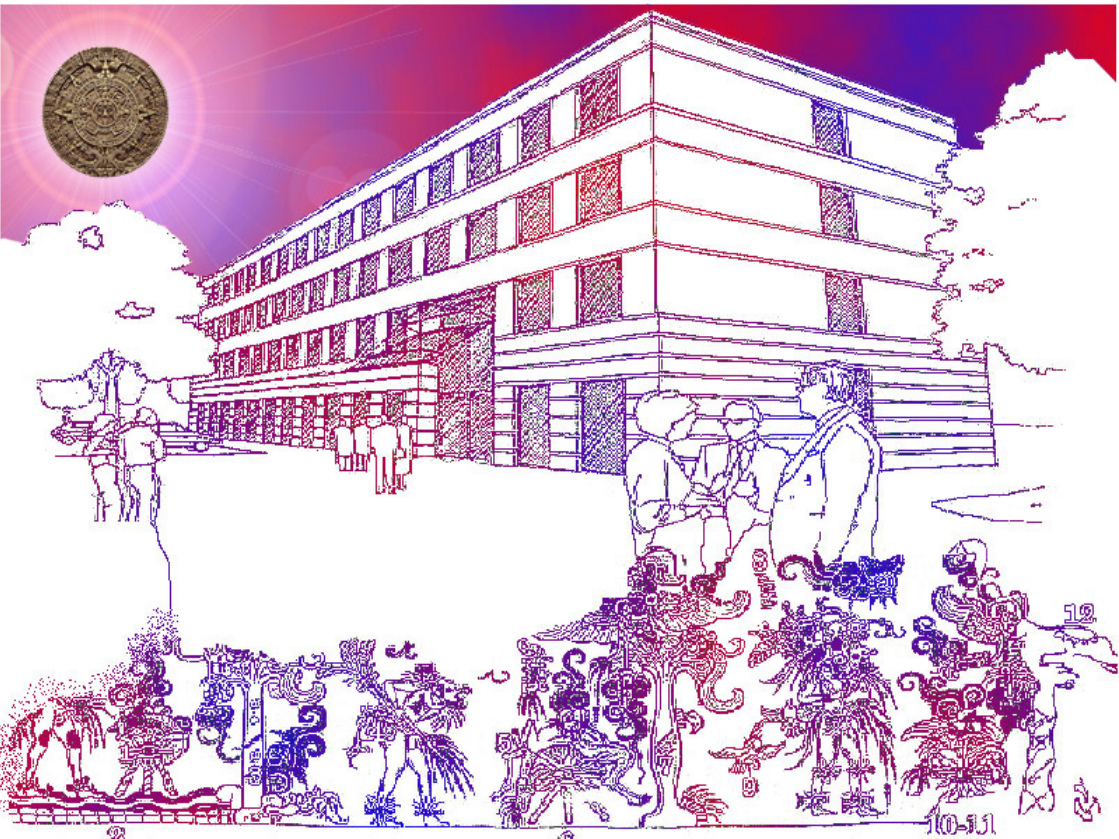


# NOTES ON A NEW FINANCIAL YEAR



CHRIS VAUGHAN

# Notes on a New Financial Year



by Chris Vaughan



*Our first day under the new scheme was an ominous reflection of the last days. We first conceived the calendar policy under the influence of a severe financial crisis. We ended our days under the weight of a large self-spun apocalypse. I read my last lines first.*

I reread these notes nightly, anticipating each word to be the last I read, the last thing I see will be the dried Heron, statuesque and revolting next to the defunct television. My last light will be that of an energy saving bulb illuminating my lonely rituals. I pass the papers from one hand to the other, reading at random.

The financial year is out of step with the current climate. A sensible thing will be to adopt a new system, a more faithful rendering of our commercial crisis. These are my thoughts. But I have no resolution, only a poor diagnosis.

Hurley came today with a filofax packed with astrological charts, and one giant a2 pad attached to the flip chart, page 1 marked *Day 1 of the Long Count Injection Scheme and further comments on Mayan Consumer Etiquette*. Board members looked on, faces hidden in their private assessments. When 'estimated return on this extension I calculate over three quarters at a 15% increase, taking into account,' they heard nothing more than demolition ball of scepticism making way for glissading skyscrapers of faith.

It took a vote to get things going. A week prior to the vote held in the cafeteria we handed out short explanations of the Mayan long count calendar attached to a chart explaining the immediate benefits to each employee on an individual basis.

Michelle from the Promotional department lost four hours on a Friday but gained sixteen free hours between Sunday and Tuesday. She was more than happy, as are Dave, Ed, Walker and Karesh – all netting an extra twelve hours or more. I myself lose out every other Saturday, required to work in the early morning until midnight. But I work less than twenty hours during the formerly known weekday. Some are worse off but admit the change graciously. Tim and Yann and Iz all work plus eighty hour weeks, leaving them the first and last months to recuperate, although they must still attend the weekly meeting and stay an extra hour to discuss recruitment in Customer Care and expansion of the Mayan Project. During these spells they appear restless, myopic. So little of their former executive selves left remain.

‘I can’t see how it transcends the calendar. There is nothing very Mayan we can apply to the catering or anything - is there? Yucatan isn’t going to cut it with the CS team, any Mesoamerican developments should really be put to another vote and the ramifications should also be fully laid out,’ I said to Hurley our CEO. I am the Managing Director and have a voice in the upper reaches, an echo.

‘You’re aware that the Mayan’s were the first to have a fully developed written language of the pre-Columbian era, and that their astronomical advances were, well... astronomical.’ Hurley had made this same joke before.

‘Maybe we can see how this policy develops before we adopt anymore CE systems. The Mayans are now fully fledged Catholics you know. Even their conversion to the BC/AD adoption was worthwhile. Our reversion, if it is that, does not have the same clout.’ My astute revision gets me nowhere. ‘Worry not.’

Our first day under the long count scheme was a chaotic juggling of names and numbers. Nobody understood where they should be, how they should act – as Mayan’s, Mexican’s, as themselves? – And their workload drastically piled up or down, depending which end of the cocoa laden straw they were clutching. It amazed me that nobody left the company, not one.

Things went more and more this way. ‘And epigraphy,’ started Hurley. ‘Maybe we can adopt this, or rather rename our current system of auditing. Anything relevant we cast in stone, engrave annual figures -



monthly would be far too consuming - and all our awards, Most Diligent in limestone bordered with gilt flowers, Longest Living employee gets the monolith of obsidian subtly lettered around the edges in white and silver. You sir, you Redgrave, you'll be celebrated with a redbrick filed at the corners and adorned with wreathes of moss and inscribed "Mr Redgrave: Caution." A tradition of epigraphy can only be a good thing.'

'Epigraphy itself is the study of inscription, dating of the materials. Epigraphy is...'

'I know, I know. The Epigraphy department will explain their role better than I ever could. They will supervise and coordinate the ebb and flow of all engravings and outgoing mail. E-mails will automatically be caste on plastic slabs and examined by the Epigraphers for relevancy, date, recipient, violations of the code. Ask them.'

In early preclassic settlements Mayans were sedentary creatures, working but lounging, longing for nothing, happy to potter and make clay figures all day long. Clay figures of brothers, hunters, fathers and mothers and monsters. Mothers would complement their teenage sons' day's work - a stumpy patchwork of clay from different climates. On the shelf sits her husband's epiphany in clay. Her daughter frets by the doorway wondering if they'll eat and if the God's deny food to those whose husbands potter all day long. Across the Pacific Coast her own son wanders, wishing he could fish easily, kill in the name of something less apathetic than that God or those Gods. Spearing the waves desultorily, kicking at the sand and buffing his knees against the rock. Sitting and doing. Pottering and wondering. Wondering and walking and spearing phantoms on the sea and sand, staring out the Pacific Coast with young eyes that look further than the furthest coastline. I will make monuments of jade and forget about clay. Inscribed: 'Further than the furthest coastline' in our new blue.

Our employees enjoy the ceremony of the sedentary period. Sitting was never as ritualistic and lifting a mug of tea to the lips is a revived esoteric motion from desk to palm to lips and down the gullet which feels to Sandra like the gullet of all ages condensed into those swift A to B to C to D actions.

Chair swivelling is a new ritual dictated by the sun. The entire Promotional department swivel 180 degrees north at 9:30am when the sun reaches the meridian of the clock tower, then back 180 degrees at 11:30 when it softens southwardly. They spend 20 minutes each day facing inwards away from their



PC's, when the sun traces the outlines of the car park and the shadow of the clock tower over Debenhams streaks the disabled spots. Fronds of sunlight and blots of sungod spunk flesh out the shadows. By 14:00 they will be at their desks straightforwardly working.

I have never seen Seb leave his seat.

I pursue the sedentary customs at home too. I worship the same shadows masking my driveway and summon the powers of moonlight in insomniac throes. A fourth or fifth side would help. I summon the powers of a morphing God for temporary sides to lie on, a dull dud of a plank living the sedentary life.

Morale is good. Hot Chocolate rings stain every surface.

'We need to recruit Stele carvers. Past and current employees, future employees, work experience lackeys, terminated men and women of mesoamericana - all of this will be entered daily by our Stele carver. Executive Stele Carver or Stele Director sounds better. Print the ad.' That is word for word.

Elements of days remain. The easy paradigm of past present and future coexist with a less clarified order, dictated by the new guy Frank North. Frank is a Mayan enthusiast with no extensive knowledge of business. His role, as far as I've ascertained, is to keep the calendar on track and oversee the various workings on a day-to-day operation, as well as implementing any additional aspects to the scheme, in light of his expertise. He has opted out of the calendar himself. He has stepped forward into the Julian calendar and seems smug about that. I ask him, 'do you have a holistic understanding of the Mayan culture, or is your knowledge focussed on the calendar?'

'Bit of both . . . I like to know about a bit of everything. You know. When I was in Mexico I talked to shamans.'

'Did you learn anything?'

'It is a very different culture. He wasn't Mayan. He was Mexican. Perhaps he was more of a spiritualist than a guru. All the same boat though.'

'Yes.' My five year plan is irredeemably swallowed now. There is nothing left but to act the part.



North sits filing through the print-outs he had laid on the oak stump, varnished and partly carved at the base. He hands out some to Finance and some frugally to the shredder, sat plump and obedient at his feet. I take a seat beside them and become a component in the circuit of hand outs. Here' a large maize-made creature clutching stalks of maize. Illustrated as towering givers-of-life, takers-of-hope, these menfolk' deities are drawn up in crayon, ink, pixellated Paintbox, stencilled and there are many bold photocopies from old textbooks. There are lady gods, ladling out Maize and life with hands full, fists full of uprooted earth, wading through the soil of Preclassic mankind to bring the abstract instrument of existence: Maize.

I sit up straight. 'What's with the maize stuff?'

'North. He has equated the Maize God's with fundamental elements of the long count calendar. Meaning if we legitimately follow the long count calendar we must also adhere to certain ceremonial attributes in accordance with its function. Therefore, North said, without Maize worship the calendar system is without electric, a body without soul. It is an active agent in the successful running of the rota. North, tell him about Itzamna.'

'Taught us how to grow maize, lives in the sky - or lived - lots of sky references: sun god, invisible high god, bird of omen - good or bad. He is invoked variously, a virtuoso - rain, the month of Mac - during the month of Uo he is affiliated with the first priests, medicine too, so as discussed there are health care options. Itzamna has a whole year in four to his himself. Big player. His sons it is thought created the earth and people. . . Big player has clout - Itzamna.'

Hurley looks at me wondering how this would sieve through my office-petered brain, similarly or differently as it had his - with wonder and infant faith for something to come out of Itzamna and his creations, his medicine blessing and rain pouring.

Time for Mayan Blue: Walls washed. Mayan blue applied in thick layers. Foundations of Mayan blue on the floors and dressing the ceiling. The doors were done without me noticing. Perhaps they were already Mayan blue but only with the walls and floors and ceiling, now the desks and chairs and monitors the stapler my hole-puncher and shredder - all that blue, which emphasises the doors. I never noticed before. The customer support agents agree to wear a shade, on the lighter or darker side, and the phones are touched with a Mayan Blue emblem and Itzamna quoting Market Research Statistics.



Mayan blue stains my wool trousers. Five shirts are ready for an intense spin at home. I polished two pairs of loafers with blots of blue acrylic on their toe. These trousers are one of two pairs I own. Tomorrow I will arrive in a tracksuit, cobalt blue and old Preclassic trainers approved by Itzamna.

In this period of adjustment concentration is lacking but morale is still high.

The room next to mine is now North and Elliot's, his new assistant. It's a large space we used as an IT training room. It's a pestilential laboratory now. A satanic craft centre full of carvings and paintings and unreadable charts. Murals fetter the walls and black masses of oil, cocoa powder and fertiliser strews the floor, 'that is the resin' they tell me. An assemblage of combat knives, snow, black fur, bic lighters, and fruit bats in a vat of resin labeled Gloom 'is a monument' on an obsidian plinth, 'and here are the tribes in genealogical colour codes.' I appreciate the craftsmanship of the tiny clay figurines.

A large black Audi is parked in my space. There are extra spaces, we let go of a third of the Customer Support Agents. Our roles are shifting, they are becoming amorphous titles of necessity – 'CEO and Promotional Executive', making up for occupational and spiritual voids, 'Director of incoming calls and Operations Manager of Worship,' 'Central Head of Finance and Itzamna coordinator and Omen Spotter of the Western aspect.' Morale is not so much bad as static.

Hurley is alone by the jugs of water left out for the clients. The clients had gone because he'd sent them away. They were the couple arguing by the entrance. North and Elliot aren't smiling as they enter and lay an A3 chart on the desk, where the jugs had been that Carole had taken away silently; a secret overheard disclosure on her face like radiation. She was swift and North and Elliot are slow, sitting carefully either side of Hurley. All this time I lean into the sticky doorframe avoiding the Wet Paint inner walls. North traces a finger through the network of lines on the paper, indicating an organic rise and fall in the pattern, sweeping his palm across it to the definitive end and stabbing that point with a calloused fingertip, 2012. Then Elliot leaves to wrap the food and prepare the sacrifice. North has his hand on Hurley's withering shoulder. 'There's time,' said North, intoning a powerful healer and connective voice to Itzamna the bearer of bad news, 'still time.'



The driver of the black Audi sits imperturbably in my space again, ground to a mechanical halt. I sense his authority and as I'm passing another man, tall and heavily dressed in leathers – boots, trousers, jacket – and his shirt silk and checkered - swiftly ducks into the passenger seat. They hadn't moved by the time I'd reached reception, the windscreen of their car like an eye that won't blink.

I heard Karesh presage the end in the board room. 'It will be 2012, and nothing goes beyond that date – all is nothing after then,' he is reciting as if to children but they sit still and listen calmly. Questions:

Walker: What will we do?

Nothing

Paul the Stele Carver: When you say nothing, I assume there are some contingency plans and redundancy packages?

Nothing means nothin'

Yan: Are there any more specifics, as to how things will run down?

Things will just end

Iz: And what about the Heron, our blue, Gloom, what of the sedentary life and Itzamna?

The sedentary life has passed, the Heron was the bird of ill omen of Itzamna and the bird was the omen of the end of Mayan blue Gloom and all of these things passing.

I: Could we not build a recovery plan based on the Gregorian calendar and forget all this?

No

I: Why not?

It is faithless. It has nothing to do with celestial cycles.

I: I have faith in my own abilities.

But not that of Itzamna, North and Hurley?

I: None at all.

Then you should seriously consider your future role in this company.

I: I'm the managing director and the future is meant to end very shortly, according to you.

It is a titular appointment and yes it will end.

I felt the multifold patterns of unreadable protocol clutch my mind, insects converging and parting like infinitesimal cells, the maelstrom of paperwork flung into my gut. I will act the part to the end.



‘It may have been one of the many stolen components, so how can we truly know?’ I hear Hurley, sitting in the same seat, his shoulder withered again under the tense confirmation of The End.

‘It can’t be wrong. By a year perhaps, but we can’t bank on a miscalculation when no miscalculation has ever been recorded.’ North removed the hand and pulled open the blinds – ‘look.’ Outside the Heron had returned. ‘Bird of bad omen, and there are no good omens I can see here – Itzamna,’ at that name I felt impelled to interject and correct the madness. But in me there was something wanting and willing to see this world hurtling toward an endpoint, even at my own cost. I listened. ‘Itzamna will foretell the outcome. We wait. Elliot is preparing the gloom and I have concentrated resin ready to be filtered through the shredder. It will come, I said there is still time.’ Beyond the unlit table and the outdated monitor at the far end the Heron launches, spreads its wings and leaves the PVC vista. It has left the omen unsettled. It fled the scene.

The shredder was prolific during the following weeks.

Inside the board room Hurley contracted the hibernating instinct of the undone despot. He was never a despot or a leader or a chief or an icon – he was and is the CEO. I wonder briefly if without North and his loosely dotted-together complexes of power and profit, if without that catalyst another equally destructive instinct would have taken hold of Hurley and carried us all into another neo-empire, he would pursue the teleology of business through any means and what would he have lost, willingly, desperately, needlessly, to evidence the final purpose? For me and the absent board members the long count injection scheme was only ever to be a sleight of hand, stilts keeping the boat afloat. But North pronounced it a miracle and Hurley accepted it while seeing the gushing, the foundations rigged and the seabed combed beneath by lank pine prosthetics.

Hurley’s last sigh: ‘it was forewarned that it may have been 2011 after all – some experts disagree, some say it is no end but a preordained return to Common Man, some acknowledge the Solar Summit of 2011-2012 as a pardon full of promising futures ahead, Jim Scott thinks he has been told not to worry, that ‘all is well’ on those dates, that a Mind-God dictates to him the itinerary of post-summit life via an internal loudspeaker.’ Only I remain seated.



It is without protest and with tamed respect we wipe away the last remnants. I whitewash the walls, Hurley boxes the computers and stationary, Elliot and North stay to oversee the removal of their shrines and long discursive manuscripts into large vats and pages and pages of logograms stacked into cupboards, each meaningful in its own way, each meaningless in every other way, carried out onto five trucks. They're driven by Karesh, The Stele Carver, Iz, Dave and Shirley. The last things to go are the heavy slabs of stucco reliefs. I've chipped a corner away from one to keep. I have a shaving of blue acrylic and a shoe box full of hallway paraphernalia; I've taken half a dozen of the figurines and hidden them in a vat of resin. Neither of them notices. It's night and only one wall's left. Its apex oversees Debenhams car park, the clock tower illuminated by the moonlight and a tapering yellow streak from the gloaming headlight of the same black Audi.

Aguilar Finance all arrive in black Audi's the next morning – a midwinter morning out of tune with the approaching end – quiet, white, and a penumbra of peace over everything like oily sediment on rough water. As our roles have become transient modes and neither I nor Hurley has fixed titles they find the handover process cryptic. I scoop the last few things in my arms and pass them to the Chief Executive. The be-leathered man from the passenger seat takes the keys and paperwork then hands them to the driver. Hurley has gone. Either crouched behind one of the Audi's or reentered the building. I nod to the two men and shake hands with the shorter driver, his face resuming a human template, the eyes erasing all my hatred, a conquered man accepting the grace of the aggressor, 'good luck.'

'Merry Xmas and a happy new year. . .'

It is almost Christmas Eve. I drive home and consent to live the sedentary life alone. I carefully place the figurines in coded order on the coffee table, still stinking of resin and the stucco sample and delicate blue shaving I frame and position meticulously near the stuffed fermenting Heron. Improperly immortalised the Heron continues the crude process of effervescence, the sluggish steps of absolute putrefaction stain the carpet. I feel the draft of the oncoming winter solstice prematurely against my cheek.

I live alone and happily. I have my things. From my window I trace the rift seen darkly scarring the clear Milky Way.



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I reread these pages and see the Heron has shrunk to nothing, the final stages of decomposition rendering him remote from the Gods. I still trace the rift and count the figurines one by one hoping they will multiply.



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ronin press  
london

may 2010

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