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COVERSTORY

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MUTANT MELON HEADS TERRORIZE KIRTLAND

There is perhaps no town on Earth as spooky as Kirtland.

This East Side suburb has a sordid history of weirdness. It's where cult leader Jeffrey Lundgren murdered the Avery family and buried their bodies under the floor of a decaying barn.

Today, Kirtland is still rural and underpopulated, a community of cabins on rolling hills amid vast stretches of forest. There is a place on King Memorial Road called Gravity Hill, where the laws of physics are seemingly reversed < cars roll uphill, here. There's a crybaby bridge, too. Local legend claims a teenager became pregnant in the early 1900s under suspicious circumstances. When her father demanded she give it up for adoption, the teen took her baby and leaped into the river. If you stand on the bridge at midnight and chant "crybaby" three times, you can hear the faint cries of a child drifting through the trees.



MELONHEADS, VICTIMS OF HORRIBLE EXPERIMENTS, STALK THE WOODS OF OHIO! DON'T GET TOO CLOSE!

But nothing is quite as scary as the tale of the Melonheads.

Around the turn of the last century, a man known only as Dr. Crow built an orphanage at the end of Wisner Road, atop a hill overlooking the crybaby bridge. He was an evil and twisted doctor, and at night, when the nurses were away, he conducted odd medical experiments on the children. The procedures caused the kids to develop abnormally large heads with no hair, on top of small, deformed bodies. He called them his "melonheads." But one day, the melonheads revolted. They killed the doctor, burned down the orphanage and escaped into the woods, where they still live today.

Ever since the orphanage burned down, residents of Kirtland have reported strange sightings of short, naked creatures with large heads roaming the woods.

Fire Chief Anthony Hutton has heard the story, but has never seen a melonhead himself < though not for lack of trying. "When I was in school, we used to take the girls out there to scare 'em," he says with a sly smile.

Other residents suspect there may be a logical explanation to the myth. "How it all came about was, there was this doctor who lived here that had some mongoloid children," says Nancy Gorman, who owns horse stables on Wisner Road. "People were just scared of 'em because they didn't know better."

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Maybe. But that doesn't explain the number of residents that post new sightings on the Internet. One fellow, on Creepycleveland.net, says he watched helplessly as a melonhead came out of the woods, attacked, then ate his pet dog. So, if you visit Winsler Road this Halloween, keep Sparky at home.

< James Renner

E.T. PHONE...SCHOOL?

Something from deep space attempted to make contact with Ohio on August 15, 1977!

On that evening, Ohio State University's "Big Ear" radio telescope was pointed at the constellation Sagittarius, listening for signs of extra-terrestrial intelligence. Suddenly, the sensors went wild as the telescope received a strong transmission. When Professor Jerry Ehman analyzed the data printout, he was so excited that he scribbled "Wow!" in the margin. It has come to be known as the "Wow Signal" and remains the best proof of intelligent life in outer space, although they've never called back.

Ehman is retired now. The Big Ear has been demolished to make way for a golf course. But the scientist still looks up at the night sky and wonders.

"It had all the hallmarks of being a purposely generated signal from an extraterrestrial civilization," says Ehman. "It definitely came from that constellation."

< James Renner



ZODIAC KILLER RETIRES TO EASTLAKE!

The smell of death hung thick in the stale air outside the Eastlake apartment of Joseph Newton Chandler by the time police arrived. The building manager had called to report a suicide.

Eastlake Detective Chris Bowersock entered the apartment around 4 p.m. July 30, 2002. Flies droned loudly around the windows as Bowersock approached the bathroom. There, Chandler, who appeared to be in his mid-to-late 60s, had fallen to the ground. The body lay in a pool of dried blood, covered in maggots. The stench was so strong, the detective had to step outside to catch his breath.

When Bowersock returned, he noticed an open case sitting on the kitchen counter beside a baggie of .38-caliber bullets. Under Chandler's body, he found the gun. But soon, it would become apparent that nothing about this case was simple.

Detectives noted strange details about Chandler's apartment. Even though Chandler had lived there for many years, the rooms were nearly empty.

A computer was confiscated as evidence, but was damaged during transfer to the evidence locker and discarded. No one seemed too concerned. After all, they had learned Chandler was suffering from colon cancer and would have died soon anyway.

But then they began to follow the money. At the time of his suicide, Chandler had



ZODIAC SUSPECT AGE-REGRESSION OF JOE CHANDLER, ABOVE.

COULD THE KILLER BEHIND THE NOTORIOUS UNSOLVED CRIMES THAT INSPIRED THE FILM "DIRTY HARRY" HAVE ESCAPED TO OHIO?

\$82,000 in a savings account. Not bad, considering Chandler worked part-time at a lubricants factory.

A probate attorney contacted local private-eye Michael Lewis, of Confidential Investigative Services, to track down Chandler's family. And that's when Lewis discovered Chandler was not really Chandler.

The real Joseph Newton Chandler had died in a car crash in Sherman, Texas in 1945. The dead man in Eastlake had used details about the Chandler family to apply for a bogus Social Security card in South Dakota in 1978, and had been living under the name ever since.

"I'll never forget this one," Lewis says. "Why did he change his name? What was he running from? This was someone who was afraid to be ingrained in society. His truck was paid for with cash. So was his recent rectal surgery."

Lake County Coroner Salvatore Rizzo kept the body in the deep freeze in Cleveland for awhile, but no one ever came forward to identify the man. "I always thought this guy was on the run from creditors or that maybe he was in the witness protection program," says Rizzo.

Some have wondered if Chandler was the elusive D.B. Cooper, who hijacked a commercial aircraft in 1971 over the Pacific Northwest and parachuted away with \$200,000 strapped to his body.

Crime bloggers suspect the man was the infamous Zodiac, a serial killer who terrorized San Francisco in the late 1960s. Zodiac sent taunting letters to California reporters until 1974, when he cut off communication. Some think the cops got close and Zodiac got spooked and moved away.

Around the time a man calling himself Joseph Newton Chandler arrived in Eastlake, this area of Ohio was rocked by a spree of similar murders. Someone was murdering lovers parked in secluded areas, and no one was ever charged. Both the Zodiac and the Eastlake man were thought to have served in the Navy. The Eastlake man also resembled the composite sketch of Zodiac, and may have had a California connection: Lewis found a woman in a nursing home there who might have been his mother.

Writes one blogger: "The connection between the impostor Joseph Chandler's arrival in Ohio around 1978 and the beginning of a series of violent murders of couples shortly thereafter in 1979 is hard for me to ignore."

< James Renner

BEWARE THE HUMAN/FROG HYBRID!

"Do you know anything about the Loveland Frog?" the reporter asks Natalie, the young bartender.

"Wasn't that the name of the old flower shop?"

"No. I'm talking about the half-man half-frog creature that lives in the river."

"Then, no. No, I haven't heard of the Loveland Frog."

And so it goes. Visitors to Loveland, Ohio, a sleepy little burg in the hills above Cincinnati, will discover that many residents have never heard of the monster that roams the local waterways. Don't blame them, though. It's been decades since the ugly thing has been spotted. Since then, ritzy developments have spawned a new breed of yuppie townies, blissfully unaware of the torrid history of their new homestead.

Once upon a time, an Indian tribe named the Twightwees settled on the banks of the Little Miami River. As early French explorers colonized the area, the Twightwees warned the white men of a lizard-like creature that could not be killed. They called this abomination Shawnahooc, meaning "demon of the river."

But the white men did not listen. And after the Twightwee were driven from the land, they polluted the river with their waste. And eventually, the Shawnahooc returned.



THE WHITE MEN IGNORED THE TALES OF THE SHAWNAHOOC - AT THEIR PERIL!

In 1955, a local businessman reported seeing three strange creatures sitting on a bridge overlooking the Miami River in Loveland. They had wrinkles of skin instead of hair, mouths with wide froglike lips, and lopsided chests. One monster held a bar-like device that emitted blue sparks. The air around them smelled of alfalfa and almonds.

Loveland police officer Ray Shockey was the next person to encounter the Shawnahooc. On a routine patrol the night of March 3, 1972, Shockey saw something in the beams of his cruiser's headlights as he approached Twilight Road. He radioed to headquarters and described a 4-foot-tall, frog-faced, human-like creature sitting on a guardrail. He watched it jump into the river and disappear.

Two weeks later, officer Mark Matthews spotted it lying on the road. He pulled his sidearm and got off a shot as it leaped toward the river. There has not been a credible sighting since.

If you want to talk about the manfrog that roams these lands, it's best to find a seasoned local, someone who's lived here longer than 40 years. Don't bother with Shockey or Matthews, though. The retired cops don't like to talk about it. The best place to get the real dish is at Paxton's Grill on Loveland Avenue. Free Times caught up with Richard Martin there. He told what he remembers over a pint of Dead Guy Ale.

"I was just a kid at the time," says Martin. He's 49 now, burly, a man's man, born and raised in Loveland. He wears a Loveland Topsoil Tee, ruffled shorts (even though it's chilly outside), and a Ford ball cap, set to extra-wide. "For the whole summer in '72, me and my friends, we went through the river at night with frog gigs and shotguns, looking for the thing. Every now and then, we seen something across the river. All we managed to catch, though, were redhorse suckers."

Martin laughs, reminiscing. "Everyone around here was in a tizzy. This thing was supposed to look kind of reptilian. I heard it directly from the cops. They said it stood up and walked across the road like a man. We looked high and low for the thing. A lot of alcohol was involved. It was pretty fun. But we never seen anything."

Still, you would do well to find a safer place to swim.

< James Renner

ALIEN COP...OWNED A BAR INLAKEWOOD!

Dale Spaur was a respected deputy with the Portage County Sheriff's Department before a flying saucer named Floyd nearly ruined his life.

Spaur was patrolling the tiny hamlet of Edinburg, Ohio, on April 17, 1966, when the dispatcher requested all units to be on the lookout for an Unidentified Flying Object. As Spaur's cruiser approached an abandoned truck parked on the side of a desolate patch of road < a truck with military markings on its door < the deputy and his partner witnessed a saucer-shaped craft rise out of the forest and head east. For the next hour, Spaur pursued the UFO, at speeds exceeding 100 miles an hour, into western Pennsylvania. When his cruiser finally ran out of gas, the spaceship hovered for a moment, as if to taunt him, then shot straight up into the atmosphere and disappeared.

When Spaur returned to Portage County, he faced a skeptical public and shied away from the media attention. But he saw the UFO, which he nicknamed "Floyd," several more times while on patrol. It seemed to stalk him. He lost weight. He disappeared for days at a time.

Eventually, he quit the department. Then, his wife divorced him. The last time he spoke to a reporter was in 1967. He was living out of a cheap motel. UFO enthusiasts have been searching for him ever since.

A few months ago, Dale Spaur's son contacted the Free Times with the rest of the story.



**"DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY PARSECS PER HOUR YOU WERE DRIVING, SIR?"
ARTIST'S PORTRAIT OF LAKEWOOD
BAR OWNER AND E.T. POLICEMAN**

Spaur returned to his home state of West Virginia shortly after his last interview, says his son, James. He drove a taxi, then worked at a local mine, where he tumbled into an open shaft, broke his back, and fell into coma. At the hospital, things got really weird.

According to James, a nurse was assigned to stay in his father's room to monitor his progress. She was with Spaur, alone, during the evenings, as he lay unconscious with his eyes open to the room. After a few nights of this, the nurse abruptly quit. "She said my father was possessed by an alien," says James.

Spaur miraculously recovered after his near-death experience, and later returned to Ohio and remarried. He bought a bar in Lakewood called the Avenue. The last years of his life were good ones. He spent his evenings regaling the regulars with stories of Floyd the Flying Saucer before his death in 1983.

< James Renner

THE MOTH MAN COMETH!

The night of November 12, 1966, five gravediggers spotted what they would later call "the Mothman" flying over a bone yard in Point Pleasant, West Virginia.. It resembled a winged man with the head of a moth. And while Point Pleasant stole most of the credit for the sightings that followed < townies built a statue and celebrate the Mothman Festival every September < the Mothman was also seen across the river, in Gallipolis, Ohio.

In December 1966, five pilots reported seeing the Mothman flying above the Ohio town. An elderly woman from Gallipolis claimed the creature swooped into her backyard and snatched away her pet cat.

The sightings ended the night the bridge connecting Point Pleasant and Gallipolis collapsed, killing 47 people. Some say the Mothman was a harbinger of doom. A picture reportedly taken of the World Trade Center on 9/11 shows what appears to be similar creature flying near the towers. See for yourself at www.reptilianagenda.com.



< James Renner

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