

Living in interesting times

For years, many have attributed "May he live in interesting times," to an ancient Chinese curse. Even Robert F. Kennedy used a variation of the quote in a speech in Cape Town, South Africa, on June 7, 1966. He added to the phrase by saying, "Like it or not, we live in interesting times." All is true, except for giving the Chinese credit for the verbiage, be it ancient or otherwise.

The popularity of the alleged "ancient curse" puzzles most Chinese scholars who have only heard the quote from Americans. The closest the Chinese can come to anything remotely resembling the phrase is a proverb that says, "It's better to be a dog in a peaceful time than be a man in a chaotic period." And that's quite a stretch if we're looking for a synonymous meaning.

As usual, we put our astute team of researchers to work on this fascinating search for origin. The quest took a surprising series of twists and turns. Apparently, a man by the name of Stephen DeLong researched the origin of the quotation for several years and discovered a possible answer in "The Book of Insults" by Nancy McPhee.

McPhee asserts that the curse was actually Scottish, not Chinese, and that it was not even old, let alone ancient. She said it originated in a science fiction story published in 1950 called "U-Turn," by Scottish author Duncan H. Munro. However, we found that Duncan H. Munro was a pseudonym for the famous sci-fi author Eric Frank Russell, who was later credited with the work. Additionally, the so-called "curse" had another half, which said, "and attract the atten-



You can't beat a system you can't understand

By Sam Bari

tion of important people." So the complete quotation was, "May you live in interesting times and attract the attention of important people."

As it turns out, the quotation was not a curse at all, and, the author was not Scottish. He was from Sandhurst, a small town in Southern England. I find it almost unbelievable that a quote as simple as this, which has been used thousands of times by as many people, has survived with its errant history consistently intact. The quote was not a curse, nor was it Chinese or ancient, and it was more often than not, used in an incomplete form. That is beyond interesting — it is amazing. However, it is indicative of life in our society during these "interesting times."

The point is: the fine line between fact and fiction has been crossed many times and will more than likely continue to be well-trampled. Couple our inability to preserve history accurately because of our penchant for illogic and sen-

sationalism, and the results can be most interesting indeed.

This week is a good example of "interesting times." Income tax deadline day, the beginning of Passover, the celebration of the resurrection of Christ, and the welcoming of spring as established by the pagan goddess Eastre (Yes, Eastre is spelled correctly.), all fall on the same weekend.

Easter (the modern spelling of Eastre) is not a Christian holiday. Christians celebrate the resurrection of Christ, not Easter. One has nothing to do with the other. They just happen to fall on the same day. Despite that misconception, two other events coincidentally happen on the same day this year that make this weekend even more interesting. In the Apostles' Creed, the phrase "He descended into hell" marks the day before Christ's resurrection from the dead. That day, Saturday, April 15, also marks the deadline for income tax returns — an ominous message at best.

Now, getting back to the pagan celebration of Easter for just a moment, let's take a close look at the word "pagan." The word comes from the Latin word "paganus" which loosely translated means "rustic," "hick," or "country bumpkin" — a pejorative term used to describe non-Christians who were slow to accept the new religion. As time passed, "pagan" came to be recognized as a synonym for hea-

then, a derogatory term used to describe a person who does not believe in the God of the Bible, Torah, or Koran.

The ancient pagan goddess of the moon was Eastre. She celebrated the coming of spring by making the rabbit her symbol of new birth because of his prolific abilities. This made sense because spring is the time that nature comes to life after a cold dead winter. The rabbit then developed into the Easter Bunny of modern times.

I find it most interesting that despite Easter weekend being the

holiest of Judeo-Christian celebrations, everybody including Christians and Jews, pays homage to a secular version of the "pagan celebration" of Easter and recognizes the day as "Easter Sunday." The commercialization of the bunny and the egg generates more money for retailers than any holiday other than Christmas, another religious celebration with a secular version. This one is overseen by a fat guy in a red suit. We do indeed live in interesting times, mired in the illogic of a system we will never understand.

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