

Delwyn McPhun

Circle's End



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This is a work of fiction. Although many of the events described are history, all the characters are the products of the author's fevered imagination.

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Summary

Avertissement :

Vous êtes en train de consulter un extrait de ce livre.

Voici les caractéristiques de la version complète :

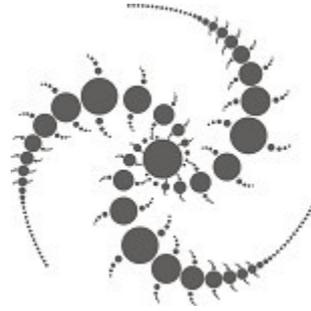
Comprend 18 illustrations - Environ 338 pages au format Ebook. Sommaire interactif avec hyperliens.

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For Marie

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to Sylviane, Claude and Sophie for their enthusiastic help;
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Prologue

I was still caressing Ember, my hands returning to their favourite places where her skin is so soft it seemed to melt under my fingers. My gaze floated in the blue pools of her eyes that glowed in the halo of her ginger hair. The uplifting power of my love was accompanied by a feeling of dangerous fragility; I was conscious of being a just collection of living cells lying in a field on planet lost in an infinite universe.

That was when I finally understood. At first I felt my mind trying to flee, to blot out all thought; anything but allow such an unacceptable vision. I sat bolt upright in the circle of flattened barley. I wanted to cry out but something strangled my voice.

“There’s only us!” I croaked.

“Yes.” Ember rolled languorously onto her back and gazed up at the sky. “Incredible isn’t it?”

“You mean, you knew that too?”

“Yes, but I only knew that I knew today, when you decrypted the last circle.” She smiled up at me. “That’s why I wanted us to come back here.”

My thoughts were thrashing with panic. I felt that the future of life in the universe suddenly depended on me.

“We’ve got to tell everyone. I mean, the world has to *know!*”

“They’d probably say you’re mad. No one would believe you. Or worse, they *would* believe you and just give up doing all the good things they’ve started now.”

“But we can’t keep it to ourselves. The Earth’s responsibility... it’s too much! We can’t leave it to chance!”

Ember shrugged her shoulders.

“If mankind ends up turning the Earth into a lifeless cinder, they’re not going to care about the rest of the universe,” she said. “When humanity’s responsible enough it will find out for itself. Until then, everyone being terrified of Big Daddy up there is working rather well, don’t you think?”

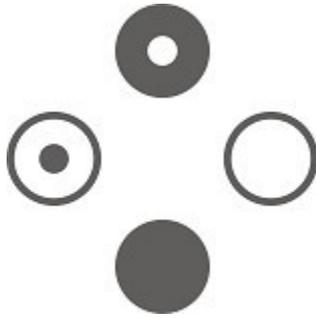
I couldn’t help laughing at Ember’s offhand way of deciding mankind’s fate. It was like playing God.

“So what *do* we do?”

“What we were doing before you started thinking too much. Make love, not war.”

She reached her arms around my neck again, pulling me down against her warm flesh. I felt myself sinking into her generous femininity.

I stopped thinking.



1– I, Mathew

I would have been a hippy if I'd had the time. Yes, even in the year 2000 there were still hippies. At the dawn of the new century the world faced Aids, eleven wars including one slap bang in the middle of Europe, mobile phones had invaded and Britney Spears had done it again. Many of my friends were ecologists, pacifists, and friends of mother-earth following every New Age trend that came along. They spent their spare time expanding their consciences by relating to the universal energy, chanting mantras and smoking conscience-expanding substances. I envied their freedom.

Saying that, I didn't have the time is just an excuse. Really, I didn't know what I wanted to be because I'd never had the liberty to pose the question. I hadn't been like those kids who dreamed of being a train driver or an astronaut. Dad always said I was going to take over his grocery shop; for him university was a waste of time. Mum wanted me to have a *proper education* and be a doctor or a lawyer. Mum had won, giving me a brief respite from the shop, but had left me with a strong dislike of both doctors and lawyers. My teachers helped me persuade her to accept a maths degree at Bristol University. It was perfect because it really didn't leave me any time to think about what I wanted to be.

I love maths but am not very good at it. Just not intelligent enough I suppose, though my tutors never had the guts to say so. It took me ages to figure out the course work and complete the assignments we were given. Once I'd understood, I could remember everything I'd learnt, but applying it to the problems spawned by the twisted minds of our professors was painfully difficult. It was clear that I was not cut out for a dazzling career on the forefront of chaos theory – the place to be at the time. My Dad often joked that with a name like Mathew it was only logical that I become a mathematician. He said it was symbolic, but he wouldn't recognise a symbol if one hit him on the head.

Symbols were my hobby (some would say obsession). They consumed any midnight hours left over after maths. My interest had started at school when a teacher had forgotten she was supposed to be teaching us algebra, and for two whole periods had described the history of numbers with contagious passion. Each number had a meaning and even a magical power attributed by philosophers, alchemists, architects and religious fanatics the world over. Take zero for instance, a simple circle representing emptiness or non-existence. Or, if you prefer, a serpent biting its tail and so symbolising eternity. Indians developed arithmetic using zero in the fifth century BC and eighteen centuries later the inquisitors in Europe were torturing people who just wanted to catch up with India. The church said zero was the work of the devil since it had the power to annihilate other numbers. Where would we be now if they had succeeded in banning it?

I was fascinated by a universe of unseen meaning in a world where numbers are mainly used for counting money. Shapes and geometry, letters and names soon followed my interest in numbers. History had been my most hated subject but by the time I left school I

was practically an authority on European and Egyptian mythology and symbols, and had started on the South Americans. My head was permanently in a book. Instead of losing my virginity, I was losing my eyesight and developing a stoop to boot. I had become an introverted library mole.

Linda got me back on track to adolescent normality. She was a small bubbly girl a year older than me who was retaking her exams. I accidentally crossed her gaze at the library and a second later she was sitting next to me asking if I found her pretty because she thought *I* was fantastic. All I saw was her big adoring eyes and curves bubbling out of her skin-tight tee-shirt. My brain must have short circuited because I didn't ask myself if she was joking or simply mentally ill. Luckily I didn't have to say anything coherent; Linda took me completely in hand – literally. Twenty minutes later she continued my initiation in a wheat field (was she aware that wheat symbolises death and resurrection?). I practically died of shame because I didn't really know what to do, and as she tried to guide me through all her strange fuzzy hair, I exploded in her hands. I guess Linda was a nymphomaniac, but she must have genuinely liked something about me. With patience and encouragement, she took two weeks to show me all the ways she liked to make love; the areas of flattened wheat getting ever larger.

Then suddenly she was going out with another guy with a big motorbike and I realised that I was zero in comparison. He seemed to burst out of his black leather jacket and I...

I had blackheads and pimples on either side of my upturned nose. If my large nostrils didn't put you off it was probably because you couldn't look away from my ears that stuck out at slightly different heights on either side. My brown eyes were too close together giving me an owlish look and my lips were too thin. The only thing in my favour was my hair, which hung in a chestnut curtain down to my collar – a rare show of teenage rebellion. Even that was too light to stay put and looked like a badly made haystack. No girl would give me a second glance, and Linda must have simply taken pity on me.

My books gave me the means to continue living and eventually pull out of my depression. After all, Linda was just a worthless tart who for two weeks had talked continuously about her nails, hair, skin, clothes and rings, and not for one second had I found that interesting. I suddenly saw much prettier girls everywhere and didn't hesitate long before applying Linda's seduction technique, word for word. Thankfully it worked twice before a neck-breaking slap taught me to be more tactful, but by then I was well on my way. I learnt to dress carefully, make compliments and to appear interested in more than just their tits. I didn't know how lucky I was to have overcome such a big complex with so little effort.

What had helped me most to forget Linda was stumbling across a correspondence between two ancient artefacts that seemed to me to be the discovery of the century. I was leafing through a tome on Aztec history and suddenly had that strange feeling of déjà vu. Before me was a photograph of a round bowl with a gold band around its rim; a bowl used by the Aztecs to collect blood from sacrifices. I knew I had seen it before and, moreover, with a feeling of unreality, I knew as I raised my eyes I was going to find the solution, and there it was.

The catalogue of the Egyptian collection at the British Museum was too tall for my shelves so it laid collecting dust on top of the other books. On the cover were a dozen images but the one that transfixed me was a solid-gold band, a neck ornament from a burial chamber. Both the bowl and the neckband had pictograms and hieroglyphs inscribed on them. The languages, cultures and epochs were different, but the translation of these symbols yielded the same phrases:

The End is the Beginning. The Beginning is Light.

This coincidence (because in those days I didn't think in terms of connections) was exciting enough in itself and probably someone has written papers on the symbolism of the two artefacts. But I was running around shouting "Wow!" because I saw something much more incredible. There was a second message hidden in the symbols, a message that every mathematician knows by heart.

What fascinates me about symbols is the knowledge buried in them. They are like actors, each one having a role to play in the telling of a story, which we can only understand if we have read their scripts.

Uncannily, even if you think you know nothing about symbols, you use hundreds of them, whether you like it or not. Our dreams talk with these symbols to get past the censorship of our conscious mind. But I couldn't help wondering what use this is if we can't interpret the symbols, apart from guaranteeing employment for psychotherapists.

At the tender age of eighteen this mystical side of symbols seduced me, but deep down I thought that, actually, men and a few women were responsible for their meaning. I could too well imagine priests or alchemists arguing during centuries of committee meetings about the precise interpretation of a symbol, whereas in fact they were defining it. These working groups usually kept their findings secret. Only a chosen few had access to the power of the knowledge of symbols. I suppose that guaranteed them employment too.

Despite my sceptic nature, a few symbols did seem to have a universal importance, and the circle was one of them.



While looking at the inscription around my Aztec bowl, I had automatically associated a number with each symbol. I tend to do this when assimilating a new language as it helps me to memorise them. The first four symbols gave 3, 14, 15 and 9. Looking at the British Museum catalogue the same digits seemed to shine out of the hieroglyphs around the neck ornament. I must have subconsciously recognised them whenever I saw the photo. Digits I knew by heart: the distance around a circle compared to its diameter. The sequence was the beginning of the mathematical constant we know as Pi.

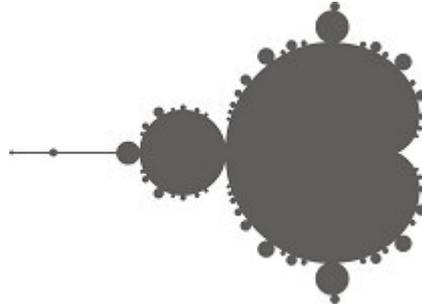
The implications were enormous! Two different cultures had used the same hidden language even though the images and symbols were different. I'd never heard of anything like it. Both inscriptions were on gold circles. "The beginning is the end" is a description of a circle, full of implications about the continuous cycle of creation. 3.14159 is a mathematical description of the perimeter of a circle. It was, it was... It was my guarantee to international fame! Dad could stick his shop where it hurts!

I wrote a fevered article that I sent to the world's three most respected science magazines.

"Unpublishable poppycock!" replied *New Scientist*.

"We do not treat esoteric subjects," excused *Scientific American*.

Nature did not deign to reply. Six months later, my article was finally published in the *Esoteric Review*, the only journal I knew of that sometimes dealt with the study of symbols in between articles on black magic and UFOs. Looking back now, my article was so badly written that I doubt anyone would have got to the end of it.



2– School of Life

Then suddenly it was time to go to university. The period was a blur of applications, interviews and desperate efforts to get any sort of grant that would help me to live through the experience. Thanks to Maggie Thatcher I ended up with a student loan that I would spend the rest of my life working to pay off. Welcome to the freedom of adulthood.

My A-level results gave me the choice of four universities. I chose Bristol, the furthest away from home. I had hoped to have a room in a student's residence but it transpired that I should have reserved it while still in kindergarten. A week before term started I drove the van – a rickety cast off from Dad's grocery store – to Bristol, still not knowing where I would live. I was finally driving on my own, I was finally getting away from my parents, but all I saw was the terrible uncertainty of the days ahead.

I soon discovered a world of people trying not to look like Bristol's biggest nerds; people with similar worries and similar hopes; people tasting autonomy and responsibility; people with time to give, and people wanting to make the most of every minute of life. It was wonderful.

Student digs were well organised. I picked the cheapest left on the list of vacancies; sharing with three other people. Was that the choice that changed my life?



Looking back it at that first year, I can't believe how we lived in our digs. There were times I didn't dare go into the kitchen for fear that some deadly virus would have evolved in the stack of putrefying washing up. Near the end of the month, no one would go in there to cook; we ate pub snacks and take-aways. But the day before the Dead Lady came to collect the rent we all would roll up our sleeves, turn up the stereo as loud as possible and attack the mess.

The Dead Lady examined every room and counted all the plates and pans to check we hadn't pawned any. She had been so named when Lyndon, our art student, saw her red eyes bulging out from her black cloak for the first time. He had staggered quaking into the living room whimpering "dead lady" over and over again. Goodness knows what he had been smoking.

Thankfully, she did not live anywhere nearby. We had the whole upstairs floor above a dental surgery. In two years I never saw the dentist below, who was thought to be the Dead Lady's husband. The rare times I was in the house when he was working, I didn't stay long. The high-pitched whine of his drills, the groans of his victims and the acrid fumes of burning teeth were not good for study, nor for that matter, for hangovers.

On her visits, the Dead Lady also collected the pound coins we were supposed to put in the meter to have electricity.

“Never had such stingy students,” she said, glaring at the candles we put out for her to see.

In fact Gritty had rewired the meter and the few coins we put in for her were strictly out of charity.

Gritty was a highly intellectual electronics student who bolstered his image by showing everyone how intelligent he was. I suppose that means he felt inferior on all other points. He once fell flat on his face at the end of an evening’s beer abuse and for days afterwards had picked gravel out of his oversized pores; hence his nickname. I couldn’t help liking him despite his totally unapproachable nature. He was small, wiry and permanently cold despite the thick black woolly hat that seemed to be grafted to his head. He wore it in bed and probably in the bath too, if he ever had baths.

Lyndon, on the other hand, had liberated his spirit from such material needs as clothes and whenever stoned, which was most of the time, preferred to be naked. His full beard grew untended and he had wavy black hair down to his armpits. He was a massive bear with an irresistible happy smile, loving everyone and everything, and always talking about the cosmos. You couldn’t say that he was five years older than the rest of us, but in a crisis he could give an amazing perspective on our problems. I became very attached to this fatherly side of him.

Lyndon was studying arts at UWE, but the only art I saw him create was on the backs of beer mats. Come to think of it, I never saw *any* of the other’s study. They went to some lectures, but if they ever put pen to paper they must have taken pride in keeping it hidden. They passed their exams and kept their tutors happy whereas I worked like crazy and had my tutors on my back because my marks were so poor. I guess that means they were gifted and intelligent, and that well, I’m not.

I don’t know what the others saw in me since I was so often buried in books. But something about our human chemistry caused a chain reaction when the four of us were together, and we couldn’t help having fun. Our friends called us The Animals, not because we were particularly bestial, but because we acted so impulsively. We each came out of each other as if by implicit understanding we could neither say nor do anything wrong. It was a bit like being pleasantly drunk without the physical side effects. At the slightest excuse we would set off on crazy expeditions, knowing that we could turn the dullest situation into a happening. Of course it helped that I had the van; it was big enough in the back for us all to crash out if we were too hammered to drive home. All of us except Shagger, of course, who always found a bed to share somewhere.

Shagger invariably looked like he had stepped out of a fashion magazine. He had class even if he didn’t have any money. While he didn’t look like De Caprio or Brad Pitt or anyone, Shagger had the same effect on girls. With a couple of compliments he had them eating out of his hands, and no doubt tearing their knickers off as soon as he got them alone. I admired how completely natural he was with girls, but not his taste. His steady girlfriends were difficult and well, the word plastic comes to mind: beautiful, expensively dressed and made up, and always complaining. I suppose they were rich.



It had been Lyndon that started us crop circle hunting. He had burst into the flat one evening, his uncharacteristic excitement making his long hair fly in all directions.

“Guys, there’s one right next to us,” he said jabbing a finger at a little Polaroid photo he was carrying. “It appeared last night. We’ve gotta go and see!”

I had already heard of crop circles – mystical flattened patches in wheat fields that no one could explain – and had dismissed them as New Age stuff. But when I saw Lyndon’s photo I started tingling all over. The wheat was carefully flattened to make a clear pattern, a design that couldn’t be an accident of nature.

“I’ve got more,” Lyndon said as he dived into his room. He emerged brandishing some newspaper clippings he had kept showing photos of other recent circles. The spark of interest ignited the most volatile part of my imagination.

“These aren’t circles,” I cried. “They’re *symbols!*”

“Uh oh,” said Shagger shaking his head. “*Two* excited people...”

“Means we’d better go take a look!” finished Gritty getting up.

My wonder was so intense it felt like an explosion in my chest and head. For a moment it seemed as though I were looking down on the world from a dizzying height. At the time I put these symptoms down to advanced hypoglycaemia and resolved to buy a Mars bar. I was the last person on Earth to pay attention to my feelings.

“Come on Matt!” cried Lyndon, already clattering down the iron staircase with the others.



We stopped to ask permission at an enormous stone cottage beside the track to the field. Shagger was born for this sort of task.

“Give me two minutes,” Shagger said as he sauntered up to the path to the front door.

Five minutes later he leaned into the van window.

“You’d better keep your head down Lyndon before he shoots you!” he said. “Boy is he pissed off with having hippies trample all over his farm. Reckons it’s cost him over three grand’s worth of crop damage. It’s OK though, you can go. I’ll stay here and sweet talk him.”

He turned back to the house.

“Oh yeah? What’s she like then?” called Gritty.

“Buxom,” said Shagger with a laugh.

From the gate at the edge of the field we could make out some shadowy lines in the orange glow of the wheat. A well-trampled rut wended to the middle where we could see there were larger areas of disturbance.

“People haven’t been bothered to go along the tram lines,” said Lyndon. “No wonder the farmer’s pissed off.”

“Tram lines?” I asked.

“The parallel tracks the tractors use for spraying. You can walk along them without doing any damage.”

“Come on before the sun sets,” said Gritty, plunging along the muddy rut.

With a backward look for the farmer, we followed.

Close up, the circle was far less interesting than those in the photographs. It was hard to imagine that the flattened wheat made a picture.

“Wow!” Lyndon was in his element. “Look at it man, it’s incredible!”

It still looked like a patch of flattened wheat to me. Lyndon advanced into the circle.

“Can’t you feel it?” he whispered. “This place is electric!”

“Electric how?” asked Gritty, raising his eyes to the heavens. “Static or magnetic?”

“It’s got magnetism, man. It’s like a cosmic vortex.”

“We’ll soon check that out,” said Gritty, rummaging in the pockets of his parka.

I laughed at Lyndon spinning in the centre of the circle with his arms outstretched.

“Beam him up Scotty!” I cried.

The place *did* feel a little eerie, but that was probably because I was expecting the farmer’s shotgun to go off any second. The flattened wheat was surprisingly neat and level, following a single clockwise movement, spiralling in slightly towards the centre. The edges, starkly highlighted by the disappearing sun, made the field look like a solid mass that had had the circle routed out of it. Other parts of the pattern led off from our circle but it was impossible to see the design as a whole from ground level.

Gritty cleared his throat noisily, something he only did to announce cataclysms, like the time when the Dead Lady had arrived a day early to collect the rent.

“Guys, you should see this,” was all he said.

We hurried over to join him at the edge the circle where he was studying something in the palm of his hand. It was a small walker’s compass made of transparent plastic.

“You found a compass?” asked Lyndon.

“Nah, mine. You should never go anywhere without a compass. Watch.”

Gritty took a couple of steps along the rut we had come along and sighted across the compass. Then he moved slowly back into the circle.

“See?” he said.

“See what?” I asked.

“The needle moves.” He repeated the process. “Look, out here it’s aligned with north while I fix the top of that hill, and in here it’s fourteen degrees off to the east.”

Lyndon and I looked closely at the compass.

“Fourteen degrees?” I asked.

“Here. Over the other side it’s nearer eleven degrees off. And look...” Gritty crouched down to hold the compass at ground level. “Here it’s only eight degrees off.”

“And what happens in the middle?” asked Lyndon.

“When I first looked it seemed to spin the needle, but now it just shows north where it should be.”

Lyndon and I flanked Gritty as he paced around the circle, staring at the compass needle in the fading light.

“So you were right, Lyndon,” I said. “There is a magnetic field in the circle.”

“Idiot. There’s a magnetic field all over the Earth!” said Gritty. “The circle happens to be on a spot where there’s some disturbance. A big ferrous deposit probably.”

“You don’t mean to say you think it’s a coincidence?” said Lyndon laughing.

Could there be something more to this circle than a creative human prank? I began scouting around to find evidence of how it had been made.

“Everywhere we’ve walked, we’ve left marks,” I commented. “We’ve crushed or broken the stalks with our feet. Mostly they’re stuck down into the mud too.”

“Easy. They did it when it was dry,” said Gritty.

“But here where no one has walked,” I continued, pointing to an area by the edge of the circle, “the stalks are intact. They’re lying straight as if they had been combed. Whoever flattened them didn’t walk on them afterwards.”

“They used snow shoes like the Eskimos. Don’t sink in,” said Gritty.

Lyndon was bending down examining the untouched patch.

“Have you noticed how they’ve bent?” he asked. “Right over, just at the level of this bulge here. They’re all the same. Bet *you* can’t bend a stem like that.”

Gritty immediately wanted to show us how it was done and started furiously bending the upright wheat stalks under Lyndon’s bemused gaze. I looked around the circle again imagining how I would have made it. It had looked precisely circular on Lyndon’s photo.

“They would need a cord tied to a stake in the middle to trace the circle,” I said. “And maybe they attached the cord to something they could roll over the wheat.”

“Now you’re thinking!” said Gritty, giving up trying to bend stalks. “They would have used one of those plastic garden rollers with just a little water in it. Easy to carry. Wouldn’t damage the wheat. It would take a solid stake though, we’ll be able to see the hole.”

Gritty raced off to the centre of the circle. I didn’t bother following; if I had created such a mystery, I wouldn’t have left such an obvious mark behind.

“How do you explain the little circles then?” asked Lyndon, pointing to a completely separate circle four metres from the rim of our circle. I could see no path leading to it.

“Er, Gritty?” I said, with a wink to Lyndon.

“Pole vault,” said Gritty rejoining us.

“Yes! Carrying the stake and a garden roller,” I said playing along.

“Man, why can’t you square just admit that they levitated,” said Lyndon.

The light was too bad for any more investigation so we ambled back, this time down a tramline, inventing ever more extreme theories to explain the crop circle. At that point I don’t think that even Lyndon thought it was a supernatural phenomenon.

When we got back to the farmhouse, we found Shagger talking to a tall girl in dungarees who could be described as buxom. Judging by the way his arm enlaced her waist, things were going well.

“Back already guys? This is Jill”, said Shagger. He introduced us as his trusty investigators, made signs for us to get moving and promised Jill to meet her on Friday.

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Fin de cet extrait de livre

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