

## Some Notes Concerning a Green Box

By Alan Dean Foster

Sirs: I did not know what to do with these notes until a friend of mine suggested that I send them along to you, assuming, I suppose, that you might find them of some interest. They form an exceedingly odd story, one with which I am now not so sure I wish to be connected. I report them here as they occurred.

I do not as a rule frequent the facilities of the anthropology department, but an occasion made it necessary. Being a graduate student, I was able to obtain access to files which are kept from the eyes of careless undergraduates and casual visitors. It was in a far corner of the old manuscript-storage room that I first came across the box.

It caught my eye because it was clearly the only new thing in the ancient place. Curious, I made a seat for myself on a stack of old papers and examined the thing more closely. It was quite an ordinary-looking green box, except for the rather formidable-seeming lock on its cover and what I imagined (falsely, of course) to be some faint lingering phosphorescence around the edges. I tried the lid idly and discovered that the lock had not been fastened.

More out of boredom than anything else, I then reached in and brought out the enclosed sheaf of papers. Most of these seemed quite new, but there were also a few scraps of some thick, coarse vellum which gave some indication of having been burnt at the sides. I imagined that they had been treated with some chemical preservative, for when I first opened the box, an odor issued forth which was noxious in the extreme. It dissipated very rapidly, however, and I thought no more on it.

The contents of the box included typed letters on which were inscribed in longhand various notes, charts, and a sketch, in addition to the yellowed bits of vellum. As the letters seemed to bear somewhat on my area of study, I carried the box and its contents to the main room and began to Xerox the material for later, more leisurely study.

Presently an elderly librarian chanced to pass. Espying the box, she became unaccountably agitated, and quite vigorously insisted that I make a halt to what I was doing. The poor woman was in such a state that I agreed to pause while she went to fetch

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the librarian-in-charge. At the sight of the box and its revealed contents, that portly gentleman became quite as incensed as the old lady, and the very first thing he did was to return every scrap of paper to the container in question and lock it securely. Containing his obvious anger, he took the old woman off to one side, carefully keeping the box tucked tightly under one arm. Puzzled, I strained to hear their conversation, but I could make out only a few disjointed phrases, for they were careful to speak very softly. The man said, ". . . who is he? . . . not permitted . . . should have been locked... delicate situation."

And the woman, ". . . didn't see! . . . no reason to suspect . . . ask him . . . safe . . ."

At this point they halted and the man returned to stare down at me intently. "Did you copy any of the material in this box, son?" I replied that I had not, at which words he seemed unaccountably relieved. When I ventured to inquire as to why I could not copy them, he replied that the manuscripts were as yet unpublished, and therefore not covered by copyright. He smiled for the first time since I had laid eyes on him and said, "No harm done, then!" and shook my hand. Continuing to play out the role, I replied that the material did not seem to offer me such aid anyway, so I was perfectly willing to forget the entire incident.

By a fortuitous coincidence, I had stopped earlier at the post office, having need to refresh my stock of envelopes and stamps. Now it so happens I have a friend who is also desirous of obtaining a position on our departmental expedition, and so I had placed my first copies in an envelope and sent them off to him by way of the library mail chute. As things turned out,

it was unnecessary for me to write him and request the return of these copies, as the original envelope was returned to my apartment the next day, unopened, stamped "insufficient postage." Despite all my efforts to relocate that mysterious green box, I could find not a trace of it in its former cubbyhole, and deemed it injudicious to make inquiries. f

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The few copies I had succeeded in making consisted of the hand-marked letters and the scraps of yellowed paper. A quick survey of the materials convinced me that I was fortunate to obtain what little I had, as there was apparently a considerable defect in the copying machine. The old scraps, which had been printed in a dark black ink and covered with faded red stains, had failed entirely to be reproduced. It is most curious, as the stains themselves had been reprinted with perfect clarity. I have written to complain to the company, and in typically evasive manner, they replied that they never heard of such a thing.

The letters were apparently the work of two UCLA professors, and I was able to obtain some little information concerning them, which I here include:

"Jonathan Turner, Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics. Born, Providence, R.I., 1910. B.A., University of Maine, 1931. Worked way through college at height of Depression performing heavy manual labor. M.A., Yale, 1932, Ph.D., Yale, 1935, doctoral dissertation, *Some Inquiries into the Nature of the Minor Religions of Southern Louisiana and Alabama*, with emphasis on the Cajun Peoples. (This work, I found, is still available to the interested scholar from the Yale University Research Library, upon presentation of the proper credentials.) Member of American Anthropological Society, Academie Francaise, etc., etc. . . . Married Emaline Henry of Boston, 1937. Following her tragic death in 1960, moved to California and accepted full professorship with UCLA . . . Author of numerous books on a wide range of subjects, including a famous essay on the Atlantis-Lemurian myths.

"Robert Nolan, Assistant Professor of Archeology. Born, Beverly Hills, Calif., 1944. B.A., M.A., University of California, Berkeley. Ph.D. thesis in preparation. Winner of numerous prizes for originality of theory in the archeology of the Pacific area. Son of a wealthy Los Angeles lawyer."

As to more personal details regarding the two

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scholars, I was" able to gain some insight from certain of their former students. This line of research was made necessary because the erudite colleagues of the two men displayed a marked hostility toward any questions. Turner was a tall, leonine individual equipped with a full spade beard and an unkempt shock of equally white hair. In contrast, the much younger Nolan was squat and almost entirely bald. Built from the innocuous base of a common interest in skin diving, the friendship of the two men grew rapidly despite the difference in their respective ages.

In 1966, both men took their sabbatical leaves together. With the money Turner had saved and Nolan's not inconsiderable resources of prize monies and family accounts, they purchased and outfitted a small, powered schooner and announced their intention to sail to Easter Island and the South American coasts. Turner had always wanted to visit the area, and Nolan was desirous of carrying out some field work of an unspecified nature.

At this juncture information on the professors begins to grow sketchy and unreliable. It is known that they returned to Los Angeles hi September 1966, in excellent health and high good spirits. Surprisingly, both men proceeded to resign their positions with the University. This, to the great consternation of their respective department heads, who were understandably depressed at the prospect of losing two such brilliant members of their faculties, one old and venerable, the other a youngster of exceptional promise. But neither man could be dissuaded, and following the setting in order of certain personal affairs, they announced then-intention to return once again to the area of their former travels. It is also known that they brought back a number of well-preserved and extremely eccentric

specimens of carved hieroglyphs and statuettes. These, Nolan maintained, had been found not on Isla de Pas-cua (Easter), but on its smaller and little-visited neighbor to the west, Sala-y-Gomez. It is also reported that they consulted with a number of supposed specialists

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in matters occult, among them a rather notorious and disreputable old bookseller in the downtown section of San Diego. The man's shop is no longer there, the structure it was located in having since been torn down and replaced by a multilevel parking lot, one section of which I am able to report sags at the oddest angle, despite repeated attempts to correct it.

Due to the obvious sincerity with which his department deplored his resignation, Professor Nolan agreed to keep in touch with his old friends by means of occasional letters which he would forward whenever the opportunity presented itself. These are the missives which I was able to copy so hurriedly at the anthropology library. On some, the postmark was stamped into the envelope with, sufficient force to leave an impression on the letter within, and by judicious use of fingerprinting materials, I have been able to bring them to a legible state. These dates vary from February 3 to May 18, 1967. All are postmarked from Valparaiso, Chile, and one of them confides that the expedition was forced to remain there for such an extended period of time so as to permit the repair of storm damage to their craft.

A letter to the man mentioned in that missive as the repairman, a Senor Juan Maria y Florez, brought as a reply a note scrawled in an awkward hand, as though the wielder of the pen were unfamiliar with its use. Of the professors it had little to say, except that he, Florez, had always thought of professors as being very composed individuals, and that these two Americans seemed both nervous and jumpy. Instead he dwelt on the damage to their schooner, which was totally alien to him, a man who had worked on ships for over forty years. For example, he mentions that he did not feel Professor Turner's explanation of an "unexpected heavy swell" entirely accounted for the odd twisting of the four-inch steel bar of the schooner's left drive shaft, nor for how three of the four blades came to be broken off the screw. A local shipman in Long Beach assures me that Mr. Florez, despite his forty years, is here

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doubtless indulging a natural penchant for native exaggeration.

The first of these letters, dated February 11, includes in longhand the note "40 degrees, 9' S, still on 110. Nothing visible on horiz. but Bob still conf."

This seemingly innocuous bit of information reveals on inspection a number of oddities. It would seem to indicate that although the letters to home were mailed from February to the middle of May, they were written not in Valparaiso, but while the professors were still at sea! Why the two men should do this and then wait to mail the letters at staggered intervals extending over three and a half months from the date of their arrival in Chile is beyond me. And the latitude given is 40 degrees S. It is quite clear. The "110" can only be the longitude. Thus, it must be inferred from this information that the ship was proceeding almost due south from Easter Island. But the most peculiar part of the phrase is the section which states "nothing visible on the horiz.," since this would seem to imply that perhaps the two men expected that there might be something on the horizon. This is blatant nonsense, since a quick glance at any map of the Pacific will suffice to show even the casual observer that there is nothing present in that section of ocean for hundreds of miles in any direction, let alone due south! It is interesting to note, though, that their course was taking them almost directly down the center of the subsurface mountain mass known as the Easter Island Cordillera.

The next letter carries in its margin the words, "Turned east, following Cook instruc." Once again consulting the Research Library files, I found that Captain James Cook had indeed passed this same section of sea in 1773 on his return voyage to England. What is more

interesting is the fact that the following year the captain, usually a dead-accurate navigator, spent some considerable time wandering about in the area between 40 and 50 degrees latitude, and 120 and 130 degrees longitude. Certainly he could not have been

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there searching for something, as the area is as desolate a stretch of ocean as exists on this world.

The next legible note reads, "129 W, Bob discouraged, turning back w. current." This can only mean that Professor Nolan did indeed expect to find something in this empty piece of sea and, as one would anticipate, he had not. Also, the reverse side of the letter contains the admonition, "coord wrong? check Sydney Bulletin." At the time, this reference held no meaning for me.

There remained only one last notation of any consequence, and I have come to regard that one as the key to the entire baffling matter. It is at once the clearest and most mystifying of them all, and consists of three parts. The words, "check Lvcrrt ref," some cryptic symbols in Professor Turner's hand, and one word, written underneath:

"CTHULHU"

The reference to a "Lvcrrt" puzzled me utterly, until I chanced to mention it to a fellow student. He informed me that my "Lvcrrt" was possibly H. P. Lovecraft, a writer of the 20's and 30's who wrote weird-fantastic stories. Searching out an index of the man's work, - I was both surprised and pleased to encounter a tale containing mention of the odd word "Cthulhu," entitled The Call of Cthulhu. Procuring a book containing the indicated story, I read it with what was at first avid interest. My interest quickly flagged. I was disappointed! Here I had thought I had unearthed some potentially great scientific discovery which for some unknown reason certain parties were trying to suppress, when in actuality all I was doing was wasting my time with the childish fantasies of two grown scholars who presumably should know better!

Still...

Further along in the story I found references not only to that same Sydney Bulletin, but also to a certain mythical island or coastline that supposedly was found at "latitude 47 d, 9', and longitude 126 d, 43' " ! If only as a source of some little humor, these coinci-

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dences piqued my lagging interest considerably. I subsequently wrote to a newspaper friend of mine in Melbourne, who promised to locate for me a copy of the Bulletin for the date indicated in the story (April 18, 1925). Several weeks later I received a letter from my friend apologizing, in which he informed me that the only known complete file of the Sydney Bulletin had perished in the Sydney University fire of 1929. I found this an especial curiosity since Lovecraft's story had been written in 1928.

Additional research turned up more disturbing facts. I must add that I continued to pursue these tiresome researches because I have to date been unable to uncover any information whatsoever regarding the whereabouts of Professor Turner or Professor Nolan, who apparently dropped out of sight after departing Valparaiso on May 21 of '67. I would greatly appreciate any information concerning same. As a last resort I attempted to get in contact with the only surviving relative of either man, but Professor Nolan's father retired from his law practice last year and moved to Europe.

A recent chat with the Chilean consul in Los Angeles produced as a by-product a kind and gracious letter from one Carlos Malpelo, the Valparaiso Chief of Police. He writes that after the date mentioned, 21 May '67, there is no additional information on the two American professors, but that there are two items of related interest which he thought I might find interesting. The first is that the professors spent much time at the Santiago University, and in particular with an old friend of Professor Turner's, the renowned Chilean linguist P. C. Fernandez. It is also noted that the professor was much pleased upon receiving from the two

Americans a gift consisting of a sealed box containing a peculiarly formed statuette of unusually repugnant design.

Unfortunately there appears to be no way to confirm any of this, because Professor Fernandez was one of the many casualties of the recent great Chilean earthquake. The few Indian porters in his party who

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survived the quake were too shaken to do more than report the death of the professor and of their fellows. These men were found in the mountains the night after the quake, shivering and frightened. They were given food and clothing by the government rescue team and permitted to return to their families, except for one oldster who adamantly maintained in spite of the most determined expostulations that the professor was responsible for the quake.

According to this patriarch, the professor had been performing some incomprehensible ritual with burning herbs and an odd little idol when the tremors had begun. At this point the old man's testimony lapses into insane drivel, as when he claims that the mountain across the valley from them got upon gigantic stone feet and stepped on the professor, killing most of the party with him. The poor man was placed in the public sanitarium for the poor at Rancagua, but apparently escaped last year from that well-known institution.

The other "items of interest" which the good Senor Malpelo forwarded to me was much shorter, but of no less import. It was a bit from a small Valparaiso newspaper stating that one Juan Maria y Gomez, given occupation, shipwright, was missing and presumed lost at sea during the night of a storm on June 6, 1967. A trawling fishing boat came upon the shattered wreckage of Senor Gomez's boat the next day. It is mentioned that the ship must have passed through an exceptionally violent part of the storm, because what pieces of the ship's fittings were found were battered beyond all recognition, even to the shaft of one of the ship's screws, which was twisted quite completely out of shape.

Lately, I have been showing the cryptic symbols which appeared in Professor Turner's hand above the word Cthulhu around the University. The reaction I get is peculiar in the extreme. Most professors who see it take it in good humor as an unusual student prank. Those few who do not find it funny exhibit an odd trembling of the hands when they first set eyes upon it,

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but cover up very quickly thereafter and pronounce the symbol an insulting hoax. They are quite forceful about this, and wish to have no more to do with it. I am much puzzled, as this seems to occur almost always with the older professors,

The first of the charts I copied shows the general area of the South Pacific. It has drawn in Easter Island, a rough duplication of Cook's courses for his voyages of 1773-75, and a number of other notations and markings, most of which are unintelligible. Most peculiar of these is an "X" at approximately 167 degrees east longitude, and 77 degrees south latitude. Under these coordinates are the notes "Halley's, '86," which doubtless refers to the next reappearance of the famous Halley comet, due back in our solar vicinity in 1986. A check of a National Geographic map of this area reveals that the above coordinates intersect on or very near Mt. Erebus, the 15,000-foot-high active volcano on McMurdo Sound in Antarctica. What this has to do with the next appearance of Halley's comet is no doubt known only to Professors Turner and Nolan.

The second sketch is simply a crude map of the world with two lines drawn in on it. Although laughable in its simplicity, I was rather intrigued by this, as the two lines ran thusly: one went in a straight line from that "X" (Mt. Erebus?) to Easter Island. The other line runs from Easter, through the center of its neighbor, Sala-y-Gomez, to a spot in the Andes of Northern Chile. This, again coincidentally, happens to be the area Professor Fernandez was exploring when he was killed by the earthquake. Straight as an arrow, it continues onward with three other "X's" marked along its length. One is somewhere in the jungle of the Matto Grosso (memo: write the Brazilian Land Survey), another in the Brazilian Basin, the deepest part of the

Atlantic Ocean, to end finally near Addis Ababa, in Ethiopia. i

The last item was neither note nor chart, but rather a sketch-drawing of what seemed to be some enormous pyramidUke structure of ridiculous shape, with

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accompanying notes in Turner's hand. This was the sole item I managed to smuggle from the library intact. I regret that soon afterward I was offered a really ridiculous sum of money for it, no questions asked, from a wealthy professor I was consulting, and so sold it to him. He has since moved.

That completes what I have found to be an exceedingly odd collection of facts, and until Professors Turner and Nolan return (from wherever they are) I am afraid much of this material must remain as puzzling as ever. I hope you find it of some little interest. Besides, I have come to think it wise to have the facts in the hands of an unadvertised party. Lately I have had the feeling of being followed, especially at night. I was also forced to move from my former apartment after experiencing a spell of severe nightmares unique in their prismatic horror. The doctor at the University assured me that these are the natural results of overwork at school. This may be, but the series of twelve grooves, six to a side, that I found etched into the glass of my one window one morning after a particularly vivid phantasm of terror have made me cautious. One thing I know, and that is that they were not the result of overwork at school.

That is all I have to say about my work with the ' green box and its odd contents. I am quite happy in my new lodgings, and I am no longer troubled by nightmares. Also, I have been selected to go on the University expedition to the South Seas! My associate and companion will be a brilliant and eccentric cine-matographer named Pickman. Only one last thing bothers me unreasonably. My new landlord has the most peculiarly colored yellow eyes.

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