



# ABLAZE! The Mysterious Fires of Spontaneous Human Combustion

By Larry E. Arnold

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**ABLAZE! The Mysterious Fires of Spontaneous Human Combustion** By Larry E. Arnold

Spontaneous Human Combustion: detested, disdained, denied, debunked by nearly all academicians and forensic professionals as simply "Impossible! The human body does not burn this way! These are hoaxes! There is no way; no way, period." But what if the overwhelming consensus against SHC is wrong? Part of a human limb extends from a pile of ash at an otherwise nearly pristine fire scene, proving a person has somehow been incinerated more thoroughly than by a crematory retort. It's made many first-responders uncomfortable when they find themselves for the first time confronting what education, training and experience has clearly not prepared them. If it makes you uncomfortable, do not buy this book.

However: if this makes you inquisitive, curious, and eager to know more about the most extreme of combustion conundrums and whether the idea of what history as called SHC deserves to be ridiculed, reviled, rebuked and rejected, or embraced as a preternatural puzzle awaiting a solution ABLAZE! will make for a satisfying, if disconcerting, read.

What is the evidence for The Fire Within? How do firemen react to mounds of human ashes found inside unburned rooms, even inside uncharred clothing? Are these mere "smoking mishaps" as coroners quickly claim, or deaths far less easily explained away? Why do fire scenes crying out for answers meet with misrepresentation, even suppression, of evidence? Why the cover-ups? ABLAZE! represents two decades of international research that discovered many baffling blazes heretofore lost in dust-covered obscure medical tomes; discloses publicly dramatic new cases of fantastic fires for the first time; presents rare photographs of astonishingly localized incinerations attributed to "clever camera angles" (you decide); and grapples with testimony from eye-witnesses to the "impossible" and of survivors who say they experienced limited SHC and lived to tell the tale.

ABLAZE! argues the case that if no other explanation can resolve this fantastic fires, then SHC must be added to medical lexicon.

Is ABLAZE! a work of fiction? Non-fiction? Medicine? Science? To classify this book is, like its subject, challenging and depends largely on what (who) the reader chooses to or can believe. Shortly before publication of this book, Arthur C. Clarke remarked: "Some cases still seem to defy explanation, and leave me with a creepy and very unscientific feeling. If there's anything more to SHC, I simply don't want to know."

ABLAZE! is about a phenomenon that has remained a hidden malady for over one hundred years; is hotly debated; scientifically confounding; fascinating to ponder.

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*By Larry E. Arnold*

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

What kind of fire leaves a human body utterly incinerated bones reduced to ash while combustibles only inches away, and far more ignitable than human flesh, remains undestroyed, or even unscorched? That, in a nutshell, is the baffling mystery of spontaneous human combustion(SHC).

For more than 20 years, Fortean investigator and scholar Larry Arnold has been smoking out cases of SHC, historic and modern, searching for answers to a mystery that has fascinated and bewildered generations. In ABLAZE! Arnold presents his findings, and the result is a breathtaking production. Solidly researched, every page riveting, ABLAZE! is a five-alarm Fortean classic.

Arnold thoroughly researches and investigates the best-known cases of SHC such as the fiery death of Dr. Irving Bentley in Coudersport, Pennsylvania, in 1966, and the SHC survival of Jack Angel in Georgia in 1974 as well as numerous obscure human burnings that defy understanding. Thankfully, SHC is an extraordinarily rare phenomenon only some 300 cases are known over the past four centuries but Arnold suspects that hundreds, possibly thousands, of other cases have occurred whose true nature was either unrecognized, or recognized by misrepresented for fear of ridicule.

And SHC does have its ridiculers, notably author Joe Nickell, who claims that SHC is impossible. With the patience of a kind schoolteacher, Arnold exposes the fallacies of Nickell's arguments and the limits of his research. Joe Nickell is to Larry Arnold what Inspector Lestrade was to Sherlock Holmes, and not even a Niagara of debunkers will put out the flames of ABLAZE!

My favorite chapter of ABLAZE! is the one devoted to the mysterious fire death of Mrs. Mary Reeser in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 1951. Investigators were baffled by the near-total annihilation of Mrs. Reeser's body in an apartment fire that left more easily-combustible objects beside her unscathed. Dr. Wilton Krogman, a renowned forensic pathologist who investigated the case and published his own findings, was baffled by the evidence and unable to explain the woman's death. Eager to know what Dr. Krogman thought of the case in later years, Arnold interviewed him. What Dr. Krogman 'revealed' about Mrs. Reeser's bizarre immolation left Arnold flabbergasted and you will be too. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book.

ABLAZE! is a feast for the mind if not for the stomach; the book's accompany photographs of SHC victims will have you pushing your chair away from the dinner table in a hurry! An old SHC victim-profile, which indicated that paupers were more likely to "go up in smoke" than professionals for some reason is one that Arnold's research flatly contradicts. The poor are no more likely to burn than the rich. If anything, I would have though the rich had a better chance of burning.

So, what is SHC? With honesty and humility, Arnold admits that after his many years of research he doesn't have a theory to explain the phenomenon. In fact, he doubts if there is a single answer to the mystery, suspecting a complex interaction of forces both environmental and biological. ...

It is worth noting that in ABLAZE! Arnold avoids a common mistake of Fortean authors: assuming a mystery's strangeness is reason enough for the reader to keep turning the pages. It isn't. Good story-telling technique is required. Arnold's prose is crisp, lively, exciting, his dramatic sense keen, and his humor sharp and sardonic. Fittingly, a chapter of ABLAZE! honors examples of SHC found in the writings of classic novelists, among them Washington Irving, Herman Melville, and Honore de Balzac. Fortean scholarship and story-telling craft do make a powerful team, as ABLAZE! brilliantly

Pay rent if you have to, buy groceries if you must, but get a copy of ABLAZE! at all costs. You will never read a more fascinating book. --Review by Dwight Whalen in INFO Journal (Autumn 1996)

#### About the Author

Larry E. Arnold redirected a background in engineering to explore the Unconventional. Recognized

internationally for his pioneering research in forteana (phenomena that challenge orthodoxy), he is regarded as the leading authority about Spontaneous Human Combustion. His investigation of SHC spans a quarter-century and several continents. The author of three books, he has been featured on hundreds of radio shows and many television programs in the USA, Canada, Great Britain, France, Japan and South Korea.

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