

...The underlying theme however was Mayan, and for that I'd found a half dozen, black and white illustrations in a book about Pre Columbian art. The subject obviously corresponded but there was something about the images that went beyond it. They had a mood and a quality of rendering that became the inspiration for my own. There was no information about the artist. He was simply referred to as "arch. F. Catherwood," Even though I'd essentially given up on the idea of a show or a book, I happened to be in the L.A. Public Library onetime and decided to see if I could find out more about him.

In the Art section I found one book: *The Lost Cities of the Mayas-The life, art and discoveries of Frederick Catherwood*. A fully illustrated biography by Fabio Bourbon published in the year 2000. Bourbon had traced Catherwood's entire career with corresponding examples of his artwork. It was the first time I'd seen his illustrations in color and the first time I became aware of his very odd life.

Like me, Frederick Catherwood was an English illustrator, and also of Scottish descent. He also went to art school in London.

He also met an American writer who happened to be living in London at the time: John Lloyd Stephens.

Stephens had contacted Catherwood on the basis of *his* artwork and they *too* had agreed to collaborate on a book together-

About the Maya...

What struck me most was the geography: Catherwood met Stephens in Leicester Square. I met Bill in Piccadilly- a few hundred yards down the road. One 'square' over as it were.

It was an interesting discovery, but when it came down to it- so what? As I read on however, the correspondences became so mathematically improbable that they were hard to ignore.

Catherwood also moved to America to complete the work- and just as I had- slightly ahead of his writer partner.

In Manhattan his first home- like mine – was on Houston Street.

He *also* had a studio in Tribeca.

Like me he moved from there to Prince Street.

We both had children born in New York, and both were separated from our wives there. His son, also born in December, was six years old at the time - as was mine.

We both quit illustration there.

He subsequently moved to California, where he *too* became an American citizen.

As artists we shared a particular image style: panoramas. In New York we'd both become known for it. Catherwood through his panoramic murals which he exhibited in his Rotunda on Prince Street, myself through

the panoramic images I created for television- while *also* living on Prince Street. Images that had led to a career as director and which were the reason I was now *in* Los Angeles.

It was all so unlikely, it seemed like a joke. There was even a punch-line: after his writer partner died, Catherwood produced a folio edition of their collaboration and wrote an account of their history together.

An account that was published a *hundred and fifty years ago*.

Like a bizarre reflection in time, there was *this* book

That I would somehow be duplicating aspects of a dead man's life was odd enough. Stranger yet was that all these coincidences were contained within an even greater one:

In his foreword to *Ah Pook is Here*, Bill's *first two sentences* read:

“ The Mayan codices are undoubtedly books of the dead; that is to say, instructions for time travel. If you see reincarnation as a fact then the question arises: how does one orient oneself with regard to future lives?”

The number of life-imitating-art, art-imitating-life crossovers this implied were almost impossible to disentangle. Once the picture had been

drawn out, all kinds of quirky connections started to appear. The ‘clincher’, the factual/fictional overlap that finally convinced me to start this book, turned out to be right where Bill had put it more than thirty years before:

“Ruined temple in a jungle clearing. Stellae and bas-reliefs on the walls have been defaced by the death symbol crudely chiselled across stone faces and dates. In the ruins of what had been the inner room of the temple, Hart and Clinch Smith have lifted a stone and found the books with a skeleton curled around them in fetal position. The skeleton turns to dust as the books are removed. Cut to evening shadows in the clearing indicating that Clinch and Hart have had time to study the books...

Clinch: “Perhaps this will show a way beyond death...A new frontier...This belongs to humanity John...”

At the very start of *Ah Puch is Here*, when I was trying to figure out a color technique, I chose this sequence where Hart and Smith discovered the lost Mayan books. It ended up looking too much like comic book, so I'd abandoned it.

What struck me as odd, as I looked at it so many years later, was my choice for Clinch's wardrobe. I'd given him a *red* jacket. What would a guy be doing in a jungle in a red jacket? Gray pants, white shirt, tan fedora with a dark band, a dark neckerchief and a *red* jacket - in a jungle.

On the contents page of Bourbon's biography, was an illustration by Catherwood of a European man, presumably Stephens, supervising a Mayan excavation. He was wearing gray pants, white shirt, tan fedora with a dark band, a dark neckerchief and a *red* jacket - in a jungle.

There's no such thing as a chance remark. Here was a quality of insight that was indeed *beyond* me.