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THE "BLACK VOLGA":

Child Abduction Urban Legends in Poland and Russia

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In Poland, investigation into rumors, sensations, and contemporary legends is being carried on at two research centres, Opole and Katowice. Dorota Simonides began her work in Opole, where it continues to the present moment. I am doing research at the Silesian University together with the group of students organized in our local Folklore Circle. The research is localized in the Katowice area, although once a year I go away to a camp which is sponsored by the university.

Besides contacts with local students, I am in touch with extramural students, who work during the week and study on Saturday and Sunday. They are mostly teachers and librarians who work in culture centres and study at the same time. Extramurals are especially precious collaborators because they live outside Silesia and have contact with people from various backgrounds.

So far, in Poland, we have not conducted a survey of urban legends although preparations are being made both in Katowice and Opole. Such a survey is badly needed. First, it will show the riches of Polish contemporary legend; second it will allow us to contrast Polish materials with other areas' folklore. Such comparisons, based on a large range of material from many different countries, are vital because they can give us results we lack presently.

In the present paper I report on a very popular story in Poland, giving Polish and Russian examples. It concerns a mysterious car--usually a black Volga--used for kidnapping children. The core story goes as follows: two men (Polish priests, foreigners, or simply strangers) lure a child or children to a black or red car where they take their blood or different body organs for Arabian sheiks or people in the west.

This rumor peaked in the 1970s, although it was popular in the beginning of the 1980s. From the start of my interest in urban legends, I have never met a more widely circulating story. The distribution was so intense that you could hardly meet a Pole who was not familiar with the story. It was a time of panic among children, parents and teachers, intensified by the mass media without any positive results. Proof of its popularity was found in interviews with successive classes of students. Every student interviewed (and there are around one hundred new ones each year) remembers from childhood a fear of a black car. Here are some Polish variants.

1. Do you know what has happened in Bedzin? Staszka told us yesterday. Near the castle there was a black Volga. Some

guests were visiting the castle, the hill, and maybe the church. There was a nun with them. They are building a new road and the place looks ruined. Not far from there a group of children were playing. The nun took one of them by the hand and went to an empty house. The men followed her. They came out without the child. They got into the Volga and went away.

When the mother learned about that they started to look for the child and found it dead. The blood had been removed and the body left behind. "I have heard that that blood is taken to West Germany to cure leukemia," said Teresa. "Yes, it is true. It is similar to the story from Czeladz. A child was kidnapped and dustmen found it in a garbage site somewhere in Katowice." [Marek Borzecki, an electromechanic from Bedzin. Recorded 1977.]

2. A priest came up in a black Volga to a certain house. A nun got off and enticed a child to show her directions. The child got in and the car went away. After two days the child was found dead under the bridge in Myslowice. A doctor found out that her blood had been removed. [Norbert Pusz, a carpenter from Katowice. Recorded 20 March 1978.]

3. A black Volga came up and a child was kidnapped. It was known in Mikolow. People said that the blood was pumped into special, white-colored tires in which it was transported. I remember whenever I saw a foreign car with white tires, I saw blood in them. But this was told maybe six years ago, maybe more. [Krzysztof O., a student of Usl in Katowice. Recorded 1984.]

4. In a village called Sromowce Wyzne, a big Fiat came up to a certain house. In a garden several children were playing. A young elegant lady got out and gave chocolates to the children. She asked a six-year old boy to go with them to Sromowce Nizne and offered a big chocolate for that favor. The boy agreed and did not return. It happened in June of 1981.

There was a variant of that story from 1977: a story of a black Volga in which kidnapers were going around. They did not kidnap small children but rather youngsters from 14 to 18 years of age. Three strong men hunted for girls walking alone or boys. They were put to sleep, the blood was taken out, or the kidneys. The blood was taken in special containers to Turkey, Iran and other southern countries. Sick people from those countries needed it.

[Maria Waniczek, a student of Usl. Recorded 1984.]

In some recollections, to be sure, the story is less tragic and rather comic. When the rumor is exaggerated, it becomes transformed, especially when people were bored with it. The story dies as a result. Still, we can see its unbroken existence in individual examples recorded sporadically. It is good material to

verify hypotheses made by folklorists: it would be interesting to determine why this plot was so popular in Poland and only in Poland. It would also be interesting to investigate its evolution from the starting point to the present day. The successive characters of kidnapers are thought-provoking: a priest and a nun, two priests, policemen, foreigners, a German, Turk and an Arab, finally a surgeon who gives an order to his colleagues.

At that same time the story was popular in the Soviet Union. I recorded it personally in Kiev in 1979. The following variants I got from Moscow and other cities, the last records dating from 1990 in Byelorussia. In my opinion the story was less popular in the Soviet Union than in Poland. Often I found people who had never heard it. Today this rumor is not active: the stories I recorded in 1989 and 1990 come from recollected facts several years old. Here are Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian variants of the rumor:

1. In Wasilkow (near Kiev) a foreign car was seen. No one knew where it had come from because there is an army airport there. It went around the town, so many people saw it. Next day it became known that two children had died: a brother and a sister. They searched for them, but no one could find them. They were found dead in the forest by an army man.
[Victoria K., a charwoman. Recorded May 1979, in Kiev.]
2. Some foreigners were going through Kiev. They stopped by children and gave them presents. They took one of them and no one saw it again. People say it was a German car.
[Ludmila S., a clerk. Recorded June 1979 in Kiev.]
3. Not far from Moscow by the international road there was a group of "pioneers." They had a summer camp. Foreign cars came by. Foreigners gave away chewing gum. Children took that poisoned gum and died.
Most of these cases were recorded before the Olympic Games were held. There were rumors circulating around Moscow that people in a western car had kidnapped children. Later they were found dead. Many people were sure of such things when border was opened for representatives of different firms coming for the Olympics.
[Barbara Kos, a scientist, after return from Moscow. Recorded 5 November 1981.]
4. I know about such cases. A series of such cases has been recorded. A group of men were hired by a well-known surgeon. They were his colleagues. He gave them orders and they went away, kidnapped children, and took away different organs especially livers, spleens, kidneys (whatever was needed in the clinic.) And children who were murdered were found in different places, until two of the collaborators were caught and the whole thing was finished.
[Olga I. from Rostov on Don. Recorded 15 August 1989 on a Black Sea beach.]

5. I remember one of these stories because I was shocked by it. I am very sensitive to the macabre, and it was a terrifying story. A couple had two children. They were on holiday. A sister and a brother went far away from their parents. A couple of nice-looking people came up. They gave them chocolates, took them by the hand and carried them away. The children disappeared. They were found dead in a place one hundred km. away with their eyes plucked out. A gang of hired

murderers was at large, who took children to their car, and carried them away into a lonely place. They killed the children, plucked out their eyes, and took the pupils. I heard it six years ago. In the end the murderers were caught. It was written up. I thought there would be a big trial but they worked for a well known oculist and the whole thing was hushed up. Nothing came of it.

[Lena D. from Rostov. Recorded 15 August 1989 on a Black Sea beach.]

6. Many such stories I heard from villagers and from the people of Minsk. They told them mainly in 1980. Later they returned to the topic from time to time. One of these stories was said to have happened in the place where I was born. A boy was walking along the road, a car was going by and the passengers asked him the way. They asked him to get in and show them the way. He got in and they went away. Later he was found in the wood without kidneys. He had been put to sleep by chloroform and then they cut out his kidneys. When he awoke they were gone. He was immediately taken to a Moscow hospital by air. He survived because he was very strong. He gave all the details of the kidnapping, what the people looked like. There was a special gang of people who delivered different body organs to hospitals.
[Ludmila K., an academic teacher from Minsk. Recorded 17 July 1990 in Minsk.]

In surveying contemporary folkloristics I have not found a paper describing a story like this. I would like to ask folklorists from different countries for references and comments on this story. Does it occur in your country? I would like to know how in many different countries and continents it circulates. For each item of information I would be extremely grateful.

Editor's Comment: Dorota Simonides gives a version of "The Black Volga" in her "Moderne Sagenbildung im polnischen Großstadtmilieu" [Modern legends created in Polish urban settings], Fabula 28 (1987):272-273. Her version (in my English translation):

"Little children were being kidnapped with the help of a black limousine of the make "Volga." With the help of a needle, the children's blood was removed, to be sold in a foreign country. Another version has it that the children's corpses were used to smuggle jewels or drugs across the border. The car holds, variously, three men clothed in black, a nun, or a priest. The children were enticed with sweets. In a newer variant, these sweets are poisoned, and a vampire motif is added: a female vampire rides in the black car and sucks out the children's blood.

Extramural students at our teacher's university were told that school authorities went so far as to put out a circular letter, asking teachers to call children's attention to this threatening danger. However, I could not obtain a copy of this document from any of them, and school authorities denied that they had published any such letter. The press reprinted this rumor as a joke, but many readers missed the irony of these news articles, assumed the story was a genuine news item, and spread it farther."

The now standard reference on the stolen organs complex is Véronique Campion-Vincent's "The Baby-Parts Story: A New Latin American Legend," in Contemporary Legends in Emergence, Western Folklore 49 (1990):9-25 (see the notice of this special issue below). She found that in 1987-88 this legend was taken seriously both in Central America and also in Western Europe, where a leftist lawyer's association submitted a report filled with

similar stories to the UN's Subcommittee on Human Rights.

Both she and Phillips Stevens, Jr. (in an essay forthcoming in The Satanism Scare, due out from Aldine de Gruyter this summer) point out that similar rumors have emerged in Third World countries whenever Western Europeans or Americans caused some disruption. A useful reference on this angle is A. L. Epstein, "Unconscious Factors in the Response to Social Crisis: A Case Study from Central Africa," in W. Muensterberger and L. Bryce Boyer, eds., The Psychoanalytic Study of Society, Vol. 8 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

And obviously the child abduction/murder motif is shared by the Anglo-American satanism panic, where the blood, fat, or vital organs of children (especially babies) are said to be necessary for occult rites. The same is true with the anti-semitic "blood libel" rumor, which asserts that Jews use Christian children's blood for their matzo bread. (See Alan Dundes, "The Ritual Murder or Blood Libel Legend: A Study of Anti-Semitic Victimization through Projective Inversion," Temenos [Helsinki] 25:7-32.)

The dynamics and structure of such panics remains largely undocumented, though the recent American devil-worship scare is bringing forth some much-needed work. It would be worthwhile to know more about exactly when the Polish panic occurred, how it spread, and what actions it provoked. Judging from Dr. Czubala's records, it must have been active there exactly as the "cattle mutilation" panic, the first major satanism flap, was occurring in the Western United States. This phenomenon often featured mysterious "black helicopters"; similarly, the "men in black" that harass UFO researchers often arrive in a "black Cadillac," the U.S.'s answer to the "black Volga."

The same week's mail brought a clipping based on a Canadian Press release of 17 February 1991: It reported a rumor, published in Irish and Soviet newspapers, that Russian hospital workers were secretly removing thousands of organs from the bodies of people killed in automobile accidents and sending them to Montréal to use for organ transplants and for making cosmetics. Sources at Montréal cosmetics firms dismissed the rumor as "completely absurd."

Collette Dionne Birks, a senior director of an agency that coordinates use of organs, explained that it would be impractical to use organs from the U.S.S.R., since they must be transferred from body to body within hours. In any case, no agency would accept organs "without knowing the donors and compatible recipients," she said. "There is no black market because everything must go through us," Birks asserted: "nobody can bypass the system. The organs certainly could not be used for transplant. But maybe for research or cosmetic manufacturers. . . ." [Final ellipsis sic in original; courtesy Paul Smith.]

THE TRAINED PROFESSOR

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In the chapter on academic legends in his recent book, Curses! Broiled Again! Brunvand deals briefly with what he calls "The Trained Professor." In what I shall call version A of this story, set in Syracuse University sometime between 1961 and 1966, a class of students is said to have trained a professor to lecture standing on a wastepaper basket. Their technique was to fidget,

yawn and the like when paced away from the basket and to look interested when he approached it. By this means they induced him to lecture standing close to the basket. In a later session, they turned the basket over and rewarded him with attentiveness, first when one foot, then when two feet, were on the basket.

Another text he quotes, version B, is set at Northern Arizona University in 1968 and is told from the professor's point of view. Psychologist L.J. Hunt reported that his class had conditioned him to lecture from one particular side of the room, using a similar technique. He estimated that he spent 70-90% of the class period in the "correct" side of the room. Hunt says that he knew he was being trained but did not know what behavior was being controlled in this way (1989:311-313).

A number of other stories like this have appeared in print and, taken together with Brunvand's versions, they raise some interesting questions. However, some background information may be relevant at this point. The students appear to have been trying to implement the basic principle of what is called operant conditioning, the leading exponent of which has been B.F. Skinner. (See, for example, his About Behaviorism (1974).)

Put simply, the central concept of operant conditioning is that any behavior which is followed by a reinforcing stimulus is strengthened, i.e., becomes more likely to occur again. Skinner at first demonstrated the principle and some of its ramifications using laboratory animals. He found he was able to "shape" the behavior of animals such as rats and pigeons. Prior to the experiment, the animal would be deprived of food for some time. Then, in the experiment, by judicious selection of just when to provide small morsels of food, Skinner could "build up" certain behavior. A pigeon could be conditioned to peck a disc, for example, by making food contingent on successive movements approximating to the target behavior. Later much more elaborate patterns of behavior could be built up.

One question that arises is what stimuli will be "reinforcing". It is not surprising that food is reinforcing to a hungry animal, but if, as was always Skinner's intention, operant conditioning was to be applied to human beings, other possibilities needed to be examined.

Early research on human beings established that social reinforcers could be quite powerful influences. These included the common verbal and non-verbal signs of attention and approval. In the 1950's, nodding, smiling, saying "Yes" and "Mm-mm", and the like, were shown to be effective reinforcers in laboratory studies. The possibility that they might also work in everyday, natural settings was also explored. For example, A.D. Calvin (1962) reported on how one group of students successfully influenced the clothes worn by other students on campus, by differential approval of particular colors.

Skinner and others regard operant conditioning as a potentially powerful tool for transforming society. Critics, both inside and outside psychology, regard it much less favorably. The fact that Skinner's position is controversial has some bearing on the interpretation of "The Trained Professor".

In the third volume of his autobiography, Skinner recounts two similar stories, one at first hand, one at second. The former, version C, set in a seminar taking place in 1958 or 1959, concerned one of his critics, Erich Fromm.

He gesticulated a great deal as he talked, and whenever his left hand came up, I looked straight at him. If he brought the hand down, I nodded and smiled. Within five minutes he was chopping the air so vigorously that his wristwatch kept

slipping out over his hand.

At the suggestion of a colleague who was aware of what Skinner then tried to "extinguish" Fromm's chopping movement by withdrawing the "reinforcement", but in fact the chopping went on for a long time (1983:150-151).

Note that Skinner is using his story to illustrate the correctness of his own position. It is not particularly good "evidence", of course, being merely an anecdote, though we note in passing that Skinner is honest enough to report his failure in the second part of the exercise. The story gains its rhetorical power from the irony that the "subject" of Skinner's control is a critic who is attacking the very principle being employed.

The same ironic contrast between the speaker's disbelief in operant conditioning and his unwitting demonstration of its power is found in Skinner's other, second-hand, story, version D which concerns psychology students "training" a politics professor:

They began the class period with deadpan indifference. When the professor moved towards the chosen corner, they nodded and smiled. He was soon teetering on the edge [of the lecture platform--SH]. A signal went out, and the nods and smiles were withheld until he turned towards the blackboard. I was told he finished his lecture facing the board and talking over his shoulder--arguing meanwhile that operant conditioning worked with rats and pigeons but not with people (1983:162).

This story, then, is rather closer in character to those quoted by Brunvand. Skinner places it in 1959, only slightly earlier than the 1960s dates given for those in Curses! Broiled Again. Also set in same general period is version E, an anecdote told in passing in a book review by psychologist P.J. Mountjoy:

J.H. Rhine spoke . . . at Denison University some twenty years ago. . . . One of my freshmen was seated in splendid isolation at the front left of the auditorium while almost all the remainder of the audience was concentrated on the right side. Rhine paced as he lectured and . . . although he had begun by occupying the half of the stage in front of the bulk of his listeners, his excursions towards my student increased in frequency and duration until finally he stood directly in front of that individual while speaking. . . . As the applause died out and the audience rose, the student rushed up with his notebook and a broad smile to announce that he had "conditioned Dr. Rhine" (Psychological Record, 31 [1981]: 611-612).

There is a slight difference here in that only one member of the audience engaged in the conditioning procedure.

Mountjoy and Skinner both write as exponents of operant conditioning. On 26 March 1970, there appeared version F, a brief item in the "Grapevine" column of New Society, where a similar story is told from a different perspective:

Remember the claims by . . . Skinner that his methods of conditioning could 'shape' the behavior of any animal. . . . Well, apparently he himself has now been conditioned, all unawares--by the students at his lectures. Every time he walked to the right of his desk that students became inattentive . . . when he went to the left they listened raptly to his every word . . . By the end of the period they had him frozen at the side of his desk. Next lesson--or so the story goes--he wound up in a corner of his classroom--

teetering on the edge of the platform, "pinned . . . as securely as a butterfly impaled in a museum showcase" is how one student described it (511).

Here the "irony" would appear to be that of the bitter bit. There is room to doubt whether Skinner would necessarily have been displeased if such an incident had occurred. After all, if true, it would have not only suggested the correctness of his theory but also that he had successfully taught his students! The use of the phrase "or so the story goes" indicates that New Society was not sure that the story was true. It should be noted that Skinner retired from teaching in 1963, so, if it did take place, it would have had to have been sometime before that date.

The most recent text of which I am aware, version G, is a letter appearing in the British newspaper, The Guardian (23 August 1990) following the announcement of Skinner's death. It is similar to that told in New Society, except that success was achieved at the end of the third lecture. The correspondent states that he has never been able to ascertain the truth of "this anecdote" (18).

Let us now review the seven versions of the story. With the exception of version G, which gives no indication of date, they are set in the years between 1958 and 1970, a time when the application of operant conditioning to humans in natural settings was a relatively fresh idea in psychology. Thus perhaps it did occur to students to try to condition lecturers (the core idea of all version except C). But did they try and did it work?

The answers to both these questions may well be "Yes", but these anecdotes should be placed alongside the scientific literature. There are a great many research reports on operant conditioning in human beings, but this writer have not come across a scientifically rigorous account of a lecturer's behavior being controlled in this way. This may simply be my ignorance, and in any case, the absence of the phenomenon from the scientific literature would not prove its legendary status.

Three further points seem worth noting. First, four of the seven versions (B, C, D, E) are told by psychologists, so this might be suggested that this is characteristically a psychologists' story. Secondly, three of the seven stories (B, C, E) claim to be first hand, and it is only in two of these (B, C) that less than complete success for the conditioning is claimed. The four second-hand stories (A, D, F, G) all imply complete success on the part of the conditioners, and three of them also make the conditioned "subject" seem that bit more ludicrous (standing on the basket in A and teetering on the edge in D and F).

Finally, may I speculate on one reason why a story of this sort may survive? It has the advantage of working in two different ways. It can be told by proponents of operant conditioning to undermine the opponents who don't believe in it, but, as we have been with the last two versions cited, it can also be told "against" Skinner.

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DROUGHT CAUSED BY EXTERMINATING LOCUSTS:
Another Agricultural Rumor

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In FOAFtale News 20 [December 1990], Jean-Louis Brodu presented an illuminating case study of an agricultural rumor: "The Plane that Chases Clouds Away." Rumors accused French orchard growers to protect their trees against hail by having planes disseminate chemicals in the clouds; the undertaking, however, was said to have resulted in severe droughts under which especially the cattle raisers in the region had to suffer. The editor mentioned a similar incident in connection with cloud-seeding in the USA and asked for further examples in other areas.

My example comes from Namibia. It does not refer to cloud-seeding but to another modern means of controlling nature, which, like the French and the USA attempts, is believed to have negative consequences and to have caused drought. I think I heard first about it in the early 1960s. In 1981, I found it to be a far-spread belief of Nama and Dama: The originator of the many droughts with which the country had been afflicted was the Government of South Africa. I heard this mentioned several times but recorded only two interviews, each time with groups of old people, once in Mariental among Nama and once in Okombahe among Dama in a so-called retirement home. I summarize a section of the Mariental interview with two old men. We were talking about rain and rainmaking in the old days.

J.S.: Look, a good year is . . . In August must the rain already begin. In August and September the veld must be green. In October you'll see how the locust trek. The locusts. That's a good year. Do you know locusts? . . . That's a good year when they trek. Look, that day, that year when the locusts have been destroyed . . . the rain also has gone away. When the locusts trekked, every year, the rain was there in time and the locusts were also there. And then the locusts trekked this direction and when they trekked this direction, then they left their young ones . . . eggs. Then the eggs lay there for the year [describes the development of locusts]. But from the time the Government destroyed the locusts, the rain also went away. In the German time [before World War I] it was here each year, punctually it was here, the locust. . . . But the South African Government did destroy them. There is nothing any more. (Just) droughts. There were droughts, too, but there were not droughts several years after each other. [My translation of the Afrikaans text]

As I never experienced locusts in Namibia nor heard them mentioned outside these interviews I did not pay any attention to the subject and do not know how, whether, and where actual campaigns of locust fighting were carried out. The old people of Okombahe talked about "spraying", but they probably knew this only from hearsay. It is, however, a matter of fact that during the last decades locusts have not ransacked the country to the extent they did in pre-war years.

A special trait of Nama/Dama worldview is their glorification of the past. In the old days everything was like or at least nearly like Paradise. The records of travelers and missionaries of the 18th and 19th centuries, however, testify to severe and

long-lasting droughts. In 1865, the missionary Kronlein of Berseba described the coming of the locusts and the terrible damage they brought for his garden as an exceptional disaster (1865:104-106). On the whole, locusts appeared frequently but because of the enormous size of the country they devastated the pasture only locally. The nomadic people would trek to another area that had not been ransacked.

In the old days the invasion by locusts was regarded as a time of feasting. For by laying fire, Nama and Dama collected enormous amounts of them without great effort, and particularly the roasted egg-carrying female locusts were valued highly as food. Roasted locusts also could be stored for a considerable amount of time. (Schultze 1907:188). Locusts' legs as part of love charms are also mentioned by Schultze (1907:297). But there is no direct account of the kind of symbolic value which these people attributed to the locusts.

In another area of South Africa a remarkable symbolic connection of rain and locusts can be traced: Garbutt described Modjaji, one of the most famous raindoctors, a chieftainess who resided in the Northwestern Transvaal at the end of the 19th century. "Modjaji even after refused to appear in public. It was said she had four breasts, and she was credited with being the source of locusts." (Garbutt 1909:550). While for the 19th-century missionary depending on his garden and for the agriculturist locusts were the symbol of devastation, for the hunter-gatherer and the nomadic herder locusts were the symbol of plenty. As locusts usually appeared when the grass was fresh hunter and herder regarded them rather as images of green pasture and rain.

In 1981, the political situation was tense. Though apartheid had been abolished for several years, the population did not feel free. In the north and in southern Angola the bush war between SWAPO and South African troops went on and on, and the propaganda of both sides heated up agitation. So for every shortcoming in the daily life of Nama and Dama, those who ruled Namibia were blamed. South Africa turned into the general scapegoat: its government could do nothing but evil.

In the French reaction to man's attempts to influence the weather, certain factors were combined: modern science and the uneasiness of the public because of their inability to comprehend it fully, allegedly unusual climatic conditions and diverging economical interests of groups. This combination usually forms the best soil on which contemporary legends thrive, and it is the base of our rumor in Namibia as well. Yet there are some noteworthy differences. In France the rumor derived from experiments carried out with rain clouds. In Namibia the actions were attacks on the animals which were taken as the symbols of the rain itself!

So modern science clashes with the uneasiness of the general public towards its latest developments, and also with old belief systems; ruling classes clash with ruled. Here we see into the tragic side immanent in many a contemporary legend complex: Prevailing beliefs hold that in former times there were no droughts of present dimensions, that locusts are representatives of rain, and that the South African Government can plan only actions that have negative results for the colored population. Therefore well-meant and absolutely necessary actions are misunderstood and even seen as a threat to existence.

Today locusts appear only rarely and in small groups. A comeback of locusts in former dimensions would probably be of severe consequences, for there is no spare pasture left to give them, and as today nobody likes to eat them any more, they are no longer of any nutritious value. I wonder how this legend will look when free Namibia is celebrating her 10th anniversary.

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AN ITALIAN CENTER FOR COLLECTING CONTEMPORARY RUMORS AND LEGENDS*

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Some years ago in England, the sale of yucca plants took a beating when the rumor spread that many of these plants carried a little spider with deadly poison. In our own country, thousands of tronchetti della felicità were thrown away by people who feared they would be bitten by a black widow or tarantula lurking in the innocent plant. These unfounded rumors, spreading like oil slicks at incredible speed, polluted everyone a little. And even today some people still believe them.

Did anyone, by chance, escape happening on that flyer with a concise list of food additives considered dangerous, even carcinogenic? This list of harmful dyes, which has affected numerous families since the mid-1970s, not only in Italy but also in France and in Switzerland, is a collection of gross errors and invented facts conceived by someone who probably deserves the title "practical joker." Nevertheless, the list still circulates, and people still believe it.

And while we're on the topic of flyers, who can forget that flyer that put parents on alert against elusive drug dispatchers who gave out LSD-laced stickers in front of kindergartens and elementary schools to lead the kids into the wonderful world of drugs? This legend (which is what it is in content), has spread worldwide and is continuously repeated, often with the help of the media, but never supported by facts.

For some years now, one rumor has become more and more persistent--spread for the most part by the rural folk and hunters --that vipers are being launched from airplanes or helicopters into our countryside regions and mountain valleys by agents identified only as "friends of nature," or simply ecologists. They intend (the story goes) to help along the local predators by repopulating the area with vipers. In spite of the difficulty, even pointlessness of such a project, and the absence of concrete proof, the "viper launchers" reappear punctually every year.

Talking about animals, perhaps we should insert into the ledger of contemporary legends the "panther," which many people say was wandering about the countryside near Rome between the end of 1989 and the spring of 1990. This event caused much discussion, as did the panther's cousins, sighted in the region of Ancona in July and on the outskirts of Milan and the hills of Florence in August. They remain at large. In such cases, the media have helped spread rumors about such mystery cats, making their existence credible.

And remember the news item that landed in all the newspapers in February 1977? According to a strange little old lady, a catastrophe would befall the city of Milan. Two young men, travelling from San Colombano to Lambro, came across a lady who asked for a ride. The old lady got into the back seat, and then, with a groan and an attack of coughing, she hit them with this terrible prophesy: "Avoid Milan on the evening of the 27th. There will be a terrible earthquake that will destroy half the city." The two men turned to look at her and found that she wasn't there any longer--vanished. Left behind was an identity card belonging to a person who had died 10 years earlier! This is an example of one of the world's most widespread legends, the vanishing hitchhiker.

An Evasive Phenomenon. In oral tradition, information that forms a precise plot is defined, overall, as folk narrative, and those accounts that are told as true (or believed to be true) are called legends. At first sight, it seems improbable that people continue to create legends in an age like ours where literacy is widespread, mass media have made the exchange of information extremely rapid by continually increasing the number of consumers, and travel is frequent. But it takes only a moment of reflection to remember how many stories, how many rumors--strange, fascinating, but lacking any verification--continuously reach our ears.

The rumors are usually improvised news items that result from a process of communal discussion. One can trace the origin of a rumor to an ambiguous or significant event, although some scholars say that no fact is necessary to serve as a point of departure or basis for the story. Rumor, therefore, can be a process of transmitting information and, at the same time, interpreting and commenting on it. It is a collective action, often looking toward making sense of facts that still have not been explained.

More recently people have begun to speak of "urban legends," which refer principally to stories told person-to-person that describe curious events which have happened "to the friend of a friend" or to an acquaintance. In many cases these stories have the same plot, although with some variation. A story can circulate in many places return after many years almost unchanged. It seems that the symbolic themes of many rumors survive time extraordinarily well.

Collective Information. In the past, "urban legends" circulated in a restricted area; today they travel even on the channels of the international media. Why do we believe what we do believe in? We all carry ideas, opinions, images and beliefs about our world in our daily baggage. Very often we have acquired them by word of mouth. Thus, unfounded information can criss-cross society with the same facility as solid facts. Without our realizing it, a large part of our knowledge has no basis. Many certainties are social: what the group we belong to considers true is true. A rumor or legend rarely arises from nothing. The story that circulates by word of mouth is always the effect of anxiety or of a more or less hidden tension. Fear is a primary element in the construction and diffusion of modern legends.

Analysis of the Phenomenon. Recently the general public has begun to take interest in the great network of underground legends that continues to traverse Italy, where previously only a restricted circle of folklorists and anomaly-observers paid it attention. The scope of our center is, above all, to coordinate the accumulation of data, at a national level, on contemporary rumors and legends, and to promote the exchange of information on them, thus promoting study of the phenomenon. Besides trying to trace the origin of any specific rumor or legend, we will also focus on how the story is transmitted, the often torturous path that it follows, its constant motifs and,

conversely, the discordant details of the various versions and their significance.

We will also refer to field investigations of bizarre and apparently mysterious phenomena by "experts" and enthusiasts, to provide objective diffusion of the data and of new bits of knowledge. We will notify you of the research of academic folklorists in France, England, U.S., and Italy, who, for some years, have been occupied with the topic.

The analysis of contemporary legends is a key sector of modern folklore research, because the stories that people consider true occupy an important part of their worldview. It is revealing in itself to gain knowledge of this modern folklore, which permeates us all to a degree. But to move beyond this stage, we must compare the stories, clarify their recurring themes and connect them with other aspects of our cultural heritage. This research will help us penetrate deeper into the nature of the civilization in which we live.

An Appeal. The Centre for the Collection of Contemporary Rumors and Legends is particularly interested in receiving new items and notices of stories and events derived from contemporary folklore. Anyone who is interested in the Center's activities or who wants to request information or examine the subject more closely is invited to write to the address above.

*Translated and abbreviated by Francis Pierucci, Penn State, Hazleton Campus.

CONTEMPORARY LEGEND--"THE PALE CAST OF THOUGHT?":

An Editorial

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The current issue of Folklore contains a brief but pointed critique by Heda Jason, chiding English-speaking scholars for having proposed "contemporary legend" as a banner for research without having clearly defined what it does and does not cover. Legend scholars would be better advised, she suggests, to begin by examining, classifying, and ordering existing archival materials, such as the large contemporary legend file at the University of California. Once "we know what we are dealing with," she argues, folklorists can follow the traditional path of folkloristics to planned fieldwork, documentation of typical performances, social context, channels of transmission, and other descriptive projects. "Interpretations will have to wait until the data are assembled," she concludes.

Formal responses to her scholarly points will be forthcoming in a future issue of Folklore; for the present, we should grant that perhaps we have spent too much time agonizing over the seeming formlessness of our subject. As Jan Brunvand noted at the last American Folklore Society meeting, we should pay attention to "sloppy, pragmatic" jobs like compiling a working catalog of contemporary legend types, proposing basic definitions of terms, heuristic subcategories of legend, and so on. Ultimately, a fresh revision of the Thompson/Baughman Motif-Index seems necessary to give students and interested colleagues from other fields ready access to material already collected.

But should we call for a cease-fire on interpretation while this necessary spadework is being done? In her title, Jason

quotes the opening of Hamlet's great soliloquy, "To be, or not to be . . ." Hamlet is the archetypal self-indulgent intellectual who fusses with fine distinctions when the situation demands action. Ironically, he finds that even the act of avoiding his duties through suicide is loaded with too many fine points and moral ambiguities, and Hamlet concludes with regret:

. . . thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action [III.i.84-88].

Certainly we would avoid much of the "muddle" that Jason rightly finds in contemporary legend research if we retreated to our Wittenburgian archives and handled our material by its motif numbers and genre descriptions for a while. But this would be retreating from the nature of the subject itself.

Whatever else we may say about the defining characteristics of contemporary legend, it is urgent. It presses on us as something that has "just happened" or is "just about to happen," and it often requires a decision to take quick, decisive action to avoid danger. This action, as I have suggested (Ellis 1990) can hardly be judged as "illogical" or a "delusion," as it frequently confronts a symbolic danger with a symbolic response.

An adolescent commits suicide; his school sets up metal detectors at the next promenade party to exclude satanists who (rumor says) will kill more students. The action does little to detect or prevent future suicides, but it effectively exorcises the town's anxiety by giving them something "constructive" to do. This event led to a tense but non-violent show of force (Ellis 1990:45-47); but Victor (1990:80) has suggested that many panics over satanists contain the potential for fatal errors if armed police or mobs mistake innocent individuals for devil-worshippers.

Recent events in the Persian Gulf show that this dynamic is hardly limited to small towns and credulous individuals. After Iraq's attempt to annex Kuwait, allies led by Great Britain and the United States succeeded in imposing several economic sanctions on the aggressor. These sanctions, overall, proved effective, and there was little reason to believe that they would eventually lead to Iraq's capitulation. Why then did pressure build at the end of the year to begin a full-scale military war?

A White House aide noted that George Bush normally looks at issues objectively, fully aware of their complexities. But with Iraq, the aide noted, he "is unlike he is on any other issue. . . this touches some deep inner core. He was deeply offended by the aggression against Kuwait. Later, the atrocities also upset him deeply." Bush himself echoed this sentiment in a statement to college students, saying that while much in this world is "washed in shades of gray," the "brutal" acts of Saddam Hussein are "black and white" (Drew 1990:82-83).

The single most vicious act used by Bush to justify his rush to war was the story, reported in a 19 December Amnesty International report, that when Iraqi soldiers took over a Kuwaiti hospital, they tore over 300 premature babies out of incubators and left them to die on the floors while the medical equipment was shipped to Baghdad (Cockburn 1991:114). Shortly after the report was issued, Bush met with his spiritual advisor, Episcopalian bishop Edmond Browning, who advised Bush to handle the affair patiently. Bush responded, "You should read the Amnesty International report. Then you tell me what I should do" (Trexler 1991). In his address announcing the start of the air war, Bush referred to the fates of

"innocent children," seen as another allusion to the atrocity.

Objective commentators commented that it was unlikely that any Kuwaiti hospital would have as many as 300 incubators, when most children's hospitals in the U.S. have fewer than 50. Doctors and nurses who held senior positions at the hospital in question consistently told interviewers that no such incident occurred (Cockburn 1991:114). Doubtless some violent acts were committed during the invasion and later, as tensions grew in the area. But the rationale for a shooting war in the Persian Gulf seems based less on objective military or moral need than on Americans' need to use force as a symbolic way of exorcizing a ruler already equated with baby-killing satanic forces.

Not that Saddam Hussein can claim many attributes of a legendary martyr-leader: having written a political tract published in Switzerland as Unser Kampf, he repeatedly turned hostages and captured pilots into media shows that allowed the allies to portray him as an unfeeling, sadistic kidnapper. Still, the U.S. used the same tactic after the Panama invasion, describing Manuel Noriega's private quarters as a "witch house" filled with buckets of dried blood (presumably used in satanic worship) and 50 kg. of cocaine. Later reports admitted that the cocaine was corn flour and the blood was red paint (Larsen 1990).

The problem with atrocity stories is that they tend to turn those who act on them into the agents they think they are fighting. The "Body Bag Backlog" described in the last issue (Shorrock's 1990) may be literally true regarding unrecorded U.S. dead--but witnesses did report that hundreds of body bags, containing Panamanian soldiers and civilians killed in the action--were loaded on cargo planes and taken for secret burial in Honduras. And, of course, the need to take arms against a satanic foe in the Middle East meant that we will kill hundreds of real children--however "surgical" our bombings might be.

The lesson: contemporary legends have their meaning and power as events unfold, not in the otherworldly calm of the archived and annotated text. We should see "modern" legends as part of an age-old folk process, and many historical surveys of legend complexes wait to be done. Still, let's not let our work "lose the name of action." We should try to spot legends as they emerge and we be bold enough to comment on them while they--and we--are at the cutting edge. We will probably make fools of ourselves in the process, but we probably will not try to "decapitate" a legendary baby-killing foe by dropping a "smart" bomb down the ventilator shaft of a bomb shelter filled with real-life women and children.

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BULLETIN BOARD

1991 PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND CONFERENCE. The International Society for Contemporary Legend Research has extended the deadline for submitting proposals. The Ninth International Perspectives on Contemporary Legend Conference will be held at the Radisson Resort Hotel, South Padre Island, Texas, USA, on 7-10 May 1991. Please forward a title and abstract for your paper (up to 400 words, double-spaced) to:

Mark Glazer, College of Arts and Sciences
University of Texas - Pan American
Edinburg, Texas 78539 USA
Telephone: (512) 381-2180
E-mail: MG6BE8 at PANAM.BITNET.

1992 ISFNR CONGRESS. The Tenth Congress of the International Society for Folk-Narrative Research will be held in Innsbruck, Austria, on 5-11 July, 1992. First announcements will be sent out soon. ISCLR plans to hold its 1992 Seminar on Contemporary Legends before the congress, and the ISFNR also hopes to hold a special session on contemporary legends. If interested, contact:

Professor Dr. Leander Petzoldt
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JUST IN!

WARS AND RUMORS OF WAR

ARMAGEDDON NOW. As the military buildup in the Persian Gulf began, evangelists quickly fit events into an apocalyptic vision. Pat Robertson, on his syndicated 700 Club TV program, told viewers that the Iraq confrontation was "exactly what the Bible said." Jack Van Impe, another nationally telecast evangelist, found four major Biblical prophecies confirming that a conflict at the Euphrates River would lead directly to the Battle of Armageddon. (Armageddon, the Valley of Megiddo, is south of Nazareth and southeast of Haifa.) Billy Graham, while stopping short of these positions, did say that "History has gone full circle, and we are coming back to these [Biblical] lands. . . . This is not another Korea, it is not another Vietnam--it is something far more sinister." (Interestingly, George Bush, after dismissing his "chief pastor" for refusing to call the conflict a "just war," invited Graham to stay at the White House.) Sales of apocalyptic Christian books like Hal Lindsey's The Late Great Planet Earth (1970) reportedly rose 83% during the fall. [Jeffery L. Sheler, "A Revelation in the Middle East," U.S. News & World Report (19 November 1990):67-68. Courtesy Alan Mays.]

. So did books on or allegedly by the 16th-century astrologer Nostradamus, some of whose cryptic prophecies allegedly fit events. Some lines, some sources say, mention "Mabus, the black and angry one"; "mabus" read in a mirror is "sadam"--close enough,

considering that Nostradamus's "Hister" was taken as a prophecy of "Hitler." [Bob Rickard, Fortean Times 56 (Winter 1990):5.] Another version had it that the seer had "an evil Mideast king in a blue turban" invading Europe in the 1990s. Observers noted skeptically that Saddam normally wore western clothes or green military uniforms, and had not worn any color turban lately. Nevertheless, Erika Chetham, London author of three books on Nostradamus, said, "I have been told by three people of good authority that the day Saddam Hussein marched into Kuwait, he wore a blue turban." [Fawn Vrazo, "Turning to the Prophets," Philadelphia Inquirer (5 October 1990):1C,7C; Courtesy Alan Mays.]

KUWAITI BABIES REMOVED FROM INCUBATORS. In a report issued on 19 December, Amnesty International stated that 312 premature babies had died at Maternity Hospital in the al-Sabah Medical Complex, "after Iraqi soldiers removed them from incubators, which were then looted." An anonymous Red Crescent doctor claimed to have seen this done and personally buried 72 of the dead babies. At al'Addan Hospital, according to a 15-year-old Kuwaiti girl volunteer, armed Iraqi soldiers entered one room where 15 babies lay in incubators: "They took the babies out of the incubators and left the babies on the cold floor to die. It was horrifying."

Despite the authority of Amnesty International's work, other human rights organizations were cautious about accepting the incident, and Aziz Abu-Hamad, a Saudi researching abuse stories for Middle East Watch, attempted to verify the story. He located the doctor, who denied that he had come up with the figure of 312 and admitted that, while he had buried 72 babies, he could not confirm that they had died by being taken out of incubators. Medical personnel from Maternity and al'Addan Hospitals who witnessed the Iraqi invasion denied that any incubators had been looted: one noted that as late as September there were still incubators available that were not being used. Aziz did concede that some newborns died after the invasion because of lack of medical supplies. He concluded, however, that there was no credible witness or hard evidence to sustain the charge that Iraqis killed large numbers of babies during the invasion. [Alexander Cockburn, "Beat the Devil," The Nation (4 February 1991):114-115. Courtesy Jeffrey Victor.]

ALLAH, SADDAM, KITTENS. A number of rumors apparently circulating among Islamic opponents of the Iraqi leader suggest that his efforts to call the conflict a "holy war" have not been universally accepted. A widespread story had it that Mohammed himself appeared to Saddam, warning him that "he has his guns pointed in the wrong direction." Commentators noted that such an allegation is taken seriously by Moslems, since Mohammed himself supposedly said that not even Satan could impersonate him in a dream; hence it is difficult to disprove his appearance without the taint of blasphemy. [Rickard 1990:5].

The Persian Gulf Times, a pro-Western English-language newspaper, also made several reports that Saddam's brutality toward animals had disgusted fellow Arabs. In the most detailed story, an Iraqi sergeant captured during a skirmish told Westerners that when Saddam visited troops in Kuwait, he brought along "a beautiful furry kitten." After showing it to a group of soldiers, he picked it up by its tail and smashed its head in against a tank, commenting, "American infidel invaders are no better than this worthless animal and that's exactly what we're going to do to them--SMASH and KILL them without mercy!"

But when he gave the dead kitten to one of the soldiers "to be made into stew," the soldier dropped it and screamed at Saddam, "You had no reason to do this! Almighty Allah will send you to the pits of fiery hell for this senseless cruelty!" Saddam at

once executed the insubordinate soldier. A "former CIA intelligence analyst" claimed he was not surprised, since he had found that Iraqi agents were buying abandoned dogs and cats from small-town independent humane societies in the U.S. [I thought it was satanists that did this--Ed.] These animals were then shipped to Iraq as target practice for soldiers and test animals for poison gas and germ warfare. ["'Iraq Butcher' Tortures & Kills Cats, Dogs--for Fun! National Examiner (5 March 1991):6-7.]

A soldier's letter home, reprinted in a Michigan small-town paper, reports: two soldiers were walking down a Saudi street during one of the Islamic prayer intervals. They passed a mosque and, despite official warnings to stay away from religious sites, one soldier dared the other to go in. He did, and even defecated on one of the prayer rugs, but suddenly he was grabbed and has not been seen or heard from since. [Courtesy Sean W. Smith, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA; alt.folklore.urban.]

MEANWHILE, IN FRANCE, 1914. "An American came just the other day to the Foyer Franco-Belge to inform us that he would give our institution a large sum of money if we could succeed in putting him into direct contact with a child who had been mutilated by the Germans. Richepin, in an indignant article, spoke of four thousand children who supposedly had had their right hands cut off. That assertion without any proof had irked Romain Rolland (see his letter) and doubtless a number of Swiss people also.

However, Mme Edwards, at the end of August (check the date) had told me of the arrival at rue Vaneau of a procession of children, all boys from the same village and all similarly amputated.

The day before yesterday I went to her, pointing out the great interest we would have in definite proof of such monstrosities. She told me then that she had not seen the children herself, that she knows they were coming from the Cirque de Paris, where they had first been sent. She invites me to come back and lunch with her on the following day (yesterday), promising me--until I find better proof--photographs of those mutilations.

Yesterday she had not been able to get the photographs, but she was expecting Cocteau right after lunch, who was to bring them. Cocteau came after lunch without the photos, which he promised me for tomorrow evening. Meanwhile he led me to the clinic on rue de la Chaise, where we could speak with a Red Cross nurse who had taken care of those children. The lady was not there yet and, expected at the Foyer, I had to leave Cocteau without learning anything.

Ghéon also tells me that two amputated children, one fifteen and the other seventeen years old, were being cared for at Orsay right now. He is to bring me further information.

Not one of these statements could be proved."

[André Gide, The Journals, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Knopf, 1951):II:91-92; courtesy Alan Price.]

AND IN GERMANY, 1945. In December 1990, the Eisenhower Center at the University of New Orleans hosted a special conference of historians to examine charges that General Dwight D. Eisenhower had deliberately starved to death at least 800,000 German prisoners of war during the American occupation of Germany. The charges were brought in James Bacque's Other Losses, originally published in Canada but since brought out in British and German editions. According to Bacque, Eisenhower, outraged by Allied losses and evidence of the Holocaust, reduced German prisoners' rations below levels required by the Geneva Convention and disguised the resulting deaths on Army records as "other losses."

Stephen E. Ambrose, director of the Eisenhower Center, summarized the results of the historians' conference by accusing Bacque of misreading and misusing documents and called his

conclusions "demonstrably absurd." Monthly reports Eisenhower made as Military Governor, Ambrose notes, account for nearly all the "other losses," mainly conscripted older men and boys of 16 or under who were sent home without formal discharge. Still, Ambrose concedes that Bacque reopened a valid issue: some American soldiers did behave in nearly as brutal a fashion as the Nazis who now symbolize unredeemed evil. The American edition of Other Losses is set for publication in May; the Eisenhower Center's conference papers will also be published. [Stephen E. Ambrose, "Ike and the Disappearing Atrocities," New York Times Book Review (24 February 1991):1, 35-37. Courtesy Joel Best.]

MEANWHILE, BACK IN RIYADH. Peter Theroux, commenting on his first experiences in Saudi Arabia in the early 1980s, recalled visiting a friend of his and finding the house in an uproar, the father praying, the sisters weeping, the mother talking excitedly on the phone: "[I] had happened to two to their girlfriends:"

they had been strolling down the block and were attracted by the sound of music from the Festival Palace in this flat Arabian suburb of Sufeimaniya. The girls peeked in to see almost a hundred elegant unveiled women dancing to tribal wedding music.

"Come in--join us!" called one of the tallest and lightest-skinned women--a princess, surely.

The girls pulled off their veils and were about to start dancing when one of them grabbed her friend's elbow.

"Look at their legs!"

All the women had the legs and hoofs of donkeys.

The girls snatched their veils and ran out of the ranch-style place, through the marble courtyard and gardens, to the sidewalk where a little yellow taxi was parked under the fizzing amber streetlights.

"Get the police! And get a sheikh--there's a party of demons in the Festival Palace!" screamed the girls.

"How do you know they were demons?" asked the driver placidly. . . .

"They were dancing, and had donkey legs!"

"Like this?" The driver lifted the hem of his thobe, the ankle-length white shirt Saudi men wear, to reveal his hirsute donkey hoofs.

The girls ran screaming home and phoned all of their friends.

Theroux comments that this was the first "urban myth" he heard in Saudi Arabia--and the last that did not concern the threat of foreigners. The most popular story that followed "the donkey ladies" concerned a young couple who went out for dinner one night. As they left, their maid (Thai, Filipina, or Sri Lankan) asked them if she might eat their new baby. "Of course," the mother replied with a smile (assuming the maid was joking?); and of course when they returned the house was filled with the smell of the dismembered and broiled baby.

A similar story involved Korean truckers who accidentally ran over a stranded Saudi motorist (or Pakistani hitchhiker). To conceal their guilt, they took the body home, cooked it, and ate it. But when they became violently ill and had to have their stomachs pumped, police found the grisly remains in the freezer of their work camp's communal kitchen.

Theroux comments: "Not that the country was not being plundered and cannibalized--it was, though chiefly at the corporate level. There certainly was something to the atrocious myths the Saudis embroidered over sweet tea on their rooftops: the criminal and cannibalistic threads that ran through the

stories said a great deal, I thought, about the virile menace of the horde of aliens who fed their children, drove their cars, managed their money, trained their army and those of their worst enemies, sold them cigarettes, entertained them, and reported their news." [Sandstorms: Days and Nights in Arabia (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990): 15-19. Courtesy Sylvia Grider.]

ALSO HEARD

PLAY BALL! Though the Toronto Blue Jays baseball team did not make it to the World Series, their new stadium, the SkyDome, has already developed its own folklore. The facility includes a luxury hotel with rooms that overlook the field, so that guests can watch games through the plate-glass windows. And sometimes the guests become themselves the spectacle. One sports writer commented, "How many times had I heard the story about the amorously demonstrative couple staying at the SkyDome Hotel who forgot to draw the curtains during a game" [Joe Mick Patoski, "The Passing of Grass," American Way [American Airlines in-flight magazine] (15 October 1990):43.

This sounds suspiciously like the legend about the couple staying at a honeymoon hotel whose exploits were videotaped and played on closed-circuit TV channels. This is itself a descendent of a 1920s French legend about a man who visits a bordello, not knowing that other patrons are watching him through a one-way mirror (a story used by Hemingway and Anais Nin). But apparently the SkyDome story is based on a genuine event.

On 15 May 1990, as the Blue Jays played the Seattle Mariners, fans noticed that a naked man and a woman wrapped only in a towel were watching the game from their window. After attracting "thousands" of watchers, the couple "opted for a more participatory sport....The lights were off in the hotel room, but the banks of ballpark lights revealed all." Hotel manager Ray Thompson doubted that the incident was accidental: the two, "for their own particular reason, wanted to perform in front of 40,000 people."

He said that to prevent future incidents, the SkyDome Hotel was printing up additional regulations to be posted in rooms and signed by patrons, warning that each hotel room was "part of the stadium, just if it were a seat." Still, Thompson conceded that the incident had boosted the hotel's business, with many patrons asking to rent the same room. "I wish they'd come back so I could thank them," he concluded. [AP, 19 May 1990; rpt. The Journal of Bizarre Occurrences and Ridiculous Deaths 6 (1990-91):20.]

Incidentally, a cottage industry has sprung up around home-made pornographic videos; producers allegedly will pay up to \$30 per minute for tapes made in your own home. Rentals at porn stores are said to be heavy. [Newsweek (4 March 1991):8.]

STOP ME IF YOU'VE HEARD . . .

CRAIG SHERGOLD. Appeals to send get-well cards to 11-year-old Craig in Carshalton, Surrey, UK, continue to circulate, even though his official record of 16,250,692 cards is published in the current Guinness Book of World Records. One such appeal was printed by columnist William Buckley, Jr., in the 15 October National Review. The appeal notes, "I have forwarded this request on to ten other friends in various companies in Boston and asked them to post this request . . . on a bulletin board" ("Notes and Asides," 24). Four days later a vice president of Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia, received a similar request from the local newspaper. This one specified postcards and also asked the recipient to "please send a letter of request to

participate to ten other individuals/companies of your choice with an enclosed list of your selections." [Courtesy Connie Leinen, Marshall University, alt.urban.folklore.] The paper, in turn, had received the appeal from the corporate headquarters of Gannett Publications, a national news syndicate best known for USA Today. Anita Manning, a reporter for this publication, confirmed that the appeal was posted prominently in her hallway.

Craig and his family visited the US again in October-November, to visit Disney World again. They made a side trip to Atlanta, Georgia, to visit "Craig's Mailroom," an office rented by the Children's Wish Foundation to hold cards sent in from their April appeal [see FN 18:8]. The Shergolds were impressed by the stacks of cards, toys, artwork, and other gifts, but Craig commented, "I don't know how we can get it all home." Linda Dozoretz, executive director of the Foundation, also arranged to have Craig ride in an American police car with flashing lights and wailing sirens, and also hired a 40-foot limousine for the Shergold's visit. State officials have warned the Foundation to use money donated during the appeal exclusively for Craig and other sick children. (Chuck Bell, "A Wish List Made to Come True," Atlanta Constitution (30 October 1990):D1. Courtesy Jean McSpadden.)

On 12 December Craig, back in London, appeared at the Guinness World of Records exhibition in central London to open a display of some of the cards he received, now estimated at 33 million. Norris McWhirter, founder of the Book of Records, estimated that the cards, if put together in one place, would make ten stacks each as high as Mt. Everest. Craig wished "happy Christmas to everyone who sent me a card"; he was expected to go to the U.S. for another operation early in 1991. [AP, 13 December 1990.]

A new version of the appeal appeared on British fax machines in January 1991. One example, written on official stationery of Jessups (Vehicle Contracts) Ltd., Stamford, read: "Craig Shergold is seven years old and suffering from terminal cancer. It is one of his wishes to be included in the Business [sic] book of Records with the largest sum of business cards ever collected by one person and we would like to help him achieve his aim. We should be grateful, therefore, if you would send one of your business cards to the address below and send this letter to another 10 companies of your own." [Courtesy Patrick Gosling, Cambridge University Engineering Dept., alt.folklore.urban.] By 1 February collecting efforts were underway in the Brighton, Sussex area, with a local kitchen centre and a real estate broker offering their premises as collection points, the target stated at 60,000 cards. ("Let's Make It Our Business to Help Craig," Brighton Property News. Courtesy Stephen Carter, University of Sussex, Brighton, alt.folklore.urban.)

On 9 February 1991, Craig published a personal appeal in The Sun asking readers to disregard any letters asking for business cards. He added, "I DO want to help save lives by being the biggest fund-raiser for the Royal Marsden Hospital's Save the Humans Appeal. Please send a donation, however little, to this address: Craig Shergold Appeal, SAVE THE HUMANS, c/o Appeal Office, Royal Marsden Hospital, 203 Fulham Road, London SW3 6JJ." [Courtesy Bill Thompson.] The Royal Marsden Hospital, where Craig received chemotherapy treatments, previously announced that more than £20,000 [\$34,200] has been raised for leukemia research by selling the foreign postage stamps on Craig's get-well cards. [AP, 20 June 1990. Courtesy J. Greely, Ohio State Computer Science.]

Anna Guigne, P.O. Box 11, Site 21, Paradise, Newfoundland, CANADA A0A 2E0, is interested in receiving and exchanging information on the Craig Shergold appeals, as well as on other, less known appeals such as those for Mario Morby and Jerrod Booth.

THE CUTTING EDGE

Starting next issue we will start a new section under this head to make our treatment of publications more efficient. New books, journals, and other projects will be summarized under separate headings, provided they contain material worthwhile to contemporary legend research. ISCLR members who want to self-advertise their own projects are invited to send material (preferably in finished copy). Journals with whom FOAftale News has an exchange agreement will always be abstracted, but other worthwhile publications will be included too. Due to space limits in this issue, I will begin abstracting journals next issue: the following is our current exchange list.

Bigfoot News, ed. Don Keating; 4/yr.; 4 issues \$12; Address: P.O. Box 205, Newcomerstown, OH 43832-0205 USA.

FLS News: The Newsletter of the Folklore Society, ed. Steve Roud and Cindy Sughrue; 2/yr.; free to members of the Folklore Society, non-members: 2 issues £3.00; address: The Folklore Society, University College London, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT.

Fortean Times, ed. Bob Rickard and Paul Sieveking; 4/yr.; 4 issues £8.00; £9.00 or \$16.00 overseas; address: SKS, 20 Paul Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DX UK.

The Journal of Bizarre Occurrences and Ridiculous Deaths, ed. Harry Farkas; 1/yr.; \$4.50 each; address: 421 E. 15th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43201 USA.

Karnataka Folklore Newsletter, ed. B. A. Viveka Rai and Peter J. Klaus; 2/yr.; 2 issues Rs. 50/-, foreign US\$5.00; address: "Suyil," J.K. Road, Jeppu, Mangalore - 575 002, Karnataka (India).

Magonia, ed. John Rimmer; 4/yr.; 4 issues £4.00, US \$10, Europe £5.00, other countries £5.50; address: John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London SW14 8HB UK.

New Jersey Folklore Society Review, ed. Hugo A. Freund and Fred Thomsen; 3/yr.; 3 issues \$12.50, foreign \$17.50; Address: 406 West Stafford Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144 USA.

Revista de Investigaciones folklóricas, ed. Martha Blache; Address: Sección Folklore, Instituto de Ciencias Antropológicas, Universidad de Buenos Aires, 25 de Mayo 217--1º piso, 1002 Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Strange Magazine, ed. Mark Chorvinsky; 2/yr.; 4 issues \$17.95, UK £13.50, other countries \$22.95; address: P.O. Box 2246, Rockville, MD 20847 USA.

The Wild Places: The Journal of Strange and Dangerous Beliefs, ed. Kevin McClure; 4/yr.; 4 issues £6.00, Europe £7.50, US \$20, elsewhere \$20 or £10; address: 20 Trembear Road, St. Austell, Cornwall PL25 5NY UK.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF INTEREST

We are interested in 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. 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.

Adler, Shelley R. "Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome among Hmong Immigrants: Examining the Role of the 'Nightmare.'" Journal of American Folklore 104 (1991):54-71. [A supernatural attack experience apparently causes Laotian immigrants to die.]

Best, Joel. Threatened Children: Rhetoric and Concern about Child-Victims. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Brednich, Rolf Wilhelm. Die Spinne in der Yucca-Palme: Sagenhafte Geschichten von heute. [The spider in the yucca plant: modern legendary stories.] München: Beck'sche Reihe, 1990. [Annotated collection of 116 contemporary legends current in German tradition, with annotations, bibliography, and critical introduction.]

Collins, Tony. Open Verdict: An Account of 25 Mysterious Deaths in the Defence Industry. London: Sphere Books, 1990. [British scientists may have been hypnotically induced to commit suicide.]

Commander X. The Ultimate Deception. New Brunswick, NJ: Abelard Publications, 1990. [Anthology of materials on US/EBE "secret treaty"]

----- Underground Alien Bases. New Brunswick, NJ: Abelard Publications, 1990. [Anthology of subterranean encounters with weird creatures; Dulce NM US/EBE laboratories.]

Luhmann, T. M. Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991. [Anthropological study of middle-class Londoners involved in neo-pagan covens.]

Manshel, Lisa. Map Time. New York: Zebra True Crime, 1990. [1985 Kelly Michaels child abuse case.]

"Modern Folktales: Wait'll I Tell Ya..." Read: The Magazine for Reading and English 40:13 (1 March 1991):8-15. [Survey of common urban legends for high school students; includes a literary version of "The Killer in the Backseat."]

Sullivan, Terry, with Peter T. Malken. Killer Clown: The John Wayne Gacy Murders. New York: Pinnacle True Crime, 1991.

Wafer, Jim. The Taste of Blood: Spirit Possession in

Brazilian Candomblé. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991. [Ethnography of religion in a small community on the outskirts of Salvador da Bahia.]

* Ward, Bob. Ripples of Lost Echo's [sic]: True Story of Superstition Mountains. Apache Junction, AZ: Tract Evangelistic Crusade, n.d. [1990?]. [Maps leading to lost gold mines.]

* Westbrook, Charles L. The Talisman of the United States: The Mysterious Street Lines of Washington D.C. Ayden, NC: Westcom Press, 1990. [Street plan of the U.S. capital city contains secret satanic and masonic symbols; also contains maps suggesting possible places where the lost Ark of the Covenant may be hidden.]

FOAFtale News is the newsletter of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research. ISCLR was formed to build worldwide links among legend scholars. It encourages study of so-called "modern" and "urban" legends, and also of any legend that is circulating actively. We invite all who have an interest in this research area to join us.

To join, send a check made out to "ISCLR" for \$18 USD to Mark Glazer, Behavioral Science, Texas University--Pan American, Edinburg, TX 78539, USA, or for £10 UK pounds sterling to Sandy Hobbs, Applied Social Studies, Paisley College, High St., Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland PA1 2BE. Institutions may affiliate themselves with ISCLR for the same price.

FOAFtale News is now indexed in the MLA Bibliography. Please send queries, clippings, notices, and short research reports (up to 3000 words) to Bill Ellis, Editor, Penn State--Hazleton Campus, Hazleton, PA 18201, USA. I can now accept material on IBM-compatible 3 1/2 inch diskettes (please include information on what software you used). Telephone: 717-450-3026 or 717-788-2021. E-mail: WCE2 at PSUVM BITNET.

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