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We had so much fun the first time, we're doing it again!

The Songs that Make the Whole World(s) Sing

Music in Role-playing



*Journal of the PK Institute for Information Engineering*TM

Volume 6(1) Winter 1997.

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Important Note: In the last week of March, the Journal offices will be moving. At this point the exact address is unknown, but we'll let you know as soon as possible.

Yes, there will someday be a volume 5 issue 4 of the Journal. However, in a feeble attempt to catch up with the actual calendar year, we're skipping over it until later.

Music. It's everywhere in our lives, but when it comes to gaming, it's often overlooked. But a judicious injection of music into a character, an adventure, or even a world can add a lot of life and dimension.

Music in Fantasy

Music in a fantasy world typically ends up being some sort of rip off of Renaissance chamber music: lyres, recorders, lutes, basic percussion. All fine and dandy, but why not spice things up a bit? Surely elves, dwarves, gnomes and orcs all have different ideas of what music is pleasing, or what music even is! Do the last surviving members of an ancient race of dragons keep their songs alive, perhaps by teaching them to a wandering minstrel? Perhaps a violent race, such as orcs, only sees music in the carnage of battle, going as far as having their forces led by military 'musicians' who 'compose' a battle plan and 'conduct' the troops as they march into battle.

And of course there's always magic. Magic items in the form of instruments are a staple of the genre, but go a step further. That helm of protection? Have it be possessed by the spirit of a dead musician, and the wearer hears inane tunes constantly while wearing it. Design a mage who can only cast spells while performing music; the better the composition and/or performance, the better the effect of the spell. Maybe a lute or lyre can serve as a temporary power stone, providing a store of mana for each period of playing.

Music in Historical Gaming

While modern day people tend to lump all of classical music together in one lump, there have been many distinctive periods in western music history, not to mention the music of Asian, Indian, African, Jewish, and other cultures through the ages. Before recording technology was available, music was always a live experience, often interactive and social. Professional musicians were sometimes taken care of by wealthy patrons of the arts, but oftentimes died penniless and destitute. The premiere of an opera or a symphony can make an excellent background for intrigue and whatnot.

Music in Modern Day

An era is defined by its music. Alluding to what's playing on the radio or a nearby jukebox can help set the scene easily. Modern day musicians can make it big in the entertainment industry, but are just as likely to end up playing in cheap motel bars or singing on cruise ships.

Music in Cyberpunk

Of all genres, music is most wedded to cyberpunk. Whether it's dystopic punk, throbbing techno, or depressing goth, music plays an indelible role in setting the mood in a cyberpunk milieu.

While it's certainly fine to stick with the traditional cyberpunk musical styles, why not experiment a bit? Retro is always big; imagine a cyberpunk world where lounge music rules, and deals are sealed while sipping martinis. Perhaps it is time for jazz to make a comeback (real jazz, not that 'smooth jazz' crap they try to pass off these days). How about a cyberpunk world dominated by country music, along with blue jeans, hair spray and ten-gallon hats? It's easy to see how attaching a differing music style to cyberpunk can change the feel of the game.

Or go the other way; try to imagine what the Next Big Thing will be. Maybe experimental 'art' music will come in vogue. How about an AI which composes music in a certain style, but never plays the same music twice?



Music in SF

When imagining contact with an alien culture, try to imagine their music. It undoubtedly will not resemble our own, perhaps not even remotely. Tone, interval, rhythm, and other basic musical concepts cannot be taken for granted. If an alien species has a different range of hearing, their range of music will similarly be affected.

Or perhaps music is the only thing that two alien cultures have in common. Remember how in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* the entire dialogue with the aliens was conducted through music? Maybe regular alien speech makes use of tonal pitches that sound like music to humans.

What happens when a human tries to compose in an alien musical style, or vice versa? Will they 'get' it? Imagine a composer who tries to blend the two completely different styles together, creating something truly unique.

Ever had a song going through your head that you just can't shake? Imagine the absolute perversity of a telepath who plants tunes in people's minds that they cannot forget. Oh, the horror! Or use your telepathic skills to excise a composer's or musician's talent. Make it impossible for a person to hear one particular note. Music can also make for an interesting limitation on psychic powers. Perhaps you can communicate telepathically, but only through song.



Music as Plot

Certainly quests and the like can be built around the recovery of a musical instruments, but also try the following on for size: a serial killer who leaves behind bits of song lyrics; a super-villain who plans his crimes according to the top 40 charts; the kidnapping of a pop singer or a famed



soprano; a record producer with the power of suggestion;

How about putting together an adventure or an entire campaign based around the idea of opera? If the players want to accomplish something, make them sing an aria! The heroes are magnificent tenors and sopranos, while the vile villain is a scheming baritone. Operas can be tragic or comic, but are always over-the-top.

For an *Atomic Horror* adventure, run it like a 50s beach musical. Again, singing should be required, and a cameo appearance by a one-hit-wonder is a must.

In a historical campaign, especially an illuminated one, it would be quite a hoot for the players to encounter a famous composer of the past.

Background Music in Gaming

Like many others I'm sure, my gaming groups have often put on music in the background while RPGing. An effective strategy for choosing music is something that goes along with the genre, but oftentimes you can just throw on any old thing.

I have noticed one very interesting phenomenon when using background music for gaming: oftentimes, especially when using music with a dramatic structure (symphonies, film scores, etc.) the pace and structure of the music can influence the pace and structure of the gaming session, especially when the music is familiar to the players. Almost unconsciously, combat and other intense situations come when the music gets loud and furious, and things settle down in the game when the music quiets down. The Raiders of the Lost Ark soundtrack is perfect to show off this phenomenon.

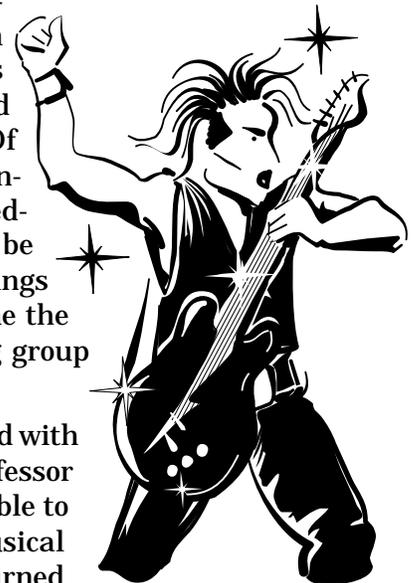


Music with Characters

The life of a musician can make for an excellent character. They tend to be self employed or not hold down steady jobs, which leaves plenty of free time for adventuring, and if they're successful they can have tons of money with which to keep their activities financed. Musicians on tour have a great chance to see the world and stumble into all kinds of messes. Of course, being the loan musician in an adventuring group can stretch the bonds of credibility a bit. However, if all the PCs can be convinced to be a part of the same band, things can be really interesting—can you imagine the members of Spinal Tap as a globetrotting group of part-time ghost hunters?

Of course, not every person who is associated with music has to be an active performer. A professor of musicology at Miskatonic U. might be able to shed some light on those mysterious musical manuscripts that the PCs have located. Burned out rock stars and aging, forgotten blues legends can add excellent spice to a campaign. And where exactly in Kalamazoo is Elvis living these days anyway?

Even if music is not the primary focus of your character's life, it is still an important aspect to his or her personality. At the very least, a character should have a favorite style of music, or actively hate a particular genre (and if your character hates all music, well that's a personality trait too). Maybe you just play an instrument for fun, or played in your high school marching band but haven't picked up your trumpet since.



Music In GURPS

Really good musicians in real life are rare, so you might think that it takes a lot to become a good musician in GURPS. But of course you'd be mistaken. Since the powers that be figured that musical ability wouldn't be of much use in a game, it only takes a few points to create a musical master.

The musical aptitude advantage is incredibly cheap. One lousy point gives you a +1 to Singing, any musical instrument skill, and Musical Composition. The Voice advantage will also give you a +2 to Singing (plus a host of other, non-musical, advantages). Musical Instrument skills default to similar instruments at -3. The rules don't define what a similar instrument is, but I'd say that good groupings would be: brass instruments (trumpet, tuba, etc.); woodwinds (clarinet, flute, etc.); classical strings (violin, viola, etc.); keyboards (piano, organ); guitar-like strings (guitar, ukulele, etc.) Percussion should be treated as three separate skills: all rhythm percussion (snare drum, timpani, etc.); all melodic percussion (xylophone, marimba, etc.); and all multiple-player pitched percussion (handbells, pitched bass drums, etc.); which relate to each other as a group of similar 'instruments.'

Singing is treated as one separate skill—presumably if you can sing one type of music, you can sing all types equally well. I recommend allowing for optional or required specialization for this skill, with a character specializing in a particular style. Examples of specializations for singing styles are: solo; choir; a cappella; barbershop; pop vocals; country-western; opera; chanting; musical theater, etc. Most singers fall roughly into one of six vocal ranges: soprano, mezzo-soprano, and alto for women's and children's voices; tenor, baritone, and bass for men's voices. In truth, very few people fit exactly comfortably into one of the six categories, but most people fit close enough. Really talented singers can sing over multiple ranges. Male voices can also sing falsetto, shifting their range much higher by singing 'differently' (it is very hard to describe, but it's rather similar to the voices used when Monty Python members would play women); and of course there are the castratos...

The Musical Composition skill says that a 'composer must have a skill in each instrument in the composition at IQ-2 (and one of the instruments at IQ) in order to compose for a particular group of instruments.' The is absolute hogwash. Plenty of people write and orchestrate compositions for instruments that have no talent in whatsoever. Part of learning how to compose is knowing how an instrument sounds, what its range is, what's difficult or easy, etc., for instruments you've never played. Also note that the Musical Notation skill is required to be able to write down your composition so that others can read it—John Lennon & Paul McCartney, for example, both had a very high Musical Composition skill but couldn't read or write music!

Of course, musicians need more than just musical skills to survive. Skills in business, marketing and management can help the aspiring musician to keep from getting screwed by the system. Savior Faire or Carousing are important social skills, depending on your genre of choice. Poetry can come in handy for writing lyrics. And many musicians have some other marketable skill to 'fall back on'.

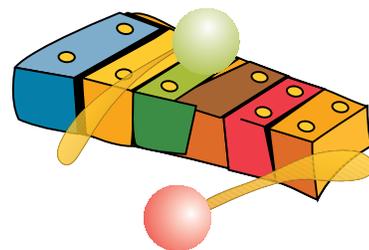
Dave's Life with Music

Although I did not come from a typically 'musical' family, I nevertheless have been quite involved with music throughout my life. At the age of 4 I began singing in the children's choir at my church, and at 5 I began taking piano lessons. I picked up the clarinet and handbells in 5th grade, the bassoon in 6th, percussion in 8th, and bass guitar in 10th. All the while my voice steadily dropped to a decent baritone (though I sing bass in four-part choirs). I gave up on the clarinet after the lawnmower accident, and have pretty much completely lost my bassoon embouchure, but I still sing fairly often, and diddle around on the piano and the bass every so often. I did the whole high school band thing (concert band, marching band, jazz band) and have played in a couple of pit orchestras for musicals (community theater productions of *Bye Bye Birdie* and *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*). I have played bass in several bands, including one with two drummers and no singer, and the band I was in during my freshman year in college cut an unreleased album.

As I have learned to play several instruments, I have noticed a pattern in learning how to play an instrument. When you first begin to learn an instrument, it is a conscious effort: for each note on the page, you translate it to a particular note in your head, which translates to a particular fingering/blowing/etc., which then you play. At some point, something finally 'clicks', and you go right from the note on the page to the note coming out of the instrument, with little or no conscious thought at all. (Where this 'clicking' lies on the GURPS skill level strata, I have no clue, but would guess that it is a skill of somewhere around 14 to 16.)

Like athletes, musicians can get into The Zone. I've only been in The Zone three times in my life: twice during marching band competitions, and once at Solo & Ensemble festival while playing the Webber Bassoon Concerto.

In addition to playing and singing, I did my undergraduate humanities sequence in music theory, taking two introductory theory classes and a class in orchestration.



More alt . conspiracy fodder

The Hits Just Keep On Comin’

God is omnipotent (Can do anything). Including “faking” carbon-14 data (and all other data - dinosaur fossils, thorium, red shift). God created the universe last Tuesday. Prove me wrong. • I am running for the office of “THE POPE” I need YOUR support..... Please write or visit your local POPE-Representative.... Thank You Very Much If you see the POPE, tell him to retire..... I need the gig.... • I guess the Brits are special because they gave us nonsense like crap circles, Loch Ness, and Crowley. Crowley was a funny guy, IMO. On the Kook Scale, the Brits rank pretty high for such a small country. Brits should wear their kook bage with pride. They don’t rank nearly as high as the U.S. on the Kook Scale of course. At least not right now. And the Brits will soon have some major competition as we learn more about kooks in China and the former USSR. • Plausible rumour of aliens make the perfect measuring stick for measuring three other mythological phenomenae: stereotypical bigotry, racism and xenophobia among people. The government, by examining types of reactions to the UFO issue, can manufacture all manner of evaluations and value judgements regarding those types of responses, gullibles, bigots, etc. • Two U.S. Army helicopters collided during a Tuesday, June 18, training exercise at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The accident claimed six lives and injured at least 30 more soldiers. The news coverage showed both choppers were so-called Black Helicopters—all black with no visible identification logos or numbers. • With so many people complaining about discrimination and welfare changes and lack of education and abortion, isn’t it about time we attacked all of these problems...and all of the others that plague this world. We have to file suit against God. For too many years now He has taken the credit for all the good things that are offered in this world, sunrises, the mountains, love,....and man has been heaped with all the problems, unwanted pregnancies, famine, inequality, politics, taxes. Now is the time for us to strike back. Now is the time to realize that He is the source of everything, good and bad.. He can no longer take the credit without accepting the blame. He can no longer can he be allowed to hide behind Adam and Eve and an apple (or IBM). • There was a GOP information booth set up at the RNC handing out American flags made in China. The new world order isn’t coming, it’s already here. The blue on these flags was especially vibrant. • Especially since Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in Moscow during the mid-1980’s, political events in Russia have been coinciding with significant astrological events. The implication of this is that history is being intentionally shaped by Russia’s ruling elite according to the stars as part of some sort of multi-year plan. There is reason to suspect that history is now being shaped toward a Kremlin coup according to astrology. • I have a friend who swears that he gets aroused every time he goes into Barnes and Noble bookstores, and some other businesses as well. He claims that they are using some kind of technology (sound? olfactory? light?) to keep people in their stores. He claims that some folks’ phone lines, and certain t.v. channels use this kind of technology. The reaction is not always arousal, either. Sometimes it’s confusion or anger. I believe that these things happen to him, but I tend to think that his is simply hyper-sensitive to flourescent lights, and high frequency noises. Of course he has been diagnosed as paranoid/schizophrenic. • Microsoft aggressively obtained the copyrights to a vast quantity of historical data (pictures and important documents) that it used in it’s encyclopedia product called ENCARTA. Now they have entered into an agreement with NBC in which they will obtain access to the t.v. networks entire video and film archives. Microsoft has taken this information and digitized it. They plan to cause the majority of individuals in the civilized world to obtain their information through electronic avenues. Once this is accomplished they can (through their database controls) change history! • A local amateur astronomer was killed today when ATF agents, mistaking his large tubular telescope for an anti-government anti-aircraft weapon, drove a tank through his observatory, referred to in a pre-raid briefing as a militia-operated weapons lab. • Over the weekend, Bob Dole announced a brilliant new campaign initiative: he is going to implement a new, more serious phase of the War on Drugs, using the CIA! I don’t know why no one ever thought of this before. The CIA agents can simply arrest themselves, put themselves on the Federal Witness Protection Program, and testify against Joseph Fernandez, Ollie North, Donald Gregg and George Bush. This will be quicker and more decisive than just waiting for the truth to trickle out, from the trial of Ricky Ross in California. • For over fifteen years, the CIA, with assistance from numerous government agencies, conducted a massive illegal domestic covert operation called Operation CHAOS. It was one of the largest and most pervasive domestic surveillance programs in the history of this country. Throughout the duration of CHAOS, the CIA spied on thousands of U.S. citizens. The CIA went to great lengths to conceal this operation from the public while every president from Eisenhower to Nixon exploited CHAOS for his own political ends. • I believe Gate\$ is using subliminal messages on this network to get people to Micro\$oft products. I noticed that during the Republican convention that the colors on MSNBC are alot more richer than the other networks... Gate\$ wants it all... • It’s happened again. For several years the Sunset Film Festival has been towing a barge through San Diego Bay stopping at various bayside parks and showing family oriented movies at dusk. This Tuesday’s movie is *The Lion King*. But program guides and festival advertisements refer to the movie, not by name, as a “Disney animated classic”. The same for the movie *Toy Story* shown Saturday night and other Disney movies in the past. Why the silence? Neither of these movies are being shown theatrically. Think of all the disappointed children saying “Oh no. Not *Toy Story* again!” • I received a call from the White House on Monday. The caller said that Bill Clinton wanted to warn me not to take the public Bus to work. The man on the phone said that the President saw a vision of death on that bus. I drove my car to work monday, just in case... I watched the evening news and guess what! The bus I ride ran off the side of a mountain and burst into flames killing all 100 people. I’m sure Glad Clinton has ESP and warned me. • I was a high-ranking mason until I discovered their plan for world domination. I couldn’t agree and I left the order. • The Queen, the Rockefellers, the Rothschilds, et.al. through the CFR, Trilats, Bilderbergers, etc. have setup gov’t and informal private systems and institutions by which they can integrate, control and/or destroy, if necessary, people like Gates who arise due to unpredictable market processes. The fact that Gates has more money than any one or 5 of them, perhaps, makes little or no difference • Is the Cold War really over? Insider was making a routine call to the Russian Consulate in Washington concerning a change in visa rules. Upon reaching a top official, Insider was rebuffed: “How did you get this phone number? How do you know who I am?” the official angrily demanded. “Well, this is a matter of public information. I mean, consulates are not some kind of secret,” Insider replied. “Then, I must be better known than I had planned,” the official mysteriously remarked. • Recent videotapes (provided by The Most Reverend Jerry Falwell) depict Bill Clinton worshipping Satan—by simultaneously reciting the Communist

Manifesto, ordering the murders of dozens of Whitewater witnesses (one day's worth), *and* having sex with a sheep. Falwell (a long-time business partner of Satan) explained that the effect of this ritual was to sell the soul of every American citizen to the Devil for eternal damnation and torture, and that in return, Clinton would be assured of winning the election, and Hillary would be allowed to convert all American schoolchildren into gays and lesbians. • Hillary Clinton contracted with three government thugs to kill Dick Morris. The planning of the hit began well before the *Star* started talking to Dick Morris's hooker girlfriend Sherry Rowlands. Apparently Morris gave Hillary too much competition for the ear of the President. • It's a fact: When you handle a penny the government gets your DNA code. By now they have everyone's code! Welcome to the world of Big Brother! I tried to stop them but it was too much for one guy. • New York City police dogs will soon be styling in the latest police state K9 designer wear: a device called the "Remote Canine Optical Navigator," or RECON. RECON, a three pound infrared video camera attached to a dog's neck, will allow police to gain a live eyewitness account of areas without sending in a police officer. For example, the dog can scout-out the insides of a building looking for guns, drugs or suspects targeted for removal. • A convicted hacker, in prison for nothing more than possession of electronic parts easily obtainable at any Radio Shack, has been savagely beaten after being transferred to a maximum security prison as punishment for speaking out publicly about prison conditions. Ed Cummings, recently published in *Wired* and *Internet Underground*, as well as a correspondent for *WBAI-FM* in New York and *2600 Magazine*, has been the focus of an increasingly ugly campaign of harassment and terror from the authorities. At the time of this writing, Cummings is locked in the infectious diseases ward at Lehigh County prison in Allentown, Pennsylvania, unable to obtain the proper medical treatment for the severe injuries he has suffered. • Capt Janeway of *Dyke Trek* is a lesbian plot to take control of the far reaches of the galaxy and promote sexual perversion. I know so. • Iraqi superguns, shadowy NATO anti-Communist vigilante groups, political assassinations and charges of high-level protection for paedophiles — Belgium has it all and more! • The CIA and other spy agencies have systematically tapped the phones of overseas Drug Enforcement Agency Administration offices, according to a class action lawsuit agents filed Thursday in Washington. • A friend of mine's sister who lives here in Boston used to work at the Board of Health in DC. She said something over a few beers the other day about Tofu not being made of Soy Bean but being made of people. • You say you are going to get New Zealand. I don't think so because the Christians here are praying against such groups as the Masons. You will not get your hands on this beautiful country. We will fight the good fight and will prevail in the name of our God!!! • FLASHPOINT has received astonishing evidence of an incredible, new "Beast 666 Universal Human Control System." Officially called L.U.C.I.D., this grotesque system of universal slavery is - even as you read this - being implemented by federal and international intelligence and police agencies. The new Beast 666 system will mandate that every man, woman, and child on planet Earth be issued a high tech, "Smart," ID card, called a Universal Biometrics Card. The chilling system is slated to be fully in operation by the year 2000, to celebrate the dawn of the New Age Millennium. This ID card allows the New World Order's police state to track and link every man, woman, and child on planet Earth. Our activities are to be monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week by federal Gestapo agencies - the FBI, IRS, BATF, CIA, DIA, DEA, NSA, U.S. Treasury Service, and Department of Justice. International police and intelligence agencies are linked with the Beast 666 system, to include America's Big Brother-enforcing CIA, the vicious Russian KGB, the devious and wicked British Intelligence Service, and Israel's terroristic Mossad spy organization. • a fossilized piece of crap was found on Mars recently. there was also evidence of a primitive pooper scooper, such as those used in the 1950's. with all this evidence i think we can safely say that Dan Rather a crossdresser. • During the past year gene tinkered crops have begun to flood the marketplace. These crops need not be labeled nor have they been tested to assure their safety both for humans and for the environment. Such production is going forward even though there is clear evidence that about one in ten tinkered genes escapes from its original crop and spreads to weedy relatives. The crops designed to resist viruses incorporate virus genes that recombine with wild viruses to create stronger (super) races of viruses. The greed of multinational companies that own most tinkered crops drives them to risk human and environmental injury from crops that are designed to grow obsolescent from spread to weedy relatives. • Would someone be so kind to email me directly to let me know if there is a place named Pine Crest in Australia? I know there is a place named Pine Creek but that is not what I want to know. That place was rumoured to be a mysterious place that only the President can enter and also the Americans are having some kind of secret plan against the world there. Really need to know for project. Many thanks. • Let's start with the facts. 1 - CBS reported that Pierre Salinger has documents indicating that Flight 800 was accidentally shot down by the US Navy. 2 - A meteor shower was predicted in the general area and time of the Flight 800 crash. [From news service reports] 3 - A Pakistani Airliner pilot reported seeing "something with lights" in the skies of Long Island near the site of the Flight 800 crash. [From news service reports] 4 - There are many safeties, arming procedures etc. for the launch of any missile. In the previous incident of the Navy accidentally downing a civilian airliner, the Surface-to-Air missile was launched on purpose. Now, here's a hypothesis for explaining why the Navy did shoot down Flight 800 by accident. 1 - There are three known affinities for alien "flying saucers": certain locations, nuclear weapons, celestial events (see Mexico City eclipse). 2 - A flying saucer decided to frequent the area of the predicted meteor shower. 3 - The US Navy identified the flying saucer as an alien craft. 4 - The Navy decided to try and shoot down the flying saucer, knowing that it would sink to the bottom of the ocean and they could recover it at their leisure. 5 - The Navy launched a radar-guided surface to air missile to down the flying saucer; the saucer evaded; within a few seconds, the missile locked onto Flight 800 and destroyed it. (too quickly for a self-destruct message from ship to missile). The problem is this. If the Navy shot down that plane, there are two possibilities: 1 - the missile was launched on purpose 2 - the missile was launched by accident Here's the thing. Missiles don't launch by accident! If it was launched on purpose, who was it launched against? THE NAVY DOESN'T DO LIVE MISSILE TESTS IN AREAS OF HEAVY CIVILIAN TRAFFIC. There is only one "foreign nation", with flying craft worth shooting down. • In 1997-98 NASA will announce that ruins of a 'civilisation' have been discovered on Mars. These will be suspiciously like the ruins of previous 'civilisations' on Earth. Richard Dawkins and other mechanicalist cretins will act as frontmen for much of the publicity. Archaeologists (whose work, like that of most academics, is based on rubbish, vacuous arrogance, and mutual congratulation/complicity anyway, let's face it) will change their 'paradigm'. Or rather, the handful of well-connected people who run this field will change it. Did humans 'come from' Mars, or did we 'go to' Mars - this will become the principal topic of debate. Room will of course be made for everybody to take one side or the other, or to say things haven't yet been made clear, from Graham Hancock to whoever's the US President at that time. But only a fool actually believes the Big Lies of the scientific-industrial-ideological complex, and the lie of Remnants of Martian Life Found in Antarctica is certainly very big in its implications.