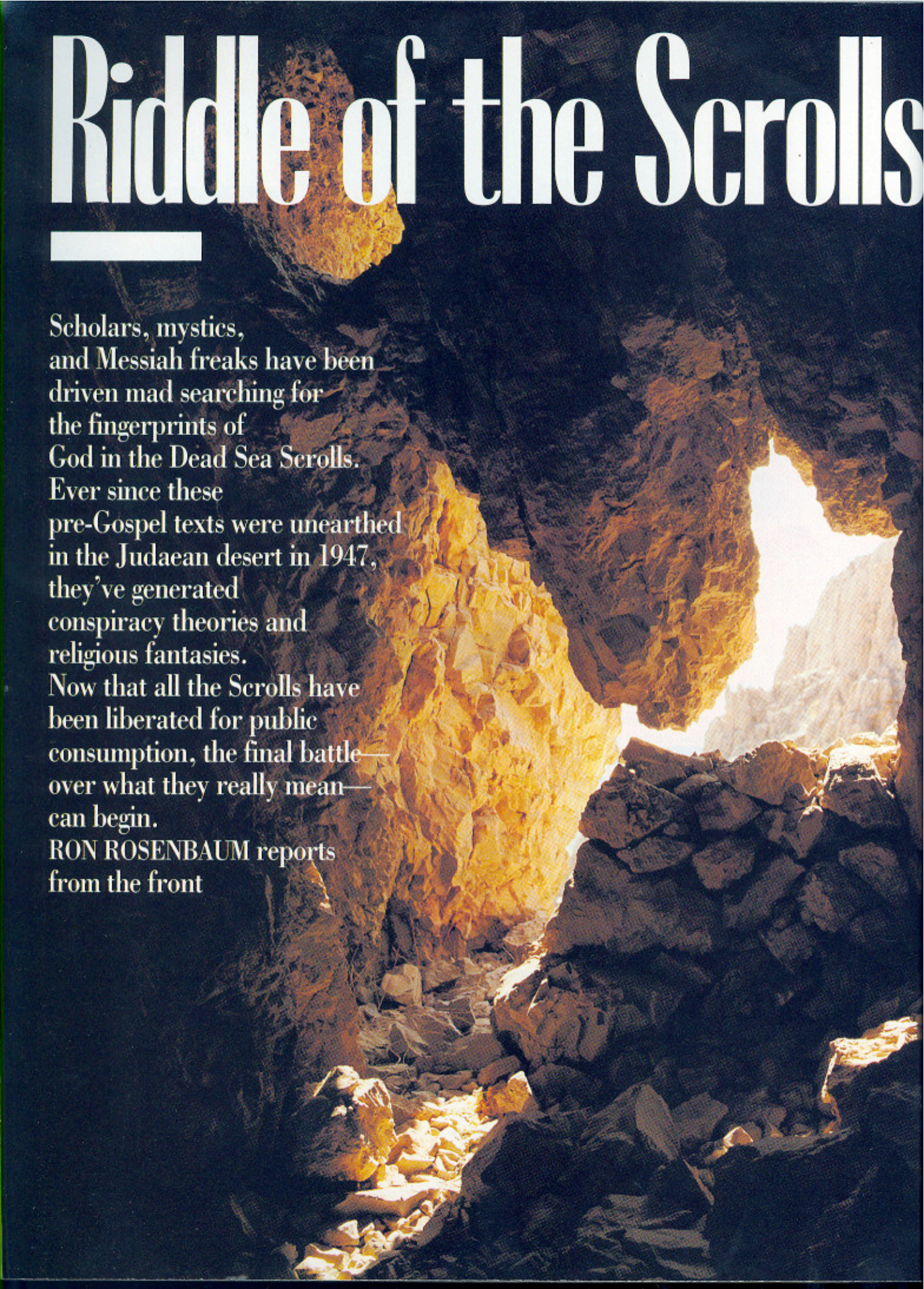


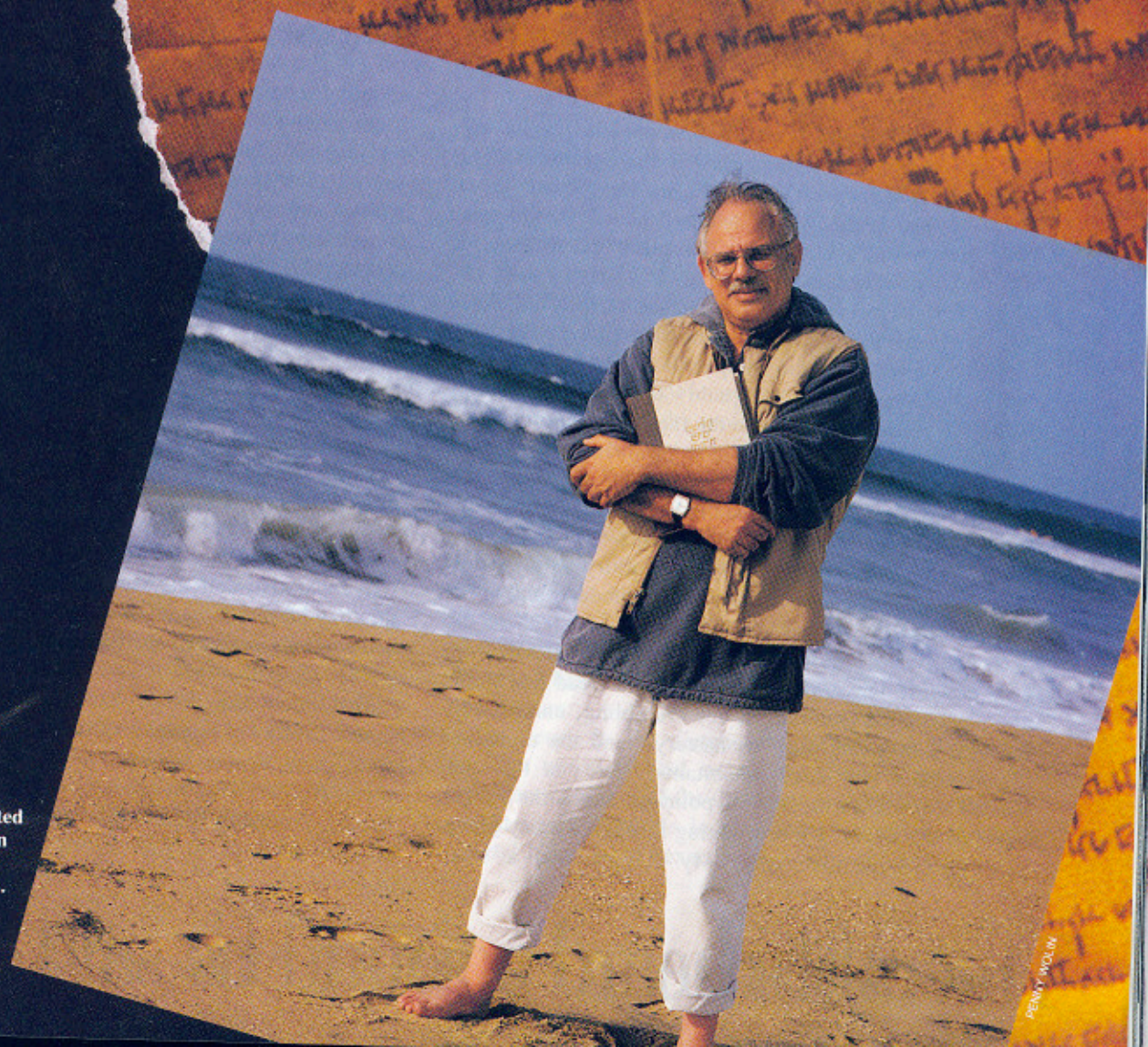
Riddle of the Scrolls

Scholars, mystics, and Messiah freaks have been driven mad searching for the fingerprints of God in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Ever since these pre-Gospel texts were unearthed in the Judaean desert in 1947, they've generated conspiracy theories and religious fantasies. Now that all the Scrolls have been liberated for public consumption, the final battle—over what they really mean—can begin. **RON ROSENBAUM** reports from the front



PASSION PLAY

Many of the Scrolls discovered in the caves of Qumran (left) were kept under wraps until last year, when they were dramatically liberated by Robert Eisenman (inset) and other rebel scholars.





PART ONE

An Expedition to the Dead Sea Caves in a Time of Scroll Fever

In Which We Sniff the Temple Incense

*Unearthed by "Indiana" Jones and Learn About the Rabbi
Who Heard the Breath of God*

The Judaeen desert. Remember that "voice crying in the wilderness" in the Scriptures? This is that wilderness, God's proving ground. This is the place where many believed the Messiah would materialize. The place where the End would begin.

This vista of ancient barren hills inhabited mainly by scorpions and vipers (and a few scattered Bedouin shepherds living in tents like Abraham's) is arguably the most terrifyingly bleak landscape on the face of the earth. And—perhaps because of that—the most productive of fevered, world-shaking visionary encounters with God and the Devil. It was here that Elijah heard the Voice of the Lord while being kept alive by ravens. Here Jesus was tempted by Satan with visions of the power and glory of a worldly kingdom. Here John the Baptist lived on locusts and honey and decided the End was coming.

Beneath the limestone cliffs where the desert hills drop down to the sterile salt flats of the Dead Sea shore, at a place called Qumran, lie the crumbling, unroofed ruins of a 2,000-year-old "monastery" and the unmarked graves of its long-dead inhabitants. Here, in this sun-blasted wasteland, the lowest point on earth, the sunken navel of the world, we're trudging through a dusty graveyard in the ovenlike heat. My companions, a small

RAIDER OF
THE LOST ARK
Vendy Jones
at the "Cave of the
Column."

group of American Christian scholars, are making a pilgrimage to the last resting place of the Dead Sea Scroll writers—the long-extinct, still-enigmatic sect of dissident Jewish visionary writers and biblical exegetes (ancient Harold Blooms!)

who, some believe, were the Jews who invented Christianity.

The now anonymous writers in the graves beneath our feet managed to defy their hellhole setting to create a body of literature that would endure the world's most dismal publishing history for 19 centuries. And then would—after a sudden, sensational, mutilated resurrection—demonstrate an extraordinary power to haunt, obsess, and torment those who sought to divine their meaning.

The Qumran writers vanished from the face of the earth, or at least from the pages of history, sometime around 70 A.D., but, perhaps sensing their end was coming, they went to some trouble to see that their visions survived. They rolled up their scrolls in linen and sealed these mummified manuscripts into three-foot-high clay jars they stashed in caves in the cliffs above us. Hoping perhaps to return from exile—or the grave—to unroll the Scrolls in the presence of the Messiah in the New Jerusalem at the End of Time, which they thought was just a moment away. Instead, their work stayed buried until the spring of 1947 when, on the eve of the creation of a new Jerusalem in a new Israel, a Bedouin shepherd stumbled onto some of those jars in a cave—and the trouble began.

Part of the trouble was the product of secrecy: a small clique of scholars who came to control the 800 or so Scrolls in the 1950s kept many of them under wraps and out of sight for years while slowly issuing annotated editions which advanced their academic careers—a policy that engendered wild rumors about Suppressed Secrets of the Scrolls, Vatican conspiracies to cover up bombshell revelations about Jesus, and the like. The unpublished Scrolls became the focus of the same secrecy/paranoia dynamic that grew up around the unreleased J.F.K. files, only the purported stakes were even higher: not the identity of an assassin, but the identity of the Messiah.

But beneath the sensationalism, the sudden appearance of the Scrolls did pose a potentially serious challenge to the official versions, both Christian and Jewish, of that moment when what we now know as Judaism and Christianity turned against each other with centuries of tragic consequences. Were the Scroll writers "Essenes," a pacifist, separatist, celibate sect, as scholarly and spiritual orthodox prefer to believe—relatively irrelevant to the life of Jesus? Or were they the heretics who taught "Christianity" to Christ?

Until now the debate has been handicapped by the inaccessibility of hundreds of fragmentary Scroll texts kept from view by the scholarly "cartel" that monopolized them. But last year an open rebellion by outside scholars, led by Professor Robert Eisenman and Hershel Shanks, crusading editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, "lib-

The rabbi heard a sound he said he knew

erated" the unpublished Scrolls—brought out a comprehensive edition of bootlegged photographs of the long-unseen fragments. And this month, with the first book of English translations being rushed into print by Eisenman, the Long Lost Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls will become public and the Final Battle will begin—over what they really *mean*.

In fact—although I can't disclose this to my companions, having been sworn to silence by Professor Eisenman—I'm carrying on my person transcripts of his first translations of some of the most significant "unpublished" texts. As the first nonscholar to read these fragments of the Qumran legacy in 1,900 years, I'd felt it somehow appropriate to bring the newly liberated works back to the graves of their long-silent authors.

Because beyond my interest in their work as explosive ammunition for theological and historical debate, I'd found myself, in the course of reading the Scrolls, compelled to respect these writers for the power and the pathos of their prose, to admire them as *writers*.

Their pathos: you can feel it in this graveyard.

"Look at the way they buried their dead," says one of my companions, James Tabor, professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Tabor points down at the faint but regular depressions in the stony dust of the burial ground. "See the way the graves are lined up in a north-south direction." He gestures toward the heat shimmers in the distance. "The way they interpreted the prophetic texts, they thought the Messiah would appear north of here and wake them from the dead on the Day of Judgment. If they were buried facing north, the first thing they'd see when they awoke from the grave would be His face."

They'd fled what they regarded as the impurities defiling temple worship in Roman-controlled Jerusalem to live here in purity and prepare for the Day of Reckoning. They called themselves the Children of Light, wore only white garments, and devoted themselves to a life of rigorously devotional communal living, the better to bring on the Messiah and the Final Battle with the Evil Ones, the Children of Darkness. They died before it happened, but went to their deaths certain they'd wake up to glory one timeless moment later, when the graves beneath us would burst open, the dry bones jump up and clothe themselves with flesh to greet the Messiah.

It didn't happen that way. This is the historical pathos of the Qumran writers, one that may be at the heart of their power to appeal to us: the urgent sense in their work of *belatedness*, of being—like us—in an apocalyptic holding pattern at the End of History, trapped in a pre-millennial moment, helplessly enduring the cruel reign of the Children of Darkness, sensing that God is late, or worse, has fled. Leaving them to pine desperately for the End.

They're still waiting, these bones in the graveyard, the last

THE FALLEN ANGEL
OF THE SCROLLS
John Strugnell,
in exile
at his Cambridge office.



prayer on their lips before they died a refrain familiar to us: the first-century equivalent of *Apocalypse Now!*

Hiking up the dry, rock-strewn ravine known as Wadi Qumran that afternoon, Jim Tabor pointed out a cleft in the cliff above, which looked like it might be a newly opened cave. There was a dicey moment as one of our party made a risky climb up the cliff wall to see if he could reach it. We all watched nervously from below, holding our breath as the climber inched his way toward the tantalizing cleft: the closer he got to it, the more he kept losing his footing, slipping perilously, desperately trying to grip the cliff face, only to find it crumbling to dust in his hands. Finally, just a few feet short, he had to abandon the effort without resolving whether he'd uncovered a new Dead Sea cave or just a dead end.

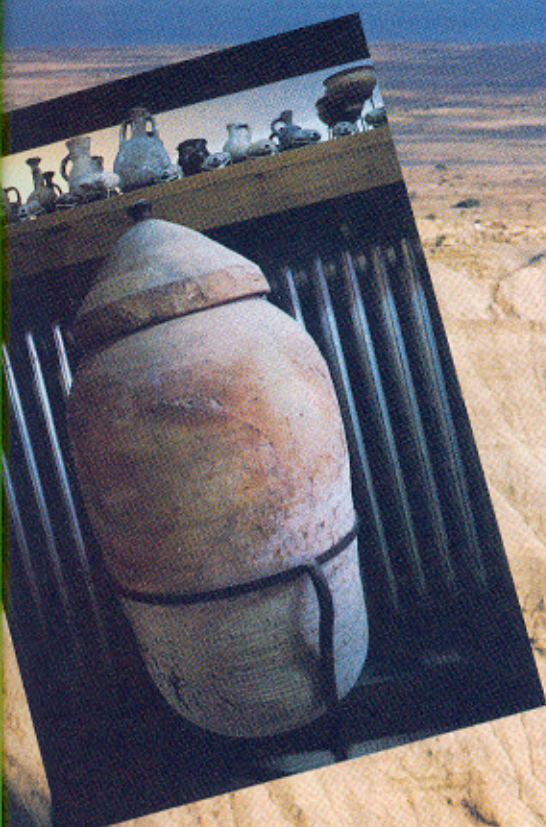
We were witnessing, of course, a metaphor for the quests the Dead Sea Scrolls have inspired over the last half-century. The high stakes and the profound frustrations, the uncertain foundation the Scroll fragments give to those who seek the fingerprints of God in them.

In the four decades since they surfaced, the Scrolls have driven a remarkable number of scholars, mystics, seekers, Messiah theorists, and apocalypse freaks (and some who are all of the above) to make some remarkable claims about "explosive" discoveries. But few so literally explosive as the discovery announced to the world here at the Qumran cliffs in May of this year by Dr. Vendyl "Indiana" Jones.

Dr. Jones is the flamboyant 62-year-old Texas-born preacher turned biblical archaeologist whose quest for the legendary Lost Ark of the Covenant pre-dated (and postdated) Steven Spielberg's Indiana Jones character. Although Vendyl Jones doesn't exactly say Spielberg lifted his life for

for sure was the roaring breath of God.

When you go into Scroll study, one scholar



APOCALYPSE NOW

Perhaps sensing their end was coming, the Children of Light rolled up their Scrolls, sealed them in clay jars (inset), and stored them in caves in the cliffs above Qumran (right).

Raiders of the Lost Ark (and the evidence suggests he didn't), he's not been shy about pointing out the parallels between Indy Jones and "Vendy" Jones, as he's sometimes referred to. While Indy went on to pursue the Holy Grail, Vendy is still on the trail of the Lost Ark. The Ark, you'll recall from the biblical legend, was the physical repository of the Ten Commandments, the tablets Moses brought down from Sinai. The Ark was also, some said, the locus of the very Presence of God Himself.

Vendy Jones believes he can find the Lost Ark using the Copper Scroll, a highly anomalous Dead Sea Scroll, not only because it's the only one inscribed on metal but also because it seems to be less a theological document than some kind of treasure map. Some scholars believe that the Copper Scroll's cryptic directions to vast quantities of precious metals—tons

of gold and silver—are descriptions of metaphorical treasures. But Jones, following in the footsteps of one of the first great Scroll heretics, Oxford's John Allegro, is convinced the Copper Scroll is a map of *real* treasures—the treasures of the Second Temple hidden by the high priests before the Romans sacked it in 70 A.D. And, more important, a map to the sacred vestments, ritual implements, and relics of priestly worship stashed away against the time when the Temple would be rebuilt to greet the Messiah in the New Jerusalem.

In May, Jones summoned the international media to a dramatic dawn press conference in the mouth of a Dead Sea cave he believes is the "Cave of the Column," as described in the Copper Scroll. And they came. Vendy had some credibility going for him on the basis of a previous find: *The New*

says, you “enter into a very dark hole.”



York Times had front-paged a 1988 discovery at one of his nearby digs, a jug of anointing oil that dated back to the time of the Second Temple. And so CNN, CBS, and the European media all trekked out to Qumran at dawn to witness the bald, sunburned, drawling Texas preacher in pith helmet and desert gear emerge from the cave with his hands full of a “fine reddish-brown powder” and proclaim his momentous find: the ritual incense of the Second Temple. The sacred substance priests burned to perfume and purify the Holy of Holies. Furthermore, he told reporters, the find led him to believe he was closing in on the Ark of the Covenant itself.

It was, by all accounts, a strange press conference. Jones offered handfuls of the purportedly sacred substance for reporters to smell. Told them he’d come upon 900 pounds of it

in a man-made chamber 14 feet beneath the cave floor. Gave them a chemical analysis on the stationery of Israel’s famed Weizmann Institute of Science/Department of Nuclear Physics, and issued a press release quoting the analyst to the effect that the “atomic fingerprints” of the elixirs of the Temple incense—the frankincense, myrrh, saffron, and spikenard—were present in the powder.

Yes, *on the stationery* of the Weizmann Institute. As we’ll see, there were some problems there, but nothing compared with the problems Vendy Jones suddenly got from the Israeli authorities.

Vendy later conceded to me that he knew why he’d made the Israelis nervous: in the powder-keg context of Arab-Israeli relations, Vendy’s magic powder had explosive potential. The discovery of any alleged relics of the Second

Type O Behavior



Temple has the power to feed the flames and the fantasies of fundamentalist fanatics, some of whom believe they can prepare the way for the Messiah by replicating and reconstructing every last feature of the Second Temple, from the precise kind of thread woven into the vestments of the priests to the exact chemical composition of the sacred incense. The problem is that the hilltop site of the Second Temple (known as Temple Mount) is now occupied by the third-holiest Muslim shrine in the world, the Dome of the Rock, the promontory from which Muhammad ascended to heaven. In the mid-80s there were spectacular arrests of bomb-carrying Messiah fanatics determined to begin rebuilding the Temple even if it meant blowing up the Dome of the Rock and touching off a holy war—indeed, *because* such a conflagration might bring the Messiah sooner for the Final Battle.

Which may explain why Israeli authorities showed up at the "Cave of the Column" the day after the press conference and yanked Jones's dig permit.

Vendy packed up and left, but he vows he will return. From his headquarters at the Institute of Judaic-Christian Research in Arlington, Texas, Jones, a former Baptist who now calls himself a "non-Jewish believer in Judaism," tells me he's raising money for a new expedition. Last time, he says, he was *this* close to the Ark itself. At the time the Israelis closed down his dig, he and his crew had explored "six of the seven underground chambers in the Cave of the Column." He's convinced from the decryptions of the Copper Scroll made by his Israeli wife, Zahava, that the Ark must be there, in the seventh chamber.

But if it's not *there*, he assured me, he knows where it's *got* to be. Using what he calls "remote sensing technology" applied to aerial photographs of the Dead Sea wilderness site of Gilgal, he believes he can pinpoint another possible hiding place for the Ark. Remote sensing devices, he explains, can pick up things like "compression of dirt and traces of ancient trails" in a desert wilderness. He starts telling me about the time the Ark was seen at Gilgal: when the people of Israel gathered there for a mass circumcision before crossing over to the Promised Land. "They didn't circumcise in the wilderness," Jones says. "And there (*Continued on page 286*)

f you thought Gary Oldman looked wan and sickly playing Lee Harvey Oswald in *JFK*—not to mention Sid Vicious in *Sid & Nancy*—behold the picture at right. That's Oldman made up for the lead role in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, lording it over three fellow travelers who appear to have misapplied their lipstick. Not pictured, alas, are cast members Anthony Hopkins, Winona Ryder, and Keanu Reeves—they're the good guys. The film, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, is due this month.

Mr. Stoker, as you may recall, wrote the original *Dracula* novel back in 1897, but is better known today as the first person in Hollywood history to get his name in a movie title without benefit of a very good agent. Still, we suspect that in the end this *Dracula* will be wholly Francis Ford Coppola's. Vampirism is certainly one of our more hot-blooded myths, coursing with sexual fear and aggression, and Coppola one of our more hot-blooded directors, rarely flinching in the face of possible excess. Indeed, he has ordered up a costume design based in part on the paintings of Gustav Klimt, the *fin de siècle* master of the decadently ornate. In other words, moviegoers interested in a polite, tidy, drawing-room sort of *Dracula* had best stay home.

What variations on Stoker's familiar themes will we notice in Coppola's allegedly more faithful retelling? For one, this *Dracula* can metamorphose into rats or a wolf as well as the standard-issue bat. Plus, unlike Bela Lugosi's or Christopher Lee's versions—or even George Hamilton's—Oldman's count is called upon to speak in authentic Romanian. Our favorite new personality tic is this, however: when *Dracula* goes into seduction mode, instead of the usual hypnotic stare and hammy "Velcome," he now breaks out a bottle of absinthe—even undead swingers know that liquor is quicker. —BRUCE HANDY

DRACULA AND HIS WIVES

Gary Oldman in
the title role,
with Sadie Frost,
Michaela,
and Monica Bellucci.

Black Mischief

A lot of the credit for resurrecting the paper had to go to Andrew Knight. But when Black moved to London a couple of years ago and began breathing down his neck, Knight began talking to Rupert Murdoch about moving over to Murdoch's News Corporation. Finally, Knight left, taking with him a whopping \$25 million in stock options. Black felt betrayed. To his surprise and delight, the Canadian outsider found that the overwhelming preponderance of sympathy in Britain was in his favor. "When your butler leaves, you like to know beforehand," commented a banker in the City.

Even if Conrad Black had bought the *Daily News*, it is unlikely that he would have moved to New York. The Canadian tycoon has grown accustomed to London—to its good conversation, good restaurants, good cultural life. He now spends about seven months of the year there, and is often spotted by his editors arriving in midmorning in his chauffeur-

driven racing-green Bentley at the new tower on the Isle of Dogs, where, as a favor to Paul Reichmann, an old Canadian friend who is on one of Black's boards, he has rented space in the Reichmanns' bankrupt Canary Wharf development.

For another thing, he seems intent on taming his new trophy wife. He and Barbara Amiel are looking for new quarters in London. "Barbara hates the house in Highgate," said the decorator Sally Metcalfe, who is helping her search for a house. "Maybe in Chelsea—not something miles away from everything. It's always difficult when a second wife moves into a first wife's house. It's emotionally impossible."

There are those who believe that, despite the thickening Oxonian accent they detect in Barbara Amiel, she will in fact be a moderating influence on her husband. "I think she will have her feet on the ground," said a newspaperman who knows both of them very well. "She's a real cool customer, and would hate to be associated with anyone who makes a fool of himself."

Miriam Gross, Barbara Amiel's good

friend, agreed. "She is very aware of the danger of taking advantage of the luxuries of life, and how things can change from one moment to the next, as any intelligent person would be," Gross said. "She will guard against and consciously fight against being spoiled. That is why being married to a rich man won't change her. She won't let herself become dependent. She will be quite prepared for any eventuality."

Still, everyone who knew Conrad Black wondered whether he would ultimately become a victim not of his femme fatale wife but of his own narcissism. "All these guys face the danger that they make the deals and then they've got to finance them," said Hal Jackman, Conrad's old comrade in the trenches of toy-soldier war games. "They've got to act precipitously to make the deals, before the financing is in place. Mind you, I'm not drawing any parallels with Conrad, who's been doing fine so far. But when Roman generals had their triumphs, they always had slaves who held a wreath over their heads and whispered in their ear, 'Glory is but fleeting.'" □

Riddle of the Scrolls

(Continued from page 228) were over 600,000 circumcised at Gilgal."

"So you're saying you'll find the Ark by looking for the heavy, compressive tread of hundreds of thousands of men trudging toward adult circumcision?" I ask.

"Well, we don't expect to find the *fore-skins*," he says merrily, "but there's a joke you must have heard: You know why fore-skins make good purses? Because you stroke 'em, they turn into suitcases!" He laughs uproariously. "You gotta have a sense of humor about these things," he adds. When I say good-bye he's still laughing, a swashbuckling Texan apparently unconcerned by the notion that he is playing with fire in the Holy Land.

My companions at Qumran tell me they're skeptical about Vendy's "atomic fingerprints" claim, but interested enough to investigate further. They invite me to accompany them when they pay a visit to an influential Messiah-theorist rabbi who'd been at Vendy Jones's dawn press conference and acclaimed the find as important. And who has his own stash of the sacred substance.

That evening, in one of the strangest moments of my reporting experience, the rabbi emerged from the kitchen of his sub-

urban-Jerusalem home bearing a silver salver filled to the brim with the "fine reddish-brown powder." And there it was in front of us, the powder—it looked like gourmet chili powder—that some believe is the very perfume of the apocalypse.

"Rub it between your fingers, then sniff it," the rabbi suggested. "Taste it." I did all but the latter. It smelled, well, like *dirt* to me, although I must admit I wouldn't have recognized the atomic fingerprints of frankincense even if they had been there. But were they there? After we sniffed the incense, the rabbi himself admitted he had some questions about Vendy Jones's claim. It wasn't just that most academic archaeologists dismissed it. It was the problem with the Weizmann Institute scientific analysis. The institute, when called by reporters, claimed no connection with the report by the man who signed himself "chemical consultant" and who used some curious locutions for a scientist (a random sample "amazingly weighed exactly 26.0 grams"). Jones insists the tests themselves vindicate his find, regardless of the stationery question.

But doubts haven't dampened the rabbi's enthusiasm for the quest. He, too, had a theory about the Ark. He knew someone, he said, who had already locat-

ed it. He told us about another rabbi he knows who was with a group of seekers when they secretly tunneled beneath the Dome of the Rock to explore the ruined foundations of the temple upon which the Muslim shrine rests. They were stopped mid-dig by Israeli authorities, but what's not generally known, what's only whispered about among the cognoscenti, is what happened just as they were halted.

They said they'd come within inches of breaking through a final layer of mortar to a still-intact chamber they were certain was nothing less than the secret compartment where the Ark had been hidden.

The authorities prevented them from breaking through, but the rabbi in the lead claimed to have heard—dimly but unmistakably—through the fragile subterranean masonry, an awesome *roaring* sound like a fierce wind. A sound he said he knew for sure was the roaring breath of God.

PART TWO

Entering "a Very Dark Hole"

In Which a Learned Man of God Speaks Gravely About "the Curse of the Scrolls"

East Jerusalem. The courtyard garden of the palace of Pasha Rabbah Effendi el