

Special Double Issue

Kissinger vs. 40 Tons of Marijuana by Albert Goldman

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**Exposé:  
Hollywood—  
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**Songbird  
Jimmy Buffett**

**War In Mexico  
Our Next Viet Nam?**

**Mescalito  
Indian Style**

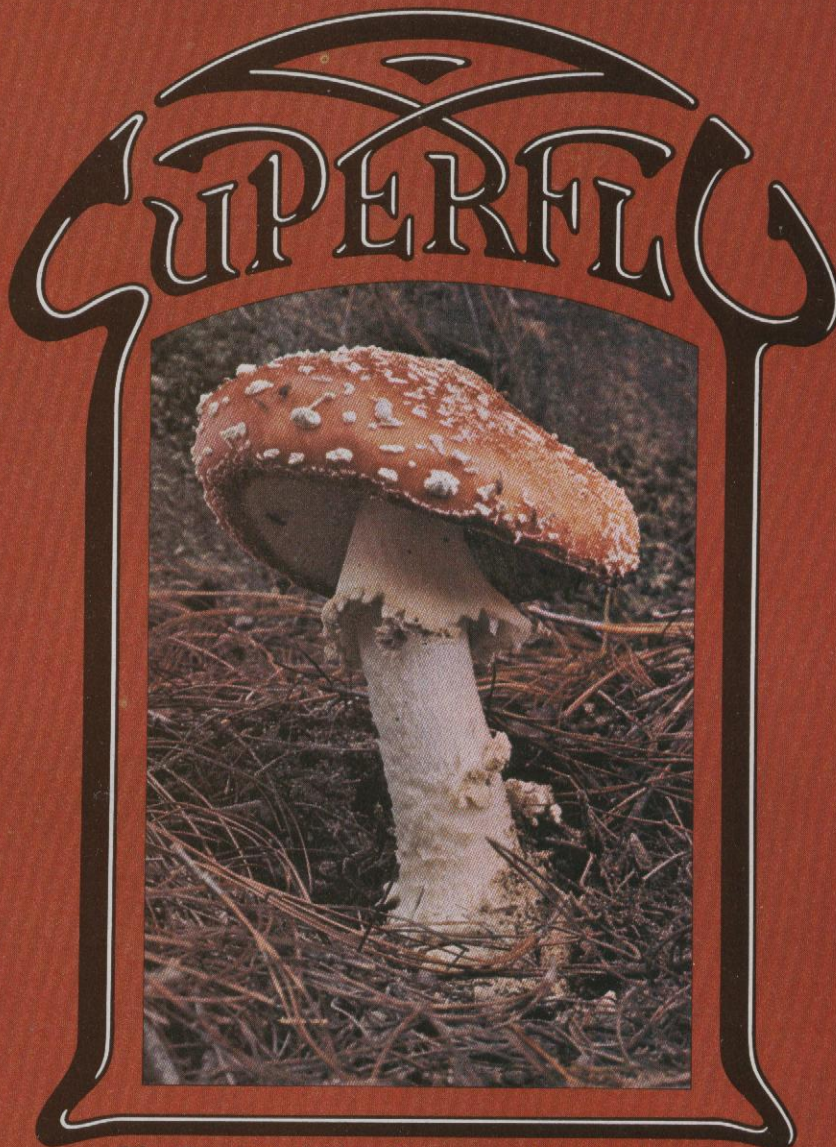
**Setting Up  
a Psychic Gym**

**A Hot Time  
In Mombasa**

**Toadstool  
That Conquered  
the Universe**  
by Tom Robbins







The Toadstool That Conquered the Universe

**G**race Slick scarcely could have known it, but that toadstool that Alice nibbled in Wonderland was neither the celebrated "magic mushroom" of Mexican origin nor some purely fictitious fungus sprung from the rich humus of Lewis Carroll's imagination. It was a good old gringo mushroom and it was genuine. Specifically, it was the *Amanita muscaria*, of whose curious effects Carroll had read in a review of M. C. Cooke's *British Fungi* published in the *Gardener's Chronicle and Agricultural Gazette* of October 1862.

Her mushroom snack put Alice through some heavy changes, as you recall. Now, there is evidence that the *Amanita muscaria* put the human

By Tom Robbins

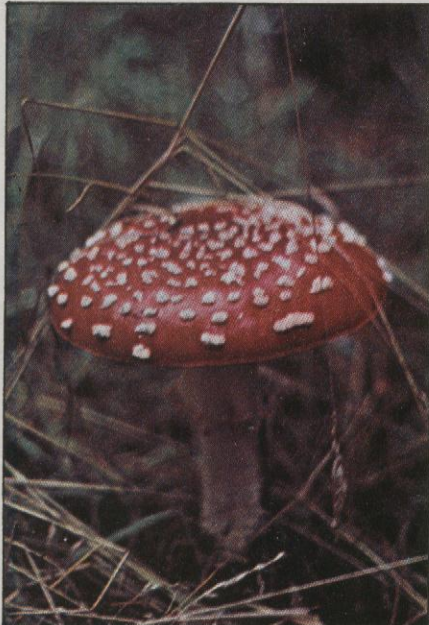












race through some equally striking alterations; evidence, indeed, that that common—if misunderstood—toadstool did more to shape humans ideas about themselves and their gods than any other organism with which they share the planet; evidence, further, that it has had greater cultural impact than wheat or cotton, tobacco or corn; evidence (and now this is beginning to sound like a huge horticultural hype) that one "poisonous" fungus was the direct inspiration for every major religion on earth except Buddhism—and since Buddha chose to commit suicide by eating a mushroom, he was either paying tribute or showing spite.

Really. The evidence is from various independent sources: mycologists, ethnomycologists, classical scholars, anthropologists and philologists. And in the past three or four years, it has begun to dovetail with neat exactitude. There is a mushroom-shaped cloud overshadowing our age, true enough, but it may not be so much the symbolic specter of nuclear annihilation as it is the silhouette of the very mushroom itself. For a hallucinogenic toadstool is threatening to re-write our cultural history.

Oh, look, I know better than to believe that history, the official hypothesis of the past, is going to be exoterically rewritten by anything magical, least of all a fungus. Yet there is something dramatic to consider here, and if it tends to get out of hand, if it aches to bathe in the hot tubs of sensationalism, if it tries to abandon the page to shoot up in the sky like a rocket, we may have to indulge it. For we are dealing not with some ordinary conspiracy or suppressed body of facts, but with a living thing, an ongoing organism whose natural powers neither opposition nor indifference, time nor slander have diminished. We are going to have to come to terms, once and for all, with the *Amanita muscaria*, the brain food to end all brain foods.

The Great of All Mushrooms  
The Woodpecker of Mars  
The Toadstool That Conquered the Universe

**T**he *Amanita muscaria*, or fly agaric as it is familiarly called, is found throughout most of Europe, Asia and North America.

In the Great Lakes states it fruits in June and early July and again in late August and September. It is a late summer species in the Rockies and New England, while along the Pacific Coast it pops up in the autumn and lasts until the severe winter frosts. It grows in the duff of the forest floor, living in delicate symbiotic relationship with certain trees: birch and pine east of the Great Plains, spruce and fir in the west.

In its early stage of development, the *muscaria* looks like a partly buried egg.

Photo credits: Jeremy Bigwood, pp. 89, 93—center; R. T. Orr, pp. 90-91, 93—top and bottom, 94-95; Paul Vergeer, p. 92



for it is enclosed in a creamy wrapper known as the "universal veil." As the round mushroom pushes up into the air, the veil breaks, leaving half in the humus in the form of a cup or volva, and dispersing the remainder about the cap in flakes or "warts." Rags of loose veil may cling to the stem, forming a shaggy ring. The cap is gilled, and by the time the mushroom is mature, it is nearly flat. A large specimen may be ten inches in diameter.

Color is its most distinguishing characteristic. Its cap ranges from a golden orange to a dazzling crimson. It looks like a candy apple with a bad case of dandruff.

Due to its striking appearance, the *muscaria* has long been the prototype toadstool. Pictures of it abound in children's literature, where it is particularly favored by illustrators of European fairy tales: any literate six-year-old knows that the *Amanita Muscaria* Club is where the elves hang out.

Peasants have bestowed upon it some fine folk names, one of the most charming being "the woodpecker of Mars" (this alludes both to its red head and to the warlike effects it sometimes has upon its indulgers). It earned its popular nickname "fly agaric" because for centuries it was thought that a concoction of it and milk killed houseflies. Lately, though, more careful research has determined that the *muscaria* doesn't kill flies, it merely makes them so high they nod out. Science marches on.

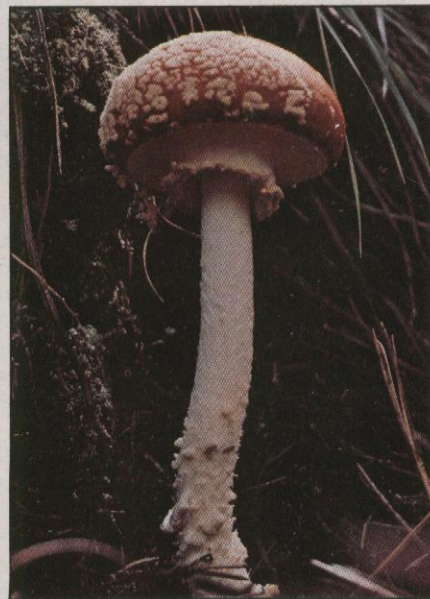
The *Amanita* genus includes some of the most prized edible species and the most deadly. The *phalloides* and the *verna* are known, respectively and with reason, as the "death cup" and the "avenging angel." Darling. Whether or not one considers the *muscaria* edible depends on one's orientations. Most field guides brand it an out-and-out killer, but mushroom handbooks tend to be a trifle paranoid and, of course, no toadstool has ever sued an author for libel.

The fact is, the *muscaria* has been eaten since at least 4000 B.C., usually for those very effects that the handbooks assure us warrant medical attention.

Until rather recently, when Communist puritans and pressure from the vodka industry put a stop to it, consumption of the fly agaric was an integral part of life among native Siberians. In 1730, Philip John von Strahlenberg, a Swedish army officer who had just served a prison sentence in Siberia, wrote the first detailed account of mushroom "orgies." Subsequent investigation revealed that at least eight Siberian tribes gobbled the *muscaria* regularly at ceremonies.

The Ostyak and Vogul peoples, after having been exposed to vodka early in this century, testified that the mushroom was far superior to booze.

Tribal elders always ate the *muscaria* first. Their urine would then be saved and drunk by other males, and it is said





that the urine high was better than the original. Women were prohibited to touch the stuff, and occasionally a male might be denied right to the urine cup. Perhaps that is how the expression "pissed off" originated.

The *Amanita muscaria* was also important to Nordic shamanism. Our word *berserk* comes from the Berserkers, Norsemen who flew into violent and destructive frenzies upon ingesting the Martian woodpecker. Vikings ate it before going into battle (even the Prince Valiant comic strip has made reference to such), and that, kiddies, was what made the Vikings so fierce.

Medieval witches are suspected to have used the fly agaric, for it is well known now that (white) witchcraft was a psychedelic activity and that the witch hunts of the Middle Ages were actually drug purges second only to our own in public hysteria and official chicanery. Belladonna salve was the witch's preferred agent: it was smeared over her nude body so that when she straddled her broomstick, it was pressed into her vulva where it entered her bloodstream immediately. Some witches got so stoned they truly believed they sailed away. The folk myth of the flying broomstick is a rather accurate allegory of a psychedelic trip. So far, no concrete proof has established the *muscaria* as an indispensable entrée on the Halloween menu, but contemporary covens in Britain claim it was, and they require munching the toadstool as part of their initiation rites.

By far the most significant consumers of the mysterious red mushroom, in terms of historical impact, were the ancient Near Eastern fertility cults and the Sanskrit-speaking Aryans who migrated into India between 2000 and 1500 B.C. Had these peoples not been so fond of the fungus, Vatican City may not have been built, the Ganges would be no more holy than the East River and Billy Graham might be back in North Carolina selling golf carts.

One other indication of the mushroom's lasting influence: the Greek word *kannabis*—our "cannabis"—has been traced to the much older Sumerian word *gan*, meaning the head of the penis, which the young fly agaric so graphically resembles, as well as the toadstool itself. Thus, marijuana was named for the *Amanita muscaria*, whose more potent properties it was thought to approximate. Isn't history fascinating?

**J**ohn M. Allegro, 51, is a philologist. That is, he studies and compares written languages. A former professor of Old Testament at the University of Manchester, Allegro has specialized in biblical languages. He was the first Briton on the international team of experts selected to analyze the Dead Sea scrolls.

Trained to be a Methodist minister and given to speaking disdainfully of dope

smokers, Allegro has neither atheistic nor psychedelic axes to grind. Four years ago, however, he shook both philology and theology with the announcement that he had discovered the Jewish and Christian religions to have been founded by drug-taking, orgiastic mystery cults. These cults worshipped a certain sacred mushroom, said Allegro, and he went on to claim that Jesus Christ had not been a man, but a code name for that mushroom.

Needless to say, Allegro's theory threw traditional scholars and priests into a snit. They angrily denounced him, then stubbornly ignored him. So it goes. But



*A. muscaria*, orange

**Belladonna salve was the witch's preferred agent: it was smeared over her nude body so that when she straddled her broomstick, it was pressed into her vulva where it entered her bloodstream immediately.**

Allegro, who had reached his conclusions after 14 years of painstaking research, published and pressed on.

The key to Allegro's theory was the realization that Sumerian, the oldest known written language, was directly related to the Old Testament Semitic languages of Aramaic and Hebrew as well as to the classical Indo-European tongues of the New Testament era. Latin and Greek. It formed a linguistic bridge between them.

Sumerian, examples of which date to 4000 B.C., is full of mushroom terminology, much of it saturated with sexual overtones. When he found the same fungus words, slightly altered and sometimes disguised as metaphors and puns, in the Dead Sea biblical texts, Allegro put two and two together and got a scandal. The very word *Christian* (the Greek *Kristionos*) proved to be derived from an

erotic Sumerian toadstool expression meaning "smeared with semen."

If one has some knowledge of the vegetation religions, Allegro's theory may seem less far-fetched. Look at it this way. In the ancient world, humans were virtually at the mercy of nature. Their dependence upon forces outside of themselves was especially keen in lands of marginal rainfall, such as the Near East: no rain, no eats.

Those early peoples saw the problem in terms of fertility, or sexuality, although it should be remembered that in those days sex was entirely free of moral taint. A tribe couldn't survive if it didn't produce offspring, just as there could be no hunting if the animals didn't breed. Fertility was of prime concern to those folks, and most of their magic and ritual consisted of trying to induce lust and promote fecundity in human, beast and vegetable.

Vegetables were hardest. I mean, how can you make a bean horny?

Well, plants were the babes of the earth, as early people saw them. The earth was a kind of womb, sometimes fruitful, sometimes barren. And the spilling rain made the earth bear, just as the spurting semen made humans and animals bear. God hung out in the sky, where the head of his penis was clearly visible—we moderns call it the sun. When God had coitus with the earth, he showered the hills and fields with his vital semen-rain. So, through art, dance, song and elaborate outdoor fucking, humans tried to entice God and Mother Earth to get it on.

In an effort to gain more influence over God's passions, the ancients attempted to find links with him on earth. They regarded bodies of water as holy not only because of their life-enhancing moistures, but because they were considered to be pools of God's come. Now, of all God's children none responded to his orgasm as quickly and dramatically as did the mushroom. It popped out of the soil in a matter of hours after a shower. And unlike other plants, it appeared directly—mystery of mysteries!—without benefit of seed. Moreover, the mushroom was fraught with sexual allusions. It thrust from the ground like an aroused phallus. Later, its cap, as it flattened, would resemble a vagina receiving an erect penis. The mushroom was both cock and cunt. Often it was coated with a slimy mucus. Hell, it even smelled sexy. (The bed in which Billy Pilgrim has a wet dream is described by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., as smelling like a mushroom cellar.)

There was one mushroom with a brilliant red top that especially resembled the sun-cock. And when one ate that mushroom—Wow! Strength! Ecstasy! Colors and sounds assumed extra dimensions, objects seemed to enlarge and shrink before one's eyes. ("Go ask Alice/I think she'll know.") That mushroom literally filled one with the divine spirit.



Seedless—that is to say, of virgin birth—mysterious, holy and powerful, the *Amanita muscaria* was the Son of God.

Taken by itself, the preceding logic might fail to rise above speculation. Allegro, however, delving behind the surface meaning and context of biblical words, tracing them to their Sumerian roots, builds a strong, scholarly case for the *Amanita muscaria* (of which he had no knowledge before he learned Sumerian) as a widely worshipped entity.

Allegro contends that the rites of the toadstool cults were closely guarded secrets, first because of the elitist character of the healer priests who administered them, and secondly because of the antipathy of enemies. Following a harsh crackdown on the mystery religions by the Romans after the Jewish Revolt of A.D. 66 (the authorities couldn't tolerate a bunch of drug-crazed mystical activists in their midst), the secrets "if they were not to be lost forever, had to be committed to writing, and yet, if found, must give nothing away. . . ."

The cultists simply followed the example of the Old Testament, which, according to Allegro, is a collection of folktales transmitting through fable and parable medical, political and occult information, a lot of it dealing with mushrooms. Imitating that method, the authors of the New Testament sought to preserve knowledge of the mushroom faith by disguising it as a story about a wondrous rabbi called Yeshua ben Miriam (a/k/a "Jesus"). That the story was taken at face value by millions of non-semen-smeared Christians is history's supreme irony.

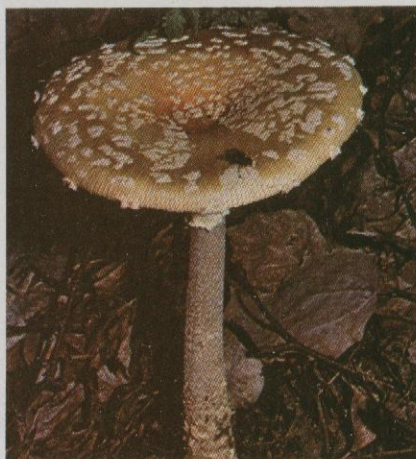
The entire Bible, says Allegro, is a carefully coded document of *muscaria* mysticism. The Resurrection story, for example, is an allegory for the spiritual rebirth that followed the rigors of a mind-blowing toadstool trip. The Ten Commandments are word plays on the two prime Sumerian fungus names (Moses, like Christ, was a mushroom personification). Peter, the rock upon which Jesus vowed to build his church, is *pitra*, Semitic meaning "mushroom." The Cross? Slice a *muscaria* in half, cap and stem, and examine its shape. The *muscaria* arrives in a veiled volva, a covered basket: that is, a manger.

That the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the sacred mushroom is substantiated by a fresco dating from 1291, in the chapel of the Abbaye de Plaincourault, in France, which depicts vividly the *muscaria* as the infamous "apple" of Eden.

And so on and so forth. Allegro's book, *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross*, now published by Doubleday as an Anchor paperback, details scores of biblical toadstool references. In each example, he provides linguistic evidence.

That some of this evidence is a bit screwy is obvious to the careful reader. Allegro's logic often is presumptuous; he

will zoom from microscopic clues to kaleidoscopic conclusions. Omissions of data are conspicuous. Christ, moreover, fits smoothly into the Levantine religious milieu of his day; several prophet/messiahs were around at the same time, each acting out roles described in heroic myths of far earlier origin. Yet, if even one of Allegro's numerous translations is valid, then that is enough to throw the whole of Christian dogma under a particularly suspicious light. If a single hallucinogenic toadstool has been smuggled into the Good Book what else might the authors have been up to?



*A. muscaria*, yellow

**Drug-taking, orgiastic  
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sacred mushroom,  
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had not been a man,  
but a code name  
for that mushroom.**

What really lends credence to Allegro's work, however, are the totally independent conclusions reached by highly reputable scholars regarding the *Amanita muscaria*'s spiritual influence in other parts of the world.

Our cosmic woodpecker has been a busy little bird.

**H**induism has attained a superficial popularity in the West in recent years, its trappings hauled about in the multicolored luggage of drug-rock mysticism. Only last month I overheard a Girl Scout discussing her karma with a Seattle city bus driver, and by now most of us have personally encountered those saffron-robed panhandlers who have sacrificed their hair and who can guess what else to the love of Krishna.

As those who have flirted with the "mother of religions" well know, there

exists a body of writings called the Vedas, which is to Hinduism vaguely what the Old Testament is to Christianity. The Vedas are the most ancient religious texts of which there is knowledge, and of the four Vedas, the Rig-Veda is the eldest.

The Rig-Veda is a book of 114 hymns in praise of Soma, a legendary divine plant-god or god-plant whose juice was offered in sacrifice and drunk by the priests of the early Aryans, the Eurasian invaders who gave to India both their language and their religion.

The identity of Soma has baffled Indologists for decades. Although the Rig-Veda spares no poetic firepower in extolling the Soma plant and the godlike state of mind which its juices induced, there is a remarkably total absence of reference to its leaves, seed, roots, fruit or flowers. What's more, no mention is made of Soma being green, but rather is is described as golden or red. Hmmmmmm.

It was Aldous Huxley, having earlier borrowed the name "soma" for the official narcotic doled out to his fictitious society in *Brave New World*, who first theorized that the Hindu superplant might have been a hallucinogenic mushroom. Huxley suggested this to R. Gordon Wasson, the world's foremost ethnomycologist. Wasson, who had spent 40 years studying the relationships between mushrooms and peoples, was intrigued.

Recruiting the services of Dr. W. D. O'Flaherty of the University of London, Louis Renou of the Sorbonne and other Vedic specialists, Wasson began an exhaustive investigation of the Rig-Veda. When his years of research were done, the ethnomycologist had established beyond any question that Soma was the *Amanita muscaria*.

In India, the fly agaric grows only in the higher mountains where there are birch and firs. As the Aryan culture spread from the highlands into the great southern valleys and the Ganges Plain, its *muscaria* supply dwindled. Gradually, over the centuries, Soma-drinking disappeared. But it was not forgotten. Even today, there are Hindu ceremonies in which organic sacraments are taken. The most common of these sacraments is a juicy, leafless cousin of our milkweed, a plant that is nonintoxicating but that vaguely resembles the mushroom for which it is a symbolic substitute.

Wasson has detailed the fungoid origins of Hinduism in a book entitled *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*. Gorgeously illustrated, the hardcover costs a cool \$100, but it's probably a sound investment. Wasson's first book, *Russia, Mushrooms & History*, published in the late Fifties at \$60 for the two-volume set, will fetch \$300 from your friendly neighborhood rare book dealer.

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has published a far cheaper edition of the Soma book, but if one is unable to get hold of it,

(continued on page 104)



# The Toadstool

(continued from page 95)

the thing to bear in mind is that Soma is not merely mentioned in the Rig-Veda—the entire text is devoted to it. It is a paean to Soma. The visionary mental states produced by drinking the mushroom juice (the Aryans also knew the trick of urine saving) were not incidental but were basic to the development of that vast, squirming, writhing, luminous panoply of gods and goddesses, demons and saints that is Hinduism.

As the Rig-Veda says (Book VIII, Hymn 48): “We have drunk the Soma, we have become immortal, we have arrived at the light, we have found the gods.

“O Soma!”

O Toadstool!

**T**hus far, we have linked the *Amanita muscaria* to the origins of Judaism, Christianity and Hinduism. Indirectly, we have included Buddhism for Buddhism essentially was an off-shoot of Hinduism. That leaves Mohammedanism, the most rigid and puritanical of major religions. Couldn't be no goofy mushrooms growing under Islam's family tree.

No?

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there came into full bloody blossom a large sect of Islamic fanatics called the “Assassins.” Yes, the English word we use to describe those who rid us of our more enlightened politicians is the same. The Assassins were notorious users of *khashish*, or as we call it, hashish. In Arabic, *khashish* means only “dried drug plant” and is not applied specifically to the hemp plant. There have been in Syria and Persia many kinds of hashish, including dried belladonna and—dried mushrooms.

The behavior of the Assassins as they set out to snuff any opposition to the will of Allah was wild, murderous and hysterical. Does that sound as if they were stoned on a hemp product, whose effects invariably are laid back and benevolent, or on “some kind of mushroom” such as a certain scarlet species that whipped the Vikings and the Berserkers into frenzies?

Use of *muscaria* by Mohammedanism's most cherished adherents suggests the possibility that Islam, too, evolved from the Near Eastern fertility cults who worshipped God's messenger, the tempestuous toadstool.

That isn't the end of it, either. Robert Graves, the poet and classicist, has recently—sitting on his Mediterranean island—determined that the initials of the six supposed ingredients of ambrosia (“the food of the gods”) spell out the Greek word for mushroom, as likewise do the supposed ingredients of nectar (“the life-giving drink of the gods”).

Prior to that, Graves had discovered the

similarity in divine attributes, right down to a sharing of the toad emblem, of Dionysus, the Greek god of intoxication, and Tlaloc, the pre-Columbian Mexican magic-mushroom deity. The Festival of Dionysus, at which ambrosia once was ingested by a chosen few, has always been held in October, the height of the mushroom season.

Graves, digging deeper, found toadstool links to Zeus, Demeter and other deities, and, digging deeper yet, realized that the toadstool could only have been the fly agaric. Soon he could say flatly (in some musings preceding a mushroom poem in the Atlantic Monthly) that “the original sacred Greek mushroom was, clearly, the *Amanita muscaria*.”

We may now add Greek mythology to the list of our woodpecker's achievements and hope that all those cultural triumphs haven't gone to his (or her) head, already inflamed to an improper degree.

**I** have eaten the fly agaric three times. On the second of those occasions I experienced nothing but a slight nausea. The other times I got gloriously, colossally drunk.

I say “drunk” rather than “high” because I was illuminated by none of the sweet oceanic electricity that it has been my privilege to conduct after swallowing mescaline or LSD-25. On acid, I felt that I was an integral component of the universe. On *muscaria* I felt that I was the universe. There was no sense of ego loss. Quite the contrary: I was a superhero who could lick any archangel in town and the rusty boxcar it hoboed on.

I wasn't hostile, understand, but I felt invincibly strong and fully capable of dealing with the furniture, which was breaking apart and melting into creeks of color at my feet. Although my biceps are more like lemons than grapefruit, I would have readily accepted a challenge from Muhammad Ali (as Cassius Clay is known since he joined up with that erstwhile mushroom cult), and even in the sober light of two years after, I believe I could have given him a rough tumble.

(Scientists are probing the possibility that *muscaria* does indeed increase one's physical capabilities. What a pep pill may be in store for the wired, wired world of sports!)

Euphoric energy was mine aplenty, but at both the onset and the termination of the intoxication, I fell fitfully asleep.

My reactions apparently were typical. Periods of bellowing hyperactivity interspersed with stupor seem to be the symptoms of fly agaric “poisoning.” Once I saw a Seattle art student sleep for 28 hours after consuming a whole medium-sized mushroom. She awoke in fine health, but could remember nothing of the ancient red thunder that had rocked her to sleep. That's an OD. (Incidentally, our word for

sleep-walking, *somnambulism*, is derived from the Sanskrit “Soma,” the old you-know-what.)

It isn't that the *Amanita muscaria* is incapable of switching the brain to those unauthorized synaptic channels, those pirate stations of the psyche that we call “expanded consciousness.” Obviously, it has introduced untold thousands personally and directly to that within them that, if not actually the godhead, is holistic awareness of the godhead. But it does not do this gently. Instead of slipping one into the cosmic fabric like a silver needle, it drives one in like a wooden stake. And, of course, a stake is blunted in the driving. It was not mere psychedelic fickleness that prompted both the olden Greeks and Mexicans to drop *Amanita muscaria* cold when they discovered that the innocuous-looking little *Psilocybe* made up in grace what it lacked in flamboyance.

I do not recommend the fly agaric as an entertainment. If one wants to get blasted on mushrooms, I suggest one of the several varieties of *Psilocybe* as a smoother, safer, more insightful blast. Of course, if one buys “organic *psilocybin*” from any but the most saintly, well-connected dealer, the odds are vast that what one is getting is minced supermarket mushroom treated with impure, fifth-rate LSD. But *Psilocybe*, the “magic mushroom,” grows in the U.S. as well as Mexico, and with a bit of mycological homework, one can learn how to find it for oneself.

On the other hand, I realize that a lot of you ladies and gentlemen would still cold cobra sweat if you thought it would get you loaded, so, please, if and when you try the fly agaric, take care. Should you by mistake pick the *Amanita pantherina*, which is the *muscaria*'s very twin except that its cap runs light yellow to beige, you could get seriously ill as well as ripped. The *pantherina* contains the same “poison” as the *muscaria*, only more. Let me assure you hardcore druggies that you don't want more: what more may mean is long periods of unconsciousness, hard muscle spasms and a homicidal headache, a headache from a world beyond aspirin.

Nor should you consume the toadstool in social situations where a real or imagined insult might provoke you into wanting to take the neighborhood apart.

The smartest plan is to eat small amounts of mushroom (or sip small amounts of its juice) at half-hour intervals, for it is impossible to gauge the dosage. Genetically, the *Amanita muscaria* is extraordinarily complicated, and no other growing thing except for a few rare orchids is as sensitive to environmental conditions. Consequently, there are wide variations in the *muscaria*'s chemistry. The amount of “poison” will vary greatly from place to place, season to season, even mushroom to mushroom. That discrepancy explains why the art

(continued on page 130)



especially taking advantage of his speedy nature. so here are my warnings—take them seriously!

Americans love speed; it's the national addiction for sure, and will probably be the cause of our eventual downfall. Americans want fossil fuel speed for the physical transport of their bodies and goods, and chemical speed for their minds. the madness of this is apparent to all who contemplate the dangers of speeding up.

slow down, Americans! wake up—contemplate!

if people will abuse mescalito, will he abuse them too? he is so benign, i really don't know. he teaches in a way so subtle that if there be any good in someone it will become stronger.

but it is very easy to abuse mescalito. you will find yourself intoxicated by your power and will become neglectful of things. balance yourself! nothing to excess!

it is all too easy to get strung out on mescalito, wanting to eat it every day, especially for people who enjoy energy and like to trade wakefulness for dreaming sleep. you can get along on much less sleep and food with mescalito. but as you sleep less after taking it for a string of days, you have accumulated a dangerous dream lack because you have shortened your dreaming time.

don't use mescalito for anything but adventure. don't take him all the time, especially not on days you are going to work or to perform trivial worldly tasks. don't profane the sacrament. take him for intense periods of learning, for journeys into the soul of a forest or your own lover. take him once a week on a day completely free from distraction. take him with those you love.

the person who gave me our first crystal mescaline caps told me: "hey, you'll want to take these every day." a good warning, friend, well-taken by the wise.

nurture your warrior's spirit, and share it with others who understand paths of heart.

don't waste mescalito, but share him lovingly with your friends. wasting him means using him too much, using him to do things not worthy of his (and your) nobility, using him as a crutch. don't make of your power a sacrilege, but make your mescalito a sacrament. sharing him means giving him with love. he has told me: "don't sell me; share me." if you are not an American Indian, never sell mescalito they have the power to distribute him: the ancient right to sell mescalito is theirs.

if you are aware and awakening, busy being born and not dying, you won't spoil things within an ace of completing them. ☐

## The Toadstool

(continued from page 104)

student OD'ed while my second *muscaria* flight never got off the ground.

Well, what is that "poison" in the fly agaric that makes people feel they've had a blood transfusion from the right arm of God? For 150 years it was assumed that the active ingredient was muscarine, a severe fungoid toxin. Indeed, muscarine was first isolated in the *Amanita muscaria*, whence it acquired its name. However, the University of Washington Drug Plant Laboratory has just completed a 12-year study in which it was determined that the amount of muscarine in the *muscaria* is so tiny as to be negligible.

Results of the U.W. study are not widely circulated. The usual antidote for muscarine poisoning is atropine. But atropine only magnifies the effects of *Amanita muscaria*. An uninformed pot hunter may eat the *muscaria*, develop symptoms which he or she interprets as poisoning, panic and visit a physician. The physician says, "Umm, yes, mushroom toxication," and, being mycologically ignorant, administers atropine. The patient grows worse. More atropine is given. The patient dies. Every death attributed to *Amanita muscaria* in the Pacific Northwest actually has been the result of an overdose of atropine, injected by a doctor. Yet, field guides, such as *The Mushroom Handbook*, continue to list atropine as the cure for *Amanita muscaria* "poisoning." So did an inaccurate, sensationalist article in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer's Sunday magazine last fall. I wrote to the magazine, hoping to correct the mistake, but the editor refused to print my letter, an act that may someday cost a life.

The U.W. project, spearheaded by Dr. Robert C. Benedict, concluded that it is presently impossible to run an absolute quantitative analysis on the fly agaric, so complex is the little redhead. But it did succeed in isolating a compound known as ibotenic acid-muserole, which is related in its molecular structure to nothing else in nature, and which is believed to be the mushroom's psychic energizer.

Ibotenic acid and muserole are interconvertible and do not exist separately in the toadstool, but in 1967 Dr. Peter G. Wasser of the University of Zurich isolated them in his lab, and over a period of weeks ingested increasingly larger quantities of each. (Shades of Albert Hofmann: Swiss scientists are nothing if not ballsy.) He found ibotenic acid to have only some unpleasant effects on local circulation, but pure muserole produced in him symptoms similar to those described by the Siberian *muscaria* shamans, only milder.

Both Dr. Wasser and Dr. Benedict suspect there may be yet another psychoactive property in the fly agaric. If there, it is so mysterious, so elusive, so human-shy,

so overwhelmingly complex that the most penetrating probes of science may never in a thousand years make it show its face.

**T**he toadstool that conquered the universe? Consider our primitive ancestors, groping their way forward, leading a precarious existence, trying desperately to comprehend the awesome forces of nature. One day after a rainstorm, in the lizard-filtered air of prehistory, hunger or curiosity or both tempts them to gnaw a brilliant, enigmatic, X-rated ground fruit.

What cosmic windows fly open to them! They are transported to levels of feeling far beyond anything known in their cruel daily existence. Tears of ecstasy wet their faces. They are granted a more fixed concept of the godhead. And there is something inside of them that the gods, through the mushroom, have activated and caused to expand. Later, they will name that thing "soul."

They take immediate solace in the knowledge that the spirit world is not closed to them, that the mushroom can put them temporarily in touch with it and that perhaps when they give up their earthly bodies, their souls will go to dwell forever in that world, that Happy Hunting Ground, Nirvana, Heaven.

So they build crude altars in gratitude. As they grow in number and sophistication, they replace the altars with temples. Trappings multiply. Rituals become stylized. Symbols flourish. Abstractions are indulged in. The temples become cathedrals. Empires are built, treasure houses filled, kings crowned, armies dispatched, documents signed, art commissioned, weddings performed, heretics burned, pilgrims landed, babies christened, books written, universities founded, movies made, bombs dropped ("Vietnam is Jesus's war": Francis Cardinal Spellman)—and, of course, the little scarlet toadstool that started it is long since forgotten.

Did it conquer the universe only to lose it?

Even in light of the findings to which I have drawn attention in these pages, the *Amanita muscaria* is not likely to regain its rightful place in the hierarchy of human development. We simply have too much invested in that stuff Sir Kenneth calls "civilisation" to revamp our historical and theological traditions to conform with the notion of a holy plant, however valid, however true.

But the findings are there; they have popped up suddenly and unexpectedly, like toadstools after a rain. And some of us will examine them with wonder, much as our ancestors examined the fungi. And we will shiver with the disappearing golden eternity Milky Way metaphysical blues just to contemplate that it might all have been a mushroom.

All. A mushroom. ☐