

Ancient Astronauts Modern Mysteries

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THE SPACE VANDALS

Every summer strange phantoms streak across the landscape, committing bizarre crimes and leaving absurd clues in their wake. Police in thousands of scattered cities hold reluctant press conferences and admit their bewilderment. Some of the crimes are so weird that they are never even entered on police blotters. The FBI, State Police, and other law enforcement agencies exclude these crimes from their statistics while local newspapers treat them as human interest stories to be buried among the classified ads. Nevertheless, somewhere out there lurks an international band of shadowy thieves and cutthroats, hiding in alleys and graveyards, performing insane acts year after year.

For the past five years someone has been ripping off antique weather vanes in New England. Literally ripping them off old barns and houses. Some antique weather vanes date back to the early 1700's and are valuable collector's items. Our phantom burglars fly over the old farms in a helicopter and actually lasso the weather vanes with a rope and wrench them off their roofs. Housewives and farmers, alerted by the noisy engines, have dashed outside just in time to see a bright orange chopper rising skywards, a prize weather vane snared in a dangling rope. The phantom weather van thief has been active in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. No one has managed to track down the owner of that orange helicopter or locate its base. Helicopters are difficult to fly and expensive to maintain. Your average helicopter owner can find easier legal ways to make a dollar. Stealing and fencing hot weather vanes would seem to be a difficult way to make a few dollars.

Other odd objects also get stolen regularly. In 1973, a five-ton wrecking ball, belonging to the Dowling Construction Co. in Indianapolis, Ind., suddenly vanished. Workmen had left it sus-

pending 200 feet in the air hanging from a crane. When they returned to the construction site the next morning the crane was still there *but the ball was gone*.

A couple of years ago an inoperable bulldozer, weighing several tons, disappeared from the yard of a construction firm in Scranton, Pa. Since its engine was filled with sand, whoever accomplished the deed had to haul the huge machine away with an even larger machine . . . without leaving tracks or clues.

In Newton, Utah, someone stole a whole barn while the owner was off on a trip. But the disappearances of entire buildings has become commonplace in recent years. Prefabricated houses are especially prone to house-napping. Someone just moves in with a truck, disassembles the house and hauls it away. But stone houses have also vanished in this fashion, as have steel bridges, entire railroad trains (parked on sidings), and airplanes. That's right, today there are rings of airplane thieves just as there are rings of auto thieves (18,000 autos are stolen off the streets of New York City each year). One minor mystery was solved this year after airports on the West Coast reported that someone was stripping the plastic from sailplanes tied down in their fields. It turned out that packs of hungry wild dogs were invading the airports and actually eating the gliders!

But what could eat a five-ton wrecking ball, a stone house, or a steel bridge?

VANDALS OR VAMPIRES

In March 1973, Mrs. Miriat Ahmed Shihata, a 20-year-old bride of four months, was swallowed up by a hole in the ground. She and her husband were walking along a street in Alexandria, Egypt, when the sidewalk suddenly parted and the young woman vanished into the crevice. A rescue squad was quickly summoned to the scene and

they dug down 30 feet *without finding a trace of her*.

People, planes, and ships vanish in large numbers every year, and not just within the confines of the infamous Bermuda Triangle. The notorious Barrens of New Jersey have claimed many lives. Ships making short trips on the Great Lakes have disappeared enigmatically. Several years ago, a man in Brooklyn allegedly vanished from a pole in his back yard while all his neighbors looked on. He had scaled the pole to fix a clothesline, when suddenly he screamed that something had grabbed him. He quickly rose straight up in the air and vanished out of sight.

Monster sightings have been on the increase in the U.S. in the past few years and investigators trying to track down the hairy 10-foot beasts have been horrified by the tales of the disappearances of domestic animals and humans in the monster-frequented areas. It sometimes seems as if the monsters may be feeding on people and domesticated animals.

The widespread cattle mutilations in the midwest have received considerable publicity in the past year or so. Someone—or something—has been butchering animals in several states, killing them with surgical precision and draining their blood. Less well-known are the human remains that have been found in the same areas, their blood drained and their heads lopped off. The strange mystery has even spread to isolated parts of Sweden. Last fall, the body of a young Belgian was found on the Swedish-Norwegian border. His head was missing but whoever committed the crime had thoughtfully removed his expensive gold teeth and put them in the pocket of the man's jacket.

Vampire myths of yesteryear have sprung from incidents such as these. Charles Fort summarized several cases from the 1800's in his books published in the 1920's. Brad Steiger,

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Jerome Clark, and other modern investigators are kept busy looking into new cases.

Local police also grumble about "teenage vandals" when the cemeteries in their towns are visited by some unknown force. Tombstones are toppled over in a neat row. Some are snapped off or sheered off at the bottom. Since modern tombstones are usually attached to their bases with thick steel rods a *gang of bored teenagers could not be responsible for the damage*. It would take a heavy tractor or bulldozer and heavy chains to knock over such tombstones. Again, there are never any tracks or footprints. The stones—sometimes 20 or 30 of them—are knocked over in a precise row. This kind of damage occurs in hundreds of urban and rural cemeteries every year. No law enforcement agency has ever made a study of this phenomenon, but it costs the taxpayer plenty. After the damage has been discovered, policemen are usually assigned to sit in the cemetery for days or weeks. Naturally, the "vandalism" ceases.

Another interesting form of vandalism is the shattering of automobile windshields which takes place regularly. A curious variation of this occurred in Naples, Italy, in 1972, when no less than 40 motorists complained that the

windshields had been stolen from their cars. It can take a skilled mechanic more than an hour to remove a single auto windshield. Were 40 mechanics in a larcenous mood that one night in Naples?

According to *The New York Times*, April 24, 1921, more than 2,500 expensive plate glass windows were smashed in London that year by "a mysterious band of men." Epidemics of window-breaking have been repeated many times since.

Each year dozens of towns across the country are visited by the phantom windshield smashers. Police generally assume that teenagers with sledge hammers are responsible, but rugged safety glass is hard to smash and these smashings occur in waves of from 40 to 100 cars in a single night. A variation of this is the "phantom sniper." Car windows are peppered with what looks like bullet holes, except that no bullets or projectiles of any kind are even found inside the vehicles. The biggest wave of windshield smashing took place in the U.S. in 1952-54. There was a smaller wave in several communities across the country in the spring of 1975.

The major utility companies have been trying to corner the mysterious phantom wire-gang that has been stealing miles of heavy electrical cable for years. Copper is scarce today and thefts of copper are not unusual. (Back in 1966, a ship laden with copper vanished off the coast of Southeast Asia.) But the wire gang is doing it the hard way. They actually scale the steel towers and cut into cables *carrying lethal voltages of current*. They must then roll the heavy cable onto huge drums and haul it away. Aside from the obvious risks of such an operation, the time and effort required to steal wire in this manner would seem to exceed whatever small profit the thieves man-

age to gain from the venture.

It would be easier to swipe weather vanes.

ARE WE SUPPLYING ULTRATERRESTRIALS?

Naturally, we don't claim that people from another planet are stealing wire, glass, and weather vanes from us. But the record proves that some kind of phantom burglars were busy 100 years ago—and are still active today. Some investigators, perplexed by the absence of clues in many of these cases, are seriously wondering if we may not be unwittingly supplying a strange extradimensional world with raw materials. Obviously someone or something needs enormous quantities of animal and human blood and we have been furnishing it for hundreds of years. Then, too, there are baffling UFO manifestations around garbage dumps and factories.

In a number of cases, witnesses have claimed that they saw huge UFOs being loaded with supplies of some sort. Detroit-made autos have even been seen driving into giant disks on the ground. A quartet of amazed witnesses in Cherry Hill, N.J., allegedly saw a huge blimp-like machine hovering over a computer plant in 1966 while men on the roof of the building were transferring boxes to the craft!

Both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. have lost expensive satellites shortly after sending them into orbit around the earth. Could they have been snatched from us by the unknown saucerers? Some students of the Bermuda Triangle have suggested that the planes and ships that have vanished there were really pirated by UFOs.

It does sometime seem as if everything on this planet is up for grabs . . . and someone not quite human has been doing most of the grabbing. ★