

What Lurks Beyond

THE Paranormal
IN Your Backyard

Jason Offutt

Truman State University Press

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Foreword

I have always held that there isn't a square millimeter on this planet that isn't haunted in some way. The memories, imprints, and life residues of every living thing throughout history has gone into the "blood and the bones" of Earth upon death, leaving behind psychic records we perceive as ghostly phenomena. We don't tune in to everything that has lived and died over millions of years, of course, which is a good thing, lest we feel squeezed right out of our space. But anywhere we go, we can find the phantom imprints of the past. We can also find openings or doorways into other dimensions, populated by odd beings, some of which we know as cryptids.

The mysterious, haunted, and bizarre are quite literally everywhere. In this enchanting collection of supernatural strangeness, Jason Offutt aptly demonstrates that you needn't look farther than your own backyard for amazing paranormal phenomena and experiences. The paranormal coexists with us all the time.

Offutt casts a 100-mile net from his home to demonstrate the variety of experiences awaiting the curious, and serves up a delicious menu of engaging firsthand accounts. Like me, you will keep turning the pages to see what he uncovers next. From my own experiences researching the paranormal for many years, I know, as does Offutt, that he has hit only the tip of things within his 100-mile radius. His point is that you don't have to look very far to have some rocking good paranormal adventures. Making pilgrimages to world-famous sites is fun, to be sure, but you can find equally exciting places right at your doorstep.

It is important for us, we the living, to get out there to explore what is "out there." Science makes only a half-hearted attempt to understand the paranormal. The fact is that most of what we know about the paranormal comes from our own subjective experiences. The paranormal is slippery with no clear boundaries, a shape-shifting entity in and of itself. We know what lies "out there" only through our own testimonies, corroborated by some hard evidence, historical data, and the testimonies of others.

By exploring the paranormal, we participate in an eternal record of everything that goes on in our little corner of the multiverse, part of the All That Is. We transcend time and space to touch a greater reality. Take a page from Jason's book—open your own back door and find out what lurks beyond!

—Rosemary Ellen Guiley

Acknowledgments

This is a big “thank you” to Nancy Rediger and Barbara Smith-Mandell at Truman State University Press for taking a chance on publishing my books on the paranormal. I would also like to thank Will Murphy and Brady Cummings for standing atop a lonely hill in a freezing Kansas cemetery, listening to the coyotes howl while we waited for something paranormal that never materialized. And I would also like to thank Northwest Missouri State University student Laura Boden (who has probably graduated by now) for her help in researching chapter 3: “Something Fell from the Sky: Skidmore, Missouri.”

This is dedicated to them and to all of those people in this book who have encountered things that, frankly, give me the willies.

Introduction

Outside Your Back Door

My House: Maryville, Missouri

0 miles from home

What's outside your back door? No, seriously. What's out there? The lawn? Crickets? A tree or two? Neighbors? Or, depending on your part of the planet, tigers, baboons, entirely too much sand, or if you're lucky, billboards for chicken restaurants. The answer is everything is outside your back door. Let me repeat, everything. Everything you can imagine, and even things you can't imagine, exists on the other side of a thin glass pane and a mesh screen that is designed, and completely fails, to keep bugs out of your house. And although I usually score high on polls where the question is "Do you like to keep bugs out of your house," I still open the back door a lot. You know, just to see what's out there.

And when I started looking, I mean really looking—research, interviews, investigations—what I found was exciting, crazy, unbelievable, sometimes brown, enlightening, and quite definitely true. I was surrounded by the paranormal. Who'd a thunk it?

The paranormal, a topic formerly known as the supernatural, simply means "beyond normal." Ghosts, UFOs, cryptids (creatures unclassified by science), telepathy, demonology, anomalous structures on the moon and Mars, time travel, out-of-place artifacts, and many other topics qualify as paranormal simply because science hasn't given them a pat on the back and let them into the club. For the longest time, the giant panda and mountain gorilla were considered bunk. Now we look at them in zoos. According to biographer, essayist, and philosopher Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915), "The Supernatural is the Natural, just not yet understood." With *What Lurks Beyond*, I hope to offer a little understanding of the usually hidden world that surrounds us.

And what a world it is. Since humans developed culture and began writing down their religions, philosophies, dirty limericks, and the happenings of daily life, they included the paranormal—how *would*

a Stone Age culture explain thunder anyway? Ghosts have been, and continue to be, present in every culture on the globe as are, to a lesser extent, demons, vampires, and werewolves. Ancient stories of lake monsters are common throughout the world, as are stories of large, hairy, manlike creatures that dwell in forests. In North America we call it Bigfoot or Sasquatch, in medieval Europe it was called the Wild Man of the Forest; Russia has the Almas, Tibet has the Yeti, and even Australia has its legends of these creatures known as the Yowie. Reports of unidentified objects flying in our skies and their inhabitants interacting with humans have existed for millennia. Like the Sumerian creation story where the Anunnaki—people from another planet in our solar system—came to Earth and created the human race by interbreeding with primitive man. The Dogon tribe of West Africa, which has existed since at least 3200 bc, believes it was visited by a race of beings that came to earth on an “ark” from a companion star to Sirius—even though that star is invisible without the use of a powerful telescope. In 1561, the skies over Nuremberg, Germany, were filled with flying spheres, cylinders, and crosses seemingly engaged in battle. And is the famous Schirmer UFO encounter in Ashland, Nebraska (detailed in chapter 28) explained by science? No. Is it fascinating? Yes.

The criteria for stories that appear in this book are: (1) the events had to be paranormal, and (2) they must have occurred within one hundred miles of my house (as the crow flies). Why? I wanted to prove that the paranormal is not just in remote mountains of the Pacific Northwest, the lochs of Scotland, in some secret lab in Roswell, New Mexico, or deep in the jungles of South America. No matter where you live on this planet, within a hundred miles of where you’re sitting in your quiet, warm, comfortable chair, exist things that will make you scream for your mother. Some of the thirty-two stories in this book are long, others—just as serious, but not quite as complex—take many fewer words to tell, but they are all complete accounts of something a person encountered and could not explain—and these stories are real. I found people who have seen Bigfoot, have traveled in time, have been possessed by demons, are haunted by monsters, have encountered UFOs, have been terrified by black-eyed kids, or have seen things that are just generally weird . . . and I didn’t have to go far.

Over the past century or so there has been a rise of interest in all things paranormal, from the popularity of the Spiritualist movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s that advocated talking to the dead, to a resurgence in sightings of the Loch Ness monster started by the famous (or infamous) “Surgeon’s Photograph” published in 1934; modern UFO encounters punctuated by the airship wave of 1897, the Foo Fighters of World War II, Roswell, and more recent sightings such as that in Stephenville, Texas; the alien abduction phenomena; and a greater interest in using modern technology to capture images and voices of ghosts. Some people are terrified of these topics, others (like me) are fascinated. The Internet has birthed a worldwide community of paranormal enthusiasts, taking over from the old media that had long since abandoned them. Ghosts and giants were treated as serious topics in the 1800s and a UFO sighting was a front-page story in the 1940s and 1950s. But during the Cold War, the subject of the paranormal was largely ignored by the mass media. It has only been since the end of the Cold War that paranormal topics have sprung back to life. Dr. Bryn Gribben, assistant professor of English at Northwest Missouri State University, said interest in the paranormal is a common reflection of society. “The twentieth century in England, they have an absence in ghosts [in literature] because they have so many things to worry about,” she relates. “World War I, World War II, the end of the Empire. There’s too much anxiety to deal with. It’s almost like ghosts are leisure time.” Today, although stresses abound, we Americans do like our leisure time. Let’s take you, for example.

What’s outside your back door? I’ll tell you what’s outside mine. I’m walking down the back steps. There it is—my back door. Pushing it open, I find a broken lawn mower, scattered toys, a dew-covered spider web, and tales of the paranormal. All are strange, close to home, and true—even the guy with the time machine. As British geneticist J. B. S. Haldane once said, “My own suspicion is that the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than *we can* suppose.”

Where do *you* have to go to find stories of the fantastic? You have a back door, don’t you? Open it.

About the Author

Jason Offutt worked in the newspaper industry for eighteen years and quickly discovered that covering city council meetings wasn't much fun. But, since 2005 when Jason began teaching journalism at Northwest Missouri State University, he started writing about whatever he darn well pleased. He covers paranormal topics in his weekly newspaper column, *From The Shadows* (also seen at from-the-shadows.blogspot.com), and has written articles for *Nexus Magazine*, *Fate Magazine*, *UFO Digest*, *Missouri Life Magazine*, and *The X Magazine*. His books on the paranormal, *Haunted Missouri: A Ghostly Guide to the Show-me State's Most Spirited Spots*, and *Darkness Walks: Shadow People Among Us*, are available at amazon.com.

Jason lives in Maryville, Missouri, with his lovely family, goes on the occasional ghost hunt, enjoys drinking beer and watching football, and is sure those who won't at least consider that humans evolved from monkeys simply don't have children.

About this Book

Jason Offutt's new book, *What Lurks Beyond*, is a study of strange and otherworldly phenomena of a truly varied, fascinating, disturbing, and ominous nature that have occurred within 100 miles of Jason's home. Encompassing engrossing tales of time travel; encounters with aliens from far-off realms; shadowy entities that lurk in the darkened corners of our world; near-death experiences; and much more, this is a book that takes a fresh, new approach to its subject matter. And it's one that will definitely have you looking over your shoulder as you read it!

—NICK REDFERN, author of *Science Fiction Secrets*
and *There's Something in the Woods*

Unearthing fresh information about classic cases and all-new tales of paranormal happenings, Jason Offutt has done a masterful job of peeling back the otherworldly veneer from the esoteric and bringing it much closer to home. He dispels the notion that high strangeness is “somewhere out there” and shows that it exists all around us, in small towns, big cities, and, more often than not, right around the corner. A fun and entertaining read that serves as a veritable grab bag of paranormal genres, *What Lurks Beyond* is a worthwhile addition to any esoteric enthusiast's library.

—TIM BINNALL, host of *Binnall of America*

Ghosts, aliens, a time traveler, and a mind-reading dog could be fiction, but Jason Offutt investigates true tales of these and other paranormal events that happened within 100 miles of his home. Offutt introduces ordinary folks who have encountered unexplained phenomena in everyday places and presents engaging accounts of their experiences. Getting a glimpse of this hidden world around us may prompt us to look—really look—in our own backyard.