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“Where have you taken us, Kara?”

– Roslin after the final jump of the Battlestar Galactica

Morella: *One more thing. You will be Emperor. That part of your destiny cannot be avoided.*

Londo: *I see.*

Morella: [to Vir] *You will also be Emperor.*

[Vir starts laughing]

Morella: *Why are you laughing?*

Vir: *I...I thought you were joking!*

Morella: *We do not joke in the face of prophecy, Vir.*

Londo: *Lady Morella, please! We cannot both be Emperor!*

Morella: *Correct. One of you will become Emperor after the other is dead. That is all we see and all we wish to see.*

– Babylon 5, “Point of No Return” (1996)

What Did Not Come to Pass: Back around probably 2005 or thereabouts, I had an idea for a game mechanic where a position would issue a prophecy and then the position players, Concierge and other positions would work the game toward fulfilling the prophecy. It was a vague idea that was originally to be the main mechanic related to either or both Reformations or Kairotic Moments in GGDM. It’s still not a bad idea, and I allowed at the time that there might even be competing prophecies by different positions pulling the game this way and that, and basically, fulfillment of the prophecy would lend itself toward winning the game or doing well anyway...

... or at least a damned good story. Though Reformations and Kairotic Moments became more mechanical and colorless in the rewrite, the following section was written around the summer of 2007 (and modified in bits over the years) in support of the in-game prophecy idea (the Praxeology, Movie Making and Cattle Killing Movement sections were added in 2019).

- ✓ “...the glacial tempo at which ideas must sometimes develop.” – Benjamin Aldes Wurgraft, Los Angeles Review of Books, July 15, 2016.
 - See full quote in Anti-Intellectualism & Public Intellectuals excerpts, Kairotic Moments, *supra*.
- ✓ The original prophecy idea for GGDM would be an interesting mechanic for a card game.

Prophecy Ark: I missed the Pittsburgh Pirates 2007 home opener because it was played at 1:35 p.m. on a Monday, but I did record it. Unfortunately, I learned the score before watching the game; Pittsburgh lost 3-0. I watched the game anyway, knowing the final score. Why?

One might think that if you know the final score, watching the game is a waste of time, right? Halfway through the game, I thought, “Even if you know the final score, it’s still interesting to see how they got there.” And that’s why we watch.

There remains something eternally fascinating and attractive about prophecy. The far-future sci-fi epic *Dune* (1965) used prophecy for the ignorant masses, Conan frequently is about prophecy and people,¹ and by far, the most interesting comments regarding prophecy were made in *Babylon 5* (Season 4 opening narration: “It was the end of history”).² *Battlestar Galactica* began with a suggestion of prophecy as well.

A prophecy suggests to us a personal connection with the cosmos, with larger events. It suggests that we are not entirely responsible for our actions (‘pre-destiny’ is the ultimate alibi³). It suggests a higher intelligence is at work in our daily lives and in the momentous events of our generations. And it remains a useful literary device because the author knows how the story will go, and can change it to suit the end of the story while writing it (that is, the writer substitutes for the ‘higher intelligence’). And the audience loves it, loves the big looming mystery and the resolution.

Like the baseball game, if a prophecy were introduced into the game, there would still be the matter of how to play the game to the point where the prophecy comes true.⁴ That might be a fun and interesting challenge. *Gestalt-Genesis Day-Million* could also be interpreted as an epic storytelling game. The game is designed so as to encourage players, in the course of competing to control the reality of the game, to develop a great story.

The Concierge will introduce all prophecies, and will probably have to bend events here and there to arrive at a reasonable fulfillment of the prophecy. In a real world sense, if prophecy provided a detailed road map to events, the actions of a few people at key places (assuming we have free will), could easily derail the prophecy, making it false. The paradox of prophecy is the best prophecies are those that don’t tell you anything useful, and that are so vague as to be capable of many diverse, competing interpretations. In a sense, prophecy might become the seventh Interpretation of the game, except that it won’t be an Interpretation in the game-mechanical sense.

Note that a prophecy should not be confused with a long-term prediction that is based on known factors and the operation of known laws and forces. For example, that our sun will eventually burn out is not a prophecy. Therefore, prophecy must necessarily involve a prediction which cannot reasonably be made from the forces, actors, or laws operating at the time the prophecy is made; that is, a prophecy must imply supernatural knowledge.

A prophecy would have two or three functions/effects on the game. First, a good prophecy would provide the players with something to work toward, something to latch onto, especially if they are just kind of milling around in the game. Second, prophecy would provide an object to measure individual play against in terms of who did the most or played the game the best from a storytelling perspective. And finally, a prophecy would provide the Concierge with more opportunity to intervene in the game and to enhance the enjoyable story arc of the game for the players as a group.

- ✓ The concept of “prophecy” addressed in these final notes is not related to single game events, but more toward an entire story arc for the game.
 - ✓ Fuzzy Groups and Prophecies share this trait, that they are most useful when less defined, lacking very specific details. Some might add to this category ‘election year promises’...
- Dents, Dings, and Scratches: Praxeology dents, dings and scratches the cosmic pre-destiny argument:

- ✓ “Mises used the term praxeology to name the deductive science that begins with the premise *that human beings act intentionally*. ... An intentional action identifies an end, or purpose, to the action, as well as certain means selected to achieve that end.” – Michael Accad, M.D., “An introduction to praxeology and Austrian school economics,” alertandoriented.com (blog), April 13, 2016 (emphasis in original).
- ✓ “Since human beings are finite and temporal, praxeology pays attention to the time dimension of human action. From that attention to time, praxeology quickly hones in on the idea of *future uncertainty*. Uncertainty means that the future is ‘somewhat predictable,’ i.e., it is neither completely determined nor completely random. Future uncertainty is conclusively deduced from the axiom of intentional human action. If future outcomes were completely known with certainty, no *ends* would be chosen, as we would simply wait for those outcomes to occur. Conversely, if we thought the future were completely random, no means would be selected, since we would not think that means could help achieve ends.” *Id.*

Thus, if the entire universe is determined, in a clockwork universe Newtonian physics way, and the gods or God is omniscient, then God needs to do nothing as all acts have already occurred, and all end results already determined. It also implies that God is powerless rather than omnipotent. Curiouser and curiouser.

- ✓ “One may remark here that uncertainty may simply be a mind phenomenon and not a feature of reality, that reality is in fact completely determined, or that science may eventually allow us to understand the determination of all events. [Ludwig von] Mises had no problem with that possibility and, in fact, may have been a determinist himself. By insisting on methodological dualism, however, he was simply pointing out that at present time, empirical science does not shed light on the topic one way or another and, for human scientists studying human behavior, the intentionality of human action seems to be a valid and constructive premise on which to build a social science.” *Id.*
- **Movie Making:** Screenwriters of movies made from songs, such as Kenny Roger’s “Coward of the County” (turned into a made-for-TV movie (1981)) and Jeannie C. Riley’s hit “Harper Valley PTA” (turned into a drive-in theatre comedy movie (1978), I watched it on TV in the 1980s) have the same problem: They are stuck with the story told by the well-known lyrics of the hit single and must imagine the story between those lines. Thus hit songs and previous movies in a franchise (and to lesser extent, original novels) act as prophecy for movies made from them.
 - ✓ The same applies to screenwriters of historical dramas, docudramas and fictions; they are constrained by the record of events known at the time. The movie Titanic (1997) cannot end with the Titanic not sinking! Which acts as a prophecy in the story, our knowledge of history is a prophecy in regards to the story’s characters. Where the historical record is not well-developed, semi-mythical, or not subject of testimonials, writers have more freedom in creating events and dramatic conflicts, which is why ancient Roman and Greek, and medieval historical movies were popular.

“What [Leon] Festinger failed to understand is that prophecies, per se, almost never fail. They are instead component parts of a complex and interwoven belief system which tends to be very resilient to challenge from outsiders. While the rest of us might focus on the accuracy of an isolated claim as a test of a group’s legitimacy, those who are part of that group – and already accept its whole theology – may not be troubled by what seems to them like a minor mismatch. A few people might abandon the group, typically the newest or least-committed adherents, but the vast majority experience little cognitive dissonance and so make only minor adjustments to their beliefs. They carry on, often feeling more spiritually enriched as a result.”

– Vaughn Bell, “Prophecy Fail: What happens to a doomsday cult when the world doesn’t end?” Slate Magazine, May 20, 2011 ⁵

Cattle Killing Movement: The case of the South African prophetess Nongqawuse and the Xhosa cattle killing movement of 1856-1857 (and subsequent manmade famine) is an interesting study. She was an orphaned girl, about 15 years old, being raised by her religious uncle Mhlakaza in Xhosaland, near the border with British colonial territories, and her uncle had visited the Cape Colony and become familiar with Christianity. She and a younger girl allegedly had a vision of ancestral spirits who spoke a prophecy of events that would result in driving out the foreigners, mainly it called for widespread slaughter of the Xhosa cattle herds and neglect of crops, which would be purified and replenished by the ancestral spirits after the foreigners (the contamination) had left.

- ✓ If we accept as quite likely that her uncle made the whole thing up and convinced her to go along, what reason did she have to become part of this story? For starters, she is 15 years old and may have come to believe the story was real (I only need think back to what I thought and believed was real when I was 15 years old), and for her uncle, it was the innocence of the child that would give life and credibility to the religious fantasy he had woven. Additionally, if successful, she would be guaranteed wealthy and powerful suitors and a princely husband, would be well-cared for, and could not be domestically abused because of her status as a prophetess. Beyond this, the prophecy falls apart, it is difficult to see how the prophesied events would result in the ends they sought to accomplish (short of something truly emergent) and it is also quite likely that they did not anticipate the explosive reaction – it spun beyond their visions and took on a life of its own. When the prophecy failed disastrously, non-believers were blamed, it was extended eight days, failed again, and then she was handed over to the British authorities by a local chieftain.

- Information from Wikipedia article, “Nongqawuse,” June 14, 2019.

Prophecies that end in widespread disaster – in this case, famine and massive loss of wealth – seem to abrogate the retrenching process described by Vaughn Bell above – regardless of whether or why the prophecy ‘failed.’

The Xhosa cattle killing movement is an example of how prophecy can be used by the Concierge as the subject of a one-time Intervention at the planetary colony level, especially in hostile colonial situations. History is full of other examples, including the Mahdist State in Sudan-Ethiopia,

the Ghost Dance of the Native Americans, the Boxer Rebellion in China, and the curious Cargo Cults of Melanesia.

**And would the last ones out of this universe, please turn off the stars...
[fade to black]**

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*And from the clicking
came the ticking
of the page that was no more...
Quoth the server, "404"*

Endnotes.

¹ Commentary: Contrary to popular belief, Conan was not written so that Arnold Schwarzenegger could become Governor of California. Hindsight is not prophecy. Neither is *non-sequitur*.

² Citation & Commentary: "I hope in your stumbling around you do not wake the dragon." – Londo Mollari, Babylon 5, In The Beginning (1998). Though there are probably finer literary terms that apply ('foreshadowing'), this declaration by Londo Mollari acts as a prophecy – albeit, one that has already come true in the series by the time the prequel movie was released. The comment is in fact notable simply because of who Mollari is in the story and because the viewers already know it to be true; it would not have made sense for the writer to have inserted the line under any other circumstances.

³ Citation: See Calvin & Hobbes comics for information regarding pre-destiny. You were pre-destined to anyways.

⁴ Citation: **Deleenn**: Prophecy is a poor guide to the future. You only understand it when the event's already upon you. – Babylon 5, "Ceremonies of Light and Dark" (1996).

⁵ Citation & Commentary: **Vir Cotto**: Prophecy is a guess that comes true. When it doesn't, it's a metaphor. You could put a gun to your head tomorrow and pull the trigger, and then the dream is just a dream, and the prophecy is just a metaphor, and so are you. – Babylon 5, "The Very Long Night of Londo Mollari" (1998).

- ✓ A 'false' prophecy is not a prophecy. It is merely a delusion. A bad guess. Or a tragedy. An incorrect interpretation of a prophecy does not make it false, however. Prophecies are largely then, more a matter of interpretation and beliefs than facts and results. So, can a prophecy ever be false? Prophecies that don't 'come true' merely tend to be 'reinterpreted' and their date of fulfillment reset into the far future, as long as they remain useful to the current generation of faithful believers.
- ✓ "Well geez. If that doesn't sink it in, then what will? Just take a couple of snippets devoid of a larger context, find two people you think it could refer to and presto, FULFILLMENT! [of Biblical prophecy]" – Nick Peters, "A Brief Look At Alexander Cain," May 6, 2015 (forum post, TheologyWeb).