



Alien Hand Syndrome

By Alan Bellows



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Welcome to the five stages of reading *Alien Hand Syndrome*: *Astonishment*: This is amazing! *Insecurity*: I'm a smart person? how could I never have heard of this before? *Panic*: Please, don't let it end. *Gratitude*: Great! and look, there are over 90 more essays where that one came from. And *Zeal*: You won't believe what I just read.

Collected and curated by Alan Bellows and his team at DamnInteresting.com, with over 400,000 unique visitors a month, this is the stuff nightmares are made of, and no one will be able to stop reading: Giant Carnivorous Centipedes; Mike, the Headless Chicken; The Exploding Lakes of Cameroon; The Swirling Vortex of Doom; Secret Agent Cyborg Cats; Fiery Balls of Naga; The Deepest Hole; The Terrifying Toothpick Fish; and, of course, Alien Hand Syndrome? a disorder wherein a person's hand develops a "will of its own," unbuttoning shirts, grabbing at the steering wheel, tossing away cigarettes, and in some cases actually attacking its host.

Most entries are full-blown narratives, complete with illustrations?for example, pointing out step-by-step how "The Halifax Disaster" unfolded. Other entries examine short-take anomalies?such as unusual drug side effects, including the antidepressant Clomipramine (spontaneous orgasm upon yawning), the hormone Oxytocin (increases one's generosity), the medicine for Parkinson's disease, Ropinirole (compulsive gambling), and Viagra (priapus syndrome, with a remote chance of gangrene curable only through penectomy?say no more).

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Alien Hand Syndrome By Alan Bellows Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

A compulsively readable collection, *Alien Hand Syndrome* brings together over 90 fantastic-but-true stories—absolutely mind-bending gems plucked from the annals of history. Selected and narrated by Alan Bellows—who can take the chaos of an event like the Lake Peigneur Disaster and retell it with harrowing step-by-step suspense—each entry opens a window onto a world where something’s gone terribly, yet fascinatingly, wrong. You can’t get enough.

About the Author

Alan Bellows, aka "The Professor," is the writer, designer, managing editor, and marketing mastermind behind DamnInteresting.com. A software designer, he developed his fascination for the odd and unexpected while doing programming for the library industry. He lives with his wife in Orem, Utah.

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The Naga Fireballs

A fire-breathing river perplexes citizens and scientists

Every year in October near the end of Buddhist Lent, hundreds of people gather after dusk at Wat Paa Luang, a 450-year-old temple on the edge of the Mekong River in the Nong Khai province of Thailand. Though they cannot predict the exact times or locations, a little patience usually earns spectators a view of a small, pinkish sphere rising out of the surface of the river. The glowing ball lingers above the river for up to a few moments, then ascends rapidly and silently into the atmosphere until it is lost to the eye. Most such nights there are dozens to hundreds of the fist-sized wisps flying skyward. Unlike so many other outlandish claims that photography cannot adequately capture, the Naga Fireballs have been witnessed by thousands of people for hundreds of years.

To believers, these fireballs are the breath of “Naga,” a large, magical serpent who patrols the river. Many of the locals tell tales of spotting a silvery flash of scale or speak of an elusive photograph proving the existence of the elusive Naga. Others seek a more rational explanation.

To many, the fireballs appear artificial in their origin, and thus they consider the entire event a hoax. These naysayers, however, offer only anecdotal evidence to support their theory. Supposed hoaxes include tales of the Wat Paa Luang monks secretly planting or lighting fireworks in order to draw crowds, or that the fireballs are simply a tradition of the region’s youth celebrating in what amounts to a centuries-long ongoing prank. In any case, 100 years of verified sightings makes the case for a conspiracy a weak one—any such ongoing effort would require preparation, equipment, and a superhuman commitment not to brag to the pretty girls who show up to view the spectacle.

Others believe that a natural phenomenon is at play, but look to other causes than the breath of an enormous, camera-shy serpent. While the phenomenon is most readily observed at night, there are some credible reports of daytime fireballs as well, though they are difficult to see in the light. Their appearance is also not isolated to October—they have been spied throughout the year but are especially common in May.

One theory proposed by Manas Kanoksin, a doctor from Nong Khai, postulates that fermenting sediment on the river's bottom causes pockets of methane gas to form. He further suggests that the Earth's position in relation to the sun at those times of year causes the bubbles to rise and then spontaneously ignite at the in the presence of ionized oxygen. Other researchers point out that the rocky river bottom doesn't have much sediment and that the river's turbulent waters would break up any such methane bubbles before they could reach the surface. Nevertheless, a 2002 study using robotic submarines indicated that the methane theory was at least viable, although it did not address the question of how the bubbles could reach the surface intact.

In 2003, the Thailand Science Ministry released a report that claimed to have solved the mystery of the fireballs. A thermo-scanner was set up near the riverbank, and several teams of specialists stood watch where the fireballs are commonly seen. Reportedly, the scanning equipment detected the movement of phosphine gas coming off the water before anyone could see a fireball form. The presence of phosphine seems a reasonable conclusion?as methane released by decay of plant and animal remains could combine with phosphorus from chemical fertilizer used on nearby farms to form the gas. This does not, however, explain the source of energy or microbes required to make the balls of gas appear fiery.

Despite the locals' preference for romantic silver-serpent stories, the harsh light of science is slowly disassembling the superstitions. Regardless of its natural or supernatural origins, however, this curious and beautiful phenomenon seems to be unique in our world, which lends it a certain awe that no number of sticks-in-the-mud may dislodge

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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