

## Travel Tales

### The End of the World is Nigh -- Thanks to Me Part 1

by

Llewellyn Toulmin

Many travelers have heard about the so-called John Frum cargo cult tribe in Vanuatu, which supposedly believes that a huge American soldier named John Frum is coming soon to save them. Wrong, wrong and kinda wrong.

As usual, you have to come to “Travel Tales” to get the real truth. Unfortunately, the bad news is that these may be the last words you ever read.

I found out The Truth by interviewing 75-year-old Chief Isaac Las Won in his village of



*A child of the John Brum tribal cult in Vanuatu, happy in the knowledge that salvation is on the way*

Lamakara in southeast Tanna, an island in southern Vanuatu, surrounded by the South Pacific Ocean. He said that, “On the wall of our headquarters is a mural that tells the history of the world. God created the world and the land, and gave it to black men to rule. God’s special gift was kava, a sacred drink that allows men to commune with the spirits and practice *kastom* [custom] rituals.”

The Chief continued, “But in the time of my grandfather Chief Tomi Numbas, missionaries came and tried to ban *kastom* and kava drinking. They brought the message of Jesus and salvation, which was good, but they made a terrible mistake in passing laws against *kastom*. Then in 1930, John Brum [or “Prum”] came to my grandfather in a vision. John Brum said that ‘You must go back to

your old way of life.’ My grandfather invited all the chiefs of Tanna to a big meeting, and gave them the good news from the vision. But the Condominium French/English colonial government heard about the meeting, arrested all the chiefs, and put them in jail.”

“In 1937 my grandpa got another message from John Brum,” said Chief Laswon. “In the vision Brum said that soon a huge war will be started by the Japanese. Brum said the Japanese will be opposed by the Americans, who are our friends and will help the people of our islands. The Americans will come with ships, planes, trucks, cargo and roads, and we must help them win the war. John Brum’s prediction was exactly right.”

“During World War II, John Brum came to our village and helped us fight,” stated the Chief. “He was a tall man dressed in white but he was neither white nor black – sort of in between. He spoke our Tanna language but was not Tannese or American. He was not a soldier. He knew all the world’s languages, and he was our brother.”

According to the Chief, John Brum said that, “I am descended from the spirit of our volcano, Mt. Yasur. Mt. Yasur is the opening to Heaven, which is in the Earth, not up in the sky. When Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead, he did not go up in the clouds, he came here to Mt. Yasur and went through the Gates of Heaven in the side of the volcano. My name is John Brum because I will return some day and cleanse the world like a mighty broom. When I come back to Tanna, I will bring more American aid. The Americans will help you again, like they did during the war, with roads, schools, clinics, houses, a wharf and an airport. Then Jesus will follow me, and he will end the world.”



*The gates in the side of sacred Mt. Yasur, from the mural in the John Brum headquarters*

The Chief told me about the flags that are the symbol of the village. “In 1957 some US Marines visited our village and gave us two red US Marine Corps flags. We were proud to raise them, and an American flag, every morning

in our village, to celebrate our love of Americans and our hope that they will return soon. We have raised these flags every morning since 1957, except when the colonial masters were very angry about these flags, and tried to get us to stop. They even tried to kill us, and they put our leaders, including my father and grandfather, in jail. But eventually we got our freedom, and are joyful to raise these US flags, which help us keep *kastom* alive.”

The Chief then asked me to help him and his tribe approach the White House, to get all the aid that John Brum had promised. He was excited to talk about this, since I was American and from near Washington, DC and must know President Obama. I said that I didn’t know Obama personally, but I did know a lot of people, and would try to help.

But first I thought of a question. “Chief,” I said, “You stated that after the aid arrives, Jesus will destroy the world. So by helping you, I am helping to end the world. How long will it be between John Brum and the American aid arriving, and the end of the world – a thousand years? A year? A month? A week?”

The Chief looked at me and said, “I know, but I cannot tell you. It is a sacred secret.”

I replied, “OK, no problem. Let’s get cracking.”

Next month (if we all survive that long), I will describe exactly what aid the Chief wanted, and my efforts to get the attention of the White House.

Lew Toulmin is working in the Prime Minister’s Office in Vanuatu, and normally lives in Silver Spring.

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