

Are you Superstitious?

No Way - Open-Minded - Maybe - A Little - A Lot - Very - Absolutely

If you checked to the right you're in good company. Some scientists think that we're all becoming more Superstitious. A toxic cocktail of Economic Collapse, Climate Anxiety, the Pandemic, Deliberate Falsehoods, Harry Potter, and Calamitously Incompetent Politicians has overloaded our anxiety circuits. Festinger's Formula says *Fear + Ignorance = Superstition*. And Superstition damages the critical thinking and effective action the World sorely needs right now.

Others disagree. "*There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy*," said Hamlet. Was he just a dim Prince who trusted what a ghost told him and came to a sticky end? Or a Visionary ahead of his time? Whatever you think, it is a fact that in some American states you can study Astrology, Spell-Casting, and Divination in Colleges and High School. With advanced degrees in 'Managing the Millennium' and 'Riding the Rapture'.

Here in the UK it is claimed that many Anglican Churches in Surrey now practice Snake-Handling rituals as part of the service while a Fox-worshipping Cult has spread throughout the Cotswolds. Both beliefs appear to be linked to concerns about maintaining property values. Of course there may be many other cults who practice in secret.

So are we facing a New Dark Age? Or a New Dawn?

"Definitely a New Dawn," says Stan (not his real name.) "What Scientists call Superstition we call Wisdom. Those bigots in white coats have had their day. They've ruled us for centuries and look where we are now. They lie to us. Take those so-called Balloons shot down over America. Have you ever tried to shoot down a balloon in the Troposphere? It can't be done. No. It's obvious we're at war with Aliens. And how do we know? Because no one is admitting it! But guess who'll have to fight the Menace from the stars? And pay the price? Us will."

Stan is a participant in the on-going Hull Investigation into Structured Superstition (HISS) research Programme. He works in a branch of Cheep Bills (*not its real name*) Supermarket as a Shelf-stacker and Security Specialist (*not a real job description*) in South East London (*not a real place*).

"I'm off the books, of course," Stan says cheerfully. "The Bosses turn a blind eye to my real work. They don't want to scare off the Punters. It's Stacker on my pay slip but Cosmic Policeman in my heart. And I don't mean catching Shoplifters. I mean Preserving the Integrity of the Matricised Inter-Zonal Multi-verse. But on the side, of course. Best think of me as a Superhero in a brown overall. And to save you asking... No, I am not crazy."

Stan explains that only a very few gifted and highly-trained people can detect the mysterious forces at work in what we foolishly think of as ordinary life. "Look! There's an example." He points at the Fresh Herbs Section at the end of Aisle 1. "I check that stand every half hour. Customers, bless 'em, do muck about. They pick up herbs, sniff them, then put them back in the wrong place. Do they know that fresh Coriander next to Chives disturbs Cosmic Balance and literally risks all Hell breaking loose through a cross-threaded intermesh portal? Literally literally." He moves the Chives. "At least a foot apart. The Public is ignorant. Not their fault. They're not taught Cosmics in school. It took me three months to master the Parsley problem myself. Flat or curly leaf, they're both right b.....s. No problem with herbs in plastic bags of course. Plastic's a life saver and no one knows it."

But what about people who grow herbs in their own window boxes without plastic bags?

“If I see that I'll ring their bell,” says Stan. “But do they thank me for it? Do they heck. They just stare. They don't realise I might be saving their life. But I can't be everywhere, can I? It must happen and that probably explains why there's so much crime around here.”

A Security Guard passes. Stan nods slyly. The Guard ignores him. “Good training,” says Stan.

But when we pass the Self Check-out machines Stan shakes his head. “The Bosses only think about profit. Time was, when I would quietly train the check-out staff in holistic feng shui. So's they put your goods on the belt in the right order for your bag and avoid disrupting aural harmonies. And it worked. But no, the Bosses want to cut the wage bill so they install Self-Checkout and make the Public work for them and... Disaster! Look at him there. Putting blue cheese next to tinned dog food without a care in the world. Won't he be surprised when his French poodle starts walking through solid walls. *And* releases a plague of puffins. I'd help out, but I can't handle so many of them. Plus I've been cautioned, believe it or not. Do not frighten the customers. They don't recognise Diplomas in Alternative Science! So the Bosses make thousands and the Public crash their car into a brick wall when a dog disappears through the windscreen. And someone else gets pecked to death by disturbed puffins. So who's the real loser?”

Stan has other self-imposed duties. Cheep Bills is built on the site of the old St Wulfstan and Divers Angels Church (*not its real name*). What was the Crypt is now an underground Car Park. Stan (no relation to St Wulfstan) gets in early each morning and stays late in order to exorcise the understandably irate Spirits who still linger in the gloom. Over the years Stan and the Spirits have learnt to get along despite the difficulty of explaining the function of the internal combustion engine and modern music styles to the original inhabitants. “But don't mention Garage,” says Stan. “They've suffered enough already.”

Stan promises to introduce me to his partner - or *meat avatar* - as he affectionately calls her. “You two'd really get on,” he says. “DellaBonna knows the business inside out. And outside in. Both equally important.”

We shake hands on it.

“Yes, meet me in Cheepy at noon at at the end of Aisle 13,” says Stan. “Got loads more to tell you.”

But when I go back the next day there's no sign of Stan. There is no Aisle 13. And no one in Cheep Bills can remember him ever working there.

Hmmm...

To be continued