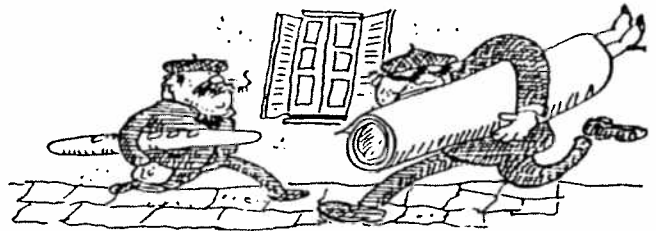


FOAFTALE NEWS

No. 12 (February 1989)



AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

EDITOR'S COMMENT

This issue will reflect the expanded concerns expressed in the previous issue. The procedures of getting issues together, printed, and in members' hands need a thorough shake-down, and I apologize if we skipped you. (If I'm sure you didn't get a copy of #11, I'm enclosing one.) In any case, I am still interested in getting current, often ephemeral information about actively circulating legends and beliefs, and I solicit reports and comments on legends from all quarters. Continuing reports of publications, both popular and academic, are needed, and I hope to include some analysis of legends in the next issue.

But more than anything, I need responses and other voices. Scoffing, as Hawthorne noted in 1837, is as much a part of the legend process as seeking, and so all communication (as space allows) will be included.

JUST IN!

WHITE SLAVERS IN MEXICO. Apparently, solitary sun-bathing can be dangerous on the beach at Cancun, Mexico. According to a Pennsylvania woman, Sharon McCormick, she was spending her honeymoon in the Caribbean resort, and was lying on the beach, when she was chloroformed and kidnapped. She says she was dragged to a construction site by her abductors and managed to escape with minor injuries.

But she told Pennsylvania state Rep. Michael Gruitza that she had seen three other American women in the kidnappers' hideout. They were heavily sedated, she said. Gruitza contacted the U.S. embassy and the FBI, which is now conducting an investigation with Mexican authorities. The FBI says it has no reports of missing American tourists, and has no hard evidence of a possible white slavery operation in Cancun. Without further evidence, the State Department says, it can't issue a travel advisory to American vacationers. (Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "Paul Simon is not afraid to offend groups," syndicated column, 3 August 1987.)

CAN ALLIGATORS ADAPT TO SEWERS? Alligators can live in unusual places if they have to. In theory, they could indeed live for a limited time in the sewers of New York; it's warm enough, and there are rats to eat, and they don't need the sun all year. In 1935, a seven-foot alligator was found in a sewer on East 123rd Street, and there have been various other sightings reported. But alligators couldn't survive there long--only a few months at the most--because they'd need sunlight eventually, and because salmonella or shigella or E. coli, organisms that one usually finds in sewage, would sooner or later poison them. Also, alligators live at temperatures between seventy-eight and ninety degrees, and caimans need temperatures between eighty-four and a hundred, so if an animal was flushed or dumped into the sewer it might survive the spring, summer, and fall, but winter's cold would kill it. Sewers would do in a pinch, but alligators have preferred landscapes. . . . (Diane Ackerman, "Crocodilians," *The New Yorker* (10 October 1988): 80.)

MASS MURDER RUMORS ON AMERICAN CAMPUSES. Greg Walker will sleep in an upper bunk on the top floor of Founders Hall this weekend. If a mass murderer comes to the Slippery Rock University campus this Halloween weekend, that will put him at the epicenter of the violence. At least it will according to the version of the rumor he has heard.

But the rumor, he said, "is bull," which he proved by sleeping in the exact same place last year, when the same rumor circulated but the only things murdered on campus were a few English tests. As a junior, Walker has seen the rumor disproved. Graduates told him they heard in four or five years ago. He has met students at other Pennsylvania colleges who say the rumor is about their college, not Slippery Rock.

The rumor always involves mass murders on certain college campuses about the time of Halloween. Robert Dawson, director of university advancement at Slippery Rock, said he remembers the rumor encompassing Pennsylvania colleges as an undergraduate 24 years ago, and in some form every two or three years since. In the 17 years Chief Eric Thomas has been with the university police he has heard it nearly every year, except "it changes like society changes." Evidently, the rumor reappears like golden leaves and football games each fall, a part of campus lore passed from upperclassmen to gullible freshmen.

But this year, Walker said, there is a difference--people believe it. "It's bad this year," he said. "A lot of people are going home for the weekend or sleeping away from the dorm. Freshmen girls seem to be scared the most. Freshmen girls are petrified." Another difference is off campus, where, for the first time, the rumor has spread. Slippery Rock Police Chief Larry Thompson said local residents rarely heard the rumor in previous years, but this year are hearing it and spreading it. He has had 80 calls in the last two days, all from residents asking about the rumor and if Halloween has been canceled. The rumor has spread over Lawrence and Butler counties, and Thompson has had calls from 40 miles away. We heard you canceled Halloween, other police chiefs say, should we do it too? No, he says, because we haven't canceled Halloween and the rumor is a bunch of nonsense.

What is the rumor? Well, that is difficult to say. Thompson said he stopped counting at 14 versions and if you ask 30 Slippery Rock students, you will get close to 30 different versions, usually tailored so their dorm room is potentially the bloodiest. Always there is a mass murder involved--Thompson has heard anywhere from four to 13 dead. Always a psychic predicts it, but the psychic can never be found, nor anyone who personally heard or read the psychic's prediction. University officials believe the rumor dates back 20 years, when a psychic--nobody knows who--predicted a mass murder at a Pennsylvania campus. "There are over 200 colleges in Pennsylvania," Slippery Rock President Robert N. Aebersold said. "If we wait long enough, it might happen someday. But if these psychics know something, why don't they take that knowledge to the lottery?"

For the last 10 years or so, the rumor has been refined: the college is named after the local town and it has a body of water running through it. "Most of the state's colleges are in a town of the same name," Dawson said. And many Pennsylvania towns have a body of water running through it, even one as small as Slippery Rock Creek. At Slippery Rock, the rumor says the murders will occur at either the highest or lowest point on campus. Since the highest point is a water tower surrounded by woods, the rumor has concentrated on the lowest point. Several places, including other dormitories and Miller Music Hall, which is already supposed to be haunted by the ghost of its namesake, Emma Duffy Miller, are supposed to be the lowest point on campus, depending on who is telling the rumor.

But Founders Hall seems like a good place for the rumor to be centered, since it is off in the woods, farthest from classrooms, and most of its residents are

freshmen. It is the newest dormitory on campus, but looks like the oldest, the wind whistles eerily through the windows and it is shaped like a cross. At eight floors, it is the tallest dormitory on campus, which puts Walker's eighth floor bunk bed at the highest point of the lowest spot on campus. Yet doubters on the first floor believe the mass murder will happen there, since they are at the lowest spot. But so do residents of the fifth floor, who heard eight people would be murdered. On the eighth floor, they heard five people would be murdered.

As with everything else, the date of the mass murder is variable. Some say it will be Halloween, others the day before (Devil's Night Out), and still others say victims will be gathered tonight. The murderer has changed over the years, beginning with the lone mass murderer who was in vogue a few years ago. Now the rumor includes a cult, sometimes religious and often satanic. And satanic cults are in vogue in popular music and culture. Although Geraldo Rivera's Tuesday television special dwelled on satanic cults, campus officials know they can't blame it on Rivera--the rumor has been circulating for over three weeks.

Most versions of the rumor blame it on a television show--usually Phil Donahue's. But a spokesman from that talk show said they have not had psychic predictions on the show. The spokesman said there have been over 1,000 inquiries, mostly from the North-east, but from as far west as Topeka, Kan., all asking about the rumor. Others have attributed the rumor to Oprah Winfrey, Johnny Carson, Jeanne Dixon, Sally Jesse Raphael and the NBC Nightly News.

Thompson said he has researched every version he has heard, but could find no one who personally heard the "prediction." "Usually someone says a friend heard the prediction on Donahue or Winfrey or Carson," he said. "Then you ask the friend, and they say another friend heard the prediction. The television shows say no such prediction was ever made."

Both campus and Slippery Rock police were upset when a reporter asked about the rumor. Both said they preferred to wait until after Halloween to discuss the issue. "We worry if we get too much publicity, it might cause problems of its own," said Thomas, head of campus security. [Dan Donovan, "Ghostly Rumor Obsesses College," Pittsburgh (PA) Press (28 October 1988): B1, B4.

OTHER WAYS OF CELEBRATING HALLOWEEN IN AMERICA. An army of volunteers like the one that helped put a damper on Devil's Night arson fires last weekend may be deployed one day to combat crack houses and youth gunfights, says [Detroit] Mayor Coleman A. Young. "Anytime an aroused community comes together to deal with a problem, that problem can be resolved," Young said Tuesday. "What you've seen is a resolution of the Devil's Night problem."

About 20,000 civilians joined police and firefighters in patrolling the streets, keeping Detroit's annual Halloween weekend fire well below last year's level and near the city's normal rate, Young said. From Saturday through Monday 229 fires broke out, a drop of 21 percent from last year, the mayor said. Devil's Night is the night before Halloween. On Saturday, a below-average number of 56 fires broke out, and Monday's 69 blazes were typical for any night of the year in the city, Young said. Officials reported 104 fires Sunday. "This was the quietest Devil's Night in years," he said. "The youngsters are beginning to get the message."

A Halloween mob barged through Hollywood [CA], battling police shattering storefronts and looting business before police in riot gear and riding horses tamed the crush early Tuesday. . . . Damage estimates were incomplete. At the Brown Derby restaurant, youths broke the front window and reached in to steal wine, said maitre d' Jose Quintanilla. "All the ghouls and the fools, it's just their day," said Edward Cahill, who sought safety in the basement of Hollywood Billiards.

In a ghastly Halloween prank gone awry, a man trying to stage a fake hanging choked to death in a [Cambridge, MA] bar full of revelers who didn't realize he was dying before their eyes. "He had some sort of Halloween attire that was going to make it look as though he was hanging himself when he really wasn't," said Police Detective James Dwyer. "The harness slipped and he really was hanging, but it took the crowd a while to realize what was happening. . . . When our officers arrived, he was down--someone had cut him down--but it was too late. [AP Press releases, 2 November 1988.]

BRIEFEST LEGEND PERFORMANCE OF 1988? His brother had just come in from trick-or-treating and was almost delirious with sated greed.

"Almond Roca, Nate!" he exulted. "Popcorn balls that are orange!"

"You can't eat the ones that aren't wrapped. Throw away the popcorn balls."

"Why?"

"Razor blades," said Nathan. . . .

"Yeah," Ricky said excitedly. "Halloween razor blades. Oh, my God, Nate, someone gave me raisin bread! Raisin bread, Nate!"

[From Michael Chabon, "The Halloween Party," *The New Yorker* (26 September 1988): 42. See Sylvia Grider, "The Razor Blades in the Apples Syndrome," *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend*, ed. Paul Smith (Sheffield: CECTAL, 1984): 128-40.]

BRIEFEST LEGEND PERFORMANCE OF 1929? His eyes fixed on the clean concrete walk, Gant strode on, muttering dramatically, composing a narrative of the picture. . . . The window on the corner was filled with rubber syringes and thermos bottles. Drink Coca Cola. They say he stole the formula from old mountain woman. \$50,000,000 now. Rats in the vats. Dope at Wood's better. Too weak here. He had recently acquired a taste for the beverage and drank four or five glasses a day.

[From Thomas Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel* (New York: Scribner, 1929), p. 225 (Scribner Library edn.). Courtesy of Sylvia Grider. See Gary Alan Fine, "Cokelore and Coke Law," *JAF* 92 (1979): 477-82.]

MICKY MOUSE LSD RUMOR. Parents of young children were advised by the state attorney general's office on Tuesday not to be unduly concerned about a drug alert circular that has resurfaced in the Hazleton area. The flier urges parents and teachers to "beware" and "spread the word" that paper sheets of LSD-laced "tattoos," tabs and stamps are being sold to school children in the area. Copies of the flier have surfaced from time to time throughout Pennsylvania and other states, and recently began circulating for at least a second time in Hazleton area schools, pediatricians' offices and other locations.

Although information contained in the circular has some factual merit, the Bureau of Narcotics in the attorney general's office said the message is exaggerated and no cause for alarm. While LSD sometimes is sold on sheets of paper, according to spokesmen, "We don't see any evidence that would cause us to issue a warning."

According to the circular, small sheets of white paper containing blue, star-shaped "tattoos" are being sold to Hazleton area school children. Purportedly the stars, which are about the size of pencil erasers, are soaked with Lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), a hallucinogenic drug. "Each star can be removed and placed in the mouth," according to the flier. "The LSD can also be absorbed through the skin simply by handling the paper." The circular goes on the state that school children also are being tempted with brightly colored paper tabs that resemble postage stamps bearing images of butterflies, clowns, Superman, Mickey Mouse and other Disney cartoon characters. "This is a new way of selling acid (LSD) by appealing to young children," the circular states, advising that the stamps are packed in red cardboard boxes wrapped in foil.

Also described in the flier are red pyramid stamps, micro dots in various colors, and cutout "window panes," or grids. These are all laced with drugs and some are laced with strychnine (a poison)," the circular warns. The flier urges its readers to alert their children and their communities to the alleged threat, stating: "A young child could happen upon these and have a fatal 'trip.' It was also learned that little children could be given a free 'tattoo' by other children who want to have some fun, or by others cultivating new customers."

The origin of the circular is listed simply as "Cumberland County Sheriff's Department 5/26/88." No state is designated. The sheriff's departments in Cumberland County, Pa., and in Cumberland County, N.J., said on Monday they did not prepare or circulate the flier. The attorney general's office said it has encountered instances in which LSD is sold on 8 1/2-inch x 11-inch sheets of paper that bear repeated symbols or designs, such as stars, half-moons and cartoon characters. A drop of LSD is placed onto each character. The spokesman explained that, aside from being easy to carry and handle, the sheet format is a "marketing thing" that provides LSD manufacturers with a way of identifying their product. Because LSD is a

manufactured drug, its quality, and price, varies. The symbols used in the sheet form of the drug are somewhat of a trademark. According to the spokesman, a single "hit" of LSD sells for \$3 to \$5, with a sheet of 20 going for as much as \$100.

Concerning the circular's warning that dealers or manufacturers may give out free samples to "cultivate new customers," the spokesman said that would be expensive and is not a normal practice. "We do not see that," the spokesman said. "These people are in business to make money. We don't see any evidence that would cause us to issue a warning." [Bob Salitza, "Concern over LSD Tattoos Unfounded, Officials Say," Hazleton (PA) Standard-Speaker, 2 November 1988.]

SATAN-WORSHIP AND TV RATINGS. [TV journalist Geraldo Rivera's NBC special on devil worship] turned out to be the highest-rated two-hour documentary ever presented on [American] network television. It also set off an interesting contretemps between Rivera and NBC programming head Brandon Tartikoff, who, following the broadcast, publicly questioned the scheduling of the program. That annoyed Geraldo, who told NEWSWEEK that Tartikoff "called me up, congratulated me on the show, and said, 'You did everything you said you would do.'" . . . NBC, in reaching for a Rivera ratings fix, apparently clashed with its own journalistic sensibility. A week before the infamous Satanism show ran, both sides were at a grisly standoff over its content. In dealing with a ritualistic murder, for example, Rivera wanted to mention on air everything from the draining and drinking of the victim's blood to his castration. "The compromise we ultimately struck," he recalls . . . "was that we would only talk about the sealing of the eyes and mouth and the carving on the chest . . . It's all a question of taste." ["Trash TV," Newsweek (14 November 1988): 73-74.]

EARLY VERSION OF "THE FIVE-POUND NOTE"? On Wednesday afternoon a married woman, living in Masbrough, was standing in a crowd at a sale by auction in Psalter-lane, Rotherham, when, putting her hand to her pocket, she missed her pocket-book, containing three sovereigns and three crown pieces. A policeman was called in, and she told him that her pocket had been picked, and pointed out three young men who stood near her as being likely to be the guilty parties. The young men protested their innocence; but, with two others, they accompanied the policeman to an adjoining beerhouse. The landlord locked the door, and a general turning out of pockets took place. The missing purse, however, could not be found; the door was unlocked; the suspected pickpockets were set at liberty, and the lady returned to Masbrough disconsolate. When she got home she found her pocket-book on the chest of drawers. --Sheffield Times. ["A Lady's Memory," London Times (8 May 1855): 8:5. Cf. Baughman Motif N360(a).]

HAVE YOU HEARD...?

BEWARE! VICIOUS GUARD SNAKE! Another syndicated column by Anderson and Van Atta, run 23 September 1988, summarized a "confidential intelligence report" produced by the US government on clandestine marijuana growing. Among the methods allegedly used by growers to protect their crops is the following: "in Florida . . . growers tie rattlesnakes on the trails leading to the pot patches. The guard snakes, bound to be cranky because they are tied up, strike out at unsuspecting passersby. Some Georgia growers have improved on this technique by cutting the rattles off the snakes so there is no advance warning." I respect the US Government's information-collecting agencies--but this sounds suspiciously like "one of ours." Can readers supply variants? Contact Editor, FOAftale News.

THE MICROWAVED SIGNET RING. In 1949 Ron Edwards heard a "true" story from an Engineering student at Swinburne Tech (Australia) about a machine that used "a new form of energy" to melt metal. Strangely, it appeared to give off no heat, and, since it had no door on the front, a hand could be put into it while it was operating without any feeling of warmth. One day a student placed a plate with metal on it while it was running, "and suddenly the heavy gold signet ring that he was wearing melted around his finger! As a result of the horrible burns that resulted he lost the finger." One suspects this is an early form of the various microwave legends (See Brunvand, Vanishing Hitchhiker, especially p. 63, which mentions "scientific" versions of the legend in which technicians cook their own insides by operating microwaves with the door

open). Can anyone supply variants? Contact Ron Edwards, Box 274, Kuranda Q 4872, Australia.

BULLETIN BOARD

AMERICAN FOLKLORE SOCIETY/FOLK NARRATIVE SECTION.

Proposed AFS Paper Session: Emergent Legends: How Do We Handle Them?

Elvis is alive! Satan is alive! MIAs are alive! Aliens are here!

Nonsense. This is all just folklore.

Or is it? Do we have the right to make preemptive claims of these beliefs' falsehood? On the other hand, all these materials show strong links with earlier tradition and are mainly passed around in small groups? Recently emerged corpuses of belief often invite polarized responses: what kind of middle ground can the folklorist strike? Should we ignore such material or should we try to respond to it as professionals?

The Folk Narrative Section of the AFS wishes to organize one or two paper sessions around this general topic. We are interested in proposals dealing with any belief or narrative complexes that have recently emerged and whose status as "folklore" is genuinely debatable. Contact Editor, FOAftale News by March 15.

Proposed AFS Forum/Workshop: Folk Narrative and Social Problems.

This forum would focus on ways that narratives deal with a range of social conditions seen as dysfunctional, for instance, AIDS, crime, poverty, war, prejudice, and the like. Folklorists should draw from their own research to spark discussion of the ways in which folk narrative expresses public attitudes in direct or disguised form. The plan is to permit each presenter a few (2-5) minutes at the beginning of the session for whatever comments on the topic they wish to make, then throw the floor open for discussion. Contact Gary Alan Pine, Department of Sociology, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA, by March 15.

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- Barbara Rieti, Department of Folklore, Memorial University, St John's, Newfoundland, Canada, A1C5S7.
- Paul Smith, Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John's, Newfoundland, Canada, A1C5S7.
- Jean Ure, Department of Applied Linguistics, University of Edinburgh, 14 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh, United Kingdom.
- RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST.
- Bowman, Marion. "Not Another Chinese Restaurant Story..." FLS News 7 (July 1988): 9-10. [After workers and patrons of a Hong Kong restaurant mysteriously die, images of foxes appear in the building's marble fixtures.]
- Bunch, Kyle J., and Michael K. White. "The Riddle of the Colorado Ghost Lights." The Skeptical Inquirer 12:3 (Spring 1988): 306-309. [Mysterious lights appearing in a cemetery in Silver Cliff, CO, are explained rationally.]
- Cocran, Robert. "The Molested CPR Doll." California Folklore Newsletter 4:2 (Winter 1988): 2, 6-7.
- Durm, Mark W. "Abigail's Anomalous Apparition." The Skeptical Inquirer 12:3 (Spring 1988): 301-305. [Debunks ghost story involving an opera singer who vowed to return after death to perform at Athens, AL.]
- Ellis, Bill. "What Happened at Gore Orphanage? Legend as Submerged Urban History." Urban Resources 4:3 (Spring 1987): 19-24. [Historical background of adolescent legend attached to site near Cleveland, OH.]
- "The Varieties of Alien Experience." The Skeptical Inquirer 12:3 (Spring 1988): 263-269. [Discussion of UFO abduction accounts.]
- Fine, Gary Alan. "The City as a Folklore Generator: Legends in the Metropolis." Urban Resources 4:3 (Spring 1987): 3-6, 61. [Survey of contemporary legends discussing urban settings.]
- "Welcome to the World of AIDS: Fantasies of Female Revenge." Western Folklore 46 (1987): 192-197.
- Finke, Nikki. "Does Your Computer Have a Virus? Experts Debate Whether Electronic Attacks are Urban Mythology or Threat to Security." Los Angeles Times (Sunday, January 31, 1988): VI.P.1. Summarized in California Folklore Newsletter 4:2 (Winter 1988): 8-9. [Note: On 19 September 1988 a Fort Worth programmer was convicted of planting a virus in his former employee's computer (AP).]
- Glazer, Mark. "The Vanishing Hitchhiker in the McAllen Standard Metropolitan Area: Mexican-American Culture and Urban Legend." Urban Resources 4:3 (Spring 1987): 31-36.
- Hallissy, Margaret. Venomous Woman: Fear of the Female in Literature. New York/London: Greenwood Press, 1987. [Touches on vagina dentata and male entrapment motifs in folklore and literature.]
- Hults, David S. "Roaming Gnomes." Australian Folklore 2 (1988): 87-92. [A lawn figurine turns up missing; then the owners receive postcards from the vacationing gnome. Finally it reappears with a suntan.]
- Leo, John. "Psst! Wait Till You Hear This." Time 29:11 (16 March 1987): 39. [Survey of legends circulating in Europe and Asia.]
- Morgan, Hal, and Kerry Tucker. More Rumor! New York/Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Orso, Ethelyn G. "Folk Narratives of the Supernatural from the Island of Chira, Costa Rica." Human Mosaic 21:1-2 (1987): 57-70.
- Reife, Mary Stewart. The New Money System. Montgomery, Alabama: Ministries, Inc., 1982.
- Rojciewicz, Peter M. "The Extraordinary Encounter Continuum Hypothesis and Its Implications for the Study of Belief Materials." Folklore Forum 19:2 (1986): 131-152. [Proposed taxonomy relating paranormal experiences from UFO encounters to out-of-body experiences.]
- Roud, Steve. "Coke-Lore." FLS News 7 (July 1988): 10-11. [Experiments concerning Coca-Cola's alleged powers to prevent pregnancy and dissolve teeth.]
- Safran, Clare. "The Devil Made Me Do It." Woman's Day (22 November 1988): 146-47, 150, 152-53. [Satanic cults' connection with teenage murders and suicides.]
- Skinner, Bob. Toad in the Hole: Source Material on the Entombed Toad Phenomenon. London: Fortean Times, 1985.

FOAFTALE NEWS: AN OCCASIONAL NEWS SHEET ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH

All members of ISCLR receive this news sheet free. Others wishing to be on the mailing list should send \$2.00 or the equivalent to cover postage. All contributions, material for publication, and inquiries should be sent to Bill Ellis, Penn State--Hazleton Campus, Hazleton, PA 18201 USA. (717-450-3026 or 788-2021)