

"Lightning Strike" caused Theme Park Inferno

Initially thought to be sabotage, police now say the blaze that killed two British Nationals "the result of freak weather"

by NIGEL POLLOCK

In the small hours of 10th August 1992, a devastating fire broke out at Dunkelschloss Theme Park, Germany.

Despite its remote location in the Black Forest, emergency services were able to respond before the fire spread to the surrounding woodland, but were too late to save the Slavic folktale-themed section of the park known as *Baba Yaga Land*.

More chilling yet, the bodies of two elderly British Nationals were discovered in a subterranean utility corridor beneath horror-themed ride *Koschei the Deathless*. Showing signs of smoke inhalation, the couple appear to have attempted to escape the inferno by gaining access to the passage, but fell down the vertical shaft into the corridor and died from the impact.

Questions Raised, Arson Suspected

THE victims were soon identified as the Managing Director of Dunkelschloss, Hilda Peterson, 66, and co-owner of British theme park Mockery Manor, Timothy Jenkins, 68. Dunkelschloss and Mockery Manor are part of the pan-European Wizzard Entertainment Group that includes *Beluga Paradiso* (Pisa), *Le Donjon d'Antoine* (Paris), *Snöland* (Stockholm) and *Tierra de Castillos* (Valencia), amongst others.

The victims' presence late at night in the bowels of a Dunkelschloss ride immediately raised questions, and leaked reports coming from the park suggested incendiary devices and bullet casings had been found on-site. A later report indicated that while Hilda Peterson and Timothy Jenkins had died of blunt force trauma, they had also been shot.



Black Forest Police insist that such reports did not come from official sources and "have no basis in fact", but are the result of gossip and rumour from uninformed members of the public.

Newly-released forensic reports make no reference to acts of violence or sabotage. Instead, they detail how the lightning rod on the turret of *Koschei the Deathless* was knocked out by high winds, and a subsequent lightning strike travelled through the wiring and pipes, along the ride track and ventilation systems, and melted a hole in the wall of a major gas pipe, allowing gas to escape and ignite.

Controversially, the areas of the park untouched by fire damage re-opened to the public shortly after the blaze at the behest of the remaining Wizzard directors, although in the months following, a decision was made to close Dunkelschloss's gates forever. All rides and fixtures were dismantled and shipped abroad, and the site now stands empty. And last week, the investigation into the origin of the fire was ruled 'a freak act of nature' and brought to a close.

For the evening of the 10th August, the Black Forest weather bureau reported a mostly clear night with dry conditions, and temperatures in the seasonal average.