

NOSTRADAMUS, DEAD PROPHET OR DEAD LOSS?

How did the famous 16th century French seer Nostradamus manage to predict Hitler, or 9/11, or the end of the world in December 2012? According to Peter Lemesurier, widely regarded as the English-speaking world's leading Nostradamus expert, he didn't. In fact, the real question is not how he managed to predict them, but how he managed *not* to predict them.

In that case, how did he write his famous book *The Prophecies*? Nostradamus himself used to claim that he was divinely inspired, or that he summoned up angels, or that he used astrology, or even that he simply 'slept on it'. In his new book *Nostradamus, Bibliomancer*, Lemesurier suggests that these claims were just smokescreens, designed to protect him from enemies such as the Inquisition. In other words, they were precisely the methods that he *didn't* use.

So what method *did* he use? Not crying with a crystal ball or a bowl of water, it seems. It has to be the only other major one that he *doesn't* mention. And that is what is sometimes called the 'Janus principle', plus the ancient technique of 'bibliomancy'. Janus was the Roman two-faced god of endings and beginnings after whom January is named, when we look back at the old year and forward to the new. Nostradamus, similarly, believed that, by looking back at the past, he could tell what was going to happen in the future. History, as they say, tends to repeat itself but not exactly.

As for bibliomancy, this is the technique of selecting a book (in this case usually a history book) at random, letting it fall open at any old page, and then taking the first words that jump up at you off the page as your guide. He might as well have used a pin. The result was chaos, of course. People have been trying to make sense of it ever since – and usually coming up with nonsense.

We are often told that Nostradamus was a doctor, an astrologer and a prophet. Yet Lemesurier produces convincing evidence that he was none of those things – which might explain why the seer himself never claimed to be any of them. He was kicked out of medical college, he was totally

incompetent at astrology, and he himself admitted on several occasions that he wasn't a prophet at all. Which might explain why most of the 6338 prophecies in his annual almanacs turned out to be wrong (yes, he wrote at least one almanac a year, too). Not that this mattered too much. After all, what do you do when this year's almanac turns out to be wrong? You still buy next year's, just in case...

So it turns out that this non-prophet was really just a *bibliomancer*, repeating the event of history at random. Lemesurier and his colleagues even went on to identify which original book he worked from. So much for prophecy!