

Folklore

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FOLKLORE FRONTIERS is an independent, non-profitmaking magazine covering folklore and folklife, in particular contemporary beliefs and actions. Urban myths and new social trends are our speciality. The magazine is broadminded and far ranging in expressing contemporary concerns.

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THE DIARY

QUITE some years ago a Radio 1 contest was to name the group performing *I Fought the Law*. I knew. Come the moment of reckoning, the disc-jockey announced there had been only two correct answers. He read out the name of someone other than me and didn't have the decency to tell all those on Radio One-derland that I had also known the answer. sad bastard! So close but so far.

Anyway, at last I've won something. The Magonia magazine judges agreed that I had chosen the most suitable slogan for UFO/Portean and related maga-

zines. My prize? A rare, collector's edition of the Japanese translation of John Rimmer's *The Evidence for Alien Abductions*.

Oh! Who made the record? No, not the Bobby Fuller (suicide victim) Four or The crickets, but England's own feisty She Trinity.

Last issue the 40 newspaper fillers survey had an omission you might have spotted. It was No. 32. Here it is:

32. HOLE IN ONE. Golf in the Kingdom (*Can anyone loan me this book by Michael Murphy? - I'll refund postage*). media favourite.

Must be a through train..

● WELL, he just wanted to EXPRESS himself, didn't he?

● This is the weirdest body-pierced man in the world - with a miniature model train set through his nose.



(Daily Sport, 9/3/95)

MUGGER?



GREG PALMER

A CHANCE meeting with funnyman Eddie Murphy was no joke for one terrified tourist - she thought he was going to MUG her.

Gisela Klein, 48, fell to her knees and begged for mercy when she bumped into Eddie and his bodyguards in the lift of a plush New York hotel.

The jittery German was so alarmed by tales of crime in the city she was convinced the Hollywood star and his minders were crooks. And kind-hearted Eddie felt so sorry for the woman he paid her hotel bill in full.

"At first I thought this lady was having a joke, but she was terrified," Eddie told staff at the luxurious Ritz

Carlton. "Gisela" was standing next to the comic and his burly pals while waiting for a lift to follow her husband down to dinner.

Wreck

The trip was a silver wedding anniversary treat, but Gisela had taken some persuading because of New York's soaring crime rate.

As she waited to press the lift button, Eddie - star of Beverly Hills Cop - and Trading Places - asked which floor she wanted.

That was enough to reduce her to a quivering wreck. She fell to her

knees, sobbing and begging the men to spare her.

Said red-faced Gisela: "A few seconds after I realised they weren't going to rob me. They were laughing and thought I was joking."

"I was so ashamed," she told a German newspaper. She admitted: "Eddie Murphy is one of my favourites, but I didn't recognise him."

The biggest surprise came when the pair checked out after their week's stay to find Murphy had paid their £2,200 bill in FULL. He had left a note, saying: "Madam. Our encounter was one of the nicest and funniest

moments in my life. If only all my women would fall at my feet like you did."

"But since you didn't have as much fun as we had, I have paid your hotel bill for you." Gisela has written to thank the star.

● Full title MUGGER? No THAT'S EDDIE MURPHY (D. Star, 6/11/95). This oldie lacks the vicious dog told to "sit" and so the point is missed completely.

This "panic" issue, in the hopes of arriving with readers before Christmas, has several other articles reproduced verbatim, adapted or original.

Apologies for fewer pages in the circumstances.

Also lack of review columns - hold on to your book vouchers!

The Great Grendel's Arm Rip-Off

FolkJokeOpus

By Mick Goss



Today, class, we are going to look at *Beowulf*. *Beowulf* is an epic poem composed in the 8th or maybe 10th Century and in *Old English*, which was the language of the Anglo-Saxons. Who are all dead now. That is why Old English is known as a "dead language". Nobody speaks Old English very much nowadays except at the University of London and a few places like that and the rest of us very occasionally when we want to swear. Now, the hero of this Old English epic poem is also called Beowulf and in the passage we are about to examine he meets someone/something called Grendel and tears his arm off. Ah, I thought that would make you perk up a bit.

Actually, readers, what we are chiefly looking at is one critic's interpretation of how a human - even a superhuman, for such Beowulf happens to be - can rip someone/something's arm off. It is not all about brute strength, neither. I learned this from something I found in that crowd-pleasing favourite among literary journals, the *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*. As a result of reading the paper in question, I feel compelled to share its insights with you. Bad luck.

If you can read Old English as well as I can (*i.e.*, hardly at all) your knowledge of *Beowulf* probably comes from a Penguin translation or something similar. No matter. I suppose there will be a few who sneer at the suggestion of reading this poem in anything other than its original OE, but we needn't worry about them. For, despite whatever may be lost in translation to modern English, *Beowulf* emerges as a tragic epic, a brutally lovely masterpiece. It has magic, it has mystery and as all folklorists know, it has plenty of folklore. Open it and you enter a realm undebted to contemporary ideas or modes of reality, which ought to warn us against expecting the characters to behave in anything like a contemporary fashion. We gather that much the moment that Grendel steps into the picture.

This Grendel is a conception well beyond the aforementioned bounds and modes of modern reality. He is a monster; the poet persistently refers to him as a fiend from Hell or a demon. He is a subhuman ogre-like giant who dwells in the marshes and fens that border civilization, having been banished there by God along with all the other monstrous and damned descendants of the unregenerate first murderer, Cain. Grendel has certain supernatural advantages, not least of them being an immunity to steel, but it turns out that he is mortal nonetheless.

Grendel represents the first of three epic challenges which confront the hero across the course of the poem's 3000-plus lines. Beowulf arrives in Denmark with the express purpose of meeting him, having heard from overseas how the cannibalistic terror has ravaged the great mead-hall of King Hrothgar for twelve winters, carrying off warriors night after night with impunity. Ever desirous of renown and by his own account having already seen off sundry giants and sea-monsters, Beowulf presents himself at Hrothgar's hall, states his lineage and other credentials, boasts a bit after the approved Anglo-Saxon fashion and volunteers to take on Grendel. Alone -unaided - by himself. And unarmed - with his bare hands. Forgetting Unferth, who attempts to deflate this newcomer and gets verbally squashed for his pains, no-one seriously objects to this proposition. Having had twelve years of failing to cope with Grendel, the Dane-thanes include no other competitors for this job, either. It is also noticeable that even King Hrothgar takes care to quit the scene before the encounter takes place.

Beowulf and his retainers stretch out to await the arrival of the 'mighty mark-stepper', the 'dark death-shadow' or 'the unlovely one' (which are just three from the many choice epithets by which the poet chooses to convey Grendel in lieu of a more prosaic description).

The retainers fall asleep - Beowulf doesn't. Presently the door bursts open and Grendel erupts into the hall, seizing and biting one of Beowulf's companions, quaffing his blood and devouring him in huge gulps. It may seem odd to you that Beowulf is content to prop himself up on one arm and watch this happen, but a knowledgeable editor explains that the hero is merely studying the monster's predatory tactics. Strategy, you see. Tough on poor old Hondscio, the quaffed and devoured companion, however.

Now we come to it! Grendel reaches out to grab Beowulf - Beowulf reaches out to grab Grendel. They shake hands, though not in any conventional glad-to-meet-you manner. And all too late Grendel realizes he is up against the possessor of the strongest grip in the world.

'Soon this perceived, the worker of evil,
That he never found in this mid-earth,
In the regions of earth, in another man
A greater hand-grip ...'

is how my edition translates the relevant passage (quaintly, but staying close to the OE original). Grendel panics. He'd break off, call it a draw and go home if he could, but that is not an option. Beowulf holds on and a furious brawl ensues. It has all the tokens of a first-class pub affray, down to overturning of benches; the poet wonders that the hall did not collapse. Not long after it's Grendel who collapses. His *fingras burston* (and I bet you don't need that bit translated). A wound or gash appears in his shoulder - the sinews gape apart - 'The bone-frame burst,' the poet adds tastily, being evidently keen on body-parts bursting. Grendel emits a great howl which is understandable in these circumstances and soon he is fleeing back to the marsh minus his arm - and the shoulder attached to it - which ends as a trophy at which all onlookers gawp in awe next morning. A bloody spoor betrays Grendel's retreat to the monster-haunted mere and the cave beneath it which he calls home. Here he has 'laid down his life,/His heathen soul, where hell had him received.' Translated into even more modern English, he is dead.

I don't propose to go any further into the poem, which would involve summarizing what happens when Grendel's previously-unmentioned mother comes seeking revenge and her son's missing arm. Let's contemplate the fact that tearing off an opponent's arm, with or without the shoulder attached, sounds quite a feat. No modern-day wrestler would be able to match that performance, even if his opponent was just a fellow-mortal and not a monster as Grendel assuredly is or was. How *does* Beowulf manage it?

We ought not need to ask this question, of course. If Grendel is no ordinary being, then nor is Beowulf. As I mentioned in my second paragraph, he is superhuman - a hero - a *superhero*. In epic literature, the Hero is routinely endowed with much-more-than-mortal strength and a capability for doing what the rest of us cannot do. That is all part of being a hero. To use the modern phrase, it goes with the territory.

We accept that epics are acted out in a magical fairy-tale zone where the supernatural things can happen simply because they, too, go with the territory. This is not a world governed by the laws of everyday credibilities. So we have no need to inquire how Beowulf ripped off Grendel's arm. One critic felt obliged to ask *and* answer that question, however. Thus, according to Calvin S. Brown, Jr. in the *PMLAA* for September 1940, the feat was made possible - feasible - credible by Beowulf's resorting to a spot of Anglo-Saxon ju-jitsu.

'Many readers ... must have felt that ... the fight with Grendel is something of a disappointment,' votes the writer. Set beside Beowulf's bouts with Grendel's Mother and/or with the Dragon, it is described in surprisingly vague fashion. Luckily for us, Calvin S. Brown, Jr. is able to piece together what happens and with a little help from A. and B., those exemplary characters from the old maths textbooks, he is able to demonstrate the Beowulf Armlock - for such the secret that defeats Grendel turns out to be:

'Let A and B stand facing each other, an arm-length apart. A extends his right arm, with the intention of grasping or pushing B's left shoulder. Just as A's hand grips the shoulder, or an instant before, B grasps A's wrist with both hands, completely encircling it, with his thumbs below and his fingers above. Then, shifting his feet so as to keep his balance, B turns in a half-circle clockwise, maintaining his hold, keeping A's arm extended, and passing his left elbow over A's arm. When this half-turn is completed, B has his back



to A, has A's elbow in his own armpit, and has A's wrist firmly held, palm up. Then, by bearing down, he applies pressure on the elbow, *against* the joint, and also exerts a twisting pull on the shoulder. He can intensify A's discomfort by shifting his own right hand from A's wrist to his fingers, gripping them hard and at the same time bending them towards A's palm.'

Remember, kids:
don't try this at
home without a
responsible
adult present.



I was attracted to C.S. Brown, Jr.'s paper like a wasp to jam. Why was I attracted to his paper like a wasp to jam? First and foremost, I am a connoisseur of LLTs - Loonie Literary Theories - and with all due respect to Brown Jr. (and to Sr. as well, come to that) I suspected that his paper was on the way to being one.

A Loonie Literary Theory is an approach to a particular text - often to a single passage, line, phrase or even solitary word in a text - which the writer makes to seem vastly important to a *full* and *informed* understanding of the work as a whole, but which on reflection you see is almost or completely irrelevant to it. Typically, they operate by injecting arcane concepts or other information from outside (*i.e.*, ones that you could not have taken into account simply from reading the text itself) and insisting that they contain the true "meaning" of the thing. They have a way of treating everything the author says with a dreadful literalness, so that the metaphorical and poetic becomes disguised fact. In the present case, the critic treats the combat between two blatantly unreal contestants as a fundamentally real, *human* contest - assumes the poet had in mind a *real* Anglo-Saxon combat style which he dressed up in metaphorical language - and proceeds to explain how it was done. As always, the ratiocinative process is fascinating, but we're left at the end with a feeling it doesn't really add to our appreciation of *Beowulf* all that much. Indeed, by reducing the hero's miraculous feat of strength and determination to a mundane wrestling trick, it could be said to detract somewhat from it.

Yeah, well, you say, but *Loonie Literary Theories* aren't folklore, are they? No problem. If it's Folklore with a capital F that you're set upon having, *Beowulf's* got it in abundance. The poem is a repository of North European legend and traditions; folklorists have been plundering it for years, snapping up a surprising amount that literary critics have missed. Consult any major journal that has "Folklore" in its title - consult *Folklore* itself, which is the inestimable journal of the Folklore Society. You will find articles which cull from this poem such cultural items as Irish battle rage, swimming contests, Celtic underwater adventure narratives. And Grendel's mother. And not forgetting the Dragon, who provides Beowulf's third and last great challenge, the one that kills him.

Folklorists enrich a text like this by showing how it stands in relation to wider traditions or cultural moments. They can show how even the small passage we've been looking at here is part of a narrative tradition distributed across northern Europe with analogues to be found as far off as Japan and America. The critic Friedrich Panzer claimed to have found over two hundred narratives corresponding to the "Grendel" sections of *Beowulf*, all of them versions of the "Bear's Son Tale" in which the house of an aged king is attacked by some kind of nocturnal demon who is eventually defeated by the formerly-despised younger boy. (Beowulf, incidentally, laboured in his youth from the label, "Unpromising"; nobody thought he was of heroic material).

And yet ... it could be said that it isn't essential to recognize *Beowulf* is an heroically-amplified version of "The Bear's Son" in order to enjoy and understand it. From this perspective, the previously-stated objections apply. Much of the information that folklorist-critics introduce is extraneous information. But surely anything that places a work in a broader perspective, simultaneously committing you to following the writer's arguments through the text, *must* be a worthwhile effort purely because it involves you more intimately in the reading of that text. Loonie Literary Theories could be defended on the same grounds.



Brown follows the rules of literary and folkloric analysis - which means that in composing his theory he follows the text. He points to it closely; he supports what he says from it. You can find many an essay on *Beowulf* that's more loosely argued than his. Furthermore, his idea about how Beowulf pulled it off - pulled off both the trick and Grendel's arm - sounds quite credible. But is he guilty of stepping outside the limits of historical possibility? A true Loonie Literary Theorist wouldn't balk at writing a paper explaining *Paradise Lost* as a 17th Century precursor of Mortal Kombat, despite the obvious objection that Milton was a few centuries removed from the delights of computer technology, including violent games made possible through it. The problem for me was that Brown's paper seemed to imply that Beowulf was some kind of martial arts master. And we tend to assume that the martial arts were invented by Orientals, which might pose the awkward question of where Beowulf might have picked up this useful trick some 700 years before any Westerner discovered Japan and thence discovered ju-jitsu/judo.

But on reflection, you don't need to know either to know how to break a person's arm. The theory behind the Beowulf Armlock does not require subtle Oriental acuity to discover. Across the face of the globe people must have realized time and again that bending an arm-joint across a fulcrum in a direction it doesn't want and is not designed to go results in an armlock and then an arm-break. A large number of the techniques taught in the Japanese martial arts, including ones popularly labelled "judo tricks" as if unique to it, were previously known in Western native wrestling styles long before we had the benefit of Japanese tuition.

There's the wild possibility that Beowulf was an exponent of just such a Nordic system. Perhaps he'd learned something akin to the Icelandic martial art of *glima*, a wrestling style which places emphasis on 'a quick eye, a quick hand, and more than all else a quick foot', to quote what *glima* expert Johannes Joseffson told the *St Louis Globe-Democrat* of 13 January 1924 at a time when he was actively touting it as simpler, more effective and all-round-better than ju-jitsu. Joseffson claimed that *glima* had been devised by the Vikings; maybe our Beowulf picked up a few hints from them. Interestingly, Grettir the Strong who twice combats monstrous or supernatural beings in "haunted houses" in the *Grettis saga*, which is concussively cited as an important *Beowulf* analogue, was also Icelandic. Being the hero of of c.1300 story, though, Grettir cannot have been the man who taught Beowulf unarmed combat. And actually, when ripping off arms is on the agenda, Grettir *cheats*. He doesn't pull opponents' arms off; he grabs a conveniently-placed short-sword and *cuts them off*.



I can't speak for *glima*, but I know for certain that neither judo nor ju-jitsu teach one how to tear an opponent's arm off. In a brief and unspacious martial arts career that embraced both I must have been in Beowulf's Armlock a dozen times or more. Yes, reader, and I can testify that it hurts. I believe I may have uttered the odd howl of pain corresponding to Grendel's on the occasions, too. But never once did I leave the dojo minus an arm. (*Dojo*, by the way, isn't Old English. It's Japanese - martial arts-talk for where you practice a martial arts. Oh ... you already knew that). In point of tedious fact, the Beowulf Lock *cannot* tear off your arm, let alone arm and shoulder together. All it does, if your opponent keeps the hold on too long, is *break* your arm. You might wish yourself dead, but you don't actually die. So I guess that if you want to stick with this theory you have to conclude that the poet's arm-ripping-off extravaganza was poetic hyperbole; he dressed up the truth of the matter to enhance the heroic, superhuman-strong image of his hero, Beowulf.

The biggest complaint about Brown's type of approach is not to do with its irrelevance and deviance away from the more important issues of the text. It concerns the perils of over-literalism. Treating literature and folk-narrative as sources reducible to historic and

scientific facts misrepresents their artistic nature. Cryptozoologists, I believe, are especially prone to translating literary and folkloric monsters into embellished accounts of unknown animals and I wasn't surprised to find a brief reference in a back-issue of *Fate* that made Grendel into a relict hominid, a Euro-Bigfoot. But that's another story or another article.

It occurs to me that many LLTs may begin as academic jokes. Scholars like to let off steam just like the rest of us and they sometimes do it in scholarly ways, for instance by slyly developing outrageous theories which will amuse some of their friends and annoy their enemies. For all I know, Calvin S. Brown Jr.'s paper may have begun this way. Is it his fault if someone - *me* - takes it all too seriously?

But look at what's happened as a result of taking it seriously (or too seriously)! I have been made to look beyond the poem at a range of things I might never have studied otherwise. I've been made to contemplate the validity of approaches to narrative that introduce materials not obviously visible in the narratives themselves - including folkloric approaches. I've been made to contemplate that old folklore conundrum of why so many stories which are essential the *same* story can occur in so many different places. Professor Kittredge wrote that the two-hundred-plus "Bear's Son" versions in themselves constitute a forceful argument for independent invention; I accidentally reflected his thinking when arguing that Beowulf's jujitsu-style armlock could have been rediscovered and reinvented many times and in many places - independently. And I have found an excuse for re-reading that marvellous poem, *Beowulf*.

And I've amused myself. Like the Cockney apothegm says, a laugh is better than having a tooth pulled out. Or having your arm pulled off.

Hrothgar at Hart (An Anglo-Saxon Wetherspoon's)

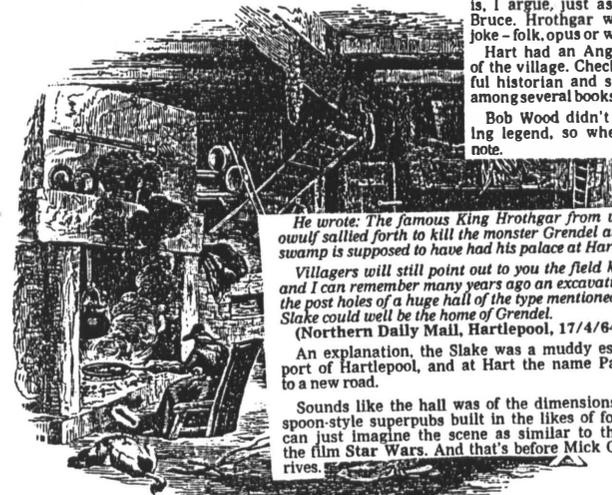
By Paul Screeton

LAST ISSUE, Folkjokeopus columnist Mick Goss put forward an Essex contender as Robert the Bruce and I countered with the local hero from Hart, County Durham.

Serendipity, not awkwardness, comes into the frame here. Goss' claim of a great mead-hall of King Hrothgar located in Denmark is, I argue, just as geographically incorrect as Essexman Bobbie Bruce. Hrothgar was also located in Hart, County Durham. No joke - folk.optus or whatsoever!

Hart had an Anglo-Saxon church and Hartlepool itself grew out of the village. Check the venerable Bede. Bede was certainly a careful historian and so was my late, old friend Robert Wood, author among several books of a history of West Hartlepool.

Bob Wood didn't have much time for Hartlepool's monkey-hanging legend, so when he locates Hrothgar locally we should take note.

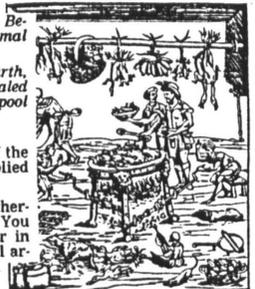


He wrote: The famous King Hrothgar from whose hall the hero Beowulf sallied forth to kill the monster Grendel at the bottom of a dismal swamp is supposed to have had his palace at Hart.

Villagers will still point out to you the field known as Palace Garth, and I can remember many years ago an excavation in that field revealed the post holes of a huge hall of the type mentioned in Beowulf. Hartlepool Slake could well be the home of Grendel. (Northern Daily Mail, Hartlepool, 17/4/64)

An explanation, the Slake was a muddy estuary, now part of the port of Hartlepool, and at Hart the name Palace has been applied to a new road.

Sounds like the hall was of the dimensions of these new Wetherspoon-style superpubs built in the likes of former warehouses. You can just imagine the scene as similar to the Intergalactic Bar in the film Star Wars. And that's before Mick Goss, me or Grendel arrives.



Aural Simulacra

(Extended version)

By Paul Screeton

I don't know if this is truly folklore and I've never come across anyone drawing attention to it as a subject. I think it was John Michell, author of the Thames & Hudson book *Simulacra*, who in conversation with me used the term "aural simulacra."

A definition would be: hearing a word/sound misinterpreted as some thing else, usually vulgar.

Best therefore to start where most people can be offended: television.

There was no doubting what was said in the late Eighties when musician/presenter Jools Holland urged Tyne tees Television viewers to watch *The Tube* - "you groovy fuckers." He subsequently apologised during the first available transmission break.

Not so straightforward for Central TV when furious parents jammed (that's what it says here - a journalistic exaggeration if ever there was one) the switchboard after they thought they heard a teenage character in *Wilderness Edge* tell a pal: "I haven't had your fucking watch."

Dad Mark Cox, 37, of Matlock, Derbyshire, who was watching the afternoon show with daughter Gemma, 7, said: "I was disgusted."

However, a spokesman for Manchester-based programme makers Granada responded: "The word wasn't fucking, it was faffing." (D Star, 25/6/93)

Ian Screeton, 18, of Seaton Carew, Cleveland, who was watching the show, told his dad, Paul, 49: "He said 'fucking' and it was plain as day."

Then there was a TV advertisement which was plucked from screens because chickens going "cluck, cluck" sounded like "fuck, fuck."

The commercial for Bird's Eye Crispy Chicken, with a voice-over by Lenzy Henry, had been scheduled to go out nationwide.

It showed a wife taking a bird from the oven as chickens clucked in the background. But the Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre, which vets ads, decided the soundtrack was too fowl.

Bird's Eye said: "Changes are being made. We are confident the revised version will meet with approval.

Grampian TV's director of programmes, George Mitchell, said: "While the chickens were clucking away in the background of the film, some people thought they were saying something else.

"The advert must have cost at least £50,000, so the feathers are really flying over it."

Bird's Eye Walls was recording a new soundtrack for the ad.

A company spokesman said: "Modifications to the soundtrack were requested by the BACC. The changes are being made and we are confident the revised version will meet with their approval."

(Ten paragraphs in D Star, 16/7/93; four in Sun, 16/7/93, claiming "exclusive" - only latter, however, mentioned Henry.)

Another F-word item. Pub dog Sherry would call time with a howl that customers at the Guinea Pig, in East Grinstead, Sussex, said sounded like they were being told to "fuck off" by the dog, but that's just the way it happened to come out (News of the World, 27/3/94 and Johnny come lately 21/5/94 D Star)

From the reproductive to the anal. Apparently a Disney talking book for children seemed to have The Lion King character Rafiki saying "squashed bananas up your arse" (Sun, 29/5/93) or "squashed bananas up his arse" (D Star 29/5/93)

A Disney spokesman insisted that the monkey says: "Asantesana squashed banana" (Sun) or from a spokeswoman "Asantesana squashed bananas" (D Star)

Asantesana, as we all know, means "welcome" in Swahili.

Children press a button in the £9.99 book to hear Rafiki speak and the problem arises when he repeats the phrase, stringing banana and asantesana together.

Carol Wright, 33, a pub boss in Bishop Auckland, County Durham, stopped her 22-month-old daughter Sadie listening. She said: "There's definitely a naughty message. All my regulars agree."

Hang on, hang on. How would Sadie, at 22 months, recognise and be morally polluted by the bum reference?

The Disney spokesman says "We simply can't hear the words these people say are there" (Sun) and in almost

parrot fashion the spokeswoman says "We simply can't hear the words that these people say are there" (D Star)

Yes, freelancers send slightly different versions to different papers. Been there, done it myself. Still, these two are odd, with only the Sun mentioning the Wrights and the D Star referring to "flooded with complaints" (that journalistic exaggeration again to make the story more saleable to a newsdesk).

A clean one now.

A six-week-old lamb (that important age factor to every person or animal again) sparked off a police and helicopter search in the Western Isles.

Tourists on the beach at Bayble, Lewis, called police before 4pm saying that they had heard cries for help coming from cliffs near the beach.

The coastguard helicopter was scrambled within minutes to the scene but, despite an intensive search with police and coastguard volunteers, no one was found.

However, the crew did spot a lone sheep peering over cliffs at Stac na Goib nearby.

A dinghy with three coastguards aboard was then launched at Stornoway and sent to investigate.

In a cave below the ewe, the crew found a young lamb crying its head off for its mother, which it could hear on the cliffs above.

Even when it was plucked to safety, the lamb was still distressed and jumped out of the dinghy and had to be rescued a second time.

Ian Stephen, of Stornoway coastguards, said: "The lamb's cries obviously were just like someone shouting 'Help'." (Aberdeen Press & Journal, 4/6/93)

Next! Why did secretary Kay Martin, conveniently far away in Auckland, New Zealand, turn vegetarian? Because the chicken she was roasting squawked at her from inside her oven. She later learned the noise was caused by steam from the oven vibrating the bird's still-intact vocal chords (D Star, 25/4/94)

Nearly there. This one's pedigree is suspect from the start (Sunday Sport, 5/2/95) and could be a joke cum urban belief tale turned as here into a reader's letter.

N. Gower, of Huddersfield, writes: *Two girlfriends of mine (lucky boaster - P.S.) stopped off on the way home from a chicken and chips takeaway before getting a taxi. They had a row with the driver over the fare which ended with him shouting "Fuck off, you bitch" as they got out. They swore back at him, but it was only when their supper flew out of the window that they realised he had really said "You forgot your CHIPS!"*

Had to laugh, Hope you did.

As a postscript, around the time non-shoplifter Richard Madeley was assailed on television by a caller requesting him to steal her some wine, I was octaroonically-attentively watching a phone-in to a member of some teenybopper band when a caller suddenly blurted out "Do you like twats?" As my son turned to gauge my reaction, the presenter dourly observed: "You always get one" as he cut off the gynaecologically-inquisitive miscreant.

Hear today, gone tomorrow.

Updating time. Police supposedly searched for a youth with a pelican in Stroud, Gloucestershire, then found someone had misheard the phrase pellet gun (Sun, 18/9/95). And blushing councillors renamed a new meeting place, Falcon Hall, after realising their accent made it sound like a swearword. The venue at Shanklin, Isle of Wight, is now Falcon Cross Hall.

Don't know quite how this fits (WORRA FANNY VOICE! Girl vent act foiled fiend, D. Sport, 31/8/95) but it's a laugh.

Doubtless the same sub-editor wrote the headline (IT'S A FANNY OLD WATER WORLD, KEV, D. Sport, 7/8/95) whereby - in a case of true visual, as opposed to auditory - simulacra, it is alleged stunned film-makers saved Kevin Costner's neck when they pointed out that there was something fishy about his gills.

"They resembled a woman's naughty bits - complete with clitoris," a studio insider revealed. "They made him

look ridiculous."

The stuck on gills had to be touched up by computer experts before the futuristic film could be released.

"They had to be altered," said the insider. "Your eyes went to the gills all the time. It was like looking at a spread-leg shot in Penthouse."

The disaster-prone film, in which Costner plays an heroic, half-man half-fish, earned its star the nickname Kevin Costly.

Upon My Sole, This Must be A Shoe Tree



By Nikki Tainton

I used to work in a pub nearby to where there was a large tree festooned with shoes between High Wycombe and Stokenchurch, Buckinghamshire.

When the shoes first appeared, I was bombarded with many rumours as to the significance of the display.

The first to circulate was of witchcraft and pagan rituals.

This was followed by stories that the number of local pregnancies increased to almost double the figure of previous years.

There was a rumour the shoes were put up by a traveller who had a fear of the tree and had to pay a "toll" whenever he wanted to drive down this particular section of road.

Then there was the idea that it had something to do with:

Guy Fawkes;
Preparation for the landing of an alien spaceship;

Part of a spell to make the people of the area "faster of their feet";

Part of the process for letting the "recently dead" walk the earth again;

Even that they were the footwear of former government ministers who had their shoes taken away as a mark of disgrace.

There was also a tale that the shoes were stolen from outside a local mosque.

The reality is that the hundred or so pairs of shoes and boots - some brightly painted - were put there after a local prankster decided the area needed brightening up. He initially put up a few shoes and couldn't explain how

they seemed to increase in number every night.

Fiona Chandler, Wycombe District Council, adds:

EARLIER this year the hazards of this new tourist attraction, on the north side of the A40, about a kilometre from Studley Green, were brought to our attention. One of our officials decided that it was a potential hazard to traffic as drivers were slowing down to take a look so all the shoes were removed and no one has seen fit to replace them.

Adapted from:



Daily Mail, August 26, 1995.

Park Pigeons Sold As Food

By Paul Watson

SICK YOBs are snaring pigeons in Sunderland's Mowbray Park - and selling them to city families for food.

Youngsters - some only 10 and 11 - are selling the birds for 50p each.

Callers to the Echo have seen people buying boxes of pigeons from school-children and then admitting they eat them!

Any pigeons the youngsters can't sell have their heads torn off and are dumped in the park.

The shocking news comes only weeks after the Echo reported how pigeon bodies were found in the park, prompting one woman to call for a police and an RSPCA investigation.

Pauline Blackburn, a member of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, told how she regularly saw youngsters trying to entice pigeons into boxes.

Today she revealed that only this week she had unsuccessfully tried to stop two children walking off with crisp boxes crammed with pigeons.

She added: "This is the most horrific thing I have heard."

One woman who saw a family buying the pigeons at a house in Hendon was sworn at for trying to intervene.

Another woman, from Hendon, has been offered cooked pigeon wings from a woman who buys them from teenagers.

(Echo, Sunderland, 15/8/95)

* The story took a racist turn when a national paper took it up. Headed VINDACOO, it was alleged the mystery of a city's vanishing pigeons was because they were being snared and sold by children to Asian families to put in their "coo-rry!"

According to Gareth Morgan, youngsters were said to have sold the plumpiest for 50p each to Asians who regard them as a delicacy (D Star, 16/8/95)

PIGEON PIE-EYED
HUNGOVER pigeons were nursing sore heads in Maidstone, Kent, yesterday after revellers left bird seed soaked in alcohol on pavements.

Ostar,
13/11/95

The Art of Begging (Picasso, Pigeons and Monet)

By Paul Screeton

REMEMBER Jean Knowlson? The pensioner who was sent to jail in July for feeding the pigeons of Purley, Surrey? Her solicitor claimed she "looked at their little faces and could not bear not to feed them." As Celia Haddon (Please do not feed - or be manipulated by - the pigeons, *Weekend Telegraph*, 12/8/95) suggested, she was possibly being manipulated by the birds.

Urban (legend?) pigeons have learned how to beg, according to Swiss researchers writing in the journal *Anthozoos*: (A pigeon would approach a potential feeder, stretch out its head to try to make eye contact, then turn away and return. A pigeon, if fed, would continue to beg for approximately 90 seconds but would turn away after 40-50 seconds if not.)

So far, so good. Now to the point, or rather not. For Haddon is so vague with the nugget in an otherwise quite interesting article on pigeons feeding motivation, that it sounds so unlikely and vague as to be folkloristic. Here she goes: "When motivated by food rewards, one study showed pigeons could even tell the difference in painting style between Picasso and Monet."

"Think that's strange? Try this one. Angler John Lambourn landed a 35lb blue shark and found a live racing pigeon inside its stomach.

John, who was fishing off the Cornish coast, was trying to reunite the lucky bird - which was unhurt - with its owner.

The angler, of Newlyn, said: "How on earth a pigeon got inside the shark is beyond me. But I'm now hoping to trace the bird's owner through its number tag." (*D Star*, 31/8/95)

An avid collector of "coming to harm" tales, I note that York railway station supposedly has a pigeon population whose members if taking off from the 25,000-volt overhead cables inadvertently brush the roof with their wings while their feet are still on the wires they explode (*Weekend Telegraph*, 22/4/95)

Not confined to York, if true anyway, apparently phones were cut off in Southend after a power surge through a British Rail cable. "An LTS spokesman said the problem started when a pigeon landed on their overhead wires. The bird exploded, shorting out the power supply and knocking out the BT cables (*Southend Evening Echo* reported in *Stop & Examine* column in *Rail*, No. 261, 1995)

Actually, such bird deaths I can believe as I saw a dead, spreadeagled kestrel at electrified Crewe station while train-spotting on 15/10/95.

Back in York, British Rail was supposedly placing four plastic decoy owls on the roof of the station to scare away pigeons (*Weekend Telegraph*, 22/4/95), adding that the *Yorkshire Post* had recently noted Heather Speakman had spent two full days trying to rescue an eagle owl that had become trapped in the pylons near her home in Long Eaton, Derbyshire, only

to learn that it was a fake put there by East Midlands Electricity to scare off starlings.

This sounds familiar. The do-gooder or ornithologist being over-zealous.

Lastly back to pigeons' cleverness and coming to harm, "lazy pigeons hopping on to Tube trains to save their tired wings will be treated as vermin and killed say London Underground." (*D. Sport*, 1/10/95)



The Moscow Injectors

By Paul Screeton

IT WAS the summer of 1980 and the city of Moscow was anxiously awaiting the start of the Olympic games, already badly damaged by a United States boycott resulting from the Russians' invasion of Afghanistan and dogged by unfavourable publicity.

As the atmosphere in the Soviet capital became increasingly tense, rumours began to circulate of mysterious assailants cruising the city, bizarre and ferocious insects, poisons, terrorists, even vampires.

Eventually future premier Yuri Andropov, who was at the time head of the KGB, ordered a full-scale investigation into the phenomenon that was sweeping the city.

The story had started when a number of Muscovites began to report that they had suffered a sudden stinging pain, often in "the most embarrassing places" as the *Moscow News* (5/11/93) put it.

The victims were of varying ages and professions, including some foreign visitors, but the most common targets seemed to be women of above average weight. A typical "attack" would be preceded by a sharp, flicking sound, similar to that produced by a wet towel, and the unfortunate victim would feel a sharp pain which would quickly develop into a swollen bruise with a tiny piercing wound at its centre.

It was shortly after the first attacks that stories began to circulate claiming that a perverse gang was at work

in the city, fatally injecting innocent people with a slow-acting poison which would suddenly become active within the body after an unspecified time.

By June more than 80 people had reported attacks and a degree of panic began to develop.

It was at this critical stage in the hysteria that orders came from the upper echelons of the Kremlin: other crimes of any kind, murder, extortion or black marketeering were all to take second place to finding these mysterious assailants.

The investigation was headed by Nikolai Kutsenko, a colonel in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who was ordered to proceed in total secrecy. There was to be no discussion of the case with family or colleagues as the political consequences of the hostile Western press picking up the story could have been catastrophic to the ruling hierarchy if the games themselves were to be overshadowed.

Knowing that Andropov was closely involved in the case, almost the whole of the Moscow Criminal Investigation Department, the branch of the police which dealt with the most serious offences, became involved and the department consulted experts on various forms of injected poison in an attempt to ascertain the seriousness of the inflicted wounds. The answer they received was neither enlightening nor terribly helpful; any definitive conclusion could only be reached after an au-

topsy had been performed on the corpse of someone who had died from such an attack, declared the medical consultants and even so a full report would probably take around three months to deliver.

Realising that this line of inquiry was rapidly leading nowhere, Kutsenko and his colleagues changed tack and approached entomologists about a possible insect plague and physicists specialising in electrostatics, just in case localised electrical disturbances were responsible. The result was in each case declared to be possible but unlikely, and so the police returned to more traditional methods and began a thorough interrogation of each victim in an attempt to find some related experiences or factors which might offer up some clue as to motive or method.

All the attacks had happened to pedestrians beside major streets throughout the city, so was it possible that the gang was operating from a moving vehicle? This initially promising idea seemed to be dead end until one woman recalled a strange type of crane standing beside her when she was stung, which she later identified as a repair truck for the city's street lights.

With this lead, the police simply plotted the routes of all the work crews from the maintenance department over the past weeks and compared them with the pattern of assaults across the city.

Consequently, in true Soviet fashion, a night-time swoop was made and two frightened teams of repairmen were delivered to police headquarters. All were men aged between 40 and 50 years old.

When confronted with the evidence against them, the men readily admitted their culpability.

Linda Lusardi's Chest-nuts

By Paul Screeton

FOR all men who have lusted after Page 3 beauty Linda Lusardi, her hus-

The whole business had started after they had been given a severe dressing down by a foreman at the depot and, as a gesture of revenge, had constructed a catapult from the rubber strap of an old gas mask and used aluminium wire as ammunition.

They so enjoyed the discomfiture of their unfortunate superior as he searched in vain for his unseen insect attacker that they decided to take their prank on to the city streets wherever they worked.

As tales of a vampire stalking the streets grew, they particularly targeted any young woman they came across and so fuelled the stories and the atmosphere of fear.

Although they knew they had caused considerable disruption, the gang was sure that as they had only been carrying out an extended practical joke, their case would not be treated seriously. Even Kutsenko expected a maximum sentence of 15 days' detention for petty hooliganism.

The authorities took a rather more political view of their misdemeanours, however, and they were charged with the more serious crime of malicious hooliganism and given sentences of between five and seven years.

The 1980 Olympic games went ahead, the rumours of poisoners and vampires subsided and each police officer who had participated in the operation was given a 30 rouble bonus and strict instructions never to speak about the case.

Apparently nobody knows what happened to the repairmen.

But is it true. One gang or two? Aluminium, surely, is too fragile and bendable to be catapulted. What force would be required to pierce skin, presumably through clothing, and why did it not stick in the body? Too many questions without satisfactory answers surely? A Muscovite very urban legend?

band's lack of attention and taking her for granted might seem extreme.

Nevertheless, her marriage break-up has thrown up repeats of two classic love revenge urban belief tales.

From an article, *The Loneliness of Lovely Linda*, by Philip Judge (D. Star, 17/10/95) we have:

"I had some great ideas for revenge which appealed to me. I heard of a girl whose boyfriend had cheated on her. She knew that he was travelling away from home for a couple of weeks.

"She got her revenge by going into his house and spraying water in all the rooms — over the sofas, armchairs, carpets, bed, his clothes, everywhere. Then she chucked cress seeds over the lot and left. When the guy came back two weeks later there was a carpet of green inside the whole house! The place looked like a jungle — and you can't get rid of it that easily.

"It taught him a lesson he would never forget — and I think it's a wonderful way for a woman who feels she's been wronged to get her own back.

"It's far better than cutting off the sleeves of your fella's suits, or taking his wine from the cellar and giving it to the neighbours, like I read that some angry wife did to her husband.

"Another girl told me she had gone to her boyfriend's flat after she found he had been unfaithful and dialled the speaking clock in America. That ran up an enormous bill, which he had to pay.



There you have it, the cress carpet and US speaking clock — as disc-jockeys say — back to back.

Wanting the moon

Francis When

LOATH though I am to believe anything that emerges from the Internet — which seems to be a clearing station for every urban myth and folk legend — there is a story floating through cyberspace which deserves a wider audience. It concerns the Apollo astronaut Neil Armstrong.

Although everyone remembers Armstrong's "One small step for man" soundbite, rather fewer listeners noticed an enigmatic remark he made at the end of his moonwalk, as he re-entered the landing craft: "Good luck, Mr Gorsky." Staff at Nasa ini-

tially assumed that it was an in-joke addressed to some rival Russian cosmonaut. They swiftly discovered, however, that there was no Gorsky in either the Soviet or the American space programme. Over the years, several interviewers have asked Armstrong what he meant, but he has always refused to elucidate.

Until now, that is. After a recent lecture in Tampa Bay, Florida, a reporter in the audience brought up the question again. Armstrong replied that, since

Gorsky had now died, all could be revealed.

When he was a boy, Armstrong was playing baseball with his brother in the backyard one day. His brother hit a "fly ball" which landed below his neighbour's bedroom window — the neighbours in question being Mr and Mrs Gorsky. As young Neil leaned down to pick up the ball, he heard Mrs Gorsky shouting at her husband: "Oral sex? Oral sex you want? You'll get oral sex when the kid next door walks on the moon!"

The global lie that cannot be silenced

By Anna Pukas

It was a horrific tale. Westerners had killed Eduardo Feliciano Oliveira, a toddler from a poor suburb of Sao Paulo, Brazil, then cut out his eyes and internal organs to sell for transplants to rich foreigners.

Fear swept through the streets of Catapicuiaba. Newspapers reported how, after Oliveira died in hospital in April, a post-mortem discovered the infant's eyes were indeed missing and his stomach found stuffed with sawdust. Then "eyewitness" accounts emerged about a gang, dressed as clowns and ballerinas, luring children into a van; their bodies were later thrown out, their vital organs cut out. It was the latest outbreak of the lie that will not die.

Oliveira's parents suspect the hospital of trying to cover up a blunder, but their son's death became caught up in the myth of Third World children murdered for their internal organs that keeps surfacing around the world. At various times, in spite of the lack of evidence, it has been swallowed by the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, the European parliament and much of the international media.

The myth would be amusing were it not for the serious repercussions. Some Third World countries have introduced new

adoption and organ donor laws as a result, while in others the numbers of adoptions and donations have plummeted.

It has also led to attacks on western travellers. June Weinstock, a 52-year-old Alaskan, was beaten almost to death by a mob because a Guatemalan mother temporarily lost her little boy and posted up in the town square was an article about foreigners stealing children's organs. A year later, Weinstock cannot walk or talk and needs 24-hour nursing.

Folklorists believe the roots of the myth can be traced back to medieval Christians tormenting the Jews as child-killers. It has an equivalent urban myth: the tourist who gets mugged and, recovering consciousness, discovers that he is covered in blood having been robbed of a kidney.

Latterly, however, the story has flown around the world and become cloaked in a spurious patina of truth. "To deny the existence of such trafficking is comparable to denying the existence of gas chambers during the last world war," said Leon Schwartzberg, a former French health minister, in one European Community report.

Todd Leventhal, an official at the United States Information Agency, has tracked the fable's progress from Honduran gossip to international accep-

ance. "This is a myth about poor people's fears of wealthy people and about more fundamental fear of mutilation, death and advances in science that they can neither understand nor control," he said.

The myth existed anecdotally at the start of the last decade. One former BBC correspondent recalls reading in 1985 about a "death strip" of road between Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo where children were mown down so their bodies could be stripped of organs.

But on January 2, 1987, the legend went global. Honduras television and La Tribuna, a Honduran newspaper, ran an interview on adoption with Leonardo Villeda Bermudez, secretary-general of the Honduran Committee for Social Welfare, in which he seemed to claim adoptive parents were selling children "for parts".

Bermudez immediately issued a clarification, insisting he was only repeating unconfirmed rumours told to him by social workers. Other Honduran officials said the allegations were baseless.

But it was too late. The story had been picked up by Reuters, the international news service. The next month there was an outbreak in Guatemala, then an article in Pravda, the Soviet newspaper, three months later. It was too good an anti-capital-

Babies 'kidnapped for US organ banks'

SEVEN Brazilian baby boys

announced

what would be the charges

Un mutile des enfants pour vendre leurs organes!

(Sunday Times, 16/7/95)

ist story for the Soviets to keep to themselves and through Tass, their news agency, it was disseminated to "friendly" press in other countries. As a result, scares and stories began cropping up around the world.

These led to condemnation in the European parliament in 1988 after a French Communist MEP tabled a resolution based on two reports from the International Association of Demo-

cratic Lawyers, a UN-accredited group suspected by many of being a Soviet front organisation. The fact that the UN had rejected the reports as uncorroborated was ignored.

Then came the big-budget television documentary-makers. Among the programmes was The Body Parts Business, an Anglo-Canadian film broadcast by the BBC in November 1993. It showed Pedro Reggi, a retarded Argentinian youth living at the Montes de Oca mental home, 65 miles from Buenos Aires, who claimed his eyes had been "stolen" to remove the corneas for transplant.

Days after the film's transmission, however, Reggi and his half-brother publicly refuted the claims. The half-brother, confessing he made up the story, admitted on television that doctors had examined Reggi that day and declared he lost his eyes due to an infection.

Judy Jackson, producer of The Body Parts Business, said last week she did not believe children were being snatched for their organs. "We went to Argentina to report on an inquiry launched into the unusually high number of deaths at Montes de Oca and to investigate allegations of irregularities in the transplant system," she said. "If people lied to us, I don't know why."

Organ Thieves, an award-

winning French documentary, told the story of Jeison Cruz Vargas, a 10-year-old from Bogota, Colombia, with no eyes. His mother said they had been stolen when Jeison had been taken to hospital as a baby. But Leventhal obtained the boy's medical records, which showed he had been blinded by an infection. A Colombian government inquiry said the mother had been paid 40,000 pesos (£40) for her story.

The myth began to pick up heavyweight support after the documentaries. The World Health Organisation was panicked into drawing up new transplant guidelines, which it subsequently acknowledged was misguided.

A UN report found "mounting evidence of a market for children's organs". However, after a four-year investigation, its only evidence was allegations from anonymous Nepalese policemen of an unnamed kidnapper trying to smuggle two unidentified minors into India to have their kidneys removed.

Doctors have pointed to the sheer medical impossibility of the clandestine trade. Organs have to be tissue-matched and their shelf-life outside the body is extremely short. "You can't just turn up at some hospital with a kidney in a cooler," said Joel Newman, of the United

Network for Organ Sharing in America.

There has been suspicion, however, at why America is working so hard to debunk the myth. "The Americans are sensitive about this because America is where the organs are going," said Ben Schonfeld, of the World Organisation Against Torture, based in Geneva. "There are few children's rights organisations that don't give this subject credence."

Those damaged by the rumours, however, are sick people, organ transplant organisations and adoption agencies. In Colombia, cornea donations fell by 90% after pictures of Jeison were published. In one Brazilian province, adoptions fell from 300 in 1993 to 36 in 1994. Several nations tightened laws on foreign adoptions; Turkey even banned them.

Paul Smith, the British-born head of the folklore department at the University of Newfoundland, says it is irrelevant whether urban myths are true or not: "The important thing is why people believe them, the ideas and fears the myths express and the way some myths eventually come true." It would be tragic indeed if the legend of the organ-snatchers were to become reality just because it was too horrible to disbelieve.

British told the Arabs it was Hitler not Goebbels that had none at all

By Richard Norton-Taylor and Ian Black

AN EXOTIC variant of the wartime ditty about the testicular-challenged Nazi high command was recorded by British propaganda agents to blacken Hitler's reputation among the Arabs, according to files declassified yesterday.

It was Hitler, rather than Goebbels, suggested the Foreign Office's political warfare executive, who had no balls at all.

The gramophone records were sent, "most luxuriously-packed", to stimulate anti-German feeling among the Arabs of Morocco. The story went like this:

A group of Arab merchants arrive in Marrakech only to discover that the market place is empty. It is the fault of the Germans. With nothing to buy, the merchants go to see an old story-teller. He explains that Hitler, a "bastard" whose original name was Schicklgruber, has a "fiery hatred" for Jews and Arabs alike.

One day, the story-teller recounted, Hitler was painting a ceiling when he fell and

damaged one of his testes.

He went to see a Jewish doctor who discovered his testes were diseased. Before an admiring group of colleagues and to general applause, the doctor cut them both off.

According to an unidentified British Arab-speaker who translated the script: "The epithets applied to Hitler during the course of this edifying story about his testicles, alternate between 'pig', or 'swine' and 'bastard'."

Later, Hitler is approached by Mara, Goebbels's wife. She is worried that her husband has lost the Fuhrer's esteem. She appears "stark naked before Hitler". Hitler also undresses. He promptly steals Mara's clothes and goes off to the eastern front "to make conquests of his own generals there". Meanwhile, Goebbels, who is accused of stealing clothes from Jews, spirits away "a private fortune".

The idea was to undermine Hitler's prestige, described by the political warfare executive as "tremendous in



Political warfare executive files declassified yesterday reveal a smutty approach to damaging German prestige

The **Guardian**

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Arab countries". But not everyone was amused. Lord Gort, the Governor of Gibraltar, for one.

He heard about the records from an Arab-speaking Briton. He wrote to Sir Frank Nelson, a senior War Office official, in March 1942: "I feel sure that you, like me, find it difficult to believe that 'smutty' stories of an unusually dirty hue really form the the most effective type of propaganda to further the British cause amongst the inhabitants of Morocco. Speaking with vile contempt the head of State invites similar treatment, and surely we do not wish to encourage retaliatory propaganda."

One official objected that "to the average Moor, the name Hitler meant little", although he conceded that the story "could be appreciated in the brothels".

Another said the comment about Goebbels hiding away a private fortune "would evoke admiration and envy rather than disapprobation". He added that, among Moors, "sodomy is quite commonly indulged in their youth".

Sex and the macabre were familiar themes in the black propaganda campaign, codenamed Special (Venom). Sample items released yesterday at the Public Record Office and apparently considered more widely acceptable than the Arabic gramophone records, include:

¥ "Scrotums of Italian soldiers killed in Montenegro being sold as tobacco pouches for 20 lire";

¥ "Germans so short of cloth they are training agents to disinter bodies in Muslim cemeteries and seize shrouds for use as machine rags in Germany";

¥ "An Italian battalion mutilated at Split after a human finger nail was discovered in canned meat";

¥ "When Rommel heard of high Italian casualties at the beginning of his offensive, he said: 'that's just what I

meant them for — carpet troops'."

Mosques, suggested the propagandists, were being used as brothels in Tripoli. Scalps of Italian soldiers killed in Montenegro were being sold for five lire as keepsakes — "pair of ears same price. Lower the limb higher the price".

One directive "reported" a new drug which "induces impotence but does not interfere with working capacity being given to all foreign workers in Germany in their soup".

One of the most venomous ran in April 1943: "On entering Tunis Allied troops found dead children cut up as butchers' meat in the German army store. Portions of them had already been used as pork ration. Typically enough, the Germans had filed their identity cards."

More serious rumours were used to suggest that Italy was suing for peace and that Mussolini's break with Germany was widening. Grim news from the Eastern front, emphasising the effect of frostbite, was a speciality.

Local Special Operations Executive agents complained that a lot of the material was simply implausible, and that the exercise was in danger of being discredited. But London cabled back to Tangier: "It is quite possible that you may not yourself always see the object of rumours sent you . . . but you will appreciate that you may be corroborating some rumour campaign being run on a wide scale in other parts of the world."



Rommel, who derided his Italian allies

Newslines

PORNOGRAPHY IN CYBERSPACE — MORAL PANICS can perhaps be seen as an adjunct to folklore. A number of correspondents (Peter Christie actually) have sent cuttings on pornography in cyberspace.

Time magazine recently ran an alarming and lengthy cover story warning the parents of America and the world to be on their guard against all manner of carnal horrors, based on a research report from Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Naturally, there was a backlash from those fighting to keep the Net free and uncensored.

Liberal commentators have warned of a sinister conspiracy whereby governments have stirred up a bogus moral panic so that they can start regulating a system that might otherwise be buzzing with dangerous political subversion.

The Independent Magazine (29/7/95) reports: "Fanciful though all this may seem, the attack on the original research has been extraordinarily thorough. So much so that its author, an undergraduate called Marty Rimm, has come in for a bit of unexpected personal attention himself. Inevitably, it emerges that his hands are far from clean. Time itself has had to admit that Rimm has a bit of a track record as an author. First there was a 'salacious' novel, called *An American Playground*. Worse, it was followed by a little self-publishing project: *The Pornographer's Handbook: How to Exploit Women, Dupe Men and Make Lots of Money*.

"Talk about running with the hare and hunting with the hounds."

The "exhaustive" research had claimed that 85.3% of all images posted on the Internet are pornographic. But the "research" was based not on the Net as a whole but on "adult" bulletin boards which specialise in pornography and which children cannot use.

"It is a bit like going into a Soho bookshop," writes John Naughton (notebook in *The Guardian*, 12/8/95) "and finding that 85% of the volumes sold under the counter in sealed wrappers contain sexually-explicit material."

DON'S DOMAIN

A SEARCH FOR QUETZALCOATL by John Spencer Carroll (\$8).

Almost 30 years ago I was buttonholed outside Leeds City Library by an adherent of Quetzalcoatl. He seemed a total nutter. Carroll, however, uses scholarship to investigate the cyclical return of this avatar. It is a personal quest with much of interest along the way.

THE CRYSTAL VEIL by Donald L Cyr (£8)

More on "hidden halos" theorising with over 200 examples of artifacts worldwide based upon ice crystals refracted into aerial patterns. A simple but controversial avant-garde archaeological theory. From Stonehenge Viewpoint articles.

THE WHISTLER SERENADE by James S Brett, Stephen P McGreevy, Neil Strauss and others (£7)

Whistlers are exotic natural sounds of a mysterious nature which can be heard on very low frequency radio receivers. From association with crop circles, this volume is particularly fascinating for its new speculations on the famous "Marfa Lights" of Texas. Mostly from Stonehenge Viewpoint articles.

Postpaid copies may be ordered from UK agent Leonard C Smith, 16 Solstice Rise, Amesbury, Salisbury, Wiltshire, SP4 7NQ.

Our good friend Donald's daughter, Annette, who has stayed with us in England has also written and illustrated a wildlife book for children. Bold and colourful, **GOOD NEWS BEES AND TULIPTREES**, shows seasons changing in the Appalachians. Published by Sundance Big Books.