



To The Headwaters Or Bust

(Episode 6)

11/11/20:

“ ‘I’m travelling in some vehicle’, Joni Mitchell sang in *Hejira* and now here am I on the *SS Omushkos Theatre*, in small business flight from big money merchants just as Mohammed was though the impetus for my exit out of this Arkansas ‘Mecca’ was merely being fired from a minimum wage job at the Pine Bluff Walmart on South Olive Street for whimsically sporting a tie-dyed hijab on ‘Casual Friday’.

Toward what American ‘Medina’ we may be now headed on this accelerating upstream paddle remains as much a mystery to me as it does for my crewmates though Captain Oz says the bull’s-eye target of our final destination encircles thousands of sky-blue lakes, big and small, with tiny tree-filled archipelagoes sprouting in between, though to which turquoise body of water or evergreened isle we may one day canoe to I cannot say—not because it’s hard to pronounce even though it most likely will be, but because nobody aboard is sayin’ and there are just too many names to choose from on my Google Earth map of the ‘Land of 10,000 Lakes’. Hey *wait*, wasn’t Minnesota where Jesse Ventura set the WWF show-business template for getting elected to political office back when I was kid? It seems only fitting that Philly, City of Brotherly Love and birthplace of the People’s Constitution, put that Dude from Delaware over the top and sent Trump, the Baby Boomer’s last delusional mass cult leader, packing for un-presidential wherever...

To be perfectly frank, assuming frankness can be perfect, if it hadn’t been for DJ ‘Campfire Girl’ who saw me hanging out my long green thumb like some ‘Sissy Hankshaw’ wannabe at the Crazy Bayou barge dock, just another heartland cowgirl hitchin’ onto America’s contemporary carny circuit near Monterey Bend a mile south of the Arkansas River’s garrulous mouth, who frankly knows where I’d be today?

We’re on our merry way to Memphis now, but before coming aboard the *Omushkos* I had consigned myself to a darker than usual mood after wandering what remains of the [Rohwer Relocation Camp](#) ruins on Sunday where Japanese-Americans were interned during WWII. Yet it was within the fenced and gated ground of this former prison camp’s forlorn cemetery that I happened upon an over-sized gardener’s glove some mourner had left behind whose great green thumb inspired a hitchhiking impulse at the height of ‘Indian Summer’ 2020 and my journey got company upon meeting an aged man poling two buckets of water between his shoulders to water a huge *Fatsea japonica* planted behind his mother’s headstone whose Zen koan inscription brought me sorrow:

Nowhere to go when dead

His name was Hiroshi and he told me an ancient Japanese tale about a pair of chopsticks floating downstream the river Hi which are seen by Susanno, a Shinto kami who had descended from heaven to earth in Hi’s headwaters and who, upon observing the chopsticks pass by, re-ascended upriver to slay an evil dragon and win himself a wife. I proposed that if *he* felt like travelling upstream why not accompany me to Crazy Bayou?

Not far from the Arkansas River’s entry into the Mississippi a town named ‘Napoleon’ by an early French explorer once thrived, as Mark Twain noted in Chapter 2

of his *Life On The Mississippi*: ‘three out of the four memorable events connected with the discovery and exploration of the mighty river occurred, by accident, in one and the same place’. These ‘accidents’, happy or not, were the successive arrivals there of the Spaniard De Soto in 1542, followed by Frenchmen Jolliet & Marquette in 1673, finally trailed by La Salle and Hennepin in 1681. La Salle was a French Jesuit who sailed to Montreal from Normandy where, upon hearing about the Mississippi River, deduced that it flowed into the Gulf of Mexico and might be a way to China so he helped establish a network of fur-trading forts from the Great Lakes down the Mississippi which he named in 1682 ‘Louisiana’ for King Louis XIV of France—the same area President Jefferson later purchased from France which in turn led to the Lewis & Clark Expedition’s search for a Northwest Passage. Louis Hennepin was a Roman Catholic priest from Flemish Belgium who published the first book and map of North America to name ‘Louisiana’.

Napoleon was washed away by Old Man River not long before Mark Twain boated back to New Orleans in the late 19th century, perhaps by that same flood which diverted Mississippi’s massive flow from Vicksburg and Grand Gulf so while passing the site of that former town earlier today thinking about how quickly reality can change on us I googled ‘Napoleon’ only to come upon this YouTube video of an oldtimer hippie song from 1966 whose A-side plays [They’re Coming To Take Me Away, Ha-Ha](#) forward and whose B-side then plays it backwards which sounds like, well, gibberish. Am I hearing here ‘Napoleon XIV’ followed by ‘Napoleon XLV’? What’s that? Hmm...too soon?

DJ ‘Fatima Qutb Khidr’ reporting here for Episode #6 of Radio Free Japheth’s ‘Indian Summer Of Love’, your postmodern Sufi-Q podcast right here on radio station WFQK (as in ‘What the F!’ I guess I could say though probably shouldn’t). Harley Quinn may be my soul sister and I an unrepentant American popular culture buff, but don’t dis my retro-religion or I’ll castrate your 1st born son (ha ha –not allowed under Sharia law).

Hiroshi, who was assigned my shipboard roommate after both of us passed the nasal swab test, turns out to be a rather uninhibited octagenarian, joking this morning about my flirtatious nature which, being a pre-existing condition, I cannot suppress: ‘You’re like a hari-kari capsule of Cyldenophil Psytrate so if my peach pit prostrate starts to fibrillate please don’t resuscitate’.

Well, that would break the six foot rule, right? But since I’m shadowing the silhouette of an arid Saharan mirage on this wet Aquarian hajj, if your libido pleads placid and the ol’ obelisk’s feelin’ flaccid, let me regale you with a thousand and one songs tailored for riverboat Sinbads and their siren island throngs. But if you can’t translate *Alf Layla Wa-Layla* and just long to view my ‘profile’, no need to ask the Sultan King, just queue up with bitcoin bling and click on ‘Sheherazade the Queen’.

Pssst: the password is neither ‘Abracadabra’ or ‘Open Sesame’.

Hint: try ‘Dunyazadiad’.

The chimeric pleasure of *my* treasure can only be found in the tales I tell.

I rub a plastic penlight on the printed page for my magic genie to appear and the first wish I want granted is permission to romance Captain Oz with my sinuous Sufi dance. Our supposed ‘Time Traveller from the Spirit Land’ seems to have a keen curiosity about the pirouetting gyre itself and I just might be that twirling ballerina who can help him bring this ship safely up to its fountainhead source after their five year dead-stop in Vicksburg where the ‘Lone Oak Leper’, whose real name was never learned, lies

motionless now in a refrigerated truck, cleared of guilt in what local media dubbed the ‘Pumpkin Bag’ murder only to perish by that coronavirus he caught from an in-your-face courtroom interrogation by the prosecuting attorney. It was during this excruciating five-year investigation and trial that Ozawindib retro-fitted our showboat with a cutting edge patch of high-tech wizardry crewmates say may have been hacked from ‘alien hardware’.

Ozawindib served as a character witness near the long trial’s end and stated that back when he was recovering from a bout of ‘Swamp Fever’ after first coming aboard the *Omushkos* at Middle Ground Island (as I read from the court’s transcript): “It was the Lone Oak Leper who who gave me the best advice of all. He said ‘Son. Your health is all you got in this life. Never wrestle, skin and eat an armadillo’ then we both laughed in spite of ourselves as an ironic acknowledgement of his incurable condition and it was this tragic self-effacing humor of his that truly helped me recover.”

Armadilloes, you see, can transmit the *mycobacterium leprae* microbe that causes leprosy in humans but when Ozawindib tried telling this to the squinting prosecutor, his own past history and credibility as a witness was raised front and center to which he only replied: “Would you pluck the heart out of my mystery and bury it at Wounded Knee?”

Thank God that crazy legal Roman circus is now in the rearview mirror and as it recedes my fellow DJ’s tell me a fresh serenity has come pouring into the ship like a luke warm fever. By snorkeling the many-coloured contours of his sailor sack tool kit, our aqua-pilot seems to have discovered a way to dip all of us into a some kind of dreamlike zone here on the *SS Omushkos Theatre* as we navigate upstream at what Captain Oz is terming ‘time-warp speed’ which in and of itself sounds a bit troubling doesn’t it? I mean, is the ‘warping’ of time a *good* thing? And what will it do to the ‘woof’ of space?

Nonetheless, in his own words, this is how Oz defines our mysterious destination:

‘What we’re all working on here, folks, is pathfinding a new form of frontier that will lead us forward to a multitemporal resurrection of our American Spirit.’

Like Joni Mitchell, I too am ‘porous with travel fever’ so as we fold space and travel through time, I’ve taken to wearing Jennie Appleton’s simple ribboned bonnet as my schoolgirl hijab and her traditional convent gown as my burka in the hopes that Captain Ozawindib too will wait for me to grow up. They do maintain a quaint wardrobe here and it’s fun to try on old things. Even puts me in the mood to sing Jennie’s song:

*“The wind blows. The sea flows. Nobody knows.
And where I am going nobody knows”*

I suppose the closest I’ve come to making an actual Hajj was a brief journey taken with friends from my Syrian immigrant community of Dearborn, Michigan to Ann Arbor in late September 2015 after the deadly mass stampede of Muslim pilgrims in Mina. It was there we encountered the U of M’s ‘Kaaba’, a 15’ x 15’ cube named ‘Endover’ installed by NYC sculptor Tony Rosenthal in 1968 which they say looks a little like the old Telstar satellite. The sculpture was planted not far from that Michigan Union building upon whose steps Senator Kennedy first spitballed his idea of a American ‘Peace Corps’ while running for president in the fall of 1960. Given as a gift from the U of M Class of

1965, Endover is the larger twin of an 8' x 8' 'cube' named 'Alamo' installed by Mr. Rosenthal at NYC's Astor Place one year earlier.

This kinetic sculpture can be spun around and round and word has it there's some grainy cam-corder video of our benefactor Havrylak Kern seated Buddha-style atop the revolving black 'Endover' sculpture on Fool's Day 1980, flash-carding the lyrics to a song from the musical *Camelot* whose name made my mind leap to the 'Battle of the Camel' between the military forces of Aisha and Ali which led to the Sunni-Shiite split.

I'm not sure Christian culture can do much to help matters there, especially after hearing this satirical country 'Jesus' song last weekend that got yanked from airplay on some Arkansas college station after protests from both ends of the political spectrum.

*I'm Travellin' to Fatwa Valley with my Holy Bible and a One Man Band
Gonna Dance 'round that Kaaba 'til Mohammed Shakes my Crucified Hand*

For we Sufi's, the dervish dance is a form of physically active meditation whose goal is to experience the Kingdom of God in the here and now. Sufi's see Jesus as the prophet of the interior life and God as the Ground of Being and in our striving for a subjective experience of becoming one with God as a lover, we model our ecstatic journeys on the story of Mohammed's mystical flight to Heaven similar to the way novelists model their narrative flights on the epics of ancient poets. We see creative imagination as the chief religious faculty and believe that God can be discovered through our whirling dance and poetic symbolism. Could the future of theology be a kind of pluralistic play amongst all the arts and sciences? A harmonious transcendent interactive multitribalism rather than some monolithic authoritarian creed? Why can't we just let human curiosity guide our search for truth? The age of the internet could bring us a great global renaissance if we just help this planet's religions vine into an intertwining 'arabesque' of flowing beauty whose ambulatory yoga of departure and reconciliation lets one leg point backward to the past while the other stands firmly planted on present ground, pointing forward to the future.

Say, who's that private eye seein' musical order in the dance of nature and singing divine ideas that keep us ever young? 'The Poet', that's who! Can you dig it? Ralph Waldo Emerson did.

Some religious scholars believe the origin of the word 'Allah' is derived from the Arabic root WLH: 'to be sad, to sigh for'. The Islamic scholar Ibn al-Arabi imagined a solitary God sighing with longing and interpreted this 'sigh' as the active creative force which brought our cosmos into existence. In the *Sacred Hadith*, God says 'I was a hidden treasure and I longed to be known'. Well, if each human being is a unique epiphany of this 'Hidden God' who is tired of being unknown and each of us manifest him in a specific and unrepeatably manner, might'n that be like achieving the enhanced or higher self which polytheists would call a state of 'deification'? A pluralistic approach could show us that all 'faiths' have virtue and that attaching oneself to any particular creed or faith exclusively could prove to be detrimental for one's spiritual and intellectual health. Sufi's would argue, as did Emerson in his *Harvard Divinity Address*, that Christianity's mistaken assumption was that one man contained the whole incarnation of the divine once and for all rather than being an exemplar showing the way for all men and women

to become 'divine'. In a free world, we are each our own pole or 'qutb' thus fulfilling that wonderful verse from *Koran* 2:109: 'Wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah'.

In other words: Here Comes Everybody!

Perhaps, as some scholars have argued, the story of Khidr in *Sura 18* is the key to solving Islam's millennial long schism. Khidr is known as the 'Evergreen Imam'. Being eternally fresh and renewable, he is the 'Master of the Path', the Discoverer of the 'Waters of Life' and the 'Dispenser of Inspiration'. For those who seek a mystical truth higher than literal forms he can be, like the Greek Hermes, a psychopompos (or guide) toward the whole world's deeper spiritual mysteries and broader intellectual flowerings.

Of course there are pompous psychos too, but can't we just let go of this current interim of American politics for awhile, however anxious we may feel, and simply enjoy November's season of Thanksgiving? For, as Mohammed once said, 'Three things of this world delight the heart: water, green things and a beautiful face'.

Who among us can't find that?

By wi-fi, through our ship's comprehensive computer e-book library, my smartphone pixeled this poetic line from *Balthazar* (1958), Volume II of Lawrence Durrell's long forgotten *Alexandria Quartet*: 'suddenly the singer burst into the passionate pilgrim song which expresses so marvellously the Moslem's longing for Mecca and his adoration of the Prophet—and the melody fluttered inside the brothers' hearts, imprisoned like a bird with beating wings.'

Now I can find joy in that but where is my Ibn-al Alhazen? My straight-striped Waldo? Who here aboard will help me find the light of both resolution and realization? What resident philosopher can zero me in on the rules of science and narrow my mind's eye aperture until I've focused on the deeper truths of our ultimate destination (all while masked and standing six feet back of course)? As Havrylak Kern sang in this abbreviated 1973 mp3 version of Marten Harbor's *Last Night Of The Storm*: 'If I can comprehend the force will I be able to guide my course?'. Word has it our northern benefactor was an outlier "Weatherman" way back in the day so he may still carry a little of their heavy 'millennial salvationist' water in him and there is some hint of this to be found in the pdf of his [Flint Wargasm Trailer](#) which was originally uploaded to the cloud on 11/11/11.

(full disclosure: I work here, as all our DJ's do, for Mr. Kern so you can sample the sustenance of these links with whatever grain of salt you wish to add. We are not legally obligated to post them however, Girl Scout's honor)

I mention all this because there is the growing sense that our creative work here is evolving toward an even greater story with real world impact whose curvilinear narrative we cannot yet clearly discern. For now, there are only these daily rehearsals of tunes from a song-cycle provisionally named '4Q521' which we know little about other than those scores and scripts which circulate daily and are then retracted for revision. Is this our baffled king composing his own hallelujah? Are we being drawn into some meandering maze-like initiation rite of no-turning-back passage or will we be offered a cut-off point when each of us must choose whether to continue on with the voyage or abandon ship?

We *are* being paid, though I'm not sure whether it's a higher wage than I was getting at Walmart because it arrives in a scrip that can only be spent aboard our ship. If choose we to disembark at any point, we've been told that scrip will be traded for

American dollars though no one's been told yet the actual conversion rate. But even so, with this pandemic swirling closer and closer all around us, perhaps maintaining our shipboard asylum here is the healthiest option. In any event, I remain more suspicious of evangelical glad-handers than I am of those who approach others circumspect and the cautious hands-off behavior of our shy overlord seems to be nothing if not that. Is he testing our improv chops in preparation for a musical play to be performed one day for an audience we won't be introduced to until that penultimate terrifying Grand Guignol moment? Or is all of this secrecy just a prankster's ploy to camouflage the weird revelation of some puffy humorous sugarsweet MacGuffin? But if so, to what end?

By the Three Daughters of Allah, I resolve to find out what's really going on.

I sometimes get the queasy feeling we are sailing toward what Mircea Eliade called *illud tempus*, that sacred temporal homeland when the original creation myths were first formed. We do seem to be moving toward the storied 'Mississippi Headwaters' at an accelerated pace as if this really might be an ecstatic voyage to heaven. But though it's in the 60s and sunny where we are now, the sky still turns cold and dark earlier with each passing day. Will I, like Mohammed, return from this mind-bending timescape in some future instant only to find my upside-down jar still in mid-spill just where I left it?

What if we are *already* living in the 'Millennium' of 'New Jerusalem' after the return of 'Christ' but don't yet know it yet because even *he* doesn't know it? What if America *is* 'The Rapture'? What if the founders of new major religious world-views always seem to be both upenders and re-animators of some preceding orthodoxy because all the world's mythologies and religions are but local variants of a far larger story which ultimately must include all our scientific knowledge? What if the day to day essence of true religion boils down to a physiological 'praxis', 'technique' or 'method' for finding different ways to faith and inspiration and 'creativity' is what awakens within your mind whenever you access the mental or spiritual frequency of the 'Kingdom of Heaven'?

Have you ever wondered that? Well, why not?.

I remember seeing a 25th anniversary showing of *Sinbad At The World's End* in a rundown Dearborn movie theatre back in 2002 which is about a journey taken north to Hyperborea and an ancient civilization called Arimaspea with northern lights, a pyramid, the good god Apollo and a magical bluish light harvested from the auroras. No one but me seems to remember this 1977 British movie however and it's probably because the film's August release followed that of *Star Wars* in May and Ray Harryhausen's antique special effects paled in comparison.

Since *Firefly*'s my favorite sci-fi tv series of all time with *Battlestar Galactica* right behind (you know, the one that ends when Starbuck enters those computer coordinates of her childhood piano melody leading to an apocalyptic 'jump' which leaps them through space into orbit around an early hominid Planet Earth, thereby accelerating human evolution), perhaps I should embody *Firefly*'s 'Kamikaze Geisha' spirit of River who says 'I am the ship' and thereby defeat that bounty hunter who has tracked her down; 'Am I dreaming?' asked Captain Reynolds. 'We all are,' she replied.

There is a Rudyard Kipling short story called *The Ship That Found Herself* which may provide a valuable metaphor for understanding how Ozawindib took command of this paddlewheeler's elliptical-shaped pilot house by hearing the 'Song of the Engines':

'...when a ship finds herself, all the talking of the separate pieces ceases and melts into one voice, which is the soul of the ship.'

Those who only hug the stern or lean out from the bow forget that humanity's populous middle lives in between, inhabiting the passenger portion of Bucky Fuller's 'Spaceship Earth' where everyone is 'Crew'. This is where Democracy's Soul resides.

My smartphone's gps tells me we are approaching Memphis, but with Ozawindib at the wheel working all those 'relocation' modifications he installed in Vicksburg over the past five years, God only knows in what cotton-pickin' year we'll actually arrive. All I can say for sure is that I'm as close now as I'll probably ever get to Faulkner's fictional county of Yoknapatawpha in NW Mississippi whose *Absalom, Absalom!* remains my favorite novel of his for those epic-length sentences and the way it's language sings. So here's a hallelujah shout out to King David's rebellious son (who symbolically brings an end to plantation culture in Faulkner's fable), and another one to "Napoleon the Leper Boy" in 1962's *Devil At Four O'Clock* (toldja I was a pop culture nerd) and, most importantly on this 2020 Veterans Day in the Year of Hindsight, my biggest shout out goes to all who've served in the battle against violent extremists, secular or religious, in our centuries long global fight for peace and freedom against those who would use disinformation and force to gain and hold political power over the will of the people.

To download Joni Mitchell's *Hejira* (1976), Donna Summer's *State Of Independence* (1982) and Havrylak Kern's *NorthStar* (1983), which is the 6th medley of our now multi-year 'Indian Summer Of Love' song-segued, left click your mouse on the photos below of an ancient Egyptian Christian pastry stamp from the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology collection in Ann Arbor portraying the 'Lamb Of God' flanked by a Tiffany's 'Engagement Ring' newspaper ad from the early years of our New Millennium.

Oh...and ps: Sorry Mohammed (*sigh*), there *is* no 'Final' Messenger of God."



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