

## INTRODUCTION

When we first heard from Varla in *The Book of the Bizarre*, we knew almost immediately that there would be a sequel. Had we printed them all, the amount of freaky facts she had provided for the first book would have spilled out of its pages, and we had to make careful selections to keep the book from becoming “too much of a good thing.” But we never forgot how many medical maladies and Hollywood twists of fate there were lying on the cutting room floor. It just seemed natural that Varla should write *Beyond Bizarre* with new chapters and even more unusual trivia and terrifying tales. It gives us great pleasure to think of her writing in the wee hours of the morning, her black cat curled up at her feet, the wind rattling the windows of her Victorian attic apartment. There is something of us in Varla, and we can see her terrifying generations to come—if by no other means than having such a keen eye for irony, wickedness, and the outright strange. We hope you enjoy *Beyond Bizarre* as much as we have.

Amber Guetebier and Rachel Leach  
Editors at Large  
Weiser Books



# CONTENTS



## **1. YO, HO AND UP SHE RISES: STORIES FROM THE SEA**

Shipwrecks, Ghost Ships, Sea Creatures, Pirates, and Ocean Lore

## **2. IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU HURL**

Crazy Carnivals, Fantastic Freak Shows, Haunted Amusement Parks, Scary Rides, and Creepy Clowns

## **3. HAUNTED HOLLYWOOD**

Ghostly Sets and Sightings, Celebrity Deaths and Superstitions, Strange Coincidences, and Harrowing Horror Film Facts

## **4. ON THE ROAD: TALES FROM HAUNTED HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS**

Ghostly Planes, Trains, and Automobiles

## **5. BLOOD-RED CROSSES AND GROSS ANATOMY: HOSPITAL HORRORS**

Bizarre Diseases and Maladies, Haunted Hospitals and Asylums, Evil Doctors, Strange Procedures, and Very Grave Robberies

## **6. MURDER, SHE WROTE**

True Crime, Gruesome Murders, and Unsolved Mysteries

## **7. BAG OF TRICKS**

Famous Magicians, Hoaxes, and Feats of Human Endurance

## **8. IT WAS TRUE THEN**

Weird Historical Events, Beliefs, and Practices

## **9. TALES FROM THE CRYPTIDS**

Mythological Beings, Freaky Creatures, and Cryptozoological Sightings

## **10. NATURALLY STRANGE**

Interesting Insects, Bizarre Plants, and Animal Oddities

## **11. BRIDE OF THE BIZARRE**

Wacky Weddings, Tragic Nuptials, Ritual Origins,  
and Odd Couples

## **12. THERE'S BLOOD IN THEM THAR HILLS!**

Ghost Towns, Lost Cemeteries, and More True Ghost Encounters

## **13. STRANGE AMERICA**

Creepy Collections, Odd Museums,  
and Americans Behaving Weirdly

**1. YO, HO AND UP SHE RISES:  
STORIES FROM THE SEA**

*SHIPWRECKS, GHOST SHIPS,  
SEA CREATURES, PIRATES, AND OCEAN LORE.*

The loud wind never reached the ship,  
Yet now the ship moved on!  
Beneath the lightning and the Moon  
The dead men gave a groan.

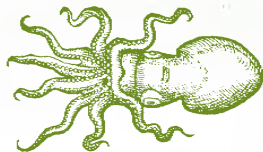
—SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE,

*THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER*



THE CREAKING PLANK OF A FOG-SOAKED WHARF, the shadow of a ghost ship slipping silently out of harbor, legends of tentacles that can pull down a merchant vessel—the ocean is as vast in stories and legends as it is in size. From the lobster pot soul cages that rattle with drowned men to the phosphorescent glimmer of the vampire squid’s false eyes, chilling tales and creepy creatures are part of the sea’s endless mysteries.

I have called a port town home for a number of years, and the sound of the foghorns reminds me that the murky waters still churn, still push their foggy fingers against the windowpanes, and still send out their siren songs and ghoulish stories from hilltop to deep crevasse. And so I welcome you, dear reader, to the monstrous and the mysterious, the dark and the stormy, the oozing and the beautiful, in this totally bizarre chapter.



## FANCY A SPOT OF MONSTER SPOTTING?

Members of Victorian England's middle class thought it fashionable to go "monster spotting," or trolling for sea creatures.

## THE DEVIL SEA CREATURE OF ORKNEY

The Orkney Islands, off the northern tip of Scotland, are said to be home to one of the nastiest sea creatures in history: the sea-trow. This monkey-faced, flat-footed, scaly beast terrified 18th- and 19th- century sailors and land dwellers alike. It was said to make frequent waddling visits ashore to visit—and haunt—the island townspeople. Courtesy of Orkneyjar ([orkneyjar.com](http://orkneyjar.com)), the Orkney folklore goes:

*The Fishers both in Orkney and Zetland are affraid when they see them, which panick fear of their's makes them think and sometimes say that it is the Devil in the shape of such Creatures, whether it be so or not as they apprehend, I cannot determine. However, it seems to be more than probable, that evil spirits frequent both Sea and Land.*



## —> CEPHALOPOD HEAVEN <—

- The octopus is considered the most intelligent of all invertebrates. It has both short- and long-term memory, and has been observed using tools, like coconut shells, for shelter.
- When an octopus gets stressed out, it may eat its own legs—though some say this tendency is caused by a virus that is exacerbated by stress.
- The largest giant Pacific octopus (*Octopus dofleini*) ever caught weighed in at 600 pounds!
- The octopus has no bones. The only hardened part of its body is its beak, which is made of the same type of material as human fingernails.
- Octopus blood is light blue.
- “*Cephalopod*” means “head to foot”; in other words, the creature’s legs are attached to its head.
- Octopuses are able to change both their skin color *and* skin texture to camouflage themselves and thus fool predators.
- Early seafarers called the octopus the “devil-fish” because of its frightful appearance.
- The sting of the blue-ringed octopus (*Hapalochlaena maculosa*) causes paralysis and even death.

Flotsam: Goods that float after being thrown overboard at sea or in case of shipwreck. Jetsam or jettison: Castaway goods that sink.

A giant squid caught in 1878 weighed more than 4,000 lbs and had thirty-five-foot-long tentacles.

The smallest crustacean in the world is the aptly named pea crab, which measures about 2.5 inches. The largest crustacean is the giant spider crab, whose body can grow between 12 and 14 inches across, with a claw span of 7.8 to 8.8 feet!

The oldest living sea anemone was 80 years old, and the oldest clam, 200 years.

The term “fathom” is an old nautical word used to measure the depth of the water. One fathom is six feet, a measurement based on the length from a sailor’s fingertip to fingertip when his arms were outstretched.



## SEMBLANCE OF A SAILOR

The U.S. frigate *Constellation* creaks and groans on its moorings in the Baltimore harbor. But visitors to this historic ship, built in 1797 and used as the first man-of-war in the U.S. naval fleet, have heard and seen more than just seagulls and the sound of gentle waves. The ghost of an old sailor named Neil Harvey, in the garb of yesteryear, appears to visitors. The ghosts of Captain Thomas Truxtun and an unnamed watchman who fell asleep on duty and was executed, reputedly by being strapped to a ship's gun and blown to smithereens, are said to also haunt this ship.



## TOUGH AS NAILS

The phrase “I’ll nail you for that” comes from a rather gruesome punishment for crimes committed at sea. The accused would be nailed to the ship’s mast by his earlobes and left until nightfall.

## SWEET, SWEET JANE

Blackbeard the pirate was captured on board his ship, *Jane*, by Lieutenant Robert Maynard. Maynard cut off Blackbeard's head with a cutlass and then threw the corpse overboard. Legend has it that the corpse swam around the ship three times before sinking into the watery depths below. Blackbeard's head was tied to the bow of the *Jane*.

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Around a cape he once would sail,  
And thus it was that he did hail:  
"I'll sail, I'll sail, I'll sail  
evermore!"  
Huzza! Satan, he heard him hail!  
ho! heigho!  
Huzza! Satan took him by his word!  
ho! heigho!  
Huzza! And damned he! His ship,  
she leaps from wave to wave forever,  
evermore!"



—RICHARD WAGNER, *THE FLYING DUTCHMAN*

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## THE WICKEDEST CITY

During the golden age of piracy, many a port town played host to the debauchery and dubious delights of sailing types. But one city in particular, Port Royal in Jamaica, was known as the “richest and wickedest city in the world.” Perhaps called so because of its extensive selection of taverns, brothels, and various illegal or illicit activities, Port Royal is now a premier destination for tourists.



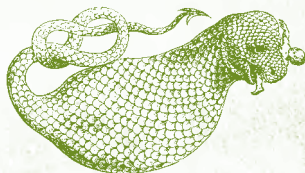
And, sick of prey,  
yet howling on for more,  
Vomitest they wrecks  
on its inhospitable shore!  
Tracherous in calm,  
and terrible in storm,  
Who shall put forth on thee,  
Unfathomable sea?

—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, “UNFATHOMABLE SEA”



## SEA CREATURES ON PARADE

- Ever wonder how clownfish can tolerate living among stinging sea anemones? Their entire bodies are slathered with a layer of mucus that insulates their bodies against big stings.
- The goblin shark got its name from the shape of its nose. The shark's long, trowel-shaped snout protrudes from the head like a sword, giving the shark a kind of mutated hammerhead look.
- The scorpion fish has a tricky way of catching its prey. Its dorsal fin, on the top of its back, is shaped like a smaller fish, which lures medium-size fish right into its jaws.
- The mighty oarfish, which can grow to lengths of 56 feet, is one of the longest fish in the ocean. Its snake-like appearance and prominent dorsal fin might account for early sailors' sea serpent myths.
- The orange sea pen got its name because it resembles—uncannily so—an old-fashioned quill pen. These soft corals can grow to be 5 feet tall.





## DEADBEAT FISH

The male deep-sea anglerfish definitely doesn't wear the pants in his relationship. Significantly smaller than his female counterpart, the male permanently attaches himself to his mate's abdomen, living as a parasite for the rest of his life.

## DEEP-SEA DRACULA

The *Vampyroteuthis infernalis*, a name that literally translates as the "vampire squid from hell," is a big name for a benign little creature. The 15-centimeter (6-inch) squid lives in an oxygen-minimum zone 600 to 900 meters (656 to 984 yards) deep, a depth that fosters the spookiest of sea creatures. But this squid is equipped with neat biological adaptations to help it thrive down there: its blue blood is oxygen rich, pulsing through the small body faster than the normal red kind, and the squid's muscles are weak, which preserves energy. But by far the vampire squid's coolest ability is to disorient potential predators with flashes of light; its body is almost completely covered with light-producing organs called photophores.

## THE MIGHTY KRAKEN

Norse seamen of the 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries called their sea monsters kraken. Over time, the creatures were variously described as gargantuan, tentacled, and squid- or crablike, but by the eighteenth century, they were mostly known as malevolent, octopuslike monsters. Kraken were capable of felling large ships, especially with the whirlpool effect their island-sized bodies created when they quickly descended back into the ocean.

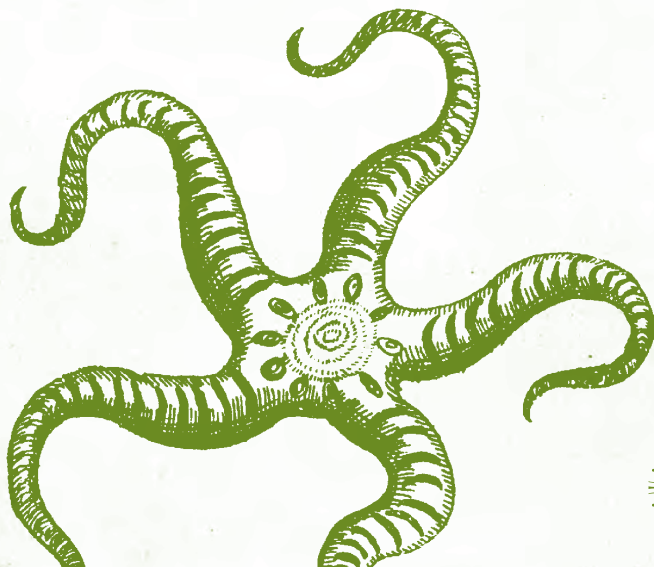
Kraken were also known to create excellent fishing conditions for fishermen; it was said that they spent three months eating and three months digesting their meals, and for this period of time, they stayed dormant at the bottom of the ocean. For snacks, the kraken fed on a fish entourage that stayed with them to feed off their monstrous excrement.

But when kraken elected to travel to the sea surface, all hell broke loose, as Swede Jacob Wallenberg wrote in 1781: "Gradually, Kraken ascends to the surface, and when he is at ten to twelve fathoms, the boats had better move out of his vicinity, as he will shortly thereafter burst up, like a floating island, spurting water from his dreadful nostrils and making ring waves around him,



which can reach many miles. Could one doubt that this is the Leviathan of Job?"

The legend of kraken has been immortalized in literature, film, and song over hundreds of years. Tennyson wrote a poem called "The Kraken," and it is said that Jules Verne drew heavily on kraken imagery in imagining the squid lair in his *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*. The kraken makes an appearance in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* series, and there is a kraken supervillain in Marvel comics. The kraken is portrayed as a horrendous sea creature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie series, and is a noted character in the *Final Fantasy* video games series. Finally, at SeaWorld Orlando, there is a rollercoaster called the Kraken—a truly terrifying ride!



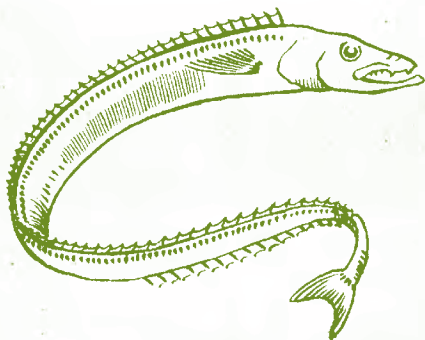
## THE ARCTIC APPARITION

On October 1, 1931, the cargo steamer *Baychimo*, returning from its trade journey to the Canadian coastline, became immovably stuck in a block of pack ice off the coast of Alaska. Its crew abandoned the ship and traveled several miles over the ice to seek shelter in nearby Barrow, but they returned several days later when the ship was shaken free from the ice. Alas, just seven days later, it became mired again, and most of its crew were rescued via aircraft. Others stayed behind, resolved to wait out the winter, so devoted were they to the *Baychimo*. But all traces of the barge were lost following a treacherous November blizzard. The crewmen assumed it had sunk, but after an Inuit trader told them he'd seen it floating some 45 miles from where they camped, they found the ship, unloaded their valuables, and left.

Over the next 30 years, there were many sightings, and even a couple boardings, of the crewless and empty *Baychimo*. It was seen floating in a 100-mile radius of where it had first been trapped, and remained intact despite stormy and frigid weather. In 2006, the Alaskan government opened an investigation into the fate of the ship, which is now presumed to have sunk.



The largest U.S. naval ship ever to disappear without a trace was the USS *Cyclops*, a 19,360-ton collier. In March 1918, on a return voyage from Brazil, the ship and all its hands vanished, and the wreckage was never recovered.



## HARMFUL UNDER THE SEA

Of the more than 3,700 World War II shipwrecks still at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, many contain the remnants of toxic cargo, such as oil, diesel, gasoline, and chemicals. These harmful pollutants have the potential to wipe out ecosystems and spoil beaches, and, in doing so, influence the economies of the affected countries.



## THE PRACTICALITIES OF PIRACY

- Pirates didn't wear gold hoop earrings for fashion—they did so to ensure they could afford a proper burial.
- Pirates sustained themselves through months on the high seas by imbibing alcohol—lots of it. Alcohol was safer to drink than the “fresh” water the ships carried, which often carried illnesses and grew slimy from months in wooden barrels. A favorite alcohol was rum, which was also called “grog,” “the pirates’ drink,” “kill-devil,” “demon water,” and “Barbados water.”
- Most of the treasure captured by pirates didn't last long enough to get buried. It was spent on gambling, women, and alcohol.





## U.S. NAVY: IN LEAGUE WITH SEA MONSTERS?

In the summer of 1997, underwater microphones placed in the ocean by the U.S. Navy detected an ultra low-frequency sound whose source has remained a mystery. The sound, which became known as the Bloop, was detected several times over a range of 5,000 kilometers. Scientists say the Bloop matches the sound profile of a living creature, but they have yet to identify which one. The Bloop is too big and powerful to have been made by a whale. In fact, scientists don't know of any animal on earth that could have made the sound—unless it's an animal that hasn't been discovered yet. Maybe a kraken?

## DOIN' IT FOR THE FAMILY

Pirates used nicknames so that government officials couldn't persecute their relatives on land.

## ROCK OPERA

Many people have heard the story of the *Flying Dutchman*, the ship captained by a man who was condemned to sail the seas for eternity. But few know of his curser,

the aquatic demon queen Rockalda. She is portrayed as the evil spirit of the deep in a 19<sup>th</sup> century opera about the *Dutchman*. In the opera, the wicked Rockalda only lets the wretched captain ashore on the condition that he promises to periodically sacrifice a maiden at sea.



## THE LIONESS OF BRITTANY

The year was 1343, and Lady Jeanne de Belleville was living peacefully with her husband and two sons in the countryside of Brittany. As they often were, the Bretons were at war with the French and the British—who were also at war with each other—and there was tension in the air. Lady Jeanne's husband was accused of siding with the British, and he was he hastily imprisoned and

executed by the French. Distraught, Lady Jeanne sought revenge for her husband's death. She sold all of her assets, which were many, and used the cash to purchase a fleet of three ships with which to terrorize the French navy. Her ships cruised the coast of Normandy, seizing French ships and killing their crews. Dubbed the Lioness of Brittany for the merciless terror she wrought on all things French, Lady de Belleville was one of the best-known female pirates to sail the open seas.


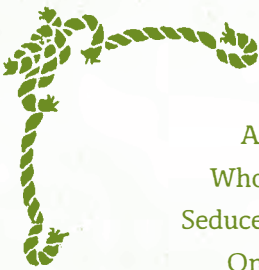
## PIRATE SOUL MUSEUM

According to its website, the Pirate Soul Museum, located in Florida, is "the largest and most authentic collection of pirate artifacts under one roof." It boasts the 1699 journal from Captain Kidd's last voyage, an authentic treasure chest, and real pirate flags, among other pirate gems.

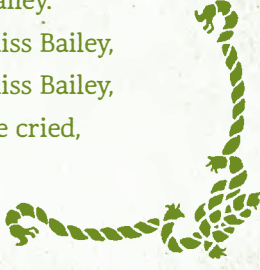

## BURIAL AT SEA

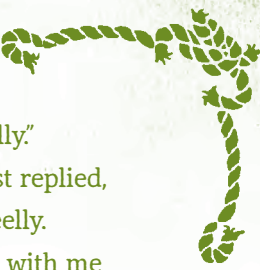
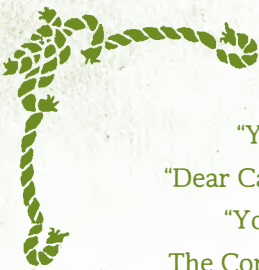


A company in Sarasota, Florida, offers a unique underwater service: the opportunity to be buried at sea. Eternal Reefs will take your ashes and incorporate them into a coral reef off the coast of Florida.



A Captain bold in Halifax,  
Who dwelt in country quarters,  
Seduced a maid who hanged herself  
One morning in her garters,  
His wicked conscience smited him,  
He lost his stomach daily,  
He took to drinking turpentine  
And thought upon Miss Bailey.  
Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,  
Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,  
One night, betimes he went to bed,  
For he had caught a fever,  
Said he, "I am a handsome man  
And I'm a gay deceiver."  
His candle just at twelve o'clock  
Began to burn quite palely,  
A ghost stepped up to his bedside  
And said, "Behold! Miss Bailey."  
Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,  
Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,  
"Avaunt, Miss Bailey," then he cried,





“You can’t fright me really,”  
“Dear Captain Smith,” the ghost replied,  
“You’ve used me ungentleely.  
The Coroner’s quest was hard with me  
Because I’ve acted frailly,  
And parson Biggs won’t bury me  
Though I’m a dead Miss Bailey.”

Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,  
Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,

“Dear Ma’am,” said he, “since you and I  
Accounts must once for all close,  
I have a one pound note in my  
Regimental small clothes.

“Twill bribe the Sexton for your grave.”

The ghost then vanished gaily,  
Crying, “Bless you wicked Captain Smith,  
Remember poor Miss Bailey.”

Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,  
Oh, Miss Bailey, unfortunate Miss Bailey,

—TRADITIONAL SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SEA SONG,  
GEORGE COLMAN

