

WONDERS

Seeking the Truth in a Universe of Mysteries

Vol.4 No.4

December 1995

THUNDERBIRDS



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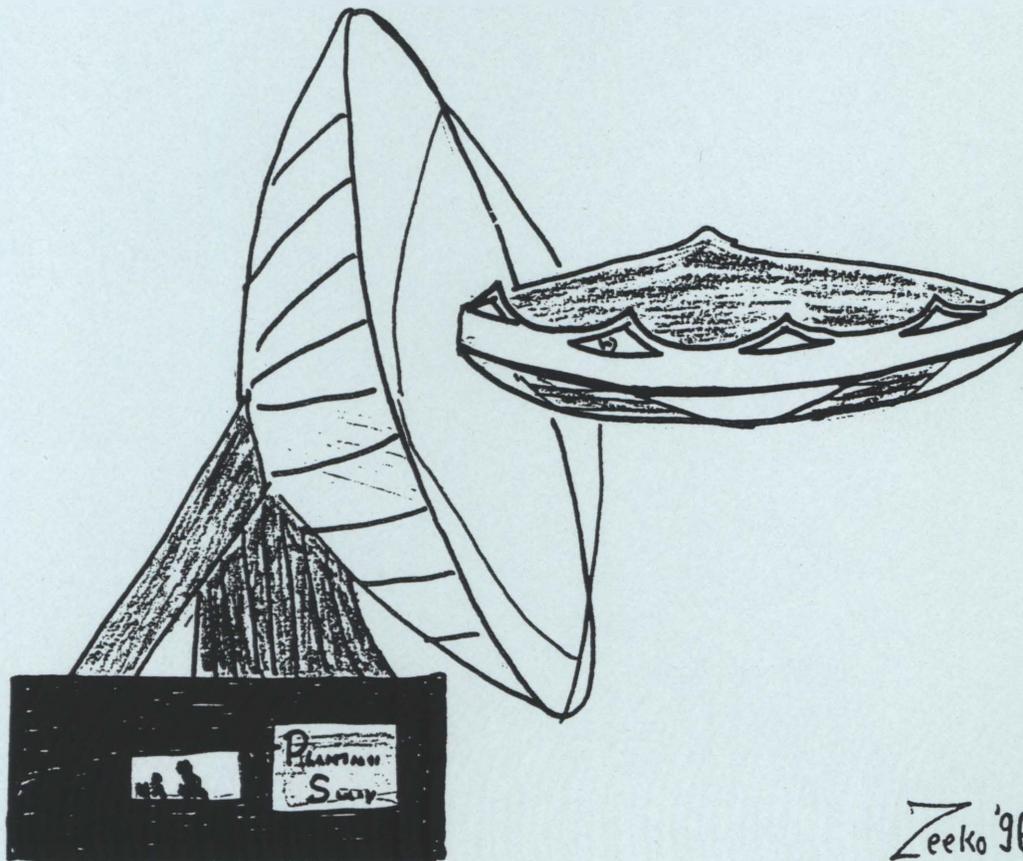
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NEWS ITEM: PLANETARY SOCIETY TO SPEND \$40,000 A YEAR TO LISTEN FOR OTHER LIFE



Zeeko '96

**"WE'RE GETTING A LOT OF INTERFERENCE
TONIGHT. WE CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING!"**

**THE STATUS OF
THE NORTH AMERICAN THUNDERBIRD**

by Mark A. Hall

The world's largest living bird has no scientific name at this time. It has been known by many popular names given to it by the people who have seen it in life. Through a large portion of the globe, in Northeastern Asia and in many parts of the Americas, it has been called the **Thunderbird**. In Norwegian Lappland it is called **Vuokho**. Many other names are known: **Imgig** in ancient Persia, **Pou-kai** in New Zealand, and so on. This gigantic predator has been said to sweep down from mountain crags and carry off large prey, including an occasional human being. [1]

We know the most about the North American Thunderbird. In the course of three centuries knowledge of this rare bird has accumulated. We can now recognize it as one of the many animals still among us but overlooked because it is hard to catch and study in a laboratory setting. Along the western continental coast and in the Great Lakes region the bird was the Thunderbird of the North American Indians. Elsewhere the Indians and later settlers of the continent gave the bird dozens of names from **Achiyalabopa** to **Yel-lo-kin**. [2]

The bird has been reported to exceed in size any known living birds. Wingspans of 20 feet and more are commonly attributed to it. The Thunderbird appears to be the descendant of **Argentavis magnificens**, a fossil giant known to have lived millions of years ago in South America. [3]

This bird has occurred throughout most of North America, from Alaska to Florida. The bird may not ever have been abundant, however. In 17th century New England it was said to be "very rarely or seldome seen." [4] The widespread appearances are accounted for by the bird's migratory habits, appearing in the north in the warm months and in southern regions during the winter.

Through the efforts of Robert Lyman Sr. [5] and his successor Gerald Musinsky [6] we know the most about the Pennsylvania Thunderbirds. The birds seem to arrive in that state in late March and depart in the late fall. They have been reported in recent years in northern New York and in Quebec. They have not so diminished that they cannot still be seen over a wide area in the East.

In the central states the modern reports have been confined to a relatively narrow migratory route from Missouri through Illinois into Wisconsin. We must suspect they are spending the months of April to July somewhere in the region of northern Wisconsin or southern Ontario. That is where numerous American Indian traditions describe the Thunderbirds as nesting. When thunderstorms return to the Great Lakes so do these birds.

It is difficult to judge if the birds' survival in such an open and populated part of the continent is coming to an end or if the birds will persist as they have for thousands of years. About every thirty years the Thunderbirds are noticed in popular press accounts, thus proving their continued presence. Then they lapse into complete obscurity. By the time of the next notoriety their earlier appearances have been almost totally forgotten. In this way the birds have kept

their status as an undefined wonder that mystifies the authorities when honest people trouble to tell what they have seen.

Some people will not talk of their experiences because they will not be believed. The usual "authorities" do not want to hear about them. Typically people wait years to say something about Thunderbirds.

David St. Albans saw a Thunderbird in July of 1968 in Illinois. His story did not come out until 1994. He had just finished mowing a lawn for his father at Keeneyville, Illinois, when he saw a large, black object flying toward him. The lawn was adjacent to cornfields and a quarry. The bird flew in over the cornfields.

St. Albans is now an artist living in New Mexico. His drawings of what he saw are the basis for Figs. 1 and 2. They show the shape and particularly the head of the bird. The body was black with a tuft of white feathers at the base of the neck. The head and neck of the bird were bare of feathers. When we look at the previous record of the birds this fact explains the headless appearance of the descriptions received by the St. Louis artist Amadee in 1948. [7]

As well the stills from the famous Huffer motion film taken in 1977 make more sense when we consider that the neck and head of the bird are difficult to see. They are lost in the background of the sky. [8]

David St. Albans had a good look at this creature for it flew right over him. He gave these particulars in his description. It looked like a California condor only maybe bigger. The head was pink and the neck was a foot long. The beak was yellow-orange in color. It appeared to have what he called teeth along the bill. [9]

From his description it appears that Thunderbirds have a serrated bill (not "teeth"). This would be a convenient attribute for a large predator used to capturing and taking apart large and living prey.

St. Albans description and ability to depict his sighting so well make this report one of the most important on record. Future sightings may further confirm his observations and hopefully will add to them.

The appearance of the bird at a small community west of Chicago in the month of July is in keeping with the southward migration of the Midwestern birds as otherwise reported in this century. [10]

The Western appearances and expected migration patterns of the birds remain unstudied at this time. No one in the area has come forward to pursue whatever remains of these birds in the West.

The benefits to research into the existence of Thunderbirds remain distant and unlikely to be realized any time soon. We ought to be concerned about determining where and when a threat to humans does exist from these birds. We need to learn of any and all possible appearances of the birds to determine their habits.

One day there will be an economic benefit to the presence of the birds in some geographic regions. Few would question that the confirmation of the existence of the rare giants promises an economic boon to tourism. Bird watchers will travel great distances to add a single bird to their life lists. Areas where this will be possible can entertain such seekers and realize a new economic windfall.



Fig. 1. The Thunderbird, most probably the modern survival of *Argentavis magnificens*.

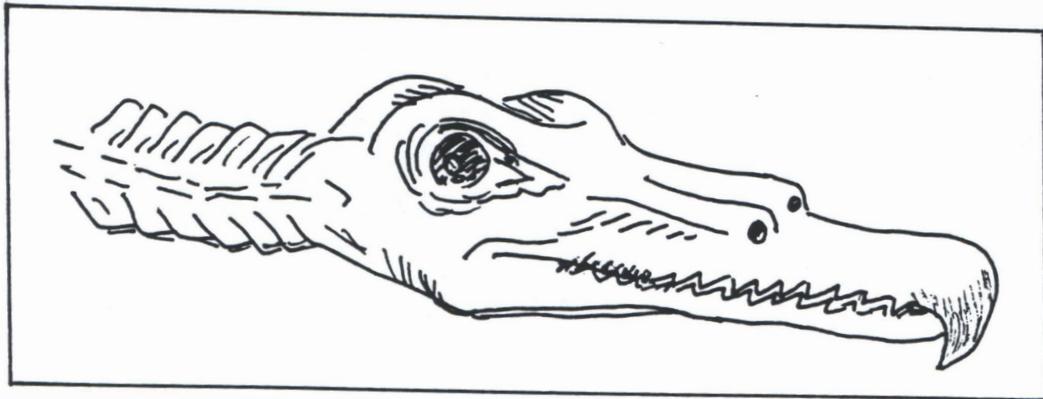


Fig. 2. The head of the Thunderbird as viewed by David St. Albans in 1968.

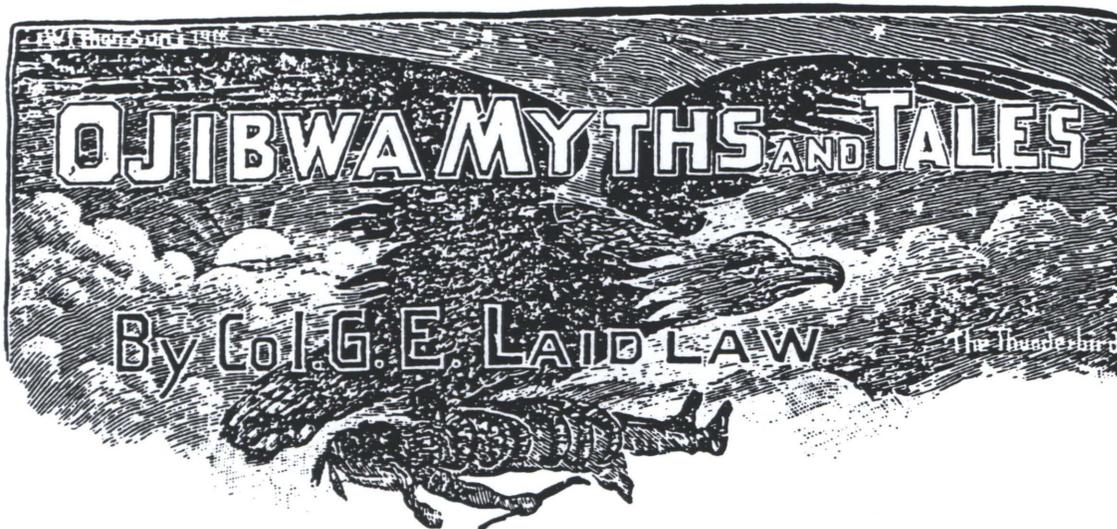


Fig. 3. The Thunderbird was known to the American Indians. That record is detailed in *Thunderbirds! - The Living Legend*. This Thunderbird illustration dates from 1918.

Central Pennsylvania, for example, has a natural beauty that is enough to justify a visit. If we knew the habits of the Thunderbirds it is a certainty that thousands of bird watchers would stream through the region each summer, enjoying its natural wonders while eager to be favored with the sight of the "incredible" birds. According to Gerald Musinsky, the Thunderbirds were seen by several chance observers in 1992 and 1993. [11] The birds are there now for those lucky enough to catch sight of them.

NOTES

1. Mark A. Hall, *THUNDERBIRDS! - THE LIVING LEGEND* 2nd ed (Minneapolis: MAHP 1994).
2. *Ibid.*, 33-43.
3. *Ibid.*, 93-95.
4. *Ibid.*, 53.
5. Robert Lyman Sr., *AMAZING INDEED: STRANGE EVENTS IN THE BLACK FOREST, VOLUME 2* (Coudersport, Penna: The Potter Enterprise, 1973), 93-97.
6. Gerald Musinsky, "Return of the Thunderbird: Avian Mystery of the Pennsylvania Black Forest," *FATE Magazine*, November 1995, pp. 48-51.
7. Hall, *THUNDERBIRDS!*, 23 (Fig. 4).
8. *Ibid.*, 76 (Fig. 13).
9. "Update on Thunderbirds," *WORLD EXPLORER* 1(5): 8-10 (1994).
10. Hall, *THUNDERBIRDS!*, 65-68.
11. Musinsky, "Return of the Thunderbird," 48-49.

THUNDERBIRDS IN 1895

A touching story of the loss of human life was told from the mountains of West Virginia in 1895. A newspaper account is all that survives to tell us of the events that year. The piece is well-written and we must regret that it was published without the author's name. It is transcribed here as it appeared in the St. Louis (Missouri) **Daily Globe Democrat** for 24 February 1895. Two illustrations that appeared with it are reproduced. It is reported from Addison, West Virginia, a town that has since changed its name to Webster Springs.

A MODERN ROC

West Virginia Mountaineers Terrorized by a Gigantic Bird

A Ten-Year-Old Child Carried Off by the Feathered Monster -
A Hunter's Terrible Battle - What a Deputy Sheriff Saw -
The Bird's Home.

Special Correspondence of the Globe-Democrat.

ADDISON, WEBSTER COUNTY, W.VA., February 14. -- Not since the treacherous Gauley River rose suddenly in the night and swept scores of the mountaineers living along its banks to death in its icy waters, has Webster County been so excited as it is at present. From away down on Cherry River to the remotest settlements on Sugar Run, in the upper part of the county, the mountaineers are talking of the gigantic bird which has been terrorizing this section for the past week or ten days.

About two weeks ago a child of Dan Junkins, who lives over on Bergoo, some fifteen miles from this place, suddenly disappeared in a manner which for a time puzzled the oldest hunters and woodsmen of the county. It is now regarded as an absolute certainty that the child, a little girl of 10 years, fell a prey to the winged monstrosity which for want of a better name, the mountaineers call an eagle.

Little Landy was sent by her mother one Friday afternoon to the cabin of Joe Warnick, a mile and a half south of that of Junkins', to ask after Mrs. Warnick, who had been sick. The girl started soon after noon for the Warnick cabin, but never reached there, and vanished as completely as if she had been spirited away by supernatural power. As Landy did not return by 4 or 5 o'clock, Mrs. Junkins grew uneasy, and sent her husband to look for her. He thought, perhaps, she had remained with the Warnicks, and went straight to the cabin. There he learned that the child had not been there. By that time it had become dark, and, assisted by the Warnicks, Junkins started to hunt his daughter. Nothing could be seen of her, and the whole party returned to the Junkins cabin. As there were several inches of snow on the ground, the tracks of Landy could plainly be followed. They were followed to a point within half a mile of the Warnick cabin, where they suddenly disappeared, and could not be seen any further. The point where they stopped was in a cleared field, where buckwheat had been grown last season. The child must evidently have been frightened at something for the tracks left the path, and where they stopped were some 15 to 20 feet

away from it. There were a number of her tracks together, as if she had turned around and around, while trying to avoid something. Beyond this point the footprints disappeared. The search was continued far into the night, and the surrounding forest was scoured as far as possible, as it was thought the child must have wandered from the path. The searchers were compelled to return to the almost distracted mother with the news that the missing child had not been found.

The next day the search was continued by a number of others, who had heard the story, and come to volunteer their services. Search as closely as they could, beyond the footprints in the snow at the point near the path, they could not be followed further. How the child could have vanished and left no farther trace puzzled every one. If she had been seized by a wild animal, its tracks would surely have been left in the snow, but there was nothing of the kind. There was no explanation to offered, and the mystery of the disappearance was not revealed until several days later.

A STRANGE BATTLE

Peter Swadley, a noted bear hunter of Webster, is now in the village being treated for the wounds he received from the huge bird over on Laurel Creek day before yesterday. He is still in a precarious condition from the encounter. Swadley was brought to Addison by Abe Kitsmiller on the afternoon of the day it happened. Swadley was hunting bear over on Piney Ridge, and had his dog Gunner with him. The two were tracking a bear, whose haunts Swadley had known for some days, through the laurel on the mountain side, when he came into a little clearing, and suddenly without other warning other than a scream louder than that of a panther, which Swadley thought at first had jumped on him, the immense feathered creature swooped down with the evident intention of bearing him off. The bird dug its talons in his back, tearing his coat into shreds, and for some minutes there was a fierce fight in the snow. Swadley lost his rifle, and did not get a chance to use his hunting knife. Though he is a large, powerfully built man, he had no chance with his bare hands, and his wounds show what a fight for life it must have been. One of the worst wounds the hunter received was over the left eye, where the scalp was torn away for at least three inches, making a terrible wound. Swadley still managed to retain his footing in the snow, though nearly unconscious, and strove to ward off the blows of the eagle's talons, which nearly tore him to pieces. Swadley's dog Gunner was probably the only thing that saved him from being gilled. The dog was off from its master when the bird attacked him, but when Swadley shouted it returned and made for the eagle. The latter turned from the man to the dog, and Swadley says with one stroke of its powerful claws ripped open its stomach and flew away with the poor creature whining in its talons.

Almost blinded by the blood which flowed from the wound over his eye, the hunter contrived to find his way down the mountain side to the cabin of Abe Kitsmiller, on Little Laurel Creek, a mile or more from the place of conflict. He stumbled into the cabin nearly dead from the loss of blood. Kitsmiller was at home, and after he had bound up Swadley's wounds as well as he could, he put him on



"THE IMMENSE CREATURE SWOOPED DOWN UPON HIM."

a horse and brought him to Addison.

Owing to the fact that the bird came on him so suddenly, and nearly blinded him at the outset by the blow on the head, Swadley is not able to give much of a description of it. Its strength, however, he declares, was prodigious, and twice he was lifted off his feet by its onslaughts. Its body, he says, is as large as that of a man. "Ef it was to come as ter how I should have ter pick atwixt a painter and the varmint, in fair hand-to-hand fight, I should take the painter every time," he said telling of the affair.

A DEPUTY SHERIFF'S EXPERIENCE

Rube Nihiser, one of the County Deputy Sheriffs, who lives over on Spruce Creek, near the foot of Owl Head Mountain, and his son Hanse had a strange experience with the eagle last Thursday. Rube and his son started out in the morning on a deer hunt. As a light snow had fallen the night before it was a splendid time to track the game. They had not been out but two or three hours when they ran across the trails of a doe and fawn, and followed them around the base of the mountain, across on Piney Ridge, and down it to the laurel beds on a little branch of Sugar Run. The two hunters expected to find the deer in the beds, as they had evidently been out feeding the night before, and had gone, they thought, into the beds to rest for the day. Contrary to expectations, the tracks led through the laurel, where they were followed with difficulty into a forest of hemlocks. From the fact that the hemlock branches were so thick, and the day was so dark, it was hard to make out the trail. Nihiser knew the place well, as it was a favorite "crossing" for the deer, along which they were accustomed to go to another laurel bed some distance away.

The two men had nearly got out of the forest and reached a clearing which had been made by fire burning the trees for several acres, when they heard a terrible commotion ahead. There were ear-splitting screams. They hurried to the edge of the cleared spot, and 200 yards away saw the doe and fawn with a tremendous bird of some kind circling above them, and pouncing down, first on one and then on the other. The bird was of immense size, and was emitting the screams which were heard. The doe was vainly trying to protect the fawn. Nihiser and his son were so astounded at the sight that they simply stood and watched. The fawn was bleating fearfully, and the doe was trying to ward off the terrible attacks from the eagle. The latter would circle up, they said, in the air 50 or 60 feet, and then swoop down on the deer. As the two men looked the bird suddenly wheeled down, and, fastening its talons in the fawn's body, flapped its wings and sailed away, apparently with ease, over the tops of the dead trees. Nihiser put up his rifle, and fired a departing shot without effect. They watched the bird, which flopped its wings until it had risen some distance up in the air, and sailed off toward the inaccessible fastnesses of Snaggle Tooth Knob.

The doe stood as if dazed when the men approached, and did not attempt to move away. It was found that the eyes had been scratched out by the eagle's claws, and it was so badly wounded that it could hardly stand. Nihiser cut its throat with his hunting knife, and its hide was found to be almost torn to ribbons.

Nihiser and his son say that the bird which they saw was of immense size, and that its spread of wings must have been fully 15 or 18 feet. Its body, they say, was as large as that of a man, and its cries were loud and shrill in the extreme. The feathers were of a dark brown color, with white on the wings, and light underneath. Its eyes were tremendous, larger than those of the largest-sized owl, and they shone with terrible brilliancy, plainly discernible from where they stood and watched.



"BAILED AWAY WITH EASE."

HOW A SHEEP WAS STOLEN

The presence of the eagle in the county can account for in some way the inexplicable disappearance a few days ago of a sheep belonging to Hanse Hardrick from his little clearing over on Rattlesnake Run, about eleven miles north of Addison. Hardrick has a few sheep which he manages to keep through the winter. As the snow is so deep and the cold so intense this winter in Webster the sheep are kept in a bark-covered shed a few rods from the cabin. The shed is closed on all sides, and the only entrance is through a door, fronting the cabin. One morning recently Hardrick and his wife locked up the cabin and came to Addison, returning in the evening. Hardrick went to feed the sheep, when he found one of them missing. The others seemed to be frightened badly, and were huddled together in the corner of the shed. Wood was scattered all over the place, and there was a hole in the roof as if somebody had broken through. Clinging to the edges of the opening were bits of wool, which showed plainly that the sheep had been taken out that way. What puzzled Hardrick more than anything else was the fact that there were no tracks whatever anywhere about the shed, which the snow would plainly have revealed had the agency that took the sheep been, as he thought, a human one. Though not more superstitious than the rest of the mountaineers, Hardrick made up his mind that his place had been visited in his absence by a "harnt" of more than ordinary animosity. He repaired the hole in the roof, and to prevent the return of the spirit, as is the custom of the West Virginia mountaineer, made small crosses of hemlock boughs, placed them in the shed, and nailed one over the cabin door. From what he had heard since of the eagle, he is convinced that it swooped down on the shed during his absence, tore a hole in the roof and carried away the missing sheep.

The eagle has been seen several times at a distance, by mountaineers living in the Snaggle Tooth Knob locality, and its den is evidently in the ice-bound cliffs and crags of that formidable

mountain. Eph Cogar, a tenant of the Panther Cove District, which is only a few miles from the top of Snaggle Tooth Knob, for some weeks has told of a bird of gigantic proportions which he has frequently seen circling across the valley where he lives. As Eph is addicted to telling what are known in Webster as "moonshine" stories, and is also addicted to a free use of pine-top whiskey, his stories have never been credited. He avers, though, that what he has seen, "was the onerest thing in the shape of a flyin' critter I ever heerd uv befo'."

A SECOND VISIT

"Pap" Tammen, one of the oldest mountaineers in Webster, says that he remembers many years ago, when the county was invaded by two just such birds as the one which is now in Webster, and that they had their den on Snaggle Tooth Knob just as this one has. He says that the creatures committed all kinds of depredations on the live stock of the peo[p]le in the county, and that they remained in the haunts until the winter was over, when they disappeared and were never heard of again. This bird may be one of those which visited Webster then and has returned to its former haunts. Such a powerful creature would likely live many years. Why it has made both visits to Webster in the winter season is a mystery, as is everything else concerned about this modern counterpart of the traditional roc.

Things have come to such a pass that the Websterites are at a loss what to do. Mindful of the fate which befell the little Junkins girl, children are kept closely in the cabins, and the men who find it necessary to go about where there are no protecting trees keep a watchful eye upward, much in the same manner as do chickens watching for a henhawk.

Realistic in the extreme, the mountaineers have made no misnomer in their name of "Snaggle Tooth Knob." The peak, or rather the face, resembles almost exactly the crooked front tooth of a human being, one cliff overlapping another. The Knob even in summer is unapproachable, as in order to reach its summit it is necessary to scale a mass of perpendicular rocks. At this time of the year, when the cliffs are covered with sheets of ice, and the crevices, wide enough for a man to slip through, are hidden by thin coverings of snow, the undertaking would be rendered tenfold more dangerous.

Through the long, dark nights and the cheerless winter days there is a mother's heart in the Junkins' cabin heavy and aching with a terrible loss. Since the discovery was made that her little girl was most likely taken by the eagle, and carried to its bleak eyrie on the summit of one of the most elevated spots in Webster, Mrs. Junkins has scarcely eaten or slept. She speaks but little, and for the most part sits in the chimney corner staring into the fire with a vacant expression, and looking blankly at any one speaking to her. Occasionally she rises and walks hurriedly to the front window, where, its summit capped with snow, or enveloped in a hood of cloud, frown grimly down the barren crags of Snaggle Tooth Knob. What sensations she has at such times can best be realized by a mother who could imagine herself in her place.

THE INDIAN ROPE TRICK



FROM THE LOG OF CAPTAIN QUINTON

PART II

by Mark A. Hall

Mystery swirls about the Indian Rope Trick like the smoke from an enchanter's lamp. Is there such a trick? Who has ever seen it? Is it mass hypnosis? How could it be done? Can the answers be found?

These questions can be answered. It is time to blow away the smoke and nonsense about mass hypnotism, about a trick that cannot be photographed, and -- worst of all -- about a trick that cannot be done.

The method of performance has been widely known for the past 35 years due to the research on the mysteries of the East by writer and amateur magician John Keel. Despite this fact, a recent book on the history of conjuring pooh-pooed the explanation as unperformable and insisted the Indian Rope Trick is a myth.

We will begin this look at the trick by hearing from someone who viewed the trick a century ago. That person is Captain Robert Quinton, that vagabond of the Pacific and Indian Oceans for most of three decades around the turn of the last century. Captain Quinton was an observer of the trick, and he was properly baffled by it. When well performed the trick is all one could wish for in magic. The impossible is made to seem possible while you just know it can't be true.

By his account in *The Strange Adventures of Captain Quinton* the Captain was with a party that stopped at Port Canning. He located the port as "at the head of the Mutla River, about twenty-two miles southeast of Calcutta." They had employed the services of two native hunters, Cassim and Ghoolah Khan, when hunting in the Sunderbuns. Here is the Captain's report of the famous feat of magic:

The two days before setting sail from this point we spent ashore in Port Canning, and Ghoolah Khan insisted that we see

the best-known fakir of the port perform the startling trick of cutting a boy to pieces, immediately mending him up and restoring him to life again. We had heard of this trick frequently, and seized the opportunity of actually witnessing it. In prompt order Ghoolah Khan turned up, accompanied by a very dirty, gray-haired old man and a boy, neither of whom wore anything in the way of drapery but the usual turban and loin cloth. The old one promptly threw down upon the ground a large sack which he carried and both man and boy salaamed profoundly before us. The boy then seated himself upon the ground while the old man opened the bag and extracted from it a large ball of common twine. Holding the loose end of the twine in his hand, he threw the ball straight up into the air, and it rose rapidly until it disappeared entirely from sight. He then let go the lower end, but the twine remained hanging perpendicularly as though the upper end were fastened to some object up yonder which we could not see. A light breeze was blowing, and I noticed particularly that the twine was perfectly motionless. The wind had absolutely no effect upon it.

After muttering some perfectly incoherent words the old man seized the twine with one hand and tried to pull it down; finding it did not yield he grasped it with both hands and appeared to pull with all his might. He then feigned to become very angry because he could not recover the ball and said something in his own language to the boy who, without a word, seized the string with both hands, pulled himself up from the ground and deliberately climbed hand over hand upon the string until, like the ball, he, too, completely disappeared from view.

The twine still hung limp in the air and the fakir stood staring upward for a minute or two as though expecting to hear something from the boy. He called to him several times at the top of his voice and apparently became more enraged every moment at receiving no answer. At last, losing all control over himself, he ran to his bag, took out a murderous-looking curved knife, and placed the back of it in his mouth, then, seizing the twine, he also climbed rapidly up it until he disappeared from view. In a few minutes we heard a piercing shriek which sounded as though it came from a very great height and, looking up, we saw something falling through the air slowly. It struck the ground within a few feet of where we stood, and we all gazed at it, amazed and horrified to see that it was the head of the boy covered with blood and still wearing the turban. As we looked in speechless horror a bloodstained arm fell beside it, and in another moment the other arm followed. Then down came each of the legs in turn, and last of all the dismembered body fell with a heavy thud and rebounded on the ground. The fakir then deliberately climbed down the twine, the knife, bloodstained, between his teeth, and throwing it upon the ground quietly pulled down the twine and rolled it into a ball without the slightest difficulty. He proceeded quickly to gather up his bag, which had been lying spread out on the ground, and in it he placed the fragments of the boy. Then facing us and covering his face in

the usual way with the palms of his hands he bowed very low, threw the bag over his shoulder and started to walk away. Before he had gone a dozen steps something inside the bag began to kick and struggle. The old man stopped and with well-feigned surprise opened the bag, whence the boy stepped, wreathed in smiles and perfectly sound, showing not the slightest trace of injury of any kind.

By this time we had begun to doubt the evidence of our own senses and, fearing to trust our eyes, we felt of the boy to make sure that he was really a human being and not a spirit or a shadow. The fakir smiled at this evident high appreciation of his performance. We attempted to question him, but the attempt was useless, and he declined to say anything about his performance.

I have been asked a great many questions about this special trick, but it is utterly useless to discuss the matter, for the simple reason that no satisfactory explanation of it seems possible. Had we been the only white people to witness it I would not attempt to tell of it here, because I should be pooh-pooed. Thousands of people have seen it, to be sure, but so far as I know no one has ever explained it satisfactorily. I even had some photographs of it in my possession until they were destroyed in the great San Francisco fire. Even if a fakir could hypnotize the spectators it is absurd to say that he could hypnotize the camera. Moreover, I do not believe that we were hypnotized, nor do I believe, on the other hand, that a boy was cut to pieces. After studying the matter over for years I am still unable to reach any satisfying conclusion concerning this marvelous piece of jugglery.

For those who think the trick has never been performed, here is a second account of the trick as observed by Dr. Alexander Cannon, author of **Powers That Be** and **The Invisible Influence**. He quotes his own letter of 1934 describing its performance in **Powers That Be** (New York: Dutton, 1935, pp. 131-32).

The scene is a palm-shaded Eastern market-place. In the centre thereof stands the Ascetic. His eyes half-open, he stands waving his arms, gesticulating, and uttering Yogi incantations, meanwhile swaying gently to the rhythm. In front of him is a coiled red-coloured rope lying upon the ground. Over this he stretched out his hands periodically. On his right hand side stands a youth who has a most noticeable far-away dreamy expression in his eyes. The Yogi (of this lowest sixth class of the Yoga philosophy), carefully preserves a semi-circle at a suitable distance of twelve feet radius as the crowd draws near, ever surging and ever swelling. At last the Ascetic stoops, and lifts up the end of the red rope, and holds it out at arm's length. The end of the rope then appears to rise higher and higher, as if drawn heavenwards by an invisible force, and this process continues until the other end of the rope is just free of the ground. The Yogi then motions the boy to take hold of

the rope, and to climb. This the youth does, reaching first the upper end of the rope, remaining with it in mid-air. Then he comes down to the ground once more by climbing down the rope. The Real Yogi does not stop here. The boy again climbs the rope and the Yogi appears to follow him up the rope with a knife clenched in his teeth. He gets hold of the boy, cuts him to pieces, and appears to drop the different parts of the body to the ground, where they lie quivering in the dust. The magician then descends the rope, puts the pieces of the body together and then sends the youth up to the top of the rope again, and when he reaches the top, the boy and the rope appear to vanish into thin air.

Dr. Cannon saw this performance along with a Monsieur Robert of the French Consulate in Indo-China. The doctor was convinced the trick was a "visual hallucination."

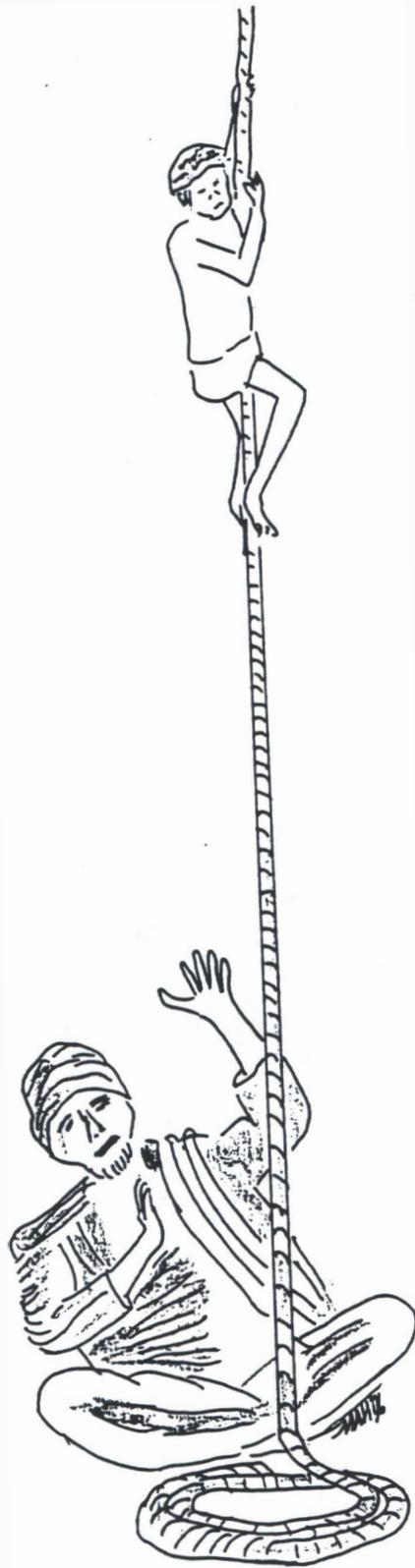
The explanation of the Indian Rope Trick was sought out by John Keel, who is more famous today for several books on Unidentified Flying Objects. His first book, however, was *Jadoo* (New York: Messner, 1957). It tells of his journey through North Africa and across southern Asia in search of mysteries and the means of performing famous magic tricks.

In southern India he met with a man named Vadramakrishna who had performed the famous rope trick and gave the secret to Keel. Here is what he learned. The site of the performance is key. There is a wire strung over the site, as between two buildings, over the heads of all the spectators. Dr. Cannon mentions a market-place as the place of performance. Captain Quinton says nothing about where the trick was performed. In days long ago a line made of woven hairs was used. Sometimes it was strung over a valley between two hills.

A performance at dusk or in the evening is ideal. The spectators are forced to view the trick by firelight. Preliminary gestures (such as the incantations mentioned by Cannon) or repeated tossing of the rope into air and letting it fall back would weary and bore the spectators. Then the magician attaches a hook in the end of the rope to a thread dangling over the overhead line. At the other end of the thread is an assistant who draws the rope slowly and magically into the air.

The rope is drawn up some 50 or 60 feet, though in the dark the height seems greater. When the magician's young assistant climbs the rope the attachment between the rope and the suspended line is made more secure with a better hook. With this arrangement all that follows is made possible.

The magician can now climb the rope and the boy can disappear by going hand over hand along the suspended line or wire. What falls from the sky is not the cut-up boy but parts of a monkey. The boy returns to the place of reappearance by either being concealed in the magician's loose garments or by way of the line and slipping back to the performance site. Various misdirections were used to distract spectators (getting the rope to drop; finding all the body parts) while the boy returns to the bag (as seen by Quinton) or into a basket, as was a common means for the boy to reappear.



The Indian Rope Trick was performed at dusk or in the evening by artificial light. The spectators were kept back from the magician and his assistant. As the boy climbed the rope the spectators lost sight of him and so too the magician later.

A similar use of a suspended line and a thread to make magical appearances was used by the American Indians. Their use was not put to such a spectacular effect as the rope trick. Its use is described in the book **Treasury of Memory-Making Campfires**.

As is evident in the accounts of Quinton and Cannon, the rope trick was so effective that people were willing to think they were hallucinating or being subjected to mass hypnosis rather than credit the evidence of their eyes.

Keel attempted to perform the trick himself in New Delhi in 1955. This story he tells on himself in his book. The trick failed to come off. This incident points to the very reason the Indian Rope Trick has disappeared. It takes a lot of practice and tremendous skill to perform successfully. The practitioners a century ago lived by this means and could do the trick flawlessly. Ghoolah Khan was justifiably proud of the fakir in Port Canning who could amaze Captain Quinton for the rest of his life.

The source of the solution to the Indian Rope Trick has been a jumble of claims ever since John Keel revealed it in **Jadoo**. John Godwin described the secrets of the trick in 1968 in his **This Baffling World** (New York: Hart). He failed to mention anywhere John Keel and his book, however. This oversight has caused subsequent writers to refer to "Godwin's explanation" of the trick.

William Poundstone, writing in **Bigger Secrets** (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), notes that a magicians' magazine called **Tops** described the trick's secrets in a December 1956 issue. As Keel's book was coming off the presses, W.T. Lawhead said he learned the secrets from some anonymous Indians who had spied on the performance years earlier as children.

Lee Siegel, writing in **Net of Magic: Wonders and Deceptions in India** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), does not want to give credit at all to Keel. He has worshipful praise for an Indian magician, P.C. Sorcar, who claims to have described the secrets of the trick in "an essay prepared for the Danish Society for Psychical Research" for which there is no citation let alone a copy. All he can cite is a book by Sorcar published only in 1960. Siegel singles out Keel as "the self-promoting American journalist" and puts his book not in the bibliography but buries it under "Other Texts." I would have thought all amateur magicians such as Keel and Siegel could be described as "self-promoting." Siegel's credibility sinks out of sight when he writes that Vadramakrishna "seems to have read Sorcar's account," an assertion that is needless and ridiculous.

The Indian Rope Trick has its pale imitations in Oriental and stage magic. It seems to have disappeared in its full form because the skill and dedication have not survived to the end of this century. In the amazement of Captain Quinton and in the perplexity of Dr. Cannon we can sense and appreciate the skill and the satisfaction that once lived in those Eastern ports of call.

The Indian Rope Trick was, as Captain Quinton wrote, a "marvelous piece of jugglery."

LIFE AS WE KNOW IT NOT

by Mark A. Hall

Something unusual was reported from Richmond, Indiana, in 1978. The report is unique in my files. I have been hoping that something like it would come along from elsewhere. Then it would not stand alone and be suspect for its isolation. Still I think the report is worthy of our attention. It appears to me to be part of something much bigger and even pervasive in the world of wonders that baffle us all.

That something is manifestations of life that are foreign to our accepted understanding of what living things must be. One pop scientist of our day has noted how remarkable it is that we have not come upon any life that was not based on the same carbon-hydrogen-oxygen chemistry as ourselves. It would be remarkable...if we had bothered to look for such life. It seems to me we have not. We have not given sufficient attention to the possibilities of life that is native and even abundant on this planet while being quite unlike the life described in our biology books.

Discussing this subject is likely to make a lot of crypto-zoologists uncomfortable. Still the topic seems to belong in a category of life that is "hidden" from us at present.

Let us begin with the events in 1978. We benefit at the outset from the good journalism practiced by Barry Wood, a staff writer for the Richmond *Palladium-Item*. In the 20 August 1978 issue of his paper two articles presented the puzzling reports made by several residents of Richmond. Among them was Bonita Bailey who was, if I am not mistaken, the same Bonita Roman who contributed newspaper items in the 1970s to the journal of the International Fortean Organization.

Any attempt to abstract the events from these articles would needlessly deny to the reader all the facts which are so clearly presented in this record. Here are Barry Wood's articles in full.

WHAT LIGHTS THROUGH YONDER WINDOW BROKE?

by Barry Wood, *Palladium-Item* Staff Writer

Martha Grieswell no longer sleeps upstairs in her bedroom. She's moved downstairs to the living room, and, more often than not, there's a light or two and the television on when she beds down for the night.

A 46-year-old woman afraid of the dark? No, it's more like she's afraid of the "lights." Since the first week of this year, the Grieswell household at 432 Pearl St. has been inhabited by "flashing pinpoints of light," she says, first moving Mrs. Grieswell out of one upstairs bedroom, then another and recently downstairs permanently.

"I have a dread of the dark...I'm hesitant to go upstairs...I try to stay in the light as much as possible," she says, often speaking like a person who no longer finds words adequate to describe how her life has changed since the night of Jan. 6.

That night, Mrs. Grieswell recalls, "one came into my room (a bedroom with one east-facing window). We were 'watching' each other for awhile, then it came toward me.

"I said 'No,' and it stopped about one and half feet away. Then I held out my hand and it came right over and sat in my hand and turned my whole hand a psychedelic purple.

"It glowed for awhile, then shut down to a point of light, then rose from my hand -- then the others started to come in...."

For the next few nights, according to Mrs. Grieswell, dozens of the floating, flashing lights entered her bedroom through the window -- it was a cold January and the window was closed, by the way.

After dark

Since then, the myriad lights -- the size of a pinhead and mostly white -- have been her constant companions when the sun goes down. She has been able to detect them during the daylight hours, too, but they seem to be less frequent and less active -- and Mrs. Grieswell also spends less time upstairs during the day.

Early in the game, she moved out of the room to the other upstairs bedroom, which has two windows, one east-facing and one south-facing; but the lights have continued to move in and out of the two rooms, the adjoining hallway and all the windows at their leisure.

Just the figments of an overworked imagination, to put it kindly? Mrs. Grieswell readily admits that one of her prime concerns always has been her sanity. But if that's the explanation then a number of witnesses suffers a similar affliction.

She's conducted a few experiments of her own with rather startling results. She has "captured" individual lights in containers, including an aluminum cigarette case, and has observed them shining through the container walls.

She has immersed the lights in water and kept them submerged for two days. The lights were observed to "swim" freely, and when released, to "fly" free, their lights undimmed.

The same results obtain when a light is kept overnight in a freezer. And these experiments were performed only when the lights were "willing" subjects, for just as many other times they have merely escaped through the walls of containers, said Mrs. Grieswell.

She also has had the upstairs rooms tested for radiation, but the results were negative. And an attempted chemical analysis drew a blank -- the captured light apparently didn't wish to be studied and the analysis showed nothing.

The only physical force that seems to have had an effect is fire. She said she touched a burning cigarette to one once, and it made "a crackling sound, as if you had wadded up cellophane very rapidly in your hand."

And since then, she adds, "you can't burn them any more. They move away too fast."

It was then that Mrs. Grieswell began to consider seriously that her uninvited guests might have some kind of intelligence, some ability to learn from experience.

So, she was asked, why try to get rid of them then? After all, many people have paid much to be entertained by various kinds and forms of light shows. Why not just sit back and relax and enjoy the show for free in peaceful co-existence?

Because they bite, replied Mrs. Grieswell.

It seems sometimes when the lights alight, they sting or bite, like a sweat bee. The result is some pain or discomfort and a "very tiny welt."

"They go through a tapping motion," Mrs. Grieswell describes their flight. "When they land, they raise up, then light again...they feel like bugs when they sit on you and that's when they burn."

Very active

One weekend in particular last spring, she said, the lights were especially active and "everyone who came through the door got burned -- I don't know what stirred them up."

One night Mrs. Grieswell got one of the lights in her eye and it "really hurt," she said, adding that the eye was bloodshot and the corner crusted the next day.

She also claims one got in her ear one day, which caused the sensation of a very strong metallic taste -- "like an old penny" -- in the back of her throat.

Her husband Harry has been very understanding throughout the entire episode, she said, particularly considering he is one of the persons who has been unable to see the lights.

One incident convinced him his wife was seeing something, however. One night he claimed his arm was itching badly, so Mrs. Grieswell reached over and scratched it for him. He wondered how she was able to pick the exact spot to scratch. "You had one of the lights on you," she told him.

Even when they aren't burning or itching, however, Mrs. Grieswell says, the lights have a tendency to land on her and "crawl" in uncomfortable numbers during the night.

As an unnerving climax to the phenomenon, she decided back in March to visit her mother in Decatur to get away from the lights for awhile.

The third night she was there, "they" came in through the window for a visit -- and her mother saw them too. Perhaps they "followed" her or attached themselves to her clothing or some got packed in her baggage. The important thing to Mrs. Grieswell was the clear message that she wasn't about to get away from them.

Sought help

Since then she has continued to try to find out what's going on. She's consulted scientists, investigators in UFO (unidentified flying object) and related phenomena and psychic researchers, one of whom advised her that she may be experiencing a stage of consciousness preliminary to becoming a psychic medium.

She has talked on local radio phone-ins, has been interviewed and filmed by area TV stations and written to newspapers and magazines.

And still the lights persist, as mysterious as that winter's night when the first purple one seemed to be asking her for a place to stay.

Mrs. Grieswell still would like to learn what they are, and she would really like to get rid of them so she can have the rest of her house back.

But she's making some adjustments.

"I seem to be able to separate myself mentally from them now," she said. "If this is a lead-in to something else -- maybe not that I'm going to become a psychic, but something -- then I don't want to read something and form an iron-clad opinion on it and close the door...."

"I've just made up my mind that I'm not going to get rid of them."

OTHERS SAY THEY'VE SEEN THE LIGHTS AT MRS. GRIESWELL'S HOUSE

by Barry Wood, Palladium-Item Staff Writer

Like so many cats under curiosity's spell, we flocked to Martha Grieswell's house. Some saw the lights or felt the stings, others experienced neither.

Most were intrigued by Mrs. Grieswell's accounts on a local radio phone-in show. More followed after hearing the reports of others.

By her last reckoning, Mrs. Grieswell has admitted more than 100 friends, relatives and complete strangers into her home in the hopes, she says, that one will be able to help her turn off the lights. None has so far.

Some, like Anna McDaniel, 70 Bridge Ave., knew Mrs. Grieswell and worried that she might be seeing things. "I thought maybe I could help her," said Mrs. McDaniel.

No sooner had she settled in at Mrs. Grieswell's than Mrs. McDaniel saw the light.

"I never would have seen it if it hadn't moved," Mrs. McDaniel recalls. "It was the size of a head of pin, and it left a streak... like it left a little energy behind it."

Shortly thereafter, she adds, she felt "something was stinging me through my nylons." She likened it to a sweat bee sting. She said she was bitten or stung about three times, but she never checked for welts or other markings.

Mrs. Grieswell says Mrs. McDaniel's experience was unusual because her visit was during the daylight hours in late April -- one of the few sightings, other than her own, not at night.

More typical was the report of Ruth Parsons, 123½ N. 17th St. She went at night and was directed to the closet in Mrs. Grieswell's bedroom, where the dark was deeper.

Mrs. Parsons said she saw about four lights -- "they were tiny blue flashes, very quick" -- in the two or three minutes she spent looking.

However, after one landed on her ankle and she felt a bite -- "like a sweat bee" -- she left the closet for good. She also reported no mark or subsequent discomfort from the "bite."

In marked contrast was the visit of Mike and Connie McClure, 1017 N.W. D St., who went "out of curiosity."

The couple was there, says Mrs. Grieswell, during the weekend when the lights were particularly active.

At first I couldn't see them," said Mrs. McClure. "Then they started to flash around -- red, green and white -- they would just flash.

"They were mainly in one room," she adds. "They were just everywhere." And where Mrs. Grieswell stood, says Mrs. McClure, "it almost made a halo around her...where she stood they just seemed to flock around her...I was amazed."

She and her husband also paid a price for their fascination, for the lights began to "sting."

"I actually had marks on me when I left there," said Mrs. McClure. "My husband did, too. It took us half the night to stop itching."

She adds that when they returned home, they tried to play cards to get their minds off the itching, but it didn't work. "It was like sitting in a swarm of mosquitoes," she recalls. "It was an experience...."

But there are those, too, who didn't see the lights. Like Helen Girdler, 509 S. 10th St. "I looked until I was seeing things," she says, but not the phenomenon Mrs. Grieswell and the others described.

"I would have loved to have seen them," adds Mrs. Girdler. "I was completely open-minded about it -- I even took a little bottle to catch one in."

Also among the non-witnesses is Esther Kellner, deputy director of Wayne County Civil Defense, whose office Mrs. Grieswell called in search of a Geiger counter to check the house for radiation levels.

Mrs. Kellner went to scout it out, but reports: "I didn't see anything or feel anything...or anything...but that doesn't mean she (Mrs. Grieswell) doesn't."

And as a final footnote, this reporter must be counted among those who found this phenomenon to be the lights that failed.

I was contacted by Bonita Bailey, 4784 Indiana 227 N., whose hobby is collecting data on various out-of-the-ordinary occurrences. She had been to the Grieswell house the night before and had seen the lights.

I have been to the house twice during prime viewing hours. I have stood at the windows, strained my eyes in the dark, felt the walls, huddled in the closet to watch various experiments and, yes, hoped for a flash or a sting -- but nothing.

But they are very real to Martha Grieswell, and she is not alone. And if she ever figures out what's been lighting up her life lately, I want to hear about it.

What are we to make of such experiences? I would like to consider the possibility that such manifestations are the low end of a spectrum of life forms that appear to us as lights. For lack of any other name let us refer to them as Living Lights. As we

progress up this spectrum of life we will encounter firstly spook lights, then some of the many things called Unidentified Flying Objects, and finally the possible makers of genuine "crop circles."

What we will consider here is not "the total answer" to UFOs or crop circles. What these particular lights seem to be is a set of allied phenomena that are represented in those bigger categories of mysteries. They have been obscured by the failure to analyze those broad categories. What may underlie this set of light mysteries is a form of life unlike our own but native to this planet.

Such intimate encounters as described by Mrs. Grieswell may have happened to others as well. She may have been noticed because she had the curiosity and the courage not only to study them but also to speak up about them.

Living Lights would be something alive and capable of responding to other forms of life with which we are familiar. They would be born of the Earth beneath our feet, active in the planet's atmosphere primarily at night. It would be logical to expect them to be capable of activity within the Earth's crust and in a natural water environment, as well as the atmosphere. The range of capabilities they possess and whether there are differing kinds of Living Lights are the questions we need to pursue in the future as we ponder the presence of these enigmas.

The pinpoints of light seen at Richmond are the most modest of the light phenomena in this group. Some of their characteristics (i.e., lights that respond to human behavior and are visible to some people and not to others) are found also in experiences with "Spook Lights."

Spook Lights, in contrast with the Richmond lights, are large lights that re-occur in the same general location. Some years ago I put together a list of Spook Light locations as an interest-rouser for a topic that had been largely neglected. [1]

Some serious work has been done to correlate these lights with geological faults and their possible source in sub-surface rocks. The subject is very broad and is necessarily allied with earthquake lights that presage and accompany tremors and quakes.

Some lights reported around Spook Light sites are distant points of light that can be explained by refracted light from distant motor vehicles. True Spook Lights are large globes of light that anyone witnessing them would agree are not easily explained as optical illusions or swamp gas. Not all locations with re-occurring lights are going to have the same explanation, but the majority of genuine Spook Lights seem to be similar glowing balls, characterized as looking like lanterns.

The controversial subject of ball lightning should probably be included in the category of Living Lights. This phenomenon might be either a manifestation of something similar to Living Lights or even a short-lived version of this same form of life.

Here is one characterization of the Spook Light phenomenon from a site in Oklahoma:

It first appeared about the size of an egg, but varied until sometimes it looked as big as a washtub. It was about as powerful as an ordinary automobile headlight with the dimmer on.

It is hard to judge the distance, but it seemed about a quarter of a mile off when I first saw it, and disappeared when it approached to a distance of perhaps 75 yards. I saw only a single glow, but other witnesses have seen it split into two, three or four smaller lights. It looked yellowish to me, but some observers describe it as red, green, blue or even purple in color.

One man swore that it passed so close to him that he could "plainly feel the heat," and a woman saw it "burst like a bubble, scattering sparks in all directions." A fellow who drove his car straight at the dancing phantom lost sight of it, but others standing a little way off said that they saw the light hovering impishly above the pursuer's car, out of his sight but plainly visible to everybody else in the neighborhood.

Brown Mountain in North Carolina has been a famous source of mysterious lights, so variously described that there may be more than one source. Charles Fort and others have noted how the U.S. Geological Survey neatly accounted for all the occurrences of the lights as known phenomena. Journalist Paul Mays interviewed the hill folk of that region about the lights in 1962. They told him the lights had been seen when all cars and trains were blocked from the area by a flood. And they were seen before there were any trains or automobiles in the area whatsoever.

Mays talked to one local man, Paul Rose, a 54-year-old nurseryman from Jonas Ridge. He had been studying the lights for 40 years. Said Rose:

"It was back during the first World War when I first seen them. My daddy and me was comin' back from Gingercake Mountain when this light raised up right by me. I swore to find out where they was comin' from.

As far as I know, I'm the first one to spot them up close. They disappear, you know, when you get real close to them. They move about through the trees, but they don't touch the trees...and they seem to be sensitive to the human body. They move away from you."

Mays reported further on Paul Rose's knowledge of the lights:

Rose believes he is on the verge of discovering the secret. The first real clue came one night last month when he and a group that included a geologist, Dr. James McMeekin-Kerr, gathered on a tower high on Brown Mountain to wait for the lights to appear.

Suddenly, Rose said, glowing balls of orange and red light about 3 feet in diameter, bubbled up from fissures in the rock around them and soared skyward like balloons, dissipating as they rose. Rose and several of the others became nauseated

as the lights neared them.

"When the lights hit us," he said, "my knees got weak and shaky. I felt like I didn't weigh two ounces and it was like the lights would pull us right off the tower."

Rose, who spends at least part of almost every night prowling the timbered heights of Brown Mountain, now is convinced that the lights are some sort of natural gas, released deep underground and somehow ignited as it rises to the surface through crevices. Geologist McMeekin-Kerr is collecting rock samples which he hopes will unlock the secret of the lights.

Questions arise from the hypothesis of natural gas. Would escaping gas move through the trees and appear to react to human beings? As noted earlier, mysterious lights need not have only one source. Multiple hypotheses and multiple answers may all be necessary before everything is explained. At this time I would suggest that Living Lights originating within rocks below the surface may be more sophisticated than has so far been considered.

Here is another account of a Spook Light seen in Ohio County, Kentucky, around 1955. The observers were J.F. Hankins and Boots, his white collie-and-shepherd mix. Hankins had lost some tools at the time and was concerned a thief might come around. Byron Crawford of the Louisville Courier-Journal gave this report:

One night in October Hankins heard his dog raising a fuss about something, and peeped out the window to see a bright light moving about one of the barns. He watched cautiously as the light left the first barn and went to the other. It circled the second barn, then headed toward the tenant house.

By this time Hankins had grabbed his double-barrel 12-gauge shotgun, loaded it with two No. 6 shells and sneaked out of the house. His faithful dog followed at his heels as Hankins crept down the road toward Barnett's Creek, where he was sure the thieves had parked their car.

The way he figured it, they were bound to come down the road past him, and he planned to surprise them. If there was trouble he'd already made up his mind to sprinkle someone with shotgun pellets. He made it to his hiding place just in time, for when he glanced back over his shoulder, there was the light, coming down the road.

It was undoubtedly a gas lantern, about 3 to 4 feet off the ground, and moving at about the speed of someone in a brisk walk. Hankins was at the edge of his cornfield, so he stepped two or three rows into the corn patch to avoid being seen until the right moment. Boots lay quietly at his feet, and the light moved closer.

Hankins waited until it was about 30 yards away, flipped the shotgun safety to the "off" position, and jumped out of the cornfield. "Hold it right there!" he yelled, his shotgun leveled at the light. Boots lunged forward and made about a bark and a half before stopping dead still.

For the next few moments, Hankins and his dog were both nearly frozen with fright, unable to believe their eyes. They saw no feet and legs beneath the light, no head and shoulders above, no lantern...nothing.

"It was just a ball of fire about 18 inches through," Hankins recalls. "It illuminated a circle around the whole road, fence and edge of the cornfield for about a 50-foot radius, I'd say. It was a bluish-like light. I stood dumbfounded, and Boots crawled back to me and just whimpered."

The light continued to move down the middle of the road, ever nearer to where Hankins and the dog stood -- too shocked to move. Then, suddenly, just as it drew even with them, it turned to the left and passed through a farm gate beside the road. Then it turned right and moved along the fence where the livestock had made a path to the creek.

When finally the light reached Barnett's Creek, it turned right and moved down the middle of the channel, still bobbing up and down 3 to 4 feet above the water.

Hankins said the light followed every turn of the creek and finally disappeared from his sight after going under a bridge. He heard later that hunters in the area had seen lights along the creeks when fox hunting. [3]

In the American West globes of light are alleged to roll across the wide-open spaces at night in some places. These Luminous Ground Spheres (LUGS) sound very much akin to the bobbing Spook Lights.

Lights in the sky have many causes but there is a class of Unidentified Flying Objects that we might call Sky-lights. These are mysterious light sources that can maneuver around aircraft and even mimic military radar. Such was the UFO encountered by an RB-47 near the Gulf of Mexico and described by James E. MacDonald in *Flying Saucer Review*.

Harley Rutledge has cataloged numerous and frequent Sky-lights over southeastern Missouri as described in his 1981 book *Project Identification*. [4]

The advent of the "crop circle" mystery takes our considerations of another kind of life to another level. The finding of circles in crops is not a new phenomenon and it can be shown to occur around the world.

When the recent crop circle frenzy began in the United Kingdom I thought to myself that the subject would eventually be complicated by some outlandish explanation. A coven of witches would be found one night wearing snowshoes in someone's field and get blamed for the whole thing, or something like that. It turned out to be a lot easier. A couple of pub crawlers announced to the press that they did it. That's all it took. As the editors of *Flying Saucer Review* pointed out this was unfair to a third party who claimed to have been making them much longer than the other two. He did not get the same attention.

The problem in the U.K. very quickly became how to sort out the genuine mystery from the fake. And the fakes came from all quarters. Jokers, rock music groups, and even the British military all turned out to make their overnight images in someone's crops.

ably chronicled in **Flying Saucer Review** and the **Fortean Times**.

Is there wheat among the chaff in this case? I think there is. Some of the early descriptions of crop circles contain unique characteristics that imply an aerial source for the circle-maker. Such markers could serve to identify genuine mysteries where the images are properly examined and described. And, again where descriptions are adequate, tell us if the increasingly complex images in crops are made by the same source as the circles and rings that were first noted.

Lights have been associated with circle-making. Especially so in the incident described by George Wingfield where six people in a crop circle heard a trilling sound. As this was going on a late-arriver was observing the six people and listening to the sound. Over the heads of the six he saw "a luminous object, as bright as the moon....shaped like a pair of horns." Those in the circle did not observe the object themselves. [5]

Genuine "crop circles" might constitute a form of communication from Living Lights. The most sophisticated of their kind might be trying to communicate with our kind. In their innocence they would have no idea how difficult it is to get through to us. Human beings make a habit of complicating everything with selfishness, lunacy, stubbornness, and a density between the ears. We probably are not ready to communicate with Living Lights. Some day, perhaps.

I am not suggesting that all these light phenomena must be identical. I am suggesting that they are similar in origin. They might be different levels of evolution in their kind of life. Short-lived ball lightning and the pinpoints of light (Pin-lights) would be the simpler forms of life. The globular Spook Lights (SPOLTS) and Luminous Ground Spheres (LUGS) would be somewhat more sophisticated Living Lights. The Sky-lights and the makers of noteworthy crop circles would be the most sophisticated.

The behavior and characteristics given in this article are the best description we have so far for Living Lights. I am not the one to outline their physical nature. Certainly a hypothesis to explain the origin and make-up of these lights is needed and would be welcomed.

NOTES

1. Originally published in the **INFO JOURNAL**, the Spook Light list appeared later in Loren E. Coleman's **MYSTERIOUS AMERICA** (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1983), 261-63. The list could now easily be doubled in size.
2. Paul Mays, "Mystery of the Haunted Mountain," New York **SUNDAY NEWS**, 2 September 1962, Sect. 2, pp. 14-15.
3. Byron Crawford, "Goodness Gracious...Great Ball of Fire Shed No Light On Its Own Origin," Louisville (Kentucky) **COURIER-JOURNAL**, 30 October 1981, pp. B1. B3.
4. Harley D. Rutledge, **PROJECT IDENTIFICATION** (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981).
5. Ralph Noyes, ed., **THE CROP CIRCLE ENIGMA** (Bath, UK: Gateway Books, 1991), 104-105. Distributed in the USA by The Great Tradition, Lower Lake, CA.

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