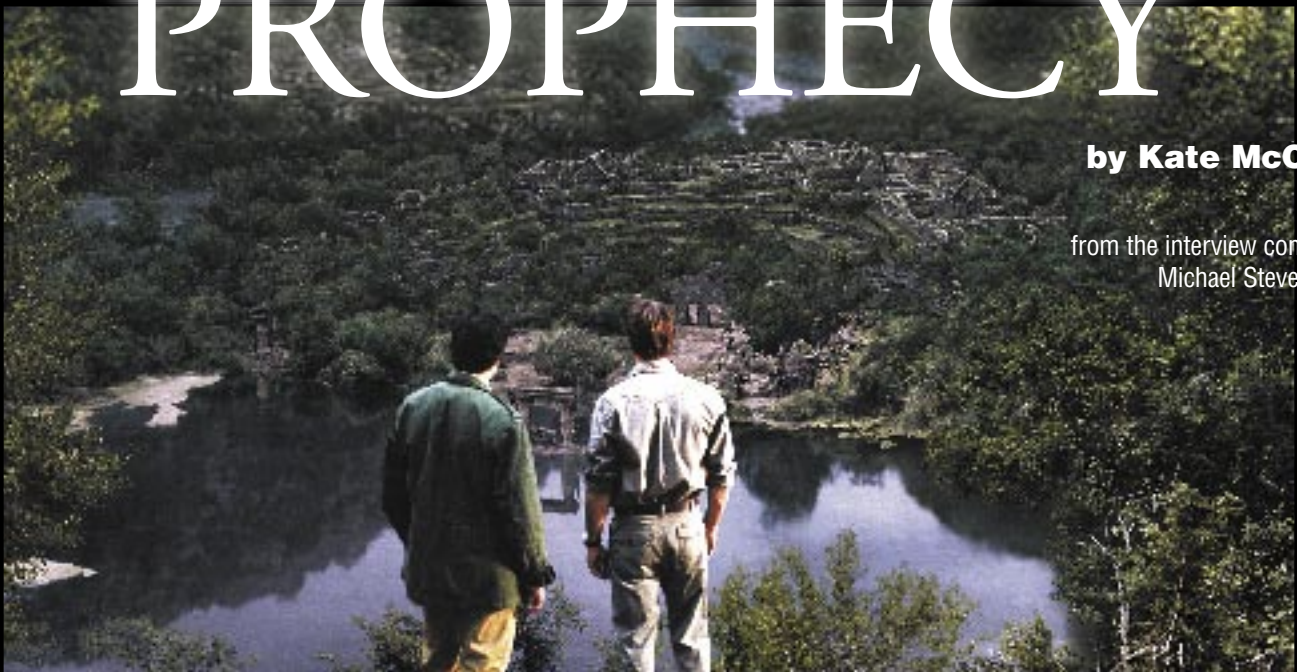


THE CELESTINE PROPHECY

by **Kate McCallum**

from the interview conducted by
Michael Steven Gregory



**SPIRITUAL CINEMA, CONSCIOUS MEDIA, TRANSFORMATIVE CONTENT, PRO-SOCIAL,
GREEN, LOHAS, METROSPIRITUALS, CULTURAL CREATIVES, CONSCIOUS CREATIVES**

What exactly do these terms mean? They are descriptive catchphrases from a growing list of terminology finding its way into the lexicon of contemporary culture, media marketing, advertising and business. Terms which define not only a new genre of content emerging that's being aggregated, identified and/or created and marketed, but also label

specific demographic categories interested in consuming that genre.

Many great films and substantial television content in existence could easily fall into these subgenres. The highly successful film *What The Bleep Do We Know!?*, featured in our September/October 2004 issue (Vol. 10, No. 5), is certainly a great example of such content. One can also look to book

categories such as "New Age," "Human Potential," "Self-Help" or "Visionary Fiction" found in the publishing world to further codify this emerging genre. Many films or TV projects in development, or readying for production or release, are being culled from successful books which fall into these categories.

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This column features one of those very books and was transcribed from a video shoot of an interview co-hosted by *scr(i)pt* magazine produced during a recent writers conference called “New Story Paradigm and the Future of Content.” Michael Steven Gregory, director of the conference, took the interview seat and had a candid and informative conversation with James Redfield, best-selling author of *The Celestine Prophecy*, a book which chronicles nine insights into a greater spirituality.

Redfield has been keenly interested in human spirituality all of his life. He grew up in a rural area near Birmingham, Alabama. From an early age, he was motivated by a need for clarity about spiritual matters. Brought up in a Methodist church that was loving and community-oriented, he was nevertheless frustrated by a lack of answers to his questions about the true nature of spiritual experience. As a young man, he studied Eastern philosophies, including Taoism and Zen, while majoring in sociology at Auburn University. He later received a master’s degree in counseling and spent more than 15 years as a therapist to abused adolescents. During this time, he was drawn into the human potential movement and turned to it for theories about intuition and psychic phenomena that would help his troubled clients.

Since 1994, when Warner Books published *The Celestine Prophecy* in hardcover, this adventure parable about a spiritual journey to Peru became one of modern publishing’s greatest success stories. According to *Publishing Trends*, *The Celestine Prophecy* was the number one international best-seller of 1996 and ranked as number two in 1995. Also in 1995 and 1996, it was the number one American book in the world. The phenomenal novel spent over three years on *The New York Times* best-sellers list and appeared on other top-sellers lists around the world.

Redfield also authored two more adventure tales in the *Celestine* series: *The Tenth Insight* and *The Secret of Shambhala*. In 2002, he also co-authored *God and The Evolving Universe* with Esalen Institute founder Michael Murphy and filmmaker Sylvia Timbers.



PAGE 28: John Woodson (**Matthew Settle**) and Wil (**Thomas Kretschmann**) arrive at the crest of the Celestine Ruins, the location where the first eight scrolls were discovered. Based on James Redfield’s worldwide best-seller, this spiritual adventure film chronicles the discovery of a set of ancient scrolls in the rain forests of Peru. The scrolls, containing nine key insights, predict a new awakening that redefines human life and provides a glimpse into a completely spiritual culture on Earth. ABOVE: **James Redfield** (screenwriter/producer) with **Matthew Settle** on the set of *The Celestine Prophecy*, written by James Redfield (screenplay and novel) & Barnet Bain (screenplay) and Dan Gordon (screenplay).

In March 2004, Redfield was honored by the Wisdom Media Group with the WorldView Award for engaging discussion on the nature of human existence and for his ongoing efforts and contributions to the bettering of humanity.

Redfield partnered with Barnet Bain in writing the screenplay for *The Celestine Prophecy*, which is being released into theaters this spring.

scr(i)pt: *The Celestine Prophecy*, 1993. *Your first book. Why that book, why at that time?*

JAMES REDFIELD: The whole book is about an experiential journey, and it’s designed, or maybe intuitively downloaded, to be a parable. It focuses on experience, and I believe the experience so many of us were having. It’s below religion. It’s below creeds and ideology. It’s about the actual experiences of this time we’re associating with a deeper awareness that’s a spiritual awareness. I think it put into words what a lot of

people were feeling and sensing and arriving at themselves. *The Celestine Prophecy* became a pass-along book that people adopted and passed around the world.

scr(i)pt: *What was the personal reason that you felt obliged to write that story?*

JR: I was a therapist, and it was the days of the human potential movement. Self-actualization. There was a sense that we were being liberated into a deeper creativity and a deeper life. It dawned on me as a kind of intuition that what was really happening was a new consensus about the spiritual life. The book was an attempt to really create a psychology of that.

scr(i)pt: *How many drafts did it take you to get to what you felt was the draft that was ready to go? How much time?*

JR: A long time. Some of my friends say that I was working on that book since college. Once I had a completed manuscript, I would hand it around to people—not

just friends but acquaintances, friends of friends who had nothing to prove to me—so I got a lot of good feedback through that process. I spent a whole year doing that, and they would say, “I love this part, this part and this part, but here I was lost or confused.” I would make revisions based on that feedback—almost like movie testing, you know?

scr(i)pt: *When you finished it, what was the next step? Did you go and try to market it to a publisher, find an agent?*

JR: For about six months, we sent it out to several publishers. We had some offers from small publishers and regional publishers, but my wife Salle and I decided if it's going to be published by a small publisher, the small publisher might as well be us. So, we put together our own company, got a distributor, and went on the road with it.

scr(i)pt: *Okay. So you pack up the car, and you go on a field trip.*

JR: That's right. We would go into these small, more esoteric bookshops. Our thought was that we'd approach the manager, owner, whoever was there, hand the book to him and say, “It's something that people seem to like, and I'll leave it with you. Here's how to order if your clientele want to order it.” Then we would give away a copy to whoever happened to be in the bookshop at that time. Of course, the book is about synchronicity, and a sense of destiny, so we figured everyone who was there was destined to receive a copy ... so that's what we did. We spent three months doing this through Florida, the Carolinas, Virginia, D.C., then through Austin to San Francisco. By the time we got home it was being passed around everywhere. We really didn't do anything else besides that.

scr(i)pt: *And before Warner Books got involved, how many copies did you sell?*

JR: About 160,000.

scr(i)pt: *What brought the book to Warner's attention?*

JR: They had their spies out there in all the bookstores; and when they start seeing a book—especially a self-published book—take off, they try to make a deal as quickly as they can. We were on the road, so it was sort of hard to find us. We were in Malibu when the calls started to come in. It was late 1993; we were staying with a friend. Warner found

us, called and said, “Hey, let us take over this publishing. This is going to be a phenomenon. Why don't you let us do it?” Salle found that another large publisher had also left a message on our answering machine, so we called them. We had the president of Warner Books and the president of the other company both on the phone, and we had this sort of informal, off-the-cuff auction. Right there, looking out on the ocean, and it was really fun.

scr(i)pt: *No agents involved, no middle men, just you and the two heads of two major publishing houses.*

JR: Yes. I told Larry Kirshbaum, the president of Warner Books, that we had the other guy on the phone. He said, “Why'd you call him?” We said, “He called us.” So, we went back and forth until Larry finally convinced us that he knew the book and that they had the mechanism that would honor what was happening with the book. He would give us those guarantees. So, we chose Warner.

scr(i)pt: *How soon after being widely published did Hollywood take an interest?*

JR: When it hit *The New York Times* best-seller list, which was in about two months. Suddenly, it became a property. So, we started hearing from every producer in town. We had a list of hundreds. They wanted to pick up the book then parlay it into something with a studio. We got an agent and went to the heads of all the studios to talk about what kind of deal might be made.

scr(i)pt: *What was your primary concern when negotiating any possible movie deal?*

JR: Well, it's a spiritual book. It has a devoted fan base because it seems true to authentic spirituality. So, we obviously thought we had to protect the movie ... that the movie had to carry the heart of the book. That was our stipulation going in. We needed to be involved in the writing of the screenplay, the selection of the director and those kinds of things.

scr(i)pt: *How receptive were the people, the movie moguls, to that concern?*

JR: Well, you've heard all the stories. Essentially, they just tried to buy it. We would say, “Here are the controls that we need,” and they'd say something like, “Well, we understand. Here's some more money.” I would say, “You've gotta hear this. This is what's important for me with this book if

you're gonna make it into a movie.” And they would say, “Boy, you're a great negotiator. Here's some more money.” So, we finally just stopped that process entirely.

scr(i)pt: *Cut to 10 years later. Now the movie is going to be released. What prompted that decision?*

JR: I was involved in writing a sequel to *The Celestine Prophecy*. A couple of study guides. It was a pretty busy time until about 1998, 1999. I actually hired a screenwriter who didn't work out. So I felt, ultimately, I would need to write the screenplay. I've never written a screenplay, so I then had to do all the due diligence and try to figure out what that craft was all about. It was around 2001 before I had written a draft.

scr(i)pt: *What did you do after you learned the craft of screenwriting? How was the transition? What was the biggest challenge of writing straight narrative, novels, nonfiction books to the haiku of screenplays?*

JR: It was the obvious challenge: brevity. The long form is so much easier. Screenplay writing, in my opinion, is the poetics of this general art field because it's so dense, and words are so valuable, and you're taking a viewer through that kind of drama in an hour and a half or two hours. It's the hardest form in my view. I started by just looking at the screenplays of the movies that I really liked.

scr(i)pt: *Now, assessing what material is going to remain in the screenplay, one of the biggest challenges for an adaptation of a novel is that most of it has to go. How did you go about picking what to pitch and what to keep?*

JR: The book is very verbal—very philosophical and very didactic between characters. Almost all that had to go. The heart of the book and the heart of the movie we hope is this journey of one person's coming from a point where his life feels as though it's stopped and he's at a crossroads. He begins to awaken to a different view on reality, and the spiritual dimension starts to creep in. That was primary; that it was a journey of awakening from the beginning of the movie to the end.

scr(i)pt: *As you moved from the novel to the screenplay, do you feel that you elevated the material or merely mirrored the material?*

JR: I do think we elevated it. The book has a parable effect. Which means you read it

and you can see an adventure tale. Or, you can read it and you see something below the adventure tale. You can wait another year and read it again, and there's even more you can pick up. I believe the insights are archetypal steps that we're hard-wired for. You can read all nine insights, and the information gets downloaded at a certain level. You could read them again and it'll change, depending on the circumstances of one's life.

Now, I don't take credit for doing that. I consider it a kind of higher self for spiritual download or some angel whispering in my ear, whatever you want to call it. It was something that I received and sort of got into writing. I don't take credit for that. That's the effect people talk about when they have a long-term experience with the book.

The idea was to try to have the movie have that kind of an effect. I think—because we stayed true intuitively to the process, I believe all the way through—it has that dimension. In our testing we've found that people immediately want to see it again and report after seeing it again that they see links and connections they didn't see the first time. People who've seen it four or five times report that there's something new to discover in it every time.

scr(i)pt: *Were you working alone?*

JR: No, I worked with Barnet Bain, a producer of *What Dreams May Come*. We took my first draft which was 150 pages long and just worked until we got it distilled into the right length.

scr(i)pt: *What made you—a man who started self-publishing, a self-made man—decide that you were going to produce a movie?*

JR: Some moment of insanity, I think as I look back on it. It just seemed to me that we could really stay true to the whole process. The whole process of making the movie was to have our own schedule, our own ability to bring in the right people from top to bottom. All 200 of us were people who really had some sort of connection with the book and with our own spiritual journey.

scr(i)pt: *The book is dealing with a lot of non-visual material. Energy, auras and so forth. How did you tackle the challenge of visually interpreting things that are pretty difficult to see?*

JR: We connected visual perception to inner growth, so the main character's growth, where he's learning these insights from a

group of people who already were living them, was reflected in how brightly and luminously he saw the world on film as depicted to the audience. The idea was really an attempt to connect consciousness to how much beauty you can see when you become more conscious. For other insights that were more cerebrally insightful, we just showed the main character struggling over what it meant until it was illustrated enough in the movie for the audience to keep up with what the character was going through.

scr(i)pt: *What would you consider the genre?*

JR: That's a hard one because I think maybe it's yet to be named. There's a transference of, call it awareness, call it worldview, that happens in a film that I don't believe fully happens in other mediums.

scr(i)pt: *Is the movie better than the book?*

JR: Oh, I don't know. I wouldn't say that, but they're two different forms, you know? Two different art forms around this same central theme.

scr(i)pt: *Thirteen years later, your great idea*

has matured from a self-published book to a best-selling novel published by the mainstream. And now, a full-blown, feature-length motion picture. Is this the story that you set out to tell?

JR: Well, it's never quite right. I mean, you never quite think you've got it all. If the movie can also just add to the conversation and be adopted by people the way the book was, then I think we've done something that makes us sleep really well at night. (i)

KATE McCALLUM is an independent producer/writer/consultant based in Los Angeles. She specializes in transmedia property development through Bridge Arts Media (Bridgeartsmedia.com) and she is currently consulting for The Harmony Channel, a new television channel scheduled to launch on Comcast in May. Additionally, she co-founded c3, The Center for Conscious Creativity (Consciouscreativity.org), whose mission is to explore the power of art and media's effect on society and culture.

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