

The background of the cover is a photograph of a swing set on a playground. The ground is covered in brown wood chips. A black swing seat is suspended by a metal chain, hanging from the top right. A shadow of a person is cast on the wood chips on the left side of the image.

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ABYSS: THE CORPORATE
PSYCHOPATH WITHIN
THE ZONE OF
OCCUPATIONAL FRAUD**

**VETTING TV
SHOW OFFERS**

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Robbery by Ratite

BY DANIEL J. DEMERS

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Waterbury Evening
Democrat [CN],
June 29, 1900

The 1900 Paris Exposition introduced to the world a number of innovations including the electric trolley bus, the moving sidewalk and the talking movie. And let's not forget the nesting Russian dolls.

There was even an "educated" California ostrich en route to the fair. The ostrich was shipped to the expo in mid-April, 1900 but as of June 11th still hadn't arrived. Accompanying the ostrich when loaded aboard ship in New York City was a foursome: an older man, his ravishing daughter and two attendants. All four booked first-class passage on a luxury liner bound for Cherbourg, France. In 1900, marine transit was the only available mode of transportation across the ocean. The voyage was scheduled to take eight and a half days and nine nights.

On the third day at sea, several "well to do" passengers reported jewelry stolen from their cabins. According to the *San Francisco* [CA] *Call*, over the course of the voyage a little more than thirty state rooms were "entered, trunks opened, jewel caskets emptied and strong boxes looted." The thefts varied in value: Texas' Mrs. James H. Davis lost \$8,000 worth of her jewels; Mrs. George F. Washburn of Boston "parted with a dia-

mond crescent and pearl necklace worth \$3,300," and New York's Miss Mae George's \$1,200 diamond tiara was purloined. All told, the thefts totaled \$45,000, amounting to a cool \$1.5 million in today's values.

According to the *Call* article, "every effort was made to [find the perpetrators] of these wholesale robberies." Ship detectives searched twenty-five passengers' staterooms in vain. When the ship docked in Cherbourg, French police continued the investigation, but all to no avail. Not a clue existed as to the identity of the thieves or how they pulled off the robberies.

Ferdinand W. Peck, Commissioner General of the American delegation to the Paris Exposition was baffled that the California "educated" ostrich was still a no-show. A few days later the "disemboweled" ostrich cadaver was found in a Cherbourg suburb. Era newspapers reported that "nearby [the body] were a few broken bits of what had been expensive jewelry."

Police concluded the foursome who accompanied the ostrich at boarding were "the most expert diamond thieves in the United States." The jewels, once stolen, were simply fed to the ostrich. Like chickens, the toothless ostrich requires pebbles or rocks to help grind their food as it reaches their gizzards. The precious stones made the perfect substitution for the gizzard stones, and the substitution by the "attendants" was easy.



CASINO GOWN.
chiffon. The blouse and overskirt are made of black chantilly lace. The underskirt is of plain black net banded with black velvet ribbons of different widths, and the sleeves and bolero effect are also made of the velvet ribbon

"The picture hat is made of black tulle with a facing of white chiffon. It is trimmed with five black ostrich tips and a jeweled buckle."

Judic Chollet (1901)
Weiser Signal [ID]



"A Parisian hat. Made of ecru straw...with a facing of tucked black mull and a bow of shaded coral taffeta, from which three black ostrich feathers droop gracefully."

Judic Chollet (1901)
Weiser Signal [ID]

While the baffled police and ship detectives were on board the ship investigating the robberies, as reported by the *Waterbury [CT] Evening Democrat*, the thieves "had ample time to escape before their scheme was suspected."

It was Oscar Wilde who wrote "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness." Sure enough, nearly two years after the incident, a "mediocre" lady and gentleman accompanied a flock of twelve ostriches shipped from London to New Orleans. While transiting the Atlantic there were "mysterious wholesale jewelry robberies." When the birds arrived in New Orleans there were only eleven. This case ended differently though – the two thieves were apprehended. While Scotland Yard detectives were baffled, the French police had acquired a bit of experience with the use of ostriches as stolen jewelry receptacles. The *Redwood Gazette [MN]* reported the Parisian police "arrested them as they were about to sail for America."

Ostriches don't always need humans to steal jewels. Take the case of Jacob Becker, a jeweler from Colorado Springs, CO. A 1901 edition of the *Arizona Republican* reported that the jeweler visited an ostrich farm and "one little [curious] ostrich...began to investigate Becker's cloth-

ing, looking in his pockets for candy and the like." A diamond stud on Becker's shirt "attracted the bird...[and] in a flash it had swallowed the stud." At press time "powerful emetics" were being administered to the "little ostrich in an endeavor to recover the involuntary investment," concluded the *Republican*.

At the turn of the twentieth century ostrich feathers were in big demand for ladies' hats and fashion. Huge farms around the world existed to supply the millinery, fashion, leather and jewelry industries.

The plumes were used as decorations on women's clothing. They were fashionable hair ornaments, too. One ladies' newspaper column described some such thingamajigs as: "combs with glistening ornamental headings, large shell pins with coronets, jeweled gauze butterflies, jeweled nêgrettes, *ostrich tips mounted on gold pins*, diamond wings...[from] which rises an osprey..."

As a side note, ostriches do not hide their heads in the sand when frightened. As flightless birds, they nest on the ground in holes they dig. From time to time, they place their heads in the nest to roll their eggs which somehow morphed into the myth. Also, George Washington never had or used wooden false teeth, but that's another story. **PI**