

Good Omens

The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch

Chapter One

Current theories on the creation of the Universe state that, if it was created at all and didn't just start, as it were, unofficially, it came into being between ten and twenty thousand million years ago. By the same token the earth itself is generally supposed to be about four and a half thousand million years old.

These dates are incorrect.

Medieval Jewish scholars put the date of the Creation at 3760 B.C. Greek Orthodox theologians put Creation as far back as 5508 B.C.

These suggestions are also incorrect.

Archbishop James Usher (1580–1656) published *Annales Veteris et Novi Testamenti* in 1654, which suggested that the Heaven and the Earth were created in 4004 B.C. One of his aides took the calculation further, and was able to announce triumphantly that the Earth was created on Sunday the 21st of October, 4004 B.C., at exactly 9:00 A.M., because God liked to get work done early in the morning while he was feeling fresh.

This too was incorrect. By almost a quarter of an hour.

The whole business with the fossilized dinosaur skeletons was a joke the paleontologists haven't seen yet.

This proves two things:

Firstly, that God moves in extremely mysterious, not to say, circuitous ways. God does not play dice with the universe; He plays an ineffable game of His own devising, which might be compared, from the perspective of any of the other players,* to being involved in an obscure and complex version of poker in a pitch-dark room, with blank cards, for infinite stakes, with a Dealer who won't tell you the rules, and who smiles all the time.

Secondly, the Earth's a Libra.

The astrological prediction for Libra in the "Your Stars Today"

column of the *Tadfield Advertiser*, on the day this history begins, read as follows:

Libra. September 24–October 23.

You may be feeling run down and always in the same old daily round. Home and family matters are highlighted and are hanging fire. Avoid unnecessary risks. A friend is important to you. Shelve major decisions until the way ahead seems clear. You may be vulnerable to a stomach upset today, so avoid salads. Help could come from an unexpected quarter.

This was perfectly correct on every count except for the bit about the salads.

It wasn't a dark and stormy night.

It should have been, but that's the weather for you. For every mad scientist who's had a convenient thunderstorm just on the night his Great Work is finished and lying on the slab, there have been dozens who've sat around aimlessly under the peaceful stars while Igor clocks up the overtime.

But don't let the fog (with rain later, temperatures dropping to around forty-five degrees) give anyone a false sense of security. Just because it's a mild night doesn't mean that dark forces aren't abroad. They're abroad all the time. They're everywhere.

They always are. That's the whole point.

Two of them lurked in the ruined graveyard. Two shadowy figures, one hunched and squat, the other lean and menacing, both of them Olympic-grade lurkers. If Bruce Springsteen had ever recorded "Born to Lurk," these two would have been on the album cover. They had been lurking in the fog for an hour now, but they had been pacing themselves and could lurk for the rest of the night if necessary, with still enough sullen menace left for a final burst of lurking around dawn.

Finally, after another twenty minutes, one of them said: "Bugger this for a lark. He should of been here hours ago."

The speaker's name was Hastur. He was a Duke of Hell.

Many Phenomena—wars, plagues, sudden audits—have been advanced as evidence for the hidden hand of Satan in the affairs of Man, but whenever students of demonology get together the M25 London orbital motorway is generally agreed to be among the top contenders for Exhibit A. Where they go wrong, of course, is in assuming that the wretched road is evil simply because of the incredible carnage and frustration it engenders every day.

In fact, very few people on the face of the planet know that the very shape of the M25 forms the sigil odegma in the language of the Black Priesthood of Ancient Mu, and means "Hail the Great Beast, Devourer of Worlds." The thousands of motorists who daily fume their way around its serpentine lengths have the same effect as water on a prayer wheel, grinding out an endless fog of low-grade evil to pollute the metaphysical atmosphere for scores of miles around.

It was one of Crowley's better achievements. It had taken years to achieve, and had involved three computer hacks, two break-ins, one minor bribery and, on one wet night when all else had failed, two hours in a squelchy field shifting the marker pegs a few but occultly incredibly significant meters. When Crowley had watched the first thirty-mile-long tailback he'd experienced the lovely warm feeling of a bad job well done.

It had earned him a commendation.

Crowley was currently doing 110 mph somewhere east of Slough. Nothing about him looked particularly demonic, at least by classical standards. No horns, no wings. Admittedly he was listening to a Best of Queen tape, but no conclusions should be drawn from this because all tapes left in a car for more than about a fortnight metamorphose into Best of Queen albums. No particularly demonic thoughts were going through his head. In fact, he was currently wondering vaguely who Moey and Chandon were.

Crowley had dark hair and good cheekbones and he was wearing snakeskin shoes, or at least presumably he was wearing shoes, and he could do really weird things with his tongue. And, whenever he forgot himself, he had a tendency to hiss.

He also didn't blink much.

The car he was driving was a 1926 black Bentley, one owner from new, and that owner had been Crowley. He'd looked after it.

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