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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

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Sophie Mangal

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Tragic Fate of Skripal's Pets

The scandal with the poisoning of the former GRU agent Sergei Skripal is gaining momentum. Meanwhile, absolutely innocent creatures suffered because of the diplomatic war between the UK and Russia.

Remember that two dead guinea pigs and a black Persian cat in a critical condition were found in the ex-spy's home. Then the cat was taken to the Porton Down chemical weapons lab (not to a veterinary clinic which would be more expected). In the laboratory, chemists made a weird diagnosis, which they described as a "distressed state". The cat was euthanized. Its body, as well as those of the two guinea pigs, were immediately incinerated which was confirmed by the British government.

Shortly after the Russian Embassy in London posed the question on what happened to the animals that Sergey Skripal kept in his Salisbury house, the British side, first in an unnamed leak and then as a DEFRA comment, said that "when a vet was able to access the property, two guinea pigs had sadly died. A cat was also found in a distressed state and a decision was taken by a veterinary surgeon to euthanize the animal to alleviate its suffering".

This is, however, the sort of answer that brings about still more questions. Regarding the dead guinea pigs and the malnourished cat, it is said unofficially that they were taken to the Porton Down facility and incinerated there. But it remains unclear if their remains were ever tested for toxic substances, which would constitute useful evidence, and if not, why such a decision was made.

The fact that the animals were locked inside the house for several days suggests that the police did not access the alleged crime scene, which would be very unusual for such a high profile investigation. Such treatment of pets is also hardly consistent with UK laws on animal cruelty and comes as a blatant disregard for Mr. Skripal's rights as the owner and companion of the animals.

Overall, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the animals have been disposed of as an inconvenient piece of evidence. It is also to be noted that, according to Mr. Skripal's niece Viktoria, there were 2 cats, not one, in the house – and the whereabouts of the second one is still unknown.

Nevertheless, the way how the UK police treat animals is absolutely awful and unacceptable. Moreover, even their bodies could cast some light on this case. Instead, we have even more questions than before.

Firstly, why were the pets sealed in the house with no food and water? How is it possible to imagine such a mockery and careless attitude towards animals? British officials must be held accountable for their decision to leave the pets inside the sealed-up house without any nutrition. In fact, their actions can be classified as animal abuse, which resulted in their death.

Secondly, no matter how cynical this may sound, any living organism remained at the place where the potential poisoning occurred could indirectly help the investigation process. You don't even need to be an expert in chemistry to understand it. The use of such a potent substance as Novichok agent might have affected the pets as well. Unfortunately, we will never know this as their bodies were eliminated. No one even asked for their owners' permission for that.

It seems like the British side is trying to cover up the tracks and destroy all the evidence. In Hollywood movies, criminals act like this when a detective tells them their version is not valid. Draw your own conclusions.

But why was the fate of Skripal's pets tragic?

Actually, there are 6 potential answers:

1. The death of any animal is a tragedy.
2. Any of the bad actors described above could have actually weaponised the pets using Porton Down technology - this demonstrates the ruthlessness of the British Secret Services and their involvement with Animal Testing - such a pointless and anti-human waste of life.

3. The 3rd is a tragedy, because it was nearly a good news story: the escape to freedom of animals previously used in weapons testing: Apparently Porton Down uses Guinea Pigs to trial its chemical weaponry. Porton Down, as we now know, is only a few miles from Salisbury. Guinea pigs escaped from the laboratory (or from the nearby chemical weapons exercises, where perhaps they were being kept out in the field in the back of a truck - maybe to go in - like they used to use canaries in coal mines) and infected the Skripals.
4. The 4th - because the Skripal's were unable to speak when they were found, they couldn't inform the police about the pets at home, so they were not immediately rescued. The operatives who were sent into the home were not pet lovers, had not been trained in pet welfare and didn't have the pets at the top of their mind when investigating the house. No-one thought to mention the welfare of the pets to a senior officer, everyone just assumed they would be OK - like when people leave their dogs in a car. Or if someone did mention it during the initial police investigation, no written note was made and it did not form part of the briefing to the ChemWeaps team who went to seal up the house. They just sealed up the house from the outside and didn't think to check the inside for pets. That is a tragedy, because just one thought might have saved 3 innocent lives.
5. The 5th, the evidence from a proper examination of the pets *while alive* could have exonerated Russia from all suspicion. This is a tragedy for the fair conduct of the the enquiry and, potentially, a tragedy for world peace.
6. *This seems the most unlikely, but sometimes it is the unlikely that stacks up - particularly if it is a series of errors that leads to the outcome, rather than any multi-party conspiracy being required:* PETA ("People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals") were the first to go on record about the pets in the UK. PETA are a UK-based, European Organisation. It also has significant presence in the US, where it has been the subject of newspaper criticism. In Sweden, which is one of the countries identified by Russia, as producing Novichok, there is also an active Animal Rights scene - they have had more success than the same organisations in the UK in raising the bar for animal protection. It is possible that Skripal had been reported to PETA by one of his neighbours - for animal cruelty in leaving them alone for extended periods of time. Perhaps Djurens Ratt (a 100 year old animal protection body) picked up the report and decided to pay back Skripal. This would have been fine, had the Guinea Pigs lived outside (as is most common in the UK - it is possible that Skripal had only brought them indoors because of the recent exceptionally cold weather) or if there had been a catflap; in fact neither was the case. This

is a tragedy, because in a good faith attempt to rescue the pets, the rescuer in fact ended up killing them.

Reasons 2, 3 & 5 have been hinted at by the Russians and, it seems, may have been a likely independent avenue of enquiry of theirs, had they been allowed one. The Russians have been denied any line of independent enquiry and this is a tragedy for the standing of the UK in the world (not, see earlier answers).