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THE MYSTERIOUS
LIFE AND
IMPECCABLE
DEATH OF
CARLOS
CASTANEDA

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CASTANEDA



MIKE
SAGER

Shaman: The Mysterious Life and Impeccable Death of Carlos Castaneda

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Published in the United States of America.

Jacket design and illustrations by WBYK

www.wbyk.com.au

Interior design by Siori Kitajima, SF AppWorks LLC

www.sfappworks.com

Cataloging-in-Publication data for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN-13:

Paperback: 978-1-950154-19-7

eBook: 978-1-950154-20-3

Published by The Sager Group LLC

www.TheSagerGroup.net

In conjunction with NeoText

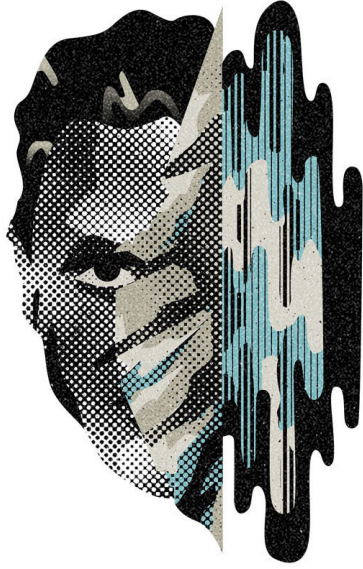
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SHAMAN

THE MYSTERIOUS LIFE AND
IMPECCABLE DEATH OF
CARLOS CASTANEDA

MIKE SAGER





“Castaneda wasn’t a common con man, he lied to bring us the truth. His stories are packed with truth, though they are not true stories, which he said they are . . . This is a sham-man bearing gifts, an ambiguous spellbinder dealing simultaneously in contrary commodities—wisdom and deception.”

—Castaneda scholar Richard de Mille



Some say he was a breakthrough academic and visionary shaman. Others say he was a sham. Either way, he shaped a generation of mystical thinkers and magic mushroom eaters. The mysterious life and impeccable death of Carlos Castaneda as told by his wife, his son, his mistresses, and his followers.

The followers doused the headlights of their dusty blue Hyundai and coasted into their regular spot, a no-parking zone diagonally across the quiet intersection from the Sorcerer's low-slung compound. It was a cool Tuesday evening in early August, just past eleven. The sky was unusually clear for Los Angeles; the mystical heavens twinkled invitingly through the tinted windshield of the ten-year-old compact. Crickets sang, a dog barked, the engine ticked off heat. They sat in silence for a few moments, enjoying the powdery fragrance of the night-blooming jasmine, girding themselves for another mission.

"You ready?" asked Greg Mamishian, scanning the compound for signs of activity. He was a short man, fifty years old, with close-cropped gray hair and an elfin sparkle in his eyes. A former Army helicopter mechanic with the spare, sinewy body of a vegetarian, he had lived his entire life—excepting his stint in Vietnam—within a ten-mile radius. Self-employed as an electrician, he worked, as a rule, only five hours a day, commute-time included. He lived modestly in a rustic, two-room cabin with a wood stove and no television in the pleasant wilds of Topanga Canyon, favoring quality of life over a big paycheck, self-determination over the treadmill of achievement and acquisition. A talented tinkerer with a fondness for silly jokes, he was a rabid aficionado of slapstick comedy. "Mongo only pawn in

game of life,” he liked to say about himself, quoting his favorite line from the movie *Blazing Saddles*.

“I don’t know,” said his wife, Gaby, sitting behind the wheel. She checked her watch, knitted her brow, a look of concern. “It’s a little early. The Energy Trackers might still be inside.”

Gaby was a tiny woman, five feet tall, thin and severe, with jet black shoulder-length hair parted in the middle. Born in a small town in Bavaria to a school teacher and his wife, she had come early to the conclusion that life promised something infinitely more magical than her mother’s middle-class dreams. Since her teens she’d been on a constant search, exploring philosophy, literature, religion, and politics, trying on a world view, shucking it, trying on something else. In her early twenties she was a member of a radical group that contemplated a trip to Hanoi to stop the war. Later, she joined an underground team of Christians who smuggled suitcases full of Bibles into Eastern Bloc countries. After living for a while in Spain and throughout Europe, she immigrated to America to pursue primal scream therapy. Over the next five years, she says, she “cried an ocean of tears.”

For both of them, this was a second marriage. Though they’d been together six years, they’d only recently tied the knot; these missions had been the catalyst. Every couple needs a hobby, a binding interest. In an odd, wonderful way, the Sorcerer had become theirs. They were, they’d discovered, one hell of a team. Greg had dubbed them the Followers. The pun, of course, was intended.

Gaby supplied the vision, the ideas, the tenacity. She read the omens, established the energetic connection, tracked the phantom, stood vigil

against inorganic predators seeking to appropriate their energy. It was she who'd first brought them into the Sorcerer's world. And, it was she who'd been most hurt when they were cast out so unceremoniously from his inner circle.

Greg's role was more focused on the practical. He came up with materials and strategies, added support, enthusiasm, and unrelenting good humor, a valuable quality on long, monotonous stakeouts fueled with green tea and McDonald's fries. Where Gaby seemed to be driven by deep personal feelings she kept masked behind a cool, almost academic exterior, Greg was more emotionally detached, someone who'd come along for the ride and found himself hooked on the adventure, the giddy folly of it all. Maybe he was never quite as invested as Gaby; commitment was not really his strong suit—he was a get-along kind of guy who always kept one foot on either side of the line. Regardless, his vivid dreams had shown him something special, something of the Second Attention she hadn't yet seen, couldn't even imagine. Since he'd begun practicing the ancient ways of the Sorcerer, he'd grown adept at shifting his assemblage point. He'd traveled to other worlds, flown without wings—he'd seen awesome, terrifying, beautiful, incredible things, things that changed his life. So what if the Sorcerer had once made fun of his sandals?

“What kind of Impeccable Warrior worries about time?” Greg asked in typical fatuous style, turning toward Gaby. He raised one finger in the air, stating the elemental: “Time, my dear, is irrelevant to luminous spheres like ourselves.”

“I . . . don't . . . know,” Gaby said hesitantly, ignoring his attempt at levity, glancing nervously across the street. She pinched her thin lips with her thumb and first two fingers, something she always did when she was stressed. Usually, her voice carried the hard residual edge of her German

accent. Tonight, though, she sounded soft and anxious. Something was bothering her. Something just didn't feel right.

One of the things that irked her most about their estrangement from the Sorcerer was the fact that it had come at a time when she was beginning to make real progress.

It had happened toward the end of an evening in the rented dance studio in Santa Monica where the group practiced their Magical Passes—martial art-like movements designed to gather energy. She was listening intently to one of the Sorcerer's three-hour monologues—highly entertaining affairs, think Lenny Bruce meets Fidel Castro meets Mescalito, the cricket-like being with a warty green head that embodies the spirit of peyote—when a vortex appeared behind the Sorcerer's head, a kind of liquid swirl in the air, a whirlpool, just behind him to the left.

Since then, the magic and the revelations had grown stronger and stronger. Like Greg, over the months of their surveillance, she had continued to practice the passes—the pair had, in fact, just come from their regular practice group, one of the hundreds of independent cells across the globe. Lately, she'd begun to notice this voice inside of herself, a voice beyond the everyday chatter of the mind, a sort of anchor, a storehouse of knowledge. The Sorcerer called it the Emissary. It answered her questions, guided her choices. It told her unwaveringly this quest of theirs was supported by universal intent.

It also told her, on this particular Tuesday night in the summer of 1997, to be careful. Something was different. Something was wrong. She could feel it.

“Let’s go,” Greg said impatiently, reaching for the door handle.

“Let’s just wait a few more minutes, okay?”

The yellowish stucco compound occupied a large corner lot in the tidy neighborhood of Westwood Village, not far from the campus of the University of California, Los Angeles. A rambling, L-shaped building with shallow peaks and a shingle roof, it had bars on the windows and a large, internal courtyard, all of it obscured from view by a 12-foot privet hedge running along the street sides of the property.

From their parking place on the southwest corner of Pandora and Eastborne Avenues, the Followers could watch both gated entrances of the compound, each of which had a different address. The right side, on Eastborne, seemed to be used only by male visitors. According to the Sorcerer’s teachings, the right side symbolized experiential knowledge, everything we know—the Tonal. The left side symbolized the mysterious, the unknown—the Nagual. The Sorcerer was also known as the Nagual, the last of a line of shamans stretching back thousands of years to the Toltecs, the pre-Hispanic Indians who inhabited the central and northern regions of Mexico prior to the Mayans. The left entrance, on Pandora, was used by the Sorcerer and his women: the three Witches, the Chacmools, the Blue Scout, the Electric Warrior, and the other female members of the inner circle. The Followers called it Pandora’s Gate.

To the rest of the world, the Sorcerer was known as Carlos Castaneda. In 1968, at the height of the psychedelic age, he had published *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge*, the first of twelve books

describing his apprenticeship in the deserts of Mexico to an Indian shaman, and his journeys to the “separate reality” of the sorcerers’ worlds. Like Herman Hesse’s *Steppenwolf* and Aldous Huxley’s *The Doors of Perception*, *The Teachings of Don Juan* and its sequels became essential reading for legions of truth seekers over the next three decades. Castaneda himself became a cult figure—seldom seen, nearly mythological, a cross between Timothy Leary and L. Ron Hubbard: a short, dapper, brown-skinned, Buddha-with-an-attitude who likened his own appearance to that of a “Mexican bellhop.”

Though the Sorcerer had ten million books in print in seventeen languages, he had lived in wily anonymity for nearly thirty years, doing his best, in his own words, to become “as inaccessible as possible.” Most people figured he had a house somewhere in the Sonoran Desert, where he’d studied with his own teacher, a leathery old Indian brujo named Don Juan Matus, who had taken his body and his boots and had disembarked in a flash of light for the Second Attention many years ago, leaving Castaneda behind to close out his line “with a golden clasp.”

In truth, Castaneda had lived and written most of that time right here in Westwood Village, a neighborhood of students and professors not far from Beverly Hills. As the Followers were beginning to discover, most of what was generally believed about the Sorcerer was not remotely factual.

For the past eighteen months or so, at least three times a week, Greg and Gaby had made these clandestine pilgrimages. They followed the Sorcerer and his party to restaurants and movies, to inner-circle practice groups, anywhere they could. They shot video at every opportunity. A major tenet of the Sorcerer’s way was erasing personal history; he never allowed himself to be photographed or tape recorded. The last major legitimate interview he’d given was to *Time* magazine in 1973; even they couldn’t persuade him to pose for a full-face picture. The esteemed newsweekly

ended up running an abstract drawing on the cover. The story described Castaneda as “an enigma wrapped in a mystery wrapped in a tortilla.”

The Followers weren't sure, exactly, what they were after. They just felt kind of compelled. And they wanted to know more.

On the one hand, what they were doing felt kind of tacky and intrusive, like they were peeping toms or paparazzi, or maybe more like they were children watching their parents have sex.

On the other, it felt like a legitimate—albeit amateur—anthropological exercise. The Sorcerer himself had earned a PhD in anthropology from UCLA; his third book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, had served as his thesis. His own journey had begun as an undergraduate inquiry into ethnobotany, a study of the natural hallucinogenic plants of the Southwest. In a way, the Followers considered their activities a sort of academic homage. And besides, they knew in their hearts their motives were pure, their energetic connection was strong and true. They meant no harm to the Sorcerer. Indeed, they liked him. They respected him. They just wanted to be close. The Sorcerer always talked about seeking nonordinary reality. It was hard to explain, perhaps, but this was theirs.

At last, the Followers exited the Hyundai. They were dressed for the occasion all in black. Taking care, they shut their respective doors quietly and crossed the street.

They began at the Eastborne side of the property and walked northwest along the exposed perimeter. As was their custom, they linked arms and

assumed a nonchalant posture, like a couple out for their customary postprandial stroll.

They'd taken only a few steps when suddenly, out of the hedge in front of them, a family of raccoons emerged—two adults and two babies in a single-file line.

Raccoons were certainly not uncommon in the area, but the Followers had been to the neighborhood at all times of day and night and had never noticed any before. They watched raptly as the furry critters perambulated unhurriedly along the sidewalk, a darling little Disney grouping. The last one in line was a bit plump. It struggled to keep up.

The Followers followed the raccoons around the corner, north on Pandora. Twice, the second adult in line, the smaller—the mother?—broke rank, circled around, coaxed the fat baby with her nose to hurry up, then went back to her place in the line. When they reached the gate used by the Sorcerer, the Witches, and the rest—Pandora's Gate—the raccoons turned abruptly right and filed through the hedge. The father, the mother, the first baby disappeared. The last one, the fat one, stopped and turned around. He looked at Greg and Gaby for a long moment, a beckoning type of expression, dark eyes sparkling from within his dark mask, as if to say: "Follow me."

Greg took a step forward. The fat baby vanished through the hedge. Greg took another step forward and bent down to see where he'd gone. Just then, a large black moth flew out of the hedge. It hovered in the air for a second or two, right in front of his face, so close he could feel the disturbance of the air, the flutter of tiny wings tickling the tip of his ample Armenian nose. A palpable sense of alarm overcame him, a strong suggestion to Keep Out.

He stood up quickly, his eyes like saucers. “Whoa!” he exclaimed, a stage whisper. “Did you see that?”

Gaby just looked at him. She couldn’t even speak.

For several long moments the Followers stood riveted to their places on the sidewalk.

Crickets sang. A dog barked. The leaves on a fig tree nearby rustled in the breeze.

Greg and Gaby both felt a weird tingling sensation that moved up and down their spines.

And then . . .

Nothing.

Crickets. The barking dog. The rustle of the leaves.

Greg looked at Gaby. Gaby looked at Greg. He raised his hands, palms up, shrugged his shoulders. Then he nodded his head toward the Sorcerer’s driveway, twenty feet to the north.

Gaby cut her eyes nervously toward the driveway, then back to Greg. She took his arm. Slowly, they continued their stroll toward the driveway, toward the large trash can at the curb.

Greg looked north, then south.

Coast clear, he opened the can and peered inside.

Grinning triumphantly, like an archeologist unearthing a pre-Cambrian pot, he began removing bags—the usual white plastic household variety, secured at the top with twist-ties. He handed three bags to Gaby, took the remaining four himself.

Neither Gaby nor Greg quite remembered which one of them had first come up with the idea of taking the Sorcerer's trash. It just sort of happened spontaneously one night. By chance they'd come to the compound on a Tuesday; trash cans were at curbs all over the neighborhood for collection the next day. As the night dragged on, the Followers watched as a cast of marginal characters combed through the neighborhood to dig for recyclables.

If the homeless could rifle the Sorcerer's trash, they figured, why couldn't they?

And so Tuesday nights became Trash Night. Every week, late in the evening, after practicing their Magical Passes with a group of like-minded (though less literal) followers at a rented dance studio in Santa Monica, Greg and Gaby would drive the short distance to the Sorcerer's compound and liberate his trash.

Once home in their cabin in Topanga Canyon, they'd light a fire in the wood stove, sit on the floor before it, and begin studying the contents of the bags, one at a time. Slowly, they put together a puzzle picture of the life of the great and mysterious man. Whatever looked important or significant they kept. Of the leavings, whatever could be burned went up in smoke.

As you would guess, the Followers learned a great many things from the Sorcerer's trash. They learned the septuagenarian Sorcerer, who was said to live in celibate solitude, cohabitated with at least five women—a fiftyish caretaker; a young woman he'd adopted; two of the three Witches (powerful practitioners and best-selling authors themselves, who claimed they had also studied with Don Juan); and a disabled old woman who was said to have been “energetically damaged” many years ago during her studies with Don Juan.

The Sorcerer and the Witches, who were in their sixties, ate a lot of chicken and eggs—the mounds of bones and shells rankled the Follower's vegetarian sensibilities and stunk up their tiny cabin. Also evident was a fondness for ceramic snakes and Mexican earthenware. Someone in the compound was clumsy: broken glasses, dishes, and electronics were frequently observed. Clearly, several or many of the women in the compound had a taste for fine clothes—Armani, Barneys, Neiman Marcus. Often the discarded apparel had been cut into pieces. Sometimes pieces remained intact—Gaby often wore a pair of DKNY leggings and a beautiful creamy leather jacket she remembered seeing on one of the Witches. A corduroy jacket with leather elbow patches had belonged to the Sorcerer

himself. It fit Greg perfectly; he wore it everywhere, even to practice group. It was his fondest possession.

The Sorcerer and the Witches favored wooden stick matches, possibly to clear the smells in their bathrooms—generally the spent sticks were in bags with the other bathroom trash. They appeared to enjoy word games, anagrams, and crossword puzzles. They cut their own hair. There was mail addressed to dozens of different people—over time, the Followers figured each of the occupants of the compound had several different aliases.

They subscribed to the Nation and to the New Republic. They loved German chocolates and Diet Pepsi, little airline bottles of vodka, Kotex Lightdays pads. There were insulin syringes and acupuncture needles, Chinese paper lanterns, red-handled garden clippers, a prescription for phenobarbital, assorted baby blue boxes from Tiffany & Co., literature on health foods and liver cancer, check stubs and bank statements and legal papers, copies of royalty checks, brochures for luxury yachts, ticket stubs from a trip to Hawaii, communications from fans and detractors, tapes full of answering machine messages, a list of home phone numbers for the entire inner circle, brochures touting ecotours, and a bunch of tapes and records by the Spanish crooner Julio Iglesias.

It was also evident that the Sorcerer was fond of getting married in Las Vegas. Discarded marriage certificates the Followers found in the trash indicated the Sorcerer had legally married two of the Witches, in ceremonies dated two days apart in September of 1993. A web-generated computer check confirms the marriages, along with several others between the Witches and male members of the inner circle, including the Sorcerer's literary agent, and the novelist and screenwriter Bruce Wagner, who gave a lengthy and obtuse interview for this story about his association with the Sorcerer but refused to divulge specific details.

Now, on this cool Tuesday night in August, loaded down with their latest take—a total of seven white plastic bags of trash—the Followers walked quickly south on Pandora, heading for their car.

As they passed the gate, Gaby spied a white-clad form leaving the house. She stepped up her pace, but it was too late.

“Hey! Stop!”

As commanded, the Followers froze and turned around slowly.

It was one of the Chacmools, a thirtyish woman with close cropped hair. The Followers had come to know her during their time with the inner circle.

The Chacmools were named for the massive statues of “fierce dreamer guardians” standing watch at the Mayan pyramids of Tula and Yucatan in Mexico. Here in Westwood, Chacmools were the Sorcerer’s bodyguards and personal assistants. At practice sessions and paid seminars, the Chacmools demonstrated the Magical Passes, aerobic movements with names like The Saber Tooth Tiger Breath, The Being From the Ground, and The Crustacean Long Form.

The Chacmool looked at Greg and Gaby with flames in her eyes. “What do you think you’re doing?” she thundered indignantly.

“It’s only trash,” Gaby said fiercely, rolling her r as Germans will do. Oddly, she didn’t feel nervous at all. In fact, she felt amazingly calm, as if someone had disconnected the wires to her fight/flight response. Even her perspective had shifted. It felt as if she wasn’t present at all, like she was watching the whole scene in third person.

The fierce Chacmool ripped the trash bags from Gaby’s hands. She gestured for Greg to put his down.

“You’ll never get close to us again,” she hissed, gathering up the bags.

That’s what you think, thought Greg. He, too, felt inordinately calm. It was as if they were getting a sign that what they were doing was wholly justified. At that moment, he was sure he was acting on the side of right.

Pulling perhaps from Charles Chaplin, Greg cocked his head and crooked his arm. Gaby threaded her arm through his. Together, they walked nonchalantly in the direction of their car.

After a few steps, Greg called back cheerily over his shoulder:

“Tell Carlos we said hello.”

There was a knock at the door, and Margaret Runyan smiled quizzically at her gentleman caller, a handsome Jordanian businessman she'd been seeing almost daily for the past two weeks. "Now who could that be at this hour?" she sang coquettishly, in the style of the era. She set down her cup and saucer, patted his knee, rose from the chintz-covered sofa.

Though she'd lived in Los Angeles for nearly fifteen years, her voice still carried the demure, lilting cadence of Charleston, West Virginia. She'd grown up on a dairy farm, the eldest of six children, her daddy's favorite, a sickly little bookworm with jet black hair, Coke-bottle glasses, and startling, gold-flecked blue eyes.

It was January 1960. Runyan had just returned from dinner with her wealthy suitor at a fancy Middle Eastern restaurant. They'd sat on pillows the floor, eating with their fingers, watching belly dancers, drinking copious amounts of red wine.

Runyan shared her surname with her cousin, the writer Damon Runyon. At thirty-nine, she'd worked her way up to chief telephone operator at Pacific Bell. She had porcelain skin and Cleopatra bangs, a short strand of pearls around her neck. She was resplendent tonight, as always, in a clingy black knit cocktail dress with a scoop neckline, a piece from the designer Clair McCardle, who was very much in vogue at the time. Though she considered herself unattractive—owing mostly, one would guess, to the thick glasses she wore to correct her nearsightedness—Runyan was tall and lithe with an ample bosom. In the retrograde parlance of the time, men would all the time tell her how well she was "put together."

Runyan lived rent-free in an apartment building owned by her aunt, a dress designer. Runyan herself had been bitten at an early age by the fashion bug: she spent much of her paycheck on clothes, a large portion of which were handmade by a South American seamstress. Years earlier, she'd come close to marrying the famous pulp-novelist Louis L'Amour. He penned beautiful love poems to her but lacked an automobile; they went everywhere by bus—she wrote him off prematurely as a failure. As it was, Runyan had been engaged a number of times to rather eccentric men. She'd been married twice, first to a poet and then to a Mafia-connected real estate tycoon. Both men insisted she quit her job and become a full-time housewife. Neither union lasted more than six months.

Runyan was an early prototype of a postmodern woman, who believed in paying her own way and making her own decisions, living un beholden to anyone. The great failure of her early life, she would later confide, was thinking she had to marry a man in order to sleep with him.

Runyan was also a prototype of another postmodern character, the New Age Seeker. She had a keen interest in what were known at the time as the pseudo-sciences—numerology, astrology, parapsychology—and she was well-read in philosophy and religion and literature. Hermann Hesse and Aldous Huxley were among her favorite writers. Her favorite historical figure was The Buddha. She was an avid student of a popular mystic from Barbados named Neville Goddard.

A spellbinding lecturer with legions of followers, Goddard believed a person could alter the future and achieve personal goals through the manipulation of their dreams, something he called “controlled imagination.” Goddard’s self-avowed personal goal—promoted through paid seminars, a weekly television show, and a popular self-published book

called The Search—was to jar his disciples out of the dangerous ruts of their ordinary, real world perceptions: to help them, in his words, “To Go Beyond.” Goddard believed in erasing personal history, awakening the untapped portions of the imagination, cutting ties with friends and loved ones. He preached something he called the I AM, an invocation of the God-like within all of us. Goddard was also said to be imbued with special powers. Sometimes, when he lectured, his face appeared to glow. On several occasions, it was said, he was spotted simultaneously in two different places. He also claimed to have the ability to generate an “energetic double,” a doppelganger existing in the same dimension.

Runyan clicked across the hardwood floor in her black pumps, peered through the peep hole in the door of her fifth floor apartment.

Standing in the hallway in the dark olive suit she’d bought him was the short, dark-skinned, South American anthropology student she’d been dating for the last five years. He called himself Castaneda Arana, but he was enrolled at UCLA as Carlos Castaneda. She hadn’t seen him since just before Christmas, when they’d had a falling out. From the appearance of the cozy scene inside her apartment, she hadn’t been crushed by his absence. She opened the door about eight inches, stuck her face through the crack.

“Carlos!” she exclaimed. Her blue eyes, framed by her bangs, magnified by her glasses, appeared enormous. “You didn’t tell me you were coming by.”

“I’d like to meet your new friend,” he said calmly in his accented English.

Castaneda was a slim man, five foot five, with the broad nose, high cheekbones, ample chest, and short legs of his high-country Indian ancestors. A curly lock of brilliantined black hair hung down roguishly over his forehead. His eyes were large and brown; the left iris floated out a bit, giving the impression he had one eye focused on something in the distant beyond.

Though not handsome in a classical sense, Runyan found Castaneda to be wildly charming and incredibly magnetic. He called her Margarita or Mayaya; it sounded so exotic when he whispered into her ear. Sometimes, he would listen intently while she spoke, riveting her with his deep eyes, seeming to drink in her soul. At other times, it was if he was alone on a stage, in a spotlight only he could see, riffing brilliantly, passionately, manically for hours at a clip—speaking of his life, his art, his dreams and fears and desires.

Castaneda was shy around people he didn't know, but he came alive in more intimate settings. He had a gift for storytelling and an earthy sense of humor, and he was so present, so absolutely directed, Runyan would later say, that social intercourse with him was a palpable, exhausting experience —“like being drenched by successive sets of huge waves of pure energy directed at me alone.”

Somehow, over the five years of their association, in his very odd, very intense way, Castaneda had made Runyan feel like she was “the only woman on earth, the only person in the whole world who mattered, who could possibly understand”—except for those frequent periods when he would disappear, often for weeks at time.

As she'd come to learn, this was the tradeoff of being with Castaneda. In certain respects, it made her feel terrible: Runyan really and truly loved him, more than anyone before. He didn't have to give her anything or do anything for her, she was just happy to be with him. When he was gone, she felt as if something very important was missing.

In other respects, however, his erratic attentions suited her just fine. She'd always had a problem with commitment. If he could be independent, then so could she. She didn't like clingy men.

"I don't want you to come in," Runyan said firmly, still speaking through the partially opened door. "Please go away. We'll talk later."

"No," Castaneda said. "I just want to come in and say hello, to speak with your new friend for a few minutes."

Runyan's will was never a match for Castaneda's. Since the first time she'd laid eyes on him—a brief, chance meeting at her dressmakers' home/studio—she'd been deeply smitten.

The second time she saw him—she'd called the dressmaker and insisted on another fitting, hoping the dark stranger would be there again—the two had spoken briefly. He told her he was a painter, a writer, and a sculptor. He said he'd love the opportunity to show her his paintings, or to do a bust of her in terra cotta, his specialty. At an opportune moment, when the dressmaker was out of the room, Runyan slipped Castaneda a copy of Goddard's book, *The Search*, inscribed with her name and address, which she'd just

happened to bring along to the fitting. “You must read this and tell me what you think,” she said, laying on an extra dollop of southern lilt.

From that night on, Runyan practiced Goddard’s techniques of controlled imagination, hoping to summon Castaneda to her side. Every evening, before she fell asleep, she’d lie in bed and concentrate on her personal goal. Goddard taught that the sleeping state sealed instructions given to the unconscious mind. Dreams, he said, could become reality if properly nurtured.

Six months later, at nine p.m. one Friday evening in June 1956, her goal was finally realized. The doorbell rang and Castaneda walked into her apartment, acting as if they’d met only yesterday. Their involvement would span the next decade and a half.

Castaneda was ten years younger than Runyan, a sophomore at Los Angeles Community College, majoring in psychology.

He told her he’d been born in Italy on Christmas Day, 1931, the product of an “illicit union” between a sixteen-year-old student at a Swiss finishing school and a visiting Brazilian professor. Shortly after his birth, he said, he was taken by his maternal aunt back to São Paulo to be raised. At fifteen, after being expelled from a prestigious private school, he’d begun traveling the world, studying art in Italy, Montreal, and New York before coming to Los Angeles to continue his education. He also said he was a veteran of U.S. Army Intelligence. He was vague about his service, mentioning both Korea and Spain; a long ugly scar stretching from his abdomen to his groin was the result of a bayonet wound, he said.

Castaneda and Mayaya seemed a perfect match—two passionate, keen, eccentric minds who'd been lucky enough to cross paths. Though Castaneda had very little money—to support his studies, he worked variously as a cab driver, a grocery stock clerk, a liquor delivery man, an artist for Mattel toys, and an accountant in her dressmaker's shop—Runyan was comfortable and generous. They attended concerts and plays, lectures, readings, and art openings. They frequented the beatnik coffee houses that had begun to spring up along Hollywood Boulevard, rubbing shoulders with Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac. Gradually, Castaneda's interest in painting and sculpture began to fade; he took to carrying a three ring binder with him everywhere, filling it with romantic poetry and prose. One of his poems won a contest and was printed in the LACC student newspaper.

Castaneda had a particular fondness for movies: Ingmar Bergman classics, B-grade horror pictures, Russian films. He was fascinated by all things Russian, particularly Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, who had recently taken power in Moscow. In Castaneda's eyes, Khrushchev was a determined leader who had come up from the bottom rung of society to grab the reins of one of the most powerful countries in the world. Over time, Castaneda developed a fantasy that Runyan would one day meet the great man. To this end, he encouraged her to take her college entrance exams, then helped her enroll in a night-school, where she began taking classes to learn Russian. She would continue her studies for several years and become proficient. The Khrushchev meeting never came to fruition.

A dapper man who favored fedoras and pastel Don Loper shirts, nicely pressed slacks and highly polished shoes, Castaneda cut his own hair and tailored his own clothes. He'd add months of wear to a shirt by removing a frayed collar, turning it inside out and then sewing it back on, a skill he'd learned, depending which version he told, either in the army or while living with a band of gypsies in Italy. Like many of his stories, the details sometimes changed.

He was partial to Mexican food, dim sum, pizza, long walks on the beach, nightclubs, and fine department stores. In a university community populated overwhelmingly with Caucasians, he seemed insecure about his height, his thick accent, his dark skin. On occasion, for reasons Runyan could never fathom, he told people he was a Hasidic Jew. Another thing she could never fathom is why they never had intercourse. Though Castaneda avidly enjoyed giving her pleasure orally, it went no further.

Having been exposed by Runyan to her favorite writers—Huxley, Hesse, Goddard, and J. B. Rhine, “the father of modern parapsychology”—Castaneda became an avid participant in “bull-sessions” with their increasing circle of like-minded friends, holding forth on subjects ranging from astral projection to trance running to ESP. The cozy, spirited gatherings, usually held at the apartment of a friend, would run into the wee hours, fueled by Castaneda’s favorite wine, Mateus Rosé, which he jokingly referred to as “my most valuable teacher.” His favorite subject, hands down, was Huxley’s experiments with mescaline and alternate realities; he chose the topic for a term paper for his second-year English class at LACC.

After he received his associate’s degree, Castaneda enrolled in the anthropology department at UCLA, a change of direction influenced by the publication of a book called *The Sacred Mushroom*, by Andrija Puharich. The book dealt with Puharich’s work with a Dutch sculptor who could recall vivid details of his past life in ancient Egypt. Placed under deep hypnosis, the sculptor became Ra Ho Tep, a Fourth Dynasty shaman who spoke a lost Egyptian dialect.

Puharich’s work with Ra Ho Tep revealed that the ancient shamanistic phenomenon of leaving the body was linked to the use of the sacred mushroom, *Aminita Muscaria*. As part of his study, Puharich interviewed the anthropologist Gordon Wasson, an expert on drug use among primitive mystics. Wasson told of an ancient mushroom cult that still existed in

remote regions of the Mexican desert, in which curanderos, or sorcerers, ate psilocybin mushrooms in healing and divination ceremonies. Of particular interest to Castaneda was the fact that Puharich had also involved Aldous Huxley in his experiments. With Huxley in attendance, Ra Ho Tep had requested and was given some sacred mushrooms, and then proceeded through the motions of an ancient ritual. Puharich's book also included conversations with anthropologist J. S. Slotkin, who specialized in the study of the Native American Church, which used peyote to reach dream states of nonordinary reality.

These notions of nonordinary reality appealed to Castaneda. He identified strongly with the Dutch sculptor who brought forth Ra Ho Tep from his subconscious, a man named Harry Stone. Like Stone, Castaneda was a foreigner in America, shy and insecure, who'd been trying to no avail for almost a decade to establish himself as an artist. The idea of never reaching his potential frightened Castaneda. He often complained to Runyan about the routine sameness of his very ordinary life, how he got up every morning, went to class, went to work, came home, started over again the next day. It was not the kind of future he'd envisioned, a lifetime toting his lunch to work in a brown paper bag. There had to be something more.

Soon after, Castaneda found himself in an undergraduate anthropology class called California Ethnography. Needing a topic for a term paper, he decided to go back to the well, to continue to look at the work of Puharich, Huxley, Wasson, and Slotkin. Honing his topic further, he settled on an ethnobotanical study of the natural hallucinogenic plants of the American Southwest.

The professor's assignment promised an A to anyone who actually went into the field and found an authentic indigenous informant to interview.

Now, on this January evening in 1960, several weeks since their last meeting—during which time, he'd say, he was roaming the Sonoran Desert in search of an indigenous informant—Carlos stepped through Mayaya's doorway and slipped past her into her living room, where he came face to face with her gentleman caller, a wealthy Jordanian businessman she'd been seeing daily for the past two weeks.

The two men chatted amiably for a few minutes, and then the subject turned to Runyan, who had resumed her place on the overstuffed chintz sofa, next to the Jordanian. His name was Farid Aweimrine. He was the brother of another man Runyan had dated in the past; they'd met at a Christmas party. Castaneda continued to stand.

"You know," said Farid, "I would have married Margaret the first night I met her if my divorce had been final."

"Over my dead body!" Castaneda said, indignant.

"Well why haven't you married her?" Farid asked.

Castaneda looked puzzled for a moment. "You know," he said at last, somewhat wistfully, "I never thought of that."

He turned to Runyan. "Come on, Mayaya! We're getting married tonight!"

On a winter afternoon in 1973, on a beach near Malibu, Castaneda sat side by side with Gloria Garvin, a blanket wrapped cozily around their shoulders. The sun was low on the horizon, a blood-orange ball. Wispy clouds glowed pink and magenta against the perfect cerulean sky. Seagulls swooped overhead, calling and complaining; sandpipers skittled on stick legs across the sand; surfers in wet suits worked a left-hand break a quarter mile offshore.

Castaneda took Garvin's hand tenderly in both of his and gazed into her startling, gold-flecked blue eyes.

"You have always been like a bird, like a little bird in a cage," he said, projecting his voice above the rush and pound of the waves. "You are wanting to fly, you're ready, the door is open—but you're just sitting there. I want to take you with me. I'll help you soar. Nothing could stop you if you come with me."

Garvin was 26 years old, petite with porcelain skin. She wore her hair in Cleopatra bangs. An attractive young woman who'd heard her share of come-on lines during her hippie wanderings of the late sixties, no one had ever spoken to her quite like Castaneda did. She realized what he was saying, how it sounded—it was kind of corny, really, the sort of drivel usually reserved for the well-thumbed pages of her mother's romance novels. But somehow . . . somehow, it didn't come across that way at all. Somehow when the words came from his mouth they were new and magical and moving. She felt transfixed.

Gloria had first heard of Carlos Castaneda on a cold day in early 1969, at a long table in the dining room of an old Victorian townhouse in Haight-Ashbury.

She and her boyfriend had hitch-hiked to San Francisco from LA to see the Grateful Dead at the Fillmore West. After the marathon concert, they went to a friend's group house to crash. There they were greeted with a delicious treat: a pumpkin pie laced with hashish.

After sating themselves on pie, they lay around on pillows on the floor for the rest of the night, reveling in the synchronous pleasure of getting high and satisfying one's munchies simultaneously, mesmerized by the glowing light from a paper Japanese lantern that seemed to be receiving them all into the universe.

The next afternoon, still pretty wasted, the crew was sitting around the dining room table, drinking coffee and smoking joints, when someone began reading aloud from a review of *The Teachings of Don Juan*.

A powerful book, simply written yet deeply affecting to some, *The Teachings* was the first of what would grow into a series of twelve—a groovy trip into the heady netherworld of psychedelic drugs and alternative realities; think Kerouac does psychotropics.

Classified as nonfiction anthropology, the book was issued first by UCLA's University Press. Shortly thereafter, it was purchased and reissued by Simon & Schuster. Though the book professed to be nonfiction, it read

more like a novel, an combination of Hemingway's bland staccato and García Márquez's magical realism.

Regardless of its genre—about which there would eventually be much debate—the book was perfectly suited to its times, an era of sex and drugs and flower power, of back-to-the-land innocence and marvelous cosmic yearnings. Offered in the form of journal entries, the story is set in a hard scrabble desert landscape of organ pipe cacti and glittering massifs. The story centers around the strange, difficult, and sometimes antic apprenticeship of a skeptical, slightly annoying young academic to a wily old Yaqui Indian sorcerer named Don Juan Matus, whom Castaneda said he met through a friend in the waiting room of a Greyhound bus station, on the Arizona side of the Mexican border, approximately six months after his marriage to Margaret Runyan.

Peopled with indigenous Indians, anthropomorphic incarnations, and spirits both playful and malevolent, the book evokes mysterious winds and terrifying sounds, the shiver of leaves at twilight, the loftiness of a crow in flight, the raw fragrance of tequila, the vile, fibrous taste of peyote. Castaneda writes extensively of his meetings with Mescalito, who comes to him disguised successively as a playful black dog, a column of singing light, and a cricket-like being with a warty green head.

Castaneda hears awesome and unexplained rumblings from dead lava hills; converses with a bilingual coyote; sews shut the eyes of a lizard with a needle and thread harvested from a cactus; meets the guardian of the Second Attention, a hundred-foot gnat with spiky tufted hair and drooling jaws.

In dry, detached, scholarly language, the book details the preparation and ingestion of humito, the little smoke, made from the dust of psilocybin mushrooms. Yerba del diablo, the devil's weed, is also known as datura. It causes Castaneda's head to sprout wings, beak and feet, transform into a crow, and fly off into the heavens. At every new obstacle and development, Castaneda plays the skeptical rationalist, a modern Everyman, trying to translate his mystical experiences into the kind of concrete scientific understanding upon which much of Western thought is based.

As such, his only tools are questions—which come in the form of his persistent, fumbling efforts to keep up a Socratic dialogue with Don Juan.

Upon awakening from an experience with the devil's weed, one of twenty-two drug trips documented in Castaneda's first two books, he asks the old sorcerer, "Did I take off like a bird?"

"You always ask me questions I cannot answer," the old man tells him. "What you want to know makes no sense. Birds fly like birds and a man who has taken the devil's weed flies as such."

Beneath the spectral fireworks and psychedelic drama in *The Teachings* (and in the subsequent eleven volumes to follow over the next thirty years) is Castaneda's quest to become an Impeccable Warrior, a Man of Knowledge wholly at one with his environment.

Agile and strong, unencumbered by sentiment or personal history, the Warrior knows that each act may be his last. He is alone. Death is the root of his life, and in its constant presence the Warrior always performs

“impeccably.” He is attuned to the desert, to its sounds and shadows, animals and birds, power spots and holes of refuge. The Warrior’s aim in becoming a Man of Knowledge, the young academic learns through his apprenticeship, is “to stop the world” and “see”—to experience life directly, grasping its essence without interpreting it, coming eventually to the realization that the universe, as perceived by everyday humans, is just a construct based on shared customs and languages and understandings.

Don Juan tells his bumbling and often frightened student that, in truth, people are not really made of flesh. Human beings, he explains, are actually made of fine filaments of light, glowing white cobwebs that stretch from the head to the navel, forming an egg-shaped assemblage of circulating threads, with arms and legs of luminous bristles bursting in all directions. By these threads, every person is joined with every other, and with their surroundings, and with the universe.

As Don Juan lectures Castaneda: “a man is a luminous egg whether he’s a beggar or a king and there’s no way to change anything.”

Of particular import in this cosmic anatomy is the Assemblage Point, a place of intense luminosity, located about an arm’s length behind the shoulder blades, where perception takes place. By shifting or displacing the assemblage point during dream states, the old Nagual taught, a practitioner could gain entrance into other worlds, something called “The Art of Dreaming.”

When Garvin returned to LA, flush with the new possibilities of Don Juan’s world, she mentioned the far-out book to her aunt, who was working in the graduate research library at UCLA. The author, her aunt happened to know, spent a lot of time in the rare book room of the graduate school library. The

married author happened to be dating a library worker the aunt knew well. In short order, a meeting was arranged.

Garvin took her boyfriend as a reinforcement. The couple spent the whole afternoon with the great man in the student union at UCLA. Sitting at a Formica table, amid the hectic bustle of the student body, they spoke about life and death, drugs and sex, meaning and shamanism.

At the end of their time together, Castaneda took Garvin's hand for the first time. "This was a most auspicious meeting," he said. Then he nodded his head in the direction of her boyfriend. "Too bad you brought this nincompoop along with you."

Over the next few years, Garvin and Castaneda stayed in touch by letter and by phone. At his urging, she enrolled in UCLA as an undergraduate anthropology student. Later, also at his urging, she broke off her longstanding engagement to her boyfriend. Castaneda, meanwhile, published his second book, *A Separate Reality: Conversations with Don Juan*, and then his third, *Journey to Ixtlan: The Lessons of Don Juan*, which served simultaneously as his doctoral thesis.

In a departure from the first two volumes, Castaneda revealed in *Ixtlan* that the drug part of the program had ended. After ten years of study with the old Indian, he wrote in the introduction to *Ixtlan*, "It became evident to me that my original assumption about the role of psychotropic plants was erroneous. They were not the essential feature of the sorcerer's description of the world, but were only an aid to cement, so to speak, parts of the description which I had been incapable of perceiving otherwise. My insistence on holding on to my standard version of reality rendered me

almost deaf and blind to Don Juan's aims. Therefore, it was simply my lack of sensitivity which has fostered their use."

Now his eyes had been properly opened, he wrote, it was necessary to focus on what the old sorcerer had called the "techniques for stopping the world." Only then could he become an Impeccable Warrior.

"One needs the mood of a warrior for every single act," Don Juan tells Castaneda in his typical fashion—harsh and judgmental but with a spirit of love, like a scolding old uncle. "Otherwise one becomes distorted and ugly. There is no power in a life that lacks this mood. Look at yourself. Everything offends and upsets you. You whine and complain and feel that everyone is making you dance to their tune . . . A warrior, on the other hand, is a hunter. He calculates everything. That's control. But once his calculations are over, he acts. He lets go. That's abandon. A warrior is not a leaf at the mercy of the wind. No one can push him; no one can make him do things against himself or against his better judgment. A warrior is trained to survive, and he survives in the best of all possible fashions."

By the time *Ixtlan* was published, Castaneda was indeed surviving in the best of all possible fashions. He had become a cult figure; would-be disciples and counter-culture tourists were flocking to Mexico, combing the deserts for mushrooms and Don Juan. *The Teachings* was selling an astounding 16,000 copies a week. *Ixtlan* was a hardback best seller. Sales of the paperback made Castaneda a millionaire. He traded in his old VW bus for a new Audi and then he bought the two-house compound on Pandora in Westwood Village.

Before long, *Time* magazine came calling. The newsweekly was one of the most influential of its day; you could probably say that getting that the front

cover of Time was for decades the equivalent of going viral—with the exception that Time practiced fact-based, textbook journalism.

In what would be his first and last major interview, Castaneda told Time he was born to a well-known family in São Paulo, Brazil, on Christmas Day, 1935. At the time of his birth, he said, his father, who would later become a professor of literature, was seventeen. His mother was fifteen. He was raised by his maternal grandparents on a chicken farm until he was six, at which point his parents took custody. The happy reunion was cut short, however, when his mother died. The doctor's diagnosis, Castaneda told Time, was pneumonia, but he believed the cause had been acedia, a condition characterized by spiritual apathy. "She was morose, very beautiful and dissatisfied; an ornament," he told Time. "My despair was that I wanted to make her something else, but how could she listen to me? I was only six."

Castaneda was left to be raised by his father, a shadowy figure whom he mentions in the books with a mixture of fondness, pity, and contempt. His father's weakness of will, he told Time, was the obverse to the "impeccability" of Don Juan. In the books, Castaneda describes his father's efforts to become a writer as a farce of indecision. He told Time: "I am my father. Before I met Don Juan, I would spend years sharpening my pencils and then getting a headache every time I sat down to write. Don Juan taught me that is stupid. If you want to do something, do it impeccably, and that's what matters."

Castaneda was educated, he told Time, at a "very proper" boarding school in Buenos Aires, where he acquired the Spanish (he already spoke Italian and Portuguese) in which he would later interview Don Juan. At fifteen, he said, he became so unmanageable that an uncle, the family patriarch—Castaneda told people he was Oswaldo Aranha, a legendary gaucho and

revolutionary who would later become president of Brazil—had him placed with a foster family in Los Angeles in 1951.

Thereafter, he said, Castaneda enrolled in Hollywood High School. Graduating two years later, he went overseas to study sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Milan, only to discover “I did not have the sensitivity or the openness to be a great artist.” Dispirited, he returned to Los Angeles and enrolled at UCLA. “I really threw my life out the window. I said to myself: if it’s going to work, it must be new,” he told *Time* of his resolve to take up anthropology. In 1959, he told the magazine, he changed his name to Castaneda.

“Thus Castaneda’s own biography,” concluded *Time*, “creates an elegant consistency—the spirited young man moving from his academic background in an exhausted, provincial European culture toward revitalization by the shaman; the gesture of abandoning the past to disentangle himself from crippling memories. Unfortunately, it is largely untrue.”

Doing his own research, the reporter for *Time* came up with a radically different account of Castaneda’s early life. Later, Castaneda’s history would be further investigated by Richard de Mille, the adopted son of movie mogul Cecil B. DeMille, who has made a life’s work of studying Castaneda.

According to U.S. immigration records, Carlos César Salvador Arana Castaneda entered the U.S. at San Francisco in 1951, at the age of twenty-six. He became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1959. He was born in Peru, in the ancient Inca town of Cajamarca, where witches and curanderos were not at all uncommon in the town marketplace.

Castaneda was the son of a watchmaker and goldsmith named César Arana Burungary, who owned a jewelry shop in the downtown section of the city and was himself the son of an Italian immigrant. Once a promising student, his father was known during his youth as a Bohemian who squandered his academic opportunities after falling in with a fast crowd of artists and bullfighters in the capital city of Lima. Settling down at last to family life as an artisan and shopkeeper, he was a tireless chess player, a constant reader of Kant and Spinoza.

Castaneda's mother was a slender and almond-eyed girl, Susana Castaneda Novoa. She was sixteen at the time he was born. She died when Castaneda was twenty-four. He refused to attend the funeral, according to a cousin, and locked himself in his room for three days without eating. When he emerged from his mourning, he declared his intention to go to America.

In his youth, Castaneda was an altar boy who attended the local public school. He often accompanied his father to the jewelry shop; over time he became skilled in working with copper and gold, but he hated selling the things he made. After dropping out of school in Cajamarca, Castaneda moved to Lima, where he finished high school and then enrolled in Bellas Artes, Peru's national academy of fine arts.

A former roommate remembers Castaneda as "a big liar and a real friend," a witty fellow who loved carousing but never drank or smoked, who made a living playing cards, horses, and dice while harboring "like an obsession" to go to the United States and become rich from gambling.

A former classmate recalled Castaneda as “a very capable fellow, likable and rather mysterious. A first-class seducer. I remember the girls used to spend the morning waiting around for him at the Bellas Artes. We called him The Smile of Gold because he had, I think, a gold tooth. Sometimes he would go to the market with some used watches which he could only make run for two or three hours. He would sell the watches and then disappear . . . He was always thinking up unlikely stories—tremendous, beautiful things. At times he sold blankets and ponchos from the mountains.”

Confronted with these details by the reporter from Time, Castaneda was characteristically unfazed: “To ask me to verify my life by giving you my statistics is like using science to validate sorcery,” he said. “It robs the world of its magic.”

More alarming, perhaps, than the murkiness of Castaneda’s history, was the debate over the academic veracity of his work.

Billed as ethnography, it read like fiction and sold at the pace of a best seller—the envy, no doubt, of many a scholar who had worked in the trenches of anthropology for a lifetime. Though the panel of professors at UCLA who awarded his doctorate continued to stand firmly behind him—in an introduction to *The Teachings*, one of them lauds Castaneda for “his patience, his courage, and his perspicacity”—social scientists were more skeptical, labeling his work a “fictionalized composite in the guise of anthropology,” and as “dramatic rehash that borrowed heavily from the work of others at the expense of accuracy and truth.”

In his two volumes on Castaneda, de Mille collected ample evidence of what he considered a fraud.

Citing myriad examples large and small, he made a case that Castaneda's books were nothing more than cleverly conceived and masterfully executed works of fiction. Among hundreds of well-researched nits, de Mille pointed to the facts that, over his years of apprenticeship to the old Indian, Castaneda never learned the Indian names for any of the plants or animals he comes into contact with, and neither did Castaneda ever submit a specimen of Don Juan's mushrooms for chemical testing. De Mille quoted experts—Wasson among them—who said that hallucinogenic mushrooms do not, in fact, grow in the Sonoran Desert, and that the practice of smoking mushroom powder was unknown prior to Castaneda's books. According to Wasson, the godfather of such studies, mushrooms are more usually eaten or brewed into tea, and even when allowed to dry, they normally macerate into shreds, rather than into a powder. In any case, he said the leavings do not burn.

Though much of the story takes place in the desert, an expert on climatology—writing in de Mille's second book, a collection of essays and interviews debunking Castaneda's work—said desert conditions, during the times of year Castaneda describes, would have been harsh and impassable. In one of Castaneda's entries, for example, dated in August, Castaneda writes of hiking to the top of a hill at noontime “to rest in the open unshaded area until dusk.” In another entry, dated in June, he describes the evening wind as being “cold.” But summer temperatures in the Sonoran Desert are typically as high as 120 degrees by noon. At night, they hover around 100.

Moreover, throughout their extensive desert travels, Castaneda and Don Juan went unmolested by the kind of pests and predators—scorpions, rattlesnakes, swarming saguaro fruit flies, razor-toothed desert javelinas—that normally torment hikers. Neither does Castaneda mention some of the more colorful inhabitants of the desert— Gila monsters, chuckwallas, horned toads, nine-inch centipedes, and tarantulas as big as saucers.

Often during his adventures, Castaneda climbs high trees. Yet the trees in the desert—palo verde, ironwood, mesquite—are nearly impossible to climb, and neither are they high. Their branches tangle into thorny thickets. Higher than six feet they are too weak to climb.

Castaneda writes of catching five quails at once in a hastily assembled trap. He runs down a jackrabbit and snares it with his bare hands. He hurdles breakneck and terrified through the desert, through barrel cacti and prickly pears and thorny scrub bushes, but never once does he mention being stabbed or cut by thorns. And while he wrote in his books that he took notes on everything—his note-taking, in fact, becomes an object of derision by Don Juan and his associates—Castaneda never produced any field notes.

A close reading of Castaneda's books, according to de Mille and his collected experts, reveals Don Juan's teachings to be an amalgamation of American Indian folklore, oriental mysticism, and European philosophy. Others are drawn upon as well, including Huxley, Puharich, Slotkin, Wasson, Goddard, and Yogi Ramacharaka, a pseudonymous American whose works are still widely available in occult bookstores.

Of equal concern was the actual existence of Don Juan himself. According to Castaneda, the old Nagual was born in 1891, watched his parents murdered by soldiers, suffered through the government-forced diaspora of the Yaquis all over Mexico during the era. De Mille and his experts point out that while many Indian tribes, such as the Huichols, use peyote rituals, the Yaquis, as a rule, did not. Yaqui sorcerers, they continued, don't take apprentices, either.

It didn't help matters that not one known expert on the desert culture of the Southwest had ever heard anything about Don Juan and his party. Or that exhaustive attempts to locate the wily old Indian were unsuccessful. In *Carlos Castaneda, Academic Opportunism and the Psychedelic Sixties*, anthropologist Jay Courtney Fikes posits Don Juan was a composite of a number of different shamans who'd been discovered, variously, by Wasson and by several of Castaneda's colleagues in the anthropology department at UCLA. Indeed: Why else would a field researcher spend so much time in UCLA's graduate research library?

"Although Castaneda's concocted episodes often have something authentic about them, they trivialize Huichol, Yaqui or any Native American culture" Fikes wrote. "Those few kernels of truth Castaneda's books contain are dissolved inside a concoction full of spurious ingredients. Finding ethnographic truth in Castaneda's books is almost as laborious as panning for gold."

Even while debunking him, however, de Mille exhibited a fondness and an overarching respect for Castaneda and his work. The continuing saga might have been the product of Castaneda's mind—but what a marvelous saga it was, what a valuable mind:

"Castaneda wasn't a common con man, he lied to bring us the truth," de Mille wrote in his first book, *Castaneda's Journey*. "His stories are packed with truth, though they are not true stories, which he said they are. This is not your familiar literary allegorist painlessly instructing his readers in philosophy. Nor is it your fearless trustworthy ethnographer returned full of anecdotes from the forests of Ecuador. This is a sham-man bearing gifts, an ambiguous spellbinder dealing simultaneously in contrary commodities—wisdom and deception."

After the meeting in the student union, it would be four years before Gloria Garvin actually saw Castaneda again face to face.

Meanwhile, she read all his books, followed all the publicity, participated in the gossip rampant in the anthropology department at UCLA. Part of the gossip centered around Castaneda's very earthly reputation as a Lothario. Some even questioned whether he ever went to the desert at all—his wanderings, they said, were just a ruse to cover his bed hopping.

Besides the library worker—who, he would later claim, was energetically damaged during her own studies with Don Juan and would live with him in the Pandora compound for many years—Castaneda was also involved with two women in the anthro department, Regine Thal and Ann Marie Carter, who would later change their names to Florinda Donner-Grau and Taisha Abelar. He also began seeing a married mother of two named Judy Guilford, who would later call herself Beverly Ames, and then eventually Carol Tiggs. Tiggs would become especially famous in Castaneda circles as a powerful sorceress who crossed over into the Second Attention for ten years and then returned to help guide Castaneda and the others in his inner circle. Together, Tiggs, Donner-Grau, and Abelar would form the triumvirate of Witches who surrounded Castaneda for the duration of his life. All three would write books about their own apprenticeships with Don Juan.

Garvin talked to Castaneda now and then by phone, exchanged the occasional letter, but never saw him in person again until one day, walking across campus during the winter quarter of 1973, she spotted him.

Their eyes locked and he came over. He acted as if they'd last met only yesterday.

Not long after, Castaneda and Garvin were sitting side by side on the beach at sunset, a blanket wrapped cozily around their shoulders. He had her hand clasped tenderly in both of his; he gazed deeply into her startling, gold-flecked blue eyes.

“What this entails is not a normal relationship,” he told her. “I want to take you with me but it won’t be as a normal man, because I am not a normal man any longer. I want to take care of you. I want you to be my wife. I’ve always known that. Don Juan has told me that. He’s seen you; you’ve hovered around me in dreams. He has identified you as the woman who is going to be in the center of the hurricane with me. There are other winds in the north, south, east, and west, and they are very cold and ruthless, but you are not that way. I want to take care of you. I will do everything in my power for you, because this is a commitment, one that has existed for a very long time. One that will exist beyond this lifetime.”

With that, Castaneda leaned over and kissed Garvin. It was, she remembers, “an intense, directed sort of kiss, not passionate, not sloppy, not out of control, just very directed.”

As they kissed, the sounds of the beach—the pounding surf, the shrieking gulls, the laughter of children playing in the sand—seemed to disappear. All went silent. Time stood still.

Garvin felt herself giving something away to him, something very deep, something of herself she’d never reclaim.

Fast asleep on a futon in his modest apartment, late one night in the spring of 1985, a thirty-two-year-old computer technician named Jeremy Davidson found himself on a mountain top, wearing nothing but his underwear.

He was standing on a rocky ridge, at the edge of a sheer cliff. Eagles soared, riding the updrafts. Clouds floated past; wispy fingers of moisture caressed his face. Beneath him, hundreds of feet below, was a gorgeous clear lake. He turned slowly in all directions, inhaling the crisp air, taking in the view, trying to form a clear and lasting image of the whole place, performing a systematic intake, the way Don Juan recommended.

It was a wondrous alpine setting, with craggy escarpments and evergreen trees, snowcaps on the distant peaks. Though it was cold and windy, he was comfortable and warm, filled with a buoyant sense of well-being despite his precarious barefoot perch. A feeling of giddiness overcame him and he took off running—hopping and skipping from boulder to boulder like an astronaut bounding across the surface of the moon. Changing direction, he plunged straight down the cliff face, pausing here and there to flip and spin and twirl, throwing tricks like a gymnast, making his way toward the languid blue waters of the lake.

The scene changed and he was standing in a small cove, his toes buried in fine, gritty sand. Thinking it might help to cement the dream, to make it last longer, he decided to look at his hands as he'd been instructed. He sat down in the sand, concentrated on his palms, his fingers, his nails. Just then, a big wave rose up and washed over him, enveloping him in bubbles and blue, sending him sprawling.

Rising to his feet, Davidson moved toward the back of the cove, toward a trail. He walked for a while through dense woods, then came upon a building in a clearing, a huge Hansel and Gretel type affair, a gingerbread house with fancy trim. He got the feeling it was an abandoned resort hotel. He decided to explore.

The scene changed again. He was inside, in the lobby, a room with a fireplace and overstuffed chairs, a gift shop off to one side. There were cobwebs and dust everywhere. As he looked around, performing a systematic intake, things seemed to become more and more solid, as if he was watching an image download from the Internet onto a computer screen. He walked into the gift shop, helped himself to a dry T-shirt that was hanging conveniently on a rack.

Off to one side, behind the cash register, he saw an opening, like a door, leading into a blue-green world. He stood a moment, regarding the opening, trying to decide what to do next.

Then he spoke aloud: "I intend to go to where the sorcerers are. Take me to the sorcerers."

Shy and highly intelligent, a bit at odds with the world, Jeremy Davidson had first discovered the writings of Carlos Castaneda in the late seventies, while studying physics as a college junior.

He'd always been a seeker, a skeptic, a bit of an outsider, the kind of person for whom the normal order and the normal answers never seemed to ring

true. He'd experimented with psychedelic drugs, read extensively on Eastern and Western philosophy. He'd been a Buddhist, a Scientologist, an atheist, an orthodox Jew. More recently, during a bad period in his life, he'd rediscovered Castaneda. Starting with *The Teachings*, he'd worked his way through the series, which had grown by now to eight books.

Castaneda himself had long since disappeared from the public eye. Smarting, no doubt, from the effects of his exposure in the early seventies, he lived in quiet anonymity in the Pandora compound with the Witches, traveling around the country and to Mexico, churning out books all the while, honing the message and the method, taking it further with each new publication.

Though Castaneda said Don Juan left the world in 1973, dying "the immaculate death" of the Warrior, each subsequent book continued to expound upon Don Juan's teachings. Diligent readers noted the anthropological references seemed to grow fewer as the series progressed, and that the books increasingly bore the traces of other influences, such as phenomenology, Eastern mysticism, and existentialism. With Don Juan having left the world, Castaneda himself became the heir to the sorcerer's lineage; he was now himself the Nagual. No longer a disciple, he had become the prophet. As the books evolved, his focus turned more and more toward the Art of Dreaming.

According to Castaneda, Don Juan was an intermediary between the natural world of everyday life and an unseen universe called the Second Attention. Though Western minds are conditioned to believe the world in which we live is unique and absolute, it is, Don Juan taught, only one in a cluster of consecutive worlds, arranged like the layers of an onion. Don Juan said that even though humans have been energetically conditioned to perceive only their own world, they still have the capability to enter those other realms—

worlds as palpable, unique, absolute, and engulfing as the ordinary reality in which we live every day.

Don Juan said that in order for people to visit those other realms—the existence of which are constant and independent of our awareness—they had to first recondition their energetic capacity to perceive. To this end, he prescribed a series of techniques designed to displace the Assemblage Point, a place of intense luminosity located about an arm's length behind the shoulder blades, where perception occurs—where we receive the signals that tell us what we see, feel, hear, and understand. Furthermore, Don Juan said, once a person becomes adept at traveling to the Second Attention, he or she can ultimately remain there as a luminous egg for all of eternity, in a wonderful universe too vast and beautiful and complex and fulfilling to render in conventional language or ideas.

Reading all of this, Davidson felt invigorated and alive, perhaps more so than he'd ever been his whole life. Here, at last, was a belief system that felt right to him—a system that stressed living every moment to the fullest, as a Warrior and a Man of Knowledge; rising to every trial as a challenge; taking responsibility for everything you have a part in; living impeccably every single day. And, it was a system that explained the place of man in the universe, and the nature of that universe itself. Added to all of this was the promise of other worlds—not just worlds you could visit in an afterlife, but worlds you could visit right now, today.

In sum, the Sorcerer's Way was a mode of thinking and acting—a world view that offered its adherents not only ideas and guidelines but also procedures and results. You didn't just sit around praying and believing and having faith. You could act. You could make things happen. You could go places. You could even fly.

Davidson embarked on the path of the Impeccable Warrior. He sought to live each day as a challenge, as a discipline. He strove to eliminate self-importance, to use death as an advisor, to erase personal history, to disrupt the routines of his life. He tried to have a romance with knowledge, and to write to the people he cared about a blank check of affection. He practiced gazing and not doing, stalking and the right way of walking. He tried to stop the world and to see. He watched for omens and read infinity, a specific gazing technique where he focused on a fixed point until a violet field appeared, then continued to focus until a little blotch of pomegranate exploded into either written words or visual scenes. He spent hours recapitulating his life—a laborious process in which he reviewed each and every contact he'd ever had with another human being since his first memories after birth, an effort to regain wasted energy.

Slowly he began to become aware in his dreams.

He began traveling to the Second Attention.

Now Davidson found himself inside of a gift shop in a hotel somewhere in the mountains, having entered the Second Attention from his futon one night in the spring of 1985.

He walked through a doorway into a blue green world, intending to go to the Sorcerers.

As he entered the doorway, a force he had come to think of as The Spirit picked him up and flew him over a huge city square, filled with thousands of people. From his vantage point high in the sky, he could look down and

see the faces of those below. Most of them, he could see, were in some state of fear, degradation, agony. Some of them looked up as he soared past.

Again, he voiced his intent: “I intend to go to where the Sorcerers are.”

The scene changed and he found himself on the ground in a dark, smoky gray area. There were small, dark beings surrounding him. When he focused on them, they turned to face him. They were ghoul-like creatures, with yellowish eyes and a single protuberance extending out from their faces, terminating in creepy little mouths. They began advancing.

Retreating, Davidson entered another area. This one was inhabited by a different sort of beings—tall, dark blocks of living shadow, sentient rectangles. They began to close in and surround him . . . when suddenly he found himself standing on something like a gray tombstone that was lying flat on the ground.

Scared of all the weird beings, wishing to leave, Davidson knelt down and clenched his fist, placed it upon the stone.

“I want to go where the Chacmools are,” he said out loud. Nothing happened.

He was about to repeat his demand when a voice intervened. Restate your intention, the voice said.

“I intend to go to where the Chacmools are,” Davidson said.

With that, the scene changed. He found himself in a cave. There were boulders strewn everywhere.

Though there was no source of light apparent, the cave was bright as day. He walked around the cave, exploring, seeing what he could find.

A man jumped out from behind a bolder.

He was primitive, vigorous, wild looking, wearing fur clothes.

He ran toward Davidson; Davidson turned and fled. The caveman chased him through a vast system of tunnels and caverns, gaining with every step, getting closer and closer.

Just as the caveman was about to overtake him, Davidson spotted a hole in the wall. He dove through.

The scene changed and he was flying again. This time he was in a prone position with his arms extended, kind of like Superman.

Davidson felt his mood lighten. Up up up he sailed, high into the sky, toward the moon, bright and full.

He made a smooth banking turn and headed back toward earth, toward a shopping mall. In his mind, he considered leaving this place, flying out toward the countryside somewhere, but the voice inside his head overruled his thoughts and The Spirit took control of his flight, as it sometimes did.

He began to descend.

He flew into the mall, around the atrium, past a fountain and an escalator.

The scene changed.

He was inside a store, a sex shop. There was racy lingerie hanging on the racks, all kinds of sex toys on the shelves. He was about to pick up one of the toys when he noticed a bunch of people in a back room, men and women in various stages of undress, an orgy in progress. He stood for a few minutes and watched.

A man came over with his attractive girlfriend. He offered her to Davidson. His inner voice told him No!

Davidson ignored the voice and took the girl in his arms, began pulling off the remainder of her clothes. She seemed a bit reluctant. Davidson got the

strong impression she'd never done this sort of thing before, that she was only doing it to please her boyfriend. It bothered him a bit that maybe she wasn't totally into the whole scene, but she was really beautiful; it had been a long time since he'd been with a woman.

The voice again told him No!

He reached for her breast . . .

He awoke in his futon.

Davidson sat up, feeling a bit ashamed.

He had not acted like a Warrior. He shouldn't have crossed the wishes of the inner voice. He shouldn't have defied The Spirit.

It was months before he dreamed again.

At precisely 9 a.m. on Christmas Eve, 1993—the same time as every morning for the past several months—the phone rang in Melissa Ward's Santa Monica apartment.

This time she was in bed with a horrible flu; she just wanted to be alone. The phone rang again, then again. The shrill noise hurt her head. Finally, she picked it up.

“How’s my baby girl?” sang Carlos Castaneda.

“Still pretty sick, I’m afraid.”

“You’re coming to the dinner tonight, aren’t you?”

“I don’t know, Carlos,” she said, and then she sighed. “I feel like I’ve been run over by a truck.”

“But you have to be there! The whole dinner is for you!”

She rolled her eyes. They were a startling shade of cornflower blue, with gold flecks that shimmered in the light. “I guess I’ll have to see how I feel.”

“Why don’t I come over and bring you some chicken soup?”

“No, no, no!” she said, a bit alarmed. “Don’t bother. Really! I’ll be okay!”

“Well you have to rest,” insisted Castaneda. “Don’t go to work, don’t do anything, just rest. You have to be ready. Tonight, you become one of us!”

“Well, er, um,” Ward said, stalling. She ran her hand through her hair, palming her Cleopatra bangs away from her forehead, letting them drop.

Castaneda had been talking about this mysterious dinner for weeks now. Frankly, it gave her the creeps. Become one of us! The way he said it made her skin crawl. It had the distinct ring of something cult-like; she didn’t like the sound of it, not at all.

“I’m gonna try my best to make it,” she said half-heartedly.

“You must make it!” roared Castaneda. “Everything is ready. You are the Electric Warrior! We have been searching for you for all of eternity! We have found you just in the nick of time. You must come!”

Thirty-eight years old, petite and attractive, Melissa Ward was born beneath the Northern Lights at a secret military base in the Aleutian chain, where her father was serving. Though she was a bit too young to have been a hippie, she grew up with her feet planted firmly in the early seventies counter-culture. She was into eastern religions, Creedence Clearwater Revival, psychedelics, the writings of Gurdjieff and Huxley.

She was eighteen when she first read Castaneda. She'd just returned from backpacking through Europe; she was severely ill with colitis, in a lot of pain, trying to cure herself naturally with herbs. Staying by herself in a friend's cabin in the woods, trying to fight the sickness, she came upon a copy of *Journey to Ixtlan* on a shelf. She opened the book at random, let her eyes drift down the page.

"Death is always following you," she read. In her condition, the words rang very true.

She turned to the front of the book and started in.

Ward had been reading for an hour or so when she heard some weird scratching noises outside the cabin.

She struggled out of bed, looked through the window. There, on the deck, was a giant black bird, the biggest crow she'd ever seen. It was hopping up and down, acting very strangely, like it was trying to get her attention. Stranger still was the fact that crows play a significant part in Ixtlan. In Don Juan's world, crows are said to be the incarnations of powerful sorcerers and spirits. Under the influence of the devil's weed, Castaneda himself had become a crow—his head had sprouted wings, a bill, and feet, and had flown off into the heavens.

Over the next few days, as Ward continued reading the book, the crow visited again.

It hopped from place to place on the deck, knocked over little pots of herbs, tapped on the window with its beak, generally making itself known. By the third day, her curiosity got the better of her. She ventured out to the deck and sat down on a chair, within a few feet of her new companion.

The crow hopped up on her chair. She fed it grapes. She might have been delirious, but she could have sworn the crow had a benevolent presence. In an unexplainable way, it seemed to be there for her, to help her through this difficult time.

The crow visited every day for a month, until she was fully recovered.

Then it disappeared.

Time passed and she went on with her life, forgot all about Castaneda. After bouncing around from job to job, she enrolled as an undergraduate at UCLA.

By the time her junior year came around, in the winter of 1993, her life was full and hectic, more gratifying than ever. She was working part time as a nutrition consultant, writing for the college newspaper, doing an internship at the actress Jessica Lange's film company, taking a full load of classes—looking forward, meanwhile, to graduation and the promise of a job in either journalism or entertainment.

Then one day she got a phone call from her mom. She was dying of cancer.

The next nine months were “a living hell.” Ward nursed her mom to the end, held her hand as she took her last breath, sat alone with the body for three hours until the man from the funeral home came to take her. Ward handled all of the arrangements, served as executor of the will. There was nobody else to help. She did what she had to do.

By the end of summer she’d taken to her bed in a deep depression. Lying beneath the covers with the shades drawn, she repeated to herself a manta of despair: “Nobody cares. I’ve given up hope. Life sucks.”

Then one day in September, she ran into a friend at the health food store. He said he was going to another friend’s apartment to hear Carlos Castaneda speak to a small group. The session had been arranged primarily through the efforts of a German woman named Gaby Geuter, a New Age enthusiast and veteran of primal scream therapy who’d befriended Florinda Donner-Grau and other members of the inner circle after a reading at a women’s bookstore in Santa Monica.

For the first time in many years, Ward thought of the weird and friendly crowd who’d helped her through hard times. She decided to come along.

Though Ward didn’t realize it at the time, the fact that Castaneda had begun to appear in public after a twenty-year absence signaled a stunning change in direction for the Nagual and his party.

Over the last few years, they’d begun taking on select students for a weekly private class, held in a rented room in a dance studio. Now, apparently,

they'd decided to rev things up, to actively promote the ideas and practices of Don Juan on a larger scale, and to make them available for public consumption.

To this end, Castaneda and the Witches had hired a lawyer and formed several corporations, with the intent of establishing, according to a press release, “a magical relationship between the endeavors of a corporate unit in our modern world and the purpose and will of a bygone era.”

Toltec Artists was a management agency—run by inner-circle member Tracy Kramer, a well-known Hollywood agent—set up to handle the literary careers of Castaneda, the three Witches, and assorted other connected artists.

Laugan Productions was a company that sold instructional videos and other saleable products.

Most important was Cleargreen, which acted as both a publishing house and as the sponsor of seminars and workshops for a program of thought and action they were billing as Carlos Castaneda's Tensegrity.

Derived from the words tension and integrity, Tensegrity was said to be a modernized version of the “magical passes” developed by ancient Indian shamans and passed down secretly through twenty-seven generations to Don Juan and then to Castaneda and the Witches.

By practicing these exercises, Castaneda said, Toltec sorcerers had attained increased levels of awareness, which allowed them to perform “indescribable feats of perception” and to experience “unequaled states of physical prowess and well-being.”

Through the use of the Tensegrity exercises—a combination of martial arts, meditation, yoga, and aerobics—modern practitioners could achieve a new level of vigor, health, and clarity. And they could gain the kind of energy needed to displace the Assemblage Point and actively engage in the Art of Dreaming, traveling at will to other worlds. While it was earlier believed the Sorcerer’s Way was a solitary pursuit, Castaneda now said the “mass” created by a group of people practicing together caused quicker and more powerful results.

Though Castaneda had never before mentioned the “magical passes” in his writings; though other anthropologists insisted there was no such tradition of body movements among pre-Hispanic Indians; and though Castaneda had always eschewed the notion of selling his techniques and holding expensive seminars, it was Cleargreen’s purpose to disseminate the teachings of Don Juan to a large audience at a high price. What had caused the change of heart was not at all clear.

Perhaps, some suggested, Castaneda saw fertile ground in America’s ever-growing interest in physical fitness and New Age philosophy. Tensegrity was perfect—a time-saving two-fer, designed to benefit both the body and the mind.

Or perhaps, others suggested, Castaneda was becoming infirm and out of touch and the Witches had begun to call the shots.

Castaneda himself acknowledged that Don Juan had always insisted the magical passes be kept secret. This new path, Castaneda explained, had been spurred by an extraordinary event.

According to Castaneda, while following Don Juan's techniques, one of the three Witches, Carol Tiggs, had disappeared into the Second Attention from a hotel room in Mexico City.

Tiggs' calling, Castaneda said, was to act as a beacon from the other side, guiding initiates through the "dark sea of awareness."

But then one day ten years later, Castaneda was doing a reading at a bookstore when Tiggs suddenly reappeared. Her return, Castaneda said, convinced him that the "message of freedom" contained within the magical passes should now be passed onto the world at large.

Critics—many of them former fans and followers who were loyal to the integrity of the story thus far portrayed in his books—were not so sure about Castaneda's explanations.

"Castaneda had built himself up as a prophet through the Don Juan books," said anthropologist Jay Courtney Fikes. "The bible, so to speak, was written; but there was no ritual, so it was necessary to invent one."

Over the next several years, dozens of seminars—some lasting only a weekend, some as long as three weeks—would host thousands of Castaneda enthusiasts in the U.S., Mexico, and Europe.

The seminars cost from \$200 to \$1,000. Tables were set up to sell Tensegrity T-shirts (The Magic is in the Movement) and Tensegrity videos, which had been directed by the well-known novelist and screenwriter Bruce Wagner.

Also on sale were Tensegrity tools, for use in concert with the magical passes.

“The Device to Enhance Centers of Awareness,” was two balls made of Teflon reinforced by a ceramic compound. “The Device for Inner Silence” was a round, weighted leather-covered object for placement on the stomach. “The Wheel of Time” was said to have been invented by the Blue Scout; it was a flat disk made of compact foam rubber, extremely pliable, but durable enough to withstand pushing, pulling, and twisting.

Castaneda himself appeared at all the early seminars; he and the Witches gave long, amusing, passionate speeches. Interspersed with the lectures were Tensegrity demonstrations by the Chacmools, dressed in matching black workout uniforms.

Over the next several years, as the movement and the profits grew, more and more questions would be raised about the origins of Tensegrity. Some alleged Castaneda’s magical passes were nothing more than the appropriated teachings of a Santa Monica-based kung fu instructor and

“energy master” named Howard Lee, with whom Castaneda had studied for many years, and to whom Ixtlan had been dedicated. There were allegations Castaneda had paid a substantial sum of money and the phallus of a puma to Lee to deter him from taking legal action against Cleargreen. Lee denied this in an interview.

Smiling inscrutably, Lee refused to speculate upon the actual origins of Tensegrity. He did acknowledge, however, that once Castaneda began teaching Tensegrity, the formerly warm relationship between the two wise men became chilly.

On a balmy night in September 1993, having been invited by a friend she’d run into at the health store, a battered and depressed Melissa Ward found herself among a small group invited to an apartment in Santa Monica to hear Carlos Castaneda. The session had been arranged primarily through the efforts of Gaby Geuter, who would later form one half of the duo known between themselves as the Followers.

Ward brought a notebook and started out taking notes, but quickly gave up. There seemed to be no particular subject, no outline, no organization, just a torrential monologue of ideas and stories and jokes. Though she became frustrated at first, she found herself settling into her seat on the plush pile carpet and letting his words rush over and through her, concentrating not so much on what he was saying as on his energy. All who knew him will agree: Castaneda had about him a calm, otherworldly presence. Being with him felt warm and fluid, like floating in a hot tub. As the talk continued, she began to feel happy about dragging herself out. Already, she felt better than she had in months.

Castaneda rambled for two hours.

At the completion of his remarks, he received an extended standing ovation.

Ward just sat there, kind of stunned. But then she stood up too, not wanting to be singled out as a newcomer or interloper or whatever.

The next thing she knew, Castaneda was standing beside her. He leaned down, whispered in her ear: “You have very nice energy,” he said.

Then he was gone.

The next day, Ward was contacted by one of the Chacmools, who invited her to a private class. She went. Castaneda seated her front and center. The entire time, he seemed to be lecturing only to her.

The next day, one of the Chacmools called to ask if Castaneda might have the privilege of calling her at home.

Soon, Castaneda was telephoning every morning at nine a.m. sharp, sometimes late in the evening as well. He called her his baby girl. He asked her about her life, her family, her past sex life, her history of venereal disease. He told her if she smoked pot, she should stop, and that she must completely stop having sex. “You must zip it up! You must not let anyone touch your baby-thing,” he said.

Castaneda asked Ward to tell him her innermost secrets; he asked her to make a list of all her sex partners, to recapitulate each experience. He asked her if she'd ever "been taken away kicking and screaming by men in white coats." Frequently, he asked her to lunch or dinner. His favorites were sushi or Cuban. Usually, she said no.

Once in a while she felt bad for rejecting him and said yes. Invariably, one of the Chacmools would call at the last minute and cancel, saying Castaneda was sick or that he had to leave town unexpectedly.

Though they never met alone outside the weekly private classes, Castaneda continued to call each morning. Again and again he remarked on her incredible energy. He insisted they were soulmates and vowed never to leave her.

Ward didn't know what to make of his attentions. His tone was distinctly sexual—or maybe romantic is a better word—but he never made a single move. Never. It was like he had a weird need to make women fall in love with him—only to keep them at arm's length.

Even though she had zero interest in him sexually, his attentions were strangely habit-forming. Despite her better judgment, she kept answering the phone.

Soon Castaneda began telling Ward she was the Electric Warrior they'd been searching for. On Christmas Eve, 1993, they held a special banquet in her honor.

Though she was creeped out by the notion of what seemed to be happening—she felt a little like Mia Farrow in *Rosemary's Baby*—she attended the dinner.

It turned out to be a classy affair, eighteen people with champagne and candlelight at a long table in the banquet room of a fancy French restaurant in Westwood. Castaneda was at one head, Florinda Donner-Grau at the other. She was seated to the Sorcerer's left.

There were toasts and speeches. In between, each of the Witches came in turn to sit in the chair beside her and chat. Though she was being treated like the special guest—or like a bride—the Witches struck her as very catty and a bit hostile. They would ask her questions and then berate for her answers. Her tastes in music, clothing, literature were treated with disdain.

As the night passed, she had a waking vision of a wedding chamber awash in flowers and set to receive her and her sexagenarian groom.

To her great relief, however, when she said she was tired and wanted to leave, no one stopped her.

But literally the moment she stepped into her apartment, the phone began ringing.

“They all love you! They’ve all been calling!” he said excitedly. She could hear the call waiting feature beeping on his line. “Everyone’s crazy about you, baby girl!”

From that night on, Ward was embraced as part of the inner circle.

She didn't understand what this Electric Warrior thing was all about; nobody bothered to explain. There were others with weird titles as well—the Lecture Warrior, the Blue Scout, the Orange Scout, The Trackers, The Elements, the Chacmools—most of them attractive younger women.

Yes, it was a little creepy, all this attention from a man old enough to be her father. But nobody was touching her, nobody was actually doing anything inappropriate—though Castaneda had this weird obsession with teaching her how to make a fist.

Actually, the inner circle was kind of fun. She hadn't been a part of a group of friends for many years; it took her mind off her problems, a great relief. The members of the inner circle were all smart and well read. They were up on current events, loved making puns, were always joking around and pulling practical jokes, infantile stuff, like a bucket of water atop a door. There were lots of dinner parties at people's houses and at restaurants. A favorite spot for ribs was Tony Roma's on Sunset Blvd.

Persuaded to forswear her vegetarian diet, Ward gained ten pounds.

One night, at a party at a beautiful Craftsman house, Castaneda prepared a jelly which he said was made of devil's weed. He said it would make everyone fly. Nothing happened to Ward.

At home in the compound, the inner circle was fond of putting on madcap performances. A troupe of players, comprised of inner circle members, was called, alternately, the Sorcery Theater or the Theater of Infinity.

The skits were hilarious. Most of them were written by Bruce Wagner, known to the inner circle as Lorenzo Drake. He'd become part of the inner circle after interviewing Castaneda for the lad's magazine, *Details*.

Wagner's best known of ten books would be *I'm Losing You*. Of his movie properties, best known would be the David Cronenberg-directed, *Maps To The Stars*, from a Wagner script. For her starring role in the film, Julianne Moore would win Best Actress at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival. Wagner accepted the award on her behalf.

Wagner's Sorcery Theater was a little like Saturday Night Live meets Don Juan Matus. Slickly produced affairs, complete with props and costumes, most of them were didactic, and self-referential, portraying Castaneda's philosophy and his rules, but always in a lampoonish fashion.

One favorite skit featured a gypsy fortune teller who picked out members of the audience and proceeded to ruthlessly deconstruct their personalities—idiosyncrasies, habits, foibles. Another favorite featured the Chacmools doing nude, martial-arts-like movements while holding sharp knives. There was a skit featuring a six-foot dildo; another was aimed at Melissa Ward and the Lecture Warrior—a musical rendition of “I Don't Know How to Love Him” from *Jesus Christ Superstar*. In time, the Witches—all of whom wore their hair extremely short and dressed beautifully at all times—seemed to grow to accept Ward; they began inviting her along to movies and on shopping trips to Century City Mall, which was walking distance from the Pandora compound.

Toward the end of 1994, Ward began seeing changes in Castaneda and the inner circle.

Cleargreen was getting stronger, holding more and more seminars. But inside the compound, the group seemed to be foundering. She could feel the inertia in the gatherings; it felt as if everyone was waiting around for something, trying to figure out what to do next. At one point, Castaneda told her: “We don’t know what to do. We don’t know where to go. We don’t know what’s happening.”

It freaked her out. He was always so confident.

Around this time, in their moments of private talk, Castaneda began to complain about the tyranny of the Witches. They were evermore bossy. They wouldn’t listen to what he said. They didn’t even seem to care. In a more public setting, Castaneda spent a large chunk of a Sunday private class railing about the fact that Taisha had made herself a hamburger the night before and had refused to make one for him.

Ward also noticed Castaneda was having trouble seeing—she heard whispers about diabetes. While no one said anything out loud, there seemed to be new interests among the group on the subjects of acupuncture and nutrition. The fact that Ward was very knowledgeable in this area seemed to draw the inner circle more closely around her; she began to advise on daily menus and meal preparation.

One thing was plain to see: Castaneda didn’t look very well. His skin had become ashen, his coloring had faded, his hair had turned entirely gray. He

wobbled a bit when he walked. Sometimes, when he came close to talk to Ward, or to help her practice making a fist, she noticed this peculiar, sour smell about him; it reminded her of the way her mother smelled before she died.

Then one day Castaneda approached her in private. “I’m leaving soon and I’m taking you and everyone else with me,” he said.

Ward was horrified. The first thing that came into her mind was Jim Jones, Kool-Aid, the mass cult suicide in Guyana.

She didn’t know what to say.

C. J. Castaneda polished off a tall glass of tap water and turned out the kitchen lights of his rambling house in suburban Atlanta. It was 10:30 p.m. on April 27, 1998, the end of another long and difficult day. The blond, blue-eyed, thirty-six-year-old was bone-weary as he climbed the stairs to the master bedroom

A former real estate appraiser and sometime-inventor, with a taste for the good life and a near-genius IQ, C. J. had recently started a new business, a chain of drive-up coffee kiosks. The logistics of servicing and running his far-flung mini-enterprise kept him hopping from long before sunup until way past dark, seven days a week. The toll was beginning to show on his

handsome face; his weight-lifter's build had gone a bit soft around the middle. Yawning, he undressed and slipped between the sheets, kissed his wife Lisa good night. As was customary, she had settled in with a book, preferring to read for thirty minutes before going to sleep herself.

C. J. set his alarm for 4:40 a.m., pulled the covers over his head. In a few moments he was out.

Though few people knew it, Carlton Jeremy Castaneda was Carlos Castaneda's adopted son, born to Margaret Runyan and a Mormon businessman named Adrian Gerritsen. As with every other chapter in Castaneda's life, the story of C. J.'s birth and adoption was convoluted.

Six months after Castaneda and Runyan were married in Mexico, Castaneda had come home to their apartment one afternoon and told her excitedly about meeting an old Indian in a Greyhound bus station near the Arizona border with Mexico.

Castaneda was enrolled at the time in his first undergraduate anthropology class at UCLA, a course called California Ethnography. His professor had promised an A grade to any student who found an actual Indian informant for a term paper. For months, he said, Castaneda had been making trips to the desert, searching for an indigenous wise man to teach him the ancient secrets of hallucinogenic plants. Though he'd once dreamed of becoming a great artist, Castaneda now had his sights set on a career as a professor of anthropology. UCLA had a great and competitive department. Surely this desert meeting was an auspicious start on his new path.

Runyan, of course, didn't see things his way at all. She was deeply in love with Castaneda; she wanted her husband at home with her. This was her third marriage, and though it had started out quite romantically—a showdown between two suitors, culminating with a midnight road trip to see a Mexican justice of the peace—things were already beginning to sour. Besides her suspicion he was seeing other women, a big stumbling block in their relationship was their respective schedules. While Runyan continued working days as chief operator at the phone company, Castaneda was attending classes during the day and working nights as an accountant for another fancy dress shop in downtown LA.

On top of his already-hectic schedule, Castaneda told Runyan, he was going to start spending his weekends in the desert with this mysterious old man.

Fights and unpleasantness ensued. Castaneda moved out of the apartment.

Soon, Runyan began dating Gerritsen, a tall, handsome Mormon from Utah. Gerritsen was in the clothing business and came frequently to LA on buying trips. In love with Gerritsen, Runyan asked Castaneda for a divorce, and he was surprisingly accommodating. They drove back to Mexico, to the same justice of the peace who had married them. Unbeknownst to Runyan, the official would never complete the paperwork.

Also unbeknownst to Runyan, Gerritsen and Castaneda knew one another. It was Castaneda who'd arranged his first meeting with Margaret. Furthermore, in a letter filed in connection with a probate case many years later, following Castaneda's death, Gerritsen would confirm that Castaneda had asked him to father a child with Runyan—a child whom Castaneda would then adopt as his own.

Despite the facts that Gerritsen was already married to a woman in Salt Lake City, and Margaret was still married to Castaneda in the eyes of Mexican law, Gerritsen and Runyan were married in Mexico a short time after beginning their affair. Though the newlyweds never took up housekeeping together, a son was born in August 1961.

Not long after the birth, Castaneda came to Runyan and confessed that their Mexican divorce had been a charade, something he'd done to appease her so he could continue his field work in peace, hoping, he said, that they'd someday reunite as a couple. Since they were still married, he said, he wanted to adopt her son.

Castaneda had been seeing the boy frequently since his birth and had already developed a deep attachment. He called the boy Cho-cho; the boy called him Kiki. Castaneda took him everywhere—to the beach, the movies, the mountains, his power spot in Topanga Canyon.

People became accustomed to seeing the brown-skinned man carrying the tow-headed boy everywhere on his shoulders. Often, he brought Cho-cho along to classes at UCLA. When asked, Castaneda proudly claimed Cho-cho as his biological son, attributing the obvious differences in coloring to the boy's mother, whom he said was Scandinavian.

When Cho-cho was two years old, Castaneda appeared at Runyan's apartment with documents from the California Department of Public Health naming Castaneda as the natural father of Carlton Jeremy Castaneda.

Her relationship with Gerritsen having long since dissolved, Runyan agreed to sign. A boy needs a father, she figured. Castaneda was the only one her son had ever known. And they were so lovely together. It was clear they shared the kind of total and unqualified love she'd always hoped to share with Castaneda.

Over the next five years, Castaneda saw a lot of his Cho-cho; the boy regularly spent nights in his room at Castaneda's rented house. In the mornings, for breakfast, Castaneda fed him bananas and raw hamburger to help him grow. The pair walked hand in hand to school. In the evenings, while Castaneda worked on his first book, the two women who would later become the Witches—Florinda Donner-Grau and Carol Tiggs—read the boy his bedtime stories.

Just before going to sleep, Cho-cho would always stand beside Kiki at his desk. "What are you writing?" he'd ask.

"I'm writing a book for you, Cho-cho," Castaneda would answer. "You're going to make it the most magical of books, because you're the biggest brujo on the planet."

Although money was still a problem, Castaneda insisted on paying for Cho-cho's tuition at an exclusive Montessori School in Santa Monica—one of his classmates was the daughter of the actor Charlton Heston. Castaneda also paid for Cho-cho's doctor bills, clothes, and karate and skiing lessons. He would continue paying child support through the mid-1970s, when he and Runyan were legally divorced.

When the boy was seven, Runyan and C. J. left LA, a move that pained Castaneda. For many years after, Castaneda continued to correspond with Runyan, writing of his undying love for both his Mayaya and his Cho-cho.

“I went by your old apt. in the Valley a couple of days ago and got an attack of profound sentimentalism,” Castaneda wrote to Runyan in August 1967. “You are my family, dearest Margarita . . . I owe you a very, very special something. I owe you the most beautiful and magical of all my dreams, my Cho-cho. You brought that dream into my life for one instant, and compared to that instant of dreaming all my other dreams are nothing . . . Take care! And kiss my Cho-cho’s big toe for his Kiki. I keep on telling to myself that I will go hiking with him.”

The following year, Castaneda dedicated his first book, *The Teachings of Don Juan*, to C.J. and Runyan. (This dedication would be omitted in subsequent editions.) C.J. was mentioned in several subsequent books as well. Castaneda discusses “a little boy that I once knew” with Don Juan, telling him “how my feeling for him would not change with the years or the distance.”

In 1978, Castaneda attended C. J.’s high school graduation in Tempe, Arizona; for the next three years, he paid his college tuition. They were reunited briefly a few years later in New York.

Starting in 1993, around the time Cleargreen and the other companies were formed, Castaneda ceased all communications with C. J. and Runyan.

Despite repeated phone calls and letters, C. J. was thwarted in his efforts to contact Castaneda by members of Cleargreen, who appeared to be handling all of Castaneda's personal business with the outside world. Other friends, including an old roommate and one of Castaneda's favorite UCLA professors, were similarly thwarted in their efforts to contact the great man. Frustrated, C. J. heard news of a lecture Castaneda was giving in October 1993. He flew to Santa Monica to try to see the only father he'd ever known.

C. J. waited in the parking lot outside the bookstore. When Castaneda spotted the strapping and handsome young man, he recognized him instantly. A smile lit his face. He seemed overjoyed. He embraced C. J. enthusiastically, kissing him on both cheeks, patting him on the back, speaking with warmth and animation.

Then two of the Chacmools took Castaneda, one by each arm, and hustled him away. As they were moving toward the van to leave, one of the Chacmools retrieved from Castaneda's pocket a piece of paper with C. J.'s phone number on it. As C. J. watched in horror, she balled it up and threw it into an outdoor trash receptacle.

Three years later, frustrated by Castaneda's continuing silence, C. J. paid \$400 to attend a Tensegrity workshop where Castaneda was slated to appear, once again hoping to reunite with his Kiki.

As he entered the door of the workshop, however, he was recognized by the Cleargreen organizers, who refunded his money and asked him to leave. When he and his wife went across the street to a mall to get lunch, members of Cleargreen followed at a not-so-discreet distance, lingering as the couple ate their meal.

As the 1990s progressed, Castaneda's contact with old friends continued to become less and less frequent. Though he was by now nearly blind and had to be helped to the stage for lectures, he became increasingly litigious.

Lawyers for Cleargreen filed suits attempting to block the publication of writings of a woman, named Merilyn Tunneshende, who called herself "The Nagual Woman." She asserted she'd also studied with Don Juan.

In 1995, a suit was initiated by Cleargreen's lawyers against an old friend named Victor Sanchez, claiming the jacket of Sanchez's book about Castaneda infringed on Castaneda's copyrights.

And in 1997, Cleargreen lawyers launched a suit against Margaret Runyan Castaneda and the publishers of her autobiography, *A Magical Journey With Carlos Castaneda*.

In February 1997, in Long Beach, California, Castaneda made his last appearance at a Tensegrity seminar. A spokesman for Toltec Artists said Castaneda had decided "the seminars were taking their own course and he did not need to be present."

Others had a different view of his absence. "He was taking medication, losing weight," said one Castaneda watcher. "People were becoming suspicious. If Tensegrity was supposed to lead to health and well-being, why doesn't he look so good?"

In the winter of 1998, Toltec Artists delivered to Castaneda's publisher the manuscript for his twelfth book, *The Active Side of Infinity*. In a departure from his other books, *Infinity* takes a somewhat apocalyptic view of the mystical universe, defining it as predatory and populated by shadowy entities called the Flyers, who prey on a man's glowing coat of awareness. Only by practicing Tensegrity, Castaneda suggests, can these dark forces be repelled.

In the book, Castaneda also reappraises his encounters with Don Juan, concluding strongly that the "total goal" of shamanic knowledge is preparation for facing the "definitive journey—the journey every human being has to take at the end of his life" to the region the shamans called "the active side of infinity."

"We are beings on our way to dying," Don Juan said. "We are not immortal, but we behave as if we were."

Much attention is given in *Infinity* to the departure of the old Nagual, and the notion that an enlightened sorcerer does not die a normal death but is consumed by "the fire from within," a sort of spontaneous combustion, gathering his mortal energy and carrying his body with him into the next realm. As if preparing his readers for his own leave-taking, Castaneda describes in great detail the departure of Don Juan and his party.

"I saw then how Don Juan Matus, the Nagual, led the 15 other seers who were his companions . . . one by one to disappear into the haze of that mesa, towards the north. I saw how every one of them turned into a blob of luminosity, and together they ascended and floated above the mesa, like phantom lights in the sky. They circled above the mountain once, as Don

Juan had said they would do, their last survey, the one for their eyes only, their last look at this marvelous earth. And then they vanished.”

On the night of April 27, 1998, C. J. Castaneda, once called Cho-cho by the only father he ever knew, was fast asleep in the master bedroom of his suburban Atlanta house when he started to become aware of the insistent buzzing of his alarm clock.

He opened his eyes. The clock said 4:40 a.m.

Just like every other morning, he reached over and hit the snooze button.

That’s when he noticed: Carlos Castaneda was sitting in a chair in the corner of the room, glowing a spectral shade of blue.

Kiki looked young again, and happy. The expression on his face was the same he used to make when lifting Cho-cho over his head to sit on his shoulders, the same as when he was standing over the sink, cutting the little seeds out of the center of a banana because Cho-cho didn’t like that part.

From across the room, Castaneda smiled at C. J. As he often did, he winked one eye.

And then . . . he was gone.

Seven minutes later, at 4:47 a.m., the alarm buzzed again.

C. J. sat up in bed, swung his legs over the side. Shaking off the cobwebs, he rose, padded to the bathroom, took a shower.

Ten minutes later, at 4:57 a.m., he was dressed, his hair still wet from the shower. As he did seven mornings a week, C. J. left the bedroom, padded downstairs, let the dog out the front door. He walked to the kitchen, poured dog food into a bowl.

Then, as usual, he looked at the clock on the microwave. It was always important to him to stay on schedule. He had a lot to do. Different spots to drive to. He had to be on time.

The clock said 11:10 p.m.

That's strange, he thought. He walked the few steps to the kitchen table and picked up his watch. It also said 11:10 p.m.

Puzzled, he let the dog back in the front door and returned upstairs to the bedroom.

The clock beside his bed said 11:11 p.m.

“Holy fuck,” he said out loud. “Lisa, wake up!”

His wife stirred and rolled over. “Why are you dressed?” she asked her husband.

“How long have you been asleep?” C. J. asked.

She looked at her bedside alarm clock, a twin to C. J.’s. It also said 11:11. Or maybe by this time it had changed to 11:12. “I went to sleep like—ten minutes ago? Why? What’s wrong?”

“Are you sure?” he pressed. “What time did you go to sleep?”

“About eleven? Same as every night.”

C. J. was positive he’d woken at 4:47 a.m. and showered and done his usual routine at the usual times. His hair was still wet.

And then he remembered.

The blue apparition in the chair across the room. His Kiki.

Now he looked over at the chair on the other side of the room. It was empty.
“Holy shit!” he said.

“What? What’s going on?” Lisa said, her voice rising. Things felt scary.

C. J. felt a weird tingle up and down his spine.

The hair on the back of his neck stood on end.

“I think Carlos is dead,” he said.

The Follower parked his dusty blue Hyundai at the curb in front of Spalding Mortuary, a nondescript brick building in a run-down industrial district just east of Culver City.

It was Monday, June 22, 1998, around 10 a.m. Though the morning sun was bright, the air was cool; Greg Mamishian was wearing his favorite jacket, a tan corduroy sport coat with suede elbow patches that once belonged to Castaneda. Greg sat silent for a few moments, listening to the engine tick off heat—a short man, fifty years old, with close cropped gray hair and an elfin sparkle in his eyes, girding himself for another mission.

For the past two and a half years, Greg and Gaby had made a hobby of following Castaneda. They'd sat outside his compound for hundreds of hours, watching the comings and goings, trying to read between the lines. They'd trailed the Nagual and his party to restaurants and movies, to inner circle practice groups. They'd videotaped him at every opportunity, collected and processed his trash, made what they considered an anthropological study of his life. Along the way, they'd learned a lot about the great man and the doings of his inner circle. They'd also learned a lot about themselves. Every couple needs a binding interest; in a mystical, wonderful way, Castaneda had become theirs.

It had been more than nine months since the summer night when the fierce Chacmool had caught them red-handed stealing the trash.

Although they'd promised the woman from Cleargreen, on a subsequent phone call, that they were done with their innocent surveillance—thereby avoiding a formal complaint to the police—they had only lasted about a week before their curiosity and determination had gotten the better of them, and they'd renewed their activities in earnest. Besides changing the time of their trash runs to 3 a.m., they proceeded pretty much as before. The Followers, as Greg had dubbed them, were back in business.

Then, one Sunday afternoon in late February 1998, sitting at their regular post, in a no-parking zone diagonally across the quiet intersection from Castaneda's low-slung compound, the Followers saw a car pull up to the Pandora Avenue gate. The blue Ford Crown Victoria belonged to one of the Chacmoos.

As it slowed to a stop, several members of the inner circle came quickly out of the house, moved toward the back door of the car. Riveted, Greg and Gaby watched in disbelief as the great man himself was hauled gingerly out of the back seat by a pair of his minions. For some time, it had been obvious Castaneda's vision had been failing; the Followers had found insulin syringes and prescription medicine bottles in the trash. Now it was obvious his health had taken a dramatic turn for the worst. Castaneda was thin and fragile, floppy like a rag doll. His skin was grayish green, his hair was very short, there were dark circles around his eyes; he had the skeletal appearance of a dying man. He didn't so much walk as shuffle, supported on either side by Chacmools, steadied from behind by the Blue Scout.

Gaby looked at Greg, Greg looked at Gaby. A wave of extreme sadness washed over them. There was no mistaking the fact that Castaneda was extremely ill, perhaps even in the process of dying. With his death, they instantly perceived, would come the end of their marvelous and binding folly. At the edge of this sadness was something else, a bitter aftertaste of disappointment: If Castaneda was planning, as he'd promised, to leave the Earth in full awareness with his boots on—in a flash of light for the Second Attention like Don Juan—he had better hurry.

From the looks of him, he didn't have much time.

Over the next weeks and months, the Followers saw no more of Castaneda. His public appearances at seminars and workshops ended; the private classes at the dance studio came to a halt; he was never again observed going out for a movie or a meal. If anything, the lack of any appearance made the Followers even more curious. They spent even more time doing surveillance.

Meanwhile, the level of activity at the compound increased dramatically. People came and went in shifts several times a day, bringing with them supplies and covered dishes of food. The members of the inner circle all got new cars, mostly mid-sized Fords. A new roof was put on the house, many other small repairs were made as well; the Followers got the feeling the place was being readied for sale. When landscapers arrived and began tearing up the internal courtyard of the compound, the Followers couldn't help but wonder if they were digging a grave.

One evening they observed Taisha Abelar packing her van with stacks of files and documents and a big cooler full of supplies. She was in an obvious hurry. The Followers wondered: Were they taking Castaneda to Mexico to die?

In mid-April 1998, Gaby and Greg observed what seemed to be a flurry of packing and cleaning and organizing. The garbage that week was unbelievably fruitful: clothes, statues and knickknacks, flatware, curtains, supplies—sixteen bags, more than twice the normal amount. Once upon a time they'd have been overjoyed by such fabulous gleanings. Now they felt only curiosity and sorrow.

During the week of April 22, Greg and Gaby left off their surveillance in favor of a rare, seven-day vacation to Kauai, the honeymoon they had never gotten around to taking—more testament to the way their pursuit of the Sorcerer's Truths had brought them together.

When they returned home to Los Angeles, tanned and rested, the first thing they did was drive to Castaneda's compound.

The place was empty.

There was no one there. No cars, no people, no furniture inside. The only thing in the trash can was construction debris and a few fast food wrappers. Several trips over the next few days confirmed their suspicions: The Sorcerer and his party had disappeared.

For the next six weeks, things at the compound remained unchanged.

Meanwhile, phone lines and Internet chat rooms were buzzing with speculation. There were rumors Castaneda and his party had bought a big luxury yacht and left on a world cruise. Others said the inner circle had taken Castaneda to Mexico to “leave.” Still others suggested Castaneda had died and the Witches had committed suicide in solidarity. Everyone had a different theory. Cleargreen remained mum. New seminars were ongoing, business as usual.

In mid-June, C. J. Castaneda received a notice from the probate court in Los Angeles. On April 27, 1998, the letter informed him, Carlos Castaneda had died.

Though C. J. and Runyan were mentioned in the will, they were left nothing of the estate, which some estimated to be worth as much as \$20 million.

In the six-page document, which was signed and dated April 23, Castaneda explicitly distanced himself from his Cho-cho, stating in Article 1 that “although I once treated him as if he were my son, C. J. Castaneda is not

my son, natural or adopted.” All monies and property and future rights to Castaneda’s work were bequeathed to something called The Eagle’s Trust, the officers of which were members of Castaneda’s inner circle, men and women who also served as the officers of Cleargreen, Toltec Artists, and the other corporations.

Outraged that Cleargreen had failed to exercise common decency and notify him of his Kiki’s death, hurt he’d been disavowed and disinherited, C. J. called the Los Angeles Times. (Later, he would initiate a suit against Cleargreen and Castaneda’s executors, claiming the will was a fraud. After nine months of legal wrangling, C. J. dropped the suit.)

The Times story ran on the front page of the Friday, June 19, edition of the paper, written by staffer J. R. Moehringer:

“Carlos Castaneda, the self-proclaimed ‘sorcerer’ and best-selling author whose tales of drug-induced mental adventures with a Yaqui Indian shaman named Don Juan once fascinated the world, apparently died two months ago in the same way he lived: quietly, secretly, mysteriously.”

According to his death certificate, the Times story went on to report, Castaneda had died of liver cancer on April 27, at the age of 72. In typical Castaneda fashion, the death certificate listed his occupation as “teacher,” and his employer as the Beverly Hills School District, for which he’d never worked. It also said that he had never been married.

Immediately following the death, it was reported, his body had been cremated, his ashes spirited away to Mexico. Explaining why no one was

notified about his passing, Castaneda's long-time lawyer, Deborah Drooz, was quoted as saying: "He didn't like attention. He always made sure people did not take his picture or record his voice. He didn't like the spotlight. Knowing that, I didn't take it upon myself to issue a press release."

The next day, on their website, Cleargreen issued a statement to the faithful. Their position was a bit different than the lawyer's.

"Carlos Castaneda left the world the same way that his teacher, Don Juan Matus did: with full awareness," the statement read in part. "The cognition of our world of everyday life does not provide for a description of a phenomenon such as this. So in keeping with the terms of legalities and record keeping that the world of everyday life requires, Carlos Castaneda was declared to have died."

Having read both the article in the Times and the posting on the web, Greg and Gaby, like many others, didn't know what to think. So many odd and wonderful things had happened in connection with Castaneda, so many mystical events and occurrences that seemed to have no explanation in the world of ordinary reality. Now they wanted to know how the story ended. They needed to know the truth: Had he died like a man? Or had he left like a sorcerer? Which was it? For so many years now, Gaby and Greg and countless others around the world had set their reality compass by the teachings of Castaneda and Don Juan. There was a need for some kind of closure. It didn't help that all the Witches had disappeared.

When asked, Cleargreen would only say the Witches were "traveling."

Using the detective skills he'd honed as a Follower over the last several years, Greg tracked down Castaneda's death certificate. A little legwork revealed Castaneda's body had not been taken to the mortuary specified on the certificate. Instead it had gone to an outfit called the Spalding Mortuary. Their telephone number was unlisted.

Greg got out of his car and walked through the unlocked door of a nondescript brick building in a run-down industrial district just east of Culver City. A discreet sign said Spalding Mortuary.

He was met in the hallway by a tall, elderly black gentleman. "What's your business, sir?" he asked kindly.

Standing in the dark hallway, wearing the corduroy sport coat that had once belonged to Castaneda himself, Greg explained to the man that this very mortuary had recently cremated the remains of a man named Carlos Castaneda. This man, Greg continued, had claimed to be a great and powerful sorcerer. He had followers all over the world.

While Castaneda's teachings were many, Greg explained, first among them was the notion that an enlightened sorcerer does not die a normal death. Rather, an enlightened sorcerer is consumed by something called "the fire from within," a sort of spontaneous combustion, wherein he gathers his mortal energy and leaves for the next realm, taking his body with him.

"I am here to find out the truth," Greg told the elderly gentleman in his typically earnest but ironic style. "What I want to know is: Did this man burn with the fire from within? Or did you burn him in your oven?"

The gentleman regarded Greg for several long moments—trying, no doubt, to decide what to do. Greg seemed harmless enough. He was polite and appeared fairly sane. He was obviously deeply aggrieved. “Please sit down,” he said at last. With his long fingers, he indicated an upholstered bench.

After ten minutes or so, a well-dressed, older woman appeared before Greg. She was a tall, heavysset, regal woman, with the air of the church about her.

Greg repeated what he’d told the elderly gentleman. She listened intently, nodding her head, wearing a sympathetic face. Until, that is, he got to the part about “the fire from within.”

She reared back her head and laughed.

Greg smiled abashedly. He raised his hands, palms up, and shrugged his shoulders.

He must have looked so sad. The woman leaned down and put her arms around Greg, a motherly hug.

“He has gone to a better place,” she said, taking a seat on the bench beside him.

“I know he’s gone to a better place,” Greg said. “What I want to know is: which better place. Do you understand what I’m asking? I want to know: Are you sure you cremated him?”

“I watched it myself,” she said confidently.

“You’re positive?”

“His spirit is gone, baby.” In due time, an autopsy would reveal the exact cause of Castaneda’s earthly death: metabolic encephalopathy, a neurological breakdown due to cancer and liver failure.

Greg thanked the woman and left the building.

Back at his car, Greg opened the door. He felt numb, a mixture of disappointment and relief.

For what must have been the one millionth time over the six years, the words of scholar Richard de Mille floated through his mind.

Castaneda wasn’t a common con man, he lied to bring us the truth. His stories are packed with truth, though they are not true stories, which he said they are . . . This is a sham-man bearing gifts, an ambiguous spellbinder dealing simultaneously in contrary commodities—wisdom and deception.”

Greg removed the tan corduroy sport coat with suede elbow patches and threw it unceremoniously into the back seat of his car.

Once it had been his favorite piece of clothing.

Now it was time to move on.



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About the Author

Mike Sager is a best-selling author and award-winning reporter. A former Washington Post staff writer and contributing editor to Rolling Stone, he has written for Esquire for more than thirty years. Sager is the author or editor of more than a dozen books, including anthologies, novels, a biography, and textbooks. In 2010 he won the National Magazine Award for profile writing. Several of his stories have inspired films and documentaries; he is editor and publisher of The Sager Group LLC. For more information, please see MikeSager.com

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