



All Shook Up: Reality Quakes

"[F]or since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Nevertheless we . . . look for new heavens and a new earth . . ."

-- 2 Peter 3:4-13

And elsewhere in the New Testament, the usually-prolix John the Divine avers simply, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away." That passage itself comes as kind of a coda to the Book of Revelation, often called the "Apocalypse of St. John," and when you start digging around in the Greek, you discover that "apocalypse" (*apokalyptein*) in fact doesn't necessarily imply a catastrophe, only a "revelation," or more precisely, an "uncovering." And by golly, when you combine uncovering with [catastrophe](#), you've got something pretty gameable. This week and next, we'll uncover a possible mechanism for apocalypse, a little meta-seismological phenomenon I've dubbed a "reality quake."

"Let us begin, then, with a theory of history and time. Conceive if you will of a great mountain range, an Alps almost beyond the imagination of man, and let it represent the history of our world. . . . [T]he 'mountains' are not as immovable as one might suppose. I hold, in effect, that it is possible that from time to time an earthquake shakes the landscape. It obliterates some things, alters some; rearranges the rock under some of that little fringe of life which inhabits its crevices."

-- Vaughan Davies, in *Carthage Ascendant: The Book of Ash*, #2, by Mary Gentle

The clearest example I know of a reality quake appears in Mary Gentle's amazing 1700-plus-page novel, *The Book of Ash*, which appeared in four volumes in American paperback. A quick precis, then: The frame story of the novel concerns the medievalist Pierce Ratcliff, who is preparing a new translation of the source documents of the life of Ash, a female mercenary captain of the mid-15th century. As he translates the stories (which make up the bulk of the novel), it becomes apparent that Ash's career in the Duchy of Burgundy takes place in an alternate universe, in which Burgundy is the center of European resistance to a Visigothic-Carthaginian jihad directed by silicon intelligences, the Wild Machines. Ratcliff, meanwhile simultaneously discovers that the documents he's been translating have been slipping from "History" shelves in libraries to "Fiction," and artifacts (such as Ash's helmet) have begun vanishing from museums. Meanwhile, he's drawn into the discovery, outside modern Tunis, of archaeological remains of Ash's Carthage -- complete with their golems and steam engines. Apparently, something in Ash's struggle with the Wild Machines caused a reality quake (a "fracture," in Ratcliff's words) that buried her history and upthrust ours, leaving "lost Burgundy" nothing but a golden legend, and Ash a character from medieval romance.

So a reality quake, then, creates such an upheaval in the path of time that history itself is upthrust and overturned, leaving a new past in its wake. Much as an earthquake leaves breaks in the strata and fractures in the geology, or flings up material from deep in the earth onto the surface, a reality quake might leave breaks in civilization or fractures in the historical record, and fling up

anomalous shards of other realities (call them "pragmaclasts") into our new/old past. Some zones of the past might be "eimically unstable" (my back-formation from "seismically" and from the Greek *eimi*, "reality"), prone to repeated shifts -- the Near East between, say, 3000 B.C. and 700 B.C., for example. After each shift, only the pragmaclasts remain, and the fossilized traces of previous realities lurk in our subconscious mind, our myths, and certain seemingly-archetypal yet puzzling myths. In a sense, any time-traveler who changes the past causes a reality quake, but (in the commonly understood versions of temporal physics), time "pastward" of his change remains unaffected. A true reality quake, on the other hand, changes the past as well; it might, in fact, *only* change the past, leaving history after the epicenter (eimicenter?) unaltered, but historians unaware that their past is now different.

"Examining the record of past research from the vantage of contemporary historiography, the historian of science may be tempted to exclaim that when paradigms change, the world itself changes with them. Led by a new paradigm, scientists adopt new instruments and look in new places. Even more important, during revolutions scientists see new and different things when looking with familiar instruments in places they have looked before . . . familiar objects are seen in a different light and are joined by unfamiliar ones as well."
-- Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Unless they look for the fractures correctly, and identify the pragmaclasts for what they are -- pieces of the previous reality -- rather than anomalous artifacts or clumsy forgeries. (Are the [Glozel fragments](#) and the [Voynich Manuscript](#) pragmaclasts? Why not?) Careful secret-historians can trace the lineaments of a reality quake's stress fracture by exploring the edges of [hollow history](#) -- in this case, not necessarily truly "hollow," since there *is* a reality underneath it, just one that wasn't there when it was actually happening. Hollow history that's explained by conspiracies or by Velikovskian amnesia doesn't necessarily indicate a reality quake, either, although it could -- leaving aside, for the nonce, issues of perception vs. objectivity. (The Velikovskian author Alfred de Grazia seems to have coined the useful term "quantavolution" to similarly gloss over the notion.) Perhaps Weird Science gadgets like "[Kirlian](#) tachyon eimic lidar" can detect eimic buildup in a sensitive area, or eimic residue from previous reality quakes in rocks, [Shakespeare manuscripts](#), or [crystal skulls](#).

This is the kind of thing that "reality archaeologists" like the heroes of Warren Ellis' *Planetary* or the agents of Warehouse 23 (or the Wheel of Ptah Lodge from *GURPS Cabal*) might discover, and quite a jolly High-Weirdness *GURPS Cliffhangers* or *GURPS Atomic Horror* campaign could center on seeking out "eimic subduction zones" where our current reality grows thin over the solid pragma of the "pre-ality." Any adventure into a [Mandevillian](#) zone of legend and half-history could be explained by a reality-quake; or by the first temblors of a new one, which would make quite the [nova](#) to throw into *GURPS Time Travel* games.

"So when he came opposite Palodes and there was neither wind nor wave, Thamus from the stern, looking towards the land, said the words as he had heard them [from the island], 'The Great God Pan is dead.' Even before the last word had left his lips there arose from the island a great cry of grief not of one person but of many, mingled with exclamations of dismay."
-- Plutarch, "De Defectu Oraculorum"

Not just history needs to change in a reality quake, of course. The laws of nature and physics can alter; perhaps the age of gods and magic existed in reality until some Ragnarok event changed the past, leaving only the myths and the wandering planets as signs of the upheaval. Pious Christian legend took the coincidental (?) timing of Plutarch's anecdote ("in the reign of Tiberius") as evidence that Christ's crucifixion had slain the old gods -- and perhaps, in line with Hermetic "prisca theologica," the resulting reality quake spread out, past and future, from 29 A.D. to plant the Biblical prophecies in their proper past, and to prefigure the story of Christ in that of Balder, Osiris, [Dionysos](#), and Tammuz. (The trouble that archaeologists have matching orthodox dating to the ruins of ancient Israel could be another sign of such a quake.) One good sign of reality quakes may be anomalous heavenly events -- the Bible records that the sun was blotted out during Christ's

crucifixion.

*"O insupportable! O heavy hour!
Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration."
-- William Shakespeare, Othello, V:ii*

And indeed, we find a total solar eclipse visible above the Middle East right there, on November 24, 29 A.D. Said eclipse doesn't actually reach totality above Jerusalem, however, and November wasn't anywhere near Passover. There's a more convenient eclipse in April of 33 A.D., but that's a useless lunar eclipse. These, of course, might be "shockwaves" or "echoes" given off by the eimicenter's truly anomalous darkness -- or the disjunction between report and cosmology might be evidence of calendrical slipping along the eimic fault lines. Our old (eimically-sensitive?) friend Plutarch, as it turns out, observed his own total solar eclipse, most likely south of Athens on March 20, 71 A.D. -- but his record ("De facie lunae") says it occurred "after noon" when in fact it would have happened at 10:50 a.m. More slipping?

This is the kind of thing that disturbs Russian mathematician A.T. Fomenko, who has used ancient and medieval astronomical analysis (especially "correcting" dates assigned to Ptolemy's *Almagest*), combined with statistical regression theory, to radically re-date and re-cast virtually everything in history before about 1500 A.D. In his "new chronology," what we think is "British" history is actually Byzantine-Russian history, since the British chroniclers re-copied both into their own mythic terms. Out of this stew comes an immense Russian empire, the "Megalion" (which Fomenko claims Western historians corrupted to "Mongol"), ruling Eurasia from Troy (alias Constantinople, alias Rome, alias London, alias Moscow) during a Golden Age under the double eagle. Perhaps the Sack of Troy, the Fourth Crusade, and the Norman Conquest all tell the same story, of a war in the highest reaches of reality between the Cossacks of Megalion and [King Arthur's](#) Knights Templar, a crusade that shook the veritable pillars of heaven. And perhaps Megalion is out there, somewhere, with [Atlantis](#), and [Amazonia](#), and [Bohemia](#), and Burgundy -- waiting for the tremors that signal earthquake weather. Waiting to come back.

Next Week: More variations than you can shake a stick at: potential fractures, possible eimic triggers, malign pragmaclastic entities, and yet more Prealities.

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