

Conspiracy theories and UFOs

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Abstract

Ever since UFOs were first spotted in the sky in 1947, many theories have sought to explain these apparitions that defy science. Some of them lend weight to conspiracy theories. Even though there is a wide spectrum of conspiracies involving a certain amount of people and organizations, the purpose of this article will be to follow one particular author's point of view, Jimmy Guieu's, namely because of the global approach that he favors. Guieu, a pioneer of ufology, followed its evolution up until his death in 2000 and tried, through his many works, to offer some enlightening information on UFOs. Ranging from Black-out to the secret government embodied by the MJ-12, he patiently assembled the pieces of a puzzle whose final product takes the form of "romans-vérité". Although he remains a rather marginal author, some approaches similar to Jimmy Guieu's can be seen on television in widely distributed productions; this will allow us to put forward the existence of a recurrent narrative structure in the alien conspiracy theory.

keywords

Jimmy guieu, MJ 12, x-files, ufo/ufology, contemporary myth, alien conspiracy theory, ancient astronauts theory.

The unidentified flying object (UFO) phenomenon invariably elicits the idea of conspiracy in the popular imagination. Since the success of the television series *The X-Files*, UFOs and the conspiracy theme have been practically inseparable. Nevertheless, suspicions of conspiracies to conceal the 'truth' were not to the fore when the UFO phenomenon first became noticed. Between the first appearance of an unidentified flying object in the skies in 1947 and the idea of a vast conspiracy involving extra-terrestrials, Earth-based governments and secret societies, several decades passed, during which this conspiracy notion only slowly developed. But the development of such an idea is only a part of the whole field of ufology, the science whose object is the study of UFOs, and it must be understood that UFOs and conspiracies concerning them are not necessarily consubstantial.

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Effectively, as far as UFOs are concerned, there exists a whole range of theoretical positions which have been adopted, only a comparatively small number of which adopt a conspiracist stance, and even amongst these their promoters do not necessarily agree about the nature of the conspiracy lurking behind the UFO phenomenon. Given that, our goal in this article is less to achieve an exhaustive coverage of the conspiracist outlook concerning UFOs than to seek to retrace how such an outlook came to be developed. We will give particular attention to one of the most comprehensive variants of this attitude, which encompasses the most diverse aspects of the various conspiracies theories on UFOs: the one associated with Jimmy Guieu. Guieu was a prolific author of science fiction and also a keen ufologist, and although he became the object of much criticism both from within as from outside of the ufology community, the fact remains that he was one of the first French authors to publish on UFOs, starting in the 1950s. He continued his investigations into this field until his death in the year 2000. He represents a choice avenue for accessing this field of study, for over the course of his writings one can clearly observe how the various pieces of the conspiracy puzzle around UFOs fit together.

Despite a clear multiplicity of forms, it has to be noted that the ‘cosmic conspiracy’ (François and Kreis, 2009) possesses a history and an evolution in terms of the development both of its theory in itself as of its spread within our society. From initially being no more than simple marginal ideas circulating within very restricted circles of ufologists, to ultimately becoming the essential substance of highly popular television series, such is the dimension of the phenomenon we are aiming to address here, even though it is difficult to evaluate the true imprint that these theories have made on our society. From *Black-out* to EBEs (Extra-terrestrial Biological Entities) and passing by way of the so-called Majestic 12 conspiracy, there exist numerous variants which are drawn together at the choice of different authors; but all such variants are part of a single broad and comprehensive history. It is this history that we wish now to focus on.

Jimmy Guieu (1926–2000): between fiction and reality

A multi-faceted writer, Jimmy Guieu presented a body of work whose various component elements tend to intersect with one another. If he is principally known for his science fiction, he also published, under a variety of pseudonyms, spy novels (as Jimmy G. Quint), detective stories (as Claude Rostaing) and erotic novels (as Dominique Verseau). All his books draw extensively on esoteric symbolism and on themes of the occult, and although Guieu himself defined them as *romans à clés*, it is none the less true that their author regarded them essentially as fiction.

Alongside his activity as a fiction writer, Guieu in 1954 and 1956 published two books on flying saucers (Guieu, 1992a, b), which constituted a compilation of facts known at the time they were written. Lined up together, these facts aimed at showing that a certain coherence could be derived from the UFO phenomena. He was one of the first people in France to become interested in the subject and to try to unravel the mystery. Although favouring the idea that aliens genuinely existed, these books constituted more than anything else a fund of documentation. For the moment no general explanatory theories emerged from these works, nor was there even found in them the slightest conviction as to what such explanations might be; the only ones expressed by the author in these books were to assert the genuine existence of the UFO phenomenon and the idea that there was ‘something’ behind it.

Guieu really only returned to the subject in the 1980s and 1990s, but whereas he still was carrying on his work of documentation, he attempted little by little to put forward a complete reading of the UFO phenomenon on the basis of a conspiracy theory. He linked all the reported events together and tried to demonstrate that there was a certain logic that linked them, and that this logic had been hidden from the public. But his most interesting books on this subject are the ones which

the author labelled as *romans-vérité* [novels of truth] (Guieu, 1990, 1991). In these novels, while the characters are fictional, the facts related are not, at least up to a certain point. For part of their plots, the novels project a setting in a near-future time period, and in this sense one can indisputably recognize the element of fiction: nevertheless, the rest of the plot structures are based on factual happenings which are more or less faithfully integrated into the narratives. These *romans-vérité* represent in reality the practical expression of the hypotheses which Guieu had advanced in his documentary writings. Through the power of fiction, he was able to bring all these elements together and to give them a coherent sense. What is more, to each of the *romans-vérité* are attached appendices ‘where the truth is stranger than the fiction’ (Guieu, 1990a: 361; 1991: 223), and in which the author re-examines the aspects of his novels which are authentic and claimed to be verified in terms which – at least according to him – are not romanticized.

Aside from his literary activities, Jimmy Guieu was a significant figure in the media around the phenomenon of UFOs. On radio he hosted several programmes on the subject, while participating as a guest on certain others. He several times appeared on television to introduce his books, but also, and more especially, to denounce the ‘cosmic conspiracy’. At the beginning of the 1990s he also compiled a set of video-cassettes in which he laid out his theories on UFOs and EBEs and investigated numerous other ‘cursed facts’, ones which official scientific sources rejected or denied completely. On those VHS cassettes which were presented as genuine documentaries, he laid out his complete theory on the ‘cosmic conspiracy’ in the way he was able to do it in his *romans-vérité*.

A manuscript, which to date remains unpublished, entitled *Ovni – E.T. la vérité cachée: Terre, ta civilisation fout le camp!* [UFOs – E.T. the Hidden Truth: Earth, your Civilization is Stuffed!] lays out a synthesis of Guieu’s ideas on the subject and presents the conspiracy in its entirety. Although this document is circulating on the internet, it is not possible to guarantee its complete authenticity and we have preferred to not include it in our documentation, all the more because the totality of the elements developed in that document already figure in previous writings.

From flying saucers to aliens

To be able properly to understand how the whole of the ‘extra-terrestrial conspiracy’ came together, we need to return to what is referred to as the ‘UFO phenomenon’. Under this label are included sets of relatively distinct phenomena. The initial notion of a UFO certainly did relate to unidentified flying objects, but the ‘UFO phenomenon’ also extends to any occupants of these objects, who could be none other than extra-terrestrial beings. Since the time when such beings came equally to be considered, the UFO phenomenon has come to represent not only something which appears in our skies, but also which interacts with our world. The manner in which perception of this phenomenon has evolved may thus be apprehended in a chronological manner.

The first sightings generally date from the Second World War. Various pilots of different nations reported having seen balls of white, yellow or red light, which seemed to follow them during their missions, and which came to be referred to as *Foo Fighters*. According to the pilots’ reports, these balls of light were not random in their movement. At the end of the war, access to military archives allowed the main explanation at the time, that these potentially were secret weapons, to be set aside, and although other explanations have since been advanced (impaired vision, collective hallucination, anti-aircraft searchlights), some UFO investigators see in them the first manifestation of the UFO phenomenon (Guieu, 1992a,b,c: 369).

It is traditional to situate the emergence of this phenomenon in 1947 with the observation of nine objects moving swiftly through the air by the American pilot Kenneth Arnold. As Pierre Lagrange (1990) pointed out, this incident set off the arguments around these ‘flying saucers’, the term which came generally to be used at that time in the daily and non-specialist press for these sightings.

Questions then began to be put to specialists, scientists, pilots and military personnel in an attempt to explain the phenomenon, the number of whose witnesses continued to mount. Most explanations subsequently advanced tended to favour faulty observation: either the person witnessing the incident may not have been capable of clearly identifying a natural or known phenomenon, or he may have been the victim of hallucinations. Such explanations would predominate in the public sphere throughout the second half of the 20th century, when observations of UFOs were to become more and more regular and frequent.

However, the simple observation of UFOs constituted only a part of the phenomenon. Indeed, not long after the first sightings, there were reports of the first UFO landings on earth, then the first close encounters between humans and aliens. This gave rise to attention about the so-called 'contactees', persons who had been able to engage directly with extra-terrestrials. The first case to come under media spotlight was that of George Adamski, who declared that in 1952 he had met a Venusian, a blond humanoid with blue eyes, and then in 1974 to have travelled in his flying saucer. In France, the most well-known witness to such an appearance was Claude Vorilhon, alias Raël, founder of the Raelian Movement, who began declaring in 1974 that he too had met aliens. In these two cases, the aliens had, it seems, come to meet with Earthlings with the intention of spreading a message of peace.

On the other hand, while some extra-terrestrials were apparently making simple courtesy calls, others proved more aggressive, and kidnapped humans for experimental purposes. The first cases to be recorded of this were those in 1961 of Betty and Barney Hill, who claimed to have been abducted by aliens who were grey in colour and short in stature: this was the first mention of this 'race' of extra-terrestrials who would subsequently come to be labelled the 'Greys' or the 'Short Greys'. The reports of people who claimed they had been abducted by aliens grew more numerous over time. If some had a clear recollection of their abduction, most had lost all memory of it, and it was only after a certain passage of time and subsequent to, or by means of, a session of regressive hypnosis that they recovered a part of their memories. They then reported having undergone medical experiments: some claimed to have had implants put into their bodies, without the reason for such implants having been divulged to them. These experiments came to be attributed to the 'Greys'.

From the 1970s on, the alien phenomenon was expanded to include another aspect, that of animal mutilation. In various different locations but principally in the United States, cattle were discovered mutilated, sometimes even drained of their blood. In each case, witnesses insisted on how precise the surgical operations were which had caused these mutilations. Some would advance the hypothesis that it must have been aliens, principally the 'Greys', who were behind these mutilations.

It should further be noted that there was a whole current of belief asserting the idea of 'paleo-visits', that is, alien visitations occurring during the past history of humanity. Those committed to this notion searched for proof of such visitations in ancient texts and archaeological remains, so aligning themselves with another major current of ufology, the Ancient Astronaut theory. Popularized throughout the world by Erich von Däniken, this theory purported that not only had aliens visited earth in the past and that there remained traces of them, but that they furthermore may have assisted the development of human society, notably by introducing it to writing and agriculture. The pyramids of Egypt and the Nazca lines traced in the earth in Peru were held to preserve signs of their presence. And the vision of Ezekiel in the Old Testament could be considered as nothing other than the story of a close encounter between humans and extra-terrestrial aliens.

The UFO phenomenon may thus be understood as one which grew in complexity over time and by particular stages. The whole set of 'facts' which were related in the different books of Jimmy

Guieu allows – through the simple possibility of aligning these ‘facts’ one with the other – for a singularity of the phenomenon to be perceived and a single overall explanation to be suggested.

The Black-out

Jimmy Guieu’s originality is based on the approach which consists of linking together all the aspects of the UFO phenomenon within a single narrative. In the initial stage, if his primary aim was simply to assemble the various reports and suggested evidence, it was nevertheless with the firm intention of demonstrating the reality of the phenomenon. But in doing so he would find himself confronted by a broadly sceptical scientific community, not to mention a scornful one, towards those who believed in UFOs. Such scepticism manifested itself in a massive lack of scientific interest in the phenomenon, whose consequence would be the relegation of flying saucers in the media to the status of trivial news. But for part of the UFO-believing community, including Guieu himself, this lack of interest was the result of a quite definite strategy put in place by the governments themselves:

The most massive campaign of denigration and secrecy ever conceived up until the present had been set in place; from that moment on, America initially and the other nations thereafter have in this regard practised a systematic dissimulation of the truth. (Guieu, 1990: 370)

This campaign has been labelled by UFO-believers as the *Black-out*. According to them its purpose was to conceal the exchanges which had taken place between aliens and certain governments. Guieu detailed the procedure of this *Black-out* according to the idea which he had formed of it:

- (a) Ensure the complicity of a small number of scientists who have been made aware of the truth and charge them to deceive their colleagues who remain outside of the ‘inner circle’, by persuading them that these so-called ‘objects’ have no objective reality and are simply the fruit of an international hallucination.
- (b) Manipulate the selected scientists, beginning with astronomers, so that they will hold firmly to the following reasoning: ‘If such objects existed, it would be we with our telescopes who would be the first to observe them, which is not the case.’ [...]
- (c) Knowingly deceive the press, radio and television by means of declarations, communiqués and interviews with ‘experts’ who are unconditional deniers, and pass off believers in UFOs [...] as harmless cranks influenced by science fiction.
- (d) Finally, heap derision on civilian witnesses and threatens military personnel with serious sanctions so as to dissuade them from making public their possible observations (Guieu, 1990: 370–371).

This campaign of disinformation was to be accompanied by a procedure aimed at destabilizing the ufologist camp. Here again, Guieu, quoting one of his fellow-ufologists Jean-François Gille, set out the procedure said to have been put in place by governments to discredit any researcher who might be penetrating a little too close to the truth:

The destruction of the credibility of a researcher, let’s call him ‘X’, is carried out in three phases:

- (1) As a first step, the secret services concerned have documents, photos or accounts published on obscure platforms that are considered of little respectability such as in certain very vulgar and scarcely trustworthy magazines, with the information in question being attributed

to already discredited individuals, for example. With the passage of time, these documents will disappear rapidly into the collective unconsciousness.

- (2) 'X' now circulates his own documents and information.
- (3) When this dissemination has reached a sufficient number of other researchers to begin attracting the attention of the ufologist community, the manipulators reveal, naturally by way of intermediaries, what will then be posited as the source, or sources, of the researcher 'X'. [...] 'X' is then effectively burnt off (Guieu, 1990: 364–365).

These two procedures form part of the 'cosmic conspiracy', which may be summarized as follows: the governments of certain states either have advanced contacts with aliens, or are at least aware of what lies behind the appearances of UFOs. But these governments had deliberately chosen to conceal the truth from their populations. At that point the motives for the authorities' acting in this manner were not yet clearly known, and it was only during the 1980s that the *Black-out* would evolve towards becoming a vast and well-structured 'conspiracy'.

Majestic 12

If the objective of *Black-out* was to stifle interest in the UFO phenomenon, it was put in place, in Jimmy Guieu's view, also and especially to conceal the existence of a much more obscure and dangerous organization: the group called Majestic 12 (MJ 12). This supposedly had been created in 1947 following the Roswell incident, if one is to believe the narrative of the events such as those that came to light at the end of the 1970s. It was with its real development (Lagrange, 1996). This group allegedly brought together politicians, scientists and military personnel, and constituted a genuinely secret government whose aim was to negotiate with the aliens, in particular with the 'Short Greys' (Guieu, 1990: 191).

The claimed existence of MJ 12 is based on allegedly top secret documents which emerged into the ufologist milieu of the 1980s: they purportedly revealed the existence of a secret commission set up by President Truman in 1947 to handle the question of UFOs. But the documents behind such an assertion have never been authenticated, and even within the ufologist community there is no unanimity about them. Nevertheless, Jimmy Guieu considered them fully authentic and for him this made MJ 12 the linchpin of the conspiracy which he denounced. From the simple secret commission charged with studying the UFO question, Guieu made it into a secret government operating in the shadows and which had its counterpart in the Soviet Union – at the time the Cold War was still raging. The objective of this government was then to negotiate with the aliens in order to gain advantage from their technology (Guieu, 1990: 271).

In exchange for this technology, MJ 12 guaranteed the security of the aliens on earth and even undertook to facilitate their operations by putting secret underground military bases at their disposal. These bases were supposedly principally in the United States – the most famous of these being that of Groom Lake, better known under the name of Area 51 – but also in other countries: in Australia, in Russia and even in France, on the Albion plateau. These alien bases were supposedly constructed beneath human military bases in order to be camouflaged and thus be protected. *Black-out* thus became a special procedure put in place by MJ 12 so as to conceal the operations of extra-terrestrials on earth. And to allow them to act upon the civilian populations and scientific communities, this secret government supposedly even set up its own enforcement cadre, the so-called MIB (Men in Black), whose function was to eliminate any evidence and ensure the silence of any witnesses.

The advantage for Guieu in presenting the conspiracy in this way is that it also projected the objectives of the aliens, or rather should we say, of the 'Short Greys' or 'EBEs'. According to

Guieu, the aliens' intention was to create a hybrid race of themselves crossed with humans, so as to be able to colonize our planet. It was for such purposes that they supposedly carried out abductions of humans and performed analyses of them. The cattle mutilations would have related to the same objective. We also learn from Guieu that AIDS may have been created by the 'Short Greys' in order to 'purge' humanity, along with 'mad cow' disease (Guieu, 1990: 336).

Nevertheless, it should further be understood that MJ 12, in order to keep their arrangement secret while satisfying the projects of the 'Short Greys', needed not only sources of money but also to command respect. It was to this end, according to Guieu, that the world-wide trafficking in drugs came under the control of MJ 12, and the money obtained in this way served to finance the construction and maintenance of EBE bases on earth. Even further, we learn through Jimmy Guieu that President John F. Kennedy and Pope John-Paul I were supposedly assassinated by MJ 12 operatives because they threatened to reveal the existence of this secret group to the public (Guieu, 1990: 330).

Up to this point in our exposition, we have encompassed the essential features of the 'cosmic conspiracy' as it was imagined by Jimmy Guieu, who restricted himself in the matter to compiling and linking together all (or nearly all) of the theories circulating in the ufologist sphere. Nevertheless, he did not limit himself simply to revealing this 'conspiracy'; he called for it to be denounced and combatted. For, still according to him, earth has been visited by around 30 different types of aliens. And if the 'Greys', the nasty ones, represent certain of these, there were other much more benevolent ones who were quite ready to help us. It is here that in the end we locate the sense of the whole of Guieu's work: a call to resistance. For once resistance becomes organized, it will then be possible to obtain the assistance of other aliens and put an end to the tyranny imposed by MJ 12 and the EBE.

It can thus be understood that Guieu's media activity was entirely directed towards exposing this conspiracy to the light of day and that, despite the incredulity of the media, which he regularly denounced, and the scornful responses of certain journalists which he complained about (Guieu, 1990: 382), he applied himself to crusading for a 'truth' which he was almost the only one to uphold.

The conspiracy on the small screen

Set out in this way, this supposed vast conspiracy may seem the construction of highly marginal groups or individuals, and thus to enjoy only limited exposure. But that fails to take into account the effect of television and the growth of TV series. From the 1960s with *The Invaders*, a conspiracy involving aliens was brought to the screen, and that series' success gave considerable exposure to a conspiracy theory of this sort. In *The Invaders*, however, all the elements which we have presented above were not developed, notably those theories relating to MJ 12 which had not yet been significantly elaborated at the time the series was made.

In that made-for-TV American drama, the hero, David Vincent, is fighting, almost alone, against an alien invasion. To thwart this invasion threat, he must convince the rest of humanity of its reality because initially he is the only person to know that they were already here among us.

Over recent decades it is to the series *The X-Files* (in 218 episodes over 9 seasons from 1993 to 2002 and 2 other seasons in 2016 and 2018) that the spread of the most elaborate conspiracy theory is owed. In a plot structure of multiple twists and turns, the FBI agent Fox Mulder, partnered by another agent, the skeptic Dana Scully, seeks first to demonstrate the existence of extra-terrestrial aliens, but in doing so gradually uncovers the existence of a vast plot associating the aliens with a large number of official American, foreign and trans-national institutions and criminal groups.

This TV conspiracy reflects the set of beliefs in extra-terrestrials which we considered earlier. It projects that an alien spacecraft crashed at Roswell in 1947, and that from that date a cooperation is established between the aliens and the United States: the aliens supply advanced technologies to the Americans who in return allow them to conduct their experiments on earth. The purpose of these experiments is to create a hybrid race of aliens and humans so as to colonize the planet in the long term. A secret group linked to MJ 12 and led by the mysterious 'Cigarette Smoking Man' keeps watch over maintaining secrecy and assuring the negotiations with the extra-terrestrials. When the members of MJ 12 learn that once the hybridization of the races is perfected, the aliens intend to exterminate the rest of humanity, they begin to conspire against them without the aliens' knowledge so as to be able to resist their intentions.

All the aspects covered in Jimmy Guieu's books are found in the series: from simple UFO observations through cattle mutilations to abductions, the *X-Files* series makes use of the whole of the ufologist conspiracy mythology. It even incorporates one of the ideas Guieu held most closely, that there were several different races of aliens currently present on earth, some of whom are more benevolent towards humanity than others, or at all events are hostile to the warlike race of extra-terrestrials. Even the Ancient Astronaut theory was briefly hinted at in the storyline (Season 7, episodes 1 and 2).

In this series as well, we find the idea of a hero striving almost single-handedly to unmask the truth. As well as the hostility of the aliens, this hero comes up against that of more or less official earthly organizations which are dedicated to maintaining the black-out on the subject. The whole series consists of a search for genuine evidence, while presenting itself as a complex puzzle whose disparate pieces Agent Mulder gradually assembles over the course of the episodes.

If the *X-Files* has won considerable reputation in the annals of television for its storyline and its durability, it is not the only series to have developed around a similar argument. Thus the series *Dark Skies: the Impossible Truth* (1996–1997) took up on its account the same story line with more or less the same elements, with the only difference being that it was set in the 1960s. The protagonist faces an organization called Majestic and discovers that aliens are involved in every major event of the 1960s, in particular in the assassination of President Kennedy. The way the story is built always follows the same pattern: a hero, almost always operating alone, tries to tell the world about an alien invasion and ends up fighting against them as against more or less official organizations.

A conspiracy with mythological facets

There are innumerable variations in the way the 'cosmic conspiracy' is depicted. Nevertheless, if we consider it in its most comprehensive form as set out in this article, we come to the realization that it activates the three rules of the conspiracy theorist (Campion-Vincent, 2007: 10).

- 'Everything is linked' is the essential characteristic of this alien conspiracy. That idea enables the coalescing into a single notion of all the diverse aspects of the UFO phenomenon and whose unity is shown to be obvious only after a singular effort to bring them together.
- 'Nothing happens by chance' governs the narrative skein of the conspiracy. The elements all line up and harmonize because, behind the UFO phenomenon, there exists an intent and a rationality: extra-terrestrials wish to colonize the earth, but before achieving this must hybridize with the human species.
- 'Things are never what they seem to be' impels us to reconsider how our world functions: a secret government is working away in the shadows, serving as an intermediary between humanity and the 'Short Greys'.

We should equally emphasize that the ‘cosmic conspiracy’ offers a re-interpretation in its own way of numerous events, each of which is the object of its own conspiracy theories, including the Kennedy assassination, AIDS, and the death of John-Paul I (Campion-Vincent, 2007). That allows for the observation that the ‘cosmic conspiracy’ sets out a veritable counter-history of humanity. In relation to events for which history cannot find any explanation or puts forward ones which are reckoned inappropriate, the cosmic conspiracy proposes its own reading.

Beyond the conspiracist dimension, we should also note the way the narrative is structured: a hero struggles almost single-handedly against official institutions as well as aliens in order to reveal to the world a terrible secret which concerns the very survival of humanity. This storyline appears in all the narrative structures which involve the cosmic conspiracy. Whether this character is the story’s hero (*X-Files*) or its narrator (Guieu), it is always presented as a single individual in a struggle against institutions and against what could be likened to gods, and thus taken as such (Renard, 1988). With all this oscillating between fact and fiction, at least as far as those who adhere to this notion are concerned, it is possible then to discern in this conspiracy theory construction the elaboration of a form of mythology which implies a lived experience and which does not simply amount to a fixed and purely narrative tale, but approaches a form of symbolic experience (Méheust, 1990), whose essence is perhaps to be sought less in the physical reality of the experience than in the content of the experience that has been undergone.

By denouncing a conspiracy, these narratives assume to themselves the purpose of explaining the true manner by which our world functions. By the revelations which they effect, the heroes bring to humanity the knowledge necessary for its emancipation, but pay the price for this by suffering the constant persecution of those who hold this knowledge. Thus they appear as avatars of the figure of Prometheus.

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Translated from the French by Colin Anderson

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