

DANCING WITH THE COSMOS

By

Ian R Thorpe

A small cloud moved westwards on the prevailing wind to reveal the moon. In the lounge bar of an old coaching inn, The Green Man of Avalon, one of three men drinking traditional English bitter beer glanced at the sky. "Good night for it. Bit too much light from a moon like that but this wind will keep the rain off and we shall stay dry."

"Finish these pints and we'll get on then," said one of his companions, a big man dressed roughly in an old Aran sweater and brown corduroy trousers. Both of the pair who had spoken wore heavy walking boots that had seen better days.

The third member of the party, younger and with a less cynical aura, drank his beer quickly as if in a hurry to be moving on.

"Easy down lad. We got 'til dawn."

"So this is how they're all done. You just come out, select a site, go to the nearest pub and have a couple of drinks and then get on with it."

"That's one way of putting it. Tell 'im Joe."

The first man who had spoken, lean and greying, with a weather-beaten face and the slow, smug manner of one who has mistaken self - aggrandisement for success, took up the cue. "This is our way. The others will all have their own approach but that's their business. We do two or three in a season. Most teams are the same, we don't never meet but you can recognise their work by the style. I mean, we couldn't have a governing body and rules and league tables like regular sports, I mean its hardly legal now is it? There's a lot of planning to do each time, designs get more complex, some of 'em's dead silly if you ask me, then you got to be one jump ahead of the barm - pots,"

"Barm Pots?"

"Hippies and new age nuts and such. Blokes with long hair and beards and

smelling of musk oil, women with ethnic skirts and saggy tits. They're always looking out for messages from the ancient gods and stuff. Pain in the arse. All want to see a psycho if you ask me. Anyway that's half the fun, get them silly bastards running round thinking some Egyptian God is trying to send us a message. Then you get the other fruitcakes. One last year said it was a hedgehog mating dance. Even that is more likely than mystical forces. The usual one is that it is some vortex of electro - magnetic energy at a place where ley lines meet.

"And really its you two with some planks and rope."

Another group of drinkers wandered in from the public bar.

"Like I said, there's a bit more to it. Keep your voice down now. Any of this lot might suss out what we're up to, then they'll be on the phone to the press and television selling the information. Wouldn't that be a scoop?"

"You never thought of grassing yourselves up. I mean, a story like that would be worth thousands, you would be on T.V. and in all the papers and magazines and you would only get a small fine."

"Maybe, but it isn't about money or getting on television. The buzz is seeing all those crusties and fruitcakes and eggheads working themselves silly over what it is all about. It's knowing a couple of ordinary blokes like us what nobody looks at twice is outsmarting the lot of them."

"Ok, but I was only saying, I mean this is great for me because its my first time, but you two, you know - what's the point if nobody knows?"

Joe's face darkened. "You better not be thinking of spoiling it. We had better not let him out of our sight William, not even for a piss."

William, plump and red - cheeked, nodded and the two men drained their glasses together and motioned their companion that it was time to leave.

As the men left the pub and went into the car park William remarked that the weather did not feel as fresh as before. There was a heaviness about the atmosphere like that which preceded a thunderstorm. A cat ran across the tarmac and seeing them stopped suddenly, arched its back and pranced away sideways. The dusk - singing birds were silent. "Thunder d'you reckon?" Joe asked.

"Isn't it dangerous to be out in the open in a thunder storm? asked the youngest man whose name was Peter.

"Feels like thunder, but where's the storm clouds. Look at the sky, just a little bit of cirrus. Look pretty that in another half hour when the sun touches the horizon. No, there'll be no storm tonight. Funny though. I put it down to this Global warming." Joe

and William shared the smug attitude, as if they alone had the answer to everything.

The three men got into an ageing four by four, Peter squeezing into the back among a ruck of planks and ropes. The engine fired up with a noisy rattle and they were on their way.

"You really think it will be tonight?"

"Absolutely, all the signs are there." A thin man with long hair and a wispy beard waved vaguely at some instruments he had been setting up. "Lot of static, no wind although there should be according to the weather chart, high humidity, falling pressure. And it is the time, of year Dana. The Earth is pregnant with life."

"Lughnasadh next week," said the woman who had spoken to him before, "the time of ripening. I wonder if whatever it is comes at this time to see if a special crop it *or they* sowed is ripening."

"If we were sure of what force was at work we might have an idea of the reasons. I'll be happy just to get some film that will expose the fraudsters and open up a sensible debate. Just keep scanning the horizon Dana and let me know if you see anything strange" Ralph, who liked to be called Herne, had been keeping his vigils on the chalk ridges of Southern England for many years. On this night the watchers had set up their station overlooking the Vale of the White Horse, an area rich in legend, reports of supernatural activity, UFO sightings and the mysterious appearance of circles and other geometric designs in the ripening crops.

There were many hypotheses about the origin of the shapes and Herne was as adept at dismissing the secular theories of cynics like the three men whose vehicle moved along a road several hundred feet below as they were at deconstructing the ideas offered by people who sought a more esoteric explanation. Despite the conviction of the New Agers that some supernatural agency was involved in the creation of the mysterious crop circles and despite the fact that throughout high summer there would be watchers out on every vantage point in a tranche of Britain that embraced Stonehenge, Silbury Hill, Glastonbury Tor and Caerleon, said by many to be the site of Camelot, the legendary court of King Arthur, nobody could offer any evidence about what made the crop circles.

Like one of the men below her, Dana was new to the game and consequently full of questions.

"So what do you think it is then H?" Nobody ever called Ralph 'Herne'. "You must have formed some idea. I mean, aliens, electro-magnetic storms, ancient forces that early man invented the gods to represent?"

"Ah, the pagan wish list. How grand it would be to get evidence of any of those things. I'd go for the Earth energies myself but I rule out only the hoaxers or rutting

hedgehogs. Since we started to take an interest in these things the designs have become so complex that it would take a team of engineers weeks to design and construct them. There is definitely some kind of message, something is trying to communicate. All we need to do is find the key. My guess is that it is some sort of mathematical code."

Dana edged up close to the man. Though she was only nineteen and he was over forty she found him quite sexy, anybody who would spend his best years living in tents and tumbledown abandoned cottages in pursuit of a the holy grail had to be a true romantic. In turn Ralph snaked his arm around the girl's waist so that his slender, long fingered hand rested on her hip.

"One to one point six two I'd guess," he said mysteriously.

"What you on about?"

"Your waist to hip ratio. The golden section"

"Thirty - five, twenty - three, thirty seven; my mother says I got child bearing hips. Could do with a bit more bust though, but what has that to do with anything."

"Mathematical language. In a Fibonacci series any number is the sum of the two before it, like two, three; five. Five, eight; thirteen. See what I mean? And if you divide eight by five or thirteen by eight you will get an answer pretty close to 1.62 , so the key to the Fibonacci series of mathematical progressions is one to one point six two which is called phi in mathematics."

"So?"

"Another way of looking at it is if you take a line A to B and put a point C in it so that A to B is longer than A to C by the same proportion as A to C is longer than B to C that is the golden section. It crops up in the Pyramids, and other ancient buildings and in great works of art and in the faces and bodies of people we think are beautiful. That ratio seems to communicate with the human soul...."

If the speaker had been anybody but Herne then Dana would have thought the information was so much bullshit aimed at getting him inside her knickers. "and you reckon the crop circle designs are all about this ratio?"

"It is certainly incorporated in them. Two years ago we were allowed to investigate one by a farmer who had vision and generosity of spirit. Normally they just say *get off my land* and point a shotgun at you but this bloke was well into it. You must remember the one, a central circle with four smaller circles around it aligned to the cardinal points of the compass and then smaller circles radiating out in arcs. And the circumference of each circle to the next one smaller was...."

"One point six two?"

"Correct. Then there is pi, three point one four. Whatever creates these designs must have a knowledge of geometry. It is using mathematics to communicate. The whole Universe runs on mathematical principles so we have two universal languages that can be deciphered by any civilised race. Mathematics and music. And tonight we might just be the ones who find the key to it all." He tightened his grip and held her closer. She knew he was interested in finding the key to something more prosaic than the mysteries of the Universe but had decided long ago that for an old bloke with dodgy teeth and hairs growing out of his nostrils he was a hunk. She would have him as a lover for a while. Living in a tent would be quite cool and her parents would hate the idea. Herne/Ralph was still talking.

"Did you know that even with the most advanced technology we have today we could not build the pyramids. Some of those upper stones weigh about two hundred tons and the reach from the base where a crane would have to stand to the apex is much too far for any crane to lift that kind of weight. And yet the ancient Egyptians, a people who are supposed to have barely emerged from the stone age managed to erect buildings like that. Perhaps what the circles are trying to tell us will unlock the secrets of the past."

"It's really mind blowing when you put it like that. Oh! What was that?"

She lifted binoculars to her eyes.

"What?"

"Over there. Just above the horizon. When I first saw it I thought it was a planet, it seemed too low and close for a star. Then while I was watching it just shot across the sky and faded. Miles too fast for a 'plane, even a military aircraft could not go from standstill like that."

"Sounds typical of what people have seen before. Where?"

Dana pointed and Ralph raised his own binoculars and aimed them towards the point indicated.

"This is ideal." The off roader had been bumping along a narrow dirt lane for a while when Joe applied the brake and spoke. "Nice big field of barley, just grown to its full height and ripening. This lane goes nowhere and the high hedge screens the car from the road."

The three men got out of the vehicle and began to unpack their tackle, planks of pine with ropes threaded through, diagrams, slender poles and knotted cords for measuring. Each had a torch and a pack in which they had sandwiches and several bottles of beer. Joe and Peter arranged the circle making equipment while William

scouted along the hedgerow for a place where they could get through and use one of the wheeltracks left by a tractor spraying pesticides to gain access to the centre of the field without leaving a tell - tale trail. When the way was found the trio divided their load and scrambled through the tall bushes of the hedge.

"Would'n'of been able to do that one time." William said. "Farmers used to keep proper hedges one time. Keep anybody out, miserable bastards. They reckon there is a bond between farmers and the land. They'll not let anybody near it 'til they squeeze out the last drop of profit."

"Bond my arse" Joe said "Only bond farmers have is with government subsidy. Let's get to it."

They were in the middle of the field, walking in single file along a wheeltrack. William took over. He was the designer. Consulting his diagram he told Peter to take a short plank with four fine ropes at each corner joined in a single knot. As Joe showed the newcomer how to walk, one foot on the wood and always leading, the other coming up behind it the team leader attached a fine cord through a belt loop on Peter's jeans and walked some distance away.

"Right Pete, you set off marking the outer perimeter. Cord will guide you in a perfect circle. It seems pretty slow at this stage but once we get going with the wide planks we will soon have the pattern building." Peter set off plodding along like some bizarre robot, lifting his right leg high for each step and shuffling the left up to join it. He was about half way around the circle when he noticed the light. It flashed across the sky from the distance, travelling from infinity to a point that seemed only a few miles away from them in less than a second.

"Whoa, did you see that?" He called out.

"Sssshhh," the other two hissed back.

"You can be heard from the road silly bugger." William reprimanded him.

"But that light. Its unnatural. Did you see?" He asked again more quietly.

William looked at where the other man was pointing. "Be some silly bastard up in a hot air balloon. That Branstons bloke most probably doing some stunt to promote his business. He is into balloons and all that."

Joe joined in, "yeah, he hired an airship once, put lights around the outside so as it looked like a flying saucer in the dark. Flew around in it for a few nights. There was plenty took in too. Some people just want to believe all that rubbish."

Peter sighed and carried on with his task, thinking that William was the type who would be sure nobody had ever before thought of inserting a "t" into "Branson"

to make the billionaire's name into that of a sandwich pickle. At first it had seemed fun to get involved with William and Joe in their crop circle capers, the whole thing had seemed like a great joke but he had found their smugness and know-all attitude irritating. They came across as a pair of bitter and resentful men whose only purpose was to convince themselves they were much more clever than most people. Every few steps he glanced at the bright light which hung quite still in the sky. The other men stayed in their position slagging off scientists, paranormal investigators, rich businessmen, students, politicians, Television Documentary makers. Their voices carried faintly to Peter and he wondered if there was anybody they held respect for.

"There, there. It's back." Dana jumped up and down excitedly as she pointed to where an unnaturally bright light hung in the sky. Ralph watched her breasts bobbing under the hand knitted sweater and thought that even if they saw nothing of note this might be the most profitable night he had spent in the outdoors waiting to capture on video the creation of a crop circle. When Dana was still he looked at what had excited her.

It was as she had said earlier, too bright for a star, too close for a planet and this time he had seen it arrive. No aircraft could have moved like that, it must have been travelling at several thousand miles per hour.

"This is a special moment Dana. Other people have described strange, fast moving lights in the sky but we are close to it. Lining a video camera up to film the object he moved to stand by the girl.

"We could be about to make history," he said and she did not object when his hand came to rest on her bottom.

They watched for several minutes she with mounting excitement, sure something was about to happen, he with mixed feelings. After twenty years of watching and waiting for something like this to happen now part of him wished the bloody thing would go away and let him get on with the seduction he had begun. He was lost in a reverie about the prospective delights of Dana's young body when she squealed again.

"There's a baby light come off it. Did you see, did you see that?"

"Too right I did," he lied. "Better get myself on the camera, it looks like something is kicking off. You describe everything you see, as you see it, and time every observation." He lifted the voice activated tape recorder over his head and hung it around her neck, making a great performance of clipping the microphone to her sweater.

"You're doing that on purpose H." She slapped his hand away from her breasts. He moved away.

"Still observing strange light in sky. Time; twelve - seventeen a.m. smaller light sheered away and descended to just above the earth where it faded." Dana said for the microphone.

Peter was fascinated and quite worried by the bright object. He had seen the small ball of light break away and drift towards them before it faded. The heaviness in the air had intensified and even Joe agreed with him that it was a strange night, the feeling that a high static charge surrounded them was intensifying and only William seemed unaffected. Peter wondered if the man was so soused in his own cynicism that he had become totally insensitive to events around him.

They were working on a design of four large circles and several smaller ones and Joe passed close to Peter just as another illuminated object broke away from the main body.

"What the hell is that?" He asked nodding towards the spectacle.

Joe looked up for a moment. "Buggered if I know, I've never seen anything like it. William makes out he's the expert on astrophysics." He called to William in an urgent stage whisper. Peter thought of the old rhyme about the schoolmaster who told his pupils anything that he did not know was not knowledge. Would William come up with a simplistic but unlikely explanation or simply dismiss the phenomenon as *some silly sod playing tricks*.

"Its a common phenomenon similar to the Aurora Borealis, the polar lights. See, atomic particles from the sun are attracted by the earth's magnetic field. When they hits the troposphere they collides with oxygen and nitrogen atoms and take out some electrons, leaving them atoms unstable. Being unstable the atoms give off radiation which causes molecules of inert gases in the atmosphere to glow. Its like neon lights in a city centre."

Though Peter knew William was almost but not quite right the discourse had been delivered in the familiar *you can't argue with facts like that* tone and indicated no further discussion would be entertained.

"Aurora my arse," Joe whispered "something's up there."

As he spoke another ball of light broke away from the main ball and trailed downwards. It would have resembled a firework but did not fall all the way to earth. There were now three small objects separated from the main one.

"I don't like it Joe. This is not natural at all. Does your skin feel prickly."

"Sort of. It's spooky alright. But what can hurt us? It's all prob'ly got something to do with that there global warming."

The two men carried on in their bizarre walk, treading down the stalks of Barley as they went and not noticing other balls of light gathering around them. They were coming close together again when the humming started."

"What you up to William, making that din?"

"Thought it was you breaking wind Joe. Get down, lie on the floor, it could be a police helicopter, you two been making so much noise they probably heard you in the next county." William lay on the ground.

"No bloody helicopter ever sounded like that." Joe said.

"Look, look at the lights." There was panic in Peter's voice. There were now about twenty lights in a circle around them, quite still but changing colour, from magenta to gold, gold to blue, blue to pink, pink to violet, violet to green.

"Time to get out of here." Joe shouted to William but William was staring Zombie-like. The humming that had started at the bottom of the human hearing spectrum now increased and varied in pitch to make a fluting melody beneath which was a rhythmic pulsing bass note. This seemed to be a cue for the lights to start moving. Slowly at first they began to circle, not centering their orbit on the three men whose presence seemed coincidental, but making a ring in the air that overlapped the one made by the boards and feet. Peter and Joe watched in amazement as the barley they had flattened stood up again. William gazed up in silent rage, as if he would reach up and physically attack the lights for their having destroyed all his certainties and revealed his inability to understand anything about the cosmos, thus bursting the bubble with which he surrounded his fragile psyche.

Above the watchers looked on in amazement. They had been joined by four others who had been stationed on the same ridge and mobile phones were busy as they kept contacts with other groups in different areas.

"I don't believe it, I just don't believe it," Ralph muttered. "We are getting it all on camera. Let them explain this away as rutting hedgehogs." They were watching a complex dance unfold as the strange lights circled faster, swooping and soaring, spinning and leaping. The humming and the pulsing bass note could be heard faintly, like some wild elemental orchestra playing a dervish - dance while above and some distance away the brighter light stood still, glowing steadily, like a celestial puppet master.

"I thought I saw three fakers down there, in that very field where the lights are," Dana announced, "wonder what they're making of it."

"Prob'ly crapping theirselves," a voice answered. "Serves them right too."

Down in the field William, Joe and Peter were having a much worse time than

anybody could imagine. They had all lost the power of movement as the energy vortex they had strayed into intensified. Flesh burned and blistered and the level of noise scrambled their brains. Faster and faster the lights danced around them, purple, blue red and white lights gyrating and interweaving like folk dancers on speed. There were odd pops of light as smaller life forms were vaporised by the energy. The vegetation was unharmed but flattened, neatly and methodically arranged. It was as if some fine artist, having cleaned his canvas of impurities was working on it to express great ideas in abstract forms. Sometimes two or three lights would break out of the ring and perform their own wild, tumbling dance for a few seconds. Peter was aware of William, closest to the centre of the circle, his head stretched like a rubber band, almost as long as his body, nose, ears, mouth, each elongated feature distorted beyond anything human. Peter himself was swelling, his head enormous like a beach ball with a stupid face, belly distended and his feet oozing out of the seams of his shoes. Joe was first to succumb, with a scream that was not of the physical plane or made by anything human he swelled enormously, became nebulous and vanished, atomised. William, having been stretched to almost twenty feet long was suddenly compressed until barely visible and then he exploded in a kaleidoscope of sinuous light. Peter was still holding on, he tried to focus his will, the instinct for survival telling him to cling to his consciousness. Focus and pray. Pray to God. Pray that there was a God. God, in whom he had never believed was his last chance now. "Our father which art.....which art.....though I walk through the shadow of death valley.....hail Mary full of grapes....the father son and the houses of the holy.....all that glitters is gold.....the voice of the turtle was heard in the la..... and he was gone, the light of his life force exploding outwards leaving for a few moments a small area of intense, almost solid darkness in the space his physical body had occupied. Peter ceased to be at the instant the noise which had risen to a banshee screech and the pulsing bass note reached a crescendo that had people leaping from their beds in nearby villages. Then suddenly all was quiet, the silence seeming loud after the cacophonous music.

"What the effing hell was that," asked one of the watchers on the ridge.

"Better than a Chemical Brothers gig," said Ralph, elated that he had filmed the cosmic show. As the group chatted excitedly among themselves a new sound intruded on the night. This time it was a police helicopter. The dancing lights had been reported by many people and the aerial surveillance team scrambled. The powerful beam of the aircraft's searchlight swept the landscape illuminating the design in the barley field. It was a huge array of circles, helixes, arcs and spirals.

"It's a map of the sky," somebody suggested.

"It's a diagram of a DNA molecule, and the body's chakras" another offered.

"I'm going to go down there and take a look," Ralph said, reluctantly pulling away from the pressure of Dana's buttocks that had been grinding against his crotch, "will somebody look after the camera. If the bizzies are out in the chopper they'll be

turning up mob handed at ground level, trampling everything with their big, stupid feet and arresting everything that moves They'll only confiscate the film."

"Its your circle H, you check it out tonight, we'll see it tomorrow."

Gathering Dana and a few possessions the New Ager set off towards his battered van to drive down to the field.

They arrived minutes before the police who immediately started to behave as if the two scruffy and ineffectual looking hippies were international master criminals.

"We are crop circle investigators," Ralph protested as the senior officer formally arrested him for causing criminal damage.

"Look" said Dana, "we were up there watching. We saw three blokes down here. Then these lights appeared."

"Oh yes young lady, well we'll be taking a blood sample at the station to find out exactly what caused these lights to appear in your mind. I must warn you that possession of class A drugs is a criminal offence."

"Yeah? Well I'm clean. And we got it all on film," she said triumphantly.

"Film eh? You had best hand that over then."

"It isn't here stupid."

A constable interrupted. "Better come and take a look at this stuff we found in the field sergeant." Somebody else reported a vehicle abandoned in a lane nearby.

Nothing was ever heard of William, Joe and Peter. No charges were brought against Ralph and Dana and a story was put out to the media that three men answering the descriptions of the missing trio hired a small boat for a fishing trip along a notoriously treacherous part of the coast and had never returned it . No television station would show the footage recorded that night and when the crop circle investigators were interviewed on radio several rent - a - cynic type experts were quick to contradict them. The government did not want the people to know the truth, which was that nobody knew what the truth was.

The believers carried on believing and the cynics carried on inventing more outlandish theories to provide logical explanations for the phenomena of crop circles.

END