

THE LIBRARY
of
JURGEN LEITNER

TITLE: GIVE A DOG A BONE
AUTHOR: JENNIFER BIGGLESWADE
DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1957
PUBLISHER: STORK AND PELICAN

Summary

This is a book ostensibly aimed at children aged around 8 to 10 years old. It has cheerful colour plates and relatively large printed text. The story follows a young girl whose dog has just passed away. The girl's mother explains to her that every living thing must eventually die, but the child cannot accept that. One night she wishes with all her might that her dog would return to her, and her wish is granted. However, the dog's flesh is falling off its bones, it stinks of decay, and it is much more aggressive than it was in life. The girl screams for help and her mother shoots the undead dog, only to find it is still limping forward. The pair manage to trap the dog in the cellar, and the book ends with them trying to ignore the horrible scraping sounds when they pass by the cellar door every morning. Owners of this book are known to have their pets return to them in some undead form.

Additional Notes:

I managed to find an interview with the author, Jennifer Biggleswade, in an old magazine archive. In the interview, she claimed that this story was based on personal experience. I managed to find two other instances of pets returning to their owners, and in both cases, the owners also had this book in their possession. One was a parrot who, despite having skeletal wings, managed to fly repeatedly in to its elderly owner's window. The other was a cat who scratched at the back door so incessantly that it managed to wear down the wood and break into its owners' house. The parrot was removed by a very bemused pest control service, but the cat's fate is unknown, as it disappeared after a few days of causing havoc in its former home.

TITLE: THE GLEN OF ISOLATION

AUTHOR: G.H. BERESFORD

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1934

PUBLISHER: FORTITUDE & SONS

Summary

This is a novel in which a young woman goes on a trip to a remote part of the Scottish Highlands. On her journey, she contemplates the ways in which her family and her friends have let her down, and remembers times in the past that she has felt cut off from them. Upon arriving at her destination, she decides to start walking, with no map or guide, and very little supplies. After hours of walking, she finds herself in a glen, and is soon lost in a dense fog. After an indeterminate period of frantically trying to find her way out of the fog, the novel suddenly stops the narrative and begins to address the reader. The book will relate to the reader incidents in their own life when they felt lonely or unloved, and will start to produce a dense fog itself. If the reader continues, and does not set the book down as soon as the fog is produced, they will be compelled to read an in-depth history of all their loneliest moments. Once they have finished, they will no longer be able to perceive any fellow living thing with any of their senses.

Additional Notes:

I found this book in a small second-hand bookshop in Ely, and could instantly feel its power. I did some research into the author, G.H. Beresford, and discovered that she disappeared not long after the book's publication. I have also managed to find out about one of the previous owners, George Bright, an avid rare book collector. His granddaughter explained to me that he stopped talking to anyone or acknowledging anyone's existence soon after he purchased the book. His wife took to leaving food out for him to find, and would occasionally hear a muttered, "Thank you," when he discovered that the food was there.

TITLE: HOT STUFF: CLASSIC ALBUM COVERS OF THE 70S

AUTHOR: PETER HENDERSON

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1992

PUBLISHER: KINGPIN BOOKS

Summary

This is a low-end coffee table book which claims to present the most iconic pieces of album art to be produced during the 1970s. If one were to quickly glance through, this claim would appear to be largely accurate, but on closer inspection, there is something “wrong” with each image. An artist may have a nasty-looking burn on their face, a piece of clothing may have flames slowly consuming it, or an abstract piece of art may seem to become more and more like an inferno the longer you look at it. The text of the book mainly offers mundane facts that any avid music fan would know, but occasionally makes reference to events which never happened, such as a record studio burning down, or a music producer being cut off in their prime by a terrible accident. Readers have been known to touch the pages and receive severe burns, or to leave the book in their house and return to find it had burned the building down.

Additional Notes:

I was lucky enough to find the publisher of this book very soon after it was released. I was shown correspondence from the printer who was producing the book, and discovered that many of the print workers reported fire-related injuries. The author also spoke to me, and told me that his entire vinyl collection had been destroyed in a fire. Hardly the direst thing, perhaps, but he seemed very distressed about it.

TITLE: HOW TO FAIL AT RUNNING AWAY WHILE TRYING REALLY HARD

AUTHOR: HENRIETTA FLEGEL

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1983

PUBLISHER: LOFT BOOKS

Summary

This book appears at first to be some kind of self-help book, with its garish cover and testimonials from “satisfied readers”. However, on closer inspection, the book describes, in excruciating detail, some hapless man fleeing a nameless threat. Interspersed throughout the book are text boxes with “Handy Hints”. When the man trips on a tree root, for example, the “Handy Hint” proclaims that “Tree roots are an excellent way to slow yourself down and add tension to your attempted escape!” The book concludes just before the man is caught by his pursuer, and at this point, the reader discovers that they now have their own pursuer and must try to run away.

Additional Notes:

This book was found in 1985, at a remote cabin in the Rockies by police, after its inhabitant, Jonah Mason, went missing. The door had been left wide open, and the book was dropped on the floor, open at its final pages. Weeks later, his body was found, horribly mutilated, in a ditch by the side of the highway. My attempts to learn more about the supposed author, Henrietta Flegel, have been largely fruitless, as she has no other works to her name, and this moniker is very likely a pseudonym. Before it came into my possession, it seems it also claimed the life of one of the police officers in charge of the evidence from Mason’s case. After the police officer’s body was found, the book disappeared for a few years, until it re-emerged in a thrift shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1989, which is when it came into my possession.

TITLE: A PERSONAL HISTORY
AUTHOR: MRS JOHANNA REPTON
DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1898
PUBLISHER: JOHNSTONE AND SONS

Summary

This book is different for every single person who reads it. Even the cloth-bound cover appears to change colour depending on the reader. However, the design of the end paper remains constant: deep green, patterned with interlocking eye-like shapes. The book is split into chapters which cover different periods of the reader's life: birth, childhood, teenage years, adulthood, and so on. The book does not present the reader with any information about their life beyond the present moment. However, it does focus on the aspects of the reader's past that they may be the most ashamed of, such as maltreatment of others or work-related failures. There are also colour plates interspersed throughout the book, rendering scenes from the reader's life in illustrations. The style of these illustrations is typical of the time of publication, rendered in pen and ink with great detail. The book generally ends on a description of the reader's current location and their reaction to reading their own story.

Additional Notes:

The Magnus Institute would be very interested in this one, I think, but I shall hold onto it for the time being. Perhaps due to the shame it inspires in its readers, I have found it difficult to track down previous owners of this book. However, I do know, thanks to some well-preserved diaries, that a young man in the 1910s tried to destroy the book by tearing it apart and burning the remnants, but woke up the next morning to find it sitting on his bedside table, completely unharmed. I purchased this book at an auction, and the only thing I could get out of the auctioneer about the seller was that they "liked to keep themselves to themselves."

TITLE: UNKNOWN (KNOWN AS THE SKIN COLLECTION)

AUTHOR: UNKNOWN

DATE OF PUBLICATION: UNKNOWN

PUBLISHER: UNKNOWN

Summary

This leather-bound book has no printed text on its cover or its pages, but, after careful biological analysis, it has been determined that every single page of this book is made from the skin of a different species. Human skin is among them, alongside thousands of animal species from across the world. Each page also includes a crude picture of an internal organ, drawn using blood-based ink. This book has been known to make readers physically unwell and recoil from the book in horror, or to “inspire” them to create a similar book of their own. From my own research, such attempts to create new books have never been successful, and the book in my possession remains the definitive one.

Additional Notes:

Reports of people coming into contact with this book go back as far as 1443. I managed to find records of a court case in which a man was tried for killing a neighbour’s livestock, and the excuse he gave was that he had to “use them for the book”. I was given this book by its previous owner, who managed to resist the urge to go “skin collecting” herself, and merely suffered terrible nausea whenever she and the book were in the same room.

TITLE: VILE DISEASES AND THEIR PREVENTION
AUTHOR: DR STEPHEN LANGLEY
DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1643
PUBLISHER: UNKNOWN

Summary

This is one of the older books in my collection. It is a beautiful leather-bound tome, gold-embossed, with finely printed text. This book claims to offer cures for the most terrible ailments, but, in fact, each of the proposed remedies make the conditions worse. I consulted with a GP who verified that every single piece of advice was, at best, misguided, or, at worst, downright dangerous. For example, sufferers of headaches are encouraged to consume small amounts of lead over a three-month period. Those with a fever are told to submerge themselves in ice-cold water for several hours, with no concern for hypothermia. The illustrations in the book are also deeply unsettling, as they depict various diseases of the body in excruciating detail. I have heard reports that readers of this book, even the most scientifically-minded, will use the recommended “cures” and, invariably, make matters much worse for themselves.

Additional notes:

One particular eyewitness account from 1743 describes how a wealthy merchant, who also happened to be an infamous hypochondriac, was given this book by a physician, and proceeded to try every single remedy in the book on himself. As you can imagine, this did not turn out well at all. There are even reports as late as 1927 of a young woman being given this book by an uncle and, as a result, poisoning herself with an overdose of nutmeg in an attempt to cure an infection.

TITLE: WHAT YOU CANNOT SEE

AUTHOR: CARLA D'AGOSTINO

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 1963

PUBLISHER: GIRAFFE

Summary

Merely judging this book by its cover, it appears to be a typical crime novel, with artfully stylised bloodstains against a black background, and bold lettering. The protagonist is Private Eye Gio Brunetti, who discovers a murder victim at the beginning of the novel, and is tasked with finding his killer, because the victim's partner believes the police are bungling the investigation. The victim has had his throat entirely removed, leaving his head separated from the rest of his body. As the investigation gets underway, Brunetti begins to have nightmares that he is being attacked by someone or something he cannot see. This fear begins to permeate his waking moments, and soon impairs his ability to carry out his investigation, as he clutches at his throat when questioning witnesses and gets startled by seemingly innocuous noises at his offices. The novel culminates in a very disturbing sequence, during which Brunetti's office is plunged into darkness, and he hears terrible, unnatural noises before feeling a terrible pain in his throat. The novel ends abruptly here.

Additional Notes:

This book was given to me in 1990 by one of my most valuable contacts. She told me that the previous owner of the book could no longer sleep in the dark, and had to have every single light on in his house at all times. I also managed to track down the author, Carla D'Agostino, who had retired to a seaside town south of Rome called Nettuno. She had no recollection of writing any crime novels, but, when I produced the book, she frantically ran around the house making sure all the curtains and blinds were fully open. Soon after my visit, I learned that she had passed away in "tragic circumstances" but could not get any further information on the cause of death. Of course, I have my suspicions.