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SPRINGHEEL JACK

In early September 1837, at Barnes Common, Middlesex, just outside London, four persons, three of them young women, were assaulted in separate attacks by a figure whose features were cloaked in darkness. In one of these attacks he ripped a woman's clothes off. One night a month later 17-year-old Polly Adams of Blackheath, London, was returning home when she glimpsed the silhouette of a huge cloaked figure standing on a hill. Suddenly the figure, taking enormous leaps, bounded toward her. When it got near her, she later told police, she saw a man with glowing eyes and a mouth that spat blue flames into her face. He ripped the top of her dress off, leaving deep, bleeding scratches on her belly with fingers that felt as if they were made of iron. The figure laughed loudly in an odd tone and leaped away into the night.

So began the saga of nineteenth-century England's second-most-famous uncaught criminal named Jack (the other being the Ripper). This one was known variously as "Springald" (jumping jack) or "Springheel [sometimes Spring Heeled] Jack," an eerie man or being in whom the residents of the London area at first had a hard time believing. Yet by the following January enough credible reports had been investigated to cause the Lord Mayor of London, Sir John Cowan, to declare that Springheel Jack existed and that a vigilance committee was being formed to apprehend him.

According to his victims, Jack was, if human, a decidedly odd-looking member of the race. He was tall and thin, with a prominent nose and eyes that were—almost literally—fiery. His fingers felt almost like claws, and he had enormous strength. His ears were

pointed. He wore a flowing cloak, a helmet which appeared to be made of metal, and close-fitting, glittering garments. A lamp was strapped to his chest. Most remarkable of all was Jack's ability to clear walls and roads with a single leap. Though his crimes were clearly of a sexual nature, after ripping off women victim's clothes he did not rape or otherwise molest them.

Jack the bodice-ripper. Sometimes, however, he seemed content merely to frighten or disable a victim. On February 18, 1838, as two sisters walked through an alley behind a public house in London, a tall, slender figure approached one, threw his cloak aside, and flashed a lantern. The next thing the victim knew, blue flames were shooting at her face, and she passed out. As the other sister watched, Jack walked calmly away.

Two days later the most publicized of Jack's attacks, on 18-year-old Jane Alsop of Old Ford, took place. The *London Times* gives this account:

.... [A]t about a quarter to 9 o'clock ... she heard a violent ringing at the gate in front of the house, and on going to the door to see what was the matter she saw a man standing outside.... The person [said] he was a policeman, and said, "For God's sake, bring me a light, for we have caught Spring-heeled Jack in the lane." She returned to the house and brought a candle, and handed it to the person, who appeared enveloped in a large cloak.... The instant she had done so ... he threw off his outer garment, and applying the lighted candle to his breast, presented a most hideous and frightful appearance, and vomited forth a quantity of blue and white flame from his mouth, and his eyes resembled red balls of fire. From the hasty glance which her fright enabled her to get at his person she observed that he wore a large helmet, and his dress, which appeared to fit him very tight, seemed to her to resemble white oil skin. Without uttering a sentence he darted at her, and catching her partly by her dress and the back part of her neck and arms with his claws, as well as a quantity of hair from her head; but she was at length rescued from his grasp by one of her sisters. Miss Alsop added that she had suffered

considerably all night from the shock she had sustained, and was then in extreme pain....

Miss Mary Alsop, a young sister, said that on hearing the scream of her sister Jane, she went to the door, and saw a figure as above described ill-using her sister. She was so alarmed at his appearance, that she was afraid to approach or render any assistance.

Mrs. Harrison [another sister] said, that hearing the screams of both her sisters ... she ran to the door, and found the person ... in the act of dragging her sister Jane down the stone steps from the door with considerable violence. She (Mrs. Harrison) got hold of her sister, and by some means or other, which she could scarcely describe, succeeded in getting her inside the door and closing it. At this time her sister's dress was nearly torn off her.... The fellow, notwithstanding the outrage he had committed, knocked loudly two or three times at the door, and it was only on their calling loudly for the police from the upper windows that he left the place.

Their father told police that as Jack fled across a field, he dropped his cloak. Someone else picked it up. Both Alsop and police suspected an accomplice.

Jack's depredations continued into 1839, then resumed in 1843. In 1845 Jack was linked for the first time to a murder, when he threw a 13-year-old London prostitute, Maria Davis, off a bridge and into an open sewer, where she drowned. There were many witnesses to the crime.

The next known appearances of Springheel Jack, or someone very much like him, were in 1877. Nearly everyone in Caistor, Norfolk, watched him bounding through the town or on rooftops. He was described as having huge ears and wearing what looked like a sheepskin. In August of the same year two guards at an army base in Aldershot, Hants, saw a huge, leaping figure clad in a tight oilskin suit and "shining helmet." One guard fired on Jack, but—so he claimed in subsequent testimony—the bullet went through him without effect. Jack jumped over their heads and belched a stream of flame, then landed near them and laughed strangely. They fired on him again, but Jack escaped, apparently unharmed. When they re-

ported the bizarre incident to their superiors, they were met with incredulity and sent to the stockade. But they were soon released after other soldiers saw the figure, too.

Jack in the twentieth century. Sightings of the same or a similar figure reportedly occurred in September 1904 in Everton, England. A Mrs. Hudson, noting a large shadow cast from the street onto her wall, looked outside, and saw what she thought was an enormous bat outside. It reappeared at exactly the same time the next evening, and now Mrs. Hudson got a better look at it. It was a man dressed in a flowing cloak and black boots. She watched him pass down the street with a series of high leaps. Her neighbors also saw the strange figure, and one remembered stories of Springheel Jack from her youth. Later in the week Jack frightened two sets of girls, springing in front of them, laughing, and bounding away. One afternoon, in front of 100 witnesses, he leaped 25 feet to the roof of a building and jumped from rooftop to rooftop. Police searches found no further trace of him.

The UFO age boasts one story of a Springheel Jack-like figure. At 2:30 A.M. on June 18, 1953, three persons seeking to escape the heat by sitting on the front porch of a Houston apartment house saw, one of them related, "a huge shadow cross the lawn. I thought that at first it was the magnified reflection of a big moth caught in the nearby street light." Then the shadow seemed to bounce upward into a pecan tree. The three then saw the "figure of a man ... dressed in gray or black tight-fitting clothes" (Thompson, 1953). There was a "dim gray light all around him. He was about six and a half feet tall, looked like a white man, and was wearing a black cape, skin-tight pants and quarter-length boots." So far this sounds like an excellent description of Jack; but witness Hilda Walker adds this un-Jack-like detail: "I could see him plain and could see he had big wings folded at his shoulders" (Gross, 1989). Fifteen minutes later the figure "just melted away." The witnesses then heard a "loud swoosh" across the street and saw a rocket-shaped object shoot upward trailing white smoke. Moments later they and a fourth witness who was arriving observed a "flying paintbrush" with a fiery tail as it flew along the northeastern horizon. Police officers and reporters who interviewed the

witnesses noted that they seemed sincere and "obviously upset."

At the time no connection was made between this incident and the earlier (and largely forgotten) tales of Springheel Jack. Jack would not enter UFO lore until 1961. In the November/December 1960 issue of England's *Flying Saucer Review* (FSR), editor Waveney Girvan noted George Adamski's claim that there are extraterrestrials in our midst, adding, "If Adamski and others are telling the truth about these visitors, then surely there must be evidence that can be produced," and he challenged UFO enthusiasts to find that evidence. One immediate result was J. Vyner's article "The Mystery of Springheel Jack" in the March/April 1961 issue of FSR, a generally accurate though hardly complete account of Jack's career. Vyner does not mention the sexual nature of Jack's crimes and is unaware of the reports from 1839 and the 1840s. He has this explanation of why Jack behaved as he did: "Aircrew, baled out over hostile territory. Strange the suggestion of evasion, living off the land, stealing clothes and food. Hard to find the safe house where lives the agent who can put them on the road home." He theorizes that Jack made his "final escape" on the night of July 6, 1838, when Inspector Hemer of the Liverpool police saw a ball of fire dissolve over a field. The phenomenon in question is almost certainly ball lightning.

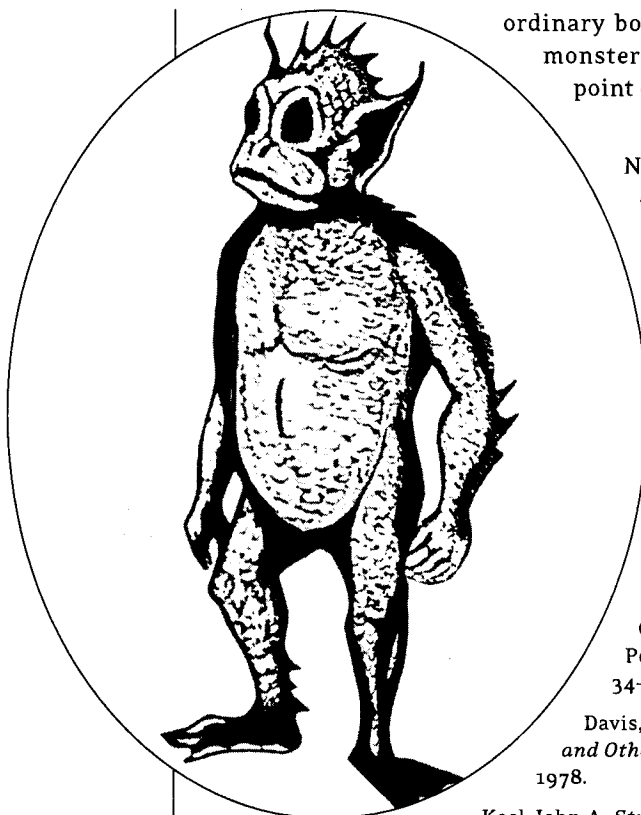
More interestingly, Vyner writes: "In 1944, towards the end of August, Springheel Jack appeared at Mattoon, Illinois, U.S.A." He refers to a curious episode in which a small town was terrified by a "phantom anesthetist" or "mad gasser" who reportedly sprayed a "sickly sweet" gas into houses during nightly forays. One of the few victims to get a look at the attacker, whose elusiveness eventually led to widespread belief in his nonexistence (Johnson, 1945; Smith, 1984), described him simply as "tall, dressed in dark clothing, and wearing a tight-fitting cap." An identical but far more obscure series of attacks took place in Botetourt County, Virginia, over a six-week period between late December 1933 and early February 1934 (Shoemaker, 1985). The link between all this and Springheel Jack is mostly the gas, though victims of the latter's gas said nothing about its being "sickly sweet."

A 1977 book by Peter Haining, *The Legend and Bizarre Crimes of Spring Heeled Jack*, revives a Victorian-era theory that Jack was Henry, Marquis of Waterford, said to be a reckless young man who liked to drink and fight. The evidence for such a connection (Waterford died in 1859) scarcely exists, and experiments with springs in boot heels (conducted, for example, on German paratroopers in World War II and resulting only in broken ankles [Stein, 1988]) offer no support for Haining's speculation that the marquis used such footwear in his exploits.

On the other hand, no nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century report of Springheel Jack says anything about mysterious aerial phenomena in his vicinity, so a UFO link is unproven. That Jack, whether one person, several persons, or nonperson, existed seems certain, if we are to credit the testimonies of the witnesses and the judgments of the investigating authorities. Beyond that Springheel Jack remains a mystery, and one likely to remain so.

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The monster of
Thetis Lake,
British Columbia,
was spotted in
1972.
(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)

ordinary body, like a human being body, but it had a monster face, and it was all scaly." It had a sharp point on its head and "great big ears."

The following summer, people in the Newton-Lafayette area of New Jersey told of encounters with a giant creature that looked like a cross between a man and an alligator.

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Springheel Jack

Victorian England played host to periodic reports of a strange man or being to whom the press referred variously as "Springald," "Spring Heeled Jack," or "Springheel Jack." The figure's presence was first noted in September 1837, when he assaulted four separate persons, three of them women, at locations in and around London. In one instance he allegedly ripped off the top of victim Polly Adams's dress, scratching her belly with fingers that felt as if they were made of iron.

What made these incidents different from conventional sexual crimes was the attacker's appearance. He was tall, thin, and powerful, wore a cloak, and had fiery eyes. On occasion, it was said, he spat blue flames from his mouth and into victims' faces. He also could effect enormous leaps that enabled him to move with such rapidity that it was impossible to escape or catch him.

By January 1838 London's Lord Mayor, Sir John Cowan, had declared Springheel Jack a public menace and formed a vigilance committee to bring the



Springheel Jack was described as a cloaked figure with springs on his boot-heels.

(Courtesy Fortean Picture Library.)

bizarre criminal to justice. But the attacks went on regardless. On the evening of February 20, for example, a stranger appeared at the gate of a London residence and called out, "For God's sake, bring me a light, for we have caught Spring-heeled Jack in the lane!" When eighteen-year-old Jane Alsop brought a candle, she saw a figure, according to the *London Times* (February 22), "who appeared to be enveloped in a large cloak. . . . [H]e threw off his outer garment, and applying the lighted candle to his breast, presented a most hideous and frightful appearance, and vomited forth a quantity of blue and white flame from his mouth, and his eyes resembled red balls of fire. . . . [H]e wore a large helmet, and his address, which appeared to fit him very tight, seemed to her to resemble white oil skin."

He lunged for her, his clawlike hands ripping her dress. The young woman struggled with him and was soon rescued by a sister, who with great difficulty pulled her into the house and slammed the door. Undeterred, Jack knocked two or three times on the door and left only when family members looking out from an

upstairs window shouted for the police. Jack dashed across a field, dropping his cloak in his haste. When it was quickly picked up by someone else, the Alsops and later the police concluded that Jack had an accomplice.

A generally similar attack took place on the evening of February 28 in the Limehouse district of London. According to the *London Morning Chronicle* (March 8):

Miss [Lucy] Scales stated that . . . at about half-past eight o'clock, as she and her sister were returning from the house of their brother, and while passing along Green Dragon-alley, they observed some person standing in an angle in the passage. She was in advance of her sister at the time, and just as she came up to the person, who was enveloped in a large cloak, he spirted a quantity of blue flame right in her face, which deprived her of her sight, and so alarmed her that she instantly dropped to the ground, and was seized with violent fits, which continued for several hours. . . .

Miss Scales said that on approaching the individual she thought it was a woman, from the head-dress being apparently a bonnet, or something of that description, but she was afterwards satisfied that it was a man. He appeared to her to be tall and thin. . . .

Mr. Scales said that, on the evening in question, in a few minutes after his sisters had left his house, he heard the loud screams of one of them, and, on running up Green Dragon-alley, he found his sister Lucy . . . on the ground in a strong fit, and his other sister endeavoring to hold and support her. She was removed home, and he then heard from the other sister what had happened.

She described the person to be of tall, thin, and gentlemanly appearance, enveloped in a large cloak, and carrying in front of his person a small lamp, or bull's eye, similar to those in the possession of the police. [As] her sister . . . [came] up to the person, he threw open his cloak, exhibited the lamp, and puffed a quantity of flame from his mouth into the face of her sister, who instantly dropped. . . . She also stated that the individual did not utter a word, nor did he attempt to lay hands on them, but walked away in an instant.

Surgeon Charles Pritchel, who treated Lucy Scales not long after the attack, told investigating authorities that she "was suffering from hysterics and great agitation, in all probability the result of fright."

However bizarre his appearance and behavior, Springheel Jack was assumed by investigating authorities to be a real person. Rumors spread that he was Henry, the Marquis of Waterford, a young Irish nobleman of rowdy habits and cruel humor, but it was not physically possible, nor is it now, to effect huge leaps with springs concealed in boot heels.

In any case, Waterford died in 1859. In the 1860s – so one of the witnesses told British writer Elliott O'Donnell years later – two women walking along a road

in the moonlight saw a tall figure, clad in "some very fantastic garment," soar over a hedge on one side of the road and land a few yards in front of them. It then bounded over a high hedge on the other side and was lost to sight. In 1872 a "ghost," as witnesses called it, haunted the Peckham area. It was said to leap over fences and walls too high for a mere mortal to scale.

The following year, in Sheffield, people reported seeing a tall figure who "sprang like a goat." In 1877 Jack merrily bounded from rooftop to rooftop in Caistor, Norfolk, nearly all of whose citizenry witnessed the spectacle. Observers said he had huge ears and was dressed in something resembling sheepskin. In August of the same year Jack (or, as some suspected, a prankster impersonating him) appeared before soldiers at Aldershot's North Camp. If a joke, it was a dangerous one. Some of the sentries opened fire on him. Jack or a figure very much like him was reported in Liverpool in September 1904.

Jack across the water

Jack-like figures began to take on an international dimension in the twentieth century. During the summer of 1938, four children in Silver City, New Mexico, saw a gray-clad man sail over them at treetop level. One of the witnesses, Ann Alley, would recall that "he seemed to be wearing a belt which was wide and had points sticking out of it. He also seemed to be wearing a cap (a la Flash Gordon)."

Not long afterwards, in the fall of the same year, the Cape Cod, Massachusetts, area played host to events that eerily echoed those of exactly a century earlier. Residents reported the depredations of a mysterious attacker – some thought him more than seven feet tall – with fierce-looking eyes and pointed ears. He breathed blue flames into victims' faces, and his leaping abilities sparked speculation that he wore springs in the soles of his shoes. A farmer who took a shot at the figure claimed that "the darned thing just laughed and jumped my eight-foot high fence in one leap." Though the episode was reported in the press of the time, no one thought to link it with England's Springheel Jack legends, little known in the United States.

Nor did Springheel Jack's name come up when residents of the O'Donnell Heights neighborhood of Baltimore complained to police that a tall, thin prowler dressed in black was terrorizing them. Though he eluded capture – the police finally doubting his very existence – witnesses swore that he possessed extraordinary leaping abilities. "He ran and jumped like a gazelle," according to one. Another who got a good look at his face described it as "horrible."

Jack from outer space

Nothing in the Springheel Jack tradition connected it with unidentified flying objects – until, that is, an incident that occurred at 2:30 a.m. on June 18, 1953, when three Houston residents sought relief from the heat. Sitting in front of their apartment building, they spotted a "huge shadow" cross the lawn in front of them, then "bounce upward into a pecan tree." A dim gray light illuminated the fig-

ure in the tree. It was a tall man with a "black cape, skin-tight pants, and quarter-length boots." He was dressed in "gray or black tight-fitting clothes." One witness thought she saw wings on the figure, but probably this was an optical illusion caused by the cape. After a few minutes the figure "just melted away," his disappearance followed by a "loud swoosh" across the street and the rapid ascent of a rocket-shaped object.

Investigating officers judged the witnesses sincere and manifestly frightened. Again, neither witnesses nor police thought to link this bouncing figure with a British legend they had never heard of. It is therefore ironic that a British writer to *Everybody's* magazine (March 6, 1954) probably had never heard of the Houston close encounter of the third kind when he suggested, for the first time anywhere, that Jack had been an extraterrestrial. A year later, in a book on Liverpool history and lore, Richard Whittington-Egan noted:

There are even those who incline to the view that he was a visitor from Space. This, they argue, would account for his astounding leaping proclivities because he would be adapted to the requirements of life on a greater-gravity planet. Likewise, differences in physical constitution would probably enable him to live longer on earth and might well explain the flame-like emanations from his mouth.

Springheel Jack as possible extraterrestrial was discussed for the first time in the UFO literature in an article in England's *Flying Saucer Review* in 1961. The writer, one J. Vyner, speculated that Jack was an alien stranded in "hostile territory ... living off the land, stealing clothes and food," waiting to be rescued.

A few years later occult journalist John A. Keel interviewed an Ohio farm woman and her son who told him a strange story. In 1963 or 1964 mysterious "rustlers" had killed their cattle but, weirdly enough, taken only inedible organs such as eyes, brains, and udders. On occasion they had glimpsed the culprits; tall and clad in white overalls, they could "leap over high fences from a standing start."

Though the Ohio witnesses did not report a UFO associated with the high leapers, a 1975 case from Washington State does, and it also brings cattle into the story. On December 14, on Toppenish Ridge in the Yakima Indian Reservation, a young man driving on a gravel road late at night noticed a cow and two calves running in his direction, fleeing three figures who were chasing them in the ditch. As the witness gaped in astonishment, one of them took a slow-motion leap and came down fifteen feet later, right in front of the vehicle. The truck's headlights showed a skinny, seven-foot-tall man with a narrow, pale face and long, pointed nose. He wore close-fitting black clothes and boots; on his chest a trapezoid-like symbol was visible. His arms were raised straight up. According to Greg Long, who wrote about the incident in his book *Examining the Earthlight Theory* (1990):

The upper lip appeared to be pulled back in a permanent snarl, and fine teeth were visible. The lower lip was either missing or very small. The man's shoulder-length hair was brownish or reddish-blond, matted and stringy. The fingers on both of the man's bare hands were long, and the

Springheel Jack
appeared before
soldiers at
Aldershot's North
Camp in 1877.
(Courtesy Fortean Picture
Library.)



creature grasped something purple in his left hand. The thing had a wire on it, which appeared to run down the creature's arm. Jim [the witness] noticed that the other two individuals remained close together at the side of the road. They were wearing the same kind of clothing, complete with white markings.

Badly frightened, the witness elected not to stop. He swerved around the figure, which turned with its arms still raised. At that point a luminous, elongated UFO appeared behind him, shooting what appeared to be a searchlight over the vehicle.

The next day investigators Willard Vogel and David Akers spoke with the witness and his parents. The latter related that when their son got home, he was in a state of terror and awoke them to report what had just happened to him. Three months later tribal police were told of a sighting of strikingly similar beings on a ranch about ten miles from the site of the original encounter. Members of a ranch family reported that they had seen two humanoid figures chasing their cattle.

There are two other known modern reports of arguably Jack-like figures. One is quite specifically suggestive of a Jack link, the other only vaguely so. The former allegedly took place in the summer of 1986 on a rural road near the border of England and Wales. A man named Marshall spotted a figure leaping – almost gliding – over high hedgerows. The figure, clothed in a black ski suit, had a notably elongated chin. It bounded rapidly toward the startled Marshall, slapping him, then emitting a mighty laugh before bounding off into the fields.

Prominent British ufologist Jenny Randles investigated an unusual report from Cornwall, where on June 4, 1996, a woman saw what she first thought to be a sack floating “at twice rooftop height” through the late-evening air. On closer examination it turned out to be a five-foot-tall man dressed in dark “Victorian” clothing. The clothing was flapping in the wind. A dog followed the figure during the two minutes it took to pass out of view. The witness dismissed Randles’s suggestion that the object was a novelty balloon or a man in a gyrocopter.

The Jack behind the legend

The account above barely touches on the vast folklore of Springheel Jack. Under the rubric of “Springheel Jack” all sorts of stories, tall tales, and rumors have circulated for more than a century and a half. A number are sheer fabrications by sensation-seeking writers. Others are hoaxes by pranksters. Yet others are crimes and assaults committed by thugs whose acts for one reason or another became linked in popular consciousness with Springheel Jack.

Our treatment seeks to uncover the core of genuine mystery beneath all the bogus and extraneous elements. There are, however, some who think no such core exists. For example, Mike Dash, author of a valuable extended survey of Jack literature, argues that Jack is no more than a folkloric entity more properly related to Victorian ghostlore than to anything truly anomalous. Peter Haining, the author of the one book-length treatment of the subject, revives the Marquis of

Waterford identification, though to make his case he resorts to unverifiable assertions and (to all appearances) outright inventions.

Yet there is a curiously consistent history of leaping entities. Not all seem reduceable to error and falsehood, and in the absence of any firm evidence that would resolve the question one way or another, all we can conclude for now is that Springheel Jack is likely to remain one of the most appealing and romantic of this world's many mysteries.

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Stuart's Monsters

There may be no stranger book in the literature of flying saucers than John Stuart's *UFO Warning* — strange not only because it is implausible, even ridiculous, but because its author appeared to believe every unbelievable word of it.

It was published in 1963 as a small, amateurishly produced paperback under the Saucerian Books imprint. Saucerian, which specialized in sensationalistic literature (such as *From Outer Space to You* [1959], in which New Jersey sign-painter Howard Menger recounted his many meetings with Venusians), was a one-man operation run by Gray Barker of Clarksburg, West Virginia. Interested in UFOs since the early 1950s, Barker had been chief investigator for the International Flying Saucer Bureau before its director, Albert K. Bender, closed the organization in the fall of 1953. Bender's claim that mysterious agents had threatened him into silence gave rise to the legend of the men in black, and it was the subject of Barker's paranoia-drenched *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers* (1956).

Part of one chapter of *They Knew* concerns two Hamilton, New Zealand, ufologists, John Stuart and Doreen Wilkinson, who together comprised an "organization" called Flying Saucer Investigators. Barker quotes from letters in which Stuart relates a few personal experiences reminiscent of those traditionally associated with poltergeists. In the final chapter Stuart tells Barker that subsequently someone had called on him and that, as a result of that visit, Stuart is leaving ufology. "I can't, at the moment, tell you any more," he says.

Stuart kept his silence until 1962, when he produced a manuscript titled *The Kimi Under UFO Attack*. Barker published an edited version as *UFO Warning* the following year. In his introduction, Barker, ordinarily not at a loss for words, confessed, "I cannot completely understand this volume, and I doubt if many others can either."

The story begins on a peculiar note, albeit not a paranormal one. The married Stuart writes that every evening, often into the early hours of dawn, he and Doreen Wilkinson, described as young, single, and attractive, met to conduct "research" together. Stuart complains bitterly about what the "evil minds" of the neighborhood made of these, uh, investigations.

Beyond this the story gets progressively harder to swallow, starting with Stuart's assertion that his and Wilkinson's relationship was an innocent one. (In fact, as private correspondence that became available after Stuart's death makes clear, they were – as any adult reader of the book will have assumed all along – lovers.) Soon, however, weird things happen, most dramatically the appearance of a ghostly spaceman who beams a telepathic warning that Wilkinson will be in danger if the two do not stop their research.

Soon afterwards John sees a UFO from his front lawn, and the next evening he and Doreen hear whispering sounds and breathing with no discernible source. A few nights later Doreen (whom Barker gave the pseudonym "Barbara Turner" in the book) goes out to buy cigarettes. John grows anxious at her prolonged absence. Then, he writes,

the front door flew open, and a figure rushed into my arms. [Doreen] said in a voice filled with fear, "There's something out there!"

Quickly releasing her, I hurried outside, stopping on the top step as a terrible stench struck me. I almost fainted in terror. It was like burnt plastic and sulphur. I stood there for a moment, and then walked down to the front gate, neither seeing nor hearing anything. I searched the rear of the grounds, finding nothing, and had just started to return to the door when I heard distinct sounds behind me. I stopped and shone my torch [flashlight]. There was nothing there. I walked on. The sounds followed. I stopped and the sound stopped. I moved. It moved. Again I stopped, was amazed and startled when "it" kept on! The peculiar shuffling, scraping sound went past me, and I felt something solid brush against my shoulder! This was the first indication I'd had that "they" were as solid as I!