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To the very purgative Rolando.

If Bengel had possessed a system similar to that offered by our Game, he probably would have been spared all the misguided effort involved in his calculation of the prophetic numbers and his annunciation of the Antichrist and the Millennial Kingdom'...

'It is fortunate you are not a historian,' Jacobus commented. 'You tend to let your own imagination run away with you.'

The Glass Bead Game, Hermann Hesse

I bumped into an old schoolmate today; he was cheerfully telling passers-by to repent at Euston station. I stopped to chat and, I must confess, I was jealous. Not only was he indecently happy, not only did his entire body beam every time he said 'Jesus', but his fliers were just so damn current! In amongst the usual Pentecostal gibberish was a cartoon of an unhappy looking stockbroker and some bullet points about the financial crash. It only happened a week ago!

Well, it's all right for some, but my sermon is 144,000 words, and I can barely keep pace with the impending apocalypse. At the risk of appearing outdated, and even more unfashionable than Bible-thumping apocalypstics already are, I offer my yellowing sermon as it is, as it was, in one of the last Septembers of the Common Era.

Here we go...

The First Seal

And behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.¹

Civilisations have been conquering each other since the dawn of history, but today a new empire breaches all borders, cutting through religious divisions and traditional hatreds to bring all tribes into its suffocating embrace. This is the spectre of international capitalism. The Cold War was the last stand for any other system, and China, despite being nominally communist, is more commercialised today than most democracies. 30 years after the Vietnam War, there are 30 colonels lickin' fingers in Ho Chi Min City KFC outlets.² Coca-cola is sold in Thar Desert tests and in Kenyan shacks, and American Express is welcome from Miami to Mecca. There are still tribes deep in the forests of Gabon who do not know what a dollar is, but the forests are shrinking. A culture of monoculture advances, trampling diversity where it treads and trades. Swathes of Southeast Asia have been concreted over in the name of development, the oceans have been robbed of 90 percent of their large fish.³ Even when we take a break we are catastrophic. Holiday resorts threaten 124 of 135 Hawaiian bird species with extinction,⁴ and 650 million tonnes of raw sewage pour into the Med each year.⁵

The 'one rule for the industrialist [is to] make the best quality of goods possible at the lowest cost possible, paying the highest wages possible', said a rather optimistic Henry Ford. Today, high wages are generally reserved for management, and best quality means most profitable. The first horseman is crowned and conquering; money rules. Many multinationals earn more than the countries they trade in, and have considerable political clout. When the bottom line defines, production is pushed to the max. In the food industry, for example, supermarket meat is raised on chemicals and pickled in additives. Consumed growth hormones are thought to be responsible for girls maturing younger than a few generations ago, and antibodies that keep animals alive in the filth of factory farms compromise our immune systems.

Pesticides, fertilizers, antibiotics and additives were first synthesised in the mid-twentieth century, and many have been accumulating at the top of the food chain ever since. Dioxins produced in the manufacture of herbicides almost certainly interfere with our gonads. After an industrial accident in Italy, the nine couples suffering the highest exposure produced twelve daughters and no sons, a chance of less than one in 4,000. Dioxin or something similar may be responsible for the ratio of births in many industrialised nations shifting to favour girls over the last 60 years.⁶ Other persistent organic pollutants including

aspartame (in *NutraSweet*) are blamed for European sperm counts dropping by about one percent per year over the same period, and may also be behind the rapid increase in testicular cancer (as much as 300 percent in some countries.) My old chemistry teacher, whom we called Mr Baked Bean on account of his jaundiced pate ringed with the last strands of a ginger history, explained that it was the tight underpants young men wore these days which were putting the squeeze on sperm counts. I went organic and switched to boxers to be on the safe side.

The Industrial Revolution led to mass production, economies of scale, and international trade networks. Atmospheric CO₂ has been increasing exponentially ever since, and it is now over 30 percent higher than before. In 1992, 113 meteorology professors selected by their governments met to study the data. 51 concluded that runaway global warming was a possibility, and 15 thought it was probable. By the time they reconvened in 2001, the situation had deteriorated beyond their worst-case scenarios.⁸ ⁹ They noted that sea levels increased at an average annual rate of 1 to 2mm during the twentieth century, and that the 1990s were the warmest decade of the millennium. They also projected a CO₂ concentration of between double and four times pre-Industrial Revolution levels.¹⁰

Sceptics point out that statistics do not prove causality, so we cannot establish a link between habits, CO₂ increase, and the climate. They are right, of course. Statistical techniques were developed specifically to get away from theory. We have only correlations, because you cannot model the greenhouse effect in the lab. You can, however, look out of the window.

It was spring in England when I planned this sermon, and it was snowing, whilst the cherry blossom came two weeks late in Japan, pushing the cherry parties and TV extravaganzas out of synch. I wrote the second draft in the Amazon, where the white horse is at full charge, transmuting the rainforest into gold and smoke. Brazil is the fourth largest greenhouse gas producer in the world. Most climatologists studying the Amazon agree that we are approaching the 'tipping point', when environmental damage triggers an irreversible cycle of destruction; they disagree over whether we have a margin of years or decades. During the second edit, an e-mail from Cape Town described the biggest waves in living memory pounding the coast. As I redrafted in La Paz, Mount Chacaltaya, which provides the water for the capital, was giving up the last of her snow, and her ski lifts hung forlorn. This is part of a trend. Along with the polar icecaps, Mount Kenya's glaciers have shrunk by 92 percent, Kilimanjaro has lost 73 percent,¹¹ and Alpine snow cover has halved.¹² As three million La Paz residents worry about what they will drink in ten years time, I chew coca leaves and type all

night in the hope that the end of *Nemu's End* will come before the end of time.

And then there are other costs of the oil trade...

The Second Seal

And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another...¹³

As bombs fell on Kabul, I was in WH Smiths of Paddington station, buying a phone-card. A young man of Middle Eastern extraction took offence at the newspaper headlines, and began shouting 'Kill all Americans!' Amidst a chorus of Englishman's tuts, a shopper asked why; he replied that they were 'fucking wankers'. More tuts, and the shopper told him this was a contradiction in terms. The cashier raised her eyebrows and gave me the wrong change.

The end must be nigh for a Brit to publicly defend Americans. Tensions are running high, and there are a lot of very scared, very angry, not very bright people in the world, retreating into their respective ignorant corners. If we follow the official line on 9/11, lightly armed gangs killed three thousand. What exactly is their problem?

Unlike in Christianity and Judaism, there never was an Islamic reformation. Iraq had the most advanced reform movement in the world in 1990, but it has been in the grip of fundamentalist factions bombing each others' mosques since NATO destroyed 2.5 percent of her population and most of her infrastructure.¹⁴ This is the kind of treatment that transformed a traditionally tolerant faith into the threat it is today. During the Crusades it was Christians who massacred civilians whilst Muslims spared them, and the Moors protected both Jews and Christians in Islamic Spain. Shortly after they were ousted, the Spanish Inquisition was formed to enforce the faith with the rack.

In 1945, President Roosevelt invited the King of Saudi Arabia to a top-secret meeting aboard the USS Quincy in the Suez Canal. Ibn Saud had been instructed to arrive with no more than ten men and a handful of his closest advisors. Being a Bedouin, he rocked up with a party of 48, several boats laden with food for the whole ship's crew, and over a 100 sheep to slaughter. The captain initially refused to let them board, but eventually allowed the king to pitch his tent on the deck and tether his sheep on the destroyer's fantail.¹⁵ Over the next few decades, various interests dragged the Arab world out of the Middle Ages, but whilst the economics of oil-rich nations changed enormously, many social institutions remain much as they were, and democracy and freedom did not develop as advertised. The inevitable anti-Western backlash was lead by the Ayatollah Khomeini, a man for whom infidels were impure

in the manner of dogs and turd.¹⁶ He advocated not only revolution in Iran, but also the conquest of all non-Muslim territories.

A dark crescent is ascending. A movement gathers momentum, with desperate and disaffected Muslims in refugee camps, rubble-strewn streets and sleeper cells, praying for the destruction of Western civilisation. There have been devastating attacks in India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Sudan, Kenya, several European capitals, and in America, 'the Great Satan' herself. The bogeyman Bin Ladin was funded and armed by the US in the first place, as were Sadam and various other Middle Eastern warlords .

Jihadis of the Islamic world are lead to believe that martyrdom will take them to paradise, where 72 dark-eyed virgins await them on jewelled couches, along with servants, fine foods and wine. I suspect they will be disappointed. Capitalists of the Western world are lead to believe that free trade will bring security, opportunity, and happiness. I suspect they will be disappointed, as these jewels are neither abundant nor equally distributed in 'free world'. The US continues to fight her capitalist holy war with invasions and sanctions, and with as much fervour as her enemies.

Personally I have no urge to hijack anything more than an air stewardess, but I have never spent time in a refugee camp. Whilst the prospect of being overrun by an Arabian hoard is not a pretty one, left to our own devices we post-Christians and lapsed Confucians may scorch far more than all-out jihad, including the planet's ecosystem and genetic pool. 9/11 was horrendous, but perhaps the mad Mullahs are the only ones who can save us from our own madness, erasing our world with our technology and trading away our souls on the stock market. Smashing the bright lights of twenty-first century might allow the planet some well-needed rest and recuperation in a new Dark Age.

...and there was given unto him a great sword¹⁷

As time goes on, technology becomes smaller, cheaper, and more powerful, whether a laptop or a warhead. Biological weapons have been privately manufactured and employed against Japanese commuters, anthrax has been sent through the post, and the nuclear threat grows. The first two strikes in history killed over 100,000 instantly, and many more slowly and painfully, but this is just a taste of the potential of the 'great sword'.¹⁸ Small nuclear weapons were used in the Second Gulf War, and there are US warheads 65,000 times more destructive than Hiroshima's nemesis. The delay between button and launch is fifteen minutes. It would be bad enough if it was just one itchy finger on the button, but nuclear secrets are available on the black market, and 45 countries are gathering the material to manufacture nukes.¹⁹ Of these, Iran, Libya, Algeria, Taiwan, and both North and South Korea have

either neighbours they have recently pledged to destroy, or neighbours with claims on their territory.²⁰ Unlike Nagasaki, the next strike will start a war, not end one. An Israel-shaped thorn digs into Arabia's side, China rattles sabres on various borders, North Korea tests missiles over Japanese airspace, and ancient enemies with modern weapons glare at each other over the mountains of Kashmir. According to former US Secretary of Defence William J. Perry:

I have never been more fearful of a nuclear detonation than now. ...There is a greater than 50 percent probability of a nuclear strike on US targets within a decade.²¹

The Third Seal

and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny...²²

If we are to learn anything from 9/11, we must look at things as they are, beyond hyperbolic reports of heroes and cowards. The jihadis were twisted, for whatever reason, and horrifically ruthless, but there is nothing 'cowardly' about dying for your beliefs. The 'heroes' were pen pushers, basically, and 'puter-tappers perishing in front of spreadsheets, and some of them just made coffee. Nothing too heroic there. Nothing too Satanic either, but this manipulation of code also claims victims, and in much greater numbers than terrorism. The economics of the international market mean, for example, that it is profitable for the USA to import beef from Argentina, one of the most fertile countries on earth. It is much more profitable for a handful of multinationals and ranch owners to export beef than sell food at home, and so nearly half of the population sits on the breadline, even in years of record harvests.²³

The WTC workers may have been guilty of nothing more than blinkered vision, and no one deserves to die for that, but do Argentinean peasants deserve to starve for not owning land? Do 300,000 Americans deserve to die each year in an epidemic of obesity,²⁴ guilty of nothing more than letting Ronald McDonald convince them that they love it? Not very guilty victims abound, not least the earth beneath our feet, but the misery machine keeps running, and it is this, not America, which deserves the name of 'Great Satan'.

...and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.²⁵

Oil sucked from the earth's veins runs Western civilisation, and wine represents luxury. Wine lakes and sugar mountains accumulate in Europe, whilst African farmers are forced to compete with subsidised

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European crops in their local markets. 40 percent of the world is malnourished, half of which eats too little whilst the other half eats too much. 80 percent of the global population subsists on just 14 percent of the wealth, and the situation is rapidly deteriorating.²⁶ From 1960 to 1997, the income gap between the richest and poorest fifths jumped from 30:1 to 74:1. In 2002, Americans spent over \$10 billion on pet food, \$4 billion more than the cost of attending to the health and nutrition of the entire planet.²⁷ Fine tartan dog kennels sell in Harrods for £1,000, enough to build several houses in the Third World. This is deeply sick, and it is also coming to an end, because global finance is disappearing down the toilet.

House prices recently crashed in the US, and are falling in parts of the EU, robbing many of their chief assets. Over the last three years, the price of steel, copper, nickel, tin, and many other materials climbed to record levels, and crude oil is over twenty percent above its all-time high. Whilst this causes havoc in richer nations, the billion souls who live on one dollar per day are not seriously affected. The rising cost of food, however, is a different story. The 'measure of wheat for a penny' shrank rapidly in the first quarter of 2008. After 30 years of cheap food, the price of wheat, rice, maize, and other staples began to rise sharply, due to the increased buying power of supermarkets, and an expanding middle class going back for seconds.

Whilst there have been local famines before, this squeeze is global. Pakistan introduced ration cards, and there are food shortages throughout the equatorial region from Afghanistan to El Salvador. Parents are taking their children out of school to afford rice,²⁸ and food riots have erupted in Haiti, Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, and the Philippines. A severe famine is predicted in nuclear North Korea, and even traditionally conservative analysts expect serious problems, including civil strife in African countries dependent on food imports. Islamic fringe groups grow bold and popular in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and especially Bangladesh, where high prices increased the misery caused by cyclones and flooding. 60 million Bangladeshis were struggling to feed themselves in 2008, and a state of emergency was declared when riots broke out. Whereas a steel deficit is easily fixed by buying more shovels, there is no quick fix for a food deficit. Flooding areas with food aid feeds the starving, but devalues local crops and pushes farmers out of business. It can take decades before new farming techniques increase yields, but people starve in weeks, and governments fall in days.

The world financial system crashed before, in the twenties, when people who thought they were rich painfully discovered they were poor. That was a different world, before the multinational had wiped out local industries, when neighbours still traded turnips. Our apartment blocks

tower high above the soil. Most modern Westerners have never seen a tomato plant, and don't know if a garlic bulb goes pointy side up or down. GM crops are touted as the answer, but they bring their own problems, not least that they are engineered sterile. This keeps the market captive, but if the market collapses, we may find that we are seedless g-nomes fishing in concrete pools. The Great Depression ended with World War II. What will our crisis lead to?

How long will the illusion of plenty last? The rich countries are ready to burst into sickly syrup, like hideous rotting fruits on a tree, with roots leaching the Third World. But the soil is parched and the tree is tottering...

Take cover! Flee the cities! Plant some carrots!

The Fourth Seal

I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.²⁹

First century Jerusalem was littered with corpses, as was seventeenth century England, and our own apocalypse is already showing promise of a body count to match its global scope. The sword is raised, hunger is rising, and microscopic 'beasts of the earth' threaten us with disease. Epidemics have rolled across continents before, but sex tourists, intravenous drugs, and long-distance truckers ensure that something like AIDS can span the globe in years.

'Don't die of ignorance' warned the old anti-AIDS slogan. I lived in Kenya in 1995, and everyone knew how HIV was transmitted, and that one in six people carried the touch of death, but few Kenyans picked up the free condoms. They just preferred not using them. Habit kills more than ignorance. Disease always has something to do with habit, whether we are sedentary or workaholic. Even for those of us who avoid Cheesy Wotsits, it is our habit to reject what is good, to polish the husk of brown rice off, to peel and cook away many of the vitamins in our food, to spit out bitter fruit seeds, but seeds kill parasites. I chewed through mountains of papaya pips and lemon seeds when I was sick. They don't taste good, but they are a lot easier to get used to than necrosis.ⁱ

ⁱ AIDS may be due to different habits. Unlike other diseases, there is no screen, because there is no AIDS antigen. It may have more to do with chemically overloaded immune systems and food shortages than with HIV. AIDS has been found in the absence of HIV, and prostitutes with HIV have lived for decades without developing AIDS.

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Other habits are collective, such as burning plastic in our rubbish and releasing carcinogens. The unnatural farming practices which lead to chicken 'flu and CJD are habits almost completely beyond our control (though we could always overthrow the state if we objected strongly enough). There are also the pathogenic habitats people are born into, overcrowded Bangladeshi deltas with waves of cholera, inner city estates with waves of smack.

There is, however, a more serious drug habit. Our bodies evolved in constant battle with armies of pathogens, but since 1945, pharmaceuticals have made our immune systems redundant. Viruses, on the other hand, do not rest. They develop drug-resistance almost as fast as we can develop drugs.³⁰ *Staphylococcus aureus* was resistant to penicillin within two years of meeting it, and defeated methicillin at the same speed. This killer is now becoming resistant to vancomycin as well.³¹ Chloroquine resistance emerged independently in Columbian and Cambodian malaria microbes fifteen years after first exposure. Virtually untreatable drug-resistant TB is rising in 45 countries,^{32 33} and 60 percent of infections picked up in hospitals are drug-resistant, but this might be just the beginning. With a chemical safety net, you can get away with eating rubbish and sitting on your arse watching TV, but what if the net is taken away? What if a suitcase nuke, an earthquake, financial collapse, or some other cataclysm disables our infrastructure and cuts us off from our dealers? Do you think Glaxo, Smith or Klein will continue manufacturing your inhaler for love?

Up until very recently, old ladies picked antibiotics and tonics from their gardens or the moors, but now both the witches and the wildernesses are dying out. Few young Amazonians care to learn what their grannies know about tree barks, and they have little faith in natural remedies. No one from the Brazilian medical services I talked to mentioned a local alternative to antimonium tartrate for my leishmaniasis. Fortunately in a world governed by poetry rather than Scyense, I found a tropical remedy for a tropical parasite.

When the supply of pills dries up, when our immune systems are dragged out of retirement and no one has a clue which plant does what, then we might start dying of ignorance. Kick the habit before it is too late. I avoid pills like the plague, and you won't catch me getting sick. There are, of course, others who steer clear of chemical medicine, including many jihadis, who share my opinion that the pharmaceuticals industry is one of Satan's limbs. They are armed and organised, waiting patiently in their cells for an opportunity to strike. It took only 175 Spaniards to conquer the Inca Empire,³⁴ mostly because the Incas were too ill with European diseases to defend themselves. If our infrastructure collapses and the enemies amongst us attack,

Armageddon may be upon us, in our lymph nodes as well as on our streets.

The four horsemen ride upon the earth, as tribulations of our own making. With an earthquake, this part comes to an end, and the story moves into the astral, with terrors from the sky. But first, there is...

The Fifth Seal

... which is rather cryptic.

Wait, my white suit is still at the dry-cleaners...

The Sixth Seal

and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.³⁵

There is something about earthquakes that fills me with apocalyptic dread. My Japanese pupils did not share my panic, and found it terribly funny when I froze mid-sentence at a tiny tremor and began pointing urgently at the door and under my desk, seeking how best to save my skin. Tremors regularly shatter the illusion of permanence in Japan, and sometimes they are very well timed. My own personal best came shortly after nookie with an English girl, setting me up for a great line about the earth moving.

Another well-timed wobble woke me up on September 1st 2004, in perfect time for me to get up and go to work. It was old news by the time I arrived; the TV in the staffroom was monitoring Typhoon Chaba's progress through the Kansai region. At 11.30 a cheer went up as the presenter announced that it was headed for Kyoto. The head teacher cancelled the afternoon lessons, we secured the doors, rolled up the tennis nets, battened down the hatches so to speak, and went home to take cover.

Charles Fort spent an enviable life in the New York library, collecting and cross-referencing data on bizarre meteorology and rare astronomical events, including meteor falls, comets, earthquakes, lights in the sky, torrential rains, rains of soil, frogs, and arrowheads, and other 'damned' details the Church of Scyense prefers to exclude. He concluded that earthquakes are often synchronicitous with comets and meteors, and that really freaky events, such as lights in the sky and

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unexplained explosions of sound, are commonly accompanied by rumblings of the earth and torrential rains.

Comets have been considered ominous since at least the time of *Gilgamesh*. A comet marked the end of Anglo-Saxon rule in England in 1066, others flew over the Aztec Empire shortly before it fell,³⁶ and there was one each for London's Great Plague of 1665 and Great Fire of 1666. This superstition has now become somewhat arcane. How can something zooming past in outer space affect life on earth?

Meteorologists consider the earth to be a planet in glorious isolation. Even the extraterrestrial origin of comets was long disputed, conflicting, as it does, with Aristotle's perfect and unchanging heavens, where rocks do not fly about randomly. Meteors from space were finally accepted at the end of the eighteenth century, after several hundred witnesses reported burning rocks falling. The word is still a misnomer; **meteorology** is the study of atmospheric, not astronomic phenomena.

It seems far more unlikely to this reverend that there is anything above which does not effect below. Perhaps meteors, comets, planets, and people are only the grossest manifestations of things that span dimensions. Even if a comet misses the planet, there may be some exchange in invisible dimensions. Newton, for whom 'as above, so below' was a law of nature, expressed one facet of this occult relationship mathematically, in the law of gravity, discovered as he hid from the doom promised by the comets of the mid-1660s. There may be other influences, unrecognised or forgotten, but such ideas reek of superstition. Even the effect of the moon on the mind is highly contentious, though over 80 percent of psychiatric staff note personality changes suggesting that lunacy really is lunar.³⁷ Amazonians know that the full moon gives a richer harvest, and that cutting your hair at the waning moon ensures that it stays short longer. The new moon is the time for planting, and by extension, for beginning any enterprise. For most of history, most people, including the fathers of science, believed that planets need not touch us to move us. Fort's evidence suggests that earthquakes, rains, and other strange events occur as meteors hit home. With the sixth seal, the earth quakes as stars pound the planet in an image suggestive of a meteor storm.

The evening after the typhoon, as Kyoto's river retreated to its banks and the rain eased from Biblical to torrential, I learned that 350 Russian school-kids and teachers had been massacred in a bungled terrorist operation as I was sheltering from the downpour. September 1st was one fucked up day on planet earth, and strangely, as I discovered years later, it is disaster awareness day as well. With natural catastrophes at record levels, we are becoming painfully aware of disaster.

In 2004, the first hurricane ever known to form in the South Atlantic hit Santa Caterina, putting thousands of surprised Brazilians to flight.³⁸ The following year Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans.³⁹ 2005 was the year of the tropical Catherine wheel, with a record twenty-seven tropical storms large enough to be named. Since 1970, tropical sea-surface temperature rose by around 0.5°C; models predict that a 1°C rise would increase the large storm frequency by 31 percent.⁴⁰ A further 2°C rise is expected by 2100. New Orleans got the blues again when Hurricane Gustav followed Hurricane Katrina three years later. According to the pioneer of hurricane forecasting, the unusually high number of hurricanes in the last decade is much greater than can be accounted for by global warming. Global warming may be responsible for the record number of forest fires,⁴¹ ⁴² increasing droughts,⁴³ and increasing floods,⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ such as those which trashed parts of Santa Caterina again in 2008, but it can't explain the record numbers of earthquakes in recent years. Boxing Day 2004 saw the second biggest ever measured, literally shaking the planet one centimetre, and causing a tsunami which killed a quarter of a million.⁴⁶ El Niño is throwing a tantrum, and meteorologists don't know why, (but Al Nino from California keeps fielding confused phone calls begging him to stop the rain⁴⁷). Something is going on, but we can't quite get our heads around what it is. We stand like King Canute at the seaside, building castles and pissing radioactive waste into the sea as waves gather on the horizon.

With the sixth seal, mountains and islands shift as a meteor shower rains down. The sun, the moon, and the heavens are obscured, perhaps by dust from the meteor impacts, or from volcanic activity associated with the quake. The gravity of the situation becomes apparent, and the message begins to get through. Everyone starts to panic, the winds are held back for a time whilst the righteous are saved. John then sees 'a great multitude ... of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues', people who have passed through 'great tribulation', dressed in white, and praising God. Nuff said about them already.

The Seventh Seal

After the calm, the seventh seal is opened, and the angels begin blowing their trumpets.

The First and Second Angels

The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up...

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And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.⁴⁸

If we have the misfortune of passing through the tail of a comet, we may witness something like the first verse above. If a big rock hits the earth, it would be more like the second. If a comet approaches us from the sun side we can expect first the tail and then the head, which would be pulled more by the sun's gravity.

We are almost certain from the geological record that an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. It has been estimated that something like this happens once every 10-100 million years, which means that another may be due.⁴⁹ Shin Yabushita of Kyoto University calculates a one percent risk that the Pacific Rim cities will be wiped out by a tsunami caused by an asteroid within the century.⁵⁰ It is not very scientific, suggesting untestable ideas like this, but that is what he thinks. Meteor tracking is a new science, one many describe as a complete waste of time, as only nutters worry about such things, and there is not much to be done about it anyway. But perhaps there is something in the alarm. Both the ecstatic and the artistic imaginations have been known to predict catastrophes,ⁱ so why not the scientific? If earth's thoughts are turning towards meteors, perhaps somewhere in the galaxy, the debris of a smashed planet is turning towards us.

The Third Angel

And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.⁵¹

Meteors might contain poisonous material, and a large impact could release toxic vapours from under the earth.

The Fourth and Fifth Angels

And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise... And the fifth angel

ⁱ See The Final Draft

sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit...⁵²

Stars fall and crash, throwing soot into the atmosphere, obscuring the sky and the sun, and a volcanic eruption darkens the day with smoke.

The Sixth Angel

...And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth ... And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man⁵³

A volcanic eruption releases the contents of the earth into the atmosphere, anything from vaporised metals to methane, chemicals to torment us, or perhaps wiping out the rest of our ozone layer and putting us at the mercy of the sun. Skin cancer is already extremely common in ozone-deficient Australia, and growing elsewhere. Whilst rarely fatal, melanoma is certainly a painful torment. We have seen how prayer and meditation keep people healthy by activating the frontal lobes. Is this the seal of God in the forehead that saves the faithful?

The terrors from the sky are over, and the seventh angel takes us into a new realm.

The Seventh Angel

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven... And he had in his hand a little book open... and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished.

Might the most awesome of the angels carry the secrets of the atom? Particle physicists have uncovered incredible paradoxes in the fabric of nature and re-enacted God's wonders, creating matter from light, making explosions hotter than the sun, and turning time's arrow around, but they approach the centre of the atom without the humility

of their predecessors. Alchemists fasted and practiced austerities, they banished and invoked, they factored the movements of the heavens into their operations. The art was feared and outlawed, but today the state supplies the funds. The Large Hadron Collider at CERN was built 'to smash protons moving at 99.999999 percent of the speed of light into each other and so recreate conditions a fraction of a second after the big bang.'⁵⁴ Smashing began in 2007, which leaves only five years to initiate an aeon-wrenching chain reaction in time for our last date with Maya and the Mayans.

... And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.⁵⁵

Nuclear technology sounds sweet, but has proved bitter wherever swallowed, in Hiroshima, in Chernobyl, and in Sellafield. Whilst nuclear weapons were once considered to be responsible for unprecedented global peace, it looks like this half-century may be the calm before the storm. Whilst nuclear weapons are not yet available for private use, nuclear reactors are:

'Now let me see if I can describe it in Texas English,' said Snead... 'There's no way it can explode or melt?' Chang nodded in the affirmative.⁵⁶

This exchange takes place between tourists and hawkers at market stalls all over China. The item is usually a funky lighter, and the gringo will be fleeced if he is not careful, but in this case, Chang is hawking a reactor, and Snead is a Texan millionaire who wants one back at the ranch.

Nuclear accidents have been out of the news recently, but reporting in this field has always been suspect. In 1999, workers at Tokai-mura nuclear fuel factory dispensed with normal procedure, measuring radioactive materials by eye and mixing them in a bucket. The resulting chain-reaction continued for 20 hours, killing two and exposing 63 to dangerous levels of radiation. Despite living in the neighbouring prefecture at the time, the first I heard of it was via a friend who had read about it on the front page of an Irish newspaper. The Japanese newspapers buried it as a few unassuming inches in the middle pages, and it was mentioned as an aside on TV. Four other Tokai-mura incidents were whispered in the Japanese news in as many years, including a nuclear leak, an explosion at a waste processing facility, and the discovery of 2,000 discarded drums leaking radioactive waste. We can only guess at the number that went unreported.

The bucket incident is surprising because Japanese are justifiably noted for their attention to detail, and for doing things by the book. The exact opposite can be said of the Chinese, and China is in a hurry.ⁱ The government intends to increase her nuclear power output at least fourfold, building three nuclear reactors per year until 2020.⁵⁷ Like all things Chinese, there are political dimensions. Beijing politicians, like our Texan friend, prefer pebbled reactors, whereas the provincial authorities favour older reactors to suit their more modest budgets. The programme is as chaotic as everything else in China. According to an expert:

If you have one type of reactor, you can give very clear management procedures to reduce risk. China already has so many types of reactors that it could cause problems in the future.⁵⁸

He goes on to describe how Beijing has no clear strategy for dealing with spent fuel. Chinese typically dump their waste wherever they happen to be. Infants wear arseless trousers and shit freely as they toddle, waitresses spit on the floor of their restaurants, cans are thrown from mountain paths onto huge cascades of rubbish. On a boat trip down the three gorges, I watched 500 instant noodle pots go flying out of the windows, three times a day after every meal, to land in the foulest body of sulphurous water this side of the Styx. Soot washes the streets of Shanghai black with every shower, and 'made in China' acid rain falls on her neighbours and beyond.

Enthusiasm and the anarchic happy-go-fuck-you attitude are two endearing Chinese traits, but they are a menace when it comes to engineering. I spent a few days travelling with a civil engineer in Yunan (we had a lot to talk about, as I was an active devil worshipper, and he had recently become a devout Christian, ditching his entire rock collection with the exception of Neil Young). He explained that Chinese mountain roads were built in a two-stage process, firstly as cheaply as possible, and later re-enforcing the areas from which drivers had plunged to their deaths. If Chinese civil engineering is this chop suey, how about a sweet and sour nuclear program?

The strangest observations of quantum physics are usually explained in one of two ways. Either time's arrow goes backwards, or the experiment puts the universe in a particular configuration, as if the cosmos is part of a grand conspiracy. Is the ultimate full stop drawing research programs, magnetic fields, and meteors towards it, pulling plots and prophets into line for the final sentence? Who knows what recreating the conditions of the Big Bang will achieve? Certainly not the

ⁱ For those who cringe at national stereotypes, try lunch in China-town and dinner at a sushi bar.

people at CERN; that is why they are doing it. I asked by e-mail if it was really a good idea, and they assured me that it was well thought out, ground-breaking scientific enquiry. This might explain the quote on their website:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.ⁱ

Particles accelerate, approaching the speed of light and the end of time, and Ouroboros opens his mouth for the Big Crunch on a hadron at the tip of his tail.

In the next section of *Revelation*, the temple of God is measured out. From here on, we move from the astral into the dimension of ideals, with great beasts and forces clashing beyond the realms of experience.

The Great Dragon

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him⁵⁹

Satan's inverted pentagram represents the triumph of the four elements of matter over the spirit, and this is the state of our planet. The Holy Ganges is the most revered river in the world, and the most polluted. The mountain vistas of Guilin, which inspired generations of Zen artists, are strewn with litter to the horizon. Bangkok stupas and Mexico City spires rise into dense smog, refracting the rays of the dying sun into vistas of unsurpassable beauty. Materialism has gone rampant, and her idols are everywhere. Mystery traditions from the Andes to Shaolin are repackaged and merchandised, if they survive at all. Ours is an age of spiritual poverty, bereft of belief and lacking in love, where priests have nothing left to offer, where monks in hallowed temples burn incense for tourists, where the spirits are forgotten.

The Beasts

Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.⁶⁰

ⁱ It was their old website. They are, of course, back where they started, because their machine broke down within days of being switched on.

The devil descends to cause chaos, and he hands over authority to the beast. The 'seven heads' include Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, but the body of the beast is the same. Imperialism arose in various nations in the twentieth century, and each head opened 'his mouth in blasphemy' to declare himself absolute ruler in the place of God.⁶¹ Individual 'heads ... were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed'.⁶² Tyrants are killed, but the beast grows new heads and survives, pushing people through wars both hot and cold, dragging virtue through the mud. Five kings have passed, and one oversees the final battle.⁶³ Ronald Reagan had a hunch that it might be him:

Jerry, I sometimes believe that we are heading very fast to Armageddon right now.⁶⁴

He was a little premature, but Russia threatened to nuke Poland the other day, and the end can't be far off. The seventh head is the kingdom to come, the ruler after Armageddon.⁶⁵ Whatever it is, New World Order, Islamic super-state, or twenty-first century Chinese Empire, it ain't nothin' nice.

Another beast joins the first, his two horns rising out of the earth, and his sights set on world domination. This is 'the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven'. This is not a kingdom, but the two horns of extremism working within other kingdoms. One is technological materialism, 'who maketh fire come down from heaven'⁶⁶ with doomsday weapons, whose 'great wonders' include moonwalks and microchips. The other horn is fundamentalism, both religious and philosophical, which ignites men's hearts, driving them to suicidal acts of devotion, to cultural revolutions and final solutions.

And he had power to give life unto the image of the [first] beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.⁶⁷

These two forces made puppets of the nations, unleashing intelligence services, scientific inquisitions and religious police 'that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.' The beast's mark is in the foreheads or hands of his followers, that 'no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.'⁶⁸ The mark binding the entire planet is the key to digital currency, a magnetic strip on a card in our hands and a pin code in our heads. Our worth is stored in worldwide databases, along with any other information the beast demands. The devil is working hard, for 'he hath but a short time'.⁶⁹ Will we be fitted with electronic chips for satellite tracking and identification? The technology exists already, injected into naughty dogs and implanted into willing nightclubbers as an electronic membership card.⁷⁰

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

For now, the system is still sliding around the globe, taking liberties before it squeezes the life out of us. For those 'without fault' who can stand the pressure, the end will release them, but things are heating up for those trapped the wrong side of the scales:

And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire...⁷¹

Is this when we cross the finish line of the arms race, or is it the fourth world of fire flooding through the realms? Can both happen at the same time?

...and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass.⁷²

Those whose spirit has dominated the elements are neither dragged down by the material nor burned by fire. They are released from the constraints of the physical. The illusion collapses, and another dimension is revealed:

behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened... and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.⁷³

The next chapter describes radiation sickness and other torments in store for the persistently beastly, including grievous sores, poisoned waters, scorching heat, and the painful darkness of a nuclear winter.⁷⁴

The Whore of Babylon

Desperate for something to believe in amidst the horror, people turn to false prophets, who lead the kings of the earth to Armageddon amidst thunder and lightning, giant hailstones and earthquakes. Mountains and islands disappear as the material world itself starts to fade out,⁷⁵ and finally she who rides the beast and 'reigneth over the kings of the earth'⁷⁶ is revealed in her purple finery. Babylon is the great whore, who drags the kings of the world who fornicate with her down into the mud of the material.⁷⁷

After the battle, a series of warlords arise to fill the power vacuum, each reigning a short time with the beast, but the horns turn on the whore and devour her. Her riches, her fine foods and her slaves are lost, and her merchants weep. They were 'the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived'.⁷⁸ The sorcery is this. For the favoured classes of the Western world, Babylon is 'decked with gold, and precious stones',⁷⁹ but her trinkets are produced by modern-day

ⁱ Her brighter side is the subject of *Baba-locas-lips*

slaves in the Third World, her fine foods are fish fished to extinction and filet steak grown on scorched forest. Our petrol is mixed with blood, our sweaters soaked in sweatshop sweat. We are spellbound, bewitched by endless choice and hundreds of varieties of chocolate bars, giving the illusion of plenty whilst brown people struggle to buy beans. The Tower of Babylon rises to ever-new heights of arrogance, glorifying the kings of the land, but as our slumber turns into a nightmare, there is hope for lucid dreamers. A voice calls the sinless to escape the plagues, as Babylon is overrun with foul spirits.

The Word of God

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war... and his name is called The Word of God... And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.⁸⁰

The Word rules even Kings and Lords,⁸¹ 'faithful and true' to the illusion of truth. There is neither right nor wrong in this world, only two sides to a story, but the sword emerges from the mouth of the Word of God to cut whatever it touches into categories and dualisms. His law oppresses 'with a rod of iron'. The Word decrees and causes conflict, but it is 'Almighty God' who passes judgement. His symbol is 'the winepress', which does not cut, but squeezes out the essence. The Word serves him, treading his winepress, but Almighty God is out of sight on a higher plane. The last of the essence is squeezed out, and the purge is coming to an end. The Word of God makes all-out war against kings and captains, against 'all men, both free and bond, both small and great'.⁸² But it is not 'The Word' that binds Satan. It is an angel of God. The beast and the false prophet are thrown into a fiery lake, and those who still don't get it are for it.

Salve et coagula, divide and combine. In the crucible of history, opposites are mixed and remixed. The word defines, but the lines keep shifting, and with each recombination, scum rises and spirit is concentrated. The Word of God divides, but those who have squeezed the essence from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge can cross the boundaries. Christ is at the cross between the worlds, neither one thing nor the other, bound and boundless, dead and alive again, patron of rebels and prince of peace. He is the sun, who passes through all houses, who sets and rises again resplendent. His is the love in the profundities of the heart, not on the tip of the tongue, and he arrives in *Revelation* with a new dawn.

There follows a thousand years of a magickal Aeon, and then Satan is loosed again for a final purge. Those who follow him are devoured by heavenly fire. The dead are judged 'according to their works',⁸³ not their beliefs or their words, and 'Death and hell' and 'whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.'⁸⁴ Life is fluid and eternal, whereas death is fixed into definitions. With darkness eradicated, no questions remain, and the devil serves no function any more. The process is finally complete. Behind the dualism where opposites unite, God shows his face, and 'the earth and the heaven fled away'.⁸⁵ The material realm passes completely, leaving only God.

New Jerusalem and the Tree of Life await those who seek God beyond limits, who are neither spellbound by sorcerers nor controlled by the beast. 'For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.'⁸⁶ Only spirit survives the second death, after which there is no separation. 'God himself shall be with them',⁸⁷ and 'the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple'.⁸⁸ Pain and suffering pass as matter is transmuted into light, for New Jerusalem is 'pure gold, like unto clear glass',⁸⁹ 'clear as crystal'.⁹⁰ 'And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.'⁹¹ The glory of God is the pure energy driving the universe. His son is this energy as we receive it, manifested in the light of the sun.

In the final chapter of *The Bible*, Jesus signs off as 'the bright and morning star'. The morning star is Lucifer the light bringer, reunited with his twin at the end of the book.⁹² The sun is our light during the day, and the morning star is Venus, reflecting the sun during the night. It is the same light, wherever it is. There is only one force in our universe, creating shadows and vanquishing them. It is at the heart of the atom and the centre of the sun, in the revealed and the hidden, the fallen and the Saviour. The shapeshifter, the master of the crossroads was there in the beginning, before the Alpha male began Lording it up. He is crucified in the middle, where he sheds his skin, and he is there at the Omega and the end, at the right hand of God.

And the snake bites his tail.

And the snake bites His tail.

Ω

Ω End of Part the Second Ω

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