



ARTICLE

# LEE COUNTY'S LIZARD MAN AND OTHER UNSOLVED MYSTERIES

BY DENNIS STACY AND KEVIN MCKINNEY

Scientists who solve mysteries are often awarded academic accolades and Nobel prizes; amateur anomalists receive a footnote in history books at best. To explain the origin of the universe, for example, Belgian priest Georges Lemaitre proposed the idea of a "big noise." The explosion of a single mass of material, he suggested, sparked the creation of the universe, which has been expanding ever since.

Changing the theory's name to the more alliterative "Big Bang," astronomer Fred Hoyle dismissed Lemaitre's idea as preposterous and challenged it with his own. According to Hoyle's steady-state theory, the universe has always existed and has always been expanding. Today, however, astrophysicists, who study the universe and its origins, have strengthened the argument in favor of the Big Bang theory.

Some mysteries, of course, are eventually explained, proved to be hoaxes, or otherwise declared invalid. Take, for example, the human footprints discovered alongside dinosaur tracks in a Glen Rose, Texas, riverbed. Here was proof, creationists argued, that dinosaurs and man had lived at the same time—an idea long disputed by scientists. Examining the site in minute detail, however, computer programmer and amateur dinosaur detective

Glen Kuban eventually found faded bluish-gray and rust-colored stains that indicated the "human" prints were actually dinosaur toe prints. Kuban not only discovered no evidence of human-dinosaur coexistence but also caused paleontologists to reexamine their ideas of the stance and posture of dinosaurs.

"The principal summons of knowledge is a desire to solve mysteries," Albert Einstein once said. Fortunately for both the amateur and the professional Sherlock Holmes, there is a bounty of unsolved mysteries—old and new, large and small—to keep us occupied until the year 2000 and beyond. The following cases are just a few that may be resolved one day, by anomalists if not by scientists—perhaps even by you. Most of them—some hundreds of years old, others having cropped up, in one form or another, just this year—raise intriguing and unsettling questions. But what do they all add up to?

As you read our case histories—nine from the *Omni* files and a new one to be submitted by you for our Backyard Baffler contest—ask yourself, Should scientists devote attention to these mysteries? Why? How will knowledge about any one of them benefit us today—or tomorrow? And what speculations, moreover, do you have about their origins, causes, or purpose?

PAINTING BY ROBIN MULLER

We'd like to know your opinions. Send them to Mystery Forum, c/o *Omni*, 1965 Broadway, New York, NY 10023-5965. (Be sure to mail your comments separately from your Backyard Baffler entries.)

FILE #1803-SC  
THE LEAPIN' LIZARD CASE

**DESCRIPTION:** Scape Ore Swamp, outside Bishopville, in Lee County, South Carolina, is said to be haunted by a seven-foot-tall Lizard Man with green, scaly skin and red eyes. According to startled eyewitnesses, the creature has only three toes on each foot, as well as long, apelike arms that end in three fingers tipped with four-inch claws.

**WITNESSES:** Around two A.M. on June 29, 1988, seventeen-year-old Chris Davis stopped near the swamp's brackish waters to change a flat tire. While replacing the jack in the car's trunk, Davis says, "I looked back and saw something running across the field toward me. It was about twenty-five yards away, and its red eyes were glowing."

Davis jumped back into his 1976 Toyota Celica, only to engage in a tug-of-war with Lizard Man as he tried to pull the door closed. "I could see him from the neck down—the three big fingers; long, black nails; and green, rough skin," Davis claims. "And he was strong."

Davis is the only true eyewitness, although everybody seems to have a Lizard Man tale to tell. Teenagers Rodney Nolfe and Shane Stokes, for example, say Lizard Man darted across the road in front of their car and "into the swamp where Interstate 20 meets Highway 15." And construction worker George Holloman claims he encountered the creature while drawing water from an artesian well.

"Lizard Man also appears to have a ravenous appetite for McDonald's fish sandwiches," says cryptozoologist Erik Beckjord, founder of the National Cryptozoological Society, which investigates sightings of seemingly mythical creatures. Making its home in the swamp, the creature may have been hungry and attracted to Davis's car because it was loaded with the sandwiches, as well as with hamburgers and French fries. "With the drought affecting their food supply, bears have gone after picnic baskets in Yosemite National Park," Beckjord says. "Lizard Man and other Bigfoot creatures may also be victims of the drought."

**EVIDENCE:** Following the Nolfe-Stokes sighting, state trooper Mike Hodge and Lee County deputy sheriff Wayne Atkinson investigated the area. They found three crumpled 40-gallon cardboard drums. The tops of saplings were ripped off—eight feet above the ground. There were also, according to Hodge, "humongous footprints," fourteen- by seven-inch impressions in hard red sand.

Following the tracks for 400 yards, the law enforcement officers backtracked and found new prints impressed in their

car's tire tracks. "Whatever it was, it had already walked back across where we had been," Hodge says.

**SUSPECTS:** Davis's account matches most other Bigfoot descriptions, except for the green skin. According to Beckjord, the creatures are usually very tall, red-eyed, hairy beasts with five digits on each hand and foot.

"Lizard Man is only the second sighted Bigfoot to have three fingers, and he's the first to have only three fingers on each hand and three toes on each foot," he says. "That makes him the rarest, the most unusual Bigfoot ever encountered."

**SUMMARY:** Lizard Man has become a Bishopville tourist attraction. Vendors have hawked souvenirs, and guides have offered tours of the swamp. There's even a "Lizard Man information center" at an Interstate 20 truck stop where Davis has autographed Lizard Man T-shirts.

Columbia, South Carolina, radio station WCOS, moreover, has offered a \$1

---

*•Davis stopped near the brackish waters to change a flat tire. While replacing the jack in the trunk, he looked back and saw something running toward him. Its red eyes were glowing. •*

---

million reward for the capture of a live Lizard Man—if it turns out to be a previously unknown animal.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Bigfoot sightings tend to continue for a while and then suddenly cease—until someone claims to have sighted a Bigfoot in another area. Beckjord has urgently suggested that *Omni* sponsor his expedition in search of Lizard Man. "The sooner, the better," he says. "If you wait too long, he will have headed for Alabama or somewhere else."

Caution advised. One man who claimed to have shot at Lizard Man produced a bloodstained napkin and "scales." Although he later admitted it was a hoax, somebody could be seriously injured before the publicity dies down.

FILE #5000-H2O  
THE TWO-BY-TWO CASE

**DESCRIPTION:** A seafaring vessel made of gopher wood, probably rectangular in shape and measuring roughly 515 by 85 by 50 feet, depending on the equivalent cubit measurements. Cargo: "every living thing of all flesh, two of every kind." Through the efforts of family patri-

arch Noah, guided by the Great Architect's blueprints, this ark was built to weather severe floods more than 4,000 years ago. Among its other abilities, the ark would have been able to battle 200-foot waves without taking on any water.

When the waters receded, the craft was allegedly beached in the mountains of Ararat, a vast area in eastern Turkey near the borders of Iran and Soviet Armenia.

**EVIDENCE:** Former astronaut Colonel James Irwin, who has made nearly annual expeditions in search of Noah's ark since 1982, isn't certain that the ark is actually on Mount Ararat. "The Bible says only that the ark came to rest in the mountains of Ararat," he says. In fact, he points out, "in the lava flow there is an impression of a vessel with almost the exact dimensions of Noah's ark." The "impression" is actually a large mound covered with ice and snow. Los Alamos, New Mexico, geophysicist John Baumgardner's opinion on this is still unknown: He has gone to the mountain to investigate the site and therefore has been unavailable for comment.

Arkologist Robert Cornuke, an associate of Irwin's, flew over the same area this past summer and reported sighting a large dark gray section. It contrasts with the surrounding high valley area known as Ahora Gorge. "The coloring, nearby running water, and other details match eyewitness descriptions over the years," says Cornuke, who is vice-president of High Flight, Irwin's nonprofit Christian organization in Colorado.

Convinced the Ahora Gorge mound is the ark, arkologist Ron Wyatt explains that the vessel's measurements are described not in feet but in cubits, a unit whose lengths varied from tribe to tribe. "Using Egyptian arithmetic, which Noah would have known," he says, "the ark's three-hundred-cubit length would be equivalent to five hundred fifteen feet." Wyatt conjectures that the 30-cubit-high sides of the ark collapsed at some point. Its flattened sides and 50-cubit width would measure 110 cubits. The measurements of the dark gray section in Ahora Gorge: "three hundred by one hundred ten Egyptian cubits," Wyatt says.

**SUMMARY:** Ararat sits in a politically sensitive corner of Turkey. Avalanches and earthquakes also act as deterrents to potential investigators. The climbing season, moreover, is short—the mountains are covered by snow and ice for most of the year.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Follow up on the results of Baumgardner's research.

If, however, anyone else wants to go to the mountain, Wyatt recommends that you stay at the Hotel Sim-er in Doğubayazit (pronounced "do-buy-sit"), four hours by bus or taxi from Erzurum. But go to the Oral Hotel, he adds, and ask for a cabdriver named Delavar Avcı. Tell him, "Gemitash," and he will take you to see the "boat stone."

**DESCRIPTION:** Atlantis—a.k.a. Atli, Attala, Aztlan, and other similar names, depending on the cultural origins of the stories—was a large landmass, possibly a whole continent. It allegedly sank 11,000 years ago during a phenomenal catastrophe. Atlantis was last seen somewhere in the Atlantic, possibly between Europe and North America, maybe even connecting them. Then again, maybe not. The details aren't very specific.

**WITNESSES:** The modern case for Atlantis has its roots in the testimony of Greek philosopher Plato and is taken from two of his printed dialogues with Critias and Timaeus. The text refers to Athenian lawmaker Solon's opinions on the subject. The veracity of Plato's, or even Solon's, accounts, for that matter, is undetermined at this time.

**SUSPECTS:** Plato refers to a catastrophe that took place roughly 9,000 years before. If either he or his translators added an extra zero, however, the event would have occurred approximately 900 years before. This would make the Mediterranean island of Thira, also known as Santorin, a likely candidate as the site of Atlantis. Indeed, excavators have found ruins of the Minoan civilization destroyed during a volcanic eruption that triggered gigantic tidal waves in 1470 B.C.

Investigators who take their Greek literally argue that Atlantis must be where Plato said it was: beyond the Pillars of Hercules, or modern-day Gibraltar. Consequently, the Azores, a lonely beacon of islands west of the Iberian Peninsula, have been the object of much Atlantean speculation. In 1979 Andrei Aksyonov, deputy director of the Soviet Union's Shirshov Institute of Oceanography, believed his research team had found ruins of ancient stonework on the submerged volcanic mountain of Ampere, one of several peaks in the sea-bottom range arching from Portugal's coast to northern Africa. Study of the photographs seemed to dispel the theory, however: The "vestiges of walls and staircases," Aksyonov said, were merely geologic formations formed by volcanic action.

In the late Sixties amateur explorers discovered what they thought were cyclopean pavement stones beneath the waters off the Bimini coast. Like those at Ampere, these could eventually prove to be the result of natural activity. The site remains one of several possible candidates, however, according to archaeologist Gary Stickel, who is mounting an expedition to the area. "Our goal is not to prove that the site is a portion of Atlantis but rather to determine whether the formation detected beneath the waters is, in fact, an archaeological site," says Stickel, who was involved in developing the character of the fictional archaeologist Indiana Jones.

A strip of submarine stair-stepped stones, similar to the Bimini and Ampere formations, has also been discovered near Lanzarote, one of the Canary Islands. "There are more than two hundred seventy-five theories on the location of Atlantis, nearly half of them indicating the Atlantic, others suggesting such places as Spain, Africa, North America, the Netherlands, and even Mecklenburg, [East] Germany," says author Charles Berlitz, a student of ancient history who still seeks the mythical continent.

"Atlantis was a prehistoric empire, and there may have been many outposts, Thira being one of them," Berlitz says. The Azores and the Canary Islands, he adds, were once mountainous regions of the Atlantis mainland.

**SUMMARY:** The one thing that can be said with any certainty is that the lost continent will probably not be found in anyone's backyard—unless it's a sizable chunk of seashore property. And even

on observers. Strange visions have been seen within their clear crystal craniums. Auras have allegedly surrounded the objects on several occasions. And unusual odors have been detected within their immediate vicinity.

**EVIDENCE:** There may be as many as 13 authentic crystal skulls, including the life-size skull on display in the British Museum and two fist-size skulls in its catalog. Modern replicas have occasionally surfaced, Chorvinsky adds.

The finest specimen was allegedly discovered in 1927 at Lubaantun ("City of Fallen Stones"), a Mayan ruin in Belize. Anna Mitchell-Hedges, the adopted daughter of a vagabond adventurer looking for Atlantis, claimed she found the smoothly polished top half of the skull among the rubble near an ancient altar. The lower jawbone was supposedly uncovered three months later—nearly 25 feet from the altar. The whole five- by seven- by five-inch skull weighs eleven pounds and seven ounces.

The two pieces were indeed carved from the same piece of crystal, but it's impossible to estimate the age of the skull. Unlike organic material, rock crystal is impossible to date. "Microscopic amounts of water in the skulls could be dated," Chorvinsky says. "But to do that you would have to break the skull. At some time in the future there might be a technique that will let us analyze the water without physically entering the skull."

Performing a series of optical and chemical tests, British Museum researchers detected a microscopic imperfection in their life-size skull. "A master jeweler who studied it expressed the opinion that the flaw could only be the result of having used a wheel in the original cutting process," Shelton says.

Researchers speculate that the crystal probably originated in northeastern Brazil. "This crystal was used in the nineteenth century to make crystal balls, for example, that were then exported from Brazil," Shelton says. "My guess, then, is that the skulls were created in the nineteenth century." If so, he adds, that would still not diminish their value or interest.

**SUMMARY:** The crystal skulls could be oracle devices in the manner of Delphi. They have been variously attributed to the Aztecs and the Maya, as well as to the legendary Atlanteans. This is not likely, however, based on the British Museum's calculations. Chorvinsky points out, however, that "it's an amazing artifact. If nothing else, it is certainly a gold mine of myth and speculation."

**RECOMMENDATION:** Additional study required. Follow up when more advanced technology is available to date the microencapsulated water.

The Mitchell-Hedges skull is occasionally displayed at mineral and gem shows as well as at New Age conventions. Check newspapers and other notices on such events.

---

Wyatt  
*recommends that you stay at  
the Hotel Sim-er,  
four hours by bus or taxi from  
Erzurum. Ask for a  
cabbie named Delavar Avci.  
Tell him, "Gemitash,"  
and he'll take you to the boat.*

---

Donald Trump would have a hard time raising Atlantis from the murky depths.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Follow up on Stickel's explorations. Periodically check *Earthwatch* magazine for researchers seeking assistance on a planned expedition to Atlantis.

---

FILE #011501-BH  
REFLECTIONS IN A CRYSTAL SKULL

---

**DESCRIPTION:** A number of carved crystal skulls have surfaced within the last century, one most recently popping up in Texas. "No one knows for certain where any of them came from, exactly how they were made, or why," says *Strange Magazine* editor Mark Chorvinsky, the world's foremost authority on crystal skulls.

"The problem is that none of them were found during controlled archaeological searches," adds Anthony Shelton, curator of the Museum of Mankind at the British Museum in London. Such controls might have enabled researchers to determine a skull's age, for example, from other nearby artifacts or debris.

There are many tales told by both believers and skeptics of the skulls' effects

FILE #1570-BE  
THE RIDDLE OF BRIGHT LIGHTS,  
OLD CITIES

DESCRIPTION: Preutility company use of electricity may have been more widespread than authorities have suspected. Both Babylonian and Egyptian high priests and perhaps even common artisans may have been adept at producing nonmetered electrical energy.

Electricity may have been used to electroplate gold on copper vessels and perhaps to illuminate underground crypts and tombs.

EVIDENCE: As early as 1936 German archaeologist Wilhelm König recovered small batteries from Khujut Rabu'a, a hill of rubble near Baghdad. Encased in a terra-cotta container, each battery was about the size of a hand grenade. At one end the batteries were plugged with a blob of asphalt (the same bitumen Noah may have used to caulk his ark). An iron rod ran through the center of the asphalt stopper, and a four- by one-inch copper sleeve surrounded the rod's entry point. The copper was soldered with the same alloy—60 percent tin and 40 percent lead—that's used in today's flashlight batteries. Vinegar or wine was probably used as an electrolyte.

American engineer Willard Gray replicated the Baghdad battery, filling his version with copper sulfate and attaching wires. It produced a one-half-volt current.

At Dendera, 40 miles north of Luxor, a relief of Thoth, the "giver of arts and sciences" in Egyptian mythology, depicts the god with objects that resemble giant light bulbs with undulating filaments, as well as cables, insulators, and generators.

SUSPECTS: Parthians, who ruled the Baghdad area around 250 B.C., are presumed responsible for the battery.

The Egyptian engineer could be Thoth, portrayed as part ibis, part human or as half baboon and half stork. Obviously a master of disguises, a.k.a. Taaut and Hermes Trismegistus.

SUMMARY: Since no one has yet been able to interpret the Egyptian relief's symbolism, "we can only speculate about their possible electrical power," says Helmut Satzinger of Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum. "The so-called light bulb could be the Barge of the Sun, a boat the sun god Ra navigates across the sky during the day and through the underworld at night."

RECOMMENDATION: If the ancient Parthians and Egyptians discovered electricity before English physicist William Gilbert did in 1570, no original blueprints have been found.

The next time you're in the area, check out the battery at the museum in Baghdad. For information about the Dendera reliefs and hieroglyphics, before or after visiting the temple, contact the Egyptian Authority for Antiquities, facing the police academy in Abbassiya, Egypt.

FILE #1713-TX  
THE CASE OF THE FIERY DIAMOND

DESCRIPTION: One of the most horrifying UFO encounters on record occurred in Dayton, Texas, near Houston, on the night of December 29, 1980. Betty Cash, then fifty-one years old, Vickie Landrum, fifty-seven, and Vickie's seven-year-old grandson Colby Landrum were returning from a bingo game. Driving along pine-tree-lined rural Highway FM1485, they allegedly sighted a hovering "diamond of fire" belching flames and emitting air-brakelike sounds. Cash brought her Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme to a halt, and all three passengers got out to take a closer look. As they gazed in awe and terror, more than 20 helicopters suddenly appeared and circled the fiery object, trailing it when it finally flew away.

Betty Cash remained outside the car longest, until the heat became unbear-

---

*Strange visions  
have been seen in their clear  
crystal craniums.  
Auras have reportedly  
surrounded them  
on some occasions. And odd  
odors have been  
detected within their vicinity.*

---

able. When she attempted to reenter the car, the door handle was so hot that she had to grasp it with her coat.

EVIDENCE: The fiery diamond left behind a legacy of illness and suffering that continues to afflict the three victims. Within hours they were medically treated for "sunburn," as well as recurring bouts of vomiting and diarrhea—apparently the results of radiation sickness. Cash's skin blistered so badly she was hospitalized. A week later, moreover, her hair began falling out in clumps.

Their health problems have continued to mount: Cash has undergone a mastectomy and suffered a heart attack. Landrum's vision has deteriorated, and slow-healing sores have broken out on her hands and feet. Young Colby's eyesight has also rapidly deteriorated, and abnormal patches of hair have sprouted on his chest and back.

WITNESSES: There are at least six other eyewitnesses who saw the helicopters. There seemed to be no reason, at the time, to report the choppers to the police. The witnesses surfaced later, however, during a Mutual UFO Network

investigation led by aerospace engineer John Schuessler.

STATUS: "We have used the term *UFO* only for want of a better word," Schuessler explains. "It could have been a secret military experiment, for all we know."

The helicopters were the basis for a lawsuit, according to Bill Shead, one of the plaintiffs' lawyers. "The government had to own them, and it is, therefore, responsible for damages."

Both the Army and the Air Force, however, deny any knowledge of the event. "Whatever they saw and whatever happened is not the issue," says Assistant U.S. Attorney Frank Conforti. "The question is, Why are they suing the government? It's like somebody hits your car and you decide to sue me, even though I'm not responsible for the accident."

In September 1985 a federal district court dismissed the \$20 million civil suit for injuries inflicted during the alleged encounter. "That's it, as far as the court system goes," Shead says. The only possible relief for the victims is a congressional resolution awarding damages. "It's rare, but it has happened before."

Cash, however, remains unmollified. "Even if the government didn't know what the object was then, it does now," she says. "Those helicopters were *there*, and for the judge to throw the case out, not even hearing us, is a sad decision." She adds that she'll "do whatever it takes" to bring attention to the dismissed case. "I'll fight until they lay me in my grave," she says. "I want people to know how our federal judicial system works."

RECOMMENDATION: The three victims saw *something*. Suggest you follow up on lawyers' or victims' future tactics.

Anyone in the vicinity of Houston should be particularly observant if driving along Highway FM1485.

---

FILE #1203-CT  
THE CASE OF THINGS THAT GO BOOM  
IN THE NIGHT

DESCRIPTION: Strange sounds continue to boom from both banks of the otherwise peaceful Connecticut River, particularly in the area around Moodus, a village in East Haddam, Connecticut. Hearsay dates events to pre-Pilgrim days, when natives referred to the area as Morehemoodus, or "place of noises."

Residents have reported shock waves that begin with tremors and a rumbling noise resembling gunshots or the discharge of a distant cannon. The tremors are felt primarily in Moodus and other neighboring towns but sometimes at great distances as well.

EVIDENCE: In September and October 1987 there were more than 175 mini-quakes near Moodus. They were the fourth swarm of earthquakes in the past decade, according to seismologist John Ebel at Boston College's Weston Observatory, which has monitored the quakes since 1979.

"There might be something unique about the local rocks that makes them conduct sound waves very efficiently," says C. Thomas Statton, a seismologist with New Jersey's Woodward-Clyde Consultants, which has also studied the area. Statton notes that in some parts of the world the ground conducts sound so well "you can almost *feel* a thunderclap."

A swarm of anomalous quakes similar to those in Moodus occurred in Cape Fear, North Carolina, during 1978 and 1979. Residents reported booming noises, falling plaster, and rattling doors. "There are probably similar cases in many remote sites, but to notice them you need a town in the area," Ebel says.

See also case histories for "Barisal guns," Ganges Delta, India, reported by Sir George Darwin; and *mistpouffers* ("fog dissipators"), French coast—also known as "landguns," "sky quakes," *brontidi*, and *retumbos*.

**SUSPECTS:** Pranksters—as well as sonic booms and exploding gas pockets—have been virtually ruled out.

The source of the sounds has been traced to an area just a few hundred yards wide, two miles north of Moodus and about a mile below the earth's surface. Quakes along California's San Andreas Fault typically occur at six- to nine-mile depths, while those in other areas occur even deeper, Statton points out. Although the Moodus noises are associated with earth tremors, there's no clear connection to the nearby Honey Hill Fault.

**SUMMARY:** No consensus emerged at a May 1988 American Geophysical Union symposium on the subject.

"Because of the swarms' shallow, concentrated nature, it's difficult to argue that a large earthquake is possible," Ebel says. A potentially devastating earthquake, he adds, could occur less than five miles away. "In 1791 there was a large quake in Moodus, strong enough to crack chimneys and to be felt as far away as Boston and New York City."

None of this, of course, reassures local residents, since Moodus lies between the Millstone and Connecticut Yankee nuclear power plants.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Follow up on studies at Weston Observatory, Woodward-Clyde, and others. Anyone going to Connecticut can contact the Middlesex County Chamber of Commerce or the Moodus town hall for information on the East Haddam village.

FILE #011506-CR  
THE JUNGLE BALL ROCK CASE

**DESCRIPTION:** In the late Thirties United Fruit Company land locator George P. Chittenden was exploring the tangled jungle of Costa Rica for potential banana plantation sites. In the process he discovered a series of almost perfectly shaped granite spheres.

Clearly the highly polished stones were extremely important to whoever carved

them. Chittenden's queries, however, drew a blank from the local Boruca Indians: No one knew how long the balls had been there, who might have made them, or more importantly, why.

**EVIDENCE:** Some found atop stone pedestals, the spheres range from one inch to seven feet in diameter and weigh as much as thirteen and a half tons each. In many cases the nearest quarry was 30 miles away.

One cluster, at Jalaca, consists of 45 balls, while two others comprise 15 and 17. They follow no known patterns: Some lie along straight lines, and others form slight arcs. The formations, however, may be accidental, according to magazine editor and anomalist Michael Shoemaker, who has studied and written about the spheres. In one instance, the stones apparently rolled down a hill from their original location; after they had all come to a full stop, he says, the stones just happened to form a straight line.

---

☛ *Chittenden and his successors located 200 of the strange stones. More were found and destroyed by banana plantation workers spurred by rumors that they contained gold. Many remain lost in the jungle.* ☛

---

Nothing is known about their purpose or function, either. "Some have been found at the east and west boundaries of cemeteries," says Shoemaker, who suggests that the spheres could be sun symbols or tribal totems. Among other theories, one possibility is that the spheres had a purpose similar to that of the South Pacific islanders' stone currency. But then, Shoemaker adds, the Costa Rican creators would seem to have placed *tremendous* importance on money.

Yet another possibility is that the spheres were the "bowling balls of giants," muses John Keel, president of the New York Fortean Society, which studies unusual and strange artifacts. "One thing is certain," he adds seriously. "It would have taken an enormous amount of effort to carve and grind down even one of these balls to a perfect sphere. To do the job, it would have to be constantly rotated, and rotating a thirteen-ton block of stone would be no easy task."

**SUMMARY:** Chittenden and his successors located nearly 200 of the strange stones. Unfortunately, during and after World War II many more were found and

destroyed by banana plantation workers spurred by false rumors that they contained gold. Today many granite spheres probably remain lost in the dense tropical jungle, but some have been hauled off for display: One is installed on the grounds of the National Museum of Costa Rica in San José, which also has a few others. Another is outside the Costa Rican embassy in Washington, DC.

Museum authorities believe that the spheres may be the work of the Chiriquí Indians, who, at the time of the Spaniards' arrival in the sixteenth century, had inhabited the area for more than 1,500 years. At least one sphere was found, seemingly undisturbed, near pottery pieces and other Chiriquí artifacts. There's no way to date the granite, however, and the sphere and the artifacts could have been placed there at different times, Shoemaker suggests. Moreover, Spanish explorers, he adds, made no references to the spheres, even though they passed through the same area, near the mouth of the Diquís River on the Pacific coast, in 1522.

"Costa Rica's best-known but least understood artifact, the granite spheres, have been sadly neglected," Shoemaker says. Unless more undisturbed specimens are found and definite patterns emerge, the spheres seem destined to remain inscrutable.

**RECOMMENDATION:** More investigation required. Check *Earthwatch* magazine for any archaeological expedition plans that might relate to the granite spheres or other Costa Rican antiquities.

Inspect the sphere at the Costa Rican embassy. In Costa Rica, visit the National Museum in the capital. Don't call the museum from outside Costa Rica, however: For some mysterious reason, no international phone calls are accepted.

FILE #1099-IRS  
THE CURSE OF DUNNELLEN HALL

**DESCRIPTION:** Dunnellen Hall, a.k.a. Topping House, a 28-room Jacobean mansion, sits on 26 acres in Greenwich, Connecticut. Hedges and a stone wall, topped by a wire-mesh fence, shield it from roadside gawkers.

Banker Daniel Grey Reid, who made a fortune in the steel and tin industries, commissioned the mansion as a wedding present in 1918 for his daughter Rhea and her husband, Henry Topping. The cost: \$1 million. At least two subsequent owners have experienced financial setbacks; some have even been indicted.

**VICTIMS:** In 1950 steel company president Loring Washburn was the first person to buy Dunnellen Hall—and the first to lose it, in 1963, after he was beset by financial troubles.

Financier Jack R. Dick bought Dunnellen in 1968. He was indicted in 1971, at the age of forty-six, on grand larceny and forgery charges. In 1974, before the case went to trial, he suffered a fatal heart

# LIZARD MAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 114

attack while on his way home in his chauffeur-driven limousine.

Dick's widow sold the estate to an India-born owner of oil supertankers by the name of Ravi Tikkoo for \$3 million. He eventually sold the estate after a severe slump occurred in the tanker market during the oil embargo and petroleum shortages in the Seventies.

The current owners are real estate and hotel tycoon Harry Helmsley and his wife, Leona, who paid \$11 million for the estate in 1983. The federal government indicted the couple this year for income tax evasion—to the tune of \$14 million. They're alleged to have fraudulently deducted the cost of a marble dance floor, a swimming pool enclosure, and other Dunnellen expenditures as business expenses.

SUMMARY: "This house is like the Hope Diamond," Linda Dick said when she put the house up for sale after her husband's death. "It has brought bad luck to everyone who has ever owned it." At that time Linda Dick's real estate agent, Duff Associates president Louis Duff, scoffed at the bereaved wife's assessment of the mansion. "I wouldn't argue the point with her today," he now says, however.

According to Preferred Properties

president Marjorie Rowe, who has handled two sales of Dunnellen Hall, "It hasn't been a particularly happy house." She adds, though, that she doesn't believe the house is cursed.

RECOMMENDATION: If nothing else, there may be a moral here: If you plan to buy a multimillion-dollar home, expect financial difficulties. At the moment most investigators and interested parties believe the owners' money woes are mere coincidence. Suggest watching what happens with the Helmsley couple. Follow up with reports on next owner.

If you're in Connecticut and want to initiate an investigation, call the Greenwich Chamber of Commerce for directions to Round Hill Road. If Dunnellen Hall goes on the block yet again, consider buying, if you dare.

---

## FILE #1978-TK THE BACKYARD BAFFLER

---

DESCRIPTION: The backyard baffler is any unexplained physical (natural or man-made) phenomenon in your area that has two or more witnesses. No UFO or Bigfoot sightings permitted.

All previous and current investigators must admit they are stumped. Knowledge of the baffler should be locally confined and not widely related on television, by newspapers, magazines, or any other national media.

OBJECTIVE: To nominate a backyard baffler, send us a complete description of the phenomenon. Include when, where, how, and by whom it was discovered; names of previous (or current) investigators, their affiliations, and their conclusions; why it's a mystery; why you think it should be resolved; and why an investigation of your baffler should have priority over others.

Send your report to Backyard Baffler, c/o *Omni*, 1965 Broadway, New York, NY 10023-5965. All entries must be postmarked by November 15, 1988, and become the property of *Omni* magazine. Open only to residents of the United States and Puerto Rico.

A panel of anomaly investigators will review all suspects, and each will determine the finalists in his specific area of research. The finalists will then be transferred to Eastern Michigan University sociologist Marcello Truzzi, director of the Center for Scientific Anomalies Research. His choice for Mystery Case #10 will be based on what he considers to be the best presented, most intriguing, most unusual baffler—and the one that has the most scientific importance.

REWARD: We will sponsor an investigation of the winning baffler, the results appearing in a future issue of *Omni*. The lucky reporter will win a "mystery weekend." Where? That's the mystery. 