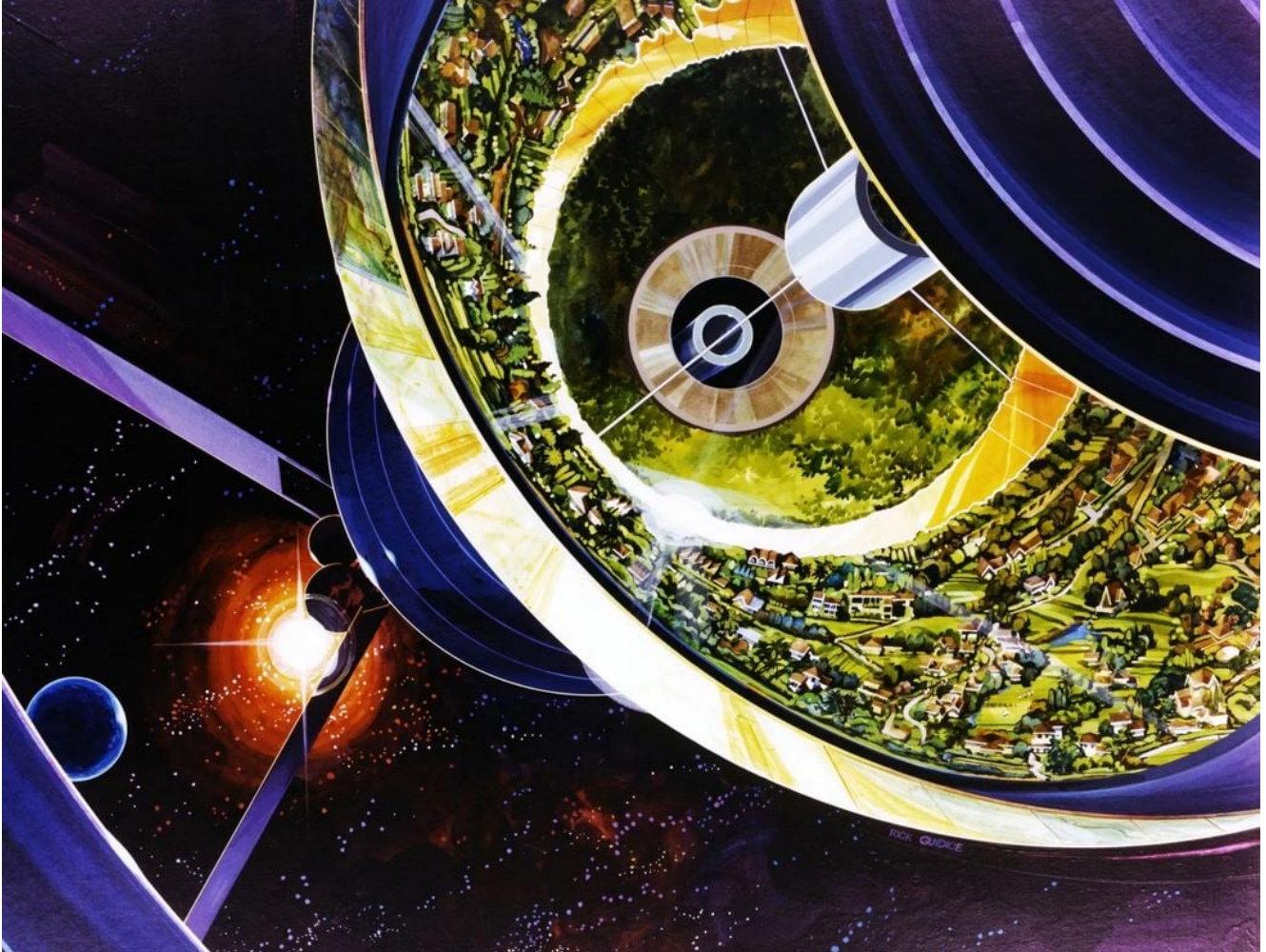


The Wonders of Majoun

by [Geoffrey Clarfield](#) (October 2023)



Cutaway of Bernal Sphere Habitat, Rick Guidice, 1976

I once knew a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea of how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about “walking on all-fours.”—Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness,

I never would have believed that Jewish mysticism would become part and parcel of modern Western popular culture, but there

it is, Kabbalah in various guises has been adopted by film stars and rock stars. Even the American pop star, Madonna, visited the holy city of Safed in the Galilee, which was one of the centers of Kabbalistic speculation in the medieval world.

And so, my ambassador has asked me to prepare a multimedia exhibit on Kabbalah. Who knows, it just may attract the average Moroccan. I had a vague recollection of having read something recently about Moroccan Kabbalists' visions of the future in one of the Moroccan Jewish archives that are still coming to light. I especially remembered a listing about a Spanish Jewish Kabbalist, Abulafia, who had lived an unusual life.

Here are my notes on his life's work: Abraham Abulafia (1240-1291) is the most important figure in the prophetic Kabbalah, and among the most fascinating Kabbalists in our historical record. From what we know of his biography—based on his own accounts and those of outside sources— he lived a very unusual life for a Kabbalist. Most of the important Kabbalists led conventional lives: they had families, and roots in their respective communities. Some, such as Rabbi Joseph Caro, were famous rabbis and legal authorities. Not Abulafia. Although the first part of his life did resemble these more conventional models, he became an itinerant mystic, traveling from town to town, attracting students, and leading a mystical life apart from communal and familial obligations.

As I started to look at other Kabbalists, while digesting this information, musing about Abulafia, I came upon this gem that I have quoted from the Zohar:

Yitro: Verse 291

Rabbi Yosi said, "Kolot" MEANS one; this voice is a great and strong one which never ceases, as it is written, "A

great voice which was not heard again" (Devarim 5:19). This is because all the other voices do cease. As we learned, four times a year the voice ceases, and then Judgments are awakened in the world. But this voice, which includes the other voices, never ceases, and never abates of its full existence and force. We have learned that this voice is the voice of voices, the voice which contains all other voices.

I am slowly concluding that some of these Kabbalists must have been on magic mushrooms. I made the mistake of voicing this theory of "psychedelic Kabbalists" to my servants, Hassan, and Zaineb. This inspired them to play a trick on me.

There is a custom here in Morocco of consuming a kind of hashish, called Majoun. It is prepared like a kind of cookie and is taken with tea. According to the custom of the country it is taken among friends to further cement trust and inspire whimsical exchanges of stories and thoughts. Hassan and Zainab decided to give me some without my knowledge. Although I am their employer, they obviously felt comfortable enough to push the envelope.

As we settled down to have our tea and cake in the late afternoon, the sun started playing on the blue and white tiles of our Moorish courtyard. As the intoxicating effect of the Majoun took hold over me, I looked up into the blue sky over Tangier. My mind, no, my whole being started floating above me and I seemed to explode into outer space. There I witnessed a remarkable tale. It flowed so effortlessly that it was as if I was hearing a book on tape. I know that I made it up, for when the effects of the drug passed, I went to my computer and wrote out the story before I fell into a deep sleep.

Here is the story I hallucinated:

ALTHOUGH HE WAS hurtling through space towards Mars at the speed of 40,000 miles per hour, Colonel Wayne Jeffries felt as if he were sitting in his mother's living room in their South Carolina home. For his pressurized cabin was windowless and reminded him of some ancient English riders' club. On the wall there were pictures of stately nineteenth century homes and racing horses out to pasture. As they caught his eye, Jeffries paused for a moment and thought how simple life had been just a few centuries ago.

The world was unpolluted then. There were no data registers that provided a universe of information at the sound of the voice of any interested five-year-old. In those days, channeled interpersonal telepathic communications were still thought of by most of the uneducated masses as a form of witchcraft which consisted of surgically inserting thin metals into the body and injecting various fluids.

Jeffries mused, a primitive place earth was, but it must have been fun. His ancestors had done well in those days. They were plantation owners and military men. He thought how strange it was that he had taken up a military profession after it had lapsed in his family for so many centuries.

He flipped through his scanner, put on his mask and gloves, and strode through classical Athens for an hour, smelling the olives vended on the street, and listening to old men dispute Aristotle, before taking a leisurely donkey ride down to the Mediterranean. Tiring of the classical world he switched off the machine and found himself gazing at the wall again.

Mars was not earth. That much he knew. He did not expect antique houses and horses grazing in fields. The truth was, he was unsure what to expect; genetic monsters, a society of cannibals, four legged creatures ? No one on earth knew what might have happened there, since they had lost contact

with the few established settlements long ago.

He turned on the screen and read over his briefing notes one last time. They were written by his boss, Karla Abulafia. She was a frustrated historian gone Interplanetary Datacrat, and every one of her reports read like a first year University student's essay. Jeffries looked up at the screen and started reading.

From: The Office of Interplanetary Settlements
Security Department
Base Number 364-781-958-771
Release Number 775-886-091
Authorization Number 665-778-990
Officer: Ms. Karla Abulafia

To: Colonel Wayne Jeffries
Martian Settlements Department
Base Number 214-364-635
Release Number 774-871-256
Authorization Number 665-778-990

Background Information on the Martian Settlement Scheme

In the year 2087 the earth scientists in charge of the Biosphere 23 project had just completed six years of fault free, insulated living within a plexi glass dome fifteen by fifteen kilometers in area. The dome housed a community of fifty multilingual adult men and women who were able to grow their own food and medicine and provide for all their subsistence needs through their basic energy kits (B.E.K).

The results of their final report and its recommendations set off an international row that the public nicknamed the "Noah's Ark Debate." The scientists wanted the newly reformed UN to set up a

similar station on Mars with the goal of conducting atmospheric experiments in the hope of developing an altered atmosphere and thus "terraforming" the planet. This debate went on for months and was not resolved until the United Nations Settlements Officer, a Botswanan DNA engineer, was replaced by a pragmatic negotiator from the C.S.C. (Cooperative States of the Caucasus).

The new man, Dr. Aramshvili, managed to hammer out a solution acceptable to all interested parties. The public dubbed it the "The Brandy Compromise" due to Aramshvili's tendency to show up at meetings with Georgian Brandy and Russian caviar. He drank the opposition under the table and got everyone to agree that private financial concerns would foot most of the colonization expenses, in return for certain production monopolies on Mars that would last one hundred years.

By October 2090, the space craft were ready. The crew had been trained, volunteers had been chosen and provisions for a biosphere on the surface of Mars had been loaded onto the supplementary rockets. All project volunteers endured a psychologically trying quarantine of six months before their fleet set out for Mars.

The first ten years of the project were uneventful except for an internal argument about children. A lottery was developed so that children would be born in numbers appropriate for the expansion of the colony.

Their most dramatic success was genetically engineering edible fungi that could thrive on the Martian surface. Within a few short years, these fungi spread to all parts of the planet. The fungi growth cycle set off an entirely unexpected, but very satisfactory result, for it caused the slow buildup of an oxygen and carbon dioxide atmosphere.

The explanation was startlingly simple. According to the ecologists among them, the fungi had no competition whatsoever and like prolific new species entering a new ecosystem, they spread like wildfire. They adapted quickly to the Martian soil, hibernated with the seasons, and produced oxygen and carbon dioxide as a byproduct. The dust storms that had swept the planet for millions of years had not prevented the atmosphere from "taking." The fungi changed everything.

By the year 2200 there were a number of communities on Mars that had hived off from the first. The children born on Mars were able to breathe the rarified air of the red planet easily. Visitors from Earth, however, compared the experience of breathing this first livable atmosphere outside of Earth with living in the Andes. The air was thin and people who were not used to it regularly complained of shortness of breath and headaches. Within a short time, the colonists coined the term "Breathies" for people not born on Mars.

Batteries of scientists routinely set out of for Mars for one-year stints studying everything from the slow melting of the ice caps to the resulting reformation of a Martian river system flowing through what had once been extended meteor shower strips. Social studies on the children of colonists filled data bases. Almost no significant differences were found between what had jokingly come to be called Martians and Earthlings, except for a peculiar kind of Martian humor that tended to make fun of machines and high technology.

In the year 3180 the UN (on Earth) fragmented once again. Rebels in Oceania invaded the F.A.R (Federation of Asian Republics) and the Earth had its first taste of war in centuries. The Pacific islanders instituted a brutal dictatorship with a sophisticated intelligence service, and a propaganda machine that almost persuaded

the F.A.S (Federation of Atlantic States) and allies like the C.S.C. that it was in the world's interest to decentralize from the practice of world government, overthrowing its elite of multilingual datacrats.

Effective opposition to the Pacific Regime was blocked by years of fruitless debate between "centralizers" and "de-centralizers." The fact that the whole war was based on conquest and force escaped the attention of far too many otherwise intelligent people, but that was because all media was by then subsidized and strictly controlled by government.

The history of this conflict is best described in the award-winning disk, *seven hundred Years of Regional Movements*, by the late historian Dr. Wang Ping Glickstein. Glickstein's thesis was that the "Pacific" adventure stemmed not from any kind of economic inequality in any part of the globe. He argues that it was really a social problem based on a cultural and technological lag that insured that Pacific islanders received new information and technology weeks after it had permeated the FAR and FAS. Over the decades this fueled enormous resentment and led to total war.

During the war, all visits to Mars ceased. Only video contact was maintained. Oddly, the Martian community maintained its neutrality throughout the conflict, to avoid causing problems with its ten percent of Pacific colonists. Towards the end of the war, however, when the world's resources were strained to the breaking point, all communications between Earth and Mars broke down.

This happened shortly before the successful resolution of the war, the peaceful reoccupation of the Pacific, and the reestablishment of World Government. After the war, the communications department tried to regain

contact with the colonists, but failed in all their attempts. Reconstruction efforts on earth took over a century. It was argued that our attempt to colonize other planets had gotten out of hand and that problems on earth should be attended to first. This "quality of life" argument went unchallenged for decades.

The Martian Enigma, as it has come to be called, has engaged the attention of scientists, technicians and philosophers. A discography of relevant articles is on base at the head office and can be downloaded to your space craft on request. Eventually, a consensus was reached. All the experts agreed that if the Martians cannot communicate with Earth, some radical social and technological change must have occurred within their society preventing them from doing so, since the chances of technical failure were extremely unlikely because their engineering system was high in redundancy features.

That is why we have finally got the authorization to send you to our newly established Station A in northern Mars from where you will set out to try and reestablish contact with the remnant Martian community. As always, you are asked to take a nonviolent approach and to adjust to any micro- cultural idiosyncrasies or styles of behavior that may have arisen among the colonists during their long separation from earth.

Dr. Jeffries, you have your instructions. Now do not do anything stupid. No adventures and no daring exploits, please. I hope to discuss your report with you in person upon your return. At this stage we simply want to know what happened and why, and how you recommend we proceed.

Good luck,

Karla

Jeffries smiled as he read the last paragraph that Karla had tacked on to his version of the official report. Karla was a tall woman in her late thirties with a crooked nose and dark brown eyes. Years earlier they had done a test marriage to see if they were compatible. The actuaries determined that they were not, because their mood swings did not coincide. But it was decided that they would make a great team in intelligence, with her as boss. And so it goes.

At least they had not had any children to complicate the situation. And yet, Jeffries thought he detected in the last paragraph a sign that Karla thought the actuaries were wrong and that they should still try to make a go of it. Jeffries smiled, thinking that she might be right. Who ever said there was something wrong with marrying your boss ?

Jeffries lay down in his oxygen cylinder, pushed D for Darkness. He woke up well after the spacecraft had landed and linked up with the newly established advanced station A, close to the Martian north pole. He was greeted by a young, smiling datacrat named Jean-Paul Castellone, who was part of the advance team at the station. Castellone told him that the station's unmanned satellite scanner was circling the planet and had produced some interesting information.

"The colonists are most definitely still around," he said in a thick French accent. "But there are no signs of any machines, no telecommunications equipment, nothing. No radio waves, no microwaves, x rays, gamma rays or L.C.B.s (light communication beams). Nor, are there any new plexi glass structures anywhere to be seen. Each time the

satellite passes overhead, people go running into caves near the rivers. What is going on?"

Jeffries paused, took a deep breath, and stared out at the unfamiliar horizon glowing dull red in the sky. "We will only know when we find out. Meanwhile I am hungry. I have been cooped up in that space craft for so long that all I want to do is eat and stretch my legs."

Space station A was not big. It consisted of no more than a few modules connected to each other by plexiglass pathways protected by radiation coating. Inside, the oxygen level was like that of Earth. Outside, there was pure, thin Martian air. For Jeffries, both inside and outside were a luxury: more space than he had had for a long time.

Over the next few days, they discussed various theories of what had happened to the colonists. What could have destroyed their equipment? Could the colonists have failed to maintain their technology despite having the tools, the power, and the knowledge? Jeffries tired of this.

He spent a week with a fleet of small Mars rovers visiting the old settlements. Upon inspection, found that everything was in working order, yet the colonists had abandoned their settlements and moved into caves. Every time Jeffries and his team sighted some of the colonists, they retreated into their caves.

Weeks went by, and then months without contacting the colonists. They were there, and they had everything they needed. But they made no attempt by to communicate with Jeffries and his team, either face to face, or through any of the electronic equipment which dotted that part of Mars, which Jeffries knew remained functional.

Jeffries searched his mind, looking for some way to make contact. Finally, he remembered reading about some Brazilian anthropologists who, during the late 20th

century, knew there were elusive, uncontacted tribes in the Amazon. When all else had failed, they adopted the tactic of setting up camp miles away. They would just wait for them to show up and then reach out to them. These were the last of the "first contacts" that had engaged Europeans since Columbus reached America in 1492. Jeffries decided to imitate their approach.

He sent the other rovers back to base and set up his own outdoor camp. He had food and medicine for months as well as the oxygen needed to help his lungs adapt to Mars' near Tibetan atmosphere. He was well supplied with recorded music and books and had radio contact with base. Occasionally, he could also communicate with the base telepathically when the atmosphere was not turbulent.

One day he finally made contact. Jeffries saw a single man on the horizon, slowly approaching him. He wore a broad hat, carried a staff, wore a beard, a ski jacket and had all the kit that goes with being a Martian. He looked like a terrestrial Himalayan mountain climber. He greeted Jeffries and asked him who he was and why he was here. Jeffries gave him a version of the briefing that Karla had given him, saying that as earth had lost contact with Mars for a very long time, the UN knew something was wrong and had sent him to investigate.

The man said, "My name is Daniel, and it is my responsibility to tell you why you have not heard from us. It is a simple tale. When the civil war and social breakdown that you know about well erupted on earth, we eventually carried out our own war here. Faction fought faction, family fought family and life here was threatened, until it degenerated into a horrific war of all against all. We were plunged into a terrifying, Hobbesian state of nature.

Eventually, we fought each other to a standstill, but we

had lost our historical memory. All our history data bases and books were destroyed, except for a 20th century Encyclopedia Britannica. Our elders read it and discussed it like the Rabbis of old who explored the Talmud.

There arose among us a few wise men and women who argued that we needed a constitution, something that we could use to govern ourselves and keep the peace. We found it. Allow me to read you the first paragraph, as it has kept the peace for a century now:

We the People of the Commonwealth of Mars, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United Communities of Mars...

Jeffries was stunned speechless, as Daniel added, "We understand that this worked for centuries on earth until the UN became the world government. This is the reason we have not contacted earth for such a long time. We became sick and tired of its wars and conflicts that we were reenacting here on Mars. Nor do we have any desire to allow Earthlings to lord it over us from millions of miles away. However, if you like we can sign a treaty of non-aggression with planet earth.

Just because you do not see our defenses and weapons do not think we cannot defend ourselves. We can, but we prefer to treat you as equals."

When I woke up 12 hours later from my drugged Majoun-induced slumber, and saw what I had written, I asked myself, what should I do with this hallucinated, Kabbalistic-like tale? I shrugged my shoulders, and decided nothing venture, nothing gained, so I printed the story and wrote a cover letter to a major American Science Fiction magazine, explaining who I was and what I do in Morocco. Two weeks later I received a communication that said,

"Dear _____

We regret to inform you that we will pass on your short story about the future of Mars. During this period of polarization in American politics we are doing our best to avoid any stories that deal with political or constitutional conflicts. We do, however, encourage you to send us any new material that may be a tad less controversial.

Sincerely,

John Smith, Senior Editor.

I thought to myself, "It is amazing how many people are called John Smith." But what really bothered me was, "Who was, or could possibly be, Karla Abulafia?"

Afterword

When Viennese Jewish writer, Theodore Herzl wrote his manifesto, *The Jewish State*, the chattering classes of Europe at the time marveled at it. What Chutzpah! An independent state for the Jewish People? Equal to the Ottomans and the Europeans? Preposterous! That was the widespread reaction. A few who were more open minded, however, called him the Jules Verne of the Jewish people.

Herzl was a visionary whose vision “came true.” Had it not, it would have been thought of as an Utopian piece of proto-Jewish science fiction. I, myself, have always thought of Herzl as a Science Fiction writer, and as a result have read much European and North American Sci Fi, especially during my teenage years in Toronto. In those days was always hoping for the next UFO sighting, and desperately wanted to set foot on Mars, one day.

So I am grateful to Hassan and Amina who in their mischievous way managed to get me there, however questionable, and unorthodox their method. I think Herzl would have appreciated the results. But then again, I wonder, what would he have also written if he had tasted the wonders of Majoun?

[Table of Contents](#)

Geoffrey Clarfield is an anthropologist at large. For twenty years he lived in, worked among and explored the cultures and societies of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. As a development anthropologist he has worked for the following clients: the UN, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Norwegian, Canadian, Italian, Swiss and Kenyan governments as well

international NGOs. His essays largely focus on the translation of cultures.

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