

## **Chapter 1 – Natural Selection: Animal Misadventures.**

Playing With Cats (26).

2 January 1996, INDIA.

One man was killed at the Calcutta Zoo, and another mauled, when the pair crossed a moat circling a tiger enclosure to put garland of flowers around the big cat's neck. The attack triggered panic and a near stampede in the zoo.

Prakesh and Suresh, devotees of the goddess Durga, were drinking when they decided to worship the tiger with their innovative adaptation of a religious New Year's greeting. Shiva, a thirteen-year-old Royal Bengal tiger, was not in favor of the plan. He attacked Suresh when the man tossed floral tribute around his neck. Alarmed, Prakesh kicked the tiger in the face to distract him. The tiger obligingly released Suresh and killed Prakesh instead.

"I was shocked to see two young men weaving about in front of a tiger with garlands in their hands," said witness Rakesh Banerjee. "I saw it all. The tiger turned and jumped on the young man, and within moments, the man's head was dangling."

Smarter Animals (36).

16 August 1999, GERMANY.

A hunter from Bad Urach was shot dead by his own dog after he left it with a loaded gun. The fifty-one-year-old man was found sprawled next to his car in the Black Forest. A gun barrel was pointing out of the window, and his bereaved dog was howling inside the car. The animal is presumed to have pressed the trigger with its paw, and police have ruled out foul play. Since it happened in a hunting preserve, the dog may elect to have the trophy head mounted on a wall in its doghouse.

1991, Nicosia, CYPRESS.

Under similar circumstances, an Iranian hunter named Ali was shot to death near Tehran by a snake that coiled around his shotgun as he pinned the reptile to the ground. Another hunter reported that the victim tried to catch the snake alive by pressing the butt of his gun behind its head. The snake coiled around the butt and pulled the trigger, shooting Ali in the head.

Running of the Bulls (37).

14 May 2000, FRANCE.

A Berlin woman attempting to capture a memorable photo of the running of the bulls in the southern town of Nimes paid for her stupidity with her life. The sixty-eight-year-old photographer removed a metal safety barricade and walked into the middle of the street, camera to her eye, searching for the best camera angle. She was knocked over by a horse whose startled rider could not stop in time, then trampled by the horse and six rampaging bulls before being rescued from the street. She was flown to a nearby hospital, where she died from her injuries.

Nine Times a Loser (41).

October 1998, AUSTRALIA.

A bloke named Gordon who, by amusing coincidence, hails from Darwin, Australia,

lost his arm, the use of his legs, and was revived three times on the operating table after an encounter with a king brown snake, the twenty-first most deadly venomous snake in the world. Gordon said, "I still can't believe my arm's been chopped off just for one snake."

Perhaps nine snakes that each bit him once would be more easily believed than the one snake that bit him nine times.

Gordon, who has admitted he was drunk at the time, had been driving with a friend from Mandorah to Darwin when they saw the snake. He picked it up with his left hand "because I was holding a beer in my right one." The snake bit the web of his hand, but Gordon managed to withstand the pain and put it in a plastic bag. He threw the bag in the back of the car.

Once again quoting Gordon, "For some stupid reason, I stuck my hand back in the bag, and it must have smelled blood, it bit me another eight times." They drove him to a nearby hotel, where Gordon was taken by ambulance to the hospital. His friend tried to keep him conscious by, as Gordon said, Whacking me in the head and pouring beer on me."

Despite his friend's quick action, doctors have said that it will take a long time and a lot of rehabilitation before Gordon regains full muscle control. When he does, we anticipate another Darwin Award attempt.

## **Chapter 2 – Relatively Dangerous: A Family Affair.**

Wife Tossing in Buenos Aires (56).  
February 1998, BUENOS AIRES.

Did he win the argument? During a heated marital dispute in a working-class Boedo neighborhood, a twenty-five-year-old man picked up his twenty-year-old wife and threw her off the eight-floor apartment balcony.

To his dismay she became tangled in the power lines below. He immediately leapt from the balcony and fell toward his wife. We can only speculate as to his reasons. Was he angrily trying to finish the job, or remorsefully hoping to rescue her? He did not accomplish either goal. He missed the power lines completely, and plunged to his death.

The woman managed to swing over to a nearby balcony and was saved.

Count Your Chickens (57).  
31 August 1995, EGYPT.

Six people drowned while trying to rescue a chicken that had fallen into a well in southern Egypt. An eighteen-year-old farmer was the first to descent into the sixty-foot well. He drowned, apparently after an undercurrent in the water pulled him down. Police said his sister and two brothers, none of whom could swim well, went down the well one by one to help him, but also drowned. Two elderly farmers then came by to help. But they were apparently pulled under by the same undercurrent. The bodies of the six were eventually extricated from the well in the village of Nazlat Imara, 240 miles south of Cairo.

The chicken was also pulled out. It survived.

## **Chapter 3 - "I Fought the Law ...": Stupid Criminal Tricks.**

Jumping Jack Cash (77).  
March 2000, ARIZONA.

The Grand Canyon is cordoned off by a fence around the more treacherous

overlooks, to prevent unsteady sightseers from tottering to their deaths. Some of these overlooks have small towering plateaus a short distance from the fence. Tourists toss coins onto the plateaus like dry wishing wells. Quite a few coins pile up on the surfaces, while others fall to the valley floor far below.

One entrepreneur climbed over the fence with a bag, and leapt to one of the precarious, coin-covered perches. He filled the bag with booty, then tried to leap back to the fence with the coins. But the heavy bag arrested his jump, and several tourists were treated to a view of his plunge to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. He did not survive to harvest the piles of coins that had suffered his same fate.

Dum Dum Boutique (81).

10 April 1999, NEW YORK.

Perhaps, as people get older, some really should retire from their careers. Or so it would seem for one fifty-five-year-old burglar. Terrence found new meaning in the term *hanging around late at the bar* when he failed to return home one night. It turned out that he had been breaking and entering through the rooftop window of a shop called the Dum Dum Boutique – the catchy name of a clothing shop – by bending back bars on the window. From this vantage point he made a bold move, and jumped into the store through the gap. Unfortunately, his sweater balked at the sight of all that fashion and refused to join him. It caught on one of the bent bars and strangled him to death. He was found hoist by his own petard the next morning.

Scrap Metal Thieves (82).

31 July 1997.

Two teens were disassembling an electric tower with wrenches when it toppled to the ground. They apparently wanted to sell its aluminum supports for scraps, but they failed to realize the essential role the aptly named “support” plays in a 160-foot tower. One of the men was crushed by the collapse of the ten-thousand-pound tower, while the other dug himself out from under, a sadder but wiser man from his close brush with a Darwin Award.

Wrong Time, Wrong Place (83).

3 February 1990, WASHINGTON.

A man tried to commit a robbery in Renton, Washington. It was probably his first attempt at armed robbery, as suggested by the fact that he had no previous record of violent crime, and by his terminally stupid choices:

1. The target was H & J Leather and Firearms. A gun shop.
2. The shop was full of customers – firearms customers – in a U.S. State where a substantial portion of the adult population is licensed to carry concealed handguns in public places.
3. To enter the shop, he had to step around a marked police patrol car parked at the front door.
4. An officer in uniform was standing next to the counter, having coffee before reporting to duty.

Upon seeing the officer, the would-be robber announced a holdup and fired a few wild shots. The officer and a clerk promptly returned fire, covered by several customers who also drew their guns, thereby removing the confused criminal from the gene pool. No one else was hurt.

Armed and Dangerous (89).

20 March 2000, GERMANY.

When the masked man stormed into the Volksbank in Niedersachsen and demanded money, the teller complied. Like a child demanding candy, the robber held his bag open with both hands and waited for the cash. Now, any fool knows you can't hold a heavy bag of money and a gun at the same time, so he put the weapon on the counter for a moment. The teller seized his chance and seized the gun, and suddenly the tables were turned. The confused robber raised his arm and, forgetting that his gun was gone, menaced the teller with his index finger. When the robber realized that his situation was not as strong as he had anticipated he fled the bank on an old bike with pink protection sheet metal. The police are hunting for the man, but they have to take care. He is armed – with his forefinger.

Poor Sense of Direction (90).

3 December 1997, CONNECTICUT.

Maurice found himself in custody for making a dreadfully wrong turn, trapping himself in the lobby of a prison as he was fleeing authorities. The confused perp was leading police on a car chase from Suffield and Windsor Locks, when he abruptly pulled into the parking lot of the MacDougal Correctional Institution, a high-security state prison located in Suffield. Maurice leapt from his car and sped into the front lobby, where he was trapped by automatic doors that closed and locked behind him. Police say he apparently thought the building was a shopping mall.

Official Drug Test (98).

1997, CANADA.

A woman called the police with a complaint that she had been burned in a drug deal. She declared that a man had sold her a rock of crack cocaine, but when she brought it home, it “looked like baking powder.” The police dispatched a narcotics agent to her house, who tested the rock and verified that, despite its appearance, it was indeed cocaine. The woman was promptly arrested for drug possession. The RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) are encouraging anyone who thinks they may have been fooled into buying fake drugs to come forward.

## **Chapter 4 - Up In Smoke: Fire and Explosions.**

Living on Zionist Time (106).

The switch away from daylight savings time caused consternation among terrorist groups in 1999.

At precisely 5:30 PM Israel Standard Time, two coordinated car bombs exploded in different cities, killing three terrorists who were transporting the bombs. It was initially believed that the devices had been detonated prematurely by klutzy amateurs. A closer look revealed the sardonic truth behind the untimely explosions.

Three days before, Israel had made a premature switch from Daylight Savings Time to Standard Time in order to accommodate a week of Slihot, involving presunrise prayers. Palestinians refused to “live on Zionist time” and kept their clocks on Daylight Savings Time. Two weeks of scheduling havoc ensued.

The bombs were prepared during this unsettled period. They were armed in a Palestine-controlled area, and set on Daylight Savings Time. The confused drivers, however, had already switched to Standard Time. As a result, the cars were still en route when the explosives detonated, delivering the terrorists to their well-deserved demise.

Firefighters Ignite (107)!

26 June 1999, TENNESSEE.

Seven firefighters from the Sequoyah Volunteer Fire Department, located in rural Hamilton County north of Chattanooga, decided to impress their chief by surreptitiously setting fire to a house, then heroically extinguishing the blaze. The men allegedly hatched the plan in order to help Daniel, a former firefighter, return to duty.

Unfortunately, Daniel's career plans were irreversibly snuffed when he became trapped while pouring gasoline inside the house. Surrounded by smoke and flames, he was unable to escape, and died inside the burning house.

A reader notes, "What makes me feel this is a genuine candidate is that not only did he kill himself with an act of stupidity, but he is also no longer able to protect other would-be pyromaniacs from Darwin Awards. Had he been successful in his attempt to regain his position, he might have had a ripple effect in the gene pool."

Cigarette Lighter Triggers Fatal Explosion (115).

4 December 1996, INDIANA.

A Jay County man using a cigarette lighter to check the barrel of a muzzle-loaded was killed when the weapon discharged in his face, sheriff's investigators said. Gregory, nineteen, died in his parents' rural Dunkirk home about 11:30 PM.

Investigators said Gregory was cleaning a .54-caliber muzzle-loader that had not been firing properly. He was using the lighter to look into the barrel when the gunpowder ignited.

## **Chapter 5 - Leaps of Faith: Fatal Falls.**

Lawyer Aloft (140).

1996, TORONTO.

Police said a lawyer demonstrating the safety of windows in a downtown Toronto skyscraper crashed through a pane of glass with his shoulder and plunged twenty-four floors to his death. A police spokesman said Garry, thirty-nine, fell into the courtyard of the Toronto Dominion Bank Tower as he was explaining the strength of the building's windows to visiting law students. Garry had previously conducted the demonstration of window strength without mishap, according to police reports. The managing partner of the law firm that employed the deceased told the *Toronto Sun* newspaper that Garry was "one of the best and brightest" members of the two-hundred-man association.

## **Chapter 6 - Military Intelligence: Uninformed Men.**

5 Soldiers, 6 Police, 0 Brains (174).

Early 1970s, NORTH IRELAND.

An undercover military intelligence squad was patrolling a notorious Belfast area in plainclothes. After a long a perilous evening they emerged onto a York street and stopped for petrol and a few smokes. One of the soldiers asked the attendant if there was a pay phone, and the attendant pointed to the rear of the store.

As the soldier turned toward the phone, the attendant caught the flash of a concealed weapon. Alarmed and fearing a terrorist holdup, he vanished into the back room, where he phoned the local police station a hundred yards up the street. But instead of phoning the front desk, which knew about all military patrols in the area, he phoned a pal in the Criminal Investigation Department.

The CID was so excited by the thought of a good action going down, that they

failed to consult with the local police at the front desk. They drove out, mob handed, to rescue their friend from terrorists.

The soldiers were just preparing to leave the petrol station when a car screamed to a halt across the street and disgorged six plainclothes policemen brandishing an assortment of weapons. Believing they were under attack by terrorists, the soldier5s drew their own weapons, dived behind their vehicle, and opened fire. The police returned fire in earnest. For good measure an off-duty officer around the corner drew his weapon and fired four shots into the air.

The exchange lasted many minutes before a lone voice sounded, "Stop! Police."

Another voice shouted back, "Cease fire! Army."

Over one hundred rounds were fired across the busy intersection during the exchange. Not a single person was hurt, and the story was kept from the media to protect the identities of the "intelligence" officers involved.

## **Chapter 7 - Testosterone Poisoning: Macho Men.**

Fatal Footsie (186).

22 March 1999, PHNOM PENH.

Decades of armed strife have littered Cambodia with unexploded munition and ordnance. Authorities regularly issue warnings to citizens, reminding them not to tamper with the devices.

Three friends recently spent an evening sharing drinks and exchanging insults at a local cafe in the southeastern province of Svay Rieng. Their companionable bickering continued for hours, until one man pulled out a twenty-five-year-old unexploded antitank mine that he had found in his backyard.

He tossed it under the table, and the three men began playing Russian roulette, each tossing down a drink and then stamping on the land mine. The other villagers, recognizing the inevitable, fled in terror. Minutes later their fears were confirmed when the explosive detonated with a tremendous boom, killing the three men in the bar.

"Their wives could not even find their flesh because the blast destroyed everything," the *Rasmei Kampuchea* newspaper reported.

Gun Safety Training (192).

28 February 2000, TEXAS.

A Houston man earned a succinct lesson in gun safety when he played Russian roulette with a .45-caliber semiautomatic pistol. Rashaad, nineteen, was visiting friends when he announced his intention to play the deadly game. He apparently did not realize that a semiautomatic pistol, unlike a revolver, automatically inserts a cartridge into the firing chamber when the gun is cocked. His chance of winning a round of Russian roulette was zero, as he quickly discovered.

## **Chapter 8 - Dangerous Liaisons: Unsafe Sex.**

Sex and Suffocation (217).

21 March 1999, BUCHAREST.

Romanian soccer midfielder Mario, twenty-four, and his friend Mirela couldn't wait to make love. As soon as their car was parked, they consummated their passion. They died from carbon monoxide poisoning shortly thereafter, inside the vehicle they had left running in the garage during their hastily liaison. The couple was discovered by Mario's father the following day. "They appeared to be unaware of the dangers of carbon

monoxide," police colonel Dimitru Secrieru said.

9 May 1999, MEXICO.

A young Mexican couple was found dead in the back of a hearse. Jose, twenty-three, employed by the Perez Diaz funeral home in Campeche, met Ana Maria for a romantic tryst in his hearse. He parked in a warehouse and left the engine running to provide air conditioning. In the enclosed location the carbon-monoxide exhaust fumes seeped into the vehicle, fatally poisoning the couple. Their bodies were found when Ana Maria's mother initiated a search for her missing daughter.

## **Chapter 9 - Davey Jones' Locker: Watery Demise.**

Gone Fishin' (233).

25 May 1999, UKRAINE.

A fisherman in Kiev electrocuted himself while fishing in the River Tereblya. The forty-three-year-old man connected cables to the mail power supply of his home, and trailed the end into the river, producing an electric shock that killed the fish, which floated belly-up to the top of the water. The man had clearly demonstrated his understanding of the deadly effect of electricity, yet at the sight of all that tasty fish, he waded in to collect his catch without removing the live wire. The predictable result: He suffered the same fate as the fish.

Yosemite Hike (239).

10 July 1999, CALIFORNIA.

A Yosemite hiker with sore feet stopped to cool his heels in the Merced River, where he slipped on algae-covered rocks and was swept over a 594-foot waterfall to his death. Siddiq was climbing Half Dome with three friends on Saturday when his lamentable choice of rest stops cost him his life.

Signs posted at the falls clearly state that if you go in the water, you will die. Not only are these warning displayed in several languages, but they even show a stick figure falling over the edge.

But Siddiq paid no heed to the warnings. As he was carried over the Nevada Falls, his friends were already calling authorities for help from their cell phones. But help could not arrive in time. Rangers recovered Siddiq's body by helicopter a few hours later.

Siddiq is the fourth person to die at Nevada Falls in the last five years, park spokeswoman Christine Cowles said.

Wet Will He (240).

23 August 1999, WASHINGTON.

Rodney was jet skiing around Lake Washington, enjoying the sun and the power between his knees. After a few funs on the lake, he noticed that his battery was beginning to fail. He idled over to docked near Juanita Beach Park and tied up his craft and ran to the car for his battery charger. When he returned, he plugged the charger into a 110-volt outlet and jumped onto his watercraft holding the booster cable.

Sizzle. He was found floating facedown beneath the dock later that evening.

## **Chapter 10 - Man's Favorite Toy: Penis Envy.**

*"Stupidity cannot be cured. Stupidity is the only universal capital crime, the sentence is death. There is no appeal, and execution is carried out automatically and without pity." A*

*pronouncement by Lazarus Long in Robert Heinlein's Time Enough for Love.*

Zany New Zealand Contest (256).

7 June 1999, New Zealand.

A computer technician trainee set his own penis aflame in a successful attempt to win \$NZ500 cash (about \$250) and an equivalent bar tab.

Thomas stapled his penis to a white crucifix, poured cigarette lighter fluid over it, and set it on fire in his bid to win a controversial "How Far Will You Go?" promotion for Trader McKendry's Tavern in Christchurch. The event, sponsored by New Zealand Breweries, encourages patrons to compete for the most lewd act.

Thomas walked away with the top prize, which he used for car registration, a warrant of fitness, and registration for his bloodhound Puss. He obtained free medical treatment for his bruised and burned penis at a student clinic. He says his member "was a wee bit tender the next day," but after two weeks he is almost fully recovered, and expresses no regrets about his actions.

Thomas claims he is no masochist. "I'm a student so every bit helps. It was worth the money, and it's all better now. I thought my act was unbeatable." He intends to use the bar tab to buy burgers and pies every day for lunch.

Thomas' mother, who was in the audience, was pleased with her son's success. "He is a grown man and I'm relieved that he won. I would have hated for someone to go through all that and not achieve the object of it all."

Mr. Happy's Vacuum (258).

13 May 1998, NEW JERSEY.

There's apparently not much to occupy residents of Long Branch during the warm May evenings. A fifty-one-year-old man decided to satisfy his fantasy of robotic love by seeking sexual gratification with his vacuum cleaner. Most men would think twice before poking a valuable organ into a vacuum, but this optimistic fellow had no safety qualms, and besides, using a vacuum cleaner had the appealing aspect of tidy up his mess afterwards.

Our horny hero didn't realize that the suction on his handheld Singer A-6 was created by a blade whirling just beneath the hose attachment, adjacent to the collection bag. His search for pleasure was cut short seconds after he suck his penis into the vacuum and the blade lopped off part of his glans. With a sense of loss he staggered to the phone and called police. He told them he had been stabbed in his sleep.

When police pointed out suspicious evidence, the victim claimed not to remember the incident.

Surgeons at Monmouth Medical Center stopped the bleeding, but were unable to reattach the half-inch severed part. Though the man is still alive, his ability to reproduce has been curtailed by both his injury and his proclivity for household appliances.

Priapism Takes a Penis (260).

June 1988, NEW YORK.

Doctors warn of a dangerous new method of cocaine abuse: injecting the drug directly into the urinary tract. Physicians from the Cornell Medical Center reported the case of a thirty-four-year-old man who suffered severe bleeding under the skin after pumping cocaine into his urethra. It led to complications that destroyed his penis, nine fingers, and parts of his legs.

"They fill an eye dropper of a syringe with a cocaine solution and inject it into the penis," said Dr. Samuel Perry, a professor of clinical psychiatry.



The man had injected cocaine before intercourse in an effort to enhance sexual performance. He was admitted to the hospital because his penis had remained erect for three days, resulting in a painful inability to urinate. The medical term for a prolonged erection is *priapism*.

On his third day in the hospital the man's erection suddenly subsided. Over the next twelve hours blood leaked into the tissues of his feet, hands, genitals, back, and chest. The blood then coagulated, causing tissue to die over large areas of the patient's body. He was transferred to the burn unit of New York Hospital.

Doctors there were forced to amputate the man's legs and all but one finger, to stop the spread of gangrene. The patient's penis fell off by itself. The man is currently recovering in a rehabilitation facility.

Drug abuse treatment experts have previously reported external use of cocaine as a sexual stimulant. Cocaine powder is rubbed onto the surface of the genital organs by both men and women in an effort to halt premature ejaculation or improve sexual sensations. Men who inject cocaine into the penis claim that it gives them a sexual high.

"We report this case to alert clinicians to this new method of cocaine abuse and to describe its rare and previously unreported complications," the doctors concluded.

## **Chapter 11 - Foolish Ingenuity: End of the Line (277).**

Sickle Cell anemia is caused by a mutation of the molecule that carries oxygen in our bloodstream. Sickle Cell hemoglobin has an abnormal sticky patch. If a child inherits Sickle Cell from both parents, all his hemoglobin is sticky. Whenever his blood is short of oxygen, such as during strenuous exercise, the sticky patches adhere to one another, causing long chains of hemoglobin to form. The chains can stretch across the entire blood cell, distorting it into the "sickle" shape that gives the disease its name. These damaged cells are fragile, carry less oxygen, and clog blood vessels. Sickle Cell anemia is an unwelcome and painful disease.

Yet, the incidence of Sickle Cell anemia remains high in countries where malaria is prevalent. How can such a profound genetic disease remain in our gene pool? The answer is that it actually protects "carriers" from the effects of malaria. People who inherit Sickle Cell from only one parent, instead of two, are carriers who show few adverse symptoms, yet are less susceptible to the malaria parasite.

These people are protected because their blood cells only "sickle" when the oxygen level is extremely low. And it just so happens that a cell infected with malaria has an exceptionally low oxygen level, because the parasites use up the oxygen as they multiply. This means that only malaria-infected cells are damaged, and when the cell dies, so does the malaria it was hosting.

Breatharianism (289).

22 September 1999, SCOTLAND.

A Scottish follower of "breatharianism" demonstrated a comprehensive misunderstanding of biology when she died during an attempt to "Live with Light" in the Scottish Highlands. Verity, forty-eight, left behind a diary with references to a self-styled guru. Jasmuheen, an Australian formerly known as Ellen Greve, boasts five thousand followers worldwide, though she does not disclose whether they are always the same followers.

Verity's diary reveals that she was attempting to adhere to the twenty-one-day spiritual cleansing course wherein followers eschew all food and drink for seven days, and then take only sips of water for a further fourteen days. They endeavor to master

"panic feeding" on the carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen found in the air. After that, Jasmuheen says that adherents to "breatharianism" need never eat or drink again, which she notes is the perfect cure for anorexia and world hunger.

Sufferers from anorexia and world hunger have already attempted this course of action with known results. Nutritionists say the human body can survive without fluid for no more than six days. But such research did not deter this woman, who took to the wilds with only a tent and her determination. A police source revealed that she had died from hypothermia and dehydration, aggravated by lack of food.

Jasmuheen, whose dress size was not disclosed, claims to have survived on liquid air since 1993, although she also allows herself cups of herbal tea and chocolate biscuits. In response to questioning, the founder of the cults stated that the woman's death was not due to any physical need for food, rather, it was a failure to satisfy spiritual needs brought about by a battle with her own ego.

Lemmings in a Well (295).

20 May 1999, INDIA.

Five people suffocated, one after another, in a particularly absurd sequence of accidents at a village well in Talaskar. A diesel pump had been employed to drain the well, and carbon monoxide and other gases from the pump filled the well. Eventually the pump ran out of oxygen and stopped working.

A youth climbed into the well to investigate the machinery, and succumbed to the choking gases and lack of oxygen. When the youth failed to reappear, another man climbed into the well and suffocated. When the second man failed to reappear, a third person climbed into the well. And so on.

Diesel fumes are not known for their beneficial effects on the human constitution. Even poorly educated people can recognize that noxious air is harmful to life and lung. But nobody considered holding his breath while investigating the faulty pump or the mounting toll of missing men.

After five people entered the well, suffocated, and died, two last would-be rescuers managed to recognize the choking feeling and rushed out of the well before they, too, succumbed. They alerted police, and firemen were dispatched to the village to recover the bodies of the Darwin Award nominees.

Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow (296).

January 1999, ENGLAND.

Some people with nervous habits have good reason to be anxious. In January a British teenager was rushed to hospital complaining of severe stomach pains. Surgeons who operated in a desperate – but ultimately unsuccessful – attempt to save her life were amazed to find a tangled mass of human hair the size of a football lodged in her abdomen.

Rachel, a seventeen-year-old hairdresser trainee, had been in the habit of chewing the ends of her tresses since early childhood. Dr. Andrew Stearman, of Poole General Hospital, Dorset, said, "The biochemical composition of hair makes it impossible for digestive juices in the stomach to break it down. It therefore accumulates, much like it builds up in the plughole of a bath or shower, attracting more hair and other food."

Recording a verdict of accidental death, coroner Alan Craze said, "This was something Rachel did from time to time by habit. She would have had the impression, if she thought about it at all, that it was passing through her system. Unfortunately, it was not, and it build to a massive size."

Pathologist Nera Patel measured the hairball – known as a "trichobezoar" – as one

foot long, ten inches wide, and four inches thick. She said, "It was closely compacted and intertwined in the shape of a football. No one in our medical team had seen anything like it."

Rachel's mother, when shown a picture of the fatal obstruction, simply said, "It looks like a dead rat."

The Daily Grind (299).

1 March 2000, MAINE.

The owner of Carrier Chipping, Inc., inadvertently reproduced the chilling climactic scene in the movie *Fargo*, and was rent asunder by his own wood chipper.

The chipper that did him in is affectionately known as the Hog. It will take birch or maple logs up to twenty-four inches in diameter and reduce them to three-quarter-inch chips of wood.

Employees were working late to make up for time spent repairing equipment malfunctions earlier in the day. When the Hog jammed, Michael climbed the conveyor belt feeding the chipper and used a rake to break up the bark jam in the chute.

Director C. William Freeman of the Bangor Occupational Safety and Health Administration said, "Generally, our experience (of fatal accidents involving chippers) has found two causes: inadequate machine guarding, or a failure to institute an effective lockout-tagout program when someone is unjamming pieces of equipment." Apparently Michael was not a proponent of lockout-tagout procedures. His unjamming efforts were directed against a machine that was still in operation.

The Skowhegan resident was somewhat the worse for wear after his passage through the Hog. Police Chief Butch Asselin said that the remains would be subjected to DNA analysis for a positive ID, and added "I hope I never, ever see anything like this again."