
Monsters are Everywhere...Live Science

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By Robert Roy Britt

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Monsters are everywhere these days, and belief in them is as strong as ever. What's harder to believe is why so many people buy into hazy evidence, shady schemes and downright false reports that perpetuate myths that often have just one ultimate truth: They put money in the pockets of their purveyors.

The bottom line, according to several interviews with people who study these things: People want to believe, and most simply can't help it.

"Many people quite simply just want to believe," said Brian Cronk, a professor of psychology at Missouri Western State University. "The human brain is always trying to determine why things happen, and when the reason is not clear, we tend to make up some pretty bizarre explanations. "

A related question: Does belief in the paranormal have anything to do with religious belief?

The answer to that question is decidedly nuanced, but studies point to an interesting conclusion: People who practice religion are typically encouraged not to believe in the paranormal, but rather to put their faith in one deity, whereas those who aren't particularly active in religion are more free to believe in Bigfoot or consult a psychic.

"Christians and New Agers, paranormalists, etc. all have one thing in common: a spiritual orientation to the world," said sociology Professor Carson Mencken of Baylor University.

A tale last week by three men who said they have remains of Bigfoot in a freezer was reported by many Web sites as anywhere from final proof of the creature to at least a very compelling case to keep the fantasy ball rolling and cash registers ringing for Bigfoot trinkets and tourism (all three men involved make money off the belief in this creature). Even mainstream media treated a Friday press conference about the "finding" as news.

Reactions by the public ranged from skeptical curiosity to blind faith.

"I believe they do exist but I'm not sure about this," said one reader reacting to a story on LiveScience that cast doubt the claim. "I guess we will find out ... if this is on the up and up," wrote another. "However, that said, I know they exist."

A subsequent test on the supposed Bigfoot found nothing but the DNA of humans and an opossum, a small, cat-like creature.

Also last week, in Texas there was yet another sensational yet debunkable sighting of chupacabra, a beast of Latin-American folklore. The name means "goat sucker." In this case, law enforcement bought into the hoey with an apparent wink and nod.

Ellie Carter, a patrol trainee with the DeWitt County sheriff's office, saw the beast and was, of course, widely quoted. "It was this — thing, looking right at us," she said. "I think that's a chupacabra!" After watching a video of the beast taken by a sheriff's deputy, biologist Scott Henke of Texas A&M University said, "It's a dog for sure," according to a story on Scientific American's Web site.

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