

## #SUPERNATURAL

### Less Religion, More TV Monsters

The spookiest elements of our favorite shows present viewers with nuanced and conflicting messages about faith and religion.



The vampires, zombies, aliens, and other monsters on our screens represent different facets of humanity and help us make sense of concepts like good and evil and life and death, says professor Gregory Erickson.

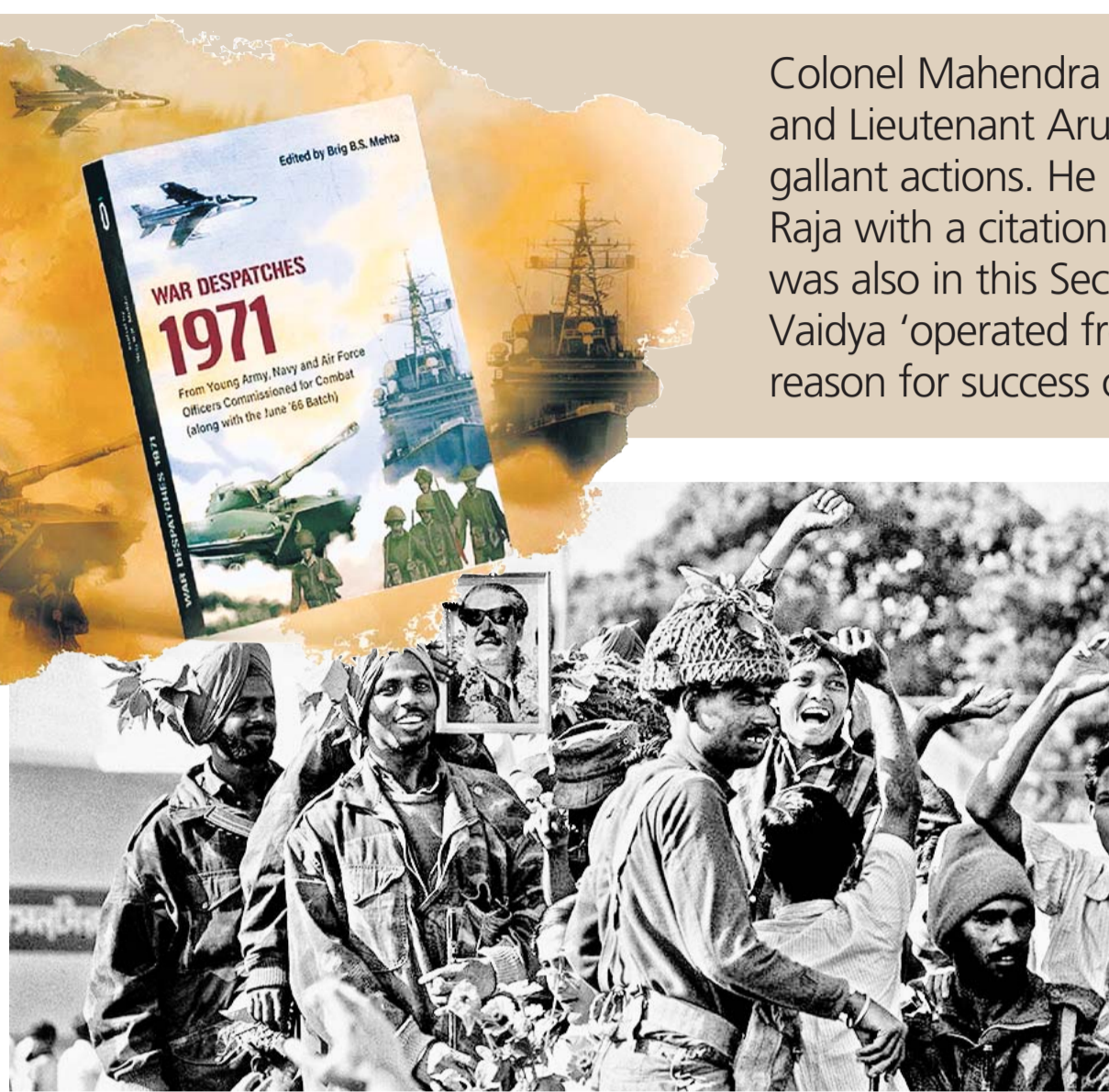
Why do crosses repel vampires? What does the afterlife mean in a world of ghosts? In his book, *Speculative Television and the Doing and Undoing of Religion* (Routledge, 2023), Erickson argues that, far from just entertaining, TV and movies have allowed for "exploration that exceeds questions allowed within most religious communities or on mainstream news and documentaries." From depictions of rituals in *True Blood* to stand-offs between devotion and atheism in *Battlestar Galactica*, the spookiest elements of our favorite shows present viewers with nuanced and conflicting messages about faith and religion.

**ERICKSON, PROFESSOR AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY'S GALLATIN SCHOOL, TALKS THROUGH THE SYMBOLISM OF SOME CLASSIC ON-SCREEN MONSTERS AND THE THEOLOGICAL QUESTIONS THEY RAISE:**

**ZOMBIES**  
Common associations: disease, apocalypse, vacant stare, meandering  
**On screen:** *The Walking Dead*, *28 Days Later*, *World War Z*  
**Religious themes and messages:** godless society, beginnings and endings  
**How we relate:** "In a culture that perhaps doesn't use religion to think about beginnings and endings, we need to find stories that help us do that," Erickson says. "Zombies particularly help us think about endings, but also maybe beginnings a little bit—in the sense of wiping the slate clean and trying to build society from the ground level up. Classic zombies also connect to our fear of death—when someone turns into a zombie, the act in so many zombie narratives is to put

them out of their supposed misery by killing them in one way or another, right?" So the zombie becomes this sort of horrific afterlife that is rooted in a fear of death."  
**VAMPIRES**  
Common associations: Blood, crosses, coffins, sunlight (or lack thereof)  
**On screen:** *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *True Blood*  
**Religious themes and messages:** Power in religious paraphernalia (e.g., cross, holy water); vampires having angelic or godlike power; clash between good and evil  
**How we relate:** "In these stories, vampires face this sense of immortality and so they're forced to deal with living forever—what is life about?" Erickson says. "Humans are not immortal, but we do share that desperate desire to determine meaning in a world that doesn't give you answers. What are we put here on Earth to do?"

**GHOSTS**  
Common associations: hauntings, unfinished business, contact with the living  
**On screen:** *Ghost Hunters*, *Paranormal Paparazzi*, *Ghost Whisperer*  
**Religious themes and messages:** narrow boundary between human and not human; meaning or existence of a soul; intersections of magic, science, and spirituality  
**How we relate:** "Let's think about time and space. Do we think about our experience as limited to our human body? Do we think about our experience as limited to time as we understand it?" Erickson asks. "Once we see this ghostly realm or imagine a ghost with a personality, that's a being or a consciousness without a body. What does that mean, and how do we understand that? How do we understand sickness, illness? If this personality exists outside of the body, it helps us to think: Am I this body or am I something else? Does a ghost have a soul? Is that what a ghost is? How do we think about our identity without bodies?"



Having passed out of the Indian Military Academy in June 1966, they joined their units soon after the 1965 War with Pakistan and later in their Service would have been Battalion Commanders during Operation Pawan and Operation Chequerboard and would have been in various appointments including Brigade Commanders while combating insurgency in both J&K and the NE and were Divisional Commanders during Operation Vijay. In fact, both Maj Gen VS Budhwar who was commanding 3 Infantry Division and Maj General (later Lt Gen) Mohinder Puri who commanded 8 Mountain Division were part of this Course. Subsequently, many of course many went on to be Lieutenant Generals including Lieutenant General Arvind Sharma who retired as an Army Commander. Hence their accounts are enhanced by their experience in Service.

Brigadier Balram Mehta is the Editor of this book and has also contributed three essays. In literature on war can be written from many perspectives, it can be from the top looking on how the events unfolded or it can be from the ground upwards. How those who were part of the events received their orders, carried out the tasks assigned and their visualisation of being part of an action.

Further, it can be written in the form of individual accounts by senior officers or by strategic analysts, historians and journalists. Finally, it can be written by either of the parties involved or by external independent observers. Each account in its way adds to the literature of the conflict and contributes in understanding of events and drawing suitable lessons.

"War Despatches" edited by Brigadier B.S. Mehta (Retired) is unique in many ways. It's written by a group of officers from the 28 NDA Course. They belonged to various Services and within to various arms and Services. At the time of the War, they were all young officers serving in battalions at the cutting edge of combat or in formation Headquarters which were deeply involved in the conflict. Hence the experiences they have written about are at the 'tactical level' and mostly at Company and Battalion level but their experiences have been recounted with the wisdom of hindsight and the maturity of their experiences fifty years after the event.



Colonel Mahendra Singh Joon was part of 3 GRENADIERS in the historic battle of Jarpal. This is where Major Hoshiar Singh and Lieutenant Arun Kheterpal were awarded the PVC and his CO Lieutenant Colonel VP Airy was awarded the MVC for their gallant actions. He recalls the seven enemy counter attacks and the handing over of the body of Lieutenant Colonel Akram Raja with a citation 'based on which he was awarded Pakistan's second highest gallantry award'. Major General PJS Sandhu was also in this Sector as a Staff Captain with 16 (Independent) Armoured Brigade and recalls how Brigadier (later General) Vaidya 'operated from his track group throughout the war and never came back to his Headquarters, that was the major reason for success of the operations by the Brigade. He was always present at the point of decision.

## WAR DESPATCHES 1971

### #BOOK REVIEW



symbol of Pakistan's gumption to fight against heavy odds, not witnessed elsewhere in East Pakistan'. Balram Mehta was a tank troop Leader supporting 4 SIKH who suffered 62 casualties including fourteen killed. He quotes General Jacob an unimpeachable source in his 'indictment of the quality of higher-level planning, execution and leadership'.

Lieutenant General RSK Kapur writes about the personality of General Sagat Singh who as GOC 17 Mountain Division 'had taught the Chinese a lesson of their lives'. After carrying out a task for which he had 'worked tirelessly' he recalls General Sagat asking his surprised Military Attache to call his 'son' and then giving him a tight hug and saying 'Well done, son'. He calls him 'the greatest General he ever served with' and this association 'taught him some essential character qualities.'

Major General Vinod Budhwar talks about his accompanying a Mukti Bhaini patrol

Dhaka after the surrender and how a Pakistani nurse asked if it was safe for her to attend to the Sikh officer, who had a dental issue. She was nervous because, "They had been told in schools and at home to stay away from Sikh men". It reveals the psyche created amongst the people.

Air Commodore Arun Karandikar writes about Kilo Squadron a 'clandestine unit' formed with a few Pakistani Air Force pilots who escaped from East Pakistan with the refugees. He also recalls Group Captain (later Air Vice Marshal) Chandan Singh a 'dynamic go-getter' and how he made him 'undertake an urgent flight in a Dakota alone.

'Burinda Bash', he writes how after the destruction of Pakistan's 3 (Independent) Armoured Squadron at Garipur on 21 November 1971, the 'window of opportunity' for capture of Dacca was opened but was 'not exploited'. This is the epic battle in which a Squadron of 45 CAVALRY destroyed fifteen Pakistani Chafee tanks with their PT-76. The Battle of Burinda took place a few days later and has been described in great detail. "It was a

destroy a bridge in East Pakistan and the difficult encounter and the manner in which they carried out improvisations to execute the mission.

Brigadier Sukhdev Singh writes about the fog of war where a bridge at Jaintapur had been captured under the Mukti Bhaini but they fled to hold on to it as they got carried away in their celebrations and began 'looting the bazaar' and the officer tasked for the demolition went missing for two days before he finally returned. He also writes about the 'Khustia Episode'; "the attack was a failure. The entire 4 Mountain Division then concentrated on one axis."

Brigadier Shimi Kanbargimath gives an insight into the human aspects through selected excerpts of letters to his wife. He had been moved to East Pakistan from the Commando Wing in Belgaum where he was an instructor. He recalls taking a Sikh officer to a hospital in

## Lung Cancer Awareness Month



Breathing—every day, all day and night—is what keeps humans alive. By bringing oxygen through the lungs and supplying it to the cells in our bodies, every breath is life giving. But when the lungs are compromised by disease, they are unable to supply the needed oxygen and, over the long term, the body is unable to thrive or even survive. Lung Cancer Awareness Month is here to educate and empower individuals and families about lung cancer prevention and early detection, so that everyone can breathe easier with healthy and happy lungs!



was also a Staff Officer as a Captain in a leading Brigade and recalls dealing with questions from the local Bengali population regarding their missing kin who had been picked up by the Pakistani soldiers and were untraceable. He also talks of the war correspondents and remembers the words of Melville De'Mello: "if you don't love the Army, you can never be a War correspondent."

Part 2 of the book covers the Western Front. Colonel Tarlochan Singh Kalra writes about the capture of a Post after the cease fire by 6 SIKH in the Amritsar Sector and the praise given by the Pakistani CO a few days later; "your men fought heroically in battle and were definitely superior."

Lieutenant General PPS Bhandari writes about his experience as Adjutant of 72 Armoured Regiment a new raising being blooded in battle and been awarded the 'Battle Honour Chhamb'. This was also the battle in which Decan Horse lost Captain Dajinder Singh who

had started. It turned out to be an exceptional and rare tank battle. The early victory served as a trumpet call.

Major Pradeep Sharma recalls being the solitary Sapper having been held dropped to the location of the advancing Independent Squadron of 7 Light Cavalry to render engineer support. He single handedly prodded the area in front for mines throwing out all the rules for such procedures. Thereafter, deciding that prodding was too tedious he moved on the leading tank observing the area for tell tale signs of mines and he even removed explosives with his hands from a bridge that had been prepared for demolition by the enemy; 'just doing what you are trained for and able to do'.

Lieutenant General Arvind Sharma was a Captain in a Brigade Headquarters which had moved from Nagaland. He gives an insight into the personality of his Commander Brigadier RCV Apte, the GOC General KV Krishna Rao and Major (later General) Zia ur Rehman of East Bengal Regiment which was placed under command of the Brigade. He also talks of the manner in which he directed an air strike at Maulvi Bazar on 08 December.

Brigadier Trigunesh Mukerjee was also a Staff Officer as a Captain in a leading Brigade and recalls dealing with questions from the local Bengali population regarding their missing kin who had been picked up by the Pakistani soldiers and were untraceable. He also talks of the war correspondents and remembers the words of Melville De'Mello: "if you don't love the Army, you can never be a War correspondent."

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silence the enemy'.  
Air Commodore Kurivilla gives us his experience as a Prisoner of War including how Bhutto visited their camp in November 1972 and said; "I want you to go home... and please return our prisoners of war."

Lieutenant General Mohinder Puri was posted in 25 Infantry Division as a Captain and describes the build up to the war as also the attack on Poonch which the GOC General Kundan Singh had anticipated and asked for additional troops. He sums up his account by saying; "intelligence continues to remain a weak spot, though our acquisition capabilities have vastly increased."

Colonel KK Nanda was part of his battalion 13 PUNJAB deployed in Ferozpur and describes leading a Patrol deep into Pakistan and the capture of Southern portion of the Mamdot Bulge in great detail. He says; "his achievement in the war has been the high point of his life". Brigadier Vijay Rai who was with 15 DOGRA gives out the role of his

view were those of young officers taking orders and passing on orders while being in the thick of action themselves. They were not the decision-makers.

Author by who fought the war with grit and courage in the face of adversity. This is a lucid recount of their triumphs and challenges. The book will serve as an inspiration for the next generations of warriors due to the unique insight it has given into a very important chapter of India's military history.

There is no doubt that we as a nation need to salute all those who contributed to the victory and particularly those who made the supreme sacrifice.

Liang works in the lab of Anhong Guo, assistant professor of computer science and engineering. Guo led the development of BrushLens with Alanson Sample, an associate professor in the same department.

Users can comb through a touchscreen interface by holding a phone connected to BrushLens against a touchscreen and dragging the phone across the screen. The phone sees what's on the screen with its camera then reads the options aloud by harnessing the phone's built-in screen readers. Users indicate their menu choice through screen readers or an enlarged, easy-to-tap button in the BrushLens app.

When given a target, BrushLens divides the screen into a grid, then guides the user's hand toward the section of the screen containing their menu choice by saying the coordinates of both the target and device. Once those coordinates overlap,

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The 1971 War was a glorious victory in which all cogs of the wheel performed admirably. It was no doubt a whole nation approach and there is a lot of literature covering various facets of the conflict. This remains a rare book as while it is a narrative from the perspective of young officers, it is a reflection of their wisdom and experience after many years in service shedding light on significant aspects important to win a war. Their points of view were those of young officers taking orders and passing on orders while being in the thick of action themselves. They were not the decision-makers.

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## #TECHNOLOGY

### Boosting Touchscreen Accessibility

"Our goal is to make that technology accessible to everyone," Liang says



A new smartphone case could soon help people with visual impairments, tremors, and spasms use touchscreens independently. The case, dubbed BrushLens, could let users perceive, locate, and tap buttons and keys on the touchscreen menus now ubiquitous in restaurant kiosks, ATM machines, and other public terminals.

"So many technologies around us require some assumptions about users' abilities, but seemingly intuitive interactions can actually be challenging for people," says study first author Chen Liang, a doctoral student in computer science and engineering at the University of Michigan.

"People must be able to operate these inaccessible touchscreens in the world. Our goal is to make that technology accessible to everyone," Liang says.

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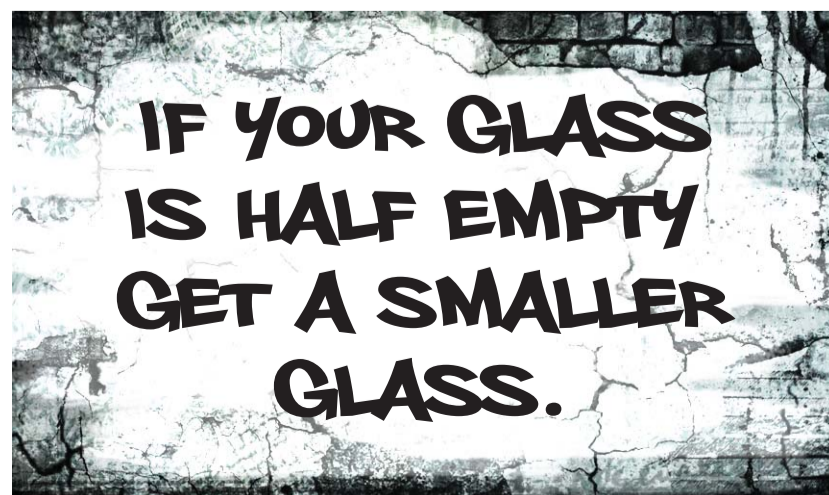
pushbuttons or autoclickers on the underside of the phone case tap the screen for the user, depending on the model. "The user doesn't have to precisely locate where the button is and perform the touch gesture," Liang says.

Ten study participants, six with visual impairments and four with tremors or spasms, tested the hardware and app. "As a blind person, touchscreens are pretty much inaccessible to me unless I have some help or I can plug headphones into the kiosk," says study participant Sam Rau. "Somebody else has to order for you, or they have to help you out with it. I don't want to be in a situation where I always have to rely on the kindness of others."

It took some time for Rau to figure BrushLens out, but once he became familiar with the device, he was excited by the tool's potential. "I thought about myself going into a Panera Bread and being able to order from the kiosk," Rau says. "I could actually see myself accomplishing something that I otherwise thought impossible."

Likewise, BrushLens worked as intended for users whose tremors or spasms cause them to make unwanted selections on touchscreens. For one participant with cerebral palsy, BrushLens improved their accuracy by nearly 74%. The inventors of BrushLens recently applied for a patent with the help of Innovation Partnerships, the University of Michigan's -M's central hub for research commercialization. The team hopes to bring the product to users as an affordable phone accessory. The team plans to further streamline their design so that it easily fits in a pocket. Offloading the battery and processing to the phone, for example, could make the design cheaper and less bulky.

## THE WALL

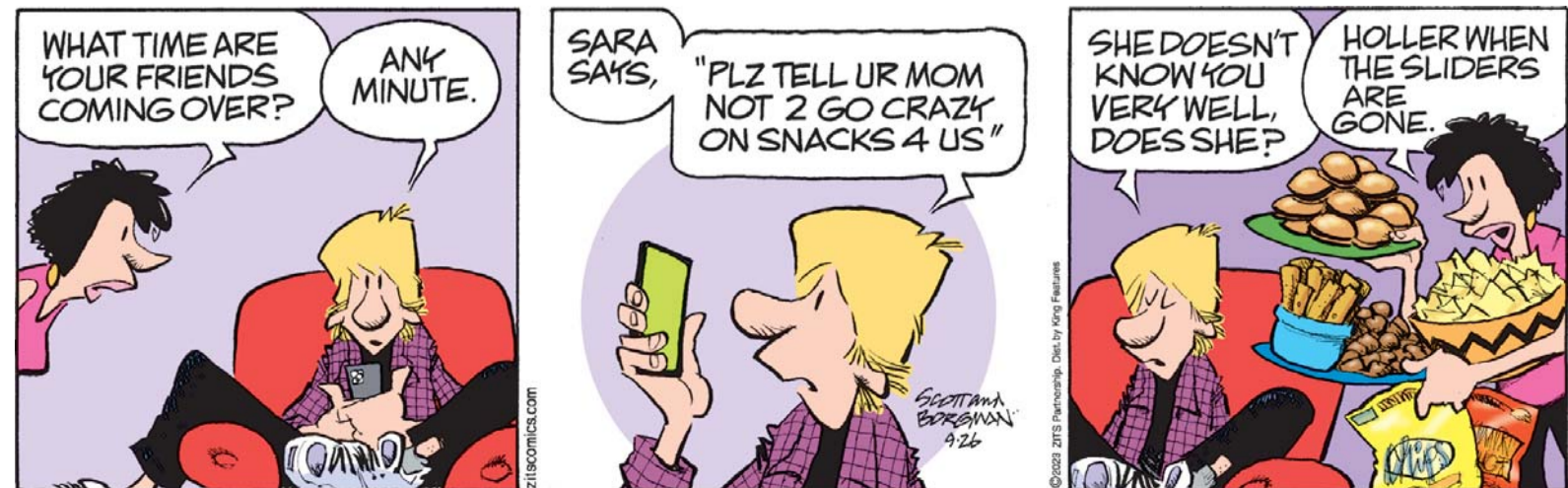


## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman