

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977)

This awe-inspiring film is one of the most dazzling UFO science fiction films ever made, although it has pre-digital special effects. Douglas Trumbell's visual and special effects of the *Mother Ship* are spectacular, ushering in – with Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) of the same year – a flood of Hollywood films featuring special effects. It was Columbia Pictures' biggest grossing film up to that time, and helped to usher in the era of the blockbuster sci-fi/fantasy film. The screenplay (finished by Spielberg from an original script by Paul Schrader) was based upon the book, *The UFO Experience* (1972), written by Dr. J. Allen Hynek, who served as the film's technical advisor (and appeared in a bit cameo part during the final scene).

–FilmSite

Spielberg is, in several senses, a master, and not least of all, a master of propaganda. His 80s films constitute the very essence of what it was to grow up as a child of the 80s, like myself. Those of us who have a keen sense for that 80s “feel” – a decade when it seemed simpler, and those who grew up in that time will feel the nostalgia. Reagan was a “good guy” leading the “free” West against a godless empire of commies and atheists, while yuppies could found businesses and snort coke, as Jacko burned his curls at Pepsi-funded mega-concerts. In the midst of this pop culture was a series of Spielberg and Lucas films, from *Star Wars* (late 70s) to *E.T.* to *Indiana Jones* to *Back to the Future*; that made the 80s even more enjoyable. We looked at *E.T.*, but the emerging alien mythos was primed earlier in a pivotal sense in the late 70s gateway to the 80s that was *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977).

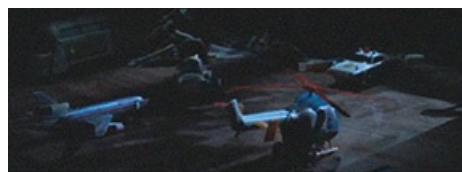
One crucial element in both *E.T.* and *Close Encounters* is a deeper esoteric theme that has been overlooked in most reviews and analyses: the nature of symbols, language and communication. In the opening sequence we are shown mysterious ships that appear in the Sonoran desert, while the French scientist Lacombe (Francois Truffaut) and a cartographer interview an elderly native who exclaims the UFO was “the sun. It came out and sang.” There is a direct connection throughout the film between the alien entities and music or sound, as well as solar worship. Simultaneously, across the globe in India, Hindu pilgrims and yogis had gathered to sing praises to the entities as gods during the sun's zenith, chanting, “Ah yah, Ah yah ye.” This is close to the Tetragrammaton (YHWH), the sacred Name of God in Scripture, as well as in the magical practices of Kabbalism: Spielberg makes a direct connection to the entities and the biblical notion of God as Lord Sabaoth, Lord of Hosts.¹ In this instance, however, the “hosts” appear to be closer to the gods, Clarke's demonic Overlords. Note also that placed over the old native is the Star of David, a symbol very familiar to Spielberg.



Francois Truffaut (1932-1984): French actor, director, screenwriter and critic, also known for being one of the founders of French New Wave Cinema. Truffaut is one of the most prominent French film figures, having worked on over 25 films. Influenced by Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford, Truffaut remained a convinced atheist is known to have had many affairs with his leading ladies.



GEORGE LUCAS: Award-winning American filmmaker, producer and entrepreneur, and creator of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* franchises. Lucas recently sold his Lucasfilm to the Walt Disney Company in 2012 for 4 billion dollars. Interestingly, Lucas was one of the camera men during the infamous 1969 Altamont Music Festival where the Rolling Stones reportedly played during the riot and subsequent death of Meredith Hunter. Lucas' films impacted a generation in an unparalleled way, making esoteric and alien themes from Joseph Campbell, Carl Jung and comparative religion household notions.



Simulacrum.

When the “aliens” arrive at Barry's house, what happens is more in line with supernatural phenomena surrounding the multitudinous accounts of possession. Strange occurrences like electrical disturbances and electronics going haywire mark their arrival, and it's worth noting that the police cars, airplanes and trucks go haywire, running in circles. Immediately following the Barry scene, we are shown Roy and his son doing fractions over the family train set. Roy, we notice, has this fascination with models and miniature versions of things. In symbology or semiotics (which is key to unlocking *Close Encounters* and *E.T.*), the connection of a smaller image, icon or model with the thing itself is simulacra.



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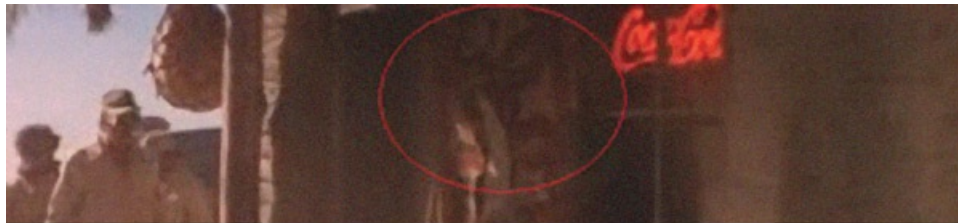
In semiotics, particularly in Plato's *Sophist* and Baudrillard's book, simulacra is intended to fool the viewer into thinking

the copy is the real thing. Baudrillard explains how synthetica leads to a virtual post-nihilism:

These two forms no longer concern us except in part, or not at all. The nihilism of transparency is no longer either aesthetic or political, no longer borrows from either the extermination of appearances, nor from extinguishing the embers of meaning, nor from the last nuances of an apocalypse. There is no longer an apocalypse (only aleatory* terrorism still tries to reflect it, but it is certainly no longer political, and it only has one mode of manifestation left that is at the same time a mode of disappearance: the media – now the media are not a stage where something is played, they are a strip, a track, a perforated map of which we are no longer even spectators/: receivers). The apocalypse is finished – today it is the precession of the neutral, of forms of the neutral and of indifference. I will leave it to be considered whether there can be a romanticism, an aesthetic of the neutral therein. I don't think so – all that remains, is the fascination for desert-like and indifferent forms, for the very operation of the system that annihilates us. Now, fascination (in contrast to seduction, which was attached to appearances, and to dialectical reason, which was attached to meaning) is a nihilistic passion par excellence, it is the passion proper to the mode of disappearance. We are fascinated by all forms of disappearance:, of our own disappearance. Melancholic and fascinated, such is our general situation in an era of involuntary transparency.

Because there is a nostalgia for of the dialectic, and without a doubt the most subtle dialectic is nostalgic to begin with. But more deeply, there is in Benjamin and Adorno another tonality; that of a melancholy attached to the system itself, one that is incurable and beyond any dialectic. It is this melancholia of systems that today takes the upper hand through the ironically transparent forms that surround us. It is this melancholia that is becoming our fundamental passion. It is no longer the spleen or the vague yearnings of the fin-de-siecle soul. It is no longer nihilism either, which in some sense aims at normalizing everything through destruction, the passion of resentment (ressentiment). No, melancholia is the fundamental tonality of functional systems, of current systems of simulation, of programming and information. Melancholia is the inherent quality of the mode of the disappearance of meaning, of the mode of the volatilization of meaning in operational systems. And we are all melancholic.²

The copy takes on a life of its own, yet viewed in scale it would clearly appear that the copy is not real. This is a perfect analogy for the nature of film itself, as well as the role of the director, who now gives man his new meaning. The writer and/or film director is creating a simulacrum of the real world with models and pictures, piecing and placing them together in a certain way, just as Roy does with the model train and city he has built. One may think of the simulated beings in *Blade Runner* (replicants) or the simulated world of *The Matrix*, as we will see later. Spielberg has mastered this art of simulation, and is presenting a simulated reality world – that of UFO-invaded America that is intended to produce a certain effect in the population. Can this be taken to a larger scale, to which Spielberg as the director himself is a “toy” of the larger, galactic forces or entities of the cosmos? Are we a Greek scale of being, being “played” and “directed” by the celestial hierarchy?



Kabbalistic Star of David

The models and simulacra also function on another level as foreshadowing of things to come within the film, as police, airplanes and military vehicles will later scurry about in a frenzy, as the plot progresses towards the Devil's Tower monument in Wyoming. But before that, it's important to look at the ship that appears in the Gobi desert, the 'Cotopaxi.' The Cotopaxi, a tramp steamer, actually did disappear in 1925 on its way to Cuba, and is part of the origin of the Bermuda Triangle mythology.³ Spielberg is tying the alien mythos to the Bermuda tales, arbitrarily linking up mysterious events under the alien banner. On the surface level, the viewer is being given a new worldview with which to connect the overt imagery under the banner of the only orthodox, mainstream-promoted “conspiracy,” extraterrestrial, alien origins for UFOs. However, on a deeper level, we can look at the association of Cotopaxi with the Colorado city of the same name, as well as the mountain in Ecuador, part of the Andes. Cotopaxi, Colorado is about three hours from Denver, which will be relevant as we progress; before we get there, another element of simulacra that should be mentioned is synchronicity.

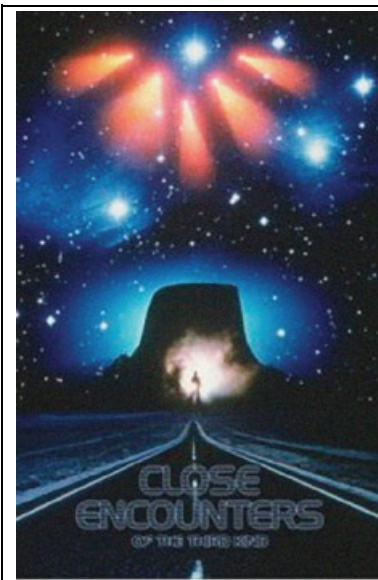


Simulacrum

Within the film, as in E.T., the characters experience a barrage of symbols and images that later become relevant on a larger scale. In this way, the simulacra function as inter-textual synchronic experiences for the characters. Roy periodically sees an image that has been placed in his subconscious that he doesn't understand. The *mountain* keeps emerging in his experience: in his mashed potatoes and on the TV. He doesn't realize what it is, but he senses there is something of galactic importance to his inner vision that will turn out to be the Devil's Tower monument in Wyoming. In the midst of his near insanity, having lost his family, Roy happens to catch a television report on Devil's Mountain. In an instant, he realizes his synchronic image is the spot of an important encounter with his new higher power.



JACQUES VALLEE: Computer scientist, author and UFOlogist. Vallee is a prominent figure in UFO research and is known for his work with the Stanford Research Institute and ARPANET (a precursor to the Internet). Vallee is an apologist for the existence of extraterrestrial beings, as well as their inter-dimensional origins. Vallee has also reportedly been affiliated with various esoteric societies and hermetic beliefs, such as Rosicrucianism.



The gods atop the high places.

Consonant with these events, the French scientist Lacombe, tracking the UFO events, has developed a sign language that corresponds to the notes the entities “sang” to the Hindus and to the old native in the desert. He presents his signs to an audience of scientists that are part of a secret project to study the “alien phenomenon,” with the Lacombe character representing none other than UFO researcher Jacques Vallee.⁴ That the film is based on esoteric doctrines is

confirmed by the Vallee inspiration. He wrote openly of his interest in the UFO phenomenon in relation to the occult.⁵ Their symbol is a *black pyramid*: thus far we have a Masonic “33” on the plane in the first scene, a “32” on Roy’s son’s jersey, hand signs with Lacombe and a black pyramid project, run, as it turns out, by a shadow government of agents and “men in black” types that are connected to the Air Force and Lockheed Martin, a major corporate force in the military-industrial complex. Earlier in the film, the Air Force met with the townsfolk of Muncie, Indiana, and engaged in a mock press conference of disinformation intent on dispelling public interest in the “close encounters” occurrence. The Air Force spokesmen make reference to bare rationalism, denying knowledge of any and all events, which adds credence to the popular, ridiculous and controlled alternative media narrative of government suppression of the existence of “aliens.” To a degree, this is true, as the real players close to the “aliens” are private, shadow military contractors – Lockheed, Raytheon, DARPA, etc., not locally elected officials. Note the inversion of the star in the logo used in the film.⁶



Two possible associations can be made here. The secret project of scientists tasked with studying the UFO phenomenon recalls the famed “MJ 12” or “Majestic 12” committee of “agents” that were supposedly studying the existence of aliens and unexplained aerial phenomena related to Roswell. This is, of course, a large load of black ops bullshit, as is the much-promoted Roswell “crash.”⁷ In fact, the entire “alien” mythos is itself one large

disinformation campaign designed to function as a cover for actual secret aerial and space-based technology and, likely, drug running.⁸ “MJ 12” was more probably the group formed to promote the alien myth to keep prying eyes from looking into the technology that was being developed. As for the French UFO scientist, it may be a reference to Jacques Vallee, the famed UFO researcher who argued that UFOs were something more sinister: demonic entities invading our plane of existence. As with *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, the encounter with the gods occurs on a mountain, one of the high places.

To add to the mystery, some researchers have pointed out the possible connection of the Denver International Airport and the numbers the entities give through their interstellar communication. In the film, the mysterious numbers become geographical coordinates. Using Google Earth, I came up in the vicinity of the Denver Airport, but it was not exact. That is certainly possible, but what can be seen here are at least two explicit references to Colorado: Cotopaxi and the coordinates. Colorado is the home of NORAD (at the Cheyenne Mountain Complex),⁹ as well as the CIA’s recent relocation – two key shadow government locations, as well as the underground base beneath the Denver Airport (and who knows what else).¹⁰ It should be added that Denver and Colorado factor quite prominently in pop media and fiction: *Atlas Shrugged*, *X-Men: First Class*, *The Stand*, *The Passage*, *The Prestige*, *Jericho*, *Red Dawn*, *The Shining*, etc. Denver and Colorado appear to have a special relation to the cryptocracy.

NORAD and the Cheyenne Mountain Complex.



Wyoming is also home to underground bases and secret establishments. When we see the government beginning to set up shop in the Devil's Mountain area, a bus is shown that brings astronauts preparing to go away with the aliens. This is interesting, since the bus has a header that reads "Cheyenne." Cheyenne, Wyoming is presumably the base from which the shadow government in the film has set up shop to control the alien arrival situation at the Devil's Tower (Devil's Tower is four hours north of Cheyenne). However, "Cheyenne" also has reference to Colorado as mentioned, since the NORAD/Cheyenne Mountain Complex is located in Colorado Springs, and is one of the most important shadow/continuity of government installations. In Philip K. Dick's story *Dr. Bloodmoney*, it is the capital of a new military dictatorship, while in the television series *Jericho* it is the capital of the "Allied States of America," a faction of the new, post-apocalyptic US government. In the 1984 Cold War propaganda film *Red Dawn*, it is the farthest the communist forces have pushed American rebels. It is also the location bio-warfare survivors retreat to in Stephen King's apocalyptic novel, *The Stand*.



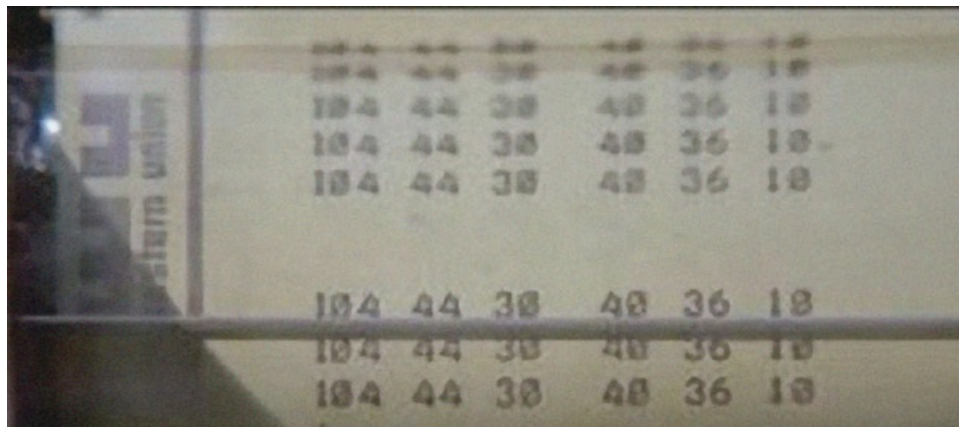
Devil's Tower, the abandoned Cold War era NSA spy center in Berlin.

While on the topic of bases and names, "Devil's Tower" is also the name of a British base on Gibraltar, and Gibraltar's rock looks strikingly similar to Spielberg's choice of the Devil's Tower monument. Thus, we can associate Devil's Tower with the RAF and MI6, as Devil's Tower is an ancient fortress keeping watch over British colonies.¹¹ Is Spielberg saying the shadow government is the Anglo-American establishment, still keeping its panoptic gaze over its "colonies"?¹² Devil's Tower also has reference to a famous Cold War spying station of the NSA.¹³ Is Spielberg saying those that run the alien myths are actually the shadow government?



Devil's Tower RAF base next to the Rock of Gibraltar.

Or, conversely the elite are saying they are the “alien” Overlords – ascended, superior evolutionary beings that condescend to contact the profane masses atop the high places. The key players in the shadow government are so removed from the masses as to be another species, “alien” to them, with the intention of playing them in the simulacrum simulation as Roy plays with the trains? Certainly it is curious that much of what is portrayed in the film has polyvalent reference to so many real-world sites home to strategic outfits of the shadow government. As the story nears conclusion, Roy flees towards Devil’s Tower and the military begins aerosol spraying nerve gas – chemtrails – upon the escaped contactees. Earlier, the shadow government had conceived a plan to “scare” all the populace with a staged biological leak, but here the military industrial complex releases it in actuality.¹⁴ We know from sites like the Sunshine Project such events are also real possibilities. “Bahama, this is Pyramid, over. Call the Dark Side of the Moon,” say the special forces soldiers. *Dark Side of the Moon*, of course, brings to mind the 1973 Pink Floyd rock opera album of the same name.



Coordinates that come close to the Denver Airport.

This may seem a bit far-fetched, but keep in mind that we are dealing with very intelligent people who do think in this symbolic and archetypal fashion. What some like Michael Hoffman have titled “mystical toponomy*” is likely at work here, and can be described as the practice of making associations and connections with events and places based on the symbology, history, and meaning of said events and places. Hoffman and James Shelby Downard write:

Mystical toponomy incorporates word wizardry (onomatology) and the Masonic science of symbolism. In considering my data it would be helpful to consider a dictum of Einsteinian physics: “Time relations among events are assumed to be first constituted by the specific physical relations obtaining between them.” My study of place names imbued with sorcerous significance necessarily includes lines of latitude and longitude and the divisions of degrees in geography and cartography (minutes and seconds).

Let us take as an example the “Mason Road” in Texas that connects to the “Mason No El Bar” and the Texas-New Mexico (“The Land of Enchantment”) border. This connecting line is on the 32nd degree. The 32nd degree is the penultimate Masonic degree awarded. When this 32nd degree of latitude is traced west into the “Land of Enchantment” it becomes situated midway between Deming and Columbus, New Mexico.¹⁵

This is a field in which to tread lightly, since the associations are often fuzzy and speculative in nature, and only the most adept are proficient at this art. It is also somewhat dangerous, as the film itself shows with Roy, who begins to go mad making associations that emerge from his subconscious and are, by him, “associated” with synchronicitous events and places in his life.



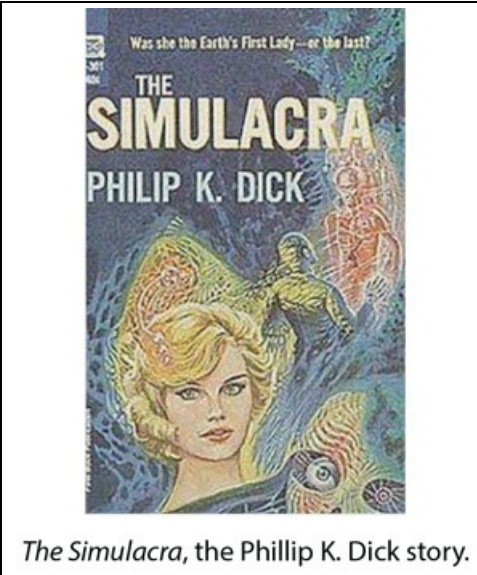
Lacombe develops hand signs.

In the plot, Roy is “chosen” by the gods/entities to gradually experience this initiatory journey until he ascends the mountain to be translated to the heavenly city. Is Spielberg laying out the frightening and enlightening journey of those who would seek out the mysteries of the universe and embark on that journey? The track Roy takes, being called to it and forsaking all that he has to attain the truth certainly lends credence to this view, and shows that perhaps Spielberg is telling us not to be afraid. Fear is what keeps us in our prison worlds of simulacra and models. Are we willing to question our basic presuppositions and worldviews, or are we married to them to such a degree that something utterly mysterious and foreign invading them and challenging them warrants scientific rationalism as a crutch?

The aliens also seem to have a difficulty communicating. For some reason they cannot just talk, so they use music and eventually the hand signs that the scientist developed. Perhaps the gods or angelic entities also find it difficult to communicate, and speak through the archetypes and symbols of our experience. I believe the angelic hierarchy or celestial intelligences organize the synchronicitous events and connections we experience, under the providential power and guidance of God. Understanding how these deeper-level connections and associations are made is a tricky and somewhat frustrating art, and therefore places the viewer in Roy’s position.

I think it is possible to read the film on all these levels, and Spielberg is certainly genius enough to make such a film. I think noticing the profound depth of the simulacra and the models as foreshadowing alone, is a gateway to viewing the films on these deeper levels. If we are permitted to take a step through that first gateway, is it possible Spielberg is telling us something more, to the extent that we are to look now at our own experiences and read a possible mystical toponomy at work? It is possible. Are we willing to be like Roy, sacrificing all for the truth of what is happening all around us? Initially, I read the film in a very moralistic fashion, such that the mythos was all about promoting aliens, and Roy was immoral for leaving his family and chasing the aliens.

Yet upon multiple viewings throughout my life, I take a more reflective position. Here is a normal guy confronted with something real, yet very out of the ordinary. Spielberg makes it a point, too, to show that Roy’s wife saw things as well, even hiding the news clippings of UFO sightings from him. As Roy has his difficult and very real experiences, his wife continues to degrade and despise him until she leaves. Roy is not a bad guy: at no point in the film does he wrong his wife. He is genuinely enthralled by something otherworldly that happened to him outside his own control, yet the people closest to him are unable to understand him. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive, either. Perhaps Spielberg is telling us about his own transformation through his artwork, and is conveying that journey to us through Roy’s gradual revelation and enlightenment. Maybe I sit here as a crazy Roy, sculpting a devil’s tower of analysis of mystical toponomy to follow, or maybe I’m just another madman.



Roy's shamanic journey begins.



¹ Halevi, Z'ev ben Shimon. *Kabbalah and Exodus*. Boston, MA: Weiser Books, pg. 54.

² Baudrillard, Jean.

³ "Ships and the Sea." *Evening Post*. 27 March 1926. Web <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=EP19260327.2.161>

⁴ "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." *FilmSite*. Web. <http://www.filmsite.org/clos.html>

⁵ Vallee, Jacques. *Forbidden Science*. San Francisco: Documatica Research, 2010, pg. 81, 241, 251.

⁶ Inverted stars generally represent the metaphysical principle of inversion as a form of black magic.

⁷ Collins, Phillip and Paul, "Alien Smokescreen." *ConspiracyArchive*. 17 June, 2007. Web. <http://www.conspiracyarchive.com/2014/09/21/alien-smokescreen/>

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ "Cheyenne Mountain Complex." *Fas.org*. 13 December 1999. Web. <http://fas.org/nuke/guide/usa/c3i/cmc.htm>

¹⁰ Priest, Dana. "CIA Plans to Shift Work to Denver." *Washington Post*. 6 May, 2005. Web. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/05/AR2005050501860.html>

¹¹ Sweeney, Chris. "The World's 18 Strangest Military Bases." *Popular Mechanics*. 16 June, 2010. Web. <http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/design/g152/strangest-military-bases-gallery/>

¹² See Quigley, *Tragedy and Hope*.

¹³ Zetter, Kim. "Devil's Mountain: NSA's Abandoned Cold War Listening Post." *Wired*. October 3, 2011. Web. <http://www.wired.com/2011/10/teufelsberg/>

¹⁴ Note the film's revelation of the military industrial complex staging news, with fake animal deaths and a planned evacuation to induce fear and panic.

¹⁵ Hoffman, Michael and James Shelby Downard. *King-Kill 33*. *Whale.to*. Web. http://www.whale.to/b/kingkill_33.html#Mystical_Toponomy_