancient religious texts. Some have suggested that the mysterious death of British astrologer Peter Vesey (a case of spontaneous combustion) was due to his dabbling in medieval occult lore designed to achieve contact with unpredictable elementals.

Spain in Flames

No one will ever be sure if “unpredictable elementals” were on the loose in the isolated Spanish town of Purchena on July 16, 1945.

This sleepy community, located in the heart of Spain’s Almería Desert, a location best known to U.S. audiences as a motion picture environment (for westerns and *Conan the Barbarian*), was visited by a spate of unprovoked fires that remain unex-

plained to this day. On the night of July 16, 11-year-old María Martínez woke up to the smell of smoke. Her nightgown was on fire, causing serious burns to her scalp and face. There were no apparent sources for the fire, since electricity was not yet available in this region of the peninsula and the cooking fires had been quenched for the night.

During the course of the week, María’s father, José Martínez, owner of the farmstead known as Cortijo Las Paredes, would witness a disparate number of objects in his home simply burst into flame. Flames engulfed metal objects and other normally noncombustible materials, and despite the best efforts of the farmstead’s occupants, who ran a bucket relay from the nearby Almanzera River, water appeared to have no effect on the devouring fires.

Crónica newspapers covered the shocking story.

Curiously enough, the ancient cultures of the Andean valleys had worshiped the fire god Pachacamac. Could the deity have come to collect his long overdue share of the harvest?

In Chile, during a UFO flap that lasted from April 25 to May 25, 1977, the residents of the village of Vilcún looked on in terror as an immense "flying saucer" approached their homes at low altitude. The vehicle spun furiously on its axis and launched tongues of flame at the ground, making an "unbearable din" as it did so. The case's authenticity was verified by the GIFE (Grupo Investigativo de Fenómenos Extraterrestres). The investigators detected a sharp rise in radiation throughout the area.

In April 2006, the Institute of Hispanic Ufology reported a case involving a UFO—allegedly witnessed and photographed by police officers—that hovered over a scorched region of the Mexican state of San Luis Potosí, which burned to ashes as a consequence of an overwhelming conflagration.

Cattle ranchers near Tamuín were bewildered by the saucer-shaped craft, which hovered in plain sight for an unspecified number of minutes. Whether the unknown object was inspecting its handiwork or just happened to be attracted by the devastation is unknown; the fact remains that the blaze on March 10, 2006, torched a thousand hectares of pastures and the small peasant settlements with their respective

small farms and ranches. The losses in livestock and farm equipment were equally high.

Strange fires were also unleashed that day in Valles, San Vicente, Tamasopo, El Naranjo, Ciudad del Maiz, and other municipalities, causing temperatures to rise to nearly 45 degrees Centigrade.

A History of Paranormal Blazes

Fires of unknown origin have been the cause of much suffering and physical pain. The blame for these blazes usually falls squarely on the shoulders of juvenile delinquents, hapless nature lovers, and the occasional firebug. Since the fire often obliterates its own evidence, police authorities are seldom able to make any arrests.

Fires of high strangeness are among the many subjects discussed by Spanish ufologist Salvador Freixedo in his landmark *Defendámonos de los dioses* (Beware of the gods) in which he reports the widely held belief of the peasantry of Spain's northwestern corner that wicked elementals or fairies known as *meigas* are responsible for sudden conflagrations in the unlikeliest places, even under the cold, wet weather conditions that exist in that part of the Iberian Peninsula.

Freixedo goes on to suggest the existence of an order of beings that live off the energy released from burning objects. Knowledge of these fire elementals—to give them a name—and their desires perhaps prompted ancient man to propitiate them through the vast burnings of offerings

Soon another farmstead, Cortijo el Cerajero, would report the mind-bending detail that not just metal objects were feeding the greedy spontaneous fires, but farm animals were suddenly catching fire as well.

It would not be until 1950 that the rest of the world would learn of the events in this isolated part of the world. Newspapers began publishing accounts of mysterious fires erupting in the mountain town of Laroya that summer. Like the fiery manifestations in Purchena, the Laroya flames burned bed linens, livestock feed, hay, and even the clothes off peoples' backs. Experts mumbled something about unusual magnetic conditions being the cause of the phenomenon, but their explanations did little to allay the fears of the local population.

Despite the undeniable human suffering, the events in the Almería region were soon forgotten, becoming little more than yellowed newspaper clippings in the possession of some collectors of Forteania. Thirty years would elapse before the enigma appeared again with renewed strength.

On September 6, 1980, the farmers and shepherds of Torrejoncillo, a community in the province of Cáceres, were enjoying a well-earned siesta as the surrounding landscape broiled under temperatures well in excess of 100 degrees Fahrenheit. According to researcher Iker Jimenez, who presented the case in his book *Encuentros* (Spain: EDAF, 2002), no one is still quite sure who sounded the alarm as to what was about to occur, but Benito Salgado was the

first to become aware of a terrifying, stentorian noise in the air that shattered the stillness of the hot afternoon. Describing it as a sound similar to that of a "strange and powerful jet airplane," Salgado stepped out of his shack on the remote Cuatro Cuartos farmstead to witness an astonishing event: something was flying over the ground, scorching the trees as it went past with the swiftness of a projector bulb melting a piece of film.

Salgado and other farmhands were witnesses to how the unexplained fireball singed everything underfoot, including rabbits trying to escape from their warrens. "We saw how the rabbits were caught and roasted immediately, as if the tornado were carbonizing everything it touched," he told Jiménez during an interview.

A spontaneous decision was reached to evacuate the farmhouse. The family matriarch refused to leave despite urgent pleas and assurances that whatever was propelling the mysterious source of fire would surely be the death of them all. At this point, neighbors had been alerted to the raging cataclysm at Cuatro Cuartos and had come out to lend whatever assistance they could. They all witnessed how the fire tornado split in two, as though governed by a terrible intelligence, and flanked the farmhouse on both sides, sparing it from destruction.

Elements of the Guardia Civil (state police) cordoned off the area about an hour after the incident had come to an end. Geologist Juan Gil Montes, who reported to the site along with other officials, admit-

etation in a matter of minutes, trapping the hapless observer in a wall of flames.

This is exactly what was reported by a group of hunters in the Pampa in August 1996. After witnessing the unearthly glow and the bloody flames, they thought their fate had been sealed by a rogue prairie fire, but as they sought a means of escape, they realized that they could not hear the trademark sounds of a fire despite the approaching glow. This caused them to pause and look at the luminous dome at the center of the conflagration, which despite its reddish glow and yellow-orange core did not produce any smoke: "the fire that is not a fire," as it is known.

Julio Orozco, a deputy sergeant with the La Pampa police, witnessed many of these "unfires" throughout his life, mainly near his hometown of 25 de Mayo. In 1995, according to a report provided by *Gaceta Ovni* magazine (www.gacetaovni.com), Orozco and an assistant were patrolling some government offices in this empty region when both men noticed what appeared to be a large, raging fire in the distance. "...I saw a light that glared brighter than hell. Ordering my assistant to load shovels into the truck to fight the blaze, I phoned the firefighters in 25 de Mayo to come to the scene. As I changed out of my uniform, my assistant came over to say the conflagration had put itself out. I thought it was a joke or that we had all gone crazy; a fire of that magnitude simply doesn't snuff itself out."

Yet Orozco struggled in vain to find the least ember of the massive dome of fire that

had prompted him to call for help. After phoning the fire brigade once more to report a false alarm, he headed toward where the dome of light had been seen for a closer look.

"We went to Medanitos, to the oil fields but saw nothing. We headed for the petrochemical plant to see if one of the burners had gone off, but nothing. No sooner did we get out of our pickup truck, a group of workers ran over to us asking if we'd seen the fire. According to them, it had been some six kilometers distant. They attested to the fact that none of the refinery's burners were in operation at the time."

Villagers have reported that huge trees known as *ombús* (*Phytolacca dioica*) have been seen burning from their lofty crowns, consumed from above by a fire that does not involve combustion; one such tree in the province of Entre Rios was burned to the ground in such a manner, with no traces of a fire anywhere in evidence.

But strange objects have also been seen causing vast conflagrations. The fields on the city of Londres, Rioja Province, in the Andean foothills, were torched by the maneuvers of a "firestarting UFO" that disgorged a fireball on the fateful night of August 13, 1982, while two police officers looked on in utter disbelief from their patrol car. It was suggested that the unidentified object had deliberately waited for gale-force winds to blow down from the mountains before releasing the gout of flame, causing fire to devour the vineyards and groves of this largely agricultural region. The Buenos Aires' *Clarín* and *La*

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ted that there was no ready explanation for the events at Cuatro Cuartos: "Some shelves holding plastic plates and cups were next to the open window and they had melted into an even paste that spread all over the floor," he told Iker Jimenez. Liter-sized beer bottles had melted into themselves, creating fascinating spiral structures. Other glass containers inside the house had melted into a large spherical clump—all of this from a source of heat energy that lasted little more than minutes. The geologist was equally astounded to find pieces of quartz and marble that had fused together completely, and to see molten metal still dripping from the ruined barbed wire fences.

As had occurred in Purchena and Laroya in earlier times, no explanation was ever found for the "cone of fire," as it was described in the reports. The Torrejoncillo mystery fire consumed 50 acres in minutes but mysteriously spared the farmhouse, despite the heat damage caused. Some of the fragments of glass and metal were still burning at temperatures in excess of 3,600 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Sicilian Fires

In February 2004, Great Britain's *The Guardian* quoted Father Gabriel Amorth, the noted exorcist, as saying that mysterious fires were "...what normally happens when the devil enters the lives of those who let him in," making reference to the string of inexplicable fires and detonations reported in the Sicilian village of Caronia, on the island's northern shore.

These unexplained blazes had prompted over three dozen of the village's residents to move out of their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. The authorities took a refreshingly proactive stance toward the fires, sending a team of experts in search of an answer. These specialists looked in vain for indications that some short-circuit or electrical anomaly in household appliances was somehow responsible for the disturbing phenomena. But Gianfranco Allegra, one of the researchers on site, informed Italy's *Corriere della Sera* newspaper that he had bemusedly witnessed how an unplugged electrical wire had caught fire—in spite of the fact that the area had been without electricity since January 4, 2004.

The oldest residents of Spain's Laroya and Purchena could have probably sympathized with Caronia's hapless residents as chairs erupted in orange flames for no reason and supposedly incombustible items—the interior of a water pipe, in this case—caught fire. Italian civil defense authorities suggested that "a dispersion of electrical energy" appeared to be the cause, but that "the origin of the presumed dispersion had yet to be determined." It was Spain all over again, 50 years later. II

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