



No. 19 (October 1990)

PENSEZ A VOS ENFANTS!

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 THE NEWSLETTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY LEGEND RESEARCH  
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HOBBS-CORNWELL VANISHING HITCHHIKER SURVEY:  
 A Progress Report

At the 1988 Seminar on Perspectives on Contemporary Legend in Sheffield, England, Sandy Hobbs and David Cornwell presented a paper, "Just Like the Vanishing Hitchhiker. . . ." This essay explored the possibilities of collecting and researching contemporary legends by written questionnaires. So far, the questionnaire has been given in introductory psychology classes in Scotland, Texas, Arizona, Pennsylvania, and Newfoundland to date, and the editors would welcome results from introductory psychology courses in other locations. Results should be sent to Sandy Hobbs, Department of Applied Social Studies, Paisley College of Technology, High Street, Paisley, Renfrewshire PA1 2BE, United Kingdom. All materials will become part of the general data base.

In addition, the editors would welcome proposals and abstracts of essays interpreting results from the questionnaire. Please send these to Keith Cunningham, P.O. Box 6032, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona 86011, USA.

The questionnaire used follows. The original form included blank space for answers between each of the questions. This has been omitted here to conserve space.

PAGE ONE:

YOUR NAME \_\_\_\_\_ YOUR DATE OF BIRTH \_\_\_\_\_

Please read this carefully before answering the question below.

During August of 1963, Mr. Peter Powell, of Kendal, was driving his car to Carlisle via Shap road, and a man on the roadside thumbed a lift.

As is natural when picking up a stranger, Mr. Powell asked the man what his work was. The passenger said he was a retired jeweller on his way home to Carlisle.

They continued to talk on various subjects, and then the conversation turned to chess, which first surprised Mr. Powell, for although he was a keen chess player he had not mentioned the fact to his fellow traveller.

The man told him that now in his retirement he did nothing but compose chess problems. He had one which he had just completed; he said Mr. Powell must see it.

On the outskirts of Carlisle, the passenger asked him to stop at his home, and invited him to come to the house, but Mr. Powell was in a hurry to get to the Border T.V. Studio, where he was due to appear. He suggested that if it was convenient he would call back later.

The man gave his name and address, and intimated that if he

wasn't at home, the chess problem was written on a sheet of paper and placed in his tobacco jar.

At five o'clock that day, Mr. Powell drove up to the house and asked to see Mr. . . . . The woman who answered the door invited him in, then hearing his story, looked somewhat taken back. "Can you describe him?" she queried.

The description was that of her husband, then, puzzled, she said, "That's strange, he died three days ago."

Mr. Powell noticed the alabaster tobacco jar on the mantel-piece, and asked permission to open it, to which the widow agreed.

Inside was the chess problem written on a sheet of paper, just as his passenger had described.

- Q 1. Have you ever had an experience like this?  
 If your answer is YES, please go to PAGE TWO.  
 If your answer is NO, please go to PAGE THREE.

PAGE TWO:

- Q 2.1 Please give as full an account as you can of the experience you have had like the one described.  
 Q 2.2 WHEN did this experience take place?  
 (DAY/MONTH/YEAR)  
 Q 2.3 WHERE did this experience take place?  
 (STREET/DISTRICT/TOWN)  
 Q 2.4 Give any information you can which you believe could help to explain your experience.

PAGE THREE:

- Q 3.1 Have you heard the story on Page One before?  
 If your answer is YES, please go to Question 3.2 below.  
 If your answer is NO, please turn to PAGE FOUR.  
 Q 3.2 If you have heard the story before, please outline any differences between the Page One story and the one heard previously. (If they are exactly the same, write 'NONE'.)  
 Q 3.3 If you heard the story DIRECTLY from a person or people, please give the following details:  
 WHO told you? WHEN? (DAY/MONTH/YEAR)  
 PLACE where told? What SETTING? (e.g. party, pub)  
 Q 3.4 If you heard the story INDIRECTLY from a book, magazine, film, TV, etc., please give the following details:  
 What KIND of source? WHEN? (DAY/MONTH/YEAR)  
 What was the TITLE? Give the names of any PEOPLE involved, such as author or actors:

PAGE FOUR:

Q 4.1 Have you ever heard a story SIMILAR to the story on Page One?

If your answer is YES, please go to Question 4.2 below.  
If your answer is NO, please turn to PAGE FIVE.

Q 4.2 Please give as full an account as you can of the story you consider is similar to the story on Page One.

Q 4.3 If you heard the story DIRECTLY from a person or people, please give the following details:

WHO told you? WHEN? (DAY/MONTH/YEAR)

PLACE where told? What SETTING? (e.g. party, pub)

Q 4.4 If you heard the story INDIRECTLY from a book, magazine, film, TV, etc., please give the following details:

What KIND of source? WHEN? (DAY/MONTH/YEAR)

What was the TITLE? Give the names of any PEOPLE involved, such as author or actors:

PAGE FIVE:

Q 5.1 Please write a story similar to the one which appeared on Page One.

Q 5.2 What do you consider are the main similarities between your story and the story on Page One?

[This questionnaire has already thrown considerable light onto the role of the media in spreading this legend: short story, film, and popular song versions exist now in several languages. But one topic lightly discussed are the actual events that constitute "experiences like 'The Vanishing Hitchhiker.'" Courtesy of two correspondents, we have two insights into the puzzling phenomena that underlie the "classic" legend.]

"MAYBE IT WAS SOMEBODY ... LIKE ACTING LIKE GOD":  
A Hitchhiker Memoriate from Indiana

[Recorded in 1988 by Linda Dégh from Mike Blaney, 22, of Gary, Indiana, talking to Mike Simonetto. Transcription by LD.]

Mike, you told me about some experience your mother had. Would you fill me in on that?

Yes, this is an experience my mother had and that I was part of ... I actually didn't see the lady, but I went with my mother to her house. This was about ... I guess, around seven years ago.

I was home alone and my mother came home with my sister, she just got back from the grocery store, and I was helping them bringing in the groceries when all of a sudden I noticed my mother's got all these empty milk gallon jugs and a ... she started filling them up with water you know, and I asked her, you know, what are you doing with all this water, these milk jugs and why she was filling them up with water?

And she said, well on the way back from the grocery store, when I was driving down, she says, Forty-fifth Avenue, somewhere between Grant Street and Harrison, somewhere between these streets she seen this old lady standing on the corner and she said she could hardly walk. My mother said that normally she wouldn't just pick up some old lady but something told her to pick this lady up. So she pulled over. She was with my sister.

My mother asked the lady if she needed a ride. And the lady

said yes, she'd like to go to the grocery store. The lady came out and couldn't even carry her packages. So my mom put the groceries in the car for her. Then the lady got in the car and my mother asked if there was any other place she'd like to go before going home. She said that, yes, she'd like to go to the bank before going home.

So my mother stopped at the bank and parked her car, waiting for the lady. She said she almost left the lady at the bank because she was taking so long to come out and my mom was wondering what she could be doing that could be taking so long. But since she had her groceries in the car, she waited.

Finally the lady came out of the bank after a long while and got into the car. She opened her purse and she had all this money--a whole lot of cash--like she just withdrew a bunch of cash. So my mother asked her what she was doing with all that cash and with as much trouble as she has getting around somebody could have swiped her money. The old lady said that she didn't worry--she had lots of money and was an old person. My mother told her to be careful, and would she like to go home now? The old lady said yes. So my <sup>mom</sup> took her home, which was a house between Grant and Harrison Streets, on 45th Avenue.

The lady walked up to the house with my mother, who took her groceries into the house. My mother asked her if there was anything else she could do and the old lady said that, yes, she would like to have some water ... that she didn't get water at her house and would my mother bring some over to me in milk gallon jugs ... she specifically said milk gallon jugs. So my mom said she would bring some over tonight ...

That was why my mom was filling the jugs with water. So she filled up about five to ten, I don't exactly remember; so I helped her bring them to the car. So we went over to this lady's house ... my mom, my sister and me... We drove over to the lady's house. So I got all these gallon jugs and we walked up the stairs to the porch and we set them down and started pounding on the door.

The lady did not come to the door so my mom said that she's old and maybe she's having trouble getting to the door. So she waited there about five minutes banging on the door. Then I walked around to the back and banged on the door and the window curtain was halfway closed and I could see that there wasn't anyone in that room where the curtains were. So I banged on the basement window. My mom got scared and thought maybe the old lady had a heart attack or something.

So there was this house set back a little ways next door and my mom said to go over there and tell that lady, there might be something wrong with her neighbor because she has just dropped her off about a half hour ago, she might have a heart attack or something.

So I went over there and banged on that lady's door. She came to the door and I said that my mom just dropped off her neighbor off next door and she was pretty old and she's not coming to the door. We brought her ... she said she wanted water. We brought it for her, left it on the porch and nobody's answering the door. We thought maybe something might be wrong.

Then, the lady looked at me and said, "Are you talking about this house next door?" And I said, "Yes." And she said that maybe we had the wrong house because nobody's lived there for like ten years. And I just said: "Are you kidding me? This house right here?" She said, that was right. And I walked back and said to mom: "That lady next door said there hasn't been anybody living there for ten years."

My mom just looked at me ... you know how you turn all white and your hair gets all up on your head ... she got all scared ... she got in the car and she was really scared. She said, "Mike, I

know I dropped her off, that lady at that house." And my sister said the same.

So both your mother and your sister could locate that house?

Yeah, and so could I. That was wild. My mom called my grandma and my grandma's really religious and she said maybe it was somebody ... like acting like God to see if you would help somebody out ... That's why she had all that money to see if you'd take that right away from her because she was helpless. It was wild and I'll never forget that.

Does your mother ever talk about it?

She hadn't talked about it for a while but she remembers it ... she'll verify the story.

Still scare you?

Yeah, when I think about it because it was like I said around seven or ten years ago and ... I was just carrying the water ... I didn't know what to expect ... when that lady told me that ... wow ... I thought maybe my mom does have the right house ... So I went up there and she was all upset. She was just sitting there saying, "This is the right house ... this is the right house ... "

"I FOLLOWED THIS UP PERSONALLY":

Additional Notes on the South African Hitchhiker

Cynthia Hind  
P.O. Box 768  
Harare, ZIMBABWE.

[A response to Sigrid Schmidt, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker in South Africa: Additional Notes" (FN 17:1-3)]

Dear Sigrid,

Someone very kindly sent me the FOAFtale News for March 1990 where I read your comments on the Vanishing Hitchhiker in South Africa. You may recall that you quoted from my article in Fate Magazine (July 1979). . . .

However, I would like to correct several impressions you gained from the people you spoke to, or conclusions you drew on your own account. I did not report from only newspaper cuttings, although I admit I used these to find out who the people were involved, and I followed this up personally. At that time, my daughter and her husband happened to live in George, which is about 60 km. from Oudtshoorn. Due to this, I was able to investigate the case personally and spoke to all the witnesses, those for and against.

The first person I interviewed was Anton La Grange, who was living with a Zimbabwean woman whose parents I knew. She was very friendly and because of this, he spoke quite openly although he was wary of the press. The story was told exactly as I reported it in Fate, except that you omitted to state that when he opened his car door (he was driving a new Mercedes, not a truck!) all the doors were locked, and he had to unlock the left-hand front door to allow her into his car. It was raining heavily, and he was also worried about her damaging his leather seats.

When he asked her where she was going, the significant factor here is that she replied: "De Lange, 2 Porter Street." It was only afterwards that he realized there was no Porter Street in Oudtshoorn, and when he turned to tell her this, she had disappeared.

He actually picked her up 17 km. outside Uniondale, while returning from there to his home in Oudtshoorn.

He immediately drove back to Uniondale and reported the matter to the policeman, "Snowy" Potgieter, who was on duty at the time. Potgieter went out in the police van with him to the spot, as La Grange was insistent he accompany him, and Potgieter told me that La Grange was a bit threatening. La Grange is a big man, a rugby player.

La Grange drove in front, and Potgieter followed behind, all the while looking along the road to see if they could see the girl, who might have fallen out. When they reached the 17 km. point, where La Grange had picked her up, La Grange heard a laugh and the left rear door (which if you recall, was locked) opened up and closed. Potgieter admitted to me that he had seen the door open and close, but thought it might have been a fault with the car's mechanism. A brand new Mercedes? Incidentally, the 17 km. point is marked by a turn off to Barnabas, a village off the road.

At the time, La Grange did not know that 21-year-old Maria Roux had been killed at that spot at Easter 1968. It was only after the occurrence that a Sgt. van der Merwe (I am not 100% sure about the name as I did not interview this policeman--he had already retired) contacted the local press and told them that at the exact spot where La Grange had picked up the girl, he had collected the body of Maria Roux in 1968. I visited the newspaper proprietor, and he showed me the cutting.

Apparently, Roux had been travelling to Riversdale to visit her parents and tell them of her engagement to pilot Lt. Giel Pretorius when the small Volkswagen Beetle in which they were travelling, passing over a rise in the road (which covered a water pipe) was caught by the strong winds that prevail in South Africa at that time of the year, and the small car was swept over the embankment. Pretorius was unscathed, but Maria's neck was broken, and she died instantly. Sgt. van der Merwe was called to collect the body, and he remembered that she wore dark slacks (they were green) and a navy blue duffle coat.

La Grange was unaware of this until I confronted him with this evidence: it did not mean anything to him, although he recalled that the girl wore dark slacks and a navy blue jacket with toggles across the front. But when I showed him a picture of Maria, he was quite startled--almost excited, I thought. He said, "I cannot swear for sure, but I think that is the girl."

Of course, there could have been suggestion about the whole thing, so I cannot really accept his excitement as recognition. After all, it was dark and raining, and he could not have seen her face too clearly in the dim light inside the car. But he gave me her clothing description before I showed him what Sgt. van der Merwe had said.

To me, the most significant factor in the whole story was the fact that the girl gave him the address to which she was going. I thought at first it might be her parents' address, but then why "De Lange"?

Her father had died since her death, and her mother no longer lived in Riversdale. I actually went there with my daughter, and we visited the police station to try and find out her address. They told me Mrs. Roux had moved to Somerset West, just outside Cape Town, but they had no forwarding address. I tried to contact her in Somerset West. I drove to the Municipal Offices there to find out if they could trace her through electricity accounts. There were several Roux's there, and two widows. I took the addresses and wrote to them both, but even though I followed them up with a second letter and an addressed, stamped envelope, I never heard from either one.

I also tried to contact her ex-fiancee, Giel Pretorius, through his last Air Force Station, and his Commandant, but no one replied. I thought he might be able to identify the name and address she had given, because to me, that is the key factor in this particular story.

Then I wrote to the Cape Provincial Board to find out where there was a Porter Street, and they told me that the only one they had was in Worcester, just beyond the Hex River Valley. I wrote to Occupant, 2 Porter Street, Worcester, but it turned out to be a boarding establishment for the local school. However, the warden there was very helpful and looked up his records to see if a De Lange had taught there. But no such name appeared.

I did not know where to go from there, except that I don't think the Cape Provincial Board kept very accurate records, as driving with my daughter in George one day, I found a Porter Street there. I tried to contact No. 2, but the building had been pulled down and two new cottages built on the site. Although both occupants had heard the story, neither knew of the name De Lange. Nor did the George Municipality have any record of the name.

The two other stories, from Dawie van Jaarsveld and A. J. Coetzee, both of whom met up with the girl when on motor-bikes, are accurate. The girl was picked up at the same spot, and, in Dawie's case, he placed the helmet on the girl's head (was she then solid?) and gave her the transistor radio ear-plug to put in her ear to keep her awake. When his rear wheel started to skid, he thought he had had a puncture, so he stopped and found the girl gone. He drove back to find her, but she was nowhere around. The helmet was strapped tightly to his seat, and the ear-plug he had given her was in his other ear--he had two ear-plugs and was already using one himself. Imagery, vivid imagination, or what?

. . . The point is that his story rang true to form, and when I interviewed the lady in the café in Uniondale where he went after his experience, she told me that he was obviously in a state of shock when he walked in for a cup of coffee after the event.

I might add that there have been many other stories in the area about this "ghost" girl on the Uniondale road. As you stated, some of these report the girl as being "in white," but I have not seen or spoken to anyone reporting this. I did visit one coloured family who lived on the coast, close to George--I forget the name of the village, but I could find out--who said they saw her one night on the road. They probably saw something moving when the press was running the stories--it could have been an animal or something like that. They were very vague, but certainly frightened. They were in a cart, and there were a group of them, and according to the best witnesses, she seems to appear only to men on their own. On Good Friday, the day she was killed--if it is the same person--and when the night is pretty dark.

I tried to persuade my son-in-law to drive along the road, as he is completely skeptical, and he did agree at first, but when it came to the point of going, he backed down!!!!!!

I have been to the place, and, I must say, it is very isolated and quite eerie, which would add to any "ghost" story.

I hope you don't mind my writing to set you right about some of the facts in your paper.

[For further information on these events, see FN 13 (March 1989):3, as well as Cynthia Hind, "Girl-Ghost Hitches Ride," Fate Magazine (July 1979):54-59, and Michael Goss, The Evidence for Phantom Hitchhikers (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1984):121-128. --Ed.]

## BULLETIN BOARD

FOLK NARRATIVE SECTIONS AT AFS. The 1990 Meeting of the American Folklore Society, to be held October 18-21 in Oakland, California will include both a paper session and a two-part forum sponsored by the AFS Folk Narrative Section. The paper panel, organized and chaired by Keith Cunningham, will focus on The Interface Between the Written and the Oral. Scheduled for 1:15-3:00 PM on Friday, 19 October, it will include the following papers:

Keith Cunningham (Northern Arizona University) TRADITIONAL RECITATIONS: THE WRITTEN AND THE ORAL.

Deb Dale Jones (University of Minnesota) DESCENT AND RESURRECTION IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: A DIACHRONIC STUDY.

Jack Truten (University of Pennsylvania) THE LEGENDARY SCOTT: FOLKLORE AND FICTION.

Susan S. Wadley (Syracuse University) CREATING A MODERN EPIC ORAL AND WRITTEN VERSIONS OF THE HINDI EPIC DHOLA.

Eric Montenyohl will serve as discussant for this panel. On Thursday, 18 October, two forums, organized by Mark Glazer (University of Texas, Pan American) will discuss The Contemporary Legend: An Assessment of Present Scholarly Activities. Participants include Daniel R. Barnes, Joel Best, Jan Harold Brunvand, Linda Dégh, Bill Ellis, Gary Alan Fine, Mark Glazer, Eric Montenyohl, Elliott Oring, and Paul Smith. The first forum, Set for 10:15 AM-12 noon, will deal with traditional approaches legends as narratives; Mark Glazer will moderate. The second, a 1:15-3:00 PM, will discuss newer approaches drawn from the behavioral sciences; Bill Ellis will chair.

Other sessions dealing with legends and related topics:

### Thursday, 18 October

8:15-10:00 AM - Legend I: Definitions and Themes.

Chair: Gary Butler. Participants: Donald Ward, Baroness Esther Sant'Anna de Almeida Karwinsky, Esther Newman, Thomas E. Barden, Kathleen Stokker.

1:15-3:00 PM - Tellability and the Untellable: Issues of Tellability in Conversational and Traditional Narratives.

Chair: Donna Wycoff. Participants: Ann K. Hayashi, Toni Reed, Margaret Ann Gerds, Daniel R. Barnes (discussant)

3:15-5:00 PM - Legends and Personal Experience Narratives.

Chair: Sandra Dolby Stahl. Participants: Elizabeth MacDaniel, Timothy C. Lloyd, Ruth E. Mohrmann, Erika Brady, John Miles Foley.

### Friday, 19 October

10:15 AM-12 noon - Legend IV: Historical Forms and Modern Functions.

Chair: Carl R. Lindahl. Participants: Roger deV. Renwick, Richard M. Gottlieb, Dwight F. Reynolds, Susanna Spiro, Pat Byrne.

1990 PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND SEMINAR. The Eighth International Seminar on Perspectives on Contemporary Legend took place 23-27 July 1990 at Halifax Hall, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, England. The meeting was marked by the usual intense sometimes trenchant discussion of common points: What is the difference (if any) between rumors, beliefs, and contemporary legends? Are rumor-panics legends if there are no coherent text generated? Are xeroxlore flyers really contemporary legends? What constitutes a useable transcription of a legend? Can a legend summary ever support global interpretations of legend complexes? What is the legend scholar's proper attitude toward

the subject matter of his material--debunker, believer, or neutral? And how does Jan Brunvand sell so many books?

During four days of total disagreement, beginning in the conference room and naturally spilling into the bar next door, old orthodoxies were shattered again, new orthodoxies battered, and novel approaches heard with overall incredulity. A productive meeting overall, during which the following papers were presented and discussed:

- Peggy E. Alford, "Anglo-American Perceptions of Navajo Skinwalker Legends."  
History Department, P.O. Box 6023, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ 86011 USA.
- Daniel R. Barnes, "The Handwriting on the Wall: Metacommunication in the Contemporary Legend."  
Department of English, 421 E. 17th Ave., Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210 USA.
- Gillian Bennett, "'... the Colour of Saying': Contemporary Legend as Folktale."  
28 Brownsville Road, Stockport SK4 4PF ENGLAND.
- Carsten Bregenhøj, "Threatening Folklore: A Hybrid Form Between Urban Legends and Photo-copy Lore."  
Ostrobothnian Archives of Traditional Culture, Handelsesplanaden 23 A, SF-65100, Vasa FINLAND.
- Jean-Louis Brodu, "The Plane-Which-Chases-Clouds Rumor."  
POGONIP, BP 195, 75665 Paris, Cedex 14 FRANCE.
- Véronique Campion-Vincent, "The Villejuif Flyer, An Early Food Scare."  
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 27 rue de Liège, 75008 Paris FRANCE.
- Linda Dégh, "The Morphology of the Haunted House."  
North Carolina National Humanities Center, 7 Alexander Drive, P.O. Box 12256, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 USA.
- Bill Ellis, "Cattle Mutilation: Contemporary Legends and Contemporary Mythologies."  
Penn State, Hazleton Campus, Hazleton, PA 18201 USA
- Ruth Feldman, "The King of Denmark and the Star of David."  
22 Gary Way, Alamo, CA 94507 USA.
- Mark Glazer, "Contemporary Legend and Belief."  
College of Arts and Sciences, University of Texas, Pan American, Edinburg, TX 78539 USA.
- Sandy Hobbs, "Going Mad: The Exploration of a Contemporary Legend Motif."  
Department of Applied Social Studies, Paisley College, Paisley PA1 2BE SCOTLAND.
- Carl Lindahl, "The Synthesis of Joke and Legend, and the Case of the Smurfs."  
826 Wendel St., Houston, TX 77009 USA.
- Robert MacGregor, "Québec's Killer Beer: A Dark T[ale]."  
1421 Leclerc, Sherbrooke, Québec J1J 1H2 CANADA.
- Sherrill Mulhern, "Satan, Saucers and Psychotherapy."  
Laboratoire des Rumeurs, 14 Blvd. Edgar Quinet, 75014 Paris FRANCE.
- W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "Contemporary Legends: Narrative Texts Versus Summaries."  
61 Louisville Avenue, Aberdeen AB1 6TT SCOTLAND.
- Graham Shorrocks, "Reflections on the Problems of Transcribing Contemporary Legends."  
Dept. of English Language & Literature, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland A1B 3X9 CANADA.
- Paul Smith, "'Read All About It! Elvis Eaten by Drug-Crazed Giant Alligators': Contemporary Legend and the Popular Press."

Department of Folklore, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Newfoundland A1B 3X9 CANADA.

Bill Thompson and Jason Annetts, "Moral Panics, Political Crusades & Legends."

Department of Sociology, University of Reading, Whiteknights, Reading RG6 2AA ENGLAND.

Jeffrey S. Victor, "Satanic Cult Rumors as a Contemporary Legend."  
Department of Sociology, Jamestown Community College, 525 Falconer St., Jamestown, NY 14701 USA.

Leea Virtanen, "Everyday Reality and Contemporary Legends."  
Department of Folklore, University of Helsinki, Fabianink 33, 00170 Helsinki FINLAND.

Planning continues for the first issue of Contemporary Legend, which will appear in 1991. Participants in the seminar were encouraged to submit revisions of their papers to the journal, but the journal will also solicit material from the membership at large and from other interested scholars. Submissions should be 20-30 pages in length and adhere to the Style Guide of the Journal of American Folklore (see JAF 101 [1988]:219-226). Those wishing to contribute should send manuscripts to Paul Smith at the address above. Deadline: 1 November 1990. Please include one printed copy of the article and, if possible, one copy on computer diskette (Wordperfect 5.0 format or ASCII).

Future venues for ISCLR conferences were tentatively set:

- 1991 Chautauqua NY or South Padre Island TX, USA
- 1992 Innsbruck AUSTRIA (to precede the ISFNR meeting)
- 1993 Bloomington, IN USA
- 1994 Helsinki FINLAND

SPECIAL ISSUE OF FOLKLORE FORUM. Charles Greg Kelley, Co-editor of Folklore Forum, solicits manuscripts (up to 35 double-spaced pages) for a special issue on the legend. Any papers on theory/practice or case studies in legend or rumor will be considered. Documentation should conform to the JAF Style Guide. Deadline: December 31, 1990. Send inquiries and manuscripts to him at the Folklore Publications Group, 504 North Fess, Bloomington, IN 47405 USA. E-mail address: FOLKPUB at IUBACS.BITNET.

#### JUST IN!

#### EYE ON SATANISM

BRITISH "SNUFF FILM" SHOCK. British Home Secretary David Waddington expressed horror on 27 July after a special team of investigators at Scotland Yard said they were convinced that the murder of several missing children had been videotaped by homosexuals making "snuff films." Scotland Yard announced that they were investigating at least twelve child deaths that informants said were turned into pornographic videos and established a special hotline to receive confidential information. Several MP's called for stronger government measures to combat "the horror, squalor, sordidness and downright evil" of such films. [Mark Souster, "Waddington pledge of action over fears of killings on film," The Times (28 July 1990):3.]

Information came from a 19-year-old drifter who disappeared after telling welfare workers about his involvement with the alleged snuff films. He said that he had been abducted from London by a group of pedophiles, taken to Amsterdam, and forced to help with filming a scene in which a 12-year-old was repeatedly raped, beaten, and then run over by a motorcycle. After dropping the body into a canal, the movie-makers (said the informant) "sat

around drinking champagne."

Staff at the welfare association, which advocates "safe houses" for runaways to protect them from homosexuals, said they had also heard of a group of pornographers called the Elite Twelve that pays up to \$5000 to youths willing to appear in videos involving torture and sado-masochism. Some of these end up being snuff films. An advisor for the association claimed to have seen such a video in Amsterdam showing three men wearing leather masks cutting up a 13-year-old girl. Author Gordon Thomas also claimed that London, along with Amsterdam and Bangkok, had become a center for filming child murders, adding that a video of a slow, lingering death brings a premium price from wealthy customers. "It is done ritually," he said, "usually with a knife after the child has been raped." The makers then dispose of the children's bodies, making arrests and convictions difficult. Such information later was corroborated by a man convicted of killing Jason Swift, 14, as part of a "gay orgy." The convict claimed that a film of Jason's death had been made and was being secretly sold to pedophiles. [Don MacKay, "How could anyone watch my son die?" Daily Mirror (28 July 1990):1-2; Don MacKay, "Sick Capital of the Snuff Movies," Daily Mirror (28 July 1990):5; Maurice Chittenden, "Teenager 'confessed' to filming snuff movie," The Times (29 July 1990:1:3.)

Other detectives at Scotland Yard were openly skeptical. A senior officer in the Obscene Publications Squad said that convicted sex-abusers "are known liars, prone to exaggerate or fantasize and will do anything for better treatment. There has been talk of these snuff videos for years, but no one has ever seen one." The FBI's chief researcher into child pornography said that he had found no hard evidence for snuff films in the US, adding "Simulated snuff movies using special effects are so realistic there is no point in risking life in jail." But Ray Wyre, head of a Birmingham clinic for pedophiles, countered, "The human imagination has no end to its depravity... with the development of the video, there is also no doubt there are men weird, bizarre and evil enough to make [snuff films]." ["Rumours abound but evidence of British dimension is elusive," The Times (28 July 1990):3; "Snuff video cops split over 'child deaths,'" News of the World (29 July 1990):2, courtesy Bill Thompson.]

Probably in the background of statements like these are real-life cases such as the 1965 Moors murder case, in which Esther Myra Hindley and Ian Brady were convicted of sexually abusing and torturing to death two children and a teenage boy in Cheshire, UK. Among the evidence presented in court against them was an audiotape the two had made while torturing a 10-year-old girl. [See P. H. Johnson, On Iniquity (New York: Scribner, 1967).] The scene of the crime, on the outskirts of Manchester, was known locally as "the house of horror" and was visited by hundreds of curiosity-seekers. Despite a recent exorcism held there, subsequent tenants say the house remains haunted by the sound of screaming children, a claim repeated on a 1980s Manchester-produced TV special on ghosts. [Terence W. Whitaker, North Country Ghosts and Legends (London: Grafton Books, 1988):249-251.] The rumors also recall a 1985 California case: after Leonard T. Lake of Wilseyville committed suicide in police custody, detectives found eleven bodies and 40 pounds (15 kg.) of scattered human bones outside his cabin. Among his effects police found a video showing women being sexually abused and assaulted in the cabin. In neither case, however, were the crimes or the tapes linked to an underground of homosexual pornographers or satanists.

Amsterdam was considered a logical place for such an underground to spring up, in the wake of a 1987 affair in Oude Pekela, a small town in northeast Netherlands. There more than a hundred

children reported that they had been lured to "parties" by people in clown suits, then given drugged lemonade and ice cream. Then they were forced to participate in perverse sex and help kill babies by cutting out their hearts or beating them with shovels. Some of these acts, the children testified, were photographed or filmed. Dr. Fred Jonker, who investigated the majority of the cases, claimed that he had found that the murders and orgies were part of satanic rituals, in which participants gained "power" by enacting sacrifices between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday, the time when the Oude Pekela abuses had peaked. Police made several arrests, but dropped the case because the children's evidence was not corroborated by physical evidence. Discarding accusations of "mass hysteria," Dr. Jonker and his wife, P. Jonker-Bakker, presented their research in August 1989 at the Third International Conference on Incest and Related Problems in London. Their paper, "Experiences with Ritualist Child Sexual Abuse: A Case Study from the Netherlands," will appear with commentary later this year in the International Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect. [Liz Hunt, "Children lured to Satanic 'parties,'" The Independent (17 March 1990):4; courtesy Bill Thompson.]

At least two British papers referred to another of the usual suspects when they recalled (for no obvious reason) that in May 1990 "police dug up land behind a synagogue on Clapton Common, East London, in search of a boy's body. Fragments of bone were discovered but turned out to be animals' remains." A second paper called the site of the dig "a car park by a synagogue." ["Probe into killing of boys in vice films," The [Sheffield] Star (27 July 1990):1; Mark Souster, "Waddington pledge of action over fears of killings on film," The Times (28 July 1990):3.]

MORE ON LAUREN STRATFORD. In FN 19, it was reported that the book Satan's Underground had been withdrawn by Harvest House Publishers after the author, Lauren Stratford, had admitted that she had fabricated her accounts of satanic cult involvement. This was an oversimplification based on the Wall Street Journal article reporting the event. Neither Ms. Stratford nor Harvest House admitted fabricating events.

The book described how Stratford was repeatedly abused by her adoptive mother, allegedly a member of a multistate pornography ring. Eventually she was introduced to the leader of the porno ring, who initiated her into satanism and forced her to give birth to children who were murdered, two in "snuff films," one in a devil-worship ritual, during which an audiotape of the child's screams was made. Seeing evangelist Johanna Michaelsen on television, Stratford contacted her and her brother-in-law Hal Lindsey (author of the best-seller The Late Great Planet Earth). They counselled her and encouraged her to make her story public.

Investigative reporters for the Christian magazine Cornerstone found that Lauren Stratford was a pen name and were able to locate friends and family members who knew her at the time when she was allegedly being abused and forced into satanism. They unanimously described a psychologically troubled young woman who continuously invented stories of sexual abuse and injured herself superficially to gain sympathy and attention. When Cornerstone asked Harvest House to explain what proof they gathered before publishing the book, they responded only that staff members who had listened to Stratford's stories "were impressed with her sincerity" and that experts had verified that such events were possible.

Cornerstone conceded that ritual child abuse was real, but argued that publishing a fictitious book as fact damaged the credibility of real child victims. One parent told them that if Stratford's book were not attacked, "then we're sitting ducks for the people we know are guilty and who are just looking for a way

to discredit our children." [Gretchen & Bob Passantino and Jon Trott, "Satan's Sideshow," Cornerstone 18:90 (8 December 1989):24-28. Courtesy Jeff Victor.]

On 26 January 1990 Harvest House withdrew the publication, but did not admit that it was untrue or that they were at fault for publishing it. The statement praised Stratford's ministry among "hurting people" and argued that "this is evidence of the transforming work of Jesus Christ in her life. The book . . . has ministered to thousands of people and clearly stands against the work of Satan." Harvest House admitted that it was difficult to obtain evidence for specific allegations like those made by Stratford, but added that "hundreds of people have written to us sharing their experiences of similar life tragedies since that time." The reason given for withdrawing the book was to end what the publishers termed an unnecessary debate that diverted people from "compassion for the abused." [Courtesy Jeff Victor.]

Lauren Stratford, in a separate statement, said that she had refused to undergo a medical examination to prove that she had been pregnant, denying that she was obligated to provide physical proof for all of the painful experiences that she had undergone. Her use of pseudonyms and altered details were necessary, she said, to protect the privacy of friends. She argued that "the essence of my story stands unchallenged, if not in fact confirmed, by what [the Cornerstone reporters] have printed," and concluded, "Before Jesus, I declare to all of you that what I have written in my books, I have written in the spirit of truth." ["Lauren Stratford Affirms Book's Veracity," Bookstore Journal 23:5 (May 1990):16,18. Courtesy Jeff Victor.]

MEANWHILE, A HUNDRED YEARS AGO IN RUSSIA. In Alex de Jonge's The Life and Times of Grigori Rasputin (London: Collins, 1982; New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1982), a series of rumors is given concerning the Khlysty [or "flagellants"], a heretical group of Christians that operated in Russia from the 17th century to the Revolution. They believed that only through committing sins could true salvation be gained, so at the end of the 19th century rumor held that their religious meetings culminated in "communal sin." After singing and dancing in circles, the celebrants would work themselves into an ecstasy, at which point an indiscriminate sexual orgy would take place, also known as "the love of Christ."

The Khlysty were also rumored to practice bizarre forms of ritual mutilation and child sacrifice. Young adolescent girls would be worshipped as "a Mother of God" and impregnated. Then her left breast would be cut off and eaten communally. If the girl gave birth to a daughter, she would be raised and become the next "Mother of God." If the baby was a son, he would be called a "Little Christ," and six days after his birth he would be stabbed with a spear and his blood drunk. His body, reduced to a powder, would be used in the worshippers' communion bread.

De Jonge comments: "the truth of the matter is less important than the fact that many educated Russians at the turn of the century believed the sects to be capable of such actions. . . . The authority of rumour and extravagant allegation in late Tsarist Russia was boundless." De Jonge associates the rumors with the notorious 1911-13 Beilis case in which a young Jew from Kiev was accused of blood ritual; the same case inspired Bernard Malamud's The Fixer (1966) (62-63 [Am. ed. 55-57]). [Courtesy Jacqueline Simpson, FLS News 10 (January 1990):4; cf. the accounts of Christian "Love Feasts" among the Phibionite heretics by "Saint" Epiphanius, qtd. in Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God: Creative Mythology (New York: Penguin/Viking, 1970):159-161.]

PROCTER & GAMBLE & SATAN. A couple from Topeka, Kansas, has

been sued by Procter & Gamble for reproducing and distributing a flyer stating that the company's trademark contains satanic imagery. The flyer states that the president of P & G "gave Satan all the credit for his riches" and adopted their well-known logo as a satanic symbol. The crescent moon was actually a "ram's horn" and that the thirteen stars, if connected by lines, form the number 666. It continues, "Christians should always remember that if they buy any product with this symbol, they will be taking part in the support of the Church of Satan."

The two are distributors of Amway Home Products, a line of privately sold alternatives to commercial household products. Procter & Gamble has asked for more than \$50,000 in damages and has requested an injunction to stop the flyer's circulation. "These lies have persisted now for 10 years," the firm's CEO stated, "and we will file further suits if necessary." In 1985, the company filed suits against Amway distributors in Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Kansas for distributing similar flyers. Soon after, it began to phase out its use of the trademark. [AP, 1 August 1990; Time, 13 August 1990:57. Courtesy Sylvia Grider. See J. H. Brunvand, Choking Doberman, 169-186.]

LIZ CLAIBORNE RUMOR CONTINUES. On 9 June a reader wrote in to an information column in the Austin [Texas] American-Statesman, asking if it was true that the fast-growing clothing firm Liz Claiborne was in league with the devil. She wrote: "My boyfriend saw Liz Claiborne interviewed recently on the Oprah Winfrey show. She said 40 percent of the profits on her sales go to Satanism. The screen went black then switched to a commercial. After the commercial, Liz Claiborne was gone." The columnist debunked the rumor, citing a spokesperson for the Oprah show, who confirmed that Claiborne had never been on the nationally syndicated show. "Sounds like the Procter & Gamble moon and stars rumor," the columnist concluded. [Ellie Rucker, "Satanism rumor about fashion designer is unfounded." Courtesy Sylvia Grider.]

"BACKMASKED" ALBUM EXONERATED. A judge in Reno, Nevada, ruled on 24 August 1990 that the recordings of Judas Priest, a British heavy metal rock group, did not contain subliminal instructions for listeners to commit suicide. The parents of two Nevada teens who shot themselves in 1985 had asked \$6.2 million in damages from the musicians and their distributors, CBS Records, claiming that recordings on the 1978 album Stained Class deliberately contained "backmasked" messages. Similar cases against Ozzy Osbourne, focusing on his recording "Suicide Solution," had failed because courts ruled that the lyrics of his songs were protected under US constitutional freedom of speech. But attorneys in the Nevada case successfully argued that messages recorded backwards were not protected by law.

The case included testimony from William Nickloff, Jr., president of Secret Sounds Inc. of Sacramento, California, who played computer enhanced tapes of the album played backwards. At one place, the phrase "Do it! Do it!" seemed to appear on the backwards track. Nickloff testified that other parts of the album contained backmasked phrases like "fuck the Lord" and "Try suicide, let's be dead." Dr. Howard Shevrin, a psychoanalyst from Michigan University, also testified that when the album's explicit lyrics parodied religious language (e.g., "Give me this day the glory, the power, and the kill") the songs created "turmoil" in the teenagers' minds that could have led to the suicides.

Defense attorneys pointed out that both teens had been the victims of domestic assaults, one having been beaten repeatedly by his parents. Both were known to use cocaine and other drugs regularly. Under cross examination, the other boy's mother admitted that she did not have ever heard her son mention Judas Priest and

to a scenario heard in a church seminar<sup>at</sup> Corpus Christi, Texas, Satan uses such terminals to emit invisible x-rays that burn "the mark of the beast" on users' foreheads (under the skin, so they can't easily be seen.) [Courtesy Janet Christian.] After this rumor circulated on the alt.folklore.urban computer list, a fellow user recalled hearing this "proof" of the satanic origin of computers from a Mormon classmate at West Hills College, Coalinga, California, in 1982:

If A=1x6, B=2x6, C=3x6. . . . Z=26x6, then

C	=	3 x 6	=	18
O	=	15 x 6	=	90
M	=	13 x 6	=	78
P	=	16 x 6	=	96
U	=	21 x 6	=	126
T	=	20 x 6	=	120
E	=	5 x 6	=	30
R	=	18 x 6	=	<u>108</u>
Total				666

[Courtesy Ronald Cole, Unify Corporation]

#### MYSTERY ASSAILANTS

MORE PINPRICKS IN NEW YORK CITY. Perhaps inspired by the "needling" attacks last October, an African American terrorized Anglo and light Hispanic women for three weeks this summer by hitting them with dart-like missiles shot from a homemade blowgun. Beginning on 26 June, the assailant approached victims from behind and blew a pin or sewing needle wrapped in paper, hitting them in the leg or buttocks. Six women reported being stuck on 29 July, and seven attacks were recorded on 29 June and 2 July, when police set up a phone line for victims or witnesses. Eight needles were recovered and tested for poison, but none was detected.

By 7 July Anglo women, noting that all the victims had worn skirts, had shifted to pants, leggings, shorts, and other more protective leg gear. The civilian crime-control organization passed out sheets suggesting how to avoid darts, increased its patrols in the affected area, and posted notices warning "Dartman" to turn himself in to police "before we make a dart board out of you!" Regular police also increased patrols in the area, while claiming that pickpockets were a more common and serious threat.

On 12 July, after more than 50 women were hit, police arrested Jerome Wright, 33, a messenger with a history of mental illness. Although no physical evidence linked him to the darts, three witnesses positively identified him as the assailant. Wright made a rambling statement to police, allegedly claiming that short skirts were immoral and that "people from the islands shoot women who wear provocative clothing with darts to punish them . . . they also throw them sometimes into volcanos." [New York Times (4 July 1990):35; (5 July 1990):84; (6 July 1990):83; (7 July 1990):25-26; (13 July 1990):81,84; (14 July 1990):25.]

The incidents attracted unusual attention because they coincided with public concern over the "Zodiac killer" who had shot four people in Brooklyn and Central Park at 21-day intervals. [New York Times (11 July 1990):B2; (13 July 1990):A1,84.]

LONDON TUBE FIENDS. On 3 May, a man waiting for a train at the Victoria underground station was pushed onto the tracks by another man, who fled the scene "laughing" as bystanders pulled his victim to safety. Twenty seconds later a train entered the station. British Transport police commented, "This sort of incident is rare

but very serious" and described the attacker as having long greasy hair and a "vagrant appearance." Service between Southeast London and Docklands would be speeded up, transport officials promised. [Adrian Shaw, "Passenger pushed under Tube train," Evening Standard (11 May 1990):16. Courtesy John Rimmer.]

Earlier, from 12-18 December 1989, underground patrons were terrorized by a "maniac" who sprayed hydrochloric acid on their clothes, usually their buttocks or back of legs. In some cases, the assailant was thought to have sprayed the seats of cars before victims sat down in them. The acid had a delayed effect, and most of the victims were unaware of being sprayed until their pants began to disintegrate. Despite a huge manhunt, twenty-seven women and one long-haired teenage boy were sprayed, and two had to be hospitalized, one for skin grafts. Police described the assailant as about 25, wearing a faded zip-up bomber jacket, reading a paperback book, and holding an aerosol can. [Jane Langston, "Terror on Tube as maniac claims 16th woman victim," Daily Express (15 December 1989):7; Andrew Culf, "Police step up hunt for Tube acid attacker," The Guardian (15 December 1989):6; "Now acid maniac attacks boy, 17," The Guardian (18 December 1989):5. Courtesy Michael Goss.]

#### ALSO HEARD

CRAIG SHERGOLD GET-WELL CARD APPEAL. As of 25 May, Craig Shergold, the 10-year-old boy with inoperable brain cancer from Carshalton, Surrey, UK, had officially received 16,252,692 get-well cards. Appeals circulated worldwide on office fax machines, computer networks, and in newspapers (see FN 16:10, 18:8). Other variations were distributed on flyers in Boston, advertised on a billboard in Gadsden, Alabama, and published as a form letter in a Russian newspaper that invited readers to cut it out, sign it, paste it on a card, and send it to Craig. Variants of the story proliferated: the boy was only 7; he had leukemia; he lived in New Hampshire, or Florida, or Chicago, where one physician testified that he had been treating Craig for six years.

Three million cards were gathered by the Atlanta Children's Wish Foundation, who turned to the Georgia Secretary of State for advice on what to do with them after the Shergold family refused to accept them. After consulting with Mrs. Shergold, the charity was advised to forward the cards to American children suffering from cancer and later have them recycled as scrap paper. The Foundation was also advised to donate all proceeds from recycling, and all financial contributions solicited, to sick children. Linda Dozoretz and Arthur Stein, the heads of the charity, were fined by the state last year after making an appeal for sick children that used bogus names. Mr. Stein countered that he had simply changed names to protect victims privacy and chose not to contest the charges to "get the thing over with." Georgia officials are investigating whether the Children's Wish Foundation used the Shergold appeal to raise funds.

Meanwhile, in Carshalton, Craig (now 11) continues to battle the brain cancer. Neighbors meet once a week to help his mother sort through the cards already received: stamps are sold to a collector, with proceeds going to children with leukemia, and envelopes go to a recycler to help schools for the handicapped. Craig's record will be included in the 1991 Guinness Book of World Records, due out this month. ["9 Million Americans Respond to Plight of a Sick Boy," New York Times (29 July 1990):24; Steve Roud, "Redemption Rumours," FLS Times 10 (January 1990):4-5.]

Foreign correspondents are reminded that stamps on their letters go to benefit the Florida Audubon Society for the Save the



Eagles program, which rehabilitates injured bald eagles.

**EARTHQUAKE ANNIVERSARIES.** On 18 April 1990, 75 earth-quakes were felt and recorded in the San Francisco area, all focused on the San Andreas Fault. Observers noted that the day marked the 84th anniversary of the great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 and also marked six months and a day after the major quake of 17 October, which killed 67 people in the Oakland/San Francisco area. Most seismologists discounted the cluster of quakes as "random chance," but Don Anderson, geophysicist at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, said, "I'm not willing to dismiss these kinds of coincidences." He also noted that the same day had seen other earthquakes in China, the Los Angeles Basin, and eastern Indiana; the day after brought a major quake to Indonesia. He dismissed, however, any connection between the quakes and the anniversaries of the 1906 and 1989 disasters.

Historians recall, however, the 1761 panic caused by two minor earthquakes felt in London. While no damage was caused by either, a soldier named Bell noted that the two tremors had happened on 8 February and 8 March. He began preaching in the streets that on the next anniversary of the quakes the entire city would be destroyed. Starting on 5 April, many Londoners left the city, some camping out in fields or boarding ships in the Thames, waiting for the city to be leveled. Happily, no third quake occurred, but many waited an additional week to be safe. [Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1852; rpt. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1932):259-260.]

We may want to watch Californians' reaction next 17 October, which will mark a full year after the 1989 quake. The American Folklore Society's annual meeting in Oakland opens the same day.

**REPTILES AND HUMANS IN THE SEWERS.** Tina Casey of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, confirmed that 50-pound [23 kg.] snapping turtles are frequently found trapped in the sewer screens. "They're big enough to do serious damage to any hoodlum," she commented, but admitted that they were not quite as big as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (The Turtles are heroes of a popular comic book series and now star in an afternoon animated cartoon and a full-length live action movie.)

Most large turtles are freed in upstate New York, Casey said, but others are kept as pets by sanitation workers, who feed them cold cuts and meatballs. Casey learned of the monster turtles while researching rumors about blind albino alligators, who apparently do not inhabit the sewers. "Alligators look tougher," she said, "but turtles really know how to survive in New York. They're real New Yorkers." Pythons have also shown up at the screening stations, she added. [Dan Blake, "50-lb. turtles found in N.Y. sewers," AP, 5 April 1990. Courtesy Alan Mays.]

About the same time, my 6-year-old daughter came home from Catholic school in Hazleton, PA, with a note asking parents to warn kids to stay out of sewers. Young children, the note said, had recently begun to go down into sewer drains with flashlights, trying to find the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The note speculated that small children seeking adventure might encounter dangers such as deep water or toxic gases. A similar report was published by London's *Daily Mirror* after two firemen in Leeds nearly died searching for a group of youngsters said to have gone Turtle hunting. A fire chief asked the *Mirror* (who serializes a daily comic strip featuring the Turtles) to warn fans that their heroes "have special powers to live down there." ["Turtle-Crazy Kids in Sewers Peril," 28 July 1990:6.]

**MEXICAN RATS.** In a recent report on garbage disposal near Mexico City, Alma Guillermprieto notes that the topic has spawned innumerable "fantastic stories," especially concerning the size of

rats. In the early 1980s, for instance, a local paper reported that the body of a "giant mutant rat" had been found in a sewage canal. The size of a Volkswagen, the carcass had "the face of a bear, the hands of a man, and the tail of a rat." A few days later, the paper retracted the story, claiming that the body was actually that of a skinned lion; nevertheless, most residents of Mexico City felt that the original story was credible.

In 1985, a scholar of ecological research mounted a display on waste disposal in a Mexico City public park. The exhibit, representing "the world of garbage," included the largest rat researchers could find in local dumps. The rat weighed nearly eight pounds (3.6 kg.) and was about the size of a large cat, but, the researcher recently recalled, "we had a problem. We began to realize that the rat was dying on us. It wasn't used to the nice, healthy pet food, or whatever it was, that we were feeding it. So we went out and collected fresh garbage for it every evening. Kept it happy. And that was important, because thousands and thousands of people came to see the garbage exhibit, and the rat was the absolute star of the show." ["Letter from Mexico City," *The New Yorker* (17 September 1990):93.]

**MICROWAVED MALTESE.** A Humane Society worker in Canton, Ohio, came home on 30 August to find her white Maltese Jo-Jo in her microwave oven. The dog was rushed to a veterinarian, but put to sleep after the injuries were found too extensive to treat. An eleven-year-old boy from the neighborhood was arrested; the dog's owner claimed that he had done it "for kicks." [AP, 2 September 1990; courtesy Sylvia Grider.]

**ITALIAN BORDELLO SURPRISE.** *La Stampa* of Turin, a sometimes reputable source (see FN 18:8), reported on 20 September that a truck driver was told by a friend to go to "an exclusive bordello" in Teramo (central Italy) and ask for an especially good call girl who worked there. The man went, had to wait a half hour, and "when he finally obtained the prohibited meeting, the woman he dreamed of and whom he knew only by her working name turned out to be his wife, housewife by day, high-class call girl by night," *La Stampa* reported. The wife reportedly had the husband arrested after he struck her. [AP, 21 September 1990.]

#### SPECIAL PUBLICATIONS

**A NEST OF VIPERS: PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND V.** Edited by Gillian Bennett and Paul Smith. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990. ISBN 1 85075 256 7. Preface, acknowledgements, notes on contributors. 164 pp. £9.95 or \$16.00.

The fifth volume in the Perspectives on Contemporary Legend series is now available from Sheffield Academic Press. It features a selection of papers presented at the 5th and 6th International Seminars on Contemporary Legend held at Sheffield in 1987 and 1988.

The title reflects the grim nature of the subject matter covered in this volume, which concentrates on case studies of individual legends featuring the dark side of the late 20th century. Included are studies of beliefs about ghosts, government conspiracies, assaults on women, rape, mindless violence on the London underground, student suicide, ethnicity, and AIDS. Although the subjects of the papers are depressing, the contributors' interpretations help us know and understand the world around us.

Campion-Vincent, Véronique. "Viper-Release Stories: A Contemporary French Legend."

Cattermole-Tally, Frances. "Male Fantasy or Female Revenge? A

- Look at Modern Rape Legends."
- Davies, Christie. " 'Nasty' Legends, 'Sick' Humour and Ethnic Jokes about Stupidity."
- Fox, William S. "The Roommate's Suicide and the 4.0."
- Glazer, Mark. "The Contexts of the Contemporary Legend: 'The Vanishing Hitchhiker' and 'Gravity Hill.' "
- Goss, Michael. "The Halifax Slasher and Other 'Urban Maniac' Tales."
- Smith, Paul. " 'AIDS: Don't Die of Ignorance': Exploring the Cultural Complex."
- Wachs, Eleanor. "The Mutilated Shopper at the Mall: A Legend of Urban Violence."

Special Discount for Members. This volume has been made available for ISCLR members at the price of 5 UKP or \$8 USD, half the list price. Address orders at this price to Mark Glazer, Vice President, Department of Behavioral Science, Texas University--Pan American, Edinburg, TX 78539, USA, or to Sandy Hobbs, Treasurer, Department of Applied Social Studies, Paisley College of Technology, High St., Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland PA1 2BE.

CONTEMPORARY LEGEND AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE. Several items in the eminent literary journal The Kenyon Review (Kenyon College, Gambier, OH 43022) betray the interest of modern writers in legends. James Solheim's narrative poem "The Lost Kings of Maryville" (11:3, Summer 1989) incorporates a number of adolescents' traditional pastimes, including a visit to "Clyde's Bridge." There, the teens ask "Mr. Clyde, mythical cat-man, to knock on the bridge/If he was real--which he did," whereupon the terrified youths tumble into their car to escape (2).

Arnold Lustig's short story "A Man the Size of a Postage Stamp" (12:1, Winter 1990) is partially based on a trick allegedly played by Nazis on condemned Jewish children during the Holocaust: they would be loaded on board an ambulance, supposedly to be taken for medical treatment. In fact, the vehicle was rigged so that the exhaust from the tailpipe would be vented into the back of the ambulance, gassing the children to death en route (1-26).

David Clewell's prose/poem "Lost in the Fire" (12:2, Spring 1990) is based around several accounts of spontaneous human combustion, cases in which people appeared to burst into flame for no known reason (36-51). The issue also contains an excerpt from Dennis Tedlock's The Archeology of Dreams (174-175), a poem imitating "a dream/journey journal arranged according to the calendar of an Other."

A future issue will include early comments on Pynchon's new novel, Vineland. Like his previous work, V, this work incorporates several contemporary legends into the plot, among them an account of the "Ninja Death Touch," a martial arts technique that appears harmless when used but in fact causes death some time later. According to one persistent story, Bruce Lee, star of a series of popular kung-fu movies, died suddenly in July 1973 after another master used the death touch on him. See Michael Goss, "The Touch of Death," Fortean Times 31 (Spring 1980):15-20.

CONTEMPORARY LEGEND STUDIES IN TRANSLATION. Indiana University Press continues to make European folklore research available in English translation, and their latest issues include two works of interest to legend scholars. One is Hermann Bausinger's Folk Culture in a World of Technology (trans. Elke Dettmer, \$29.95 hb), a groundbreaking study of the influence of technological change on culture. Another is Leea Virtanen's "That Must Have Been ESP!" An Examination of Psychic Experience (trans. John Atkinson and Thomas DuBois, \$27.50 hb, \$12.50 pb), an objective study of

people's accounts of paranormal events that suggests an expansion of humanistic studies. Both may be ordered from Indiana University Press, 10th & Morton Streets, Bloomington, IN 47405. Orders received before 31 December will be entitled to a 20% discount (US orders please add \$2.75 for first book and \$.75 for each additional book; foreign orders add \$3.00 for first book, \$1.50 additional books; US dollars only).

#### RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

We are always on the lookout for publications on any topic relevant to contemporary legends, especially those in journals or from publishing houses not usually read by academics in the US and Great Britain. Please forward offprints (if convenient) to Bill Ellis, Editor, FN, Penn State--Hazleton, Hazleton, PA 18201 USA. For publications in foreign languages, English abstracts would be appreciated.

Items starred (\*) are housed in a file in the Editor's office and can be made available to qualified scholars for reference. Books and articles from major publishers or standard folklore journals are not normally starred.

\* Ascherson, Neal. "Aliens turned my baby into an olive and other rumours." The Independent (22 July 1990):23. [Overview of contemporary legends in European and Third World countries.]

Best, Joel. "Secondary Claims-Making: Claims about Threats to Children on the Network News." Perspectives on Social Problems 1 (1989):259-282.

Blum, Howard. Out There: The Government's Secret Quest for Extraterrestrials. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990. [Secret US military projects to collect information on UFOs and alien intelligence.]

\* Dresser, Norine. "Good to the Last Drop." California Folklore Newsletter 5:1 (Summer 1990):3-4, 12. [Encounters with real-life blood-drinkers and media personalities after publication of American Vampires.]

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