

Treasure

by R Brent Smith

It is 1687. A gale is blowing hard. The ship is barely three days out of port and this gale may sink it and its precious cargo. The sea beds of the world are littered with man's treasures and this one may soon join them. The captain struggles to keep the ship pointed into the storm as the wind whistles through the bare rigging above. The decks are awash with foamy spray and the water is pouring into the hold where the cargo is held. The captain orders his crew to place more tarps over the cargo and raise it further off the lower deck to keep it above the rising flood. The crew struggles in the dark hold as the ship tilts and bobs violently. A man is crushed as the cargo slides starboard with a particularly wild roll of the ship. The men are shouting and cursing over the crashing roar of the ocean on the outside walls of the ship. They are soaked and bruised by the time they complete the task. The man who was crushed by the load is alive, cracked ribs and a broken forearm will keep him bedridden for the remainder of the voyage, should they survive this storm. The crew knows of the hard hours to come, waiting out the storm, praying to their God for salvation.

Hours later, the storm abates. The sun, low on the evening horizon, breaks through, flooding the scene ahead with shades of pink and mauve. The sea is calm again. The captain orders the sails set and has the men spell off for much needed rest. The crew bless their Lord for seeing them through this storm.

#

Six weeks into the voyage, the call, "Land ho!" brings the crew on deck. Before them, glimpsed through the rolling waves are thin lines of green, the tops of distant trees. Within the day, they are seeing a solid coastline ahead of them. The captain gets out his maps. These are

poorly drawn, created by adventurers who have visited this land before them. The captain has been in these waters several times previously but that doesn't mean he is familiar with all of the thousands of islands and bays. The captain is looking for a particular island. One where men are waiting for his cargo. There he will receive a small fortune in gold for having delivered the cargo undamaged. The man was not chosen to lead this voyage by accident. He was selected for his navigational skills. After several days sailing up the coast, past hundreds of similar-looking islands, he finds the island of their destination.

At a dock on this island, the cargo is unloaded, the captain is paid and the ship is sent on its way. The captain and his crew are not witness to what happens to the cargo after its delivery. The men on shore strip away the soaked and battered wooden shipping container to reveal a finely crafted chest. Thick leather straps over oak planks, the chest is large and heavy. It is hauled by oxen across the island to a busy construction site. On this island, just off the east coast of what will become known as North America, men have been toiling. They have built a deep shaft through hard clay, a hundred feet deep. At the bottom of this shaft, they have carved out a small room, seven feet on a side. It is a vault for the coming cargo. Arriving at the site, heavy block and tackle are used to lower the chest into the hundred-foot-deep hole. The chest is placed in the chamber below and cement is poured into the hole, filling the space around the crate with a hard shell of cement. The hole is filled in with clay and sand. Wooden barriers are placed at regular intervals along the vertical shaft. These are packed with blue clay to form a pressure seal. The openings to flood tunnels are cleared, setting the trap. Digging into the old shaft will cause a flood of water preventing anyone from gaining access to the chest below.

The men who built the vault know nothing about the contents of the large wooden chest that has arrived by sea. It is obvious to them that someone wants whatever is in this chest to be well

protected. But it makes no sense to them to construct such a vault that even the men who built it cannot dig the chest up again. Who buries something in such a way that even they cannot get to it? Some men speculate that the crate contains a king's wife fallen from favour. Others suggest it is witches, demons or even the devil himself.

#

The burial site remains undisturbed for a hundred years. Then, in 1795 a young boy named Daniel McInnis notices something odd on an island not far from his home. By an old oak tree is a circular depression in the ground. The oak tree bears the scars of having supported heavy lifting equipment. Daniel guesses what only an adventurous boy of his age would: that this is the site of a buried treasure. He and his friends return to the site to dig up the treasure. Digging some ten feet down, they encounter wood. The fact that they got this deep is testament to their determination. Most boys would give up after a foot or two. On encountering the wooden platform, they think, "Surely, this is the top of a treasure chest." They are disappointed to learn that it is a barrier made of logs laid horizontally. The boys remove the logs, certain that the treasure must lie just below. Below these is more sand and clay. They dig a further ten feet before encountering a second log barrier. They dig past this barrier as well but are now some twenty feet down in a hole, sand cascading down on them from the unstable sides. They prudently decide to end the dig. Adults with more knowhow and equipment will have to continue this work.

Adults do continue to dig over the next two hundred years as the legend of a buried treasure grows. Thus, is born the treasure hunt on Oak Island. Speculation of vast riches drives many a man to spend his life's fortune in this vain attempt. Almost a dozen men lose their lives tunnelling deep into the unstable ground.

Whoever put this treasure into the soil of Oak Island meant it to stay there for a long time. It

is not meant to be dug up so easily. Two hundred years of digging and tunnelling have turned the site into a churned-up mess of flooded and collapsed tunnels down to a hundred-foot depth.

A final expedition is launched, supported by a millionaire's personal wealth and income from a documentary style television program. These people drill and dig for over a decade before finally locating and dragging to the surface what they think is the legendary money vault. It is a colossal effort that only modern engineering backed by remote sensor technology could pull off.

Brought to the surface is a roughly constructed rectangular concrete vault, seven feet on a side. It bears the scars of being poked and prodded by the many drilling efforts of the past century. After a decade of mediocre finds and hints of something 'down there', the team finally have something substantive to reward all of their efforts.

There is a frenzy of speculation and a storm of paperwork. Local governments want to preserve any historical content, lay claim to it. If there is treasure, they want their share. The television cameras and members of the team that brought the vault to the surface are pushed back by an army of academics brought in by the government. After all of their time and expense, the expedition leaders and TV producers lose control of the moment, the final reveal, the opening of the vault.

Oak Island is swamped with fans of the show, treasure hunters and history buffs. It looks like golf's Masters Tournament, the main actors poised around the vault and hundreds of spectators, held back by rope barriers, anxiously looking on. A swarm of buzzing drones hover overhead.

A backhoe is used to chip open the vault. The cement crumbles under the assault and soon one end of the vault is open. The official camera crew are the first to gain access to the interior of the vault. The academics crowd around the backhoe, craning to get a look inside. The surrounding crowd of thousands shifts and squeezes into the best lines of sight into the vault but

little can be seen, the back hoe, academics and camera crew obscuring their view. The drones jockey for a clear line of sight into the vault. But the vault is like a hard-boiled egg. The concrete being the hard shell. Inside this is the egg white, a wooden chest five feet on a side, bound by leather straps. The chest is stuck fast in the concrete surrounding it. Jack hammers are brought in to break the concrete away. From what they can see, the chest is wet; various drilling operations over the years have cracked the concrete, allowing water to seep into the precious contents of the vault. It takes several days to chip away the concrete. During this time the crowds thin and then swell once more as it becomes obvious that the last of the concrete shell is about to be chipped away.

All wait impatiently as the concrete debris is removed from around the chest so that now it sits free of obstructions. The crowd of onlookers can clearly see the 'treasure chest', unusually large, clearly a sign that it contains something very special. The cloud of drones circles overhead, carrying news cameras ready to record the opening of the chest. By now the press corps has swollen with the addition of correspondents from around the world. The chest is ringed in by camera crews.

The academics are in charge of opening the chest. Soggy leather straps are cut and the lid of the chest prised upward, its rotted hinges resisting the effort. It takes several of the academics to apply enough pressure to snap the resisting hinges and pop the lid open. Everyone is silent, breath held, as the academics are the first to peer into this chest in over four hundred years. There is silence as the academics crowd around the now open chest. The drones overhead transmit their images – an indiscernible brown patchwork. The academics are discussing something. The on-looking crowd is getting impatient. A man calls out, “What’s inside?”. There is no reply from the academics, still in discussion. The crowd begins a chant, “What’s inside, what’s inside.” As if to

answer the chant, two of the men of letters reach in and lift something out of the chest.

#

High on a bluff overlooking a Swiss mountain valley is a monastery. Its stone walls rise up the side of a mountain. It is a rectangular building constructed of reddish-white stone. The walls are dotted with small rectangular openings. A single circular spire emerges from the centre of one wall and rises high above the valley. Atop its red tile roof is a large wooden cross. Access to the monastery is purposefully difficult. The only access is by a rough, overgrown foot path up the steep face of the mountain. None bother to go there unless looking to join the brotherhood. The year is 1640 and something unusual, no, astounding is happening here, far from the everyday lives of men. Within the walls of the monastery is a young man sitting at a small table, working. The young man is an expert at his craft, calligraphy. He creates beautiful flowing letters with barely perceptible strokes of his quill. It is cold in the chamber where Brother Tomas is working. Shutters are closed and blankets are hung across them to block the cold winter wind. In the dim light of an oil lamp, Tomas is transcribing the scribbles of Prior Vincent. It is important work and Brother Tomas toils at this transcription for twelve hours a day, seven days a week. You see, Prior Vincent speaks to God, or more specifically, he listens to God. Almost fifteen hundred years after the scriptures of the New Testament were recorded, God has more to say. Vincent is his conduit. Tomas and his fellow monks are his scribes, hand writing, in multiple languages, the New Scriptures According to Vincent.

The things that are contained in Vincent's scriptures are fantastical. To Tomas, they seem more like the ravings of a man gone mad than the word of God. But Tomas is a follower, a man of deepest faith who will do anything if it brings him closer to God himself. Tomas dutifully, anonymously, spends his life copying out the New Scriptures According to Vincent, his

contribution to the greater Kingdom of God.

Some forty years later, the task of transcribing the word of God is done. Dozens of copies of the book have been made in several different languages. Tomas has written several volumes in French. Vincent announces that the books are to be sealed in a heavy chest as prescribed by God himself. The box will then be shipped to a secret location where it will be interned deep underground. Vincent explains that the world is not ready for the New Scriptures so they must be buried in a faraway land, to be uncovered when the world is ready to accept what God has to say.

#

Back in the present, the two researchers lift an object from the chest on Oak Island. They hold it gingerly but despite this, the item disintegrates in their hands. One of the academics realizing that millions are anxiously waiting for news of what is inside the chest calls out, "It is books. Dozens of books stacked tightly together." A murmur runs through the attending crowd. There are groans as if the golfer just missed a critical putt. Someone in the crowd, not accepting that after all this, the chest contains nothing but books, calls out, "Dig deeper."

The academic who spoke turns toward the cameras and the crowd. "The chest appears to be filled with books, all with identical covers, all the same size. The books are wet and very fragile. We will have to dry them out before attempting to remove them."

This has been a disappointing day for those anticipating a treasure of untold value or of lost religious artifacts. The only thing in the vault is books, bound in leather, written on parchment, most badly damaged by water. The crowds dissipate when it becomes clear that there is nothing more than old books. Most are broken hearted, like having their favourite sports team knocked out of the playoffs, only in this case, there can be no 'next year'. Others, those of a more inquisitive mind, wonder why all the effort to hide a bunch of books? That is a question for the

academics.

With the vault extracted from a hundred-foot-deep shaft, wooden chest moved to a drying facility, and months in a drying chamber, the books from Oak Island can finally be examined. It turns out that all of the books are copies of the same book; *The New Gospel According to Vincent*. The copies include several different languages, archaic versions of modern European languages, including Latin. The condition of the books is terrible. The water has washed away much of the ink, many pages stained and washed clean of their original text. Extracting bits and pieces of the readable text from all of the books, they are able to recreate the entire text. This consists of many parts written in the various languages. The researchers create a single, complete electronic version in English. After two years of research, two years of silence in the mainstream press, most had forgotten all about Oak Island's 'treasure'. The disappointment of salvaging a bunch of old books made it easy to forget.

With the book translated, the researchers have a problem. The content of the book is unbelievable, mind blowing in its accuracy, terrifying in its message and earth shattering in its meaning. Secrecy is imposed on the project early on. Security is 'top secret'. Governments and organized religion become involved in making decisions about the release of its contents – 'under no circumstances - a need to know basis only'. Organized religion calls the books 'the devil's work'. Government officials want the books kept under wraps. One prominent political figure suggests putting the chest back in the ground. Another offers the use of his fire pit.

The researchers are not so dismissive. Although the books and their contents are a stunning mystery, everything suggests that they are authentic. The researchers guard the books and their research with great care. They are quite aware of the political pressure on the project.

The millionaire who funded the Oak Island treasure hunt for so many years wants to know

what it is they found. All of his efforts to find out are rebuffed. "We are not ready to release the results of the research," was all he received in reply to his queries. For those studying the content of the books, the secrecy is appalling. The message in the books, whether it is the word of God or the ravings of a mad man, is bang on. As time runs on, those who know the message in the text grow more frustrated and impatient with the secrecy imposed on their work. But it is only a matter of time. This is the age of the internet and social media. Information has a way of leaking onto the web and spreading like oil on water, next to impossible to put back in the jar.

#

According to the leaked information, the academics confirmed the origin of the texts. They put them early sixteen-hundreds, originating in Switzerland. The latter fact determined by examining the DNA in the leather bindings. This is an important reference point for what is contained in the texts because the texts contain knowledge far beyond anything known at that time.

The text claims to be the word of God, delivered through a Prior named Vincent who lived between 1565 and 1626. His monastery was indeed located in Switzerland, authenticating the DNA analysis. The scriptures are divided into parables, similar to the Old and New Testaments. The messages are delivered as stories about individuals.

The first sections of the text are concerned with stories of moral issues. The tone is one of dismay and disappointment. A tone of 'I thought I made it clear before' and 'how can you not see that this is wrong?' Like scolding a three-year old who actually lacks some of the self-awareness to make good judgements, humankind is seemingly being called before the Boss to account for its behaviour. Humankind is being called out for putting commerce, wealth and greed ahead of humanity and the environment.

In the middle sections of the book, the topics covered in the parables are wide ranging and perfectly, but impossibly, told in the context of our modern world. A text, written from the mid-1500's to early-1600's contains details of our modern world that would be impossible to imagine back then. The details are spot on, although the languages at the time were insufficient to clearly describe our modern technologies. It is a damning critique of our modern world and its unsustainable consumption. It is a setup for the final third of the book.

The latter part of the text is a warning and a guide to help mankind make the right decisions. Based on history, humankind needs all the helpful hints they can get to make the right decisions. Again, in the form of parables, it talks about the relationship between human and nature and how it is out of balance. Humankind needs to reign in their consumption so that they are not taking more than the planet can give. So that they are not consuming their children's and grandchildren's future. The message is for humankind to listen to the wise men of science and discard the rapacious behaviour of unfettered capitalism. It is a call to arms for the socialist green movement, an empowerment of their cause.

Upon the release of the leaked information, governments and religious leaders are in denial. "All fiction," they say. Conservatives rant and rail against the socialist content of the book. A scientist involved in the program, offered a plumb career appointment, stands before the press and tells all that, "None of the books were salvageable. The information in the leaks is pure fiction."

But the truth has a way of finding the light. The leaks cannot be contained; the full text is eventually released and becomes the "Bible" and catalyst for an exploding green movement. The wisdom of the scriptures is undeniable. Its guidance is sound and insightful and forms the basis for many a policy in the years after. The New Scriptures According to Vincent go to print and are

a massive bestseller. Four hundred years after they were written, they become the reference book for saving humanity and the planet.

The old religions reject the New Scriptures. They do not believe that God is updating his message. They ignore the truths of its parables. They continue to inform and instruct their followers based on texts that are thousands of years old. New religious movements form that do believe in Vincent and these whittle away at the membership of the big religions. A trickle turns to a flood as humankind, ordinary people, embrace a new updated message, one that has more relevance and context to their lived experiences. The churches, mosques and synagogues of the old religions are empty. There is no longer anyone there to listen to their dated and corrupted message. They are silenced by a message that is more in touch with the modern world.

Such is the treasure of Oak Island; wisdom. A rewrite of God's message, a scolding, a warning and a guide to a better future. It is a message whose time is ripe for acceptance.