

# THE CHILLING, CHANGELING CHUPACABRA!

**HELLO!**

Today we'll investigate a mystery as gruesome as it is creepy. Hair-raising stories claim that a vampire beast stalks the shadows—stealthy, silent, and thirsty for blood.

According to these tales, the *chupacabra*—or “goatsucker”—is rarely seen. It strikes farms in the night, feasting on blood from goats, sheep, chickens, and other helpless prey. These stories first terrified people in Puerto Rico, then spread to many other places. Some claim it is an unknown animal. Others say it is an alien predator or secret experiment gone wrong. What is the truth behind this modern vampire legend?

**Let's Find out!**



## CONTRIBUTORS:

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## BLOODTHIRSTY RUMORS

We'll begin our story with a warning. The trail of the chupacabra is a dark path indeed. We must bravely face monster claims, horror movies, and the grim realities of death.

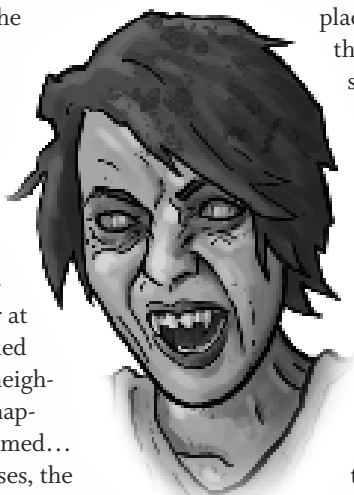
The chupacabra legend began with the mysterious deaths of farm animals. On numerous mornings in 1995, in various places across the U.S. island territory of Puerto Rico, farmers woke up to shocking sights. They stared in horror at the remains of farm animals killed during the night. Farmers and neighbors struggled to explain what happened. These animal deaths seemed... strange. Unnatural. In many cases, the animals were not eaten. Instead, witnesses said that the animals appeared to be drained of blood. Terrified people began to whisper a word from ancient folklore: *vampire*!

It may sound weird for modern people to be scared of vampires. And yet, similar rumors have spread many times in many places throughout history. Often they start when people or animals sicken or die for no obvious reason. Unexplained deaths make people feel afraid. “Why is this happening?” survivors ask. “Could we be the next victims? How can we keep ourselves safe?”

If people are unable to find a *natural* cause or enemy to fight, they may leap to the conclusion that some hidden *supernatural* threat is to blame. “Witches are harming people with black magic!” rumors may claim, or “Vampires are attacking in the night!”



This Issue's Cover features a digital painting by Daniel Loxton.



## THE POWER OF BLOOD

Modern fictional Dracula-type vampire stories have been told for two hundred years. These were inspired by vampire folklore that goes back centuries more. But the blood-drinking idea is much older still. Long before the vampire legend was born, ancient stories spoke of other blood-drinking monsters, demons, and spirits. Vampire-like stories are probably as old as language itself.

For thousands of years, people have known that there is a connection between having blood and being alive. “There is great vitality ...in the blood,” said the ancient Roman writer Pliny the Elder. When creatures lose their blood, “it carries the life with it,” Pliny explained.

People in Pliny’s time did not know that blood carries the oxygen and nutrients that our muscles and organs need to function. Instead, many guessed that blood must be filled with some sort of mysterious, mystical life force.

Ancient people therefore imagined that drinking blood might allow one creature to absorb life energy from another. After all, leeches and biting insects remain alive by sucking blood for their food. Some falsely believed that drinking a strong person’s blood could restore a sick person to health. “Epileptic patients are in the habit of drinking the blood even of gladiators,” Pliny said. They thought blood was a “cure for their disease” because it was “teeming with life.” When a gladiator was stabbed, these patients would gruesomely “apply their mouth to the wound, to draw forth his very life”—much as fictional vampires do in modern movies. (Pliny was disgusted by this horrifying spectacle.)

It was even imagined that drinking blood could partially restore life to the dead. In one story from Greek mythology, the hero Odysseus confronts a horde of ghosts. The spirits are screaming, mindless, insane beings until Odysseus offers them sheep’s blood to drink. The blood gives the ghosts enough life energy to remember things and to speak. “Any ghost that you let taste of the blood will talk with you like a reasonable being,” one spirit explains after drinking. In this story, the power of blood is useful and good. Odysseus provides sheep’s blood as a gift. This gift recharges the spirits enough to become helpful and even to feel love.

### Vampires

But if blood can be gifted, it can also be stolen.

Centuries later, medieval legends spoke of dead bodies brought partly back to life. When people in a village sickened and died, some blamed the sickness on zombie-like undead “revenants.” These walking dead supposedly left their graves at night to terrorize the living, spreading disease wherever they went. Over hundreds of years, revenant legends slowly combined with ancient ideas about the power of blood. A new kind of monster was imagined: the blood-thirsty vampire!

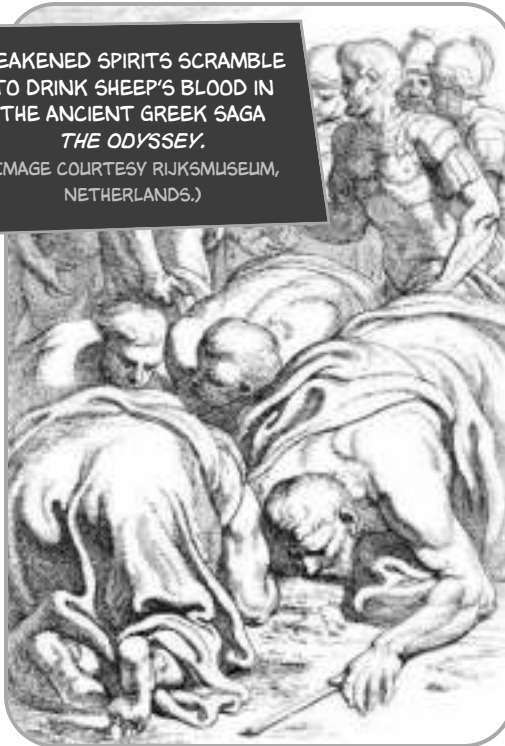
One rare early example was told in England almost nine hundred years ago. According to this supposedly true story, a rather nasty man died from a fall, only to return as a wandering corpse. The “air became foul and tainted” as this rotten, “corrupting body wandered abroad, so that a terrible plague broke out,” killing many people in the village. Eventually two brave young men dug up the grave of the suspected revenant. They “dealt the corpse a sharp blow with

the keen edge of a spade, and immediately there gushed out such a stream of warm red gore that they realized this blood-sucker had batted upon the blood of many poor folk.” The men then burned the corpse to ashes on a huge bonfire. The plague ended. The village was saved!

As centuries went by, bloodsucking vampire claims evolved and became more common. One case was investigated by German-speaking authorities around three hundred years ago. A man named Arnold Paole died in an accident. Soon afterward, several people in his village sickened and died. Rumors claimed that Paole had risen from the dead as a vampire. Community leaders opened Paole’s grave and drove a stake through his body. They also beheaded him. Then they burned the body just for good measure. They weren’t taking any chances! By this time, folklore claimed that a vampire’s victims could also become vampires. To be safe, the townspeople also dug up and destroyed the bodies of everyone else who died during the panic.

But apparently these precautions still weren’t enough to protect the villagers. A few years later, more people sickened and died. This time the government sent an official investigator. He ordered forty more graves to be opened. Seventeen of those bodies were suspected to be vampires. All were staked and burned.

WEAKENED SPIRITS SCRAMBLE  
TO DRINK SHEEP’S BLOOD IN  
THE ANCIENT GREEK SAGA  
THE ODYSSEY.  
(IMAGE COURTESY RIJKSMUSEUM,  
NETHERLANDS.)



## ISLAND OF MYSTERY?

Unexplained deaths inspired centuries of European vampire legends. The same thing happened again in modern Puerto Rico. When farm animals were killed under mysterious circumstances, people fearfully speculated about bloodsucking monsters.

Puerto Rico's Caribbean islands—one main island and several smaller ones—are a tropical paradise with a troubled history. The United States invaded Puerto Rico in 1898 and still controls it today. The people are U.S. citizens, but many are poor. Poverty is much more common in Puerto Rico than in any U.S. state.

Paranormal claims are also widespread on the island. “For decades, Puerto Rico has experienced a level of paranormal phenomena beyond that usually felt elsewhere in the world,” writes pro-chupacabra mystery author Scott Corrales. Puerto Ricans share many of the same legends and superstitions that are popular on the U.S. mainland: psychics, aliens, crashed spacecraft, Men in Black, and so on. UFOs are reported often. In “other areas, certain types of cases occur at certain times, but here every kind of case is occurring all the time” raved early UFO investigator Allen Hynek. Even Bigfoot is supposedly spotted from time to time. But Puerto Rico also has its own distinct history, Spanish-speaking culture, and regional legends—including countless conspiracy theories. Many locals believe rumors about sinister secret American military and scientific experiments on the island. Those rumors often involve space aliens, bloodsucking monsters, or both at the same time.

It's true that Puerto Rico has long been used for U.S. military bases, weapons testing, and also for scientific research. The Arecibo Observatory's gigantic 1000-foot dish made it the world's largest radio telescope for over fifty years. Many people think of aliens when they think about Arecibo. Research at the radio telescope includes listening for radio signals from possible alien civilizations. (No such signals have been detected so far.) Arecibo has even transmitted a hopeful greeting from Earth up into outer space. The telescope has often appeared in Hollywood science fiction movies that imagine contact with aliens.



ARECIBO OBSERVATORY

### Arecibo Vampires?

Bizarrely, this scientifically advanced observatory was once also the setting for a minor vampire panic. Scientist Frank Drake was in charge in the early 1960s when a night security guard spotted a suspicious figure walking near the dish. The figure looked like a man in a black cloak, the guard said. “He told us in all seriousness that he believed the man to be a vampire,” Drake later recalled. Then, two days later, a cow was found dead on a farm nearby—apparently drained of its blood! Drake suddenly had a problem on his hands:

*The vampire rumor had already spread through the observatory staff, and now the cow incident whipped the fears of many people into a frenzy. The night guards began reporting more figures in black cloaks, and demanding that some action be taken to cleanse the observatory of the vampire presence.*

Drake phoned an expert on real vampire bats (which bite larger animals and then lap blood from the wound). The bat expert also knew a lot about vampire folklore. He soon gave Drake an idea: garlic! Vampires supposedly hate the stuff.

*Legend had it...that victims could successfully drive vampires away simply by eating lots of garlic. ... I met with the kitchen staff, instructing them to increase the amount of garlic used and to make special efforts to prepare dishes that called for garlic. Then I circulated the news that this strategy was in place.*

This menu change reassured the Arecibo “staff who feared vampires,” Drake found. People soon calmed down, “And lo,

the vampires summarily deserted the observatory.”

But Puerto Rico’s vampire fears were far from over. In the years that followed, dead farm animals would repeatedly trigger new waves of vampire panic. Some of these rumors would point straight back to Arecibo.

### Vampire Birds

A larger-scale panic broke out a decade later. In 1975, a number of farm animals were killed in the town of Moca, supposedly drained of their blood. Newspapers ran alarming stories about the “Vampire of Moca.” Fearful farmers struggled to understand what was killing their chickens, geese, goats, and cows.

Animal experts examined the dead farm animals. They concluded that there was no mystery. It wasn’t true that something sucked all the blood from the animals. Instead, the injuries perfectly matched typical dog bites. Despite this explanation, many people insisted there was more to this mystery than Puerto Rico’s many wild dogs.

The story kept growing in rumors and newspaper headlines. It seemed to combine science fiction ideas with claims of the supernatural. Witnesses reported a bewildering variety of UFOs in the night skies, from colorful spinning lights to flying saucers. Others reported miracles such as blood dripping from religious images.

Still others claimed to have seen monsters—gigantic flying bird creatures, according to several. One woman said a huge flying animal landed on her roof. It screeched loudly, pecked at the roof, and then flew off. Paranormal authors have claimed that this woman may have seen a surviving pterosaur (an extinct reptile with bat-like wings that lived during the

time of the dinosaurs). Other witnesses reported monstrously huge birds and “horrible” monsters “covered in feathers.”

The Moca vampire case wasn’t the last time that dead farm animals were blamed on bird-monsters. Fifteen years later, Puerto Rico suffered another rash of animal killings. This time the culprit was supposedly caught—a “serpent bird”! The creature promoted in newspaper photos was certainly weird looking. It was

a normal sized bird with exaggerated, dangerous-looking sabre-tooth fangs.

This was awfully suspicious. Modern birds have beaks, not teeth! UFO authors claimed that this fanged monster must be “some genetic mutation” or the result of secret science experiments. Those claims were all nonsense, according to animal experts. This wasn’t a monster at all. It was a very crude hoax. Someone had simply attached fake teeth to the beak of a bird called a *guabairo* (a Puerto Rican nightjar).

Most people soon dismissed this phoney vampire bird. Few have bothered to mention it since. We could forget this hoax ourselves except for one small detail.

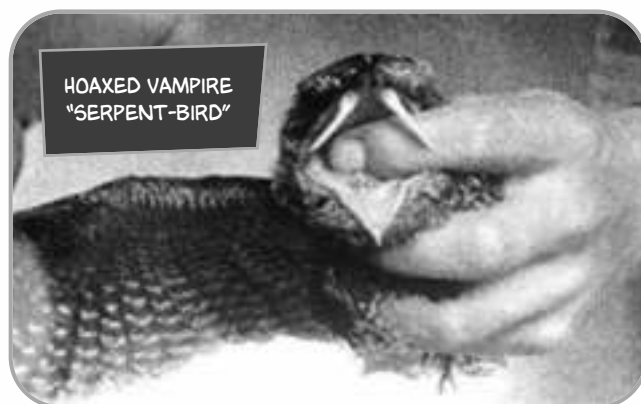
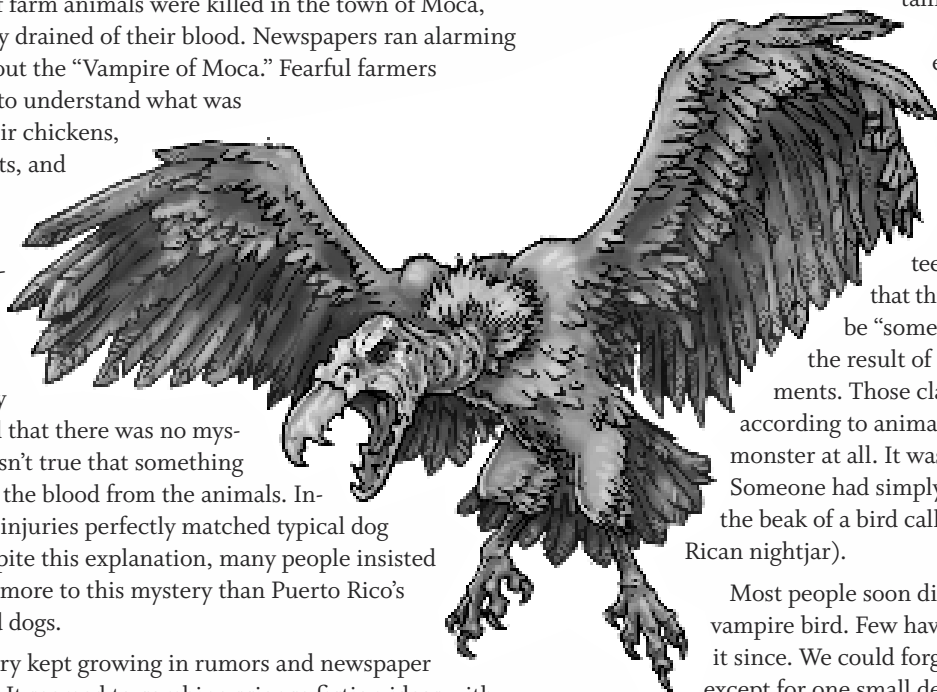
Nightjars are also known by various other names. In Spanish, one of those names is *chotocabras* or *chupacabras*—“goatsucker”!

Nightjars hunt insects at night. Farm animals attract mosquitos and other insects, so nightjars often swoop around livestock to catch their dinner. (I loved watching hungry bats do this same thing at night when I herded sheep as a young man.)

Ancient people misunderstood what the nightjars were doing in the dark. They formed a mistaken folklore belief that the birds were stealing milk from the udders of farm animals. The “goatsucker” is a bird that “thieves by night,” claimed Pliny the Elder.

*It enters the folds of the shepherds, and makes straight for the udder of the she-goat, to suck the milk. Through the injury thus inflicted the udder shrivels away, and the goat that has been thus deprived of its milk, is afflicted with...blindness.*

People imagined that nightjars were basically vampires. Although they stole milk instead of blood, this harmed their victims. This belief remained popular during the Middle Ages. It was still believed in modern times.



## A NEW MONSTER IS BORN

Legends have origins. Stories have moments when they're told for the first time. In the case of the chupacabra, 1995 was that moment.

To be sure, the ingredients for a new monster story had been ready for a long time. Puerto Ricans had struggled for decades to explain mysterious animal deaths. Such deaths were often blamed on vampires of one sort or another. These rumored, frequently bird-like monsters were often connected to UFO sightings. This echoed claims from mainland America, where people blamed alien intruders for cases of so-called "cattle mutilation." Finally, the word *chupacabra* already existed—the name of a bird that was at least occasionally blamed for attacks on livestock.

In 1995, all of those threads were woven into something new. It began with a terrible drought. Puerto Rico hadn't been so dry in decades. Crops were failing. Water was rationed. In some areas, city water supplies were turned off entirely on every second day. People saved meager rainwater in barrels. Unfortunately, those water barrels bred mosquitos. The bloodsucking insects then spread a disease called dengue fever. Many thousands fell sick. Some died.

Then a new threat emerged. In the middle of all these dangers and difficulties, something started to kill unusual numbers of farm animals. Authorities blamed wild dogs. Attacks on farm animals were predictable because the drought made it harder for predators to find prey in the wild. (The earlier "Moca vampire" and "vampire bird" animal attacks also happened in dry years.)

### A New Monster Is Born

Many people simply refused to believe this explanation. Farmers said that their animals had been sucked dry of blood. No dog can do that! In many instances, animals were killed with a single bite to the neck, leaving two small puncture marks with little obvious sign of bleeding. Nor were the animals actually eaten in many cases. In the opinion of many, these animals could only be victims of a vampire!

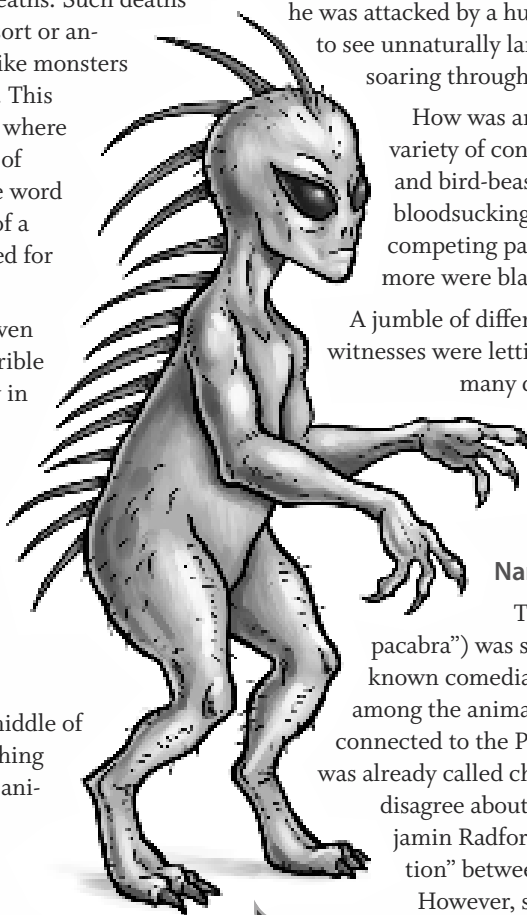
Sensational headlines and a frenzy of rumors spread fear across the island. This only got worse as witnesses began to report bizarre, otherworldly experiences. There was a wave of UFO reports and alien encounter claims connected to the

farmyard mystery. A number of people claimed to see classic short, big-eyed, bald "gray" aliens. Several said that these space beings hypnotized them or made them feel sick or unable to move.

Other people reported bird-like monsters with wings. One man said a gigantic flying creature landed on his roof. He claimed that it had two extra legs (like a mythical griffin) and a ferociously wolf-like muzzle instead of a beak. Another said he was attacked by a huge flying creature. Others claimed to see unnaturally large birds or gargoyle-like monsters soaring through the air.

How was anyone to make sense of this wild variety of conflicting stories about UFOs, aliens, and bird-beasts? Puerto Rico did not have one bloodsucking monster, but a chaotic zoo of competing paranormal claims. All these and more were blamed for killing farm animals.

A jumble of differing claims is what we'd expect if witnesses were letting their imaginations run wild in many directions. Something new would have to happen to unite the many varied stories into a single legend. A monster needs a name—and an image.



CHUPACABRA REPORTED BY  
MADELYNE TOLENTINO.

(DRAWING BASED UPON  
SKETCHES BY JORGE MARTIN)

### Naming the Beast

The "goatsucker" name ("chupacabra") was suggested late in 1995 by a well-known comedian, apparently because goats were among the animal victims. But was this name also connected to the Puerto Rican nightjar—a bird that was already called chupacabra? Skeptical researchers disagree about that question. Investigator Benjamin Radford has argued "there is no connection" between the bird and the monster.

However, skeptical scholar Jason Colavito has argued that Radford was "too hasty" to dismiss the connection. It certainly would be an astonishing coincidence: Puerto Rican folklore claims that two creatures with the exact same name supposedly both suck fluids from farm animals. Besides, all sorts of other farm animals were killed. Only a few of the victims were goats. Why not call the monster a "chicken-sucker" or "night stalker" or something else altogether? When the comedian "applied the term 'goatsucker' to the monster, he must have been reusing (consciously or not) the term for the legendary bird," Colavito argues. Without familiar folklore about the goatsucker bird, the monster's name "makes no sense and would not have stuck."

The nearly forgotten 1989 "serpent-bird" case appears to support Colavito's argument. Just six short years before the birth of the chupacabra monster legend, Puerto Rican



ORIGINAL CHUPACABRA WITNESS  
MADELYNE TOLENTINO

TOLENTINO'S  
EX-HUSBAND  
MIGUEL AGOSTO

STREET WHERE TOLENTINO'S SIGHTING TOOK PLACE.  
(PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BENJAMIN RADFORD)

newspapers claimed that a fanged version of the chupacabra bird was sucking the blood from farm animals! When we consider the many reports of bird-monster sightings, it seems clear that bird folklore was among the ingredients for brewing the chupacabra monster legend.

### Monster Sighting Makes History

There were countless conflicting paranormal claims, but no sighting was widely accepted as revealing the menace behind the attacks. Then, in August 1995, a woman named Madelyne Tolentino claimed the most important and influential chupacabra sighting of all time. According to paranormal author Nick Redfern, her story "changed everything." The Tolentino sighting gave the new monster a "form and a name," said early chupacabra author Scott Corrales.

It happened in broad daylight. According to Tolentino, she had a good long look at a four-foot tall creature from the window of her home. There were supposedly multiple witnesses who could confirm her story, including her mother, a local boy, others on their street, and her husband.

The four-foot tall creature she spotted in her yard was standing upright, "walking like a human, on both legs." Its long arms "were drawn back into an attack position," like a

movie monster about to pounce. It had huge, dark, wrap-around eyes "running up to its temples," with "two little holes" for a nose and a "slash" for a mouth (just like the little "gray" aliens common in UFO claims). It had long, skinny, yet powerful legs; it seemed to hop like a kangaroo. Each hand had three long fingers. Its feet had three webbed toes "like a goose's" feet. Tolentino said the creature had short, "well combed" hair on its body. On its back were something like long "feathers."

While watching the creature, Tolentino realized with a chill that it was staring right back at her! She screamed. Then the creature bounded away into the nearby woods.

According to this wild tale, her mother and a local boy went running after the chupacabra. Apparently, the boy claimed that he actually caught it, wrestled with it, and even pried its mouth open to reveal wicked fangs. The boy said the "feathers" on the creature's back were really sharp quills.

This story became a media sensation. A UFO researcher made a detailed drawing based on Tolentino's description. Newspapers carried that sketch as front page news. Tolentino was interviewed on popular talk shows and mystery programs. All this publicity made her sighting the original, "official" version of the chupacabra. A legend was born!

## UNBELIEVABLE CLAIMS

Tolentino's story was spectacular, but there were serious problems with her claims. To begin with, her tale was not consistent from one telling to another. For example, at first she did not mention claws. Later she said it had long, curved claws. Still later she told Radford, "There were no claws." Tolentino said in one interview that the creature was four feet tall with three fingers on each hand. Later she said it was three feet tall with five fingers.

Some of her facts also proved wrong. "The creature leaves some sort of slime," Tolentino claimed. This "greenish" slime was supposedly analyzed by an American UFO researcher who found it was "nothing from this world." When Radford checked out this claim, that UFO researcher told him she never saw any slime and didn't know how "complete untruths" like this story get started.

Worse, the stories told by Tolentino and her then-husband contained outlandish, impossible details that simply defy belief. For example, Tolentino claimed that she later saw the creature a second time, while driving at night. She insisted that the creature's eyes literally glowed in the dark, lit up "like Christmas lights" or blazing fire.

But glowing eyes are nothing compared to levitation. Tolentino and her husband both insisted that they saw the chupacabra *float in midair like a superhero!* "Its feet weren't touching the ground," Tolentino claimed. "It was as if it had

been suspended in the air, floating." Her husband claimed "the creature floated right over us, suspended in the air." It wasn't *flying*, he insisted, but *levitating*. "This thing was floating. ... It was defying the laws of gravity."

That's just not realistic. Tolentino's husband was perfectly correct to say that no ordinary creature "can hang in the air like that." In fact, no animal, machine, or substance known to science can defy gravity! As far as science can tell, anti-gravity can only exist in science fiction. The physical laws of the universe make it impossible to block or reverse gravity.

People who search for legendary creatures such as Bigfoot usually think of the chupacabra as simply an undiscovered species of animal. Tolentino's claims about glowing eyes and levitation tell us that's a mistake. The chupacabra was imagined from the beginning as a paranormal being with out of this world powers. "Several witnesses swore to us that the Goatsucker's eyes emitted *beams* of light that illuminated the nocturnal landscape like flashlight beams," marvelled one researcher. He admitted these claims are "not consistent" with biology. Other witnesses "insisted that the Chupacabras has a levitation ability that allows it to float through the air like Superman...without any other visible means of propulsion."

Witnesses have even claimed that the chupacabra is a *shape-shifter!* One said she watched a hulking, Bigfoot-like ape-man shape-shift and shrink down into a small, spiky chupacabra. Needless to say, that could not be a natural ability. Shape-shifting is purely imaginary Harry Potter-style magic.



## MOVIE MONSTER

The chupacabra evolved from earlier ideas about vampires, including folklore about “goatsucker” birds. However, it seems that Tolentino’s history-making claims had another, very specific inspiration.

In a 1996 interview, Tolentino gushed about *Species*, a science fiction horror film shown in theatres one month before her sighting. “It would be a good idea if you saw it,” Tolentino told UFO researchers. She explained,

*The movie begins here in Puerto Rico at the Arecibo Observatory. There’s an experiment going on in the film. There’s a girl in a glass box as a result of the experiment. They put her inside to kill her because there was something evil within her. So when they’re trying to kill her with poisonous gases, she breaks the box with supernatural strength. What came out from inside the girl? It made my hair stand on end. It was a creature that looked like the Chupacabras, with the spines on its back and all.*

The film’s imaginary monster “Sil” is half alien. American scientists grow Sil using alien instructions received at Arecibo. Of course this mad science experiment goes horribly wrong. Sil escapes and goes on a killing spree.

According to Tolentino, Sil’s resemblance to the chupacabra was “really impressive.” Moreover, Tolentino insisted “things are happening in Puerto Rico” just like the plot of the movie. She said the chupacabra might be an alien creature that escaped from a secret experiment!

How could a monster so similar to the chupacabra appear in a movie right *before* Tolentino’s sighting?

Radford argues that the answer is obvious: Tolentino’s supposedly true chupacabra story was *directly inspired by the fictional film!* This is the central argument of Radford’s 2011 book *Tracking the Chupacabra: The Vampire Beast in Fact, Fiction, and Folklore*.

The sketches based on her sighting do resemble Sil in many details, from the long skull shape to the distinctive back spikes. Also, those sketches were drawn by other people. Tolentino may well have *meant* that her monster looked even *more* like Sil. She said the chupacabra “had hips,” “very long” arms, and “very long and skinny” legs. She told Radford the creature had “human hands” with five “long fingers and human-like nails.” Its skin was “grayish,” just like Sil’s. Most

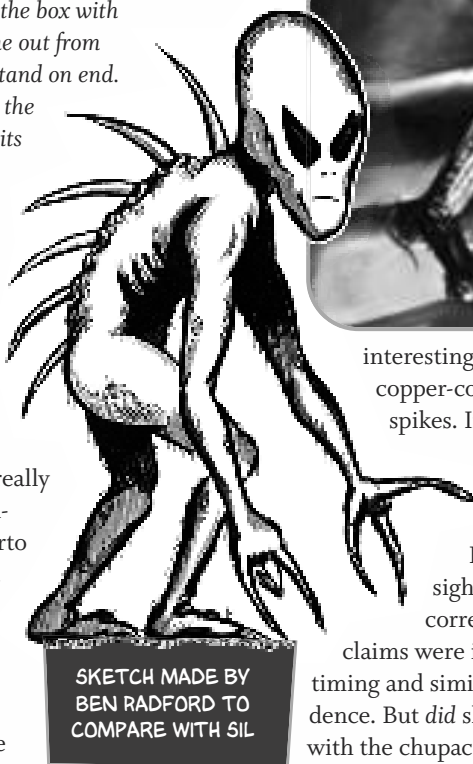


interesting was Tolentino’s description of “reddish” copper-colored “feathers” that were somehow also spikes. In the film, Sil’s coppery, blade-like back spikes *actually* do resemble feathers!

### Mystery Solved?

If Tolentino watched *Species* before her sighting, then Radford’s explanation is probably correct. It appears that Tolentino’s chupacabra claims were indeed based on a Hollywood movie. The timing and similarities are too close to dismiss as a coincidence. But *did* she see the film first? Tolentino compared Sil with the chupacabra several months after her sighting. Also, she said she “rented” the movie. It would be a huge problem for Radford’s argument if she reported her sighting before she ever saw the film.

Radford checked. He learned that *Species* was not available for home video rental until after her interview. He also told JUNIOR SKEPTIC that Tolentino is a “huge science fiction, fantasy, and horror film fan” who would have rushed out to see the “hot new sci-fi film.” Finally, he interviewed Tolentino and asked her this question in person. “I can confirm that she said she saw *Species* before her sighting,” Radford said. We don’t know if her rather dreamlike story was a hoax or a mistake that mixed up reality with images from the movie. We can conclude that the original chupacabra sighting took place in the realm of the imagination.



## SPREADING AND MUTATING

Tolentino's story provided the original template description of the chupacabra. As her story became famous, other people reported similar monsters. Stories are contagious! "If she had reported that the chupacabra had six legs and four eyes," Radford observed, "it's likely that later eyewitnesses would have followed her lead and reported similar characteristics."

When people see something in nature that seems weird to them, they try to explain what they saw. They compare their sighting with things they've seen in the past, and also with things they've heard described. A person who glimpses an animal disappearing into the bushes might ask, "Was that a dog... or was it a chupacabra?!"

People also pay more attention when they've heard monster stories. A person visiting a random lake might not notice a distant object that might or might not be a boat. A person visiting Loch Ness probably would notice—and might even think they spotted Nessie.

### Fear and Fame

Tolentino's story made the chupacabra famous across Puerto Rico. Not everyone was convinced, of course. Most people viewed chupacabra claims with curiosity, skepticism, or amusement. Many Puerto Ricans considered the claims ridiculous. Chupacabra jokes appeared often in newspaper cartoons and humorous t-shirts.

Nevertheless, some people feared that the vampire beast was a dangerous menace. Animal deaths truly were a threat to the livelihood of poor farmers. Fear spread through communities where monster sightings were reported. That was certainly true in Tolentino's tight-knit church community. Other members reported sightings of their own. The mayor also belonged to Tolentino's church community. As friends and neighbors told terrifying encounter stories, the mayor decided to take action. He organized search parties to hunt the beast with nets, machetes, and tranquilizer guns. Rival politicians accused him of using the scare for publicity. "This is not a joke," the mayor told papers. "We're taking it very seriously because it's killing animals right now" and "people could be next."

It didn't take long for news of this mystery to spread far beyond Puerto Rico. Tolentino and other witnesses appeared on TV shows that were popular in numerous Spanish-speaking countries. American papers covered the mystery as well. The story was also beamed around the world on a newfangled thing called the internet.

Immediately, websites sprang up devoted to the beast.

People began to report chupacabra sightings in other places. At first, the monster was only spotted in Spanish-speaking countries where the mystery was most publicized. That's awfully suspicious. If chupacabras were real creatures migrating to new lands, they'd spread first to places close to Puerto Rico, regardless of language. That isn't what happened. Instead, the publicity in Spanish-language media inspired copycat reports in distant places (even as far away as Spain). The *idea* of the chupacabra caused people to claim sightings. New sighting claims created even more publicity, which then spread the idea to even more people.

### Winged Weirdos

The Tolentino case influenced later sighting reports. That doesn't mean everyone reported the same thing. A surprising number of witnesses insisted the chupacabra had wings! In one case, it was reported that two men fled in terror from a winged chupacabra that "pursued them, flying above the treetops." Such sightings made the chupacabra "one of many winged weirdos—ranging from pterodactyls to Mothman-like creatures" reported by Puerto Rican monster witnesses, noted one chupacabra book.

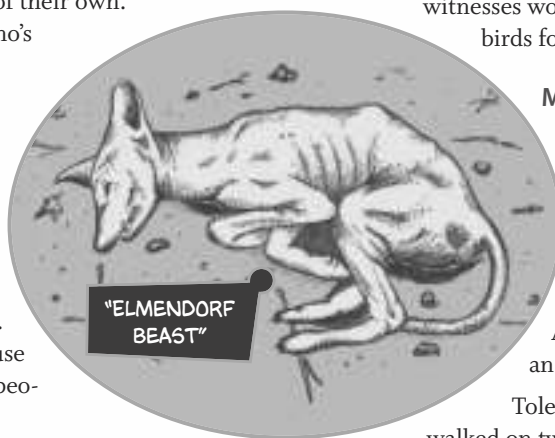
Gigantic wings are a pretty major detail for witnesses to disagree about! Imagination clearly played a role in eyewitness reports. In one case from Mexico, news reports claimed that a young nurse was attacked by a chupacabra. Witnesses supposedly spotted a black-winged monster fly up from the scene. In reality, there was no attack. The poor nurse fell down some stairs and broke her arm. People heard her scream and ran to help. However, their imaginations were working overtime because there were so many chupacabra stories in the papers. As the nurse's brother explained, the witnesses wound up mistaking a flock of small birds for a monster!

### Mutating Chupacabras

Chupacabra sightings were also reported on the U.S. mainland. The first sightings predictably took place in states where lots of folks spoke Spanish. But then something weird happened: the American chupacabra mutated into an entirely new form!

Tolentino's chupacabra supposedly walked on two legs. In Texas, people began to blame smaller, *four-legged* creatures for attacks on farm animals. This new kind of chupacabra lacked the quills, wings, or big black eyes reported by earlier witnesses. Instead, they resembled hairless dogs with grayish blue skin.

When a rancher in Elmendorf, Texas shot "the very first authentic specimen of the storied chupacabra," he hoped that



scientists would declare it a new species. He was disappointed. Biologists declared instead that the strange-looking creature was a canine with “mange.” This is an infestation of tiny, contagious parasites that attack the skin of an animal, causing its hair to fall out. Animals that normally have pelts of fur look almost unrecognizable when they lose that fur! DNA analysis confirmed that this “Elmendorf Beast” was actually a domestic dog.

People claimed to discover the bodies of chupacabras in several similar Texas cases. All had similar outcomes. In one case, biologists studied a bizarre, hairless carcass that turned out to be a mangy raccoon. In another case, a Texas woman became a local celebrity for discovering the hairless body of a supposed chupacabra. She made money selling chupacabra t-shirts and other merchandise. But DNA results showed that her specimen wasn’t a mystery monster after all. It was a mangy coyote.

### Solving the Chupacabra Mystery

“Quite clearly,” author Nick Redfern wrote in his book *Chupacabra Road Trip*, these Texan animals were “very different” from the original chupacabra reports. He argued that the “bipedal, spiked, and possibly even winged animal of Puerto Rico is obviously not a hairless...coyote.” He’s right that these are two different versions of the chupacabra legend. Nevertheless, there is strong evidence that these distinct mysteries have one common solution.

Like medieval vampire panics, the chupacabra legend began with unexplained deaths. Dead farm animals were found with two puncture marks on their necks. This caused people to speculate about vampires, monsters, and aliens.

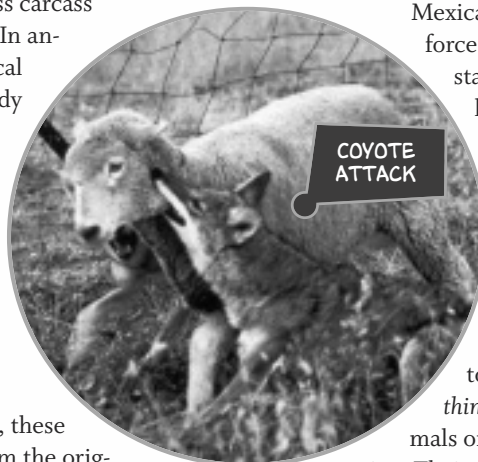
However, the true solution to that farmyard mystery has been known from the beginning. Wild claims about vampire birds and spiky-backed aliens have only distracted people from the simple, unfortunate truth: *most of those animals were killed by dogs.*

Witnesses have claimed that dogs could not be responsible because blood was drained from the animals. These claims “have no basis in reality,” Redfern admits. In fact, “there is no evidence of blood-draining.” That part of the legend was based on a misunderstanding!

When witnesses say that blood has been drained, they really mean that *they did not notice much blood on the outside of the animal.* That does not mean the blood is missing! To find out if an animal really did lose a lot of blood, medical experts have to carefully examine the inside of the animal’s body. This is called a “necropsy.” Redfern admits that he was “never able to secure even a single,

official necropsy report” showing that blood was drained.

That isn’t because claimed chupacabra victims have never been necropsied. Many have been! Dozens of animals were officially necropsied in Puerto Rico during the original chupacabra craze. Others have been necropsied in Mexico, Brazil, the U.S., and elsewhere. When examined by experts, every single animal had the expected amount of blood in its body. None were sucked dry. All died of normal causes such as sickness, parasites, or known predators. Most often, necropsies revealed bites from a dog or coyote.



Mexican authorities went even further. A task force of scientists, zoo experts, and police staked out a farm where the chupacabra had previously attacked. “Late at night, a few wild dogs showed up and attacked the sheep—leaving the same marks found on the first dead sheep,” explained a senior police official. The team captured the dogs and tried to calm public fears.

Most chupacabra bites look *identical* to dog bites *because they are the same thing.* Dogs and coyotes typically bite animals once on the neck, crushing the windpipe. Their canine teeth leave neat, vampire-like puncture marks. Usually there isn’t much blood to be seen—any lost blood just soaks into the ground. All of the remaining blood settles into the lower parts of the victim’s body. Some congeals inside the veins; some soaks into the animal’s muscles and organs.

It’s unfortunate but not mysterious when many farm animals are killed but none are eaten. Dogs have an instinct to chase and bite. Even friendly family pets will often chase farm animals if they get the chance. When they do this, *they’re not hunting for food—they’re playing!* Chasing animals is fun, like chasing a ball. It’s so much fun that dogs will do it over and over until they get tired. I’ve personally seen this happen. I once watched a dog named Twinkie chase down and kill several sheep in just a few minutes. She gave each one a single quick bite to the throat, leaving the classic chupacabra-style injury. Then she ran after the next.

The chupacabra legend grew from rumors, sensational news stories, and a fictional Hollywood horror movie. But it all began with a misunderstanding about life and death on a farm.

### FURTHER READING

BENJAMIN RADFORD’S 2011 BOOK *TRACKING THE CHUPACABRA: THE VAMPIRE BEAST IN FACT, FICTION, AND FOLKLORE* IS THE BEST BOOK ON THE TOPIC. FOR A DETAILED LOOK AT EARLY CASES FROM A PRO-PARANORMAL PERSPECTIVE, CHECK OUT SCOTT CORRALES’ 1997 BOOK *CHUPACABRAS AND OTHER MYSTERIES*.