

We're going back in time. As if we have anywhere else to go.

August 15th, 1953. A 911 call is made to police in the town of Springfield, MO, regarding an animal disturbance on the 1400 block of East Olive. A snake has been spotted in a local resident's backyard. I don't know why tf we callin' the police about a snake, but I support it 100%.

By the time police arrive, homeowner Roland Parrish has killed the snack with a garden hoe.

Normally, snakes are an open and shut case for the police. Probably not even a case if we're being completely honest. But this snake was different. It wasn't a normal Missouri snake. It was a weird-shaped snake.

Because of the weird-shaped snake, investigators get involved. They are sent to Mowrer's Bird and Animal Company, an exotic pet shop located a block away from the scene.

Investigators arrive at the shop and meet the owner, Reo Mowrer. Now I can't find shit as far as info on our boy Reo. But we will know everything we need to by the end of this story. Also spelling his name is a goddamn chore.

So investigators show up at the shop and question Reo about the snake, but Reo denies that the snake came from his store. He dismissed it as a harmless, common species from the area with an abnormal birth defect. The police believe him, and decide to close the case.

Word gets around, and the next morning the local newspaper runs an article about 'Rattlesnake James', a suspected serial killer, convicted of murdering his fifth wife to collect insurance benefits using rattlesnake poison to kill her. I guess the people of Springfield had vipers on the mind, and everyone starts talking about the mysterious snake on East Olive. Reports start getting embellished, rumors of the poisonous snake

loose in town spreads, and the Springfield Health commissioner is soon forced to assure the public that the snake is an anomaly.

Fast Forward one week. Police are back in the East Olive neighborhood due to another serpent popping up at the house across the street from the first incident. A man named Wesley Rose, an employee of the local Barth Brother's Clothing Company, and resident at 1421 East Olive kills the 4 ½ foot long reptile with a garden tool of his own after his bulldog Sally pinned it in a patch of grass on his front lawn.

Same kind of reptile. Same odd shape.

This time detectives take the corpse over to Herbert Condray, a science teacher at nearby Jarrett Junior High School. A single glance at the specimen sends Mr. Condray reeling. He's freaking the fuck out.

He identifies the carcass - not as a harmless garden snake - but as a deadly Indian Cobra.

One thousand miles from its native habitat.

What the actual fuck.

Police visit Mowrers shop, armed with more information, demanding to know if the shop keeps such exotic animals.

Reo Mowrer is pissed. He says that the business does keep cobras, but that all had been safely accounted for. Investigators take the kill to Bill Swinea, the director of the Springfield Zoo, and Professor Parson of Drury College, who both have greater experience examining cobras.

Both confirm Condray's classification of the animal, and Dr. Parson further elaborates that the snake's fangs have been removed, as if for domestication, but that new fangs were in the process of growing, which would have made the snake deadly in a few days' time.

All signs point to the Mowrer's pet shop, but detectives need more proof before charging our little resident weirdo with negligence. Until then, the case is stalled - partly to law enforcement's relief. Springfield's police department is busy preparing for the arrival of the town's very first city manager, William E Hansen. A 51-Y/o straight shooter from Pittsburg Kansas, Hanses was selected after a three month search done by the mayor's office.

Hansen's arrival, coupled with the newly elected city council, signals a fresh direction for Springfield, and the public is eager to see improvement. Hansen did a bunch of good stuff for Pittsburg, like restoring the city's credit, reducing taxes, etc etc. He's also a bible thumper. He was a bible school teacher, and preacher for the big-four denominations in town, which puts him in everyone's good graces.

So because the town's public officials are brand new, the police doesn't have experience working with them. Luckily, Hansen's arrival is put on hold when he battles with kidney stones for three days straight, and is then put on bed rest. His first day in his new role will be Sept. 1.

Okay enough city-manager-mumbo-jumbo.

Fast forward again. August 23rd, 1953. With news that the loose snakes are indeed Cobras, the local paper runs a side column, informing the public of the details, including naming Mowrer as a possible suspect. Interest in the piece leads the Soringfield Leader and Press to photograph the snakes and publish them in the next days paper. The heightens interest even more, and city attorney Gerald Gleason directs the police to officially investigate Mowrer's shop.

August 25th's paper reports this development, and in response the townspeople call for the shops closure.

So the police give our buddy Reo an ultimatum: move the shop's snakes out of town, or lose your business liscence. Mowrer agrees to transport the snakes to a storage facility far out of town fir safekeeping,

though he continues to maintain his innocence, stating simply “the cobras aren’t mine.”

His attorney alleges that the snakes could have been dumped by carnival workers that had recently visited the area.

His neighbors on the other hand, don’t buy it. Several interviews with police reveal that Mowrer is known to regularly dump snakes of all varieties into a huge water-filled tub he keeps in his backyard. Once more, the pet shop has been in trouble before.

Several monkeys and an iguana have escaped the shop and run amok in the past, and nearby homeowners routinely worry for their kid’s safety outside.

Two more articles from the Leader and Press which absolutely read Mowrer to filth lead the townspeople to flood the police department with calls to close the shop, and to disclose where Mowrer has moved his snakes.

August 29th. The location of the storage facility is discovered, not far away from Springfield, but at a place called Miller Sales Barn, only a stone’s throw outside the city limits. In response, the paper’s opinion section is filled with articles calling for the exotic pet owner to be run out of town. Mob mentality 101.

Two days later. Early morning of August 31st. Police are planning by court order to inspect Mowrer’s storage place, more cobras are found in town.

Just before midnight, 17 year old Willis Lans Murdaugh Jr. runs over one with his car in an intersection. He gets out of his car and sees the snake is still alive. What does he do? Kill it with a jack handle.

Then, at 2AM that same day, an unidentified man stops an officer and reports seeing a snake six feet long and three or four inches thick slither

under a car. The officer calls for backup, and they comb the area but are unable to find the little guy.

By the time the sun is up, another report rolls in from down the road. A man named Ralph Moore has killed a serpent found crawling through his front yard.

Soon the Leader and Press find out, and the whole town is going absolutely batshit crazy because there are goddamn snakes everywhere.

So what was supposed to be a day of preparation for the new city manager is now a stupid day full of stupid paperwork about stupid phonecalls from stupid people about stupid snakes. They were even reporting snakes that were native to the area. I agree, get rid of them all. Please.

Several people reported seeing our buddy ol' pal, Reo Mowrer, running around his neighborhood with a bag and a stick, as if frantically searching for loose reptiles.

Dr. Parson. Remember him? The guy that was called in to identify the cobras? He tells the local paper that the city should start stocking up on anti-venom in case someone gets bitten. But it's unknown whether cobra antivenom is even available in America. So that's cool and safe and awesome.

September 1st. Hansen shows up, ready to manage a city. But not like taxes or anything boring like that, but rather, snakes. He calls a meeting of department heads and council members to address certain policies, but most importantly, the snake scare.

The health department is directed to develop a mitigation strategy, and manages to locate two doses of cobra antivenom, one in florida, which gets mailed out immediately, and another at a zoo in the city of St.

Louis which can be delivered in hours if necessary. The town of Springfield is eager to see how Hansen handles his first crisis.

The next day, September 2nd, Reo Mowrer gets another ultimatum from the county prosecutor. Move the cobras (like actually move them) further away from the town, or be charged with public endangerment. 314 residents signed a petition demanding that he find a different storage facility for the snakes. But his grimey attorney said that the city is violating his rights as a business owner, alleging that since the paper broke the story, the Mowrer family has received numerous threatening phone calls.

Shit doesn't help when they find another cobra the literal next day. This time it was in a garage right behind Mowrer's pet shop. A six year old girl found the snake on her way outside to play. The child's mother killed it with a garden hoe, and after hearing the commotion from across the street, Mowrer hurries over to whisk the evidence away. FISHY FISHY. Detectives immediately arrive on the scene as our resident weirdo is in the process of hiding the body, and despite his denial, the snake is a goddamn cobra.

People are pissed.

Now the children are at risk of getting eaten by a goddamn dangerous pool noodle. But, Mowrer still maintains his innocence. At the end of the day, the antivenom from Florida arrives in town.

The next day, the people of Springfield decide it's time to go snake hunting. They arm themselves with garden tools, guns, and nets, and canvass the entire town looking for snakes. Did this work?

No.

Meanwhile, Reo spends the day moving his cobras away from the original hiding place, Miller Sales Barn, to an 'undisclosed location', taking extra care to cover his tracks.

The Leader and Press continue their smear-campaign, publishing cartoons mocking the crisis, and the classifieds section even begins promoting cobra-proof homes for sale in the area. Which sounds so good. I want one.

So the Springfield Police start wildin' out. They start shooting any reptile reported by citizens, on site. On September 7th, the cops shoot an iguana, and the wonderful writers down at Leader and Press insinuate that it probably came from Mowrer's pet shop, despite his adamant denials.

Sep. 8th. Another snake. This time spotted by two girls, 10 and 9 years old. One of the girl's fathers pins the snake with a board and calls the cops. But, before detectives can arrive, our slimy boy Reo shows up, stuffs the snake into a box, and flees the scene.

The cops send a bunch of higher-up cops to Mowrer's residence, demanding that he turn the snake over for ID. Reo refuses, and directs the authorities to his attorney. He tells reporters that it was a harmless bullsnake, and continues to profess his innocence.

Sep 9th. Another cobra was found and killed. That's six total snakes, if anyone lost count. City manager Hansen and a bunch of other government people create a public-nuisance ordinance, and under its provisions, finally send a full inspection team into Mowrer's Pet Shop. In this horrible place, we have:

- A dead penguin, in a case with live ones
- An overflow of animal shit and decaying veggies.
- A bunch of other horrible things that i don't want to talk about.

Also how did this dude get a penguin????

In good weirdo-fashion, Reo skips town and goes to the next county over and sets up a snake exhibition tent at an area carnival, ALL WHILE THE COPS ARE SEARCHING HIS STORE. What is he doing there you might ask? Trying to sell his damn snakes for low-low-low prices. People attending the carnival are obviously weirded out by this random guy selling snakes for dirt cheap, and complain to the fairgrounds. He got kicked out.

Meanwhile, at the shop, police find records and determine that a crate of 12 cobras had likely escaped the shop. We have five snake bodies accounted for, and one 'mystery snake' that disappeared with our boy Reo, that leaves five snakes still out and about.

Outside the shop, a random dude spots a cobra on the road, grabs a rock, and hits it over the head. The cobra flees under a nearby house. He calls police over, and they spend the next THREE HOURS bombarding his house with tear gas until the snake is flushed out. Another officer tries to shoot it with a riot gun. The gun jams, so he pulls out his revolver and fires six shots. Five of the bullets hit the cobra's body, and the police chief manages to get a pole-mounted loop around its neck. They send it to hell with a garden hoe.

We are at an all-out war with goddamn snakes. At this point, the cobra scare starts getting international attention. Which is always good and always makes America look super cool and put-together. Reporters are flying in from out-of-state to cover the store, and the Police chief's house phone rings 24/7 from columnists requesting quotes. Hansen, city manager, orders all weeds in the area to be burnt to a crisp in the hopes of wiping out any remaining snakes. Officers organize another city wide snake hunt, and citizens join in, hunting any and all reptiles crawling around the small town of Springfield.

Sep 11th. Police get an anonymous tip that vigilantes plan Mowrer's pet shop, and law enforcement is forced to station itself outside of the business to prevent any arson.

Sep 12th. Seven fields have been burned off. Reptiles of all shapes and sizes around the area are being killed by local townspeople and sent to the police station for inspection. It's a massacre. No snake left behind. But also, no cobras were discovered.

Mowrer's business is handed a new city order, giving him five days to remove all animals of all kinds from his shop. Reo complains that it will cost a fortune, and that the city is bleeding him dry for a crime he did not commit. This is a witch hunt that I can get behind.

Sep 13th. A two-year-old named Charles White discovers a snake while playing outside, and is bitten. Police rush him to the hospital, where luckily, the snake is determined to be harmless.

Now the police have to deal with a new problem. Prank calls. Kids spend the evening calling emergency dispatch to report fake-cobra sightings, which is honestly funny as fuck. ACAB.

So now our little weirdo Reo has a change of heart. He wants to do anything he can to help catch the cobras. In his own words, "I would be the last person on earth to wish that anyone, child or adult, be endangered or injured by any snakes which might remain at large." Don't worry, he gave a copy of that statement to the Leader and Press.

Soon, snake dealers throughout america flood the paper with letters accusing them of making a mountain out of a molehill, and offering various home-remedies for dealing with loose cobras. The townspeople are accused of a smear campaign against an honest businessman, and words are had between Reo and the newspaper.

Sep. 17th. Another cobra was found, run over repeatedly, and killed with a rock. Hansen, city manager, is pissed. Too many issues, too many snakes, not enough time. His latest problem though? Out of control grass fires. LMAO. apparently citizens were starting their own fires, trying to smoke out the rest of the cobras, and ended up tying up the

fire department and literally wasting everyone's time. Then, teenagers start vandalizing the town with snake-related graffiti, and even the elderly are causing unnecessary headaches: a 71 year old man knocked over a bunch of trash-cans to run over a snake with his car. He brought the body in for ID, only to find that the species was harmless.

So the local paper, Leader and Press, are fully embracing this snake fantasy. They even start a story that the cobras are laying eggs around town. Full on HYSTERIA BITCH.

Two weeks go by, no snakes.

UNTIL!

October 1. A block from mower's shop, a trio of bird dogs corner and kill a snake at the Springfield plumbing and heating company. After inspection, it's confirmed. Cobra.

So the town starts to freak out a little bit. They try something new. The health commissioner somehow finds a vinyl record of "Indian snake charming music" and approaches Hansen about the possibility of using it to lure the snakes out in the open. Desperate and tired, Hansen agrees. Caywood, the Health commissioner, rents a sedan mounted with two loud speakers and leads a team of armed officers through the town, blaring the snake charming song at stupid loud levels. Fun. Snake parade!

BUT, that afternoon, a 10th cobra was spotted and killed. News of this successful hunt is reported internationally.

Thought this story was weird, right? Nope. Gets weirder.

October 6th. 2:45AM. Police make a traffic stop of a suspected drunk driver. 18-year old OK native Ralph Cramer Jr. flees the scene, leading police on a 45-minute chase throughout the town. Shots are fired at the vehicle, hitting four times and shattering the vehicle. During

interrogation, he reveals to investigators that he is a visiting snake dealer. His client list? Reo Mowrer. Also, our buddy Ralph has a 20 gauge shotgun wrapped in a towel in the back of his car.

ARMED SNAKE DEALER. So the police are like... yeah it's definitely this guy that let the cobras lose, that makes a lot of sense.

Nope. He was in Oklahoma when the initial snake mess started up. But witnesses place him at the snake-charming caravan the day before. Apparently, Mowrer has been contacting various snake dealers from around the nation, offering to sell his remaining stock of animals with dummy low prices. He got too drunk at a bar, got arrested, and was put in jail for drunk driving.

October 26th. An 11th cobra pops up. This time, authorities catch it. Alive. In a pickle jar.

With 11 cobras counted for, and assuming the unidentified snake Mowrer whisked away on Sep 8th was cobra #12, detectives announce that the hunt is finally over.

For the next week, the pickle jar cobra is displayed at the local zoo.

Everything dies down for a while.

November 16th. A boa constrictor is caught and killed, and immediately blamed on our boy Reo. He skips town. Without a scapegoat, everyone loses interest and the Great cobra Scare of 1953 is finally put to bed.

Good story, right?

ITS NOT OVER BITCH.

WERE JUMPIN TO 1988.

A nearly 55 year old man named Carl Barnett approaches the former Leader and Press with a shocking confession.

“I’m the one that did it.”

Let's explain.

Back in 1953, then 14 year old Carl had a business deal with Reo Mowrer. Carl would catch snakes around town, and trade them to Reo for 15 cents a piece, or for a new pet fish. This kept Carl busy for most of the summer months, until the second week of August. Barnett had traded a snake to Reo for a tropical fish he had his eye on in the pet store. By the time he got home, the fish had died. He went back to the shop and confronted Mowrer, and Mowrer said “that’s tough.” so fuck off, kid. Lol. So Carl went out back, saw the crates full of snakes, and let them loose. Worried that he would face charges for his actions, Barnett held the secret for most of his life. 35 years later, after being assured by an attorney that he wouldn’t face charges or jail time, he finally told the truth. Reo Mowrer died before hearing the confession.

THE FUCKING END JESUS CHRIST.