

Matter 46

Summary

Miracle at Monte Albán

Account by:	José Carlos Méndez Reyes, ~40. Salesman.
Source:	Amateur press release.
Location:	Monte Albán, Mexico.
Event:	16 May 2024.
Report:	1 Jun 2024.

Report

José Carlos Méndez Reyes
1/6/2024

MIRACLE AT MONTO ALBÁN WITNESS
STATEMENT

One who was there corrects social media reports.

**[Monte Albán, Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, Mexico
16/5/2024]** The explosive social media claims
about the miraculous cure of Señorita Yamileth De
Los Santos De La Cruz at the Monte Albán
archaeological site are exaggerated and fanciful. As

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the only independent witness to the event, I hope to correct this nonsense before it becomes widely accepted as the truth. A miracle did occur that day; to repeat it with invented embellishments is to diminish it.

The story referred to as the "Miracle at Monte Albán" has seized the interest of millions of people on social media in recent days. It has been told and retold, summarised and expanded upon, such that there are hundreds of variations in circulation. Most of them share a central narrative of events that goes something like as follows.

An albino schoolgirl, Yamileth De Los Santos De La Cruz, was on an excursion with her class to the archaeological site of Monte Albán in Oaxaca. She wore a hat and dark glasses because of her high photosensitivity, but that morning the sun was too strong for her and she had to retire to the shade of the museum while her friends explored the ruins. At the museum, the Archangel Michael appeared and told her three secrets that she should only reveal, one each, to successive popes. Then, he cured her of her condition, whereupon she was able to run off to join her friends and tell them of the miracle that had blessed her.

Some of this story as told is true, but much is false. I shall now relate what actually happened.

I am a salesman. I sell branded merchandise to small businesses. On the morning of 16th May, I had concluded a successful meeting with the manager of the small shop in the museum at Monte Albán and was leaving to return to my car. In the foyer were three people: Señorita De Los Santos, who was looking at her phone, and two men dressed in what looked to be clerical gowns, who were arguing with one another in English (a language I understand). The ticket attendant was outside, smoking a cigarette.

At first, I ignored the men and approached Señorita De Los Santos, because even allowing for her albinism she did not look well. I asked her how she was feeling, and she assured me she was fine.

My attention was then drawn to the two men. They were becoming quite loud, but the nature of their argument was bizarre. It did not advance at all, but was a series of repetitions of the same contentions in different words.

"There will be job losses."

"No there won't be."

"Yes there will."

"I think you'll find there won't be."

"I disagree."

"Well you're wrong to disagree."

"No I'm not."

"Yes you are. People will not lose their jobs."

"I think they will."

... and so on. They were speaking with an uncommon accent, which I believe to be British.

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I was about to leave them to their discussion when suddenly there appeared a third man. He didn't walk in, he was simply there, where a moment earlier he was not.

This man was dressed in a suit of brown furs, even though the sun was very strong (that part of the story as reported is true). He didn't seem to notice the heat. He addressed in English the two arguing men, asking them what they were arguing about. He said that other people were complaining about the loudness of their discussion – a bizarre statement considering that Señorita De Los Santos and I were the only other people present.

One of the two men explained that they were arguing about whether “these things” (he pointed at Señorita De Los Santos and me as he said this) would cause people to lose their jobs. The man in the fur suit told them that the judges were gathering evidence, then invited them to depart. This, they did, leaving him alone with me and Señorita De Los Santos.

Noticing that the señorita was wearing dark glasses, the man became curious. He asked her why she was wearing them, as if he hadn't seen such articles before.

Señorita De Los Santos heard him and looked up from her phone, but she did not respond.

“She doesn't speak English”, I told him.

He thought about this for a few seconds, then seemed to stare into space for a few seconds more.

"Do you understand me now?" he asked.

Señorita De Los Santos gaped. "Yes", she replied. "Yes? I'm speaking English? ¿Puedo todavía hablar en Español? Oh, this is incredible! I can speak English!"

It was indeed incredible, all the more so because she, too, spoke it with a British accent. I'd go so far as to call it a miracle, yet none of the reports I have read make mention of it. It may be that she has told no-one of her new ability, but has hinted to her friends that there is more to her tale. If so, this could be the origin of the part of the reported story that declares she has three secrets to tell successive popes.

The man asked Señorita De Los Santos why she was wearing dark glasses. She explained, in English, that she was very sensitive to strong light. She gave every impression of delighting in the way that obscure words of English vocabulary came to mind with fluent ease.

At this point, she took off her dark glasses and showed him her pale, pink eyes.

The man then asked her, quite casually, whether she wanted to be able to see properly.

She said she did, but that there was no cure for albinism.

He said he could cure her, then repeated his question.

She said confirmed her position, but restated that there was nothing he could do to help.

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He thought a moment then said that this was an intricate problem and he could only fix it by fixing some other things, too. Her skin would gain pigmentation immediately and her hair would change colour gradually as it grew. Was she sure she wanted this?

I got the impression that he was requesting formal consent, as if he might get into trouble if he proceeded without it.

Señorita De Los Santos asked if it would be painful. He assured her it wouldn't be, whereupon she invited him to go ahead.

With that, he paused for a few seconds then announced, "There".

Señorita De Los Santos's eyes were now blue and her skin a healthy tone. It happened in an instant. She looked at her hands in astonishment, then quickly picked up her phone and used the camera as a mirror to see her face.

She began to cry tears of joy.

"Thank you, thank you", she said. She glanced around, as if seeing the world afresh. "Everything looks so different! *I* look so different!"

"Glad to have been of help", said the man.

Then, he disappeared. I was looking right at him, and then I wasn't. There was no flash, no puff of smoke, no fading away: he simply was there no more, as if a switch had turned him off.

Señorita De Los Santos had also seen him disappear.

"It's a miracle", she said.

I told her I agreed.

Señorita De Los Santos did not immediately run out to tell her friends what had happened. Instead, she excitedly called her mother and began to explain everything to her.

The entrance door opened and the ticket attendant returned. She showed no interest in the señorita's news, and I had another meeting arranged a forty-minute drive away so took the opportunity to leave.

This is the true story, told by one who was there. The fur-clad man, although he certainly acted as an angel might, made no claims to be one of any kind, let alone Saint Michael the Archangel. There was no blinding light, no descent from the Heavens, no mention of the Virgin Mary, nor any of the other features that people have added to the tale to make it better fit their idea of what miracles look like.

For what reason should a modern miracle appear Biblical? The present is not the past, and if those who serve God choose to appear in a more restrained way than previously, this should be noted. The decision was made for a reason, and ignoring it in favour of more familiar and comforting images by introducing ostentatious trappings is, to my mind, to deny the will of God.

Not one, but two miracles occurred at Monte Albán that day, and neither bore a great

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resemblance to what has been reported. I would be grateful if members of the press were to recognise and to report the fact.

Notes

This press release was made available both in Spanish and in English translation.

Miss De Los Santos De La Cruz has proven impossible to contact, but the fact that her albinism has been cured is undeniable. The change in her condition did not propagate beyond her body, so physical and digital records and photographs were not deleted. More significantly, neither were two blood samples that had been taken the previous week. There are hopes that by comparing her DNA pre- and post-procedure, a general mRNA treatment for albinism may be developed.

The visitor centre at the Monte Albán archaeological site promised to release CCTV footage of the events of 16th May, but discovered that its recording for the period in question showed only static.

Matter 47

Summary

Important Notice

Account by:	Northern Powergrid. Electricity distribution company.
Source:	Leaflet.
Location:	Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, England.
Event:	21 May 2024.
Report:	21 May 2024.

Report

Northern Powergrid

www.northernpowergrid.com

Important notice – we need to switch off your electricity supply on:

Date: ...5th June, 2024

Between: Time ...9 am/pm and Time ...3 am/pm

We apologise for any inconvenience caused.

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Why we need to switch off your electricity supply

In order to keep the lights on, we typically need to carry out planned work on 480 occasions in an average month, which require the network to be switched off. Please be reassured that this represents only a small percentage of work carried out and that more than 90% of work is undertaken with the electricity switched on.

However, for some types of work such as repairing a fault, replacement and maintenance work, connecting a new supply and clearing trees/vegetation from overhead lines, we need to switch off the electricity to make sure we can carry out the works safely.

Why we need to replace and maintain the network

We employ teams of people who, on a daily basis, need to carry out maintenance and replacement work on the electricity network. This work is planned throughout the year in order to maintain and improve the reliability of the electricity supply to your area. This also helps to reduce the number of power cuts and inconvenience to our customers resulting from faults on the network.

How much notice we need to give you

By law we must give you a minimum of two days' notice if we are going to switch off your electricity supply. However, we realise that sometimes this is

not long enough for you to make other arrangements, so we aim to give you 10 days' notice. We know that giving customers more notice often means they forget about us switching their electricity off so we've included a reminder for you to keep in a place where everyone can see it.

How to protect your electrical equipment

- You should turn off and unplug any sensitive electrical equipment before we switch the electricity off.
- Turn off electrical equipment that generates heat such as irons, fires, fan heaters, hair straighteners and so on. If you leave these on, they may cause a fire when we switch the electricity supply back on.
- If your burglar alarms have a reliable battery supply they should stay on until we switch the electricity back on.
- You may need to reset the timers on some electrical equipment such as your central heating, cookers and so on when we turn the electricity back on.
- Do not open the fridge or freezer door until we switch the electricity back on as this will allow the cold air to escape.
- Try to avoid using lifts or stair lifts just before we switch the electricity off.

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- If you have electrically operated access control doors, garage doors or driveway gates you should find out how to open them manually. You should also consider opening your driveway gates before we switch the electricity off.

How you can prepare

Have the following to hand:

- A torch in case there are problems with your supply.
- A fully-charged mobile phone (landline phones that require an electricity supply will not work).

In cold weather, you should also make sure you have the following:

- A flask so you can have a hot drink.
- A blanket to keep warm.

Handy Tip:

Why not leave a light switched on so you will know when the electricity supply is back on.

Notes

Every house attached to the local substation received one of these notifications. It appears to be

genuine, but contains less information than is usual for Northern Powergrid.

Our burglar alarms have a reliable battery supply.

Summary

The George Eliot Prize for Poetry

Account by:	Love Ellis, 30. Poet.
Source:	Transcript of interview.
Location:	London.
Event:	29 May 2024.
Report:	29 May 2024.

Report

Interviewer: Sophea Tiffen (ST).

Interviewee: Love Ellis (LE).

ST: So this is just a chat where we advise potential nominees of our new prize.

LE: You didn't say 'in which', you went with 'where'. (laughs) Heroic couplet scanning can ensnare.

ST: (laughs) You noticed!

LE: Has anyone not noticed?

ST: Perhaps they were too polite to say.

LE: Or perhaps they merely made a mental note that you were manipulative.

ST: You think I'm manipulative?

LE: I should hope you are – you're a journalist!

ST: (laughs) Fair cop!

LE: (laughs)

ST: Anyway, it's great to meet you in person.

You're very hard to get hold of.

LE: Yes, it seems a lot of people want to get hold of me, not always for pleasant reasons. I spend a good deal of time off-grid.

ST: I suppose the fact that we're sitting in a café in Nine Elms means you're not off-grid at the moment, then.

LE: Sometimes, it's harder to be found in a crowd than in a wilderness.

ST: You don't even spend a lot of time online.

LE: I used to, but the replies to my posts kept getting deleted so the threads didn't make much sense, it was like listening to one half of a telephone conversation

ST: I understand. There's a lot of toxicity online, especially for women. We're working on it, though.

LE: The whole world's online.

ST: It sometimes feels that way, yes. Anyway, the reason I wanted to speak to you is about this new prize we're going to launch with *The Guardian* newspaper.

LE: Has *The Guardian* agreed to go ahead with it?

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ST: Yes. The lawyers are still dotting the i's and crossing the t's, but we've agreed in principle.

LE: Only, it seems to me that *The Guardian* isn't always entirely happy with the way that large tech companies behave.

ST: Well, this is something we're hoping that initiatives like the George Eliot Prize for Poetry will help redress.

LE: You're naming it after George Eliot? That has to be because it's a response to the T. S. Eliot Prize, it can't be because of her poetry, she didn't write enough of it.

ST: Don't you think that women poets should be celebrated?

LE: I think that all poets should be celebrated, but for their poetry, not for sharing a surname with a poet who wrote ten times the number of poems they did.

ST: Some of her poems are superb, though. *O May I Join the Choir Invisible* –

LE: "Of those immortal dead who live again", (laughs), I can relate to that in a big way, but no, she's not as accomplished a poet as she is a novelist. She isn't as articulate, you can feel her exploring the form but finding it wanting. Let's put it this way: you can't be the first to have had the idea of a George Eliot Prize for Poetry, and the fact that everyone else who's had it has subsequently dropped the proposal might perhaps indicate that it bears closer scrutiny.

ST: Well, I didn't choose the name myself, of course, but I expect it'll go down well with *Guardian* readers.

LE: (laughs) I can't disagree with that.

ST: Now, as this is a new prize, we're sounding out potential nominees to make sure they'd be OK with seeing their names on the shortlist.

LE: I'm flattered that I'm one of them.

ST: There's no guarantee that you'll win, of course.

LE: I don't expect I will win.

ST: Why's that?

LE: I'm more shortlist material than winner material.

ST: You don't know who the judges are yet, we're still in the process of finalising the panel.

LE: That's true, but I do know that I don't write about subjects that connect with poetry judges. I've never been nominated for a prize before, and don't suppose I'm likely to be nominated for one again.

ST: No, don't sell yourself short, Love! You have been noticed, believe me – well your work has.

LE: Is that for good reasons or for bad reasons?

ST: For being-different-from-the-norm reasons.

LE: OK, well I can't dispute that.

ST: Writing in rhyme when every other poet of your generation writes in blank verse gives you visibility, and your performance at readings is, frankly, sensational.

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LE: That's not a performance, that's the poem as I wrote it. Every time I read a poem, it's identical. Listen to recordings; every reading of the same poem is the same on each occasion.

ST: Is that true?

LE: Why would I lie when you can so easily check? There'll be differences to do with the technology side, sure – the volume and acoustics and so on – but not in the presentation itself.

ST: Well, be that as it may, you're a star, and considered a possibility for the shortlist. Everyone on the shortlist is a potential winner.

LE: I'll take your word for it.

ST: Good, good. Now, something I wanted to ask you: how autobiographical are your poems?

LE: What, like on a scale of zero to ten or something?

ST: Nothing so mathematical. Your name is in the title of all four of your collections, so there must be some autobiographical element to them. *This Thing called Love, In the Name of Love, Love Story, Labours of Love....*

LE: Well they were all written by me and my name is Love, so they have that in common. Whether they're about me or not is for others to decide.

ST: Surely you yourself know, though? You must know!

LE: (sighs) My poetry says things to the reader. The thing that one poem says is that poem;

nothing more, nothing less. A poem is a complex, irreducible lattice of understanding; if we make the analogy that a poem is a single, precise, exquisite word, then a collection of poems is a honed, crafted sentence, structuring those words to allow the reader to frame their meaning. In the same way that the meaning of a sentence is the sentence, so the meaning of the collection is the collection. To me, my collections are precisely what I want to say in those collections. Still, were you to choose to read the surface characteristics of a collection to draw inferences about me, much as you might do when picking up on body language, say, well that would be completely valid. You'd be doing it for reasons meaningful to you, and that's what poetry is about: finding things meaningful to you in the words of someone else.

ST: Nevertheless, if you'd called your latest collection *Love's Labours Lost* instead of *Labours of Love*, that would have completely altered the perception of it.

LE: How does that contradict any of what I've just said?

ST: Ah. Yes, I see. You do regard your collections as complete wholes, though?

LE: That depends.

ST: On what?

LE: The collections *are* complete wholes, but there may be more to them.

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ST: How can a whole be incomplete? Oh, do you mean that you've withheld some content, so we're not seeing the full picture?

LE: No, that would be unfair. Have you read *Labours of Love*?

ST: Yes, I read it for this interview.

LE: How did it end?

SE: How did it *end*? Did it tell a narrative?

LE: If you want to interpret it that way then yes. If not, then no.

ST: I don't see what you're getting at.

LE: Well for that particular collection, I myself don't know how it ends, but I will next week.

ST: What's so special about next week?

LE: It's my birthday a week today.

ST: Oh, are you planning anything special?

LE: I shall be celebrating reality's continued existence.

ST: That's assuming it does continue (laughs).

LE: Well I can't plan for the eventuality that it doesn't (laughs).

ST: OK, OK, so coming back to your poetry. The reason I wanted to know if your work was autobiographical was because much poetry today involves the author's expressing aspects of their identity.

LE: I'd noticed that. You're asking if I do the same?

ST: Yes – coded, obviously.

LE: If it's obvious, it isn't coded.

ST: Well you know what I mean. For example, do any of your poems make reference to your sexuality.

LE: If you want to read them that way then yes. If not, no.

ST: (sighs) Is that your answer to every question about the content of your poetry?

LE: In general, yes. The poem is what I'm saying, but it's for you to read it in a way meaningful to you. If it helps to think of me as a confessional poet, do so; if it doesn't, don't.

ST: Well most lesbian poets make some reference to their sexuality in their work.

LE: If that's what you see when you look.

ST: I don't have to look hard, it's usually there in unambiguous black and white.

LE: But my ... Oh, hold on ... Oh god, you don't believe Pabst and I are lovers, do you? (laughs)

ST: Well, er, you do seem to be inseparable. I mean, she's sitting over there, two tables away.

LE: Asleep. Coffee doesn't work on her.

ST: So you two aren't in a relationship?

LE: She and I travel together, but she has her life and I have mine.

ST: She's your muse? Your amanuensis?

LE: I wish! No, she's more like my bodyguard. She's saved my life several times. Mind you, she's killed me a couple of times, too.

ST: Wait, so what you were saying earlier about people not always wanting to get hold of you for pleasant reasons – you've received death threats?

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LE: Death threats? People who send death threats just want to scare you. These people actually want to *kill* me.

ST: Why? Why do they want to kill you?

LE: There's a group of them and they've taken it up as a challenge.

ST: Oh my word – that must be awful!

LE: It's definitely inconvenient. Anyway, the police can't really help, so that's why Pabst and I spend a lot of time together.

ST: OK, yes, I understand. Right, well I'm supposed to ask you some screening questions, to make sure you don't have any skeletons in your closet that might come out when your name is on the shortlist and embarrass the sponsor or *The Guardian*.

LE: Is that normal?

ST: Not so much for established competitions, but for one just starting up it's ... well you can see why there'd be a wish to avoid controversy.

LE: OK, well I'm curious as to what you might regard as skeletons, so ask away.

ST: So, er, these aren't in any particular order. Let's start with this one: how did you vote in the Brexit referendum?

LE: The same way that you did.

ST: You don't know how I voted.

LE: I don't care. I believe that secret ballots should remain secret, so whenever anyone asks me how I voted, I always tell them I voted their way.

It's the same if they ask me how I intend to vote. If they're wearing a red or a blue or a yellow or a green rosette, it doesn't matter, I say I'm voting for their lot. That way, I'm giving good information to the people whose way I *am* voting and bad information to the rest.

ST: They're just doing their jobs – *I'm* just doing my job.

LE: I'm not stopping you from doing it. Besides, I'm just doing my job, too. I'm a poet: I say what I say and if you want to interpret it in a way particular to you, go ahead. I'm not *supposed* to be easy to pin down. Look, if the sponsor is worried that I might have made some public comment undeniably about Brexit that *Guardian* readers would find offensive, they can rest assured that I've made no proclamations on the subject whatsoever: no skeletons there – unless failing to declare allegiance is one.

ST: OK, next question: should trans women be allowed to use women's public toilets?

LE: Yes.

ST: Good, good. Next question –

LE: Of course, I might have said that merely because I believe anyone should be allowed to use any public toilet. Aren't you supposed to ask me to explain my answer, just in case?

ST: OK, so do you think anyone should be allowed to use any public toilet?

LE: If they can find one, yes. There's no law against it.

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ST: I'm not sure what I'm supposed to put for that one.

LE: No skeleton?

ST: Yes, let's run with that. Moving on: what charities do you support?

LE: Humanists UK.

ST: That should be fine. Any more?

LE: That's the only one that I have a direct debit set up for, but I sometimes donate stuff to Oxfam and I buy a poppy every year; it depends what you mean by 'support'. I might give the local hospice some change if they're out collecting, or the RNLI, or the Sally Army band at Christmas; it's not something I assiduously record.

ST: You buy a poppy? Why?

LE: Well if I'd been conscripted into the armed forces and sent off to kill other people my age who had also been conscripted, in a war that neither of us wanted to fight and at the behest of deranged or incompetent leaders, then I'd at least like to know that afterwards someone would remember me, that I *existed*. They might not know my name or what happened to me or what I did, but I'd one-hundred percent want them to be aware that people like me *die* in wars. I don't care what the anti-poppy police have to say about glorifying sacrifice: if we don't remind ourselves that people die in wars, that *increases* the chance of having more wars, it doesn't lower it. That's why I buy a poppy.

ST: I see. I'll have to ask if that's a problem.

LE: It doesn't matter, my name won't be on the shortlist – the whole idea of a poetry prize if going to fall through anyway.

ST: What makes you say that?

LE: This isn't about poetry, it's about optics. I was selected as a potential name for the shortlist because some corporate researcher thought I ticked the lesbian box. Maybe I do, maybe I don't, I haven't actually told you, but as soon as you asked I knew my fate was sealed.

ST: That's ... that's not how it is.

LE: Were the other people you've spoken to all neatly diverse? Were there poets from different ethnic backgrounds, poets who didn't start writing until they were in their sixties, poets who have lost limbs, poets who have been the victims of sexual abuse, trans poets, poets who have mental health problems, all selected to fit the profile that the sponsor has determined will maximise the shortlist's appeal to *The Guardian's* management?

ST: I – oh. Oh. You're ... right. I don't believe it! I have an interview lined up with a headscarf-wearing British Bangladeshi poet this very afternoon!

LE: Would that be Fatima? Oh, she's good – she should be on any shortlist anyway: a poetry prize has to be about the poetry, not the poet. The people at *The Guardian* will understand this, no-one there is going to fall for such brazen virtue-signalling; they can see the hand of a cynical corporate

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marketing machine one thousand, six hundred and nine metres away.

ST: That's a mile, right?

LE: Just about, it's thirty-four point four centimetres short, give or take.

ST: I'm going to have to think about this – thanks, thanks Love. This isn't my doing, I've only been asked to do the interviews, you understand, I'm freelance.

LE: Yes, yes, don't worry, you were given an incomplete brief, that's all.

ST: Er, right, well, I suppose that's that! Thank you for the chat, it's given me a lot to consider. Sorry it didn't really work out how either of us expected.

LE: No problem, I quite enjoyed speaking to someone who isn't Pabst for a while, to be honest! (laughs)

ST: (laughs) Give her my best wishes when she wakes up. Enjoy the rest of the day.

LE: You too, nice meeting you.

Notes

Plans for a George Eliot Prize for Poetry did not come to fruition: *The Guardian* rejected the sponsor's proposal.

Sophea Tiffen is an independent journalist. It is not known which organisation she was representing. This transcript of her interview with Love Ellis was sent to *Poetry News* as the basis of a potential feature, but was rejected for being overly narrow.

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Matter 49

Summary

The Judgement of Marjorie Laleek

Account by:	Marjorie Laleek, teacher. 18 [64].
Source:	Letter.
Location:	Erwā.
Event:	31 May 2024.
Report:	31 May 2024.

Report

Hi David! Hi Melanie!

I don't know what the date is back in Dheghōm but by my reckoning it's May 31st 2024 here in Erwā, if leap years work the same way. I suspect that our two worlds may be time-locked together, so with luck this will reach you seven months after I got here, rather than seven days or seven years or, if you've been re-rebooted, before I've even left.

I'm settling in very well. Although I speak English to the locals, there's some kind of translation

system in place so we can understand each other just dandy. It doesn't work for writing, though, so teaching them that is going to be hard. Still, I'm optimistic: I've noticed that proper nouns aren't translated, so I'm hopeful I can use names as a starting point. I haven't decided what's best for writing implements yet, but chalk and slate seems to work. That's what I'm using to write this very message; Sarah says she'll put the text on some nice paper for you when she moves it to your safe.

We still haven't thought of a reliable way to get messages from you to me. Sarah can't teleport in Dheghōm, so it's going to be hard for her to collect deliveries for me. Also, she needs a static location in Erwā to materialise them in and I'm on the move a lot. That's the problem with nomadic cultures – well, not the problem, but certainly a problem; there are plenty of other ones, with traipsing through clouds of biting insects being highest on my list.

Oh, I used underlines there because I don't think Sarah's slate-to-paper transcription service can handle italics.

Now, I have some news for you! I'll try to be brief so I don't run out of slate.

First thing is, I asked Sarah if she could arrange for John Thorndyke to be undeleted. He was deleted

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from Dheghōm for the same reason I was, so I argued that if it was OK to move me to Erwā then it should be OK to move him here, too. I knew that his mind had been saved at the time of his deletion because that's how Paul found out about me, so there was no practical obstacle to undeleting him. I like John, and don't think it was fair how Paul treated him. Sarah managed to get Paul to agree to John's undeletion, but it was on condition that John did the same job as me but in another world in Paul's stable. As a result, I had John here in Erwā for a few weeks, teaching him the ropes, then he was moved to Londhom. He had a choice of worlds but chose that one for the reason that he's always wanted to visit London and Londhom is the nearest he's ever going to get now.

John wants his sister to know he's gone for good but is OK. Could you inform her on his behalf, please? He says to tell her it's like when they found the hippo; she'll understand. I asked him what it meant, because I certainly don't understand it, but he wouldn't tell me as he's sworn to secrecy.

Next thing: remember Lionel Hackett, the murdered gentleman from Troy, Michigan, whom I met that time while he was fishing off of a pier or a jetty or whatever those things are called? It seems that this morning he is visited by a judge from Bhéwonom by the name of William. The judge

wants to know whether Mr Hackett would like to be returned to Dheghōm. I can see the aim of this ruse: to find out in a sly kind of way whether Mr Hackett thinks highly of Dheghōm or not. Mr Hackett replies that he'd prefer to stay in Erwā, but happily for you goes on to explain his reasoning. Dheghōm is the better because it has dentists and antibiotics – he had to extract his own tooth after he got an abscess few years ago, which he wasn't happy about. However, he's made a new life for himself here in Erwā and would feel like a stranger if he returned to Dheghōm now.

Mr Hackett summarises his views on the two worlds by saying that Erwā was made for people but Dheghōm was made by people. As for why the two went different ways, he doesn't profess to know, but he acknowledges that something must have lit the fire of the Dheghōmese. He tells Judge William, "If you're the folk who made it, you figure it out."

I know this because Sarah brings Judge William to see me after he visits Mr Hackett, along with another judge, Judge Michael. Two judges! You're quite the celebrity, Marjie!

Here's how our encounter unfolds.

I am asked by Judge Michael whether Dheghōm should be closed down or not. You'll be relieved to

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know that I reply in the negative, but I follow up by telling them it shouldn't even be a question. The people of Dheghōm have just as much right to live as the people of Bhéwonom do, and it's unconscionable to think otherwise.

I don't know what the translation system makes of the word 'unconscionable', but it seems to do the trick. The judges look shocked, as if they've just realised they've accidentally committed a giant blunder, like that time I phoned my father's cousin to ask a family history question and was told it was the day of his funeral.

Every question the judges ask me thereafter to try to determine whether the people of Dheghōm should be deleted as one, I throw straight back at them.

"What do you think of the people of Dheghōm?"

"What do you think of the people of Bhéwonom?"

"Are the people of Dheghōm alive?"

"Are the people of Bhéwonom alive?"

"Why should the people of Dheghōm live?"

"Why should the people of Bhéwonom live?"

"Are the people of Dheghōm real?"

"Are the people of Bhéwonom real?"

"Do you have feelings or do you merely act as if you have feelings?"

"Do you have feelings or do you merely act as if you have feelings?"

"Should Dheghōm continue to exist?"

"Should Bhéwonom continue to exist?"

Once they realise that I'm making an equivalence between Dheghōm and Bhéwonom, they ask about that.

"On what basis do you equate the people of Dheghōm with the people of Bhéwonom?"

"On what basis don't you equate the people of Dheghōm with the people of Bhéwonom?"

"Why do you believe you're real?"

"Why do you believe you're real?"

"Knowing that you are a program, do you believe you are real in the same sense that we are real?"

"Not knowing that you are a program, do you believe you are real in the same sense that I am real?"

No-one likes a smart Alec, and if someone had bounced questions back at me like that then I'd

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have made sure to phrase them differently. "Should Bhéwonom switch off Dheghōm but keep a copy of its database so it could be restarted at a future date?" is hard to invert because it has two actions in it.

As it happens, though, my approach prompts some deep philosophical reflection by the judges. I guess they haven't heard of the Socratic method. They go into a huddle and Sarah gives me a quick smile to reassure me that this is a good thing and they're not going to take my obstreperousness as evidence that they should pull the plug on Dheghōm. Or on Erwā; I guess we'll all be in the firing line sooner or later.

Judge William tells me that he has enjoyed our conversation. I thank him for the compliment. I prudently decline to tell him that he could have had a pretty well identical one with a parrot.

Judge Michael says I have given him much to think about. Deciding that buttering him up will work better than begging him not to be so stupid as to kill six billion people, I reassure him that I believe he'll make the right decision.

After the judges leave, Sarah tells me what transpired in Judge William's meeting with Mr

Hackett. She and I are due to meet tomorrow anyway, but we have our chat a day earlier instead.

I ask if John has also been visited by a judge. Sarah doesn't know, but says she's seeing him tomorrow too. Time passes faster in Londhom than it does in Erwā so it could have been anything from weeks to decades ago for him. I say I'd like to meet with him again myself, so he can tell me all he's learned, but Sarah says that I can't. Paul doesn't want to keep moving people between worlds because it's a faff.

Oh! Sarah tells me that she's been to Dheghōm herself! This is news, because she hadn't last time we spoke. She's amazed by it, much like Americans are when they go to Japan. She works for Marius, though, not Paul, so has no special privileges there; this is why she couldn't drop in on you to say hello. Ansnā did help to kit her out in Earth clothes so she wouldn't stick out so much, but some people were still mean to her because she didn't look like them. Been there, done that, Sarah.

I'm almost out of chalk. I thought it would be slates I'd run out of but no. That's a lesson for the future, Marjie. Before I end, though, I need to tell you that I asked Sarah whether Ansnā looks the same in Bhéwonom as her character looks in Erwā and Dheghōm. Sarah said that yes, she does. She was surprised to hear that to our eyes Ansnā is regarded as an astonishing beauty; she isn't

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regarded as being particularly pretty by the Bhéwonomese. They don't think she's ugly, just she's not as completely breathtaking as we NPCs think she is, it's something to do with the amount of dead skin she sloughs off. As a result, I suspect that she's entirely unaware of the effect that her appearance has on the people of Dheghōm.

Hmm, I wonder if the people of Erwā think my new face is as pretty as I do?

Oh, don't be silly, Marjie! You're 18. All 18-year-old girls are pretty!

I hope you're both doing well. Let's hope we can figure out some way you can get a message to me every now and then

Fingers crossed that the judges don't hit the power switch.

Love, Marjie X X X

Notes

This letter was found in my safe printed on cotton paper.

I passed John Thorndyke's message to his sister, Laura, in a telephone call. She burst into tears and thanked me, but did not offer to explain what the hippo reference meant. I felt it wasn't appropriate to press her.

Through Martin Søndergaard and Lillian Bang, I also informed Juliana Meep that John was back, albeit not in our reality. Her thanks for this update were relayed back to me two weeks later.

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Matter 50

Summary

Daemon

Account by:	Eugene 'Genie' Nethercott, 30. Video game designer.
Source:	WhatsApp.
Location:	Austin, United States.
Event:	2 Jun 2024.
Report:	2 Jun 2024.

Report

2 June 2024

Hi there Mr Scott you free 13:31

Yes. 13:31 ✓

Great this is vv important 13:31

Paul is gonna set up a daemon 13:32

A what? 13:32 ✓

A process that sits around in the background
and wakes up every so often to do stuff

13:32

This one's gonna wake up maybe hourly 13:32

It's search and destroy 13:32

It'll delete all copies of anything that escaped

Paul's previous deletion attempts

13:32

Single-media copies? 13:33 ✓

Yes but worse 13:33

It'll also delete the multimedia versions that the
single-media copies copied

13:33

What do you mean? 13:33 ✓

Say you have text Paul wants deleted 13:33

In a form he can't detect 13:33

He can detect scans of text 13:33

Because they're single-medium 13:33

So if you scan the text 13:33

The daemon will detect and delete the scan 13:34

But then it'll delete whatever you scanned 13:34

Same with photos, transcripts 13:34

Anything that would have been deleted before
plus anything missed that it connects back to

13:34

So if I don't delete copies I lose originals?! 13:34 ✓

Yes 13:34

You have maybe a day at most to delete all yr
copies before he sets the daemon running

13:35

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It'll propagate both directions 13:35

Multimedia copies of digital copies will also go

13:35

All the links in the chain will go 13:35

Unless I break the chain first? 13:35 ✓✓

Prob yes like a firebreak 13:36

How do you know about this? 13:36 ✓✓

I went to Bh will write to explain 13:36

Meantime you need to expunge anything that
tracks back to what you want to keep

13:36

Tell anyone who has copies to do the same 13:37

I'd better get onto it then. 13:37 ✓✓

Me too 13:37

Do you have shredder software 13:37

Yes. 13:37 ✓✓

Use that or just overwrite yr copies 13:37

Anything on the net is going to be a bust 13:37

That includes email servers 13:37

Let's hope breaking the chain works then. 13:38 ✓✓

For sure 13:38

Catch you later 13:38

Notes

I followed Mr Nethercott's advice and now, as far as I'm aware, there are no extant links connecting my previously-undeleted materials to deletable renderings of them. I do retain some undeletable physical copies in mixed media, but digitised versions of those have also been expunged.

Mr Nethercott informed me later in the day that he had expunged his own deletable copies of items related to matters Dheghōm and had persuaded his mother to do likewise to the scans of them she'd made.

I don't have access to most of the materials I sent to Marjorie Laleek, but understand that she destroyed what she could before her move to Erwā. I have nevertheless erased all copies of anything I sent her that could connect back to the originals. Those of her messages that were conveyed to me by Sarah of Bhéwonom are, according to Sarah herself, undeletable.

I contacted Martin Søndergaard and Lillian Bang, flagging my request to meet at level *maximi*. Ms Bang arrived at the house alone four hours later; I assume that, because of the urgency, she drove up from London without waiting for Mr Søndergaard. I explained the situation to her; afterwards, she

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spent twenty minutes on the phone in her BMW explaining it to someone else. Because her organisation is distributed, emergency protocols have to be used to reach in an expeditious manner the disparate parts of it that hold single-medium copies of material that has previously escaped deletion.

To detect when the daemon starts its work, I have made a digital copy of another digital copy and then deleted the latter.

[Update 3 Jun 2024]

The loose digital copy was duly deleted from existence at around 20:12. It seems that Bhéwonom measures time in Dheghōm from the last reboot point.