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Foreword

What do the following have in common? UFOs, extraterrestrials, Bigfoot, covert military operations, Native American medicine men, cowboys in white hats, cowboys in black hats, stand-tall lawmen, cultists, hungry thought-forms, and hitchhiking, shape-shifting she-devils. No, they are not the characters in a new Tony Hillerman novel. They are the real-life denizens of Christopher O'Brien's mysterious valley--the isolated and awesome San Luis Valley of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico.

Proving once again that the truth is far stranger than fiction, Chris spins a compelling tale of amazing weirdness that even the harshest critics of so-called paranormal phenomena will find hard to dismiss.

My own interest in this subject matter dates back to 1975. As a writer/journalist living in the region, I became aware of the wave of mysterious cattle "mutilations" plaguing cattlemen in Colorado and throughout the West. Indeed, it was hard to miss. In that year, the mutilations were voted "story of the year" by the Associated Press of Colorado and Governor Richard Lamm was calling the situation among "the greatest outrages in the history of the western cattle industry."

Hundreds of reports poured in to western law enforcement officials in 1975. In a typical "classic" case, the cow was found dead and drained of blood with no signs of struggle. The sex organs were neatly removed and the rectums were "cored out." Other missing parts included eyes, ears, tongues, portions of the lips or snouts, teeth, patches of skin, or the hearts. To make matters more complicated, ranchers were reporting strange "helicopters" and even UFOs flying around their pastures in the middle of the night. Citizens were up in arms and lawmen, despite their best efforts, were totally baffled.

At first pranksters and cultists were believed to be the culprits. Then, with the advent of the mystery helicopters, suspicions were cast on the military. Finally, facing the sheer scope and "impossibility" of what they were confronting, a growing number of people (including lawmen) began to ask the question: "Is it possible that the mutilations are the work of extraterrestrial beings?"

As preposterous as it seemed, it was a question that had been raised as early as 1967 when the owner of a "mutilated" horse told the press "flying saucers killed my horse."

What began for me as a challenging piece of investigative journalism has turned into a twenty-year odyssey through the farthest reaches of the Twilight Zone. After personally examining scores of mutilated carcasses, conducting hundreds of interviews and reviewing thousands of cases worldwide, I admit to being more puzzled than when I started. As O'Brien succinctly puts it, "If I had known then what I don't know now, I'm not sure I would have knowingly embarked on this journey into the unknown." A long, strange trip indeed!

With his refreshing "everyman" approach, Chris poses the same questions that any rational person would ask when confronted with such imponderable conundrums. He is not here to beat a drum or promote an agenda. He is not a Chicken Little running out to tell us that "the sky is falling and aliens are taking over the Earth!"

Chris *is* a man with a very healthy sense of curiosity: "When I sensed something unusual was going on in this area, I took it upon myself as an 'interested resident' to document it the best I could. I just intuitively felt that it was important."

Using the San Luis Valley as "a laboratory of paranormal events," Chris has diligently and objectively recorded his "quixotic" journey of discovery. Instead of tackling the Big Picture head-on, he has wisely chosen to take the "microcosmic" approach. Take one defined geographic area and study it exceedingly well. Document everything, no matter how ridiculous, irrelevant, or frightening it may seem at the time. Study the local folklore, the Native American traditions; the history, the geology. Leave no stone unturned.

In his search for the truth, Chris rightfully casts much scrutiny on the circuitous process by which unusual events are originally perceived by the "experiencers" -and eventually find their way to mass consciousness. He finds that "the true nature of many strange events become lost in the inevitable process of dissemination." He understands his role in this process and the responsibility that goes with it. In peeling away the layers of this onion of illusion, O'Brien arrives at the very birthplace of myth, "the fodder of new legend."

Whether or not "the greatest unsolved mysteries of our times" are *unknowable* is another question. Only a handful of researchers have persevered through the frustration and ridicule that go with the territory.

First among equals of this tenacious few are the Texas investigators Tom Adams and Oary Massey. The intrepid duo first visited the San Luis Valley in 1970 to study the aftermath of the world famous "Snippy" the Horse case. They admit to being drawn back year after year "like moths to a flame." Says Adams, "We passed the point of no return years ago. Once you get into this business it's difficult, if not impossible, to get out." Chris calls it "embracing the Tar Baby."

Adams and Massey consistently caution newcomers to the field to resist the tendency to jump to unwarranted conclusions. As Adams puts it, "We bear the onus of ontological concerns. Consider everything and believe nothing." Will the identity of the mutilators ever be revealed? As Massey has stated, "If we didn't catch 'em in 1975, when all hell was breaking loose, we're never gonna catch 'em."

Tom Adams shares Chris O'Brien's implied conclusion, "When we first started coming to the San Luis Valley, we were exposed to a wide range of unusual phenomena. It has led me to see the intrinsic interrelatedness of all paranormal phenomena."

Linda Moulton Howe, another colleague and veteran researcher, is more definitive in her conclusions. In her books, documentary films, and lectures during the last fifteen years, she has consistently promoted the view that: "We are dealing with an off-world intelligence." According to Linda, mutilations, UFOs, and human abductions are the harbinger of a scientific revolution; "We may be getting closer to a new definition of the universe."

While Chris O'Brien stops far short of saying that extraterrestrials are intervening in human affairs, he does come to suspect "a shadowy presence" at work: "Could this 'presence' have existed alongside humankind for thousands of years, mocking our attempts at proving its very existence and agenda by hiding its true nature and purpose behind a veil of religion, magic, and superstition?"

As for myself, I'm still trying to figure out what psychologist Carl Jung had in mind when he speculated in 1958 that UFOs could be "materialized psychisms" emanating from the human collective unconscious.

As Chris observes: "This subject matter has stretched my rational world view to the breaking point. These are mysteries wound around a riddle, locked inside a puzzle that's effectively obscured by haze, behind a veil..." Linda Moulton Howe compares her research to entering "a hall of mirrors with a quicksand floor." Are you starting to get the picture?

What I've learned in my own "journey of transformation" is that these are highly complex and challenging questions. Absolute truth may well be unobtainable at our present level of development. What is important is the search for the truth. If, as I suspect, the answer is within us, we are going to have to dig deep. I agree with Chris that "data alone may not be able to solve these mysteries."

Hopefully, this wild Star Wars western thriller, *The Mysterious Valley*, will bring these issues to the attention of larger segments of the scientific community, the government, and the public at large. Or perhaps it will at least shed a little light on some very dark corners of the human psyche. As "paranormal" writer John Keel says: "To hell with the answer, what's the question?"

Happy Trails,
-- David Perkins
