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ARUNDLE& KIN
2.THE TREE OF LIFE

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Prelude:

Floating borders' delimiting stream
Promise the dream of courageous esteem
Light of soul the earthen ways
Prompting love's endless miraculous maze

Chapter 1. Get to know Yourself

“The beginning is always difficult”, Mrs. Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk said with a smile. In the circle around her were seated some twenty – mostly female – students and were staring with tight eyelids against the light of the mild morning sun, that was flooding the room. Mirrors on the walls around did best to bath the room in light.

“Much light is required, if you want to really see”, the Professor went on, who was the Headmistress of the School of Inbetween and closed her eyes the way she wanted it done by her students.

She sighted at the two girls in the middle of the circle, whose contours – so it seemed to her – clearly shone up. “Well, you see, it's all that easy. Take care of the contours. You have to fix the edge of the sound bodies, and then you see IT. Everybody sees IT some when”, she comforted the despairing, who were shaking their heads, and rubbed their burning eyes.

“I'm sorry, I don't see anything,” Arundle whispered into her friend Florinna's ear.

“It seemed to me as if I saw a grey line, though”, Florinna answered. “Quite small, as if the edge is doubling. Imagine you look at a page. It's essential to get the contour. Don't get distracted, that's important. It takes a while. Well, is it better now?” Florinna whispered hopefully, as she saw Arundle's face clearing up. “Grey, you say?” she asked, and her question was more an assumption though. “Blue-grey with a tendency towards silver?” – “That's right – you've got it, a silver stripe on the horizon, so to speak. Keep it and move along the contour – where the light is.”

“It's like a miracle” Arundle sighed. “Isn't it?” Florinna agreed. “How beautiful the humans are!”

And all of a sudden it happened to be like in a pot full of corn over the fire: From all sides the Ahs and Ohs popped up like popping popcorn – whenever someone switched and passed the border to ‘the other way of seeing’.

Mrs. Wiggles nodded satisfied. “Was about time, after all...” she grumbled, while licking her lips all dry from the tension. Every time she fevered with the candidates, for the blooming first time.

The other groups of the basic course ‘Get to know yourself’ were taken care of by others. One of them was Mrs. Wiggles’ husband the Vice-Headmaster, Adrian Humperdijk. Lucky though, Marsha did not have to handle his male-dominated group. As the boys had even more problems switching to ‘the other way of seeing’. While you only had to let yourself in and did not get disturbed, though, and of course the light had to be right. Nevertheless, if there was no aura, you couldn’t see anything of course. Not everybody got the aura or a bright charisma, as it differed from day to day with those who called it their own.

However, bothering about such finesses was far too early. First, they should be glad to have managed. The candidates in the middle of the room were chosen Somniors of course, as all other members of the group. They all were gifted with the ability of guided dreaming. That was why they had found together, and Mrs. Wiggles-Humperdijk’s task was to show them the secret ways of sympathy that was drawing them towards each other.

That was no question for Florinna, as her little sister was sitting in the middle of the room. That was why Arundle had been so desperate, not as well to see, what she was feeling. She loved Corinia, loved her as much as did her sister. They were friends since they met some five years ago.

They had achieved quite something, wherever they intervened, finally yet importantly the turmoil in Laptopia, and after all, they found their way to the School of Inbetween. Here now it was high time to develop and form all those slumbering talents and gifts, they have been blessed with.

“Those who are able to guide and influence their dreams are called Somniors” Mrs. Wiggles-Humperdijk just explained. “Your colour you know by now. – Yes, a light silvery Grey – that is correct... However, please do not wonder, should you come about other colours or shades. The world over here is no less colourful than the world over there... but I don’t want to anticipate, what’s getting hopefully clearer in the long run. Our next exercise is going to look a little different to the one you just absolved.

Look for a site in front of the mirrors, and then focus on your own contour. I think it is light enough everywhere. Take your time, concentrate, look for the line at the edge of your contour, watch for colour and shape.”

Everybody went silent, you could almost feel the concentration. Arundle felt it not at all easy to concentrate on her own image, until she stopped thinking and managed to ignore the own self. Then she saw the line in the mirror, sound and clear. She followed the line and when she came to the head, she noticed, what the Headmistress had meant with shape. On her

head, she could see a couple of about four inch long rays extending. They were not at all grey or silvery, but shone in all colours of the rainbow.

‘...didn’t know what kind of metaphysical punk I am’ she wondered and grinned. Her eyes met those of the Headmistress, who was quietly sneaking through the hall and got in contact with the exercisers here and then. She nodded and smiled at Arundle and whispered – “About that, we are going to talk later. Don’t you worry, you are quite alright, you metaphysical punk, you are...” as if she had read Arundle’s thoughts. Her gaze seemed to touch Arundle almost corporal, and was tenderly striking over her hair. The sprouting rays bent like a brush, but got immediately up, as soon as the gaze went on.

Arundle was somewhat confused anyway. After the exercise, she did not want to share her friends’ cheerful small talk, who were talking about all those new experiences, while strolling towards the dining room, as it was time for lunch.

They had indeed spent the whole morning with these exercises.

“What’s the matter?” Corinia asked, while she was queuing next to her with her tray. Arundle only shook her head. “I’m just exhausted, it was rather heavy, that’s all...” she murmured, but Corinia didn’t give up. “There’s something wrong with you. Come on, tell me, who you could tell, if not us?”

Arundle just wanted to start with an explanation, when she saw Billy-Joe’s head in a group of boys, whom he exceeded at least by two inches.

On Mondays was their ‘South Pacific Day’; they all had agreed upon, so they automatically headed for the palm leaves roof. Billy-Joe was not smiling as usual; like Arundle, he was monosyllabic and taciturn. He didn’t understand why he was in such a bad mood, although they had had a lot of fun with Professor Humperdijk this morning.

First, they tried ‘the other kind of seeing’ but gave up after some fruitless trials. Adrian altered his strategy. “Forget your eyes for the moment. We try something else. Close your eyes, stretch your arms out, and move slowly through the room. And when you notice something, stand still and try to describe, what you feel” he suggested. In addition, as not all seemed to be enthusiastic about his proposal he added, „Come on, have it a trial, don’t waste time.“

Giggling and uncertain the boys started tapping through their hall. First, they bumped into each other, but soon they changed and took better care. Adrian nodded quite satisfied. ‘They feel each other, otherwise they wouldn’t sneak about so elegantly’ he reckoned.

“How do you feel? Stay with what you feel, don’t let it slip away”, he suggested to the searchers, the band developed into. Like ferric cuttings

under the influence of a strong magnet, the boys came to an arrangement and formed a figure.

Billy-Joe was the centre. He was slowly wheeling around, until Adrian asked him to halt, while from all sides the stretched out hands got closer, until the boys had circled him in.

“What do I feel? Come on, let it out” Adrian whispered. “Don’t be shy, no matter, no why...”

“Steaming Fuji when winter sun turn” a voice was heard. “Hay, hay” came the answer – must have been the Japanese, though, Billy-Joe guessed, while a clapping and singing arose clemadshaaroo, clemadshaaroo – that were the Africans. His own people still hesitated. Then he heard them murmur “sacred mount when rain cloud kiss” he meant to understand.

The groping hands got still, while the circle started wheeling. Everyone kept uttering what he was feeling. Again, the voices got in order after a while and formed a sound carpet that swallowed any detail. So Adrian stopped the trance, the circling got into, by clapping his hands.

For the rest of the morning everybody was busy describing, what his feelings had been, while Adrian stressed on the colours having been noticed. Grey had been the favourite colour of all groups, while red had been important as well.

“Next time, we are going to see those colours with our own eyes instead of deducing them from what we were doing, as we did today... - Well it’s about time for lunch I’m afraid” he said, rubbing his belly in good hope, so to speak. You could see where his affections were set on.

“You are going to learn the meaning of the colours later. First, we have to see them, right. It’s like with everything. Humans got to learn the most common things, that’s where we differ from other more limited species ...although they are in certain aspects far closer than we like to accept” – he added and gave Billy-Joe a long and thoughtful glance. That was the reason why the young man was in a bad mood at lunchtime. He felt his headache coming.

Sunshine and fresh air might do, he decided. The summer was approaching with might down under in the south now in the beginning of October. He would do some sports in the afternoon.

The morning lesson was arbitrary; you had to pass it, because otherwise you could not go on. “Whatever you are going to achieve” the Headmistress reconfirmed repeatedly “you’ve got to know yourself and find out your colours.”

They served the famous Flying Bats for lunch, and Florinna, who disliked them in the beginning, had them as her favourite dish in the

meantime. They were made of a variety of ingredients, among which there was definitely no meat. The form it was, that gave them the name.

Billy-Joe and Arundle did not speak, but stuffed in thoughtfully, what was on their plates. Nobody cared for a dessert, they rushed off for a swim right away.

Billy-Joe enjoyed not only swimming but sailing as well. He would love to sail over to the forbidden island, but did not dare – not yet!

“Far too dangerous” it was said. “It’s the reef, and besides the island is taboo and is strictly reserved for the so called Convertors. What Convertors are, you will soon be learning in your elementary course ‘get to know yourself’ you can’t explain in two of three sentences, though...”

Nevertheless, sailing in the fresh southerly winds behind the reef was also fun. You had some hundred yards plain racing course ahead, before you had to get round the final buoy.

*

On September 15, the summer-term had started officially in the School of Inbetween. Arundle and her friends had soon found out, that it was not all that easy to get all their interests into one timetable, although all of them were dreamers, or as they were called here – Somniors.

Billy-Joe had to pick up a lot of regular stuff, and Corinia was one year behind anyway. So they packed their days fuller than full, and might have to give in here or there, eventually.

“Somniors are naturally gonna be attracted by each other” was the saying and the friends proved it. They all remembered the spontaneous sympathy they felt, when they first met.

The three girls knew each other for ages, though. They first met while still in Elementary School. Of course, they didn’t know, why they felt driven towards each other then, although there were severe obstacles in their way. Nevertheless, they overcame them with great bravura, and that went on and included now Billy-Joe, Arundle relied on, more than she could say, and saw in him the brother, she had never had, and so did her friends. For them this was even easier, as Billy-Joe looked quite alike.

For Corinia nobody needed to worry. She was gay by nature and managed well with everybody. She was never retreated and was easily accepted wherever she came, while Arundle had her difficulties with certain people. That was why her friendship with the two girls was so fortunate and advantageous.

Thus, it was no wonder that they stuck together, while going through thick and thin. Billy-Joe was as cheerful as Corinia, although it did not look alike right now, because of his headache, and the worries, the morning’s exercise had caused. It was the same every month shortly before and after the full moon.

*

The school kept them so busy, that they forgot about all their former activities and their enthusiasm did not find a limit yet. They were eager like beavers. Billy-Joe had to overcome the worst gaps and was therefore doing the greatest deal of work. He sometimes felt exhausted. His headache might have to do with such an overload.

“You’ve got to step back,” Arundle said very decidedly. “You work too much. You cannot handle the stuff of six years in six months. If there weren’t the other subjects, first of all our all important basic course ‘the other way of seeing’, I wouldn’t mind...”

“Arundle is right. We are lying down here in the sunshine, go for a swim, have a round of tennis or just chat. That’s the way we are spending our afternoons” Florinna added. “And what are you doing?” Corinia asked – “you are sitting at one of your tutors, who are fed up as well, and would prefer to relax. No wonder your head is aching...”

As this was the first free afternoon for ages, that Billy-Joe was spending at the waterside. He felt his headache fading. It would be nice, if the three were right, he thought partly convinced.

The wind calmed down and the sailing turn came to a natural end. The evening kept coming, while they left the lagoon and climbed the stairs up to the crown of the island. The sun was sending his last rays over the glittering sea, waving his good-bye at them. The wind from the south fell in with the night again and still blew somewhat chilly, as it came from the polar ice and had not been underway long enough to warm up.

Almost unconsciously, Arundle sighted along the contours of Billy-Joe’s, and some sort of watch made a click inside, while switching into the other mode of seeing. There was that fine grey cloak fluorescing around his body. He was one of them after all, and was dwelling and travelling together with them in the dreamtime. Yes, those Somniors – as they were called over here – could often not differentiate, which time was more important – except for the last month, perhaps.

More silvery than grey the cloak covered him, and it warmed the cockles of her heart. How dear he was to her! Her sight moved on, on the search for the almost invisible fine rays. Whether he had a similar crown of rainbow-rays around his head? But to her surprise she discovered some single red wire-like beams extending at length from tip to toe, so the speak. What did that mean?

Arundle closed her eyes. She felt like having seen something misfitting, which should not be there, although it was there. It was a feeling, though, that made her keep it hidden in her mind. They might get an explanation, while they proceeded on the way of enlightenment.

Nevertheless, patience was not her strongest notion. She would have to wait a whole week, until the course continued, that wasn't her cup of tea. If she sneaked into one of the other groups? They might have got further. Most Somniors clung together, but what, if there were connecting points with other colours?

The Korean twins came to her mind. They were no Somniors and still somehow familiar. Then she remembered the little lad from Mongolia so full of hatred, while she only wanted to excuse herself, for the performance of hers.

Did she know what she wanted to find out? Well, she could test her newly adopted ability, whenever she wanted. The colours showed her the right way.

2.The Animations

“There are connecting points, no doubt about that. The differences are smaller than you realize in your mind”, Marsha explained and Adrian nodded heftily. All groups of Somniors were bundled that morning, though. The aim was to come to a first overall view.

All of the Somniors now managed ‘the art of the other seeing’ after all, while the male still felt uncertain. In the aftermath they now understood, what they had been doing, tapping blindfold around and associating all kinds of landmarks. In the proper light, they all showed the same or a similar shade of grey, and that was their colour after all.

“Seeing is not all” the Vice-Headmaster pointed out. As seeing was not his favourite either.

“But it’s a definite sign” his wife added, who knew the little weaknesses of her husband. In a way men reminded her of dogs, they often did rely on their other senses more than on their sight. But that she did better not let him know. Her husband already felt somehow inferior, and she had to take care of his sensitivity.

“After all, the result is, what counts, isn’t it?” he objected, and in his voice a faint air of protest swaggered; only she was able to hear.

“We do have dear guests today, as you are not the only ones, who experience the art of self-knowledge, as all of us are challenged with - most of all the newcomers, since they lack the appropriate discernment. But you, who have ripened meanwhile to a certain extend – some more, some less – may uncover entirely new dimensions...”

The large group of Somniors was not formed only by the newcomers alone. The course also consisted of youngsters who had been found ripe

now to win first merits in such magic field. Besides, those who had failed last term, and had to repeat the course.

“Without a triple A mark, you won’t get along, as a matter of fact” the advanced participants explained, somewhat bitter, as this was their last chance, no matter how advanced they were in other fields.

“Li Chang and Li Mei may be still well known from their sensational gig at the introductory feast. Today you are going to exercise and test your newly acquired abilities.

No whispering or giggling please and no cheating. Concentrate for your own sake. Form circles. And the two of you, would you please step to the marked spots? – Yes, that’s right. The whole room is flooded with light. Alas, get ready. Concentration please! Find the borderline, search for the contour; let the light be glimmering a little. It takes an instant, while the eyes adjust...”

The Korean twins felt strange first, as they were separated. They did not like that. However, the circle had been too large for both of them in the centre. By now the probationers pressed in already for the best position, while the light was everywhere the same.

Arundle and her friends understood the twins quite well. Being part of your acquainted made you feel awkward without them. All the more now dozens of eye-pairs gazed intensely at you. Tensions and excitement had to ebb, before you could think of ‘the other kind of seeing’.

Arundle tried her own exercise. She advised her friends to do likewise by telepathy, and to concentrate on themselves. Her suggestion was welcomed from others as well, as a telepathetic flow cannot be limited.

Marsha nodded approvingly - ‘... great talents seem to develop right there...’ she thought. Besides, they were lucky with the newcomers this year on the students’ side, but on the teachers’ as well. Who would have believed Professor Grisella Lady of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots to master the Divinatio almost perfect? - And such quite impulsive, without any further promotion. Of course she had studied the mystics, any earnest philosopher would do. However, were there not thousands of philosophers, who did not proceed on that way, because they did not meet the spirit?

The atmosphere in the lecture-hall changed. The Headmistress could feel it. She glanced about the circle and realized that all eye-pairs were fixed on the media. The upset gaze made her know, that the pHase of ‘the other kind of seeing’ had set in.

She herself followed the blue contours of the Animations, as were built up exemplarily by the Korean twins. A broad deep-blue line cloaked Li Mei. Compared to such a blue their own grey was somewhat weak, Corinia wondered. She grabbed for the hand of Florinna, as if the touch

increased the effect. Arundle was moved as well, while Billy-Joe didn't know what that meant. He was not sure whether the blue shimmer he noticed, was what he was supposed to see, as he felt quite acquainted with. Against the light and the sky in the background, such a stripe was almost unavoidable. Was there anybody at home, who did not build up such a coating? Perhaps his so-called father, who was drowning his last bits of brain in any kind of alcohol in the range.

Well, up here you did not see the sky. Even more, he wondered how such coating could be. All of a sudden, he got it. Not the heaven was covering the beings, but they were emitting the colour from inside. That was the difference!

Arundle took special care of the 'hairstyle'. Li Mei did not show a rainbow-coloured crown of rays. Her head was surrounded by some kind of grey garland, extending over the temples like a hood, which might be the reason for the spontaneous sympathy she felt.

Uneasiness was going to spread. Everybody seemed to have seen enough. The interest in Li Mei sank like a burned out fire. The later rehearsal of the exercise brought about, what Billy-Joe had guessed. The members of his tribe were without doubt dreamers. The Professors explained the blue colour as well as the reflection of the sky that overruled the original grey.

"On the other hand transmigration of souls is nothing unusual amongst aborigines" Professor Humperdijk objected. "The one or the other colour may well overrule or undercover..."

"Besides, take care of strict rules and limiting borders. Things are floating where we are moving, there might be other treasures hiding deep inside you," the Headmistress agreed with her husband.

"Yes, but what does the blue colour actually mean?" a voice asked.

"Should I like as well to know," another added.

What about you, Li Chang and Li Mei would you like to talk a little. What are you doing anyway?" The Headmistress asked.

"Well, yes, sometimes when we think we are sleeping, only our body sleeps..."

"Yes, we only sleep..." Li Chang agreed "and when we wake up, we lie in our beds, no matter where we come from, and what we experienced or what we've seen."

"I think the differences aren't so big, after all" Li Mei went on "It starts like that: We see us lying somewhere, and then the journey begins..."

"Whereas we do have difficulties aiming at our targets... well, I have" Li Chang objected.

"... Or the find the way back" Li Mei added "it's sometimes kind of difficult, though..."

“Yes finding the way back is most important. Imagine your soul is goofing about and cannot find her body. That’s a strange feeling. It’s like being lost in a strange city and nobody is there, who can understand and who you could ask.”

“Horrible, just horrible – it once happened to me, and I was so shocked, that I didn’t touch the matter for months.”

“Yes, but how do you escape from you body first of all?” another voice asked.

“Souls are leaving their bodies only after death, that’s what we know...” another added.

“Are you kind of dead, when you’re leaving your body?”

The twins looked at each other and shrugged. They had never thought about getting out of their bodies. “As we said, the homecoming is the problem, understand? Everything else is just there.”

“That’s the way with us, we are born like this. Our mother said, it came from the fact, that there wasn’t enough space in the womb for both of us” Li Mei said with a smile.

“I see, that was why your souls escaped once in a while, sound logical” Arundle replied – “...and you don’t need any device like a magic bow or so? Does work all by itself, though?”

Arundle thought of her way of disappearing, since the magic bow had come to her. She couldn’t think of a life without. She had felt really miserable at that time, and while desperately longing for a companion, her wish became strong enough and got real.

Li Mei and Li Chang looked rather stunned; they did not know what Arundle was talking about. They did not understand what she wanted to tell them, by referring to her magic bow.

They whispered at each other for a short while, and then came about with a funny explanation. “Do you mean anything like snuffling Teddy?”

“Before one of us gets started, she snuggles up to her Teddy, though...”

“... And she’s often offended as well...”

“Well, then she is snuffling at her Teddy, and when she comes to an end with it, she is gone, and just lies there empty and still. We as the remainders got to take care of her body, keep it warm, when it’s cold or cool when it’s hot...”

“...ain’t always easy though...”

“...mainly in winter, I’m sure you can imagine...”

“at home it’s no big thing, but when we came flying here we had an argument and Li Chang was so upset, that she couldn’t stand it. I was terribly afraid as she became stiff and still. How could I explain that to the

hostess? Besides, I didn't know how she would manage to return in flight. Lucky me Li Chang's seizure went by soon..."

"In other words your gift is not a blessing" Arundle asked and felt reminded of her flying from the real world into an imaginary one, as she did with her magic bow. Although she did not leave a cold and motionless body behind. That was but quite a difference.

"That's what you've got to learn right away and never forget anymore – all of you: your gift's likewise some kind of burden as well! - Thank you my dearest good child" the Headmistress warmly said with a thankful gaze at Arundle.

"It's not all that bad" Li Chang and Li Mei shook their heads. "It's neither all trouble nor all fun." They knew of course what was really going on. Of course, they wouldn't like to miss all those beautiful sights and intriguing discernments. "But a little more safety wouldn't be all that bad"

"...It's sometimes like Russian roulette, so to speak" Li Chang agreed to what her sister had said.

"Well, after all, we're still here, as you can see..." they said grinning. "Our parents want us to get a sound training."

"Our mother took lessons with a Shaman while she was young."

"Yes, that's why we are here."

"It's nice to be with others, though..."

"Right, we are all the like in some way, that's right." The Headmistress came back into the developing discussion that was what she had wanted.

"There are big differences as well. And we are going to find them out as well, while we get better acquainted with each other."

The little ones wanted to know about that Teddy snuffling, as some of them still had a pet with her or him, they wouldn't stand to become separated from, as if they were the ends of invisible naval-strings, connecting them with their parents.

Some wanted to know the difference between snuggling and snuffling, but there was none. It might be a question of translation though.

Professor Humpertdijk grabbed for the thread and explained in detail, how people used drugs almost everywhere in the world to get in trance. Those Animations seemed to be predicted, was his conclusion.

Such intersection did not meet his wife's appreciation at all. Thoughtless remarks like that could ruin the best conversation. In fact none of the Somnors knew what he intended to say. Probably their Teddy was filled with some special kind of substance. However, the twins denied. Their Teddy was theirs for ages. What ever had been in there must have evaporated in the meantime.

The twins had come here, because they had had trouble, and had been dismissed from their former school because they had been involved in a case of drug abuse. No wonder they went silent after the Vice-Headmaster's intervention.

'That was it then, the discussion had been strangled, thanks to Adrian's silly remark.' – Marsha thought and suggested a short break. She hoped she could save the situation by that to a certain extent. The students pushed out onto the balustrade rounding the hall, as they were on the tallest building – a kind of observatory, with the covering roof half open. Here the conditions of light were just ideal and perfect. Not only the basic "Get to know yourself"- Course met up here, but Astronomers and Astrologers as well as Painters and Sculptors; the latter mostly in the afternoons, the first in the morning and the others by night, because the morning-light was best for 'the other kind of seeing'.

That was why some of the students spent their whole day up here. Scholasticus Slyboots was teaching here after nightfall, while Grisella of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots was teaching here in the afternoons, to pass on her considerable artistic knowledge.

Arundle and her friends were closely familiar with both. As things do happen, their lifelines had finally crossed right here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. The families of the two Professors from Germany were arriving these days at last. Professor Slyboots managed to get rid of the old workload at last, except for two scholars still left, but could be looked after from afar to a certain extent as well.

From the balustrade of the observatory, there was a fantastic roundabout sight. The Isle of Wisdom-tooth extended to all sides towards the sharp rocks and cliffs of the volcano edge, behind which the stratum fell deep down into the steaming sea. The sea in rage had over the thousands of years reduced the former broad socket of the island and had formed this now so typical appeal. Therefore, the founders of the School of Inbetween thought it quite suitable to name the island Wisdom-tooth, as they did. Other native names were not known, as the island had never been settled permanently.

The sharp salty seawater got into the former chimney as well biting corridors and passages where the substance allowed, while the slot was filled from the top with drifting fertile sand, as if a giant dentist counteracted the destruction from within, with fillings from outside.

The peculiar geological state guided the architects of the School of Inbetween and led them to the now typical form of the inner building. They could use the natural flights and tunnels by slightly altering the form or shape. Therefore, it was done. Thus, not only the chambers and dormitories could be set up, but as well huge halls for a variety of purposes like sports

and sociality. Of course, the maze of corridors made orientation a bit of a problem, as not all parts were inhabited, but landmarks and road signs did a good job, though. If someone wanted to get lost – here he had a good chance.

When the architects realized how easy it was to build subsoil, the housing programme on the surface was frozen. Thus the tallest building – the observatory – now formed the centre of the island, that had been opened this morning for flooding ‘the chosen few’ with the golden rays of the bright sun and make them aware of their own true colours.

After the break the discussion did not get started, no matter how hard the Professors tried. It was about lunchtime anyway, and the participants had other things in mind - thinking ahead, what they would do in the afternoon.

Billy-Joe had an appointment with the math tutor. Arundle would come back up here, as well as Florinna, while Corinia had her deep-sea colloquium on the lowest floor in that hall with the big crystal pane. Arundle and Florinna had registered for Grisella’s art lesson. Afterwards they all wanted to go for a swim in the lagoon.

The southerly summer broke out with might, and while still fresh winds were blowing around the island, the thermometer climbed steadily, day by day. It would become a long summer for those from the northern hemisphere this year, a very long summer indeed, and they intended to enjoy it at best they could.

3. The Sublimators¹

“Today we not only need light, but space as well” the Headmistress opened the session of this week’s basic course ‘Become aware of yourself’. The roof of the observatory was opened, as it otherwise was only done for the astronomers in a clear night, and reminded on a blossoming flower, opening up for the early morning sun.

“Put your caps and hats on, please. The sun down here is stronger than elsewhere as the ozone layer is fading over the pole,” Professor Humperdijk suggested, who could not stand the sunlight, because of his albino-like complexion. He lowered himself carefully in the shade of a huge umbrella, and took good care that not the slightest ray got at his snow-white skin. His complexion was his caprice. Mrs. Wiggles-Humperdijk, his wife, got used to that. Nevertheless, she also covered under a huge straw

¹ Sublimo = lat. lift up

hat that fitted well and advantageous. Rather obedient the students put their caps and hats on, or used handkerchiefs for replacement, as they all knew the dangers and risks of the southern summer sun. The ozone-hole was growing year after year, and allowed the dangerous UV-rays to pass unfiltered down to Earth.

As in the last session, the Headmistress had invited guests. Again her students should get to know another group, who they shared the island with, while they did not have much contact though.

“But that’s gonna change soon”, Mrs. Wiggles prophesied with a meaningful air. “You’ll soon notice how wonderful you’re gonna complement.”

Of course, this was kind of wishful thinking on her side. The reality looked somewhat different. There seemed to be mysterious obstacles in the way, obstructing all too close contacts between the colours.

Perhaps it was the difference between the colourings, as the guests today were devoted to the colour green. That made the difference - whatever the reason was! As open-minded as last week, things would not work out, the Headmistress thought and sighed. For that the differences were too large. You could feel the resentments even before the first contact in the room, as they kept wavering ahead from both sides, as if some nasty disease infected the others.

Mrs. Wiggles raged with anger inside. However, she as well felt a certain shyness when it came to bodily contacts with members of the group, she had invited for today. All the more, she produced friendly gestures, which were rather difficult to obtain as she felt resentments from all sides, as soon as the guests finally appeared.

Once more, she had to admit, that she was one of the Somniors, who she was devoted to, next to their close relatives the Animators².

The demarcation-line to their guests of today met a highly sensible sphere, and had to do with strange characteristics of habits, they might never become acquainted with. The only exception was her own husband, and she was not able to explain, why this was so, as he disappeared in part behind that imaginary demarcation-line of repellents.

The guests, a small group of two girls and two boys, did not make any advances. They did not open up for small talk or social gestures; and that was not only due to the language barrier, which without doubt existed. Those four came to equal parts from Mongolia and Patagonia, which did not seem to cause yet problems amongst them; - as might have been suggested. Thus was not the case. They seem to have developed some kind of very special private talk they communicated with amongst each other.

² anima = lat. soul

As soon as they stepped into the circle in the middle, they turned their backs to the group of attentive Somniors. The Repellent stood almost physically like a block of ice right amidst them and made the more sensible ones shudder. The Headmistress hurried to come to an end with her introduction of the guests, who didn't care at all for her or her friendly words, be it, that they didn't understand or that they were just ignorant or otherwise occupied.

Repeatedly the Headmistress sighted disapprovingly over to her husband, who was sitting under his big umbrella with closed eyes and did not seem to mind what was going on. While his duty as co-ordinator of the groups had it been, to show responsibility.

In the present case there had been little to choose, as the group of the Sublimations consisted of only the four guests. Mrs. Wiggles should have known that. Perhaps she had forgotten about it. She intended to have a word with their tutor about decent behaviour, as theirs was not acceptable. The four contradicted fundamentally the spirit and the intentions of the school.

Arundle recognized the leader of the small group as the angry boy, who performed after her on that introductory feast. His contribution then had been a complete failure, as well as her trial to cheer him up.

She felt again that secret longing, as if that little group attracted something inside, where she only considered rejection, all the more as they started wheeling about in a hefty whirl. Faster and faster the four whirled round. The arms over the shoulders vanished to one circle, and the beating feet could not be seen anymore, when a green whirl swallowed them, and had them lift from the ground forming one body. You could still hear and discriminate voices: wild screams and unbound yelling of released excitement and sheer joy, reaching Arundle's ears and initiated a very special kind of sweet aching, she'd never experienced before.

She witnessed something great. The green whirl lifted, the ground contact was long given up, as if an inner power in the middle of the circle tore an invisible rope upwards, taking with it the combined body of the ecstatic four, and had their joy spread over the wide world.

Professor Humpertdijk twinkled satisfied, as he saw the heads bending up with open mouths, while the green mist got shiny and thin in the glowing light of the summer sun, and only a fierce chanting reminded the left-behinds of the joy and happiness of their comrades up there.

How weak and helpless they then felt! The hardly suppressed ignorance and resistance turned into open admiration; how much did they long to participate now, had they the power as well.

Up and down the green whirl waved. Fierce commands made them reverse whenever the ground came too close.

How much time elapsed nobody could tell later, whether seconds or minutes did not mind – what an experience!

When the green whirl slowly and finally lowered and the tripling feet could be heard again, and the wheeling circle could be seen, as well as the ecstatic faces, there was a frenetic applause arising thus, the dome vibrated. The onlookers yelled and screamed as if they themselves had just been ‘dancing with the wind’.

“Thus we call our little exercise – Dancing with the Wind”, Tibor, the leader, explained still gasping for breath, all merry and gay. No fierce resistance any more, no morbid fume of plague and pain...

The dancers were surrounded by their comrades, all eager to know what had been going on right away, and how one could move so fast and green... how you felt above the surface, and if you realized what was going on down there... and why you didn’t get sick...

Questions over questions and the morning were over before the worst thirst was stilled.

“There is a language, that can do more than words say” Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk whispered into her husband’s ear, and embraced him thankfully. “There you pulled us well by the legs. You knew what they intended, didn’t you?”

Adrian shrugged meaningful – “I think it is worth while a continuation, don’t you think so too? And next time there will perhaps be a real surprise – wait and see...”

“That was wonderful really absolutely marvellous; I miss the words to express what I feel. I could almost sob, so happy as I am” - and indeed two tears rolled her over the cheeks, she rubbed off timidly.

She accused herself of being sentimental, but it didn’t help. She knew she had experienced something very special. “There you became almost fifty and then that – you had it before your eyes all the time and didn’t understand a thing, not the least bit...”

Arundle, Billy-Joe, Florinna and Corinia clung to the lips of the little leader. Proudly he explained what ‘the dancing with the wind’ was all about. “There is no other purpose but fun!” Tibor was different now, but Arundle had changed as well, whether she noticed or not. No demonstration of superiority any more (she had an air of arrogance her friends often enough could hardly stand), as she felt superior because of her magic bow. Had her friends not know her better; they would have not only rejected such behaviour but the whole person likewise.

For outsiders Arundle thus was sometimes somewhat challenging and they felt offended. Her newly won friend Tibor was much alike, so there was at least such negative characteristics they had in common, and both

became aware what had happened the other day. Arundle felt sorry for her feelings then and so did Tibor.

“The world is full of prejudices” Florinna commented and Corinia added: “We humans are sometimes so silly!”

“...Most often when we feel witty and sly,” Billy-Joe agreed. All understood what was meant, and nodded meaningfully.

“So, everything is said” Tibor Khan picked up the thread, as nobody asked a question. “There is one thing you didn’t find out...” “What is that?” they all asked and wondered what they had forgotten. “That you are going to understand next time, if I understood Professor Humperdijk right. I’m looking forward to this...”

In order to honour their new friend they accompanied him to his lunch, but the menu didn’t invite them, as most food looked as strange as it smelled. They were here at last so they stayed and did as best they could. Billy-Joe was the least distracted and was heartily chewing the bloody piece of meat Tibor had chosen for him, while the girls had flat cake and sour yoghurt, pretending not to be hungry.

Tibor Khan gave them suspicious glances and earned guilty winks in return until they finally admitted that they didn’t really like the food of his motherland. “But you don’t have an idea of what we eat” he returned offended. Billy-Joe tried to mediate “excellent, really juicy and tender” he exclaimed with bloody foam on his lips. Well, he was used to such kind of nutrition. “Where they come from, the food is produced in factories. If it doesn’t taste like plastic or paper, they can’t stand it, the pitiable chicks.”

Tibor laughed – “Back to nature, is that not a saying with them?” Billy-Joe nodded again and grinned almost weird. “Before you are going to gossip about the traditional role of the woman as such, we better leave you alone”, Florinna said with a smile on behalf of the mocking girls who were in due train to depart. “You may find us at the beach...” and the three waved a good-natured farewell.

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The Headmistress was delighted and officially congratulated Moschus Mogoleya, the teacher in charge of the Sublimations as they were called here in the School of Inbetween, while Adrian, her husband and Vice-Headmaster, also got a piece of the cake, as he was the one who took the risk of such experiment.

The following Thursday morning the joint courses gathered again and this time they needed an open dome in the light flooded sun be-shone seminary high above the island. “This time all of them might be coming” the rumour went among the excited Somnions and Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk only smiled mysteriously but said nothing, as she had been introduced a little further by her husband.

The bell had not rung a second time, while all seats were taken. The Headmistress, followed by her husband and an assistant came marching in through the door and sat down as soon as the bell stopped. They sorted their files meaningfully, then whispered at each other and looked to the door. They seemed to wait for somebody.

You could feel the tension. The Headmistress checked her watch. Nobody had yet spoken an opening word. At last, the Vice-Headmaster nodded and opened the session by summing up the previous lesson.

“We are now coming to the theme of today or should I rather say the intention? I’m sure you remember what last week’s actors promised for this Thursday. We may look forward now, what they are going to surprise us with. For the time being, you may ask questions. I remember quite a few remained unanswered though.”

The Vice-Headmaster sighted around, but there was nothing, nobody wanted to ask any question. “Well then all queries are settled, - would you allow me then to ask some questions? Take it as a kind of test though. I’m prepared to take notes for your evaluation, so let me have your name with your answer please.” That was a surprise; such a turning point they had not expected. The questions now came after all, beginning with the air pressure and the turnover momentum, the difference between centripetal forces and gravitation, as well as the phenomenon of the green colour, and other scientific explanations, whether they could keep up with contributions that were more metaphysical... – Question after question, while the answers trickled in rather poor. The students had thought about other aspects, in fact mostly about their own feelings, while witnessing such a remarkable phenomenon.

“We are interested in other questions” the Vice-Headmaster was soon interrupted.

“How come they are so happy...?”

“Why can’t we learn dancing with the winds?”

“How can they employ such power?”

Thus, it went on and on - everybody was shouting and nobody understood a word. Such a rebellion was more or less part of the Vice-Headmaster’s concept, although the turmoil got all too excessive and busted the limits.

He was lucky to be relieved by a hefty whirl. Most of the questions he had not been able to answer himself. His answers would have been as personal as those of the students were. He knew his hour would come though. The whirl increased and caused loose paper to be sucked in, ending thus all questioning. All eyes gazed upwards from where a whirling green cloud lowered right in the centre of the hall. First, there was nothing but the green circle then you could hear the tripling feet and in the end, you saw

faint bodies shortly before they came to a halt. The landing was accompanied by chanting, ecstatic screams and laughter and moved the hearts of the onlookers and caused in them a strange and sheer unbearable longing for something out of range - rising once more the yearnings of the ground-fixated, now in repetition clearer and more indisputable than ever.

Their aching hearts felt the sting anew, being unable, that is in a way disabled - to do likewise, to feel such sheer pure undividable joy. The Headmistress was expecting the whole lot of the Sublimations, but only the four appeared in the circle. She therefore was somewhat disappointed. "Where are the others?" she asked. "What others?" Tibor Khan asked back. "There are no others, we are the only ones!" While he said that, you could feel the pride as he stressed on the double meaning of the 'only ones' and raised disapproval amongst the audience.

"He's the son of the Khan" a voice whispered that belonged to a Patagonian girl who did not say a word yet. "We are all of pure blood" a second boy backed her up. "Tuzla is the daughter of a famous Shaman, perhaps the most famous of the Southern world", Sandor Kahn objected. He was like his brother Tibor a descendant of the famous Dschingis Khan.

"This is Patagonia, daughter of the great chief Patagos, the last Inca of the land between the oceans" Tibor introduced the last in the round with an elegant waving of his dainty hand. All four were of delicate contour.

'Where do they get the power from?' Arundle wondered, while she felt a strange itching in her legs and asked herself whether she could as well participate in such a wild race.

As if he had read Arundle's thoughts Tibor invited the audience with a gesture of grandeur to form circles in order to try 'the dancing with the wind' by themselves. "What could be more convincing than have it a trial?" he exclaimed enthusiastically.

The circles however were too large and would not work, so he arranged a smaller one. "Best would be fifty, fifty or three to one, otherwise it won't work and we wouldn't get the feet off the ground. We'll have it a trial with the dainty ones first..."

The lucky star maids were chosen by Patagonia right from the spot, while Billy-Joe stayed behind, but didn't mind. He was not as eager as the girls were about 'dancing with the wind'. He had his own dances and knew how you felt - at least that was what he said to himself. In fact, he was nevertheless somewhat jealous and offended not having been chosen right from the spot like his friends. 'We humans are funny beings, if we don't get what we want, we pretend of not having wanted it, whereas we long for it more than for anything else' he wondered, while 'the dancers with the wind' wheeled and whirled about jubilant. The green whirl however didn't appear yet, Billy-Joe noticed, somewhat satisfied. However, the dancers

had big fun and then Billy-Joe meant to see the green whirl at last and couldn't distinguish the tripping feet anymore. This image took only seconds, while the feet came back in sight and on the ground and the yelling faded as well, while the girls appeared with red sweating faces breathing heavily and the circle came to a halt and so did the other. The young teachers were not very enthusiastic but when they realized how their pupils felt, they calmed down. After all, they had to do with laymen, thus, you should not expect too much, they said to themselves.

“Can't we do that again?”

“What about a dancing school?”

“It's so great, you really get out of your mind...”

“Thank you so much, you don't know what fun it was...”

Such was the agreement from all sides. Tibor nodded with satisfaction. He gathered his folk proudly, none of them showed signs of strain. “We are leaving you now. You may talk things over with your teacher!” Again, the four Sublimations formed a magic circle and whirled away just like that, while the remaining discussed the dangers of prejudices for the rest of the morning, until they came to the roots and uncovered them: You got rid of prejudices by empathy, and empathy worked best by doing, they just had learnt.

Ignorance and self-esteem had been whirled away in ‘the dancing with the wind’; Arundle realized and again was ashamed. She now felt admiration where she had felt ignorance before.

4. The Divinators

“You've got to know not only yourself but your mates as well. They are different and acquainted at the same time”, the Headmistress Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk opened the weekly session of the basic course ‘Get to know yourself’ – “well, as far as your talents are concerned. You got rid of your prejudices after a closer look and you were able to lift the corner of the carpet hiding a truth and reality you had not dreamed of. Even we were most surprised, am I right, Adrian?” The Vice-Headmaster nodded.

“...As I'm a Somnior like you, but that doesn't mean - everything is said then, not about me or about you. Our colour is grey. Why that is so, nobody has yet found out and most likely will never find out, I am afraid. – We are closest acquainted with the Animations. In fact, for many of us, there is only little difference between Somnions and Animations, although some of us may see it differently. We both run the risk – or is it a privilege – to leave our resting body behind, while travelling about. Something is in

us, which manage to get rid of the corporal bonds occasionally. The Somniors call it the Self. The Animators call it the Soul, as the soul travels on. Animators have to care all their lives to keep body and soul together. I'm sure you remember a situation, when you felt endangered, and didn't know the outcome."

The Headmistress now addressed to the Animators. In their faces, you could see doubts. They were all still deeply impressed by 'the Dancing with the Wind' of the Sublimators, and nobody wanted to raise a wholly different argument. Besides was it time for lunch anyway.

"Until next week then – again in the great assembly as we've just had" the Vice-Headmaster shouted, while everybody got up and tried to get away first, discussing in small groups and pairs, what had impressed them most this morning, and that was not the likeness of Somniors and Animators.

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The Headmistress Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk sighted meaningfully in the round, and her co-referent Penelope M'gamba kept her eyes rolling around no less meaningful, although she could not confirm everything, her colleague said. She did not have problems returning into her body after excursions. As an Animator, she nevertheless contributed to what the Headmistress said, as Marsha was not only a dear friend but also a Somnior and that she had to consider as well somehow.

The hall underneath the glassed dome was filled up to the last seat this Monday afternoon. A block seminar combined all members of the basic course "Get to know yourself", as the semester was on the verge of turning, and the Professors regarded it high time formulate some kind of conclusion and weigh successes and failures.

Professor Humperdijk, the Co-ordinator of all basic courses was not available that day. He had departed with his Convertiors almost two hours ago over to the neighbouring island, the Headmistress explained somewhat formally. Her voice was laden with fear and sorrow, as always when her husband was concerned. Such excursion by the time of the full moon was part of the training of the Convertiors, and was not harmless at all. So Marsha regarded them as an unnecessary offence, she would very much have liked to overcome, the sooner the better. A limit had been reached, which she had at best lowered much further, while she knew of course, that there was no chance, you couldn't interfere with the natural might and forces.

Penelope M'gamba, who knew much better this time what the Headmistress was talking about, patted her arm tranquillising "looks worse than it is, believe me, dear Marsha, they don't harm each other. Its all just

habitual ado, when you Somniors lie in bed like corpses, while underway in your dreams somewhere far abroad, it doesn't look convincing either."

Nevertheless, Marsha was hard to be calmed down. She thought of the natural dangers out there, the strange inhabitants, the wild storms, the sharp reefs and most of all the incalculable fellow humans. Therefore, she was alert from the first sign of the beginning full moon until the first signs of descend again. Four days, sometimes even six, the Conversiors remained on their island, if they didn't, like Adrian, plunge into the wide-open sea and disappeared.

Penelope M'gamba would join them shortly after the seminar. She didn't need the boat that was taking the small group of Conversiors over to the island. Her field of action was the sky. She would follow last minute. She had everything under control by now and read the signs precisely the conversion was announced with.

Some days ago Adrian Humpertdijk had asked Billy-Joe in his office for a lengthier conversation. They had talked about the fits of headache Billy-Joe encountered regularly, being on the increase since the puberty month by month. "Something wants to come out, and doesn't find the exit, my dear boy. That's the way it is, that's our nature. That dreaming stuff is somewhat preliminary though, I daresay. There is more in you, much more, and that want to come out. You didn't find your place yet; your aim hasn't been reached. Well, therefore you are here at last. Together we will manage, I'm convinced..."

Pale and worried had Billy-Joe said farewell to Arundle and her friends on Sunday evening. Arundle even wanted to have her magic bow accompany him, but that was not possible. The Vice-Headmaster waved such an idea off laughingly, "Where we go, you can't use such a device."

"It was no accident why we put the meeting on today's date. We knew the Conversiors would have left us, except you of course, dear Penelope."

"Well, it won't take long now anymore", the latter answered. The Headmistress patted her arm in return now. The mighty woman was full of tension, wholly occupied by the coming event. Her smile was then already kind of fussy, she wasn't right here anymore.

"Don't know if I can keep it until the night-fall; see, the moon is rising already", the woman whispered and her voice sounded like a bird's croaking. "If you don't want to see me convert in front of your eyes, I'd better be going", said she and slipped through the rows like a colourful cloud in her fancy dress, then stepped over the edge of the balcony and wasn't seen anymore.

“The reason why we came together without the Convertors is a special one, I don’t want to hide from you”, the Headmistress went on somewhat irritated by the sudden disappearance of her colleague, but her concept was spoiled by now and she didn’t find the right words.

“Be it as it may – hem – what I wanted to say, ...where did we stop...?” Mrs. Wiggles-Humperdijk seemed to have lost the thread. She halted and thought for a little while before she went on.

“May I introduce to you our dear guest of today”, she then went on, when Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots suddenly appeared out of no-where, and was seating on the chair where Penelope M’gamba had sat a minute ago.

“Today, everything is too much, I’m afraid” she sighed while turning to Grisella. “I’m totally off the track, could you be so kind and take over, please?”

Grisella did not mind. Such blackouts where a teacher’s fate and belonged to their state; as long as there was no band of cruel kids mocking and faking about, it wasn’t all that bad, all the more if there was help in sight.

Of course took Grisella over and filled the breach. She knew roughly, what it was about. The students should become aware of their similarities, after having realized the differences. Such was the task of the day. Assembled were the colours grey, blue, and green. Therefore, she could just as well start with the physical relations of the colours, in order to enlighten the acquaintances, but as a philosopher, she preferred a different approach.

On the other hand she could have made things quite clear by stressing on her own colour, that she shared only with Scholasticus – to a certain extend, though. However, she felt the tension in the air - heated up by Penelope M’gamba’s sudden departure and now even increasing because of her mysterious appearance.

First, she should reduce the tension. However, how should that be done? Should she make a joke? That was not her cup of tea. Why not use the system of colours, as had first come to her mind? What was it like again? The sum of all colours ended up in white. What about the complementing colours then? Well, at best, you get it out of them, she said to herself. “You surely wanted to know how I suddenly appeared. Well I tell you. I came out of the light; to be more exact out of the white light. - Why is light white, can you tell me?”

“Light is the sum of all colours, therefore light is white” Tibor said.

“Right, we understand now my colour. Is there anyone around here with a similar aura? By experience, we know that light is also orange or

golden or even silvery like the moonlight. Do you know who is in the room right here? Well perhaps that is the wrong question”, Grisella realized that she spread misunderstanding. The reference to the colours of light caused confusion already.

“Just tell me the colours you see in that room, I mean colours stemming from you of course.”

“Grey” - “Sulphur” - “Silver” - “Green” - “Yellow” - “Blue” - “Dark blue” - “Violet” - “Light blue” - “Orange” - “Red” - “Who sees Red?” the Headmistress stepped in and jumped up all alert. Tibor pointed at Arundle’s head. “There’s a red blade on her head” he exclaimed. Mrs. Wiggles nodded. “That’s alright. Forget about the naughty straw for the time being. We may come to that later.”

Grisella agreed. “We shall now bring the colours into order by complementary basic modes, and set them in relation to each other.” People were moved about depending on what the actors saw. Thus, the session went on. Mrs. Wiggles recalled a set of slides she had prepared. She managed to find back to her concept. She had indeed had the same idea as Grisella.

By means of colours, it was easy to spot the relations between the groups. They should understand by now that they were all part of the white light. They even were able to produce combinations altering their state of being.

Mrs. Wiggles asked the Korean twins to hook up with Grisella and their blue mingled to some kind of greenish shade. That was very interesting, so she tried herself and came to a similar result, although Marsha was a Somnior, but as her colour was more blue than grey it worked out almost as perfect as with the twins.

“Let’s try a dance, dear colleague” Grisella giggled and hooked up with a twin on the right and Marsha on the left and in no time they were whirling about and even lifted from the ground for an instant. However, it did not work, as it should.

“You see, blue and yellow mingle to green and the effect could just be seen. That’s very interesting for the Sublimations, isn’t it?” she said breathlessly after their trial.

“Yes, look how our contours mix” the elbows of the two teachers shone indeed greenish, although Marsha was a Somnior her aura was a weak pigeon blue. “May I ask for a dance, dear colleague?” the Headmistress said with a smile. Grisella giggled and put her arms around the sound body in front of her, while she was held on the shoulders.

“I wonder whether we manage to form an equilibrium though”, she whispered when Marsha started wheeling around. She had to lean back then, she thought, to balance their uneven bodies.

“See, how it works?” she yelled while being lifted up this time, just like that. Like a green whirlwind, the two were flying up to the dome, which was closed again, because of the late hour and for the slide projection of the spectral colours. Therefore they just went up and down a couple of times, yelling and chanting much like the youngsters before - until they came back with the feet on the ground, so to speak, while the students busted out in frenetic applause.

Had there been a better chance of demonstrating the relationship between the colours? The show had a deep effect and quite some impact on the students, and made them aware of their oneness, they all were part of.

The students spent the rest of the afternoon discussing the character of the colours and what that meant for their state of being. The natural attraction Animations and Somnions felt was as easily explained as the slight resistance against the Sublimations, who formed a tiny minority compared with the bulk of the others, while there was only one Divination yet, ‘more or less pure’, as Grisella put it, ‘stressing on less’, she added with a smile. “But there are talents amongst us, no doubt”, the Headmistress pointed out, “who will step into such footprints sooner or later... Far is the way to the light!” she went on somewhat mysterious and also pathetic to an extent, hoping to have taken steps into the right direction herself, as the pure white light was the ultimate mother and the final aim of all colours.

5. Convertors’ Island

The boat with the flock of Convertors had then long reached the neighbouring island, and Billy-Joe had passed his first hours in such a company. As soon as they arrived, Professor Humpdijk left.

He could not wait any longer, he murmured and let him plunge into the sea, where he disappeared immediately, and was not seen any more.

The others seemed to know that, as they scarcely took notice - “...and if he’s drowning?” Billy-Joe scared, as he didn’t see the Professor coming up to the surface again. He was rather upset about such ignorance.

“Don’t you worry, he won’t drown, I can assure you. When the moon’s turning he’ll be back...”

“As punctual as an egg-timer...”

“Better take care about yourself...”

“It’s only you that counts...”

“Nothing else...”

Everybody seemed to be himself the next, Billy-Joe thought with dismay. What kind of company was he in here? He did not know anyone, almost nobody – nobody whom he cared to know, anyway. Once in a while you met, but with a couple of hundred faces around you, you didn’t keep those in mind you had no contact. He did not even share one of the dormitories and spent his nights outside alone in the open. That was another reason why he did not make friends. To others he was somewhat strange himself. The group of Convertors was small, just one boatload full, a dozen or so, more or less. “We are all, I can assure you, and nobody stays behind voluntarily. We do have our experiences...”

“...And the others with us!” one of the few girls giggled and her cat eyes sparkled. “Some of us are no pleasant customers to deal with...” a big strong looking guy with a good-natured face agreed.

“What can we estimate behind you?” a witty weasel-like comrade, though?”

“Perhaps a sweet little possum” another asked with a hopeful undertone in his voice.

“No, no the shoulders are too broad for that. That’s a fast runner”, a tall boy answered. “Some kind of horse, perhaps?” he hopefully went on.

“No, a camel would fit” a fourth one uttered and lifted his shoulders and rounded his back, while stretching the bent neck.

Billy-Joe was upset. With such lunatics, you could not talk. However, they did not care and disappeared one by one in the thick Underwood. They all seemed to know where they belonged. Soon he was alone on the little opening next to the landing stage of the boat.

What now? – He could take the boat and row back. What was he doing over here? All alone? Nevertheless, they must have had an idea why he was here – the Vice-Headmaster and the Headmistress. Had only Professor Humperdijk been here, but he had disappeared in the sea. All of them were somehow out of their minds and not they selves. Something was wrong with them, while even the Professor admitted to be one of them!

Why was there no one who explained what was going on? Were there secret intentions hidden behind, as had been, when he tried to find out about the Shaman, and everybody knew better then he did what really was going on. It had taken him quite some time until he finally understood. Was this then a similar task?

He then had to find out what was inside him, and whom he was going to meet in the future. Was that now again almost the same or a similarly related question?

He knew now that he was going to end his worldly life some hundred years from now afar in Laptopia as the Shaman of the Churingas; although

things were not very certain nevertheless, and his future death had still a fictional aspect.

Perhaps there was still more in him, something else, that had no connection with such hidden Shamanism, or was it just opposite and he was right now on the right track to find out the real whereabouts of his mysterious being?

There might be something more real and definitely present, he wondered. What was the matter with the others, who had come here with him to this island? Perhaps it would be wise to make up his mind and find out what conversion actually meant.

Conversion meant change; Arundle explained the day before he left, while he first learned that he should better leave with the Convertors.

When Billy-Joe spoke about those red antennas erecting from his head, as had moved the Professor considerably, Arundle confirmed his findings after looking at him closely. - "You're only partly kind of grey; and blue I don't see at all, instead a lot of violet. Red is pushing through everywhere. You are changing..."

Thus, she had spoken while he waved her off in disbelief. He then did not want to be separated. Things should remain as they were. In fact, it was true that his coming here to the School of Inbetween had influenced him a lot and might have started the false accusation already. The workload covered things to a certain extent. The harder he learned the more he changed, he realized at last and now he was at the point to let things go. All he could do was wait and see.

Where did Professor Humperdijk disappear when diving into the sea? Why did nobody care whether he drowned? Perhaps there was something in the Professor, that wanted to come out and forced him into the water, being another part of his self, and for that part water was the appropriate home. Did he not live with the mer-folk for a long time on the other side of the world in Bermudia the motherland of Melisandria? Billy-Joe remembered the joint performance with King Melisander at the late feast. There was more than thankfulness, instead a deep inner connection, as Adrian had become some sort of 'merman' then, with all attributes, and that had only been possible because of his inner preparedness. Other landlubbers drowned just like that and could not be helped, no matter what the deep-sea-doctors tried. Was Adrian able to convert into a nix, with gills and fins and all that?

The Convertors had given many hints pointing that way, while nobody said what really lay ahead. That was something you did not talk about in human company.

Billy-Joe felt a hefty wave of headache acoming - he experienced for days now, but had increased since he had set foot on the 'Isle of the Convertors'. He felt a strong notion to retire and find a place to hide, and have the waves of ache roll over and pass him by at last or let it go. He managed to get under a sharp overhang, where he rolled in awaiting either the sleep to free him or the pain to faint. He felt strange forces working his frame over, starting from the lower head and stretching over the spine down to all the four extremities. Thus, it went on until the full moon was shining and the night took over. The pain released as soon as he crawled out into the moonlight. He then erected and stretched his stiff limbs.

How well it did! He felt at once free and strong, - freer and stronger than ever. He could see much better and could hear even a leave while falling, while the greatest variety of odours ever surrounded him and filled his nose with a meaningful longing.

He was able to identify most of the fellow Convertors by their smell, and had a clear picture in mind. Some smelt so well, he could not make up his mind which to follow, as the traces were leading in every direction. He felt like racing and could not stand such indecisiveness. What a great feeling that was, the power in muscles and sinews, the joints so capable, while the wind was howling in his ears now as he paced on, nose down over stick and stone on the sweet most promising track.

What was there drawing? Was he hungry? – Well, he felt hunger in the bowels. When did he have his last meal? Nevertheless, it was not really hungering that teased him. Something even more elemental was there. It was no ache either, but similar, more overwhelming, then anything he had ever experienced – an incomparable might it was, something greater than everything he knew; ...and while he still wondered for the whereabouts the track stopped all of a sudden and he could not find the connecting joint. He tried and tried but in vain, as if the ground had swallowed the prey. He finally sat down in agony and desperation after having hopelessly sniffled here and there, in circles and lines, and finally sat down and moaned bitterly.

Other fumes he discovered, but less fresh, less stimulating – just different. The bittersweet odour was it not! The moon broke through the black waving treetops. Billy-Joe couldn't do otherwise; he settled down, raised the head and claimed his distress to the moon. A long howl descended his throat, strange and familiar at the same time. What was happening with him? Where did such sounds come from? Who was howling like that? Was he thrown back to infancy?

Of course, he did not remember; he was acquainted with such sounds; he knew them, they had been full of meaning, full of that secret mysterious

yearning that had driven him here. Somehow, he was reminded of the fragrant, he had lost.

His thoughts turned around. Thinking caused trouble. Much easier was it to let the mourning go - and while doing so, he felt the cause all fading. The pale moonlight seemed soon reason enough for his sentimental song of undividable loneliness.

Why was he sad? What did he miss? What was it like to be? He did not know the answers – he did not know why he moaned. Was it the moonlight as such - the paleness of the sad round face in the treetops and the vastness of the wide space above or was it the immeasurable depth within? The moon disappeared behind a cloud. The undisguised connection broke. He felt another attempt from within. He didn't have food for ages and while thinking of prey, he felt the saliva dripping from his fangs and felt unbearable greed turmoil in his bowels and made him forget about everything else.

The sudden darkness let the olfactory world aflame anew. A trace - a track – hunger – greed – chasing – there, a trail at last, clear and strong; now over stick and stone through thorns and thistles and on rough grounds was he flying along.

A sudden shadow right ahead, Billy-Joe did a mighty jump, his hand closed in on a soft winding body – all too slippery at last. His hands did not obey the will, the fingers seemed somewhat shrunken; - you should have done otherwise. Next time you know, he said to himself all disappointment. However, there was another appeal. While chasing, he had left the thick black wood behind. The rat he had grabbed and lost again disappeared between sharp edged rocks and clefts.

The sudden opening above – as the cloud had moved on – made him forget the turmoil in his bowels. A sight of eternal beauty made him gaze above again. With the head in the neck, his voice sounded all anew as he now visualised what had been so unforgettable in his nose before. At once, he knew that sight and fragrance belonged together, although the silvery silhouette against the dark-blue background of the sky was out of the olfactory range.

What a grace, what a silhouette! The duet that was now heard made Mother Nature listen, while she forbade all others to intervene and had all winds and trees, and beings listen to the mysterious song of such primordial yearning that was guiding two beings towards each other, as if they were apart broken halves on the verge of completion. Such predicted the joint howling of the wild dogs, they in fact were. Tika, the answering, made sure the distance remained the same, while Billy-Joe sneakily undertook it to altering the cleft. Whenever she felt like flying she did so and was well seen a minute later on another hill top, stretching her peaked mouth high up

into the emptiness the silvery moonlight was shining on; thus answering the call of the wild. She as well was a victim of such yearnings. She knew the risk of exposing like that but she could not help it. Something inside made her doing so. Calculable was the risk, as no hunters were allowed these days, thus was the law of the island. Who however knew about such law? Who knew what was going on in the misguided souls of a Converter while conversing for the first time? Had the one down there not almost killed a rat?

She did not know what was going on with her right now, although she had some conversational experience already. The call was new, never before had the wild laid such a heavy hand on her. The call came from the newcomer. She meant to know now what it was like. The idea of having a mighty comrade and next-of-kin made her heart beat faster. Was that not what she always wanted, since she had set foot on that damned island, you never got away from again?

Was it really a curse? Where else you jumped over hurdles the like or exceeded limits, you got aware of. If you had once done a look over the fence, you could never ignore what you saw. You would always try again and you would never be content with the life of a simple human. The male did not know yet. His outcry, primordial as it was, lacked the wisdom of reflection and experience. She missed an air of understanding as life over here followed strict laws as well. No offence would be accepted. How did he dare to do what he did? They all had to stand the pains of their state. He had to learn a lot before she would alter her considerations.

Well, three days of starvation would cool him down. He would have to learn the hard way, and get the answer right away, while the tribunal would follow. She almost felt sorry for the forlorn hustler, but could not help it. His self appointed lot was the hard way of learning. She had to stay away from him. This was his first night. The ritual had not been practised, he had not been accepted yet, and it was doubtful whether he would be accepted at all, after that.

Would they be allowed mating? Mating, while in the state of conversion? Surely not, they would have to crosscheck while in the state of humanness, where there were other obstacles to tackle, she all too well knew. He had never given her a recognizing look so far. She had been non-existent for him. Could there be true fulfilment? How about the decision then? Those who choose, was it not a decision forever? You had to decide which side you choose. A lot of rumour went about, but up to now had all of them returned on the fourth or fifth day after conversion. They collected their clothes carelessly thrown away, dried them over the fire, washed their mouths and got rid of dubious substances in their hair. They might look

over their shoulders, to see whether the back was straight again and on the right spot.

‘Wanderers between the worlds’ that was what they were, tragic, solitary beings that could not be harmed by the time as long as they remained in the state of indecisiveness. “It’s like resisting to grow up” Adrian, who was an expert himself, once described their state of being. He was some seventy years of age and still not grown up. If he wished to he’d become easily four times as old in his other apparition, he busted once in a while. “Grown up I’m still not” he giggled and rubbed the tears out of his eyes, he could not say if they stemmed from sadness or joy. Both lay side by side in such intermediate indecisive state of being.

The moon faded and a grey shade announced the coming daylight. A dangerous phase began for the converted, which had to avoid the daylight in general and the sunrays in specific. ‘Young newcomer look for a hiding place’ Tika tried to communicate but was wholly misunderstood. Her decent warning stimulated a lengthier answer full of woe instead, still howling on while Tika had left long ago for her hiding place, as it was high time.

Billy-Joe well felt uneasiness but couldn’t deal with, as the hunger still raged in his bowels, or was it the nameless yearning that moved him on? The dawning day yet not noticed spiked with golden rays over the horizon and cut him right through the eyes with a fit of the most terrific pain. He took his heels into the hands, so to speak and got away from those hilltops back down into the Underwood, and finally back to the beach, where there still was that overhanging rock, he had first been hiding. Was there, what he was looking for? He took shelter there, rolled in like a just-born suckling and fell asleep just like that. His dream had the night pass by with all its beauties and perils.

For a mighty dingo, the hiding-place was not enough. The wandering sun sent his rays under the hook in the early afternoon. The rays itched like knife blades where they stabbed the bushy red fur his body was covered with. In the end, he was standing on his paws and finally jumped, feet bathed in light, and whimpering for pain up and down, when at last the treetops stopped the cruel prank.

Yes, it was the hard way of learning he had chosen. Next time he would look for proper shelter in time. Exhausted as he was, he fell asleep in the deepening shade and slept on until the late night.

When he awoke his body longed desperately for liquid, every cell of his tough body did, while in the bowels the beast of hunger raged out of control. In his desperation Billy-Joe dug for damp leaves and roots at best he could, and scratched the bark off the tree trunks – his knowledge as a man helped him to survive. He found threadworms and maggots he would

have liked as a man and ate up everything as long as it filled the emptiness inside.

After a short while he recovered and the old lust returned as in the night before. Would he be able to see her again? Tika – the sweet gentle silhouette at the far horizon! He would rehearse and listen at any place he had been, he reckoned, while he was rushing through the Underwood nose down, close to the ground, checking his path through a sea of fragrances, being spread about like a net wider than the subsoil roots. While chasing and racing, he could as well look out for her.

Was he allowed to chase? Yesterday's rat had been one of them, a Converter like him. He recalled now the severe warning he received while dreaming: "Never kill an animal while here for conversion. You are brothers and sisters – all of you, no matter your appearance or state of being."

Was that meant for the maggots and worms as well he had just had? He felt uneasy and uncertain. It was too late anyhow – and besides it would be most unlikely though. Early forms of insects were no option for Converters – as they only got what you saw. At last, it also was a matter of proportion, nevertheless – to a certain extent anyhow.

This second night lacked of stimuli. The clouds covered up the full moon's pale face. Tika did not appear at all, and the law forbade and punished the joy of racing. Silence was resting like a thick black cloud over the island - a bad silence indicating no good. It reminded him of his duty. He was urged to look for a hiding place for the upcoming day, a damp, shady site, where no rays of sunlight reached.

6. Arundle interferes

The first discernments into the relations of light and colour raised the students' interest in physics. Most girls regarded the stuff Professor Slyboots was teaching as dull and dry – too difficult for them anyhow. They missed the sensual component they said. Scholasticus refused to accept such prejudicial viewpoint all the more as his heart belonged to his subject.

"Is there anything more moving than the bundled rays of light, our Mother and Creator? Nothing could exist outside her range. Light is the beginning and the end of all."

It was an early afternoon on a hot summer day, not ideal for an introductory lesson into the secrets of physics and cosmology. Arundle had

chosen the class because she was deeply devoted to Scholasticus Slyboots, but had preferred another time of the day as well.

Grisella's hints of the interdependence of light and colours and the practical demonstrations the other day had raised her curiosity, while a heavy meal on their Italian day – in combination with the excessive temperature had a laming effect.

Later she would excuse with the call she had received from Billy-Joe. She met Billy-Joe desperately jumping under his far too small roof. A huge yellow dingo he was, and she pitied him and haunted the day when she first saw the red antennas erecting from his skull, indicating him as a member of the Convertors, as if that had been the cause of his trouble.

It then had been too late already any way, as things were underway and pressed with might ahead out of control, and nobody was there to alter the course. "The next step would be some kind of Orange, at best of Yellow", Grisella suggested, not knowing either what could be done in a case like that.

They all had their own way of going on, and Billy-Joe had been caught on the wrong foot, so to speak. He was in deep trouble now. What could she do? How could she help him? She tried to get in touch, but the poor beast was all upset and far too busy getting his feet off the ground, when at last the sun disappeared behind the treetops, and he fell asleep, totally exhausted - only seconds later.

She tried to get hold of his dreamland, but soon noticed how different things were. The beast was not capable of any kind of interconnection. Billy-Joe was closed in a strange somewhat flat universe. His means and motions did not mean anything to her. There was hunger and thirst, and some other kind of greed, basic and alike, and different at the same time. Starvation was but one aspect as there was more. Another yellow shade passed by – another dingo – so what? A clear picture she did not get and communication was not possible, she was not able to show him her presence. She knew now what he was like, and pitied him unspeakably. Everything should be done to get him out of such hell.

Scholasticus was the first who had to stand her enthusiasm after the lesson. She did not even feel like excusing for having slept. He did not know what should be done, and referred her to Grisella who talked about the many roads the Rome. "Each one has to find its own, I'm afraid... I was lucky that I could skip such threshold – never experienced any such conversational notion myself though. I don't know whether I should be all glad about that. Penelope is telling the fanciest wonder tales. As to her, things are just great over there... - Of course, I knew these headache attacks, but thought it a different cause, you know. Nobody had to tell me that I was something special. I can't remember a time when it was different

and without Dorothea, I would have lost contact with the solid ground long time ago, I'm afraid. So I was lucky she kept me down somehow, while I envied her for her beauty. She could be all herself and did not need such loopholes. She was content the way she was made; - but I? I had only to look into the mirror and I knew, something had to happen, things couldn't remain as they were. That was perhaps the reason why I became a philosopher."

Arundle had been listening impatiently. "If this is so, I'm gonna become a Converter too." Grisella just raised an eyebrow but could not speak up as Arundle continued, "don't tell me it won't work. I know I have red enough in my colour scheme, I saw it with my own eyes."

Grisella did not want to object, her advice was meant to help Arundle avoiding such unnecessary diversions, and even more so as many Convertors were stuck in such state of their overall development.

"There are many who can't find their way back some day and stay away for good. That's why poor Marsha scares to death every month."

"Billy-Joe won't get stuck, I assure you" Arundle grumbled. "I'll be prepared and won't be caught and trapped like poor Billy-Joe's converted image." She told Grisella what she had found out about Billy-Joes state of being. "He wasn't even able to dream anymore, believe it or not. He dreamed already like a lost beast."

"Well, that's another thing you've got to learn. Nothing remains forever after you finally passed it. You've got to give things away, I'm afraid. That's the law. Do you think that was always easy for me either? You should keep that in mind. - By the way, do you know your Totem animal? What animal might hide behind your surface, some bird perhaps – definitely no dingo, that's for sure, is it? So everything would be in vain..."

Arundle blushed, Grisella hit the crucial point, and her objections were sound. – Still the decision was made. She had to give it a trial. She even tried to involve Florinna and Corinia, but they did not feel like converting right now. Therefore, she had to go on alone.

First, she wanted to find out as much as possible about the secret island opposite the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, which was said to be not suitable for settling, as the volcano was still active.

It was a suitable site for the Convertors though. The island was close enough but not in range, as there was the reef - a natural barrier blocking the passage in between. Special attention was necessary at the time when the Convertors stayed on the island.

Such a narrative was indeed not helpful. Therefore, she tried the Headmistress who understood her all too well, and referred to her husband somewhere out there, deep down in the perilous ocean. "Believe me, I'm

all with you, and scared to death myself, from the first to the last minute of his absence. There is nothing that could be done now, things have to develop their own way..."

The idea was to grant an unspoilt refuge for the Conversiors when they were all different. Besides, some were endangered while in their other state or were perilous to others. Sometimes the worst instincts lured in the most decent people.

Arundle could have chosen the elegant and easy way of getting over there by dreaming. Thus, she had been safe, but she knew already that she scarcely got access to the strange world of that different form of being. She had tried already and failed.

The isle became interesting by night, when the strange beings started roaming about. Joining them while dreaming would have meant to get an overall view but no particularities. This was what she told herself, but in fact, there was that tickling thrill, of offending once more a given law, all the more because she could pretend, she was doing it for the common good, while in the present case this was only the good of an individual. An individual she might at last be herself after all. Besides, the magic bow would enjoy such adventure, she doubted not. The bow was bored to tears in the wardrobe he had to remain, as no private weapons were allowed on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. In vain had his friends tried to free him, even the Slyboots could not help.

Arundle used the afternoon to get prepared. She had a lengthier talk with the bow and learnt more of the whereabouts of the Conversiors. Of course, he immediately referred to the horrid werewolves, as being known over there in ancient Transylvania; while the red colour – he said - referred even further back to a time when Totems and Taboos reigned everyday life. Tribal life was the high time of such intercourse. Everybody then had his or her Totem animal, and lived in a close connection with it. "Sometimes too close and it came to such strange phenomena nowadays know as werewolves, the most popular reminiscence left behind that is still frightening narrow souls and limited minds, who feel easily endangered by the pure existence of anything strange and out of range. In fact was the werewolf just the tip of the iceberg, while in the depth of humane complex being - other forms survived."

"There can't be many left", Arundle objected and thought of the little flock of Conversiors having recently left the Isle of Wisdom-tooth for their strange exercise. They had come from all parts of the world; and had been systematically traced by talent scouts; quite similar to the way Arundle and her friends had been found.

The magic bow couldn't tell how Conversiors felt. He had heard of tragic cases but hadn't had anything to do with them personally, he said.

The closest tribal connection actually was his acquaintance with Billy-Joe, who might not really be the most typical representative of such mode of humane existence, he considered. "Some don't want to return, it is said, and others have trouble getting there. They have terrible aches, as if they were born anew every time."

"Could well be - Billy-Joe is such a case. My Goodness, he is suffering, you cannot imagine how bad he feels. I met him exposed to the sunlight the other day. I then decided to help him. He can't go on like that."

All ready for action Arundle met Grisella and had her tell everything she knew. The last secrets of the colours were thus lifted, while the transformational forces of the light were of Arundle's highest esteem, as she saw here the chance to overcome Billy-Joe's malaise. Her approach was rather simple, although not easy to fulfil: The more colours he was able to collect the closer came the final solution.

With Grisella's warnings still in her ear - not to take any risk, she went on to Scholasticus, where she got a quick lesson about red giants and why they become red, before dying. "Not a pleasant thought though", the bow and Arundle agreed. "Yes, the colour Red is most difficult, wherever it occurs", Scholasticus admitted.

"...Yes, and red is the colour of the Convertors, damn it - poor Billy-Joe" Arundle thoughtfully murmured, while the excursion into the outer galaxies didn't really help her with her worries. "In the end conversion is indeed a 'small death' - his aches after all would fit all too well..."

The last permit for her planned obstruction Arundle got from the Headmistress. She seemed to know already of the girl's intentions and wanted to make the hardliner at first, but could not stick to that role - all too familiar she was with Arundle's worries, so she waved her through, so to speak. Before she told her everything she knew about the island, the rules and regulations. "You've got to know that hunting is an absolute no-go. No being must be harmed over there. That is supposed to be obvious, as there could be a human behind any animal. What Convertors actually do, while in their crucial state, is out of our control. We just don't know. Therefore, no arms, and nothing that may lead to violence must be brought there", she pointed out and had a sorrow look over Arundle's shoulder were the magic bow was hiding.

"How do the Convertors protect against each other?" Arundle asked to overcome the irritation the bow was causing.

"That's a real problem. Sometimes we have an ambulance ready at landing. Penelope is giving us a warning a short while ahead. She's got the overall view after all."

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk flapped her hands and arms, indicating that Penelope M'gamba conversed into a bird - a griffin, to be precise. A fact, especially Grisella scared, as griffins played an important role in her family's history. In ancient days, it was said - griffins were employed to overcome 'human weaknesses', so to speak. Grisella thanked her fate that such goblet had passed by. She warned the Headmistress not to be all too trustworthy as griffins were mean beasts. "Well, of course there is an exception to any rule, I know, but still..." Up to now, there had been no complaints. Penelope, the griffin, just disappeared same as Adrian, the water-sprite, one in the air, the other under water; and came back on the fourth day only to re-converse right away.

In fact Penelope M'gamba was here now for half a year, same as Grisella, by the way - no proof however yet.

"Well, six or seven conversions should be proof enough though" the Headmistress replied. She had - no doubt - a heart for the beastly side of the human existence.

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The evening came and Grisella secretly saw Arundle off with best wishes from the Headmistress as well. "You know now what to keep in mind and how to care. Don't you take this quiver or if you have to, make sure; there are no arrows in. Don't be caught by the guides. Have a look on your map where all the outposts are. Take care the guides don't see you. If you are caught, nobody can help you - Marsha said - you are all on your own as soon as you are over there. The guides sit in their cabins and fill in their forms. They are responsible for the Conversiors. They control of course, whether invaders try to land and therefore they are well-hidden at all crucial spots. If you see them, it is too late, as they have seen you as well. Once more, if you are caught, you will most likely be dismissed from school. We can't help it. We have to obey the regulations, and exemptions can't be made" she said with a witty smile and a wink of her eyes. "Well, there is always a way - so just do, what you have to do. I'm sure it must be done, your friend is worth your effort, isn't he?"

Should she ask her new friend Tibor? Guides were some kind of cracked Sublimations as well. Perhaps he would be of help when it came to an encounter. Besides, at night you wouldn't be able to see any colour. Arundle checked again with her magic bow, which promised not to let her down. "I'm well able to spot anyone close or far and get you out of range, just like that... - just you trust in me..."

Arundle showed him the map with the marked posts and he gave them a green shimmer, after a recheck. "Seem to be correct though" he admitted. "Don't talk to anyone else", he said with a mysterious air. "The

Headmistress and the Slyboots are involved and that is trouble enough”, he concluded.

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The night had come. On her map, she could see the green points of the guards. The bow had brought her right amidst the wilderness where there were no green signs at all. First thing she noticed was the silence. You couldn't hear anything even the wind was still, as it sometimes happen shortly after nightfall. She shouldered the bow and had his eye shine. The night pressed down frightening. A shallow woe was creeping beside the narrow footpath she decided to follow first. “Can't we spot him by his aura?” she thought. The bow understood her right away. Who else could she have in mind but Billy-Joe? “Won't be necessary”, he replied, “Just follow the howling...” She cocked her ears in vain; instead, she felt the heavy air pressing. No star or moon could be seen. There was absolutely no light except the little extra light of the bow's eye.

Knowing to be surrounded by wild exhorted beasts, which didn't even understand themselves, made the girl feel uneasy. She wasn't really scared yet because of her magic bow and all the means he could procure, but still – those beasts all around here were separated from their fellow-beings because they were somewhat incalculable and out of their minds. For that reason they were brought here in isolation apart from the rest of the world.

What did she have in mind? How could she find anything in such a dark wilderness? The magic bow signalled her to calm down. What did she expect? They hadn't been here for more then ten minutes. The bow made her walk on until they came to a small clearing. There she saw the hilltops while the clouds tore open for a moment. They were the same she had seen in her dream. She now knew where to go. On the map, she could see a green circle nearby, but the bow signalled no immediate danger, so she went on.

The higher she climbed the lesser the Underwood would become, she figured. If the clouds opened, she would be able to overlook the crucial part of the island. She might be lucky and Billy-Joe had the same idea right now, no matter who he was looking for.

Arundle felt the itch. Her motives weren't all altruistic, but she didn't want to justify her motives right now. She pitied Billy-Joe, no doubt about that, but there was something else...

Arundle discovered Tika the same moment Billy-Joe did; he was approaching from the other side. Tika, the dingo, held her favourite site and formed a wonderful widely visible silhouette whenever the moon managed to break through the clouds. If the moon did so, she had her song sound

over the island that touched not only Billy-Joes mind and body, but others as well, one of them was meaner than death.

The pure light sounds touched Arundle's ear far less lovable than they did elsewhere. Arundle felt the loneliness and a frightening distress – a cry for help and redemption. She felt pity, boundless pity that made her sigh, how could she bring relief? Perhaps she was the wrong addressee, though. She was not meant she had to admit.

She climbed on towards the hilltop. The magic bow was signalling Billy-Joe's approach, from the other side. He was near-by, but so was the guide's outpost, right in front of her on the map. Either she could take a lengthier diversion or she had to slip by the post unseen.

Meeting Billy-Joe in the state he was in, was not a good idea, the bow let her know. Arundle couldn't be stopped though. She didn't think about that. She wanted to be present and find out herself. The converted Billy-Joe was surely not able to understand what she wanted. She didn't know herself what it was. She had a vague idea though, but that was surely not enough. Would she be able to have her friend reconsider his state of being, and give it up for good? Had he to be freed out of a prison he was closed in?

She asked the bow whether he could help with a beastly appearance, at best a dingo as well, but he denied vehemently. "You're lacking the most basic suppositions", he snarled rather upset. Was she not chasing through the Underwood like an animal already? "I can't convert you, of course not into a dingo. Besides, they'd kill you most likely. They wouldn't understand... I'm so sorry. Nobody knows Tika. Where is she from? What is she doing over here?" asked the magic bow and Arundle realized that she did not know the answers. All she recalled from her dream was the name.

Arundle thought her to have come over here with the bulk load by boat like the others; but if she wasn't a Converter but a real beast that belonged to the island - probably even as some sort of secret agent?

"Sounds somewhat strange", the bow giggled unheard as they still were near the green circle ahead on the map. "Forget about such strange ideas. She isn't a spy guide either."

While they were having such speechless conversation Arundle sneaked as carefully as she could through the bush getting thinner now. From the other side she could hear the voice of the converted Billy-Joe, somewhat different to that of Tika, deeper and lower in connotation, but no less meaningful. Such howling near-by would attract the guide's attention and gave her the chance to get closer to the animals. Now the moonlight became the enemy, as there were no bushes left to hide. She had to wait until a cloud drew the curtain, and then she rushed on and up the steep hillside. The silhouette of the howling beast was some fifty yards ahead she

noticed, covering behind a rock flattened to the ground, while the moon took a chance.

Only fifty yards, but what would then be? What could she do then? Have a word with her to leave Billy-Joe alone! Should she tell her of her sorrows – a beast illiterate and speechless not even converted probably?

She had to pause and hide, still in the vicinity of the guide's outpost. Both animals were near-by and silent all of a sudden, while the moon was going to be darkened by a cloudbank. A gusty wind had come up, but it could free the pale face only occasionally.

Talking with Tika wouldn't make sense at all, the magic bow confirmed. Upset as she was, she gave him names, but in deep silence as the outpost was still near. The moon managed another break-through and a broad beam of light lit the hilltop and caught the dainty silhouette of the rival. What a sight - she had to admit. Again, the dingo raised the snout up into the dark-blue sky and sang her forlorn song soon answered by another voice close by.

For the first time she had waited for him, Billy-Joe realized. Should he answer or sneak ahead? While he made up his mind, the voice on top broke off and Tika fell to the ground hit by an arrow that seemed to come out of nowhere. Arundle saw what happened, and was by her side in no time. An arrow stuck in Tika's side. Blood gushed forth and trickled from the thick fur.

Billy-Joe who entered the scene only seconds later turned against the human with a fierce growl, and pushed her out of the way.

"Have me take care of the wound", the girl pleaded, but Billy-Joe snapped at the bow that managed to escape the sharp teeth, by lifting off from her shoulder.

"We didn't do that", Arundle desperately exclaimed. "It's me, Arundle, you can trust my words."

Was it the sound of her voice or the words – Billy-Joe retired from his attempts and allowed her to look for the injured. Arundle got a compressive bandage out of the invisible quiver. She carelessly threw the golden arrows to the ground; there was no time to lose. The bleeding had to stop, otherwise it would mean Tika's end.

First, Arundle tried to get the arrow out of the wound but then decided to leave it. "We've got to break the arrow near the entry, before covering it", the magic bow suggested – "and then I take her right away to the hospital."

Billy-Joe's strong dingo teeth were of help. He managed to cut the wooden shaft with one bite. The wound could be covered then. "Hurry up", Arundle hissed, and the bow slipped under the dog. "I'm staying, got to find out what's going on..."

Tika felt raised and only seconds later lay in bed in hospital, while reversing to her human appearance.

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Whatever Arundle was doing now, she had to take into consideration, that she would be the suspect of an attempted murder. Her only witness was a converted beast. What had Billy-Joe seen? Well, he cut the wooden shaft of the arrow sticking in the wound. It would be wise to keep the debris though.

While still searching for the left behinds of the arrow, the magic bow returned. Tika became human, he reported as soon as she arrived, and was now in the surgery for the operation. Arundle was very grateful. Without her bow, she had felt all alone, all the more Billy-Joe was in such a precarious state. However, for reflections and deeper thoughts there was no time. On the map, she could notice the green circles approaching from all sides.

“Let’s get away and find the culprit who did that to your mate”, she uttered wordlessly. The dingo seemed to understand. He headed downwards and anyway, and managed to slip through the chain of the approaching guides, while Arundle was following over stick and stone, through thick and thin, so to speak. Without her map she’d been lost, the animal’s instincts alone weren’t enough.

Other Convertors had witnessed the bloody deed, and referred to the illegal human, who was on the island, armed with a bow. That was why the guides didn’t doubt a minute that they chased the proper prey.

Even the griffin got the message and was cruising above the island now. With her sharp bird’s eyes, Penelope was able to see even a mouse from her considerable height, but the weather of that night was in favour of the flying girl as well as of the assassin she was after. Penelope could see hardly anything now, as heavy rain was falling that washed all traces away.

A minute ago while approaching from the seaside, she had noticed something strange that arose her suspicion at once. Things were much different then they seemed to be.

On the ground, you could hardly see where you set your feet; so, the guards stopped their search and retired to their cabins. Arundle saw them leaving on the map. Her clothes were heavily soaked with rain. She was chilled to the bone, but didn’t mind. How could she find the assassin, whose deed would fall on her?

She found shelter under an overhanging rock. There she had a closer look at the left behinds of the arrow she had taken with her, but couldn’t see much in the dim light of the bow’s red eye. Nevertheless, she found out that the arrow was of modern fabric as used by white sportsmen. Down here, such weapons were not common amongst natives anyway.

Somehow, Arundle felt relieved, but she realized of course that the search would not get easier though. If somebody had landed secretly and unnoticed by boat, he would be able to leave the same way.

“Billy-Joe, I’m sorry, we can’t sit here and wait until the rain stops. We must look for a boat, that doesn’t belong here, that’s our only chance.”

Billy-Joe seemed to understand. The communication with him improved. Arundle wondered whether she was able to influence him to the better already. They headed towards the coastline. Billy-Joe paced ahead and Arundle was following as fast as she could.

All covered with mud, Arundle made it for the beach. Face and arms marked with bruises, her knees were bleeding – without her human friend - she was helpless in the wilderness like a newborn child. She still had the map, but the guards remained in their cabins, no green circle was moving.

Landing here was almost impossible, if you didn’t know the passage through the reef. – The passage the Conversiors used when coming over here; but it didn’t mean of course that there were no other - even more secret passages.

The dingo checked the common pier first but couldn’t find the boat. Perhaps the guides had taken it or was it even stolen... Little further ahead the beast found another port-like stripe of beach, where you could tear your boat ashore if you had mastered the reef. However, the girl and the dingo were too late. As they turned round the bordering rocks, they heard a motor howling and fading in the distance unseen.

At least they knew now for sure there had been someone. They weren’t tracing a phantom. If there had been doubts on Billy-Joe’s side, they were gone now.

For the time being, they couldn’t do anything. Arundle had turned to her magic bow and Billy-Joe felt the end of the wordless conversion. Cold as the girl was she covered as good as she could with the dingo’s fur, and indeed after a while life returned into her numb limbs, the fur did wonders.

Arundle fell asleep at once and only woke up when the morning sun sent his rays under their shelter and made her getting up and fetch some twigs to cover the dingo, which still could not stand the sunbeams.

The rain of the night had gone. This was the third day for the Conversiors. The bow had gone again and Arundle didn’t know when he would come to pick her up, thus prepared for a lengthier day. Sure enough would the watchmen pick up with their search, as soon as they got up. She reckoned she had still some hours to go, besides she had the map, where she could see them moving. The guards had had a busy night though, and used to sleep at daytimes anyway.

She might be able to search the island until the evening. She hoped to find traces of the nightly attacker that gave her hints with regard to his

identity. Perhaps he had eaten something and thrown the package away, or an arrow dropped him off the quiver. Perhaps he had done more than one shot, before he hit. It would be best if she went up the hill right away – and that she did. On her way, she picked berries, as she felt hungry. She also drank rainwater out of pools she found beside the path. She didn't have a cup and have water brought to her friend, who was still suffering, although the night had been wet enough.

Until dawn, the pool might be dried again, as the sun was shining bright and hot as usual. When she got to the peak, she started investigating inch by inch around the spot where they had found poor Tika. Rests of her blood could still be seen, although the hefty rain had washed most of it away.

She then started a systematic search in circles, to cover all possible traces. After a tiring hour on stony grounds completely lacking of shade, she at last discovered something: a coin was twinkling in the sunlight – an English penny of the old sort – big, red and copper; and close by she found a smashed coke-tin and a half full beer bottle - Australian brew, as well as some cigarette tips. The assassin obviously had waited for some time before he committed the murderous attempt.

Arundle collected all the pieces of evidence and carefully tied them up in her blouse. There might even be fingerprints left, leading to the culprit. Scholasticus would be capable of such an investigation, or could arrange with the police authorities in Sydney.

The sun had passed the zenith at length when Arundle returned exhausted from her investigation to the landing pier, where she found Billy-Joe sound asleep under his shelter. He didn't look frightening, as he lay there, whining faintly in his dreams – or did he mind the light? Arundle let the curtain go, she had lifted to spy in on him.

If only the bow was coming! How could she manage another night on such unpleasant island? Was Billy-Joe once more able to protect her from the guards and the other Conversiors?

She decided not to think about that anymore, instead to look for something eatable and for water. At the near narrow beach she found a large shell, she could collect precious water with and dispose it in the hide.

A whizzing noise relieved her from all sorrows. The magic bow came in flash-like like a supersonic jet and filled her brain at once with a mighty flood of information, before he even touched the ground, where Arundle could put her yearning hands on him.

Tika had reversed in transport, so she was well accepted and got an operation right away, while he almost got invisible – “as a bow you are automatically responsible for arrows” – he snarled somewhat still upset. Her identity was then proven. She turned out to be one of the Australian

newcomers; all too shy, so, nobody took notice so far. “I didn’t leave, before it was clear that she would survive, that is why I’m so late, I hope you managed alright without me, though...”

“Thank God” Arundle sighed, “I’m so relieved. Of course she is Australian, what else? They are going to drive mad if she converses again. I’m sure the Headmistress will take care of that.”

“I’m not sure whether she knows what’s going on, anyway... didn’t think of informing her though. They realize anyway. Besides, you needn’t worry. Any being returns to its original form of being, when threatened with death. That is some kind of self-protection and lasts for some time. While the moon pHase is almost over now, I reckon that Tika won’t convert again – not in the present cycle. The question is, if she will ever be able to convert again after such a traumatic experience”, the bow explained thoughtfully.

That indeed was the question; both of them didn’t know the answer yet. “Time heals such wounds” – “Yes, hopefully indeed...”

Arundle had a last look at the sleeping wild dog. She put the shell with the water near its snout and then carefully covered the hiding site, while reporting what had been going on over here by telepathic means, just to let the bow know. Then they returned to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. They immediately reported to Professor Scholasticus Slyboots and handed him over the pieces of evidence for further investigation, while giving him a detailed secret report of the murderous attempt.

7. The Trial

Scholasticus realized the gravity of the case right away. “I’m glad you didn’t lose your nerve, that’s more than you can expect in such a situation. Such evidence will definitely help, I’m sure. I couldn’t have made it better”, he said after Arundle had finished her report and handed over the items she had collected at the site of the crime.

“Marsha, would you please have that report copied in written form. I’ll then pass it on to the appropriate authorities. You won’t skip a trial though, Arundle, you’ve got to keep in mind. There will be the accusation of the guards and of course, Tika’s own testimony. I’m afraid both will not be in favour of you- ...and of course the fact, that you were on forbidden grounds, no matter how important your task was... - Well, yes, I know, you talked things over with the Headmistress and with my sister-in-law, I wonder what she had in mind... Well, well that’s the way it is... and can’t be helped anymore.”

He looked at Arundle and the Headmistress who blushed and shook her head, either to say she then didn't have meant it or didn't understand now how she could have been so yielding.

"You see, there is Adrian – I know all too well, what's on the girl's mind, - all too well, indeed..."

"Still, nobody's allowed to disturb the Convertors, everybody knows that... - how honest your reasons might have been"; he turned back to Arundle, "and whether you spoke with the Headmistress or your tutor... - you were the one after all who actually offended the regulations, knowing all too well that you risked your presence here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. We have to see now how this can be handled. I dearly hope, Marsha, you have an idea..." – "...perhaps we have to declare her as a boarder liner on the verge of transformation..."

"That's a good idea. It was you, Marsha, after all who first spotted that red ray erecting from that poor misguided girl's skull..."

"...That's right..."

"Besides, there is still Billy-Joe's testimony – he will testify in your favour, Arundle, will he?"

The girl nodded somewhat uncertain. She was ashamed. Why didn't she trust Billy-Joe? Was he not old enough? Why did she always interfere in other peoples' affairs?

"The statistical probability that someone got lost in his first conversion is one to one million, dear sister-in-law", Scholasticus argued with Grisella, who just had wanted to mention that, while she tried to justify the advice she had also given.

"Of course would it have been better if Arundle had kept patience and waited until her friend returned on his own. She's got to wait now anyway..." Scholasticus objected.

"You are right. On the other hand - Arundle knew so well what she wanted and was so self assured, and when Marsha came with her fear about Adrian, I myself was almost convinced that there was no other way..."

Grisella was ashamed too, and felt the burden of responsibility she had taken, weighing heavy on her shoulders. She didn't get along with her role, she realized. At the University, it was enough to be brilliant. Here at the School of Inbetween you had to be brilliant, and emphatic, and reflected, and wide-sighted all at once. That was sometimes too much.

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The Convertors returned deeply distracted and scared, most of all Adrian Humperdijk, whose excursion into the underwater world that he liked so very much was severely discredited afterwards.

The guards reported their version, and Billy-Joe came about with his. The guards didn't mention the motorboat of course, as they didn't see or

hear it, but referred to an invader, who came here under the black night's hiding hood, and might well have escaped by means of a boat. They didn't think of the whereabouts of entry or exit. None of them had actually seen Arundle, but as Billy-Joe as well as Tika clearly identified her, there was no doubt left. Suggestions were not their business.

Billy-Joe was rebuked for his attack on the fat giant-rat, which was indeed a fellow Conversior. That was the reason why his testimony was not regarded as reliable, and didn't help Arundle at all. Tika's provocative behaviour was also mentioned, as had been heard all over the place, but was not in favour of Arundle either.

The evidence however, Arundle had collected, turned out to be very helpful, all the more the guards had forgotten about that. They on the other hand mentioned another detail that was none routine. The blood bank had been only hesitantly frequented - perhaps because of the bad weather.

Adrian Humperdijk realized the questioning gazes of the spectators, who had come down to the pier to welcome the survivors of the attempt. Therefore, he explained the cause and reason of such a device – “Yes, it's kind of strange though... since hunting is absolutely prohibited, we had to substitute such vital demand, if I may say so. Either chaos or blood bank, we had no choice. Something had to be done to still the blood-thirst. I do prefer the present solution, I daresay” Adrian concluded his statement. In fact, nobody checked on him, and the way he stilled his blood-thirst while in his second element. Of course, he assured his wife, were the same regulations valid in his case, “...as they are in the air as well...” Penelope agreed, who had been just flying in at last. They both were only responsible to their conscience, as soon as they left the vicinity of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and the adjacent Conversiors' Island.

“You soon weigh with two measures”, Marsha objected, somewhat upset, as she knew better what was going on in the depth of the sea. She was caught on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand she was glad to have access to Adrian's secret other life, on the other hand she stood for justice and righteousness. Therefore, she turned a blind eye to any remorseful offender, as long as more or less harmless offences were meant, - accompanied only by some scratches and bruises, she could do as she did. Now with a murderous attempt things were all different, even more so as the assassin had smuggled himself onto a hidden island, nobody knew where it actually was located.

Some reliable students investigated already the boats in the little harbour, whether they had been used lately or in the night in question. Unfortunately, the idea came rather late, but they found at least one suspicious boat. One boat had left, but nobody remembered who took it.

The items Arundle had collected did not lead to a definite person either. The fingerprints on the tin did not fit with any registered individual the Sydney police department had on record.

The Headmistress asked the students to report any unknown person at once, no matter if the accused was in fact a mate. The number of accusations was significant, even teachers were reported as strangers. Thus, the Headmistress found out about the narrow degree of acquaintance and the limited overall structure of the way of life on the island. A reform seemed necessary and worth a serious consideration. However, a definite suspect she didn't find that way either.

Arundle got her trial, no matter of her numerous friends and guarantors. There were too many unanswered questions, the Headmistress announced on behalf of the jury, and an offence of the school regulations was questionable if not evident.

The Grand Council gathered. It consisted of the teachers' representatives and the representatives of the students. The Somniors and the Animations sent six delegates each, thereof three teachers, as they were the most numerous groups. The Conversiors and the Sublimations sent two representatives each, while Grisella, the only Divinator, represented herself and took the chair.

Some of the students, not the least the accused, showed divinational talents, and so did other colleagues, but they all still needed time to ripen.

The chairwoman first defined an accuser and a council for the defence. They had to assemble and present the material for or against the accused.

Scholasticus assumed the defence and a certain Moschus Mogoleya, a righteous, stubborn Sublimator, took over the accuser's part. He had to present and prove all facts and circumstances of the crime.

The grand hall was filled to the last seat. The tribunal was public and no one wanted to miss it. Those who didn't get in anymore were able to follow on monitor in the dining hall.

The tiring statements of the accuser did not come to an end. In a monotonous mode, Moschus Mogoleya brought forward what had happened the night in question. He therefore read the protocols of the ten guards, which said more or less the same, and then added his one-sided conclusions. He did not leave the slightest doubt that only Arundle was responsible for the murderous attempt.

Scholasticus, as councillor of defence, was listening such one-sided sermon with growing annoyance. It would not be easy, to alter such an impression later in the people's minds, the longer the accusation went on. It was almost lunchtime, when Moschus Mogoleya finally ended. The chairwoman interrupted the trial for two hours.

While everybody headed for the buffets in the big dining hall, People spoke about nothing else but of Arundle, the wicked assassin. Her performance at the Beginners' Feast turned out to be her doom now. Her great success then had brought about grudgers. Such dogs in manger now saw their hour of revenge. At the end of the break, the pre-condemnation was almost perfect. Nobody doubted Arundles guilt – a development that made a successful defence almost impossible, and would - without doubt - influence the further development of the trial.

Scholasticus' performance was born under an unlucky star, so to speak. He brought forward Arundle's version of the night in question. He stressed on Arundle's heroic role while rescuing the poor victim. He presented the evidence she had collected that proved, that there had been another unauthorised person on the island, but in vain. He could see the doubt remaining in the faces all around, and did not know what else he could do.

How could he explain her presence first of all? Whatever the trial's outcome would be, such fact could not be ignored. This became evident by the questioning of the witnesses. One after the other of the guards said, what everybody knew already. They had chased the invader all over the island, but weren't able to get hold of her, while the additional boat, the defence didn't stop mentioning, never existed; none of them had seen or heard it anyway. Besides, that could have well been an aide. Such speculations did not find entry into the protocol, but were heard nevertheless.

The evaluation of the evidence Arundle had collected had been so carefully prepared by Scholasticus, but did not bring the expected relief either. Neither the experts from Sydney were able to present another suspect, nor were the students who checked for the boat, that had been taken. While Penelope M'gamba's testimony was able to stray the first grains of doubt, as she had seen the boat 'with her own eyes', some fifteen minutes before the victim was found and rescued. However, the public opinion was set and sound.

Chairwoman Grisella noticed with growing sorrow the tightening rope around Arundle's neck, so to speak. She bade for revelation from above in vain. Only a wonder could save Arundle from being expelled from the School of Inbetween.

Everything depended now on the testimonies of Tika and Billy-Joe. Before they were called to the witness box, Grisella had a word with the jury. Her idea was to delay the trial until the next morning, so the defence got a chance to sort out the facts and arguments and present them somewhat more reliable and convincing. As the afternoon had passed,

nobody objected, thus the trial was postponed to the next morning at nine o'clock.

Arundle was not imprisoned, not yet! - As there was no such device as a prison on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Supported by her friends Corinia and Florinna, she staggered out of the hall of defiance, pale and somewhat conscious of her guilt, although she only had wanted to be of help and had not done anything wrong.

Nobody believed her, and as she wasn't sure any more about her motives, which had driven her over to the forbidden island, while well recalling the fits of jealousy, thus seemed to her now only logical. Was it so very unlikely that she had done the stupid, weird bowshot?

Arundle's magic bow rested between the other items of evidence in the caretaker's strong-room. She could not ask him for advice. She would lose him in any case. "That's the least we can offer, before it comes to the worst", Scholasticus argued with desperation in his voice.

What were they to do? Good advice was hard to achieve now. Scholasticus took it over to care for the 'desperada'. Grisella could not see her, the chair she was holding stood between them, and she could not risk being suspected as well of partisanship with a criminal. As much, she had liked to be with Arundle, who so desperately needed her support.

She had an Ace still up her sleeve, but she intended to play it only in the very last minute and in the worst case of emergency, even if it cost her precious gloriol and privilege. Heavenly revelation did not allow such discernments into the mode of being - she would have to procure them... - be it as it may... Perhaps Scholasticus managed without her assistance and found the right track on his own, she dearly hoped.

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Florinna and Corinia sat by Arundle together with her official councillor of defence Scholasticus Slyboots and pampered her as good as they could, while they strained their brains for the best strategy.

"If we only had the conviction of the true assassin, things would soon be straightened out", Scholasticus sighed "he can't have dissolved into nothing, he's got to be still somewhere around here right amongst us, I daresay..."

"...If he is up and away by air or sea?" Corinia suggested. Scholasticus shook his head, "there was no airlift, and no ship departed either... - how shall we find one suspect amongst hundreds?"

"Nothing's easier than that", Florinna knew the answer and Scholasticus felt dissatisfied with himself, as her proposal was as simple as effective. "Of course the fingerprints, we do have those on that tin can, already evaluated by the Sydney police authorities, all we have to do is

have them all scanned in the computer and in no time the culprit will be spotted.”

“Well, the person, who had been throwing such items away, first of all... but still... your idea is brilliant, indeed. However, is it practical? In fact we stray suspicion amongst the community and might cause great moral damage though... so let’s first think of other means.”

“There is still Billy-Joe. His contribution will surely be in favour of Arundle. He was present during the whole operation, the rescue, the searching and all that...”

“Was he really? Present I mean. He was out of his mind, somehow not himself, so to speak.”

“Right” Scholasticus agreed, “The accuser is going to dissolve him, that is - all he says - in no time. What does such an animal know for sure, doesn’t remember himself though. What about that fat giant rat, they are surely stressing on that...”

“And Tika” Corinia suggested.

“Yes, what about Tika” her sister bitterly agreed “Tika is the accuser’s chief witness!”

“Right you are - what a pity...”

“She is the least to know who shot”, Scholasticus agreed “and of her rescue she wouldn’t know anything, unconscious as she was...”

“I think so too”, Scholasticus agreed – “thus we won’t get any further, the solution must come from outside, we’ve got to present the culprit, with conviction and everything...”

“That’s easily said”,

“And if we ask Walter for help?” Corinia suggested.

“That you have to do on your own. You know my limited abilities when it comes to dreams and the like”, Scholasticus waved off. “Still, what could Walter do, we couldn’t do ourselves? He hasn’t got any idea what’s going on, on that island of the Convertors.”

“Well, he could look for traces and perhaps to the finger print check. If we had proof that someone from the Isle had the things in hands and threw them away, then we had the proof that there had been some other person on the island”, Florinna didn’t realized that she was repeating what was said a while ago.

“By means of the magical stone the check won’t be difficult – and something must be done!” Florinna sighed in desperation. She didn’t really believe in what she was suggesting.

“Arundle, please say something” - but Arundle only shook her head in silence. She followed the discussion as if hidden behind a veil. The words hardly came to her mind, so deeply was she involved in her sorrows.

What was going to happen? She couldn't think of a life outside the school. Should she eventually return to her parents? All alone, without her friends? The idea was so strange she didn't even consider.

"Arundle make up your mind. You are innocent, damn it", Florinna pleaded.

"...Just the opposite, if you hadn't been there, Tika would now be dead. Surely many more Conversors had been slaughtered. Think of that. See it this way round. You chased the invader away, you and Billy-Joe, that's got to be clear..." Florinna blushed in rage. She took her friend by the shoulders and shook her fiercely. "Wake up, please, wake up."

If she then had only known how true that idea was!

"That's it", Scholasticus agreed. "That's the right spirit, that's how we're gonna handle the case."

8. Walter's conversion

Walter was changing, no doubt about that. Never before had his friend been so moody, Pooty realized. His change might have to do with the fact that their human friends didn't have time for them any more. Just now, where they were so close! In the former time, when they stayed at the other end of the world, they didn't refrain from trying hard, harder than necessary sometimes, to remain in contact almost daily, when Walter's abilities were needed. Such an attitude didn't through a positive light on them; but what could you expect – they were humans after all, selfish, arrogant and merciless, when it came to animals.

Still there had been times before, when they didn't meet one of them for months and that hadn't done him any harm – quite the opposite. Isolation alone could not explain Walter's change.

One day at nightfall, Walter broke down with trembling limbs and foam before his mouth. The magical stone rolled off the shrinking belly-bag and followed Pooty, who ran away and hid behind the nearest bush. Pooty had no idea what he could do, nor had the magical stone. He closed his eyes and ears – a terrible change was going on. Walter was not himself anymore - he became a Man. Pooty could not believe his eyes as soon as he opened them again. The Man got up and ran into the bush, naked as he was, and Pooty ran after him, and so did the magical stone - what else could they have done. A naked man was running through the bush, what a sight! Walter kept on running until he reached the nearest sheep farm, where he

broke in and stole clothes, a rifle and a jeep. With that, he disappeared in the bush.

Of course could Pooty not follow the jeep as it was far too fast for him, so he hid nearby and waited. The jeep returned in the middle of the night, all laden with corpses of dead kangaroos. The farmer, who had come back in the meantime, heavily drunk though, welcomed him excessively, when he realized what was on the truck, and had Walter posing on his prey in order to take a picture. Walter, the Man, proudly presented himself on a pile of corpses. Then they set down for a drink.

Pooty didn't know where to let go his grief - flying this murderous site; what he saw would remain forever in his memory, as soon as he was far enough away, he let the tears run.

The farmer and the Man-Walter kept drinking until the morning came. By nightfall, the Man-Walter repeated the job of the previous night, and so did he the night after next. During days, so Pooty, who stayed near by, found out, the Man-Walter was fondling under a breeding lamp in the barn. On the fourth daybreak, while the farmer was away with his sheep, Walter re-converted to a kangaroo. He didn't remember the previous nights and days, when Pooty picked him up all confused, wondering where he was. Pooty collected his Man's clothes, but they didn't mean a thing to him. Pooty hid them in the barn. Then they disappeared in the bush, the magical stone still following.

The re-converted Walter didn't know even hours later what lay behind him. The last four days had been cancelled in his memory, as if they hadn't been. Pooty refrained from mentioning anything of the horrid facts and scenes, but couldn't hide his feelings either. Walter realized thus, that something was wrong with him. However, Pooty couldn't be moved to let out, what it was, of course. The more Walter insisted the more Pooty closed up.

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That was the night when Florinna and Corinia came visiting them for the first time after the term had started, three months ago. They reported what had been going on that night, when Tika was wounded on the island of the Conversiors, and Arundle was suspected of having shot her.

The girls explained all the whereabouts of the tribunal and the threatening outlook Arundle had to face, if nothing fundamental occurred that brought relief.

Walter cocked up while hearing Conversion. He seemed to have a faint idea meanwhile of the ongoing distress, he was enclosed.

Pooty took his chance and grabbed for Corinia while Florinna was talking with Walter away on a little walk. "Your advice is needed more than ever", she just said. Walter felt much better at once; solving the

problems of others was just what he needed, so he jumped on that train all the more as Arundle was in trouble. “What could be done, would be done”, he said. “Nothing is impossible by means of a magical stone”, he said with an encouraging smile, or what he thought would look like one.

“Would be a shame if we didn’t trace him down though”, he went on, “unfortunately I can’t find the magical stone. I must have mislaid him though, can’t think of the whereabouts. We’ve got to ask Pooty – The stone will be back, he always is back when we are in need...”

Pooty had taken the stone at last – had to promise the least possible weight and seize, as Pooty was a small being after all. The magical stone had fled the ‘Were-Man’ while Walter’s belly bag shrank to a naval.

“I won’t stay with such a monster, not a second longer”, had the stone hollered in dismay, while Pooty had been sobbing the guts out of himself, so to speak; and now, it was Pooty’s turn to let out the nightmare that lay behind them.

“I don’t know how to go on.” He concluded his tale. “I cannot live together with a cannibalistic mass-murderer”, “nor can I”, the magical stone agreed.

Corinia felt no less helpless. What could she suggest? She didn’t know, but shook her head all helpless. Instead of getting help, she felt surrounded by a weird mould, without outlet.

“When did that conversion happen”, she asked thoughtfully. “On the fifth or sixth of December? That was full moon, when our Convertors set sail for their island.”

“Billy-Joe was converting into a dingo and chased a fat giant-rat, while Walter was converting to a kangaroo hunter, and took the next rifle at hand, and shot down a pile of fellow kangaroos, - almost at the same time. That’s a funny coincidence”, she wondered. - “It’s a pity, you don’t have a picture of the killer... - but he can have hardly been on the island as well, can he?” Corinia wondered.

Pooty found her idea of blaming Walter somewhat odd. “... Never heard of such a beast, have you?” he asked in return. “A kangaroo changing into a Man-monster, unbelievable, isn’t it?”

“In principle somewhat sound”, Corinia answered - “the dearest and most peace loving creatures turn the cruellest beasts inside out. As if such had been oppressed for a long time and is now all the fiercer.”

“Do you really think a cruel cannibal is hiding in Walter ever since? Or has it come from the outside?” Pooty wanted to know.

“Well, he enjoys the company of the humans. He thinks like a human, he is intelligent like a human...” Corinia replied.

“You are right, I doubt not”, Pooty somewhat proudly agreed.

“Now the Man in him is awoken with all his cruelty – sounds logical to me...” Corinia went on.

Pooty shrugged in dismay – “how can I live with such a monster?” he asked and looked somewhat forlorn. “That definitely exceeds my limits...”

Corinia gave him an emphatic look. “There’s a solution for everything, you’ll see. If I see it right, Walter will remain himself for the next three weeks, if he is converting again at all.”

In the meantime, Florinna had asked Walter for a meeting on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth as soon as possible, but Walter only shook his head. Without stone, he was helplessly tied down to the local grounds. “Where did I leave him after all?” Pooty knew but could not tell, and the stone resisted the return into Walter’s belly bag at present.

There was no time for such fuddle muddle Pooty decided and declared somewhat decisive, the stone was his for the time being, “until further notice”, whatever that meant. Walter was concerned, but did not argue, so Pooty took the lead, while Corinia and Florinna returned on the dream stream, and Pooty via star bridge followed, accompanied by the unhappy and in fact unlucky kangaroo Walter.

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Back on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth neither Scholasticus nor Arundle could find sleep, different from the two dreamtime travellers who were just returning, while lying most comfortably in their beds, turning from one side to the other to pick up more pleasant subjects though.

The accused and her defender were brooding over the best strategy of defence. They had arranged for a carefully selected questionnaire, by means of which they wanted to guide Billy-Joe the right way.

Pooty and Walter came in on the Isle shortly after. It took some time until they found Professor Slyboots’ office. Theirs was the only light in the dark, so Pooty added two and two and thus made it at last.

The Professor was highly pleased and welcomed Walter most heartily, although he noticed the shadow of distress that overlaid him somewhat noticeable though. As Walter tried to overrule such notion, Scholasticus didn’t inquire, instead he informed him of the whereabouts once more, as had Florinna done before briefly.

Walter agreed, the trial stood and fell with their finding the real culprit – or reliable witnesses who could support Arundle’s version. The more they found the better it would be. Someone must perhaps have spoken to a stranger on the pier, or have seen his murderous equipment. Perhaps someone asked for the passage through the reef. “A boat had been taken for half a night, and been returned early the next morning, and nobody had

noticed? – That was very unlikely.” – “Yes, we’ve got to find witnesses.” Walter agreed.

“And we’ve got to manage the turn-around. Florinna had the idea first. She said by Arundle’s interference a massacre had been prevented, that is - it was stopped before it began, or was just about to begin, poor Tika was shot after all... Well, and most important, the danger is by no means over yet. There is something under way, much bigger and much more dangerous than we yet realize. If we dismiss Arundle from School, we clear the way for the assassin. He will come back, much sooner and more powerful than we can imagine. We’ve got to bring that over, good heavens - they can’t be that ignorant, after all...”

“Yes, attack is the best defence”, Pooty agreed on Walter’s behalf. “Well, in some cases, though”, the latter admitted vaguely.

“Exactly”, Arundle exclaimed. She seemed to awake from her lethargy.

“Let’s get out of the defence. Not Arundle has to hide anything – on the island there is something hiding and that is monstrous, dangerous and murderous – there is great evil and our task is to unveil the culprit and have him torn the mask off his face...”

“...Or hers” Pooty objected somewhat witty.

“Why not...” Arundle agreed.

“Let’s put our cards on the table, no secrecies any more”, Scholasticus added. “What’s next?”

Pooty took Walter to the island of the Convertors to get an idea of the whereabouts of the crime case. While they were away, Scholasticus asked Arundle to fetch her friends. They might be able to tell them, why Walter was in such bad shape. Perhaps they knew more.

They indeed did. Corinia told them what she had learnt from Pooty, but also stressed on the fact that Walter didn’t know what he did while in the state of conversion. Scholasticus got all alert when he learnt about that all the more as it coincided with the assault over here.

“...Somehow looks like some sort of secret connection, as I see it”, Arundle put in – “Although it’s quite a distance, but what does distance mean, when it comes to magic?”

Coincidences of such kind were of their taste. “I’d suggest you inquire once more. Pooty might have forgotten details”, Scholasticus said - “and I would like to be present”, Arundle added. “Four ears hear more than two...”

“Perhaps it would be a good idea to get Walter and Billy-Joe together...”

...well, Walter has no memory, he doesn’t know that he was converted, he isn’t the master of his mind, I’m afraid”, Corinia objected.

“First of all we need more time”, Scholasticus said. “I’m going to plead for an extra day of two. Our two guests from Australia put an entirely different light on the picture. Before we didn’t evaluate such new traces, we can’t outline the true dimensions of the case. A sentence now would mean we ignored vital facts. Besides, we would stumble into a catastrophe of immeasurable outlines. Let us sum up. What do we have? There are the fingerprints, we’ve got to differentiate – and second...”

“If you bring in the fingerprints once more, the accuser will deny a postponement right away. He will argue you only want to win time for time’s sake. No, the attack must come right at once. We have to uncover the conspiracy in all its dimensions. The existence of the School is in question. I only happened to lift the veil by accident, as my presence had somehow been considered. If I’m out of the way, the door’s pushed wide open for dark elements to enter. I’m the key, I can’t help it, that’s the way it is...” Arundle straightened things out for the first time, and Scholasticus agreed wholeheartedly and so did her friends.

“Very right, bravo, that’s the right spirit. First we sum up all those so called coincidences, and then we ask why Billy-Joe converted just at that time...”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t see that the right entry either”, Arundle contradicted. Scholasticus felt almost insulted. What was now wrong again, he asked himself; but the situation was far too serious to stick to narrow-minded emotions.

“We’ve got to put the colours first. That’s very clear to me now. The colours are the key to everything. The colours don’t lie. We must get everybody on the island tested. That’s the only way to separate the chaff from the wheat. It’s got to be done and no council or councillor can refuse nor can any individual refuse the test.”

“What is that?” Scholasticus asked. He didn’t quite get what was meant.

“Well, the basic course of course ‘Get to know Yourself’ – we all needed to attend”, Florinna agreed. “Why do we learn the other way of seeing? Now we can prove what it’s good for, after all...”, her sister assisted.

“You mean an assassin would have a certain colour, a colour different from the common colours known to us? Is that right?”

“You can’t suppress or hide your colour”, she agreed -

“We all hoist our true colours, so to speak”, she went on - “Colours never lie...”

Scholasticus began to understand how right Arundle was once again. We were all prisoners of our fate and dispositions. Nobody could hide his true colours, though. My goodness, he thought - what a battle. ‘I wonder

whether there are experts enough, able to interpret, what's been sent inside out. The deepest secrets couldn't thus be hidden... Well I hope not I am right..."

Nobody was prepared to answer such quest.

"We have to put the councillors on their honour, if they deny this test, they aren't interested in finding out about the truth, but only want to punish me for the rules' sake. That is by far not enough. Call it an accident, but it was me, who discovered a conspiracy of gigantic dimensions."

Those who witnessed Arundle stating such prophetic outlook could not do otherwise but agree deeply impressed. The avalanche kept coming, prepared to flatten them all to death, or...? - The last word had not yet been spoken.

9. The Colour Test

The whole morning was Arundle's. Scholasticus managed to have her in the witness box, where she took the chance to uncover her thesis in detail before the ears of the council as well as of the whole school community. The more she uncovered and the clearer the picture got, the better they understood and the more they began to admire her, while at the same time realized the size of the danger they were all in.

Of course there were no other lessons that morning, and all other activities came to an end as well, while the horrid vision of a massacre was laid open. Scholasticus pointed out and made quite clear who made this bitter cup of sorrow to just pass by.

"Arundle alone" he declared in an almost antique attitude, "saved numerous precious lives, yes she did... – but the danger is not yet banned, the threat goes on, the culprit is still amongst us." Thus, the attitude changed and things were seen from an entirely different angle at once.

Then Adrian Humperdijk took the word for a most important, possibly even decisive message, he just received from his friend, the King of Melisandria, while the mer-folk showed the most lively interest in the on goings ashore, and asked for regular reports as they couldn't be present at the trial.

A group of youth came about the truth, as they disobeyed strict laws, and reported the sounds of a motorboat in that night, while they were goofing about near the forbidden island. Curious as they were, they swam after the boat and saw it landing on the island's shore. They even claimed to be able to recognize the debarking man, armed with a bow – at any time without the faintest doubt. The man disappeared in the woods, where they could of course not follow, and returned about an hour later. He jumped in

great hurry into the boat and off he went, while only seconds later a red wolf followed by a girl appeared.”

Adrian confirmed the genuineness of the testimony. “There is no reason for those water-sprites to out them as witnesses, quite the opposite - the youngsters have to face severe punishment. I hope I can influence the King to pardon the offenders, as their word brought about a radical change in the ongoing trial, thus pardon for any likely offences may well be granted with regard to the benefits resulting from it”, Adrian concluded.

Marsha had tears in her eyes. Proud and tender at once she sighted at her husband. The council agreed, even the prosecutor. That was indeed the radical change, as had been announced by the councillor of defence.

For the afternoon, a confrontation was arranged with the witnesses. It had to take place in the grand hall below sea level, as only there the panorama windows guaranteed unhindered sight inside out and outside in. While the whole school community assembled, they could as well take fingerprints, Scholasticus suggested, who looked rather satisfied, as his proposal was finally accepted, that had been vehemently denounced before.

Arundle was almost sure now that the assault hadn’t been the deed of a misled lunatic, but a wide-ranged and well organised conspiracy – clearly indicating Malicious Marduk’s stamp mark. Such a conclusion went too far even for Scholasticus. “You see ghosts”, he said, shaking his head.

“That’s very right” Arundle agreed, “I do see ghosts! Let’s hope it’s not too late already, so that I’m not alone therewith.”

“...Might be too dark for the fingerprints tough”, Grisella announced, but thought something else, she didn’t let out. Another date was arranged for the morning to come. “Let’s hope the sun will do”, Marsha sighed after she got a sign by Grisella. ‘It looks good though’, she thought, although the weather had been rather changing – quite unusual for the time being.

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As a beehive was the grand hall with the subsoil sea view humming, shortly before the just freshly crowned young bee queen took her heels into the hands, so to speak - up and away towards virgin new shores.

Adrian Humperdijk, the Vice-Headmaster of the School of Inbetween together with the Caretaker, tried in vain to achieve the necessary earnestness and dignity for the council, that finally got on stage in that beehive-like turmoil still raging. One by one, the members of the council entered their central pedestal, where they sat down on their chairs.

The audience was expected to stand up, while the councillors where entering, but as many spectators couldn’t claim a chair their own, and were seated wherever possible – on stairs and sills, even on top of cupboards they sat, such disrespectful behaviour could be overlooked.

Once more Grisella announced the cause of the date, and asked for tranquillity and discipline, and for the undivided cooperation. All students should be prepared – “at best - even dormitory by dormitory, then you will be able to find out, if someone is missing” – to defile.

“The witnesses will remain unseen, behind the mirrored pane to the outside. Please look straight into the pane. Don’t let yourself become irritated and go on when the Vice-Headmaster tells you in the advised direction. I hope we manage this morning. In the next room Professor Slyboots is waiting for you, who will have your fingerprints been taken. Thus, we will kill two birds with one stone. Those, who have black fingers, are automatically registered. I hope in your own interest you agree with such measures. They are necessary for your own safety and therefore unavoidable.”

Agreeing murmur indicated the readiness to undergo that procedure. The first groups waited already impatiently. The caretaker raised the curtains, which closed the pane to the sea and the attending people suddenly looked into the plain straight light of the mirror into their own portrait in the huge pane.

Grisella and the other councillors looked at each other, then nodded and took the appropriate lists of the dormitories, which had been prepared for that purpose during the night. Names, age, nationality, colour and talents were stated and the length of stay in the School of Inbetween.

That was a kind of back and forth, turning pages, questioning gazes or helpless shrugging – indicating how difficult the task was for the councillors.

Of course, the light was sufficient for taking a secret colour-test, Grisella was personally directing, immediately after the fingerprints were taken.

Group after group marched alongside the pane and stopped whenever the Vice-Headmaster gave the sign. The teenagers on the other side behind the pane were laughing and made fun in the beginning but after the first hour, they got tired and bored by that identification.

Repeatedly they shook their heads and denied - the person they had seen in the boat was not present. In the fingerprint section things worked out fine; the prints were scanned into the central computer and were inch by inch crosschecked with the available material, and that was quite something, as the Sydney Police department was connected with Interpol.

Scholasticus counter-checked the results, with his own findings, but there was no better than seventy percent probability and that meant a definite no-match.

Thus, all inhabitants of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth were re-registered. By noon, the councillors realized that they needed at least the afternoon to get through with this tricky procedure. In the evening, the job was done at last. The water sprites behind the screen almost had shaken their heads off their shoulders. Their superiors thought the day punishment enough for their misbehaviour. Adrian assured them that their engagement would be mentioned at the appropriate institution.

None of the humans outside was suspicious or had any acquaintance with the wanted. Such was the saddening result of the enquiry. Arundle was released in any case, the prejudicial attempt lacked of substance, while the true dimensions of the situation came in sight.

Exhausted and hungry as they were, they proceeded to the dining hall. Scholasticus hooked up with Adrian, who still kept his witnesses in mind. "The assassin might have been masked", Scholasticus tried to ease his frustrated colleague. Adrian fetched for that straw: "That's brilliant, it's a brilliant idea indeed. I wonder why it didn't come to my mind." He decided to have another word with the youngsters and offer them the different possibilities, humans choose to mask.

The fingerprint investigation was a failure as well. Thus, it looked as if they weren't on the right track. The assassin did most likely not come from the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. However, who took the boat? Because the theft of the boat was absolutely clear by now.

By checking the fuel consumption, it could clearly be proved that one of the boats had done the tour twice that night. Thus, the culprit had come from here without any doubt. How could he disappear unseen after his return? That was the big question.

All who were engaged in Arundle's defence met again after supper, to rehearse the day. Walter and Pooty joined them as well, after returning from the island of the Conversiors. Unfortunately, Grisella was still not allowed to join them before the final sentence; so, there only met Billy-Joe, Florinna and Corinia, as well as Tibor and Arundle, of course.

"I wonder if those Misieriors ain't bothering us right over here now", Corinia said vaguely.

"I know, they are some hundred years away from us", she admitted as she saw the questioning gazes around her.

"On the other hand it is also fact, that Malicious Marduk managed to spoil the investigations of the future, but he did it from here, he was in our time, without doubt. What if he found a secret passage for his kind to enter the presence?" Arundle answered thoughtfully.

"As far as we know, they have been disposed for good", Florinna objected. "Yes, but in over one hundred years from now..."

“Nobody really knows where they are right now, that’s absolutely true”, Scholasticus agreed.

“Grisella was cheated by Malicius Marduk without even noticing where he came from, and managed to enter Walter’s virtual spacecraft just like that, uncontrolled and unhindered, nobody knows how...”, Florinna nodded.

“...that could happen not only because Grisella was careless, as she was, but happened, because of the perfidy and cleverness. Malicius Marduk seems to be able to cover under masks or go even further than that...”, Walter put in.

“I wholly agree, we don’t know him, we have nothing but a faint idea of his whereabouts”, Pooty backed up his friend sorrowfully.

“No matter the fact that we overcame him at last...” Arundle said.

“...And release him again...”, Scholasticus answered.

“...Somewhat altered though...”, Arundle objected.

“Grisella had some kind of black-out, I’d say – that’s meant wholly literally – that’s why we did that colour check, by the way - in order to find traces of the dark kind. Blackness is, so to speak, the ultimate non-colour, the lack of all light...” Arundle went on.

“Those Miseriors know of course about their aura and wouldn’t dare to show up amongst us, because we are able to distinguish a person by the colour”, Corinia agreed.

“Who ever went over there to the Convertors’ Island, Malicius Marduk, or one of his creatures, wouldn’t mingle with us after return, but hide somewhere, most favourably in another human being, but a being that guarantees complete protection, that is, also colour protection as well...” Arundle suggested. -

“... Or wouldn’t be checked or even looked at...” Pooty put in, thoughtfully -

“...As nobody expects an aura...” Corinia agreed.

“What, if we had to do with an attack, similar to the attacks we had to face in Laptopia”, Pooty asked and looked forlorn and scared to death, as he had certain pictures still in mind, but could not openly talk about, such had killed his big friend without doubt.

“It’s worth while considering”, Scholasticus agreed, he had been informed meanwhile of what had been going on in the bush during full moon.

“I wonder what their motives are. Are they chasing lost souls over here as well?” Arundle, who raised that question looked from one to the other. Billy-Joe nodded fiercely – “That’s it, they are eating up soul-stuff, that’s how they survive, they can’t do without...”

“The question is - how a soul gets lost. Is that the good old procedure raised in moral questions like wickedness, murder and the like – in one word - sin?”

While Arundle said – murder – Pooty shrugged in pain. Was Walter a murderer now? A lost soul, bound to be the Miseriors’ prey, regardless of his consciousness, where such knowledge didn’t appear? What a terrible idea, if Walter had lost his soul forever!

“Discussing Miseriors seemed of some interest though, still I don’t see the connection to our problem. What do we have, or have not? We didn’t get any results at that pane. Our witnesses weren’t able to identify any of the persons passing by.

None of the islanders were identified to having used that boat, that was taken back and forth. That seemed clear so far.

The checks of the fingerprints didn’t lead to positive results, as were found on the objects near the site of the assault; and the secret colour check didn’t come to a positive conclusion either. Grisella and the councillors didn’t spot any forbidden colours. What ever that means...” Scholasticus summed up what had been done over the day.

“Was such test legal, and what was it good? I don’t see the point. Does that mean a bad individual can be spotted by his aura, just like we can see ours?” Florinna asked.

“You better check this with your teacher in the basic course. Outlining the tricky connections right here would lead us astray, I’m afraid. There won’t be the time though. Just that much for now. If the sum of all light contains all basic colours, you can imagine what the opposite side may look like”, Scholasticus tried to explain.

“... And that will become visible then?” Corinia asked.

“Well, no of course not – such become ‘invisible’, so to speak...”, Arundle replied. “Perhaps it suffices if nothing can be seen.”

“What about all those people without aura? They would be lost right from the start. Such would be suggested by this theory, anyway, and cannot of course be accepted”, Billy-Joe said.

“Right, there’s something wrong”, Scholasticus nodded – “As I said, let’s talk things over during lessons, I don’t feel fit... besides we don’t have the time right now...”

The rehearsal of the defence strategy thus came to a dead end. The questions raised, they could not answer and the problems they had talked over did not find a solution.

“...Looks as if we have to wait for the coming full moon though...”, Arundle said.

“The dismissal seemed to be off the agenda, now that the earnestness of the situation became clearer. It was no kind of prank that made Arundle

head for the forbidden island, but a deep concern, that turned out to be a threat of a much wider range. Tomorrow, the council will officially announce the results of today's investigation, and their final sentence", Scholasticus ended their rehearsal.

On the way out towards the dining hall, Pooty asked for a meeting with Arundle about Walter, the latter didn't seem to like as he asked his little companion to join him right away. "Tonight, I'll be with you", Pooty whispered before he filed up with Walter who headed for some site in the open for the night.

10. The pictures

The night was settling, but the friends still missed the inner rest, so they went down to the beach for a swim, and Billy-Joe joined them. The physical exercise after a long day's suspense did them good. Still they did not manage to relax and have the whirling thoughts lowered. When they settled on their island, they remained thoughtful and monosyllabic.

The sun, though disappeared a while ago, still sent his last rays out of the black mirror of the flattened sea, while the night spread about its dark blue blanket wherein the mystic Goddess of Darkness had woven first stars and signs of the zodiac.

Pooty came to Arundle's mind. She had forgotten about his whispered plead, but the way he had spoken indicated a subject of great importance. He might be waiting already in the dormitory. Well, under his magic hood nobody would take notice of him.

She rushed away anyway, but did not tell the others why. First Pooty should tell. She claimed fatigue and retired and so did Florinna and Corinia. They jumped off the pontoon and Billy-Joe had no choice, so he followed them. What else should he do all alone out here?

The water was still lukewarm, some thirty degrees Centigrade, out here in the lagoon. After the turmoil of the day, Billy-Joe felt like company and did not want to be alone.

For the time being he had given up his outdoor facility and stayed in one of the dormitories the Sublimations shared with some Conversiors. He had made friends with Tibor and his brother Sandor Khan, the proud descendants of the mighty Dshingis Khan. Nevertheless, he felt still drawn towards his girlfriends, as a part of his belonged to them.

The brothers of the Mongolian steppe realized at once the problems Billy-Joe had with his new role as an outcast, thus the ribbon was easily bound.

“If it is your decided will to get rid of the beastly spirit that dwells inside you, we can surely help you. We know a safe way” they let him know.

Such an offer helped him a lot. Had it not been for Tika, he had agreed right away. As vague as he remembered his stay on the forbidden island, Tika he could not get out of his mind. The timid girl, healed and well again, that looked so shy at him, whenever she thought he would not realize, kept the memory alive.

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Arundle managed to slip into the dormitory just before Corinia and Florinna, where Pooty was waiting under her bed. She wondered how he had found her. Pooty was staring out of the window.

Boetie, the mermaid, was there, awaiting Corinia. The two met two or three times a week. Sometimes Corinia left to the outside, and then she felt the strong desire to convert instead of paddling about with gas flask and snorkel.

Communication was no problem though. They conversed in a telepathic mode, that was not the same as real talk, and sometimes Corinia wished to get things a bit clearer. The threshold between lung breathers and gill-breathers seemed sometimes somehow insurmountable.

Arundle led Pooty along some endless corridors to the ‘Terra incognita’³, so to speak, where they were alone. Pooty took his magic hood off and they sat down on one of the volcano rocks that lay about waiting to be prepared for further use. Still some light came down the inner well that made them see each other faintly. Of course, they knew each other well enough to manage without eye contact.

“What’s troubling your soul, dear friend?” Arundle started - much too loud her voice echoed from the narrow walls, she realized and shrieked – what if someone eavesdropped them? It was Arundle as if the walls had ears all of a sudden. They might better go outside. – Then she pulled herself back. What a nonsense she said to herself. ‘You see ghosts where there is nothing.’

Pooty felt no less uneasy. He had a bad conscience because of Walter, but he could not bear the terrible secret alone any more. He would suffocate if he did. Therefore, he told Arundle what had happened to Walter during the last full moon period. His conversion into a ‘Were-man’ and the horrible things he then did. “Even photos had they taken. Walter, the ‘Were-man’ in hunter’s pose on a pile of kangaroo corpses – an awful sight, I will never get out of my mind.”

³s lat. Area of the unknown

Pooty began to sob and hid his little head in Arundle's lap, who tried to comfort him but in vain. "Do speak up and tell me everything. A sorrow shared is but half the trouble", she whispered, while the waves of distress shook the little body and seemed to find no end.

"They took a picture, you say?" she asked after a good while, as that was the first news she learnt. Everything else Corinia had briefly told her.

Pooty nodded, "the farmer took the pictures" he confirmed, "whenever Walter returned; and he gave him money as well. Ten Dollars for each corpse." Pooty started sobbing all over again, while he visualised the pile on the platform of the land rover.

"I don't know how I can go on. I can't possibly stay with him, can I?"

Arundle did not know either. She just could not imagine what she would have done on his behalf.

"Are you sure there is no mix-up?" she asked somewhat hopelessly, as she of course knew how much Pooty had liked that the worst was untrue.

Pooty shook his head in silence. For a while, they were sitting side by side. Arundle was softly rocking the little creature while humming a long forgotten children's song, the text she had all forgotten, until he relaxed.

What could they do? How could they help the little lad? They had to be careful with Walter, for sure, and do not have him participate in the further investigations.

Grisella had to be notified. She should check Walter's aura, if there had been a change after the conversion, no matter whether Walter locked his other being away. Poor Walter was nevertheless a victim; never had he voluntarily participated in such a slaughter.

'What happened to him? Who took possession of him?' she asked herself. - "That's it" - a sudden strike came to Arundle's mind though. Someone or something took possession of Walter. An evil spirit got hold of him. Arundle knew who he was, and she knew, where he got hold of poor Walter.

Walter had done everything to help Grisella and her project-team. There it happened then. The invasion had begun right then and nobody realized what was really going on, while the scientists still thought they were doing good solid positive research.

The student who stole the results and published them as his own, smuggled himself into the team, and afterwards nobody could say, where he came from. He had been there, just like that. Everybody thought him having joined the staff as all others on earth, but what - if he came into the team in Laptopia and got entry that way into another time, where he didn't belong, and was now dumping his poisonous payload that didn't belong here either?

None of the scientists could describe him or had a clear vision of his face after he disappeared. Except for Grisella, he was nothing but a vague image then.

“Do you think we could get a photo of that slaughterer?” Arundle wondered and woke Pooty up, who had fallen asleep, exhausted as he was. “What photo?” he asked back. Well, a photo taken by that farmer, showing that man posing on a pile of corpses!”

Pooty nodded. “I could easily steal the camera, if the photos aren’t ready yet.”

“How shall we get there”, Arundle asked herself. She missed her magic bow now badly, which was stuffed into a strong room, and was surely even more upset. Right now she could not get him out there, not while the trial was still pending.

“I’ve got that magical stone though, who doesn’t go back to Walter, since he knows the truth.”

“Well then, let’s go” Arundle commanded and Pooty took the magical stone, which started vibrating and glooming. In no time, they were at that farm, standing right in front of the living room window. The farmer was sitting drunk at the table and was about to fall asleep, right there.

Pooty sneaked inside but could not find the pictures. Therefore, he took the camera and brought it to Arundle who took the film out. “That’s all we need”, she said.

“Let’s hope the photo is on the film”, Pooty agreed.

“We must risk that, otherwise we come back. Now let’s get away. The film has to be developed. We need the picture for tomorrow’s trial.”

Arundle had something in mind that seemed to be somewhat crazy, but the longer she thought about it, the surer she got. “Let’s go”, Pooty commanded this time, and off they went back to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

There it was then almost eleven o’clock. Should she try, and see Scholasticus right away? Arundle was well aware of her situation, she could not take a risk, so she decided to deliver the film early the next morning. If she got up in time, Scholasticus’ aides could still develop the film before the trial began.

11. The Thousand Faces of Malicious Marduk

Arundle could not sleep, upset as she was, she rehearsed the day with all the assumptions and considerations, and the conclusions drawn, whether

they were substantial and factitious. What would it mean, if they were wrong, and things were all different, because the key was somewhere else?

Had the work and the efforts of the past days been all for nothing, and were leading astray, or did they hit a track incidentally that might turn out to be the right one?

The pictures on that film, she felt under the pillow, were but another piece of evidence. It was a new beginning at last. If she was right, she could roll the whole case up again under a completely different point of view. She could uncover a conspiracy of huge dimensions, reaching out with greedy fingers for the School of Inbetween, and further from here to the world outside.

She had to make herself clear, that Laptopia meant the future of mankind, and was no closed far chapter of a strange planet. The ignition switch was set, the bomb was ticking, although time did not seem to play any role right now.

It looked different, as if it was about something else. The imperial Advisor gave here and then hints, pointing that way: the loss of time was not the real problem. In fact, the real problems occurred while someone tried to gain control. There was much more on the verge of ruin but a tiny planet of a medium sized sun-system in one of millions of galaxies.

Who was in command of the course of things? Who handled eternity? What colour was the light? Such were the real questions.

Arundle felt somewhat dizzy. Her thoughts dissolved, was she dreaming or awake? She felt she was gliding and sinking. She enjoyed her sinking, as sleep and dreams were her good friends. For the first time since long ago, her dream led her to far Laptopia. She felt the yearning coming over her, even before she felt the grey cloudbanks you could sit on. The grey towers were greeting near by, the battlements of the old palace, the squares down there, the people and their artifact aides – advanced laptops, little robots and big ones, able to perform almost any duty. Helpers and competitors in one, trickling sweet poison into the social body, pampering the masters for long ago inventiveness and brain-skill, and now longing for nothing else but a long, all too long life.

All means were right. A small class of the mighty ruled over the multitudes, exploiting them from the only property they had left: their lifetime.

The victory over the corrupted old regime stopped such negative development. The riots had found an end – time had been available for all again. The young Prince became Prince Regent by appointment of His Mighty Majesty Rolandus Caesar of the Universe. He then ruled wisely, being assisted by the Clan Chiefs and of course by General Armyless, who stood by his side ever since.

Prince Watchanot's father had lost his mind though, because he had been responsible for the worst atrocities in a way. After his defeat, he never really recovered and finally died.

"It was better that way", the General comforted his Prince, when he saw the clouds of depression darken his eyes.

Arundle learned of the death only then. Young Prince Watchanot was so pleased of having Arundle here again that he arranged a feast, and proudly presented the new food that found her wholehearted agreement for the first time.

"It's all nature, as you recommended. You see, we have learnt."

The Prince still preferred the synthetic food he was used to, although he pretended to enjoy the hard corn and shred, Arundle liked, and was now the base of the nutrition for the multitude.

"Nobody will be forced", the General pointed out, who got up to meet the honourable guest. He looked somewhat sleepy. He was no youngster anymore, but rather advanced in age. What had that man all done, Arundle thought full of admiration.

He still could not refrain from clapping heels and kissing hands. "Dear General, I'm so pleased to see you", Arundle sweetly said, while the General showed his suggestive grin as usual. "How is my dear ancestor, Scholasticus Slyboots? I hope he is well and of good health?"

Arundle nodded and gave the regards of the others.

"Oh, they show here up once in a while – only you we had to miss for a very long time", the Prince put in.

"Unfortunately Professor Slyboots doesn't manage the dreamtime travelling business, I'm afraid", Arundle went on.

"We see that quite different, Scholasticus stands at our side with advice and deed, as a matter of fact", the General snarled. "He is indeed a true ally."

"He must have had a hard training though. I didn't think he was so flexible."

"Obviously he is. To a great extend he is responsible for our advances. He laid the seed, so to speak that is now blossoming. In a way, you are just eating from it. Without the assistance of the Professor, we would be way behind and not that far yet. He taught us how to gain water, by recycling Oxygen. We have now more water than ever. The blue planet is restoring its old soul. We have filled the oceans by one third, and daily the water is rising. All over the places, fresh fountains are sparkling. Where there had been desert, the land is now bursting into bloom. Time plays an important role though... The Advisor told us we were on the verge of return to the factor two already. Nature gets relieved. The sunlight – so desperately needed - is getting down to the earth again. Ozone-shields are

protecting us against the poisonous UV-rays. Only the cloudbanks, you like so much, over the City are still there.”

Arundle felt fine and was happy with that clear and precise report of her little prince, who was now all grown up. The dinner ended. The General was yawning stealthily. Arundle felt it was time to say good-bye, and while she did, she deeply sighed. Both the Prince and the General noticed at once.

“Arundle, dear child, what is it, what’s troubling you?” the General asked fully awake in a fatherly manner and the Prince looked by sorrowfully. “You know, we would do everything for you we can”, he said. “You are our guiding star of a merry renewal”, the General added. “Come on, let’s hear what it is? What matters you?”

Arundle sighed once more, and then she told what was going on right now in her own world, the troubles that just began and the horrible suspicion that had fallen on her. She told of the dangers that were coming over the people on the good old earth, and how some hidden evil force tried to trick her out. “There is a system behind”, she pointed out “although I sometimes can’t believe my own thoughts. But I’m not out of mind, I’m no lunatic either...”

The Prince and the General both agreed wholeheartedly - “Of course not, we notice the handwriting of that culprit Malicious Marduk all too well”, the General rigorously exclaimed. “And poor Walter is his victim – how could that happen?”

“Just Walter who can’t do harm to anybody”, the Prince confirmed, then shrugged in dismay while learning of the pile of corpses on that truck, as he hated all bloodshed, no matter whether in self-defence. That was why he still felt somewhat awkward whenever he saw Billy-Joe, as he then remembered the bloody deed, although Laptopia was saved with it.

“What are we to do now?” the Prince asked. They could not let go their friend like that. “I may find the Advisor”, the Prince suggested while he realized that the General had no idea either. “I still have that secret channel – our ‘red telephone’. I’m connected with the imperial council right away”, the Prince explained. Arundle had no objections.

For the first time roles changed – not she was helping but she needed help. She would appreciate any helpful advice from the future. It did not take a minute until she was connected, and a minute later, the Advisor appeared, smiling as usual and attentive though.

Arundle told her tale of distress once more and laid open the cloud of evil that was brooding above her head. The Advisor was most interested in Grisella’s colour scheme instead, she just mentioned, and confused Arundle by that. To him the colour scheme was a remarkable model. He then realized how offensive his behaviour had been. “Your sorrows and worries will surely be considered and being looked after”, he comforted her

therefore and then confirmed the identity of the assassin as well as of the evil spirit, which governed Walter in the state of conversion.

“Your conclusion is sound and logical, dear Miss Arundle”, he said, referring to the location of the culprit.

“May I ask, if you are the only one who’s realizing the gigantic dimensions of the threat?” Arundle stopped for a moment then nodded.

“We’ve got to interfere, it’s high time to notify the Emperor. Every mistake in the past requires permanent repair. Of course, we cannot accept any alteration of the course of time and history afterwards, that is quite clear and cannot be tolerated from any side, but we have also to take care of the development as such. Things have to develop the way they are later recorded in the history-books. There we’ve got to carefully check, what’s going on, even more now as we learnt of such invasion of evil spirits being smuggled into the historical process. Chaos and confusion are attributes of Malicius Marduk. May I make therefore a humble suggestion?” - the Advisor ended such lengthy speech, while he was working already on the string-strut connecting him with the virtual centre of everything - that is, the Emperor’s Peninsular somewhere in the no-where - light years and light years abroad.

Arundle wholeheartedly agreed. She had nothing to lose. Whatever the Advisor suggested, she would comply with, she said and the Advisor smiled his little somewhat arrogant smile. “That’s all the proud Arundle, brave and bold – that is so very right, His Majesty’s all with you, dear child...”

The Prince and the General looked somewhat bewildered and scared while Arundle all agreed with the suggestions, although she would be transformed some aeons apart, forth or back, did not matter, so to speak, as it did not make any difference.

“Well then”, the Advisor said. “I’m taking you with me to the centre of all might. There you will see the record of the thousand faces of Malicius Marduk, and hopefully keep in mind, as this is essential. You should remember when you meet him in one of his masks. He has nothing to do in the 20th century, if I see it right – or should he regain power at the end of this century? We will see. Are you ready? Well, then, lets go. Come over here and stick close to me, please.”

That was easier said than done. The Advisor was no being of flesh and blood, but a kind of hologram. However, Arundle was only present in her dream, thus, she finally managed to spot the right site. With the power and the absolute speed of a decisive thought, they managed to overcome space and time, by which Laptopia, the earth and the galaxy of the sun-system was separated from the universal eternity. It meant to break through the membrane enclosing the system.

Had she expected a lively adventure she was disappointed. Different from travelling by means of the magic bow, she scarcely noticed the transfer to the virtual centrepiece of everything. In fact, she found herself in a peculiar room that charged her attention right away.

“We are now in the trans-galactic rogues gallery”, the Advisor explained and pointed at the flimsy walls that became a picture as soon as the eye stood still. “Where, if not here, would be the right site to search for the thousand faces of Malicious Marduk”, the Advisor asked.

He did not expect an answer, as he was right of course. The trans galactic rogues gallery contained a never-ending sequence of all criminals, who had committed a serious crime, from the beginning of time until the end, carefully sorted by solar systems and their different time scales.

“In fact you find only a small part of the universe represented, only systems that are populated by acquainted species and civilisations, so the intergalactic culprits, like Malicious Marduk, are easier to prosecute, if dismissed in one system. In order to get away, they slip into masks. Malicious Marduk is the master of over one thousand masks. Therefore it is not easy to recognized him.”

“...If he does not out himself, like he did, when he cheated himself into Grisella’s project”, Arundle objected.

“Very interesting, that’s the first time I hear”, the Advisor replied. “How did he do that, and what was the institute called, you said?”

Arundle then told the story and what she read in that newspaper article about the investigation Grisella performed for the new Prince Regent of Laptopia soon after he got in charge. A certain Malicious Marduk cheated himself into the group of students who were busy with the survey, while Walter, who was now suffering under the threat of the culprit, organized the transport, by means of a magic black box powered by the magical stone from Uluru.

The traitor then published the results of the survey as his own and then disappeared without a trace.

“I was so busy at that time in the future, that I forgot about it. Besides, the School of Inbetween asked for our undivided attention. I had to fiddle around with my parents and Billy-Joe with his authorities. Well, we made it after all, and so did Grisella and Scholasticus. They had registered as well and are now our teachers, you know”, she explained and the Advisor nodded meaningfully.

“Now things are getting clearer. It looks as if things turn around. We will see. We have not lost yet, but he should not get hold of the presence, he and his devilish contraband. We have to take care of that. I am most thankful of course, if you take over such tricky task as you did and will support you by all means. My task is not an easy one though, and

consequently yours is not either. Malicus Marduk is the slyest of the rioters, his ingenuity is somewhat marvellous.”

Arundle was not very sure, whether she understood what the Advisor wanted of her.

“I think it would help if I saw some of the pictures available”, she said.

“Certainly, my dear child, that’s why you are here, you will be well prepared when that film is developed tomorrow morning. Memorise well the faces. I show you the respective fracture of time - beginning in the middle of the 20th Century to the beginning of the 21st; Malicius Marduk has changed his sight so radical that even his own mother would not be able to identify him. Let’s see what we have here...”

“It’s a pity Grisella isn’t here. Can I take some with me? Not all, just a few...”, Arundle asked while gazing over the faces passing by.

“Only by means of a photographic memory, I’m afraid”, the Advisor answered.

“Well, I try, but what I have in mind is not worth a penny, not with that council, they need provable facts. The atmosphere is somewhat chilly there, you know. Malicius Marduk has done a good job, I’m afraid.”

“Is that so?” the Advisor answered. “Perhaps we get a special permit – for - let’s say two pictures, not more. So, choose well. I have them printed out and beamed over as soon as you have made your choice”, the Advisor said, after a hefty intercom debate.

“Don’t give in. Your cause is righteous, remain bold and strong”, the Advisor earnestly advised when Arundle meant that she would have problems even with the copies. “How shall I explain the whereabouts of the pictures?” she asked desperately. The Advisor smiled mildly and it seemed to her as if he was going to fade. The room itself lost contours. Had she identified the two pictures? She must have done, while as she looked around the surrounding disappeared in waving mist.

The Somnion’s colour covered and surmounted her as a tender cloud of the sweetest slumber. The dream was over, no doubt. She was back on earth and set up shrugging. “What a dream”, she whispered.

“At last Arundle, we thought we couldn’t wake you up at all. It’s high time, if we want to get to the trial in time.”

“But the film...”

“Which film?”

Instead of answering Arundle rushed out of the room along the corridors and stood in no time - panting heavily - before the Slyboots door. She was lucky Scholasticus was still there. She explained in brief the whereabouts of the film she held in hand, that had to be developed and implemented into the trial as important evidence supporting the new

approach, they concluded on last night. "I'm almost sure we will get the proof we need", she said mysteriously, "and there is more to come, just wait and see..."

Scholasticus almost lost his temper as Arundle offended again one of the strict rules.

"Hush, hush see that you get away unseen back to where you belong. I have the film developed for the trial, rely on that... we'll meet at the bars in some minutes..."

Arundle was already on her way back. Breathless as she was she searched her bed for the two pictures the Advisor had promised in her dream. She even checked the shoes under the bed. The Advisor had promised - where were those copies!

"Arundle, we've got to go, let's have breakfast. The trial is on in ten minutes."

However, Arundle did not feel like breakfast. She would have her teeth brushed quickly, and then follow she said, so Corinna and Florinna went ahead somewhat hesitant.

"Sure, you're coming right away?!" Florinna said uneasily.

"We will meet in the Hall. Do you think I'm missing my own show?" she asked challenging and the courage of the day before somewhat defiant resounded.

Only half convinced the sisters hurried to the dining room, where they had a hasty cup of coffee, and then rushed on to the Grand Hall, where people were streaming from all sides in order to get a good seat.

Arundle was brushing her teeth meanwhile. As she so did, she looked just like that into the mirror without thinking anything specific. She checked with the tip of her tongue for a successful cleansing while observing her front teeth, and then she saw it.

"Can't be true - the Advisor - what a smart guy!" Arundle giggled, when she discovered two dots in between her front teeth. That was no dirt, no rests of food she had overlooked. She carefully pulled the clasp off she wore for teeth-correction and had a closer look. The spots turned out to be miniature pictures showing two faces. She put the clasp back into her mouth, and the faces she had seen enlarged in the mirror, disappeared.

"What a son of a gun" she thought with a thankful smile. He did not leave her alone, with the task and burden, she had to convey to the council - definitely not an easy task though. He seemed to know her very well, as brushing her teeth was a definite must every morning.

Relieved and at ease she muddled towards the Hall with the tingling clasp in its box where she safeguarded the precious content. They would look astounded, all of them, most of all - the prosecutor! Thus, her assertion would be somewhat sound. It was no doubt a technical masterpiece to have

those photos implemented into a tooth-clasp, even more if they then also matched; - that was more than she dared to hope. The theory would not change anyway, no matter whether the pictures suited or not.

She now was sorry of not having the Advisor made familiar with her theory, but there had not been the time. Out of the thousand faces of the culprit, she had seen not even one hundred. That weren't many; still she had not been able to keep them all in mind, and besides – without the two hard copies her dream would not be worth a penny, she now realized. 'Whatever we experience in our dreams is lost quickly, as soon as we are awake', she said to herself - 'thus it is - even with us Somniors though.'

Arundle managed to slip into the hall just as the council marched in and sat on her stool of prosecution, before they had settled. Scholasticus, her councillor of defence, awaited her impatiently. He signalled 'all clear' and pointed on the table in front at a white envelope. Other signs of his she could however not interpret; but there was neither time nor chance to talk, as everybody got up to greet the council.

The Chairwoman, Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots opened the session by summing up the results of the 'very enlightening and prosperous' previous day, as she put it. Nonetheless, of the efforts, things were not settled yet and no sentence found.

Although the tests did not bring profound results, Grisella still interpreted the outcome positive. She pointed out that there were no doubts left. The integrity of the school community was unquestionable again, all members rehabilitated, and the suspect relieved.

"Yet the danger is not over", she went on raising her voice "quite the opposite - the dark side knows our position now and is prepared. Therefore it is essential now to stay together united and hinder the chaos on the march in order to prepare a joint and effective defence under the guidance of the proven staff."

However, the prosecutor, Moschus Mogoleya, did not want to give in just like that. He took the word after the Chairwoman and pointed once more out that the pending case dealt with a severe offence of the school regulations. "Even if we can't prove the murderous attempt, the offence remains. Therefore, I strongly request for another cross-examination of the prosecuted. Vague excuses cannot be tolerated. The whole theory of conspiracy of the accused sounds to me like a trumped up allegation, to lead the council astray."

Scholasticus at once supported the application of the prosecutor, but for a different reason. A short gaze over to Arundle was enough. She was eager to get the word. The prosecutor would ask narrow and limited-minded questions, therefore, it would be better, if Scholasticus granted her

space and time for developing the wide spectrum of the danger the school was in, and not only the school...

The Chairwoman was in favour of the Council of defence and therefore allowed her brother-in-law to begin with the interrogation. Thus, Arundle got the chance to report of her journey to Australia and of the sheep-farmer. Then she talked about her visit to the virtual centre of the universe, where she was confronted with the thousand faces of Malicius Marduk, in the intergalactic rogues gallery. She did not get far in checking through the gallery, but she had looked into the most interesting if not most important faces.

Here the prosecutor saw his chance, and asked for the word. He spoke of the fairytale world of the accused – “undoubtedly a mere product of her imagination”, he said. He could not imagine a worse web of lie, wishful thinking and hypocrisy, he concluded. “There is of course no evidence, how should there, is the accused but a Somnior... That means for us, believing, believing, believing – grey mist, nothing but sound and fury.”

The last remark was very unfavourable on his behalf. A murmur of protest went through the ranks. The many Somniors present did not like to hear what the prosecutor said about one of them.

The Chairwoman of the council fiercely knocked with her little hammer on the table and claimed for silence, while grinning inside. Even the Sublimators present shook their heads with annoyance, because of such faux pas⁴ of the prosecutor, was he but one of them after all.

Scholasticus realized flash-like his chance and took the word, only to pass it on to Arundle, who - thus he pointed out - had more to offer than ‘sound and fury’.

He pushed the envelope at her that had been lying on the table, and she tore off the pictures, she had not yet seen, and it took her breath when she looked at them now.

That was more than she had dared to hope. Stunned as she was she gasped for air, stuttered and went silent again, while pushing the photographs on towards the Chairwoman’s who jumped off her seat as soon as she looked at them.

“That’s him, that’s him, that is the impertinent guy who sabotaged our survey, how did you get at such pictures?”

Arundle found back to her voice, while Grisella went out of mind. Arundle reported at length what she and Pooty had found out in Australia. Walter’s terrible conversion and all that...

⁴ false step

“Are you able to identify the person on that photograph?” - the prosecutor, Moschus Mogoleya, asked just to say something to get back into command.

“I would not have a problem with that”, the Chairwoman answered on Arundle’s behalf. - “This is without doubt, Malicious Marduk, a mean intriguer and impostor.” -

“...And the head of the Miseriors” Arundle went on, “but the true identity must remain still undercover, no matter what impression that may cause. We first need more evidence. That is for sure. We have it here most likely to do with the head of a conspiracy of gigantic dimensions, the first attack we got aware right here last month, and Tika was the unlucky victim. However, we were lucky after all. Had I – together with Billy-Joe of course - not stopped the assassin, there would have been more victims.”

“Many more”, the councillor of defence assisted. Arundle nodded. “The Miseriors are still somewhere around. We do not know how they managed to slip through all of our controls yesterday. Anyway, they must still be on the island, well hidden and ready to strike at any time, under the command of the sly rascal Malicious Marduk, who is their brain trust and leader. This is where we have to focus our efforts, instead of muddling about and waste our time accusing each other of having offended small-checked rules and regulations. Of course rules are not meaningless, of course life has to be regulated - to a certain extend, but if that life is endangered, it’s got to be defended as well, and can’t be sacrificed in blind obedience.”

The prosecutor was of course not happy about Arundle’s testimony, but suspected a feint, all the more the Chairwoman had identified the man on the picture, so she took the word by a sign of Scholasticus: “We are going to install a committee of inquiry, who is going to publish their results, as soon as the danger is over. Herewith I declare this aspect as exempted from the trial. Please have that recorded in the protocol. In my obligations as Chairwoman of that honourable council, I would like to direct your attention towards the responsibility you have to face and of the consequences of any indiscretion. I am assuming though that this council is going to man the committee as well. Does this proposal find your agreement my dearest Sires and Dames?”

The councillors nodded eagerly and looked appropriate to the earnestness of the situation. Thus, it looked as if the trial against Arundle was in due course of dissolution, which by no means meant that the danger was banned. Quite the opposite – sinister signs gave reason to the assumption of an increasing gravity of the situation.

Terrorists of the worst kind were most likely amongst them, well hidden and ready to strike at any time, indeed a tricky situation!

Moschus Mogoleya, the Prosecutor, did not realize the change the trial underwent. Like a fierce terrier he jumped – after the one bone was out of reach – onto the next by pointing out on the – as he put it – ‘hair-raising phantasmagoria of a visit to a so-called ‘intergalactic rogues gallery’ – “and again of course, by means of those fancy dreams, some people still regard as an advantage, while having their leaden limbs rested in soft cushions, and pretending to fulfil mighty deeds.”

Thus, he raised another storm of indignation amongst the spectators. Well, in fact more a kind of faint wind coming about with sweet sounding silvery bells of serenity over such bottomless ignorance.

The atmosphere was all against the prosecutor because of his continuous clumsiness. He was charged then with the punishing gazes even of his own kind, who feared about their reputation. Up to now they had been so proud of rising up into the air without any visual means, while the Somniors and Animations stayed behind when leaving their bodies for their excursions.

The Somniors knew of course that Arundle hadn’t been able to provide evidence from her dream, as this was against the nature of such mode of being, so they thought the attempt of the prosecutor most unfair.

“We must be able to trust each other”, the Headmistress said, filled with indignation, as she was the head of the Somniors. “How can we live on if we don’t trust our own experience, if it is as factual as in this case?”

Most of the audience agreed, only a few suppressed a malicious grinning, who agreed with the prosecutor to a certain extent.

Arundle was meanwhile fumbling about that clasp of hers. “I’m afraid the prosecutor’s triumph was too soon. Some people think we Somniors are helpless, when it comes to tackling with profound realities, but we stand with both feet on solid grounds, if we must. Sometimes Mr Sandman is dropping some grains of sand into our eyes, or elsewhere, and then we are able to prove, what we experience. If you please want to look”, she shouted torn towards the audience, while heading for the big mirror. She looked straight inside and showed her teeth.

The pictures shown up as they had done while she was brushing her teeth but not clear at all now. “What a nuisance”, she thought. What had happened? At least the photos were there, but you could hardly notice that they showed faces and of course not the text that went with the record, stating name, date and alias. The recording was precise though. What had happened?

Scholasticus stepped forward next to her – “might be the light”, he said. “The photos are in there?” he asked and pointed at her clasp, she now held in her hands. Arundle nodded and handed it at him. “Indeed, there is

something” he murmured, while he held the thing against the bright light of the lamps from the ceiling and narrowed his eyes.

The audience was infected, the tension increased. Everybody took part in the ongoing operation. The ones in the back pressed forward for a better sight, while the vague images had long disappeared in the mirror, some really had seen.

“It’s most likely the distance. Just a minute, we will manage right away... Is there an overhead projector?” Scholasticus asked and the caretaker by the entrance waved affirmative and disappeared in a side chamber. Some elder students helped him getting the old-fashioned apparatus transported into the middle of the hall. Scholasticus put the clasp on the projecting screen and two large faces showed up sharp and clear from the wall at the stunned audience.

Underneath the first photo you could read, when it was taken. It showed a young handsome man with intelligent eyes and a friendly smile; very sympathetic though the female audience found.

“There he is again”, Grisella shouted and pointed at the table. “It’s the same face, no doubt about that, and that photo is from the intergalactic rogues gallery, while the other was taken by an Australian farmer just recently. Now the circle is closing. There is no doubt possible. If I imagine how close that rascal was all the time! I don’t think he took hide just lately... poor Walter, what a nuisance”, she murmured the last sentence unheard as she didn’t want to publish Walter’s misfortune wider then done already.

Poor Walter, what would happen with him? So much, had he done for her and the project, and now that? But it was also clear that he could not be left alone with Pooty as guide and eye-witness, besides Pooty wouldn’t stand it anymore.

“What a rascal, you needn’t wonder about anything any more...”, Grisella shook her head more angry than distracted. Her colleagues in the council turned at her completely stunned. They did not understand a thing. Grisella had to inform them. On the other hand, she wanted to limit the number of persons who were in the secret. Perhaps there was still a solution to the better for Walter, but that was just a last very unlikely straw.

Had there been no successful exorcisms? In any case, they had to try whatever was possible. If they failed, they had to think of even more radical measures, but not yet and not now...

She asked for a break and retreated into a separate lounge with the councillors in order to pass on the necessary information. She could not help but have Scholasticus join them, as he was the one with the best overall view. She could not make up her mind to ask Moschus Mogoleya to join them as well. The reality exceeded the cause by far and he did not

present himself as trustworthy and reliable but stubbornly stuck to the once taken course.

The assassin was still not identified. Did the prosecutor hide information? Had his stubbornness to do with information he possessed, and did not share with the council?

The rascal was identified as Malicious Marduk, but even he could not be at two sites at the same time. He was clearly identified as the ‘Were-Man’ who took possession of poor Walter in the Australian outback, at the same time when Tika was shot on the island of the Convertiors.

He scarcely could be at two sites at the same time – really. -What, if he could? It was much likelier that he had helpers on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and why not someone like the prosecutor, who tried everything to ruin Arundle and have her dismissed from the school and even destroyed.

Was he aware of his opponent? Did he know, who was on his trail, over here or elsewhere and far away in another dimension, supported and backed up by supra-natural agents and heavenly creatures, not all that different from him, but separated by a world of hope and glory.

12. Florinna’s Dream

While the council met behind closed doors, most of the audience raised from their seats, some went out to get a drink, others chatted. There was some kind of pell-mell. Arundle looked for her friends and found them after a while chatting with Billy-Joe and his new mate Tibor, who welcomed her friendly but somewhat embarrassed because of his Professor.

Florinna was reporting of a peculiar dream that she had dreamed the night before - dealing with the subject of the trial. “I was following Walter’s trace”, she said. “Walter and Pooty were at that farm, by the way”, she just said when Arundle joined them. “There was that horrible farmer, a drunkard and Good-for-nothing, who left his sheep alone while arguing about kangaroos stealing the scarce grass.”

The farmer came to Arundle’s mind; she had visited with Pooty, for that film.

“Walter underwent a dramatic change under horrible aches”, Florinna continued. “It was at the beginning of the full moon, while Tika was attacked over here. I then saw him running converted and naked through the bush and finally hiring as a kangaroo hunter with that farmer. From him he got his gun and truck. Equipped like that, Walter disappeared in the bush. The steppe was flat and that was good, because Walter was somewhat helpless and could not see without his glasses, in either form of appearance.

He curved - wildly blowing the horn - through the night. He sang and yelled, and occasionally he shot the rifle without aim. By midnight, he ran into a soft obstacle. He was lucky that it was soft; otherwise, he would have damaged the jeep. Walter got off the truck and realized that he had bumped into a pile of corpses.

An illegal gang of hunters had piled up their prey of kangaroos. Perhaps they planned to pick them up later. Were-Man Walter saw his chance. With that lot of kangaroo corpses he could make quite some money, as the farmer paid \$10,- each on behalf of the government. Walter loaded as many corpses as he could and covered the rest with twigs, as he intended to pick them up at another time. Then he returned to the farm. He only managed, because the drunkard burnt a huge bonfire; otherwise, he had failed no doubt.

The farmer was glad to see him again for the company and for the prey and they kept on drinking until dawn, when he disappeared in the barn.

The same happened the coming night and thus he went on until the moon elapsed, then he converted back.

I could see Corinia and myself coming. It was a kind of mess though, as I dreamed of a dream in a dream, rather confusing, isn't it? – Anyway, we came because of Arundle and asked Walter and Pooty for help.

I was here the third time as we had come to Australia before already in order to ask Walter for help, but couldn't find him, because of his troubles, we couldn't know at that time. Had I known, I'd have thought twice before bringing him over here. He was somewhat strange, wasn't he, Corinia?"

Corinia nodded – “but somehow I felt sorry for him”, she added – “most of all Pooty. He was so desperate and still didn't know, how much he could dare to tell.”

“He of course ran away as soon as he realized what had happened to his friend, and took the magical stone with him.”

“Horrible, just horrible poor creatures, both of them...”

Walter was somehow released, as he was not the mass-murderer of his own kind.

“I think it is high time to let him know, now that he was out of the woods.”

“It's bad enough still...”

“Had you told him he was a mass murderer, he'd hung himself right away...”

“Pooty will be relieved, I'm sure. Perhaps the stone even returns...”

“I beg you, please, no word to the outside, you've got to keep silent, promise, otherwise your ruin everything and push him in his death...”

Walter has to be fixed first! But how – that is the question”, Arundle pleaded.

“I think, I have an idea”, Tibor and Billy-Joe started both at the same time: “Exorcism!”

They looked at each other and had to laugh no matter how serious the cause was.

“You too”, Tibor said.

“Exorcisms – you know, getting rid of evil spirits, having gained command of a soul.” Billy-Joe explained.

“It’s often done, but seldom helps, the spirits are stubborn and tricky. They return or pretend to leave.”

“It’s my suspicion with all the Convertors”, Tibor added seriously. “You - I mean in specific”, he said to Billy-Joe. “Your symptoms point all that way. You are not happy with your Totem.”

Billy-Joe remained quiet, and then murmured something of distraction and worries that were more important.

“Right you are”, Tibor said, “one after the other, first comes Walter... - it’s interesting by the way. Walter is the first ‘Were-Man’ I’ve ever met or heard of. That’s a wholly new development, it seems. I’m sure we will talk this over, if we handle that subject in our basic course. I’m sure it will be, after all what happened...”

“Yes, the Tree of Life must be newly described”, Arundle added thoughtfully. Once more she was again already ahead of time.

The caretaker rang the bell, before Arundle got the chance to utter her suspicion about the hiding of the outlaws. The council under its Chairwoman Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots had come to an end with their considerations and marched in, while the audience got off their seats in respect.

The Chairwoman formally knocked three times to indicate that a decision was found. The audience glanced at the pedestal where the council resided in front of the huge pictures still standing sharp and clear to everybody’s discernment. From a third photo taken from the envelope, a third face was now projected next to the two, while the rest of the picture didn’t show, for good reasons.

“We don’t need to see the rest, besides - it’s so awful”, Grisella explained, raising of course curiosity. “Those photos are top secret, we can’t allow any failure in our situation. The existence of the School is on the verge. I have experienced how well this rascal Malicious Marduk knows his matter, he almost broke my neck once, so to speak.”

The councillors nodded eagerly. Those photos wouldn’t be published, neither in the school nor outside. Thus, the school members agreed and were sworn in as a community of fate. That was helpful and necessary as

jealousy and hypocrisy were spreading. At the same time, such a fictive compound could become the best protection of all.

Still nobody knew were to look for the hidden band. It was high time for Arundle to come about with her suspicion, although she didn't know whether she was right.

First, the trial was settled however. The prosecution was rejected, and the accused was found 'not guilty'. The councillor of defence had been able to prove Arundle's innocence. Because of her mixed colour patterns, she had had the right to enter the Conversior's Island, so the official statement of the Chairwoman who was well able to judge such difficult matter, even more so as she was backed up by the Headmistress who definitely confirmed her findings. "Oppressed or freed, there is a clear conversional talent to be notified, whatever may the outcome once be", the Chairwoman wisely concluded. "In other words, Arundle had a right to be there", made the Headmistress clear once more. "Nevertheless was the way the accused won access intolerable, and therefore a reprimand is unavoidable, but is more than balanced by the praise for unselfish engagement in rescuing an injured comrade."

Thus, the accusation was dropped. In future - steps like that one - had to be arranged with one of the teachers. Arundle couldn't help grinning as she had just that done. Of course, neither Grisella nor Marsha had forgotten about their involvement. Arundle didn't mind as long as her file remained clean.

"After that" - as the Chairwoman put it - 'unpleasant duty' - was off the table, they could now turn to the matters of real importance, she said and pointed at the second photo, Arundle got at the intergalactic rogues gallery. This picture was also dated and showed quite opposite to the first one, only Grisella and a few others were familiar with, a common face, known to all of them, as Peter Adams was smiling gently down on the assembly.

Once more Arundle explained how she found that photo among hundreds of others. "I was not sure. After so many faces, I didn't know who I knew, but this face I couldn't overlook, there was no doubt. In fact, not this photo is the surprise, but the other one. I don't think Peter Adams has anything to do with Malicious Marduk. Borrowing his face is but one of the feints of the rascal. The other picture I chose while following some sort of intuition, as I couldn't know what was on the film under my pillow, while I slept - roaming through the universe."

"You never know", Scholasticus said with a smile. "I'm glad you look at it that way - the Adams photo I mean. He'll be absolutely stunned if he learns of such coincidence." Peter Adams namely wasn't here. He had left for a congress in Toronto a good while ago. Scholasticus had informed

him of what was going on. Of course, he didn't know about that photo of his.

The Chairwoman thought it high time to come about an official explanation, as accusations were spreading already. "We are not allowed to follow our emotions", she concluded, "while our feelings are nevertheless helpful. We know now that Malicius Marduk borrows other people's identity. Thus, wholly innocent individuals probably at the other end of the world are suspected of deeds they hadn't even heard of. - Arundle was thus cheated, when he presented himself as her own father, who of course didn't have anything to do with the ongoing capture. Malicius Marduk is a kind of chameleon. - Still, the case is different, as the young man, I recognized, called himself indeed Malicius Marduk. Whatever the reason was; most likely, he didn't care to hide at that time, when we opened him the gateway into our presence. We didn't know anything at that time and my dear brother-in-law didn't tell me of his experience with that monster in the far future."

Scholasticus blushed, and murmured something about the circumstances, and that there had not been the time for many things, definitely not for lengthy controversies on a scientific level.

Everything was at sixes and sevens at Laptopia. A war was threatening and Scholasticus almost burnt at the stake. In such a situation you could forget to inform everybody about everything, he meant lamely while didn't feel right, as it surely was right that many things hadn't happened and surely would not happen right now, if he had informed his relatives and friends in time.

Had Grisella then known, what she had to learn some weeks later in such a painstaking manner, her speech had sounded to her like the oracle of Delphi, - just her, who was gifted with an incomparable and extraordinary talent.

It's often that way - later on we recognize, what we knew for a long time, without actually noticing.

"Again and again innocent people will be afflicted by Malicius Marduk. That's something else than a stolen counterfeit that is used behind ones back", she continued in her speech. "Marduk leaves them alone at last, while it might happen though that they will be charged for something they had nothing to do with in reality. That's why I'm so sure in regard of Peter Adams that he's just the straw man and mask behind the rascal is hiding. You may understand better what I want to say as soon as the other case was cleared up."

“We don’t want to jump ahead here and now, things take their time, though”, the Headmistress put in, who cared about her reputation. The Chairwoman – unknowingly and purposeless - threw a deep shadow.

Thus, she felt forced to utter an official word: “In order to uncover what has happened and still is going on, we will form an extra committee, while the islands are still hit by the scary ban of evil spirits and daemons, I am not willing to publish just one more word. You can return to your rooms however, with the certainty that everything that could be done, will be done from our side for your protection – and believe me – everything – and a little extra, so to speak.”

In fact, Tibor had liked to talk about the chances of exorcism with regard to Walter, but the number of those in the know should remain small, therefore he didn’t publish his idea, although he felt somewhat insulted. They could as well have spoken about the subject in general, without mentioning names.

Not only Tibor had to keep his suggestion in mind but also Arundle. She couldn’t talk about where she suspected the assassin or his lot were hiding. She was almost sure the longer she thought about it. Walter’s trouble was, so to speak, just the dot on the I. You could clearly identify the handwriting of Malicus Marduk – but where could she set the lever?

“Walter is no mass murderer at last”, Corinia repeated while she told the version her sister had dreamed, and Pooty had to swallow that – he did in fact and was relieved! Perhaps he and even the magical stone would return then...

So it was. Pooty stood on his head with joy. “Right – his eyes, he is short-sighted like a mole. Without glasses he can’t hit a thing neither by dart nor bullet.”

13. Exorcism

Pooty promised to have a word with Walter, and have him informed about his conversion, and what he had done while he became Malicus Marduk – or, precisely – what he didn’t really do but pretended to have done.

“Could you then let him know our suggestion? Such an exorcism is of course no pleasant procedure, but it is much less bad than an occupation by an evil spirit, I’d say”, Tibor added, who remembered awful scenes, when occupants struggled in their bonds, because the daemon didn’t leave.

“Let’s hope it’ll work. This Marduk seems to be a mighty daemon”, his brother agreed.

“... And becomes mightier the more we learn about him”, backed Tibor.

Walter agreed with everything. “As long as I become myself again”, he stammered while in his eyes bottomless dismay stood. Pooty had done a careful and emphatic job though, but still not care-taking enough, or could Walter not stand the truth, and was overwhelmed by self-hatred about the scandalous role he played in that cruel drama, he performed in the state of conversion?

When Walter then the photo saw, him as the ‘Were-Man’, posing on a pile of kangaroo corpses, he was completely done and could not stop sobbing.

“The earlier I’m freed from this monster the better”, he said shaken by hefty eruptions. “Help me please, do what you can, no matter if it costs my life. I’d rather be dead than hosting that monstrous beast for another day. I hadn’t had the faintest idea...”

Was that so? Walter wasn’t sure anymore. Didn’t he suspect that something was wrong with him? He then thought it was the workload; all the back and forth with that group of students, and the hysterical leader, being afraid of flying, and worst of all the hassle and arguing about a traitor. Thus, he thought he had had good reasons for not feeling well, and after some days of rest and recreation, he would feel better, though...

It was not the stress. The rascal had somehow won access to hide from the furious scientists and settle secretly somewhere inside. He didn’t fly, as the Dean suspected. In his hiding right in the middle of the action, he could spy out what was going on, on both ends of the world – in the presence and in the future, until Walter left for Australia.

Why did he not let him go there? What was the sense of keeping him occupied in the empty steppe of Australia? What was the reason for that cruel conversion at last? Was it sadistic fun, did he enjoy tormenting him? Walter was sure, Malicious Marduk did not do that without purpose. He knew exactly what he wanted!

Walter had been asked for help with that feast on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Thus, it could well be that Malicious Marduk intended right from the start to get a foothold on the island and used him and his connection and as a vehicle; knowing well that the scientists and their young friends had moved there as well. They held the key to the future world, where they recently kicked him out. Was it therefore not somewhat natural and obvious that he followed them into their own world, using Walter as the caretaker of the magical stone, and his magical device as a transformer?

Sure enough, Malicious Marduk had looked for a strategic hideout and found it in Walter. Everything that followed was the consequence of that

initial step. Walter's conversion in the state of full moon, the incredible things he then did on Marduk's order - were but cruel pranks meant to disgrace and humiliate him.

What did Malicious Marduk plan next? What was he going to do on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth? Walter tried to remember where he had been, when he first visited the island. He had arranged the stage for Billy-Joe's dance and then he came about with the ponies, Florinna needed for her performance, and at last, he even forwarded the Laptopian cloudbanks for Arundle; the most difficult task of all, as he had to transform to Laptopia just for that.

The horses were not so difficult to get by, as there were some on the island, which followed him right away, when he asked them to perform on stage. Horses do like show business, though!

Malicious Marduk had been with him all the time. He saw and heard everything, even on the Conversiors' Island had he been. That had been days after the murderous attempt. Still, he knew now the cabins of the guards' men and the footpaths all over the island.

Meanwhile Tibor was almost ready with his preparations for the exorcism. A room was upholstered for the purpose to avoid harm for the delinquent. Everywhere had they fixed mattresses – even on the ceiling. Everybody in the know gave a helping hand, thus the work was done by noon.

Walter was asked to proceed into that room, and then was locked in by Tibor. “This is necessary for your own safety”, Tibor explained. “As soon as the daemon notices, what the people intend, he usually gets crazy. Therefore we placed the mattresses everywhere to avoid injuries”, he explained to Walter, who now felt somewhat bewildered though, even more when the door closed behind him, and the key was turned in the lock.

All of a sudden, he was all alone. Even Pooty had to stay away. Like the black despair, he was sitting in a corner of his cabinet – sobbing bitterly.

*

The food didn't taste that day. Those in the know were sitting at their meal monosyllabic. Tibor was ahead in his mind - while Billy-Joe recalled his own conversion as a process full of pain. Pooty saw the piles of corpses before his inner eye. The slaughtered kangaroos didn't come out of his mind. Arundle and her two friends were dreaming with open eyes, searching for power, wherever they could find it.

Meanwhile, Scholasticus was sitting in the teacher's lounge. With him, there was the Shaman who had taken the vow of not touching foreign soil, and was therefore hovering one foot above the ground. Tibor had

recommended and then asked him to come here for the exorcism. With the two were Grisella, the Chairwoman, Marsha, the Headmistress, and her husband, the Vice-Headmaster, and Penelope M'gamba who was another expert in that mysterious art.

They rehearsed the planned procedure and ongoing once more. Did they overlook anything? Had all necessary measures been taken to protect the patient and the surrounding habitat of the students? – They knew about the risk they ran, but didn't see an alternative.

The opposition was waiting for a mistake. The former prosecutor, Assistant Professor Moschus Mogoleya, would not miss the chance to win back the initiative again; what that meant for Arundle was easy to figure. Therefore, they had to be successful. There was no other way. The alternative was death – clear and simple. The former prosecutor would not hesitate for a minute, if he had to decide. Walter was just an animal so he argued, and slaughtering animals was no crime, he said with a malicious smile on his face. Scholasticus almost lost his temper, if Grisella didn't have torn him back on the ground.

Unbelievable as it was, Moschus Mogoleya had friends and followers among the councillors, and had of course been informed about the planned exorcism.

The Headmistress ascertained those in the know, that she or her husband didn't utter a single word, although nobody suspected her openly. In fact, she was a talkative person though...

The Shaman listened to the sorrows and quarrels of his mandators rather cool. However, they couldn't be sure, whether he had heard them at all. Their demands were probably too far away from the world, he was dwelling in - peopled with spirits and ghosts, and daemons of any colour and shape.

The group of teachers seemed like inexperienced swimmers intending for a swim in a crocodile infested swamp, worrying about mosquitoes, though.

All that ignorant the teachers of the School of Inbetween were not after all. The dangers of the other world were not altogether unknown to them. However, there was another reason why the Shaman was so absent-minded. His presence was not altogether real. Tibor had not been able to get him into an airplane, thus, he was here as an image, not so different from the mode the Advisor was choosing when he appeared in order to give advice - mostly to Arundle though; but sometimes also to whom it might concern.

Tibor repeatedly confirmed to those aware that this didn't make the slightest difference, in fact it was the other way round. In the virtual mode, the Shaman was even stronger, as for ghosts and daemons physical

conditions were of minor importance; their ‘modus operandus’⁵ was the twilight zone.

“We Sublimations don’t really like to employ those fancy veils of mist, as you seem to like it”, Tibor pointed out with a humorous sidestroke against his new friends the old competitors from the beginning; while the worst misunderstandings had been solved and cleared by now.

Tibor came to fetch the Shaman and the others followed them to Walter’s domicile that was some kinds of prison cell actually, comparable to those in a prison like Dartmoor or a madhouse of the late 19th century.

“Nobody is allowed access, not even Pooty – no way!” Tibor passed on what he learnt from the Shaman. He was exempted for lingual reasons. The Shaman feared most likely that he would not be able to communicate properly, which sounded somewhat illogical to Penelope M’gamba, who knew the matter and the mode of conversing with all kinds of ghosts and spirits; and there was but one language; a tongue though, hardly to be named a language.

The Shaman and his guide disappeared in the cabin. The key was turned from the inside. The soundproof cabin did not let out the slightest sound.

“How does the daemon leave the room, if everything is closed up?” Pooty asked, and looked somewhat lost. Professor M’gamba waved such narrow-minded worries off: “The channel for daemons, spirits, and souls is always open, we from over here would not be able to find it anyway, even if we intended to stuff such opening, don’t you worry!”

The group in the know stood useless about before that cabin door. What were they supposed to do here? There was nothing, they could do; thus, Arundle took the opportunity to publish her ideas of the whereabouts of the assassin. If Walter was freed from his daemon – she didn’t doubt a second that this was happening right now – it was high time to clear up with the whole band of Miseriors as well. They were then headless, because Malicious Marduk was their master and chieftain, but still had to be found and neutralized. Thus, she suggested to the assembled to listen to her suggestions: “You surely have asked yourselves how it could happen that Walter converted into a human. I have studied a little and learnt that this is not possible. Man can return to an earlier stage of development, but how should an animal take the opposite direction? This is the most intriguing question.”

Somewhat admiring murmur on her teachers side interrupted the elocution.

⁵ mode of operation

“Hear, hear”, Penelope M’gamba exclaimed in admiration, and rolled her big eyes.

“Yes, Arundle is a clever girl”, Grisella, the Chairwoman, confirmed. Such a circumstance raised indeed a remarkable question, which exceeded the knowledge laid down in books.

“We must accept the fact as such - that’s what it’s all about”, Arundle went on. “This was my basic assumption. If Walter can convert to a ’Were-Man’, then we know the hiding of the assassin.”

“Why that?” the party stuned “had Walter not been miles away as we bespoke just presently?”

“I don’t mean Walter”, Arundle replied, “Walter is but an example, a kind of pattern – do you get now where I’m after?”

“You mean...” Grisella answered – “you mean by chance...” Scholasticus went on.

“Right, of course, how simple, it’s completely logical...”

What there was so logical had to wait though. From inside the cabinet a terrible outcry was heard. The door flew open and Tibor stumbled out, followed by the Shaman and Walter, who had foam in front of his mouth, while his blood-shot eyes didn’t announce any good.

Those in the know were startled, but Tibor waved quietening and indicated that everything was all right. “The daemon has departed, and was not amused - as you can see. Walter will recover soon, don’t you worry, a couple of nights good sleep and he will be like new.”

Pooty took Walter by the hand and led him to their quarter – as animals they were sleeping in the open, and stayed with him until he fell asleep. Curious and somewhat upset the group headed for the barns and stables close by.

“Now I’m really curious”, Grisella said: “The aura should disclose the daemons, that’s right”, she went on. -

“Probably not noticeable for everybody, but we should be able to see it though!”

“Who, if not we”, Arundle confirmed. For an outsider her remark would have probably sounded somewhat witty, as she was a student, who had learnt ‘the other way of seeing’ just recently, and was not at all settled yet.

How could she be so self-assured? Not only her friends asked themselves full of admiration.

Arundle was not heading for the stables, as some might have expected, because Walter had been in touch with the ponies when he projected them on stage for Florinna. Arundle was leading them to the pigpens.

“I was absolutely sure about the horses”, Billy-Joe exclaimed somewhat bewildered. “So was I”, “me too” Corinia and Florinna agreed. Billy-Joe felt uneasy, because of the pigs. Tibor and the gliding Shaman were following about one foot above the surface.

The pigs were furious; they seemed to feel what was coming. “You can feel the vibrations physically”, Penelope M’gamba whispered and her big eyes rolled. “There is no doubt, dear colleague”, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Headmistress, agreed. The others nodded earnestly, just those who found out now, what Arundle had meant, when she thought Walter to be an example of the other kind, for whom the Tree of Life had to be re-written.

Once more the Shaman had Tibor ask the group to remain on stand-by outside the pigpen, while he disappeared inside with his assistant; when the squeaking and shrieking increased. “Sounds horrible”, Arundle whispered scared.

“As if they were to be slaughtered”, Florinna agreed. “Poor pigs”, Corinia added. “Can we do nothing for them? It sounds as if they are suffering a lot.”

“Yes, pigs are very sensible, and the humans are so ignorant about this fact. The way they treat pigs is a scandal.”

“That’s all too right, Professor”, the sisters agreed, and Adrian fiercely nodded, he was much in favour of the innocent creature.

Time was passing. The squeaking went on and even increased. Corinia covered her ears with the hands and wanted to either get inside or away, but her sister stopped her.

“You are spoiling everything, if you burst into the pigpen right now; trust in the Shaman and in Tibor. They know what they are doing.”

In fact, it wasn’t quite like that, they didn’t have experience either in ghost-healing pigs - Tibor was witnessing the procedure for the first time, while the Shaman had only taken him because there was nobody else.

When after half an hour the squeaking turned into a rattle that died away as well, Billy-Joe dared a secret look through a half-blind spy-hole and sighted a picture of horror. The pigs were lying like dead all about, the Shaman and Tibor dreaded in agony totally exhausted, and tried to extinguish a fire, that had gone out of control.

“It’s burning”, Billy-Joe cried and rushed into the shag, followed by the other. Everybody was shouting for buckets and water and for the fire brigade. The flames entangled by the oxygen that came through the open door, roared up and in no time the whole building stood in flames.

Corinia tore at a pig’s leg in vain; she couldn’t move it an inch. Some buckets were found at last, but the little water in the pig trough was soon gone, and no professional help was in sight. The flames now rose high up

and dark smoke clouds covered the island. At last, the fire fighters came running with hoses and the fire was soon under control. For the poor pigs, it was too late. Most of them didn't awake after the exorcism. The smoke made them die. They suffocated or were burnt while unconscious.

"They didn't feel it anymore, the poor beasts", Scholasticus tried to comfort Corinia who was sobbing in her sister's arms. Florinna also started crying then - "how do you know?" she complained. Scholasticus shrugged - "let's hope for the best", he said and Adrian patted his back. It was too late now. "Had we only interfered right away - felt somewhat uneasy though", Billy-Joe thoughtfully said.

The accident had happened. The opposing circle around the former Prosecutor, Moschus Mogoleya, would take that as a hint to follow the hawk's line right away. "If they hadn't interfered with the butcher's obligations, things had been settled much more reasonable and without unnecessary damage, just like that", the Assistant Professor argued.

The Headmistress, also in tears, couldn't stand the cruel man. Her husband tried to quieten her: "After all we got rid of the daemons. We'll soon be noticing what a benefit this will be when the next full moon's coming!"

Marsha enjoyed her husband's comfort. She hoped more than she believed that he was right.

Tibor excused his Shaman and their carelessness, but made sure that they didn't act negligent as a wild boar all of a sudden came from nowhere, while they were in the middle of the cleaning process, they did globally as it seemed best.

"A customary procedure, with a fifty to ninety percent success margin", Tibor explained. "You can say the boar started the fire when it overthrew the kettle, thus the glowing fuel got into the straw. The rest you then saw with your own eyes. - The pigs were in trance already and almost clean inside. This fact surely upset the head-daemon. We had no idea of such a strong spirit. We didn't see the huge animal, until it was too late."

An explanation was found soon. The boar had been living in its own separate box. Somehow, it must have managed to open the gate, while Tibor and the Shaman did their ceremony. It left through the backdoor after overthrowing the ceremonial fire. Meanwhile the boar was racing over the island. "We've got to search and fetch it right away; but be careful, it is dangerous. I recommend having the children sent to their dormitories, except some of the stronger boys - preferably those with pathfinder qualities. The beast can't get far, but hiding-sites there are enough, though", Adrian Humperdijk suggested.

Time had passed just like that. The sun stood deep in the west by now. There was not much time left for the search on that day, before the

daylight was gone. Therefore, the scouts swarmed out in all directions, each followed by a troop of more or less armed grown-ups.

The broad twin hooves of the boar were soon found as the ground near the stalls was soft and muddy, but when they came to the rocky grounds, things weren't so easy any more. The scouts had to take care of tiny details, like smashed plants or a hair, a sweat flake – things the like.

The evening came, when the boar was found. The troops were standing around a dark, yawning cleft that was cut into the solid rock, and figured, how deep it was, and if it was advisable to step in. They decided to stay away from such plans for now. They might as well try the next day and then adequately equipped during daytime. Those who figured the cleft as a shallow hide suggested starting right away with the exorcism, when Tibor with the drifting Shaman picked up and joined the party standing about considering the chances of a quick success right away.

The Shaman agreed in a second trial right away and lit his flames again, while the people formed a semi circle around the cleft. Murmuring strange spells the Shaman threw all kinds of ingredients into the flames, thus, they arose in bright nice colours. He lifted his arms up into the meanwhile darkened sky, greeting the settling sun or the rising moon, and impressed the witnesses all the more he himself started shining, - be it from inside or by the last rays of the sun from the outside, while hovering up and down as he was pleased.

From inside the cave you could hear a fierce roar, thus the Shaman doubled his efforts as he took this for a sign of the beginning defeat of the daemon. Empathetic as they were, the witnesses imagined the degree of sufferance the poor animal had to stand, as the daemon didn't want to give way and clung to his host with all means.

Heftier arose the sing-sang of the Shaman. The flames shone brighter as the night settled, indeed brighter than ever, what ever this meant.

Tibor was sweating. His naked body glistened and reflected the coloured flames. He was dancing the get-rid-of-the-daemon dance and soon whirled like a green whirlwind well off the ground, up and down, hardly visible as a human. What role did he play in the ceremony? Billy-Joe kept such question in mind. Perhaps there was something underway, nobody yet realised that had to do with Tibor.

In the cleft, the terror went on. The poor boar roared, squeaked, and rattled, as if wounded to death. A deep last sigh – then there was silence; no sound, but the air was charged with suspense; you could hear the men breathing.

Tibor had come back and squatted under a cloak now next to his master, keeping him in an upright position.

“It’s all over now”, he said, “The daemon has gone. There was but one exit”, Tibor said and pointed at the spot where he had performed his dance. “Right there is an invisible channel that leads straight into the other world, where daemons belong.”

The caretaker brought food and water for the poor beast, as well as some straw to make it rest more comfortable. Some of the over empathized suggested to have it transported on a stretcher to the hospital, but it was too big and too heavy for that, so such idea was dropped. The boar had to remain there until it was able to walk away on its own feet.

The doctor came for a surgery with spotlight and infusion. He diagnosed low blood pressure. “Pigs tend to weak hearts, therefore caution and care is somewhat arbitrary”, he concluded repulsing the anthropocentric mockers, who meant to have once more good reasons for their cruel criticism.

The Convertors could hardly stand such ignorance. “The human arrogance is but a shame you can feel all over the places”, Adrian murmured bitterly and somewhat delusional. Just those Sublimations should have known better, but were far from that; thus was the way still long and the distance wide, and the aim lost in the invisible, if it was taken in sight at all in the School of Inbetween. Sometimes Adrian thought the heap of prejudice and ignorance insurmountable; right here, where paradisiacal conditions prevailed. “You needn’t wonder what the world outside is like, if we can’t do any better”, he explained to Scholasticus who wholeheartedly agreed and promised to care for the improvement, while smoothening patting his back.

Adrian had made the worst experiences, and Scholasticus knew that; but for extensive reflections was no time now. Two doctors were willing to spend the night with the patient, so more food was brought as well as sleeping bags, mattresses, and even a small tent; besides the Chairwoman and the Headmistress cared for a detailed report to be presented to the council.

The moon rose up as a small sickle, when the outdoor actions ceased, while the whispering and chatting went on in the dormitories and of course in the teachers’ Lounge where the Council met for a final rehearsal of the day.

The Council officially confirmed and published the news of the successful exorcism on the information board the next morning, and everybody felt relieved. The Convertors would be able to hang on to their secret demands in the upcoming cycle. No shade of evil would hitherto fall on them, thus went the hope.

Billy-Joe however had to come to a definite decision, as his was a very special case, and Tibor took the subject up while they strolled home at

last. “You can free yourself from your Totem-spirit, but you’ve got to know that he won’t return after once dismissed. If you decide against him, you might feel sorry for your decision some when. Many would give a lot if they were chosen by a Totem-spirit.”

Billy-Joe didn’t quite understand, what he meant; Tibor didn’t know either, he only referred to what he had heard, as he wasn’t bothered with such an attempt. “As far as I know”, Tibor said “it’s like that: You Convertors are being accepted by your Totem animal. – All humans have a Totem animal or should have one, but most have forgotten about it. Your Totem animal sends its spirit, and grants its grace, so you are entitled to experience the world by its mode of existence. You can accept or refuse such offer. – You can do that while most others cannot. For them such a question does not apply.”

Billy-Joe nodded somewhat confused. Monosyllabic he retired but could not sleep for half of the night staring at the ceiling. In the short fits of sleep, he found in the grey morning Tika wavered through confusing dream-sequences, and made him feel guilty and desperate. What was he going to do? Nobody could help him; only he alone had to come to a decision.

14. The Tree of Life

“You will surely agree, the ongoing circumstances enquire for urgent clarification”, Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots declared, while the basic course “Get to know yourself” had once more come together as a block, thus the Hall was filled to the last seat as all four subdivisions were united.

Six Professors were sitting in a row on the pedestal in front. There was the Chairwoman of the School’s Standing Council next to Adrian Humperdijk, and as Penelope M’gamba, followed by the Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk. She sat between Assistant-Professor Moschus Mogoleya and Professor Scholasticus Slyboots, in order to separate the two squabblers, as they used every opportunity to attack each other, although the fierce days of the trial were gone and past.

Like Penelope M’gamba Adrian Humperdijk represented the Convertors. His wife, the Headmistress, stood for the Somniors and the Sublimations were represented by Moschus Mogoleya, while Grisella, the only pure Divinator stood for herself, same as Scholasticus, who was hardly to be located in that colour scheme but professed a helping hand for

the Somniors, since he discovered how advantageous such travelling mode was.

The Animators - the strongest group next to the Somniors - were taken care of by Grisella herself. She was assisted by Penelope M'gamba, who indicated a likewise multiple talent, as did most of the teachers anyway. The question always was whether they were able to trace down and consequently follow the outlines of their art wholeheartedly and fully convinced, as this was the supposition for a successful approach.

Could such bulk of assumptions be positively answered on behalf of Moschus Mogoleya? He ran the basic course for his green team; but was he gifted enough? Was he the appropriate character? Neither the Headmistress, nor the Vice-Headmaster had made up their minds in this respect, nor could such do the Chairwoman of the Standing Council after the scenes Mogoleya made up as a Prosecutor, showing an intolerable degree of prejudice, paired with ignorance, and latent fits of xenophobia.

Was his character typical for his kin? Moschus Mogoleya had his followers and friends among the students, while his status was still pending and lay with the General Board – the extended version of the 'Standing Council' - some also referred to as the 'Grand Jury'.

"We weren't able to find a more suitable character for the job", the Headmistress apologized, whenever she felt like it, behind his back, but could of course be sure that such rumours had come to his ears as well. That was not helpful though.

Thus, his status as Assistant Professor was pending for almost two years, but still the Board had not come to a final decision whether to grant full authority or to get rid of him in the long run by not prolonging the contract.

It was the first year though that teacher represented all colours, thereof the Headmistress was very proud. On the other hand, the differences between the divisions showed up deeper and more stricken as odd as ever. Not everywhere, a similar harmony kept dwelling as between Marsha and Adrian. Such harmony might stem from Adrian's Somnior-part, without which he would not have managed by the side of his wife – at least that was her explanation, while he found her generosity most attractive with which she endured his escapisms.

Thus, the Headmistress had been more than lucky with Penelope M'gamba. Not only was she dual talented but also a gifted pedagogue. As an Animator, she was in charge of the appropriate basic course. Furthermore, she accompanied and guided the Convertors every month as the 'Regina of the air', so to speak.

Before Penelope took over, Marsha had to do the job alone with her husband, who was no big help as he professed a limited spectrum, and so

did she in fact. Although the relationship between Somniors and Animations was all too obvious, there were but slight differences, you could not see on the surface.

For today's session, the roles were clearly defined. On the pedestal were sitting Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, for the Somniors, Penelope M'gamba, for the Animations, Adrian Humperdijk, for the Convertors, and Moschus Mogoleya for the Sublimations.

The wholeness of all light but represented the Divinations. – Such status was the final aim of the Headmistress and her husband, the Vice-Headmaster, - a goal, unreachable most likely, and they knew it after having met Grisella.

Incidentally, Adrian came about a feature when Scholasticus was honoured for his several academic merits. Thus, the trace was laid and led to the Slyboots in Frankfurt, Germany, where the counterpart and the real chosen then appeared, who Scholasticus was only announcing, and that was Grisella, the true and only Divinator so far.

It was obvious though, that the two had gathered plenty of light around them, and their twins were of course affected by the glistening gold from heaven and they were not the only ones.

*

Grisella's colour scheme soon became the base of the teachings and led to a new understanding of 'the Tree of Life'. Nobody ever undertook it to implement the colours into such evolutionary proceedings. All effort had laid on the recognition, which had been a major task indeed, only the most gifted managed right away, while the others muddled about in some kind of chameleonic border lining.

As the gifted had handled their talents rather natural in their former lives, or they had deduced privileges there from, if they hadn't been forced to deny and hide themselves. However, the negative consequences resulting from such suppression could hardly be overcome in the short period, the basic course was in due process by now.

Arundle's trial then proved, what a Divinator was good for: The plenty of light provided her with an overall view, which exceeded the limited spectrum of all other colours, as they all were included as parts of the wholeness of truth. Thus, the accusation was turned down, however peace could not be reinstated. The seed of mistrust and jealousy was laid, and the colour scheme was the visual result.

After such an experience the School of Inbetween was threatened by the old saying –

'where's plenty of light,
there's also much shade.'

Did the light attract the darkness? Had Grisella and Scholasticus provoked the daemons of the dark? - Or had they been here unnoticed and were involved in the undertakings of the Convertors? Did they undergo decisions and arrange accidents, thus reducing the school's reputation and limiting its success?

The Board of teachers faced problems, which were clearly differing in weight and colour, so to speak, as the school as such, was challenged. They had taken too much for granted, and had to realize that this had been a sweet lie. They couldn't rely on certain patterns of behaviour and reject others as misleading or even wrong. Certain values still existed but the teachers on the board weren't so sure any more whether they were approaching or reproaching them.

"A battle we won", Scholasticus opened the discussion following the regular session, and pushing the former subject aside – "with sad casualties though, but by no means did we win the whole war!"

Once more, the abortion of the daemons was discussed excessively. It was Moschus Mogoleya who mentioned and praised Tibor's part and the obligations of his master the Shaman, who had by then left, although certain mischievous aspects remained unanswered. The original contribution of Moschus Mogoleya pointed into the opposite direction; had he had the saying in the first place, the poor beasts had been killed right away – all of them, and without exception or discussion.

He didn't want to hear that any more now. Others remembered all the better. He had even slaughtered Walter, they knew.

However, his contribution focussed only on the accident. He didn't mention or had in mind the suffering of the poor animals, but suggested to renounce on pigs in future, as they were the preferred target of daemonic attacks, as was known since biblical times.

Adrian raged in wrath. Marsha did her best to keep him on his chair, and so did Scholasticus, who held the chair that day.

There was much to be done, they thought, as Moschus Mogoleya represented a tendency and minority point of view, that had been overlooked or wholly ignored, not only with the Sublimators but also with other colours of the spectrum. The tendency was there. Tibor and his brother Sandor were somewhat arrogant too, when it came to animals. However, they were willing to learn from others they met on the island, while their teacher was but ignorant.

Mogoleya's contribution led the discussion on another track, a sidetrack, so to speak, Grisella, the Chairwoman, noticed:

"We wanted to face quite a different aspect of our reality. Therefore, extensive preparations have been undertaken, which we should not ignore. I

would appreciate if we could turn our attention to the subject on the agenda then, all the more with regard to the advanced time.”

Scholasticus agreed somewhat relieved and started searching through his papers on the desk in front of him. “Very right, my dear, I thank you – well, let’s consider the following... - We do have a problem, and I assure you – all of you – that we teachers don’t have a solution either. We only see the challenge – a scientific challenge of the highest ranks; and I would highly appreciate, if we could jointly through some light into such darkness.”

Scholasticus unrolled a large map-like sheet and tried in vain to fix it to the overhead projector. It was far too long. Therefore, he helped himself with the first section only.

“Before I am going to present to you ‘the Tree of Life’, I would like to confront you in simple words with the problem, that we have to face in a dual mode. The first is the ontogenesis - that is the evolutionary history of every individual, from procreation and birth to death. The other is the philogenesis. This mode covers an immense time-scale and measures in Millions and Billions of years - while the first is pressed into a very limited lifespan of a couple of years – sometimes even only weeks or days in case of some species. You are thus confronted with the history of the whole evolution of all earthen life.

Life runs through a multitude of generic sequences, and spreads in uncountable many different ways and forms, you could think of under one singular aspect: and that is the longing for perfection.

No matter where you look, everywhere we notice that drive towards perfection. More than that, all forms of life tend to exceed boundaries. There is something in all creatures pushing them to overcome the inherited form, and find a modified, higher – that is a more perfect form.

However, let us come back to the first – perhaps less complicated mode. We will have to follow both modes though.

The Ontogenesis, that is the history of every individual, is no less interesting or even simpler than the Phylo-genesis. By no means – but can be overlooked, that is the big advantage. The total wide- and long-ranged evolution is pressed into a time-lapse-motion frame. Each evolutionary step on the Tree of Life is mentioned in our individual mode of becoming. In the womb, in the egg, or elsewhere, - life is developing in fast jumps from the unicellular – the single-celled animals, via amoebas, and so forth to all possible forms life can take and you could think of. In the depth of the oceans, there you can find forms and shapes, which are unbelievably strange. As I said, in ontogenesis we have to do with the dynamic flash-like insinuation of all those steps. Billions of years are pressed into the shortest thinkable mode – the life span of the individual.

I now come to our problem, which may become clear before this background:

Conversionists return - for reasons we don't yet know - more or less regularly back to an earlier level of their individual evolution, that seems to be generally accepted, so let's take it for granted then. As far as you can take anything for granted - well in fact you cannot, but that's another theme we may have to deal with.

The question is, why do they do that; and the other question is, how do they do that? While these are questions, the Conversionists have to deal with, we want to find out, how this relates with 'the Tree of Life', and the assumptions or prepositions going with it.

A first approach to the phenomenon as such we receive in reference to the totem animal.

What is going on in the womb, when the step of the totem-beast is reached? Something's going to happen then, something special, that other individuals don't experience. Thus, you clearly can spot what is happening. You can't figure out what exactly it is, but there must have been something extraordinary, something that left a remarkable footprint in the foetus's fate, as it became later a milestone that can't be left behind, but demands and enforces a more or less regular return, as it cannot become worked over and laid aside while other evolutionary steps can. At least we think so, because we aren't bothered later."

Scholasticus stopped and looked around to check whether the audience was still with him. Nobody raised a hand or indicated by the slightest affirmative movement of any significant part of the body that she or he intended to comment on what just was said, while for Scholasticus the answer was all too obvious. Thus he went on: "I think you noticed what I'm after", he hurriedly paced on therefore: "the foetal encounter with the totem animal occurs exactly at the time such evolutionary step is reached - I knew you all came to that conclusion, as it is all too obvious though", he went on while noticing that the faces in the round shone up.

He then rehearsed at length what he had just said briefly, and put specific emphasis on the coincidence of evolutionary step and key-experience for mother and foetus likewise.

"A splash into the depth of the sea combined with the encounter with an inhabitant, well likely under danger of life; being rescued by a dolphin, or swallowed and spit ashore by Jonas' whale. - Things like that are the keys to our conversional abilities. They make us return frequently as long as we live, no matter whether we look at them as gift or woe.

We can only speculate about the mechanisms that enables us to do so. One possibility would be that the spirit of the totem animal settles in the heart of the affected individual. - Well, it's some kind of explanation and

doesn't sound convincing though. We shall soon see what it is worth. In fact it is here like elsewhere in science, we have to work with hypotheses as long as they prove, and then replace them by others which carry us on for another little while, and so forth..."

A general respiration indicated that Ariadne's red thread⁶ shone up. The entrance to the confusing maze of Conversion did open. The Convertors looked at themselves with different eyes now. Many of them hadn't thought about their offspring that way, and didn't know anything about their totem animal. They took Scholasticus' explanation for granted against his advice, although it could explain neither the physical conversion as such nor the re-conversion.

"We have here a needful device at hand, we can work with, that's all", he reaffirmed once more, enjoying the wave of agreement that carried him on. – "From here leads a straight path to the problem, we are dealing with, which I would like to bring back to your minds and your attention. The question is, how can a kangaroo convert into a human being. – This is what Walter did, as far as we know, and he did it in the way of the Convertors. How can that be? After all, we considered so far – A kangaroo, just a kangaroo, an animal, way behind on 'the Tree of Life' though, if we follow the Darwinian approach.

Some of you may feel their saliva gathering between their fangs while the most basic instincts awake. However, I don't want to be polemic", Scholasticus went on with a noticeable stroke at Moschus Mogoleya, who had recommended to have Walter slaughtered in order to solve the problem with his occupant.

"The Tree of Life' is our guideline, said I. Life is a peculiar force. It moves into one direction – I stress on one direction. It is as if an imaginary sun was shining, towards all life was urging – irresistible and permanent, a will, stronger than anything, enduring, everlasting, witty and wise when it comes to the strategies and tactics of such dwelling.

Let's have a look at the respective part of that 'Tree of Life'."

Scholasticus moved the lengthy sheet along on the screen of the overhead projector. Millions of years passed just like that as a diminishing trace over the wall, until he was satisfied and came to a halt. The chosen part showed a branching-off where it read 'Marsupial Mammals'. While the main stem went on, and the strong side-branch with the Marsupials picked up and rose in the same manner and the same direction as the mother-stem, until another branching-off said 'Kangaroo', more precisely 'Red Giant Kangaroo'. The stem meanwhile had reached the Mammals, and the first Primates appeared together with the first Human.

⁶ Figure in Greek Mythology who used a thread to find back her way in the Maze of the Underworld.

“You can see, were the problem lies”, Scholasticus went on. “The kangaroo can’t be regarded as a very advanced being, as it didn’t comply with the latest advantages of the evolution. It is however no less a crown of creation as are other beings of the main stem, though separated by force from the rest of the worldwide evolution, that is continuously going on. The marsupial way of breeding could endure in Australia, because there was no need to shorten and hide the period of pregnancy as everywhere else in the world.

However, I do not want to say too much, and I do not want to influence you with my thoughts. They can be wrong. Things can be looked at from a different angle. Most challenging of all – ‘the Tree of Life’ as was presented - could be false – in detail and as a whole.

The long and the short of it – the thesis I followed says - it is impossible for kangaroos to chose a human as ‘Totem animal’, as the human level is too high for them. They never came by such level on their time-lapse-motion march through the evolution.

The development begins some Million years beside and behind, respectively before of his (while this depends on the point of view the observer takes.) You can clearly see, what I’m going to say”, Scholasticus pointed with a pointing stick at the respective point on the graph, and drew an imaginary line from the kangaroos to the stem of the mammals and the humanoids, which came out of it.

“So far so good. The problem has become clear to you at last, so I do hope. The kangaroo is not an advanced being as to the standard opinion. Its development doesn’t touch that of the humanoids, it is said. Therefore, can a kangaroo - under no circumstances - take up the humanoid level!

I strongly recommend to studying ‘the Tree of Life’ carefully. The traditional science may be of help though. As long as we do not have better arguments, we should use those available. This is my opinion, and I would like to release you therewith for today. Perhaps we do have some ideas and first suggestions of how to solve the due problem already next week, when we meet here again. May I recommend that we meet in the same formation because of the actuality and the importance of the subject, which may help us not to fall back into rudimentary structures that are so hard to overcome.”

Most of the Professors showed agreement and so did the students, as they applauded fiercely by knocking their knuckles on the desk, as is academic custom, while some looked rather stunned.

On the way out, they collected copies of that ‘Tree of Life’ available for them. Three feet at length the graph -filled with hundreds of hardly readable mostly Latin terms – presented itself as quite some challenge. A

huge Tree though with a timescale on the side that was topped by a singular crown: the Homo sapiens.⁷

On the first sight, it looked as if the whole purpose was for Homo sapiens' sake only, as most branches died out, indicating species that became extinct. Others stood still over Millions of years and did not develop further, in the contrary - they degenerated.

15. Billy-Joe's Decision

The full moon was near. Billy-Joe could feel it; and had he not noticed himself - the questioning gazes of his friends had told him that the time had come. The tutors of the Convertors - Penelope M'gamba and Adrian Humpdijk - started gathering their flock – full moon lay two days ahead.

The Convertors prepared for their next excursion, while the boat with the guards left the same day. A final check seemed desirable and necessary – possible hidings had to be checked, as well as crucial spots of danger. They had to arrange for the blood bank again; and that meant they brought some twenty gallons of blood there in a tank usually delivered directly from a slaughterhouse in Sydney.

The troop of guards was increased in number by four – to be exact - by one man and three women. They had to survey the nightlife on the island.

There was blood enough that time because of the tragic accident - as the flesh of the suffocated pigs had been traded for that purpose. You could never have enough blood on the island.

Billy-Joe had to make up his mind. In a lengthier conversation with Penelope M'gamba, he learnt about his very special disposition. He was able to choose and that made him different.

“I know, the decision is difficult, I know, I know”, Penelope said. “The decision is final, this way or that. Your totem animal – the spirit of it demands its site – or leaves forever, and discharges its protective hand from you. An idea I personally couldn't stand”, she warned with her eyes rolling.

“But I don't want to influence you. You must know, what you're doing. The first shock was probably too much for the spirit though, thus it

⁷ Lat. The Man of understanding

wanted to leave. There is a lot to do elsewhere for them. Many people care for a second soul in their breast. However, I don't know the spirit of your animal. I don't know anything about it, where you are pushed or what it demands. None of us has the guarantee to be guided to the better. The blood banks speak their own language. Many of us don't endure the full moon nights, without an extra pint of blood."

Thus, Billy-Joe recalled as well: He had been thirsty, thirstier than ever – but such thirst came along with a new and strange way of longing. Never had he realized such intensity - a mode of being, beyond all borders. He knew he would miss something, if he shut that door now and forever and burry the animal in him. Was he really prepared for that?

Penelope M'gamba had not been able to help him. He still could not make up his mind. Thus, he tumbled out of the office, where they had met. Penelope was full of pity, while noticing that she could do nothing and was not of help – help the poor boy so desperately longed for.

Her relation with that big bird slumbering inherent and inherited somewhere inside her, was somewhat challenging and satisfying though. However, this did not necessarily mean that others were as lucky as she was. Afraid as she was of wolves - and she figured dingoes unconditionally to such specie – she could not wholeheartedly suggest even one more trial.

"What am I going to do, Arundle?" Billy-Joe sighed, searching for advice elsewhere. Once again, he described the raging storm of feelings that had gone over him on the island of the Convertors.

"That is also in me, that's what I am as well; well, of course not only, but also. Can I cut this off, once and for all?"

Arundle felt the tickle of jealousy. Billy-Joe was on the best way of freeing himself from her influence, she realized. Did she want to let him go? No, she was not prepared to do so. It was so good to rely on Billy-Joe, who was always there, whenever she needed him. His manly strength and authenticity so often proved vital. What would have happened to Laptopia without him? And where would she be without him? She would lose him she could feel it. Billy-Joe faced a vital decision. Whatever way he chose it would never be like before.

Arundle didn't want to be responsible for his unhappiness. If he missed the singular chance of opening towards his totem animal and let it come into his life, she would take over a responsibility she could not bear. Billy-Joe's decision in her favour would fire back, as for her he would give it up as well as Tika, who were the real cause of the trouble.

Again, she felt that ache in her heart. It hurt to lose the undivided love of a person so close. She now felt perhaps for the first time that awesome sentiment of inferiority and didn't know how to stand it.

“Once you should know, dear Billy-Joe. I cannot be the cause and reason for your decision. Trust in your fate, follow your brave heart, wherever it leads you – keep in mind that he, who avoids the danger, will become its first victim. Perhaps our joint time was over, when we saved Laptopia. Thus, I feel now. The School of Inbetween I thought would bring us closer together, did in fact separate us, as we found out here, what’s truly inside us and what’s going to become of us. Your way is opening in front of you and mine in front of me. We will remain friends though, but we are not one. We will never unite; we will never experience the feeling, which is revealed to you under the full moon, as this is only the beginning. Follow your destiny, follow your fate and endure the consequences. Follow your destiny as I follow mine. Nothing and no-one will hinder me to do so.”

Once more, he felt the estranging hardship – Arundle’s adamant will. Like a rod of steel she returned into an upright position whenever she was bent – the same grey-blue as that rod of steel - kept shimmering in her eyes – why didn’t he discover her truest secret, as open as it lay? Was that the true secret of the Somnions, instead of a romantic diving into the depth of uncertainty, neglecting reality, negating the world – but such clear and decisive strength? He almost felt as if Arundle embodied the true being of the Somnions, while she made their colour shine in such an incomparable mode.

Thus, her clairvoyance almost overwhelmed him once more. How easy such surrender was and how likely she attracted him in a way that made him forget all differences and repulsing forces. Why could he not split, and give the day what the day’s was, and the night what was the night’s? If there were two souls in his breast, why not split reality as well?

Such were only images yet, sun, moon and two souls – how real were they? Could those images help him to come to a decision? What would it be like, if he didn’t come back, if he remained in the Conversiors’ empire, lost and haunted by the spirit of his totem animal?

Well, he didn’t get lost in the sunshine; why should he get lost in the moonlight then? Perhaps, because he was dealing with different tools at night; so it could be – the risk was there; he had to take it, as he, who doesn’t take the risk - is bound to fail.

“We don’t want to push you, but it’s about time now, we got to know”, Adrian Humperdijk urged, who was excited as always. The journey into freedom was for him a challenge once more he would have badly missed. For him such dual identity was indeed a kind of existential elixir and vivid stimuli; and thanks to his dear wife, the return never caused him big trouble though.

Billy-Joe still couldn't make up his mind. Doubts were his lot. When he told her his ideas about sun and moon, she pointed out that he couldn't base his decision on astrological assumptions. She didn't like such comparison though. Billy-Joe was more confused and indecisive than ever.

"The cause of your decision is up to you. What is on the ground of the cause? – You should ask yourself. We have, God knows, seen what daemons do to living beings. So, – what is in you - that is the question. Is it a daemon, then you should see to get rid of him right away; or is it a good spirit, who brings you ahead and who wants your best, then follow him, by all means – what else?"

That was it. Arundle put the finger into the wound. He finally came closer to the core of his doubts.

What was the spirit like, he was dealing with? He didn't have a chance to get to know him so far. It might be wise to change that, before he came to a final decision.

There were those feelings on the other hand, dualistic and contradicting as they were, whenever he opened himself to that spirit.

"Find the way back to the roots", Arundle recommended – "remember your first decision when searching for identity. You once went back on the search for your true self, and you came to a crossroad of your life. For now, you will have to go on that journey again, and your trip might be lengthier and more tiring than before. You will have to return into the womb, until you come to the crossroad of your individual evolution, where you first had an encounter and consequently matched with your totem animal. You must get to know it - and more important – you will have to stand the truth, what ever you find; it's going to be compulsory for your decision."

The time was pressing now, from all sides, Billy-Joe was forced to make up his mind; and thus he should dive back into the depth of his former life, even back to the beginning of his life and even further, into the pre-natal becoming of the foetus he had once been. How could he manage without help?

Arundle suggested to jointly visiting Tika, who was in hospital again for recreational activities – her shoulder was not working properly yet. Therefore, she would not be able to join the Conversiors trip to the island.

Tika felt miserable and the two visitors weren't really welcome, mostly that girl of course, whom she couldn't help but connect with the assault, although she knew the truth by now. Still she could not feel thankfulness, no matter whether Arundle had rescued her and probably even saved her life.

She turned to the wall as soon as the two entered the room. She could not hide her tears of disappointment otherwise, when she noticed who was

accompanying Billy-Joe. Besides, she had a bad headache, most likely because of the coming full moon, same as Billy-Joe.

Arundle unpacked some nuts and fruits and decorated them on the small table next to Tika's bed. While she did she softly spoke to the patient in the way she was used to with her bow, which she felt on her shoulder again, granting power now for the difficult task.

The bow had been released from his prison when another bow was found in the boathouse, together with a quiver filled with the same kind of arrows that was used for the assault. Thus no reason remained to have the magic bow locked up, and he took the chance and freed himself, which he could have done anyway all the time, but didn't do because of Arundle. He didn't want to cause her more trouble than she already had.

Nobody on the island cared about Arundle's bow over her shoulder except the former prosecutor, Moschus Mogoleya, who couldn't refrain from a nasty remark when they met, which was not often the case; as the bow gave her a warning whenever their joint foe was due to cross their way. The prosecutor wasn't able to overcome the defeat in the trial and tried as best he could to turn her down at any chance.

The good spirit of the magic bow helped Arundle to find the right words now. Tika dared a shy look first and then turned and sat up, while Billy-Joe was standing somewhat timid near the door, ready to disappear. Arundle realised a stunning similarity between them, she hadn't realized before. Of course Tika was finer and smaller in any way.

The ice was broken. Tika became somewhat talkative in fact; pleased as she was about the attention she was able to rise; besides, the days in hospital were boring. Perhaps they had come just at the right time. Her headache was forgotten. Billy-Joe cracked the nuts in his strong hands as they couldn't find a nutcracker, and Arundle had the right air of listening attentively.

"The spirit of great dingo revealed to me in a dream", Tika confirmed. She enjoyed displaying herself properly. At last she found the attention, she had lacked for over three months now, since they were on the island, while Billy-Joe had hardly noticed her. Tika on the other hand noticed her similarity with famous Billy-Joe right away.

"Of course I knew whom the big yellow dog was howling after", she said with a malevolent smile.

Now he sat next to her and had the white girl not been, she would not have known were to look and what to say. He was talking to her about this and that, and while it was not the stuff she had dreamed of, it was but better than nothing. Had only that white girl not been...

She was nice though, much nicer than expected - not at all arrogant and highbrow. She talked about crucial things somewhat easy and open-minded and gently touched the most secret notions and thoughts, without fear.

Arundle briefly explained what Billy-Joe's problem was, and why he was in trouble with his way of converting. She also referred to sun and moon, and made sure Tika understood whom she stood for.

"Well, I think it would be a good idea if Billy-Joe tried to make himself clearer", Arundle concluded, and Tika nodded looking expectantly at him who at last was comfortably sitting at the desk, cracking nuts with his strong hands.

"I would like to know from you", he began somewhat boyish and hesitantly, "what your spirit is like. Perhaps there is a similar similarity between our spirits as there is between us. After all we both are dingoes."

"You could be twins", Arundle agreed.

The two looked at each other. Billy-Joe waved such idea off. He knew his little brothers and sisters all. Tika shook her head likewise. She grew up in a Mission-hut until a talent scout discovered her for the School of Inbetween. The missionaries didn't let her go first, but then Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk came and changed their minds.

The time before the Mission-hut Tika only vaguely recalled. Her mother had died while delivering, she had been told.

"And you, what do you remember?" Billy-Joe wanted to know, as he did not remember his early days either. - "After all I'm still looking for my Totem animal" he said vaguely - "that is to say, its spirit though, as I expect help for the decision I have to make. Therefore, I want to learn from you as much as possible. Why do you have no problems? Why are you so sure you do the right thing?"

When Tika learnt Billy-Joe's intentions, she felt rejected at once. He was not at all interested in her but only in himself. On the other hand, she felt the desperation of the poor guy. Why should she not tell him, what she knew? The yellow mother came visiting her in her dreams and spoke to her, her own way. She also could see her sisters and brothers - yellow squeaking fury balls in the soft nest of a housing cave.

"One day I learnt the truth about me. The Prior told me shortly before he died the secret of my birth. Hunters found two human babies in the cave of a deadly wounded dingo mother. The boy they left behind, but the girl they took with them and sold her to the mission-hut, as the Padres paid a good price for girls - my mother was a dingo then", Tika concluded her brief report. She seemed to have not the slightest doubts.

"And you, were you the other child, Billy-Joe" Arundle turned to him invitingly; then asked Tika: "Did you never question the fact that you were

human, while your mother was dingo?" Tika looked somewhat absent-minded, she shook her head.

Had Aborigines found Billy-Joe, after the white hunters had left with Tika? Did Billy-Joe grow up with them? That would make sense; the question remained how the babies had come into that dingo's cave, though. What had happened to their real parents? Nobody would find out the truth, if they didn't remember. Were they brother and sister, even twins, perhaps? Did Tika remember the good spirit of the dingo-mother; she had come so close now?

Such an approach contradicted with the ambivalence that tore Billy-Joe apart. A wholly different view was no less likely. The nursing dingo-mother was just an image and didn't matter whether true or not, as such image fitted well into a wider scene of primordial savagery. A pack of hungry dingoes could have killed the human parents, while the babies were taken away as living prey. Assuming such a scene would explain the ambivalence of Billy-Joe's feelings as well as Tika's positive identification.

Arundle knew it all too well, such were, but speculations without any proof, be it that Billy-Joe's confusion would be taken as that. Other aspects had been neglected and would cause even more complications, if such tale were referred to the Tree of Life.

It was Billy-Joe's lot to be torn apart by doubts and worries. Tika on the contrary was held by a strong conviction, while their likeness indicated one offspring before they soon were parted. Here lay different traces, they followed later, resulting in two different approaches to reality.

Arundle felt her agreement trickle in more easily than she thought, now that she meant to know that Tika was Billy-Joe's sister. Their love for each other would change colour – at least on the humane side.

The stunning likeness and Tika's tale didn't leave any doubts. Billy-Joe had no reasons to be ashamed of his animalist appearance. What ever the Totem animal was like: in him there was a good part of the motherly love from their nursing dingo-mother, who took care of them as good and loving as she could. That was it. Billy-Joe was not haunted, no daemon captured his soul; the close encounter with his dingo-mother was a sound experience, if it was real, - which he doubted not.

16. The Tree of Life – rectified

Adrian Humperdijk and Penelope M'gamba were highly pleased when they learnt of Billy-Joe's decision and thanked Arundle for her

unselfish engagement and her decisiveness for bringing light into the matter.

All the more as the boat had not yet left for the Convertors' Island. Arundle, Florinna, Corinia and Tibor just settled at the old pier by the lagoon, when the Convertors entered the boat for their island. Tika was amongst them. After the analytic discourse with Arundle and Billy-Joe, all her wounds stopped aching and healed in minutes.

It was high time though and the moon would rise soon. No clouds were in the sky; it would become a clear light night – ideal conditions for Convertors.

Arundle unrolled her poster with the Tree of Life and laid it in the sand. She was all heart and soul for that subject and somehow infested her friends. They had still some hours to go until dawn. That was good, as they needed time. The matter was too complex to get started repeatedly. The problem they were working on was a great challenge and of enormous significance, as there was no singular solution, but a certain probability range, all the more as they missed a link, which had to be found, if the diagram was the paper worth it was printed on.

They had an idea though, more or less sound, but weren't yet able to implement it into the chart.

Of course, they could reject the Tree of Life as a whole, as it was nothing but an abstract scheme, extrapolated by scientists as a means of clarity, and guideline - not more.

Soon they noticed however that they had to replace such Tree of Life by a different Tree, or by another type of abstractum. Arundle suggested to rectify the existing Tree of Life instead as far as possible.

"It would be too easy to say the Tree of Life is wrong", she explained. "It is incomplete, no doubt, and we are here to find out where and perhaps even why it has to be corrected."

"That's an option I could live with", Corinia replied. "Why that?" Florinna wanted to know, as she didn't have expected any comment from her little sister's side, who wanted to assist Tibor, and was thanked with a winning smile of his; but she had more in mind than that. Her discernments into the ocean life raised sounder and longer lasting doubts, as not the faintest trace of the mer folk ever appeared in such schemes. An aspect she would bring in later.

For the time being she enjoyed the attention she got from the little fellow with the wind and weather tanned face - with the thin black plaits left and right, who seemed to have only eyes for Arundle. In his presence, you could almost smell the width and the freedom of the steppe, the yearning of long rides and lonesome nights beside the campfire.

Somewhat forceful Corinia returned from her reveries while she then objected, “I am for the scheme, that is to say I would be for it, if the nymphs and nixes would appear – where are all those water sprites and deep-sea creatures of the oceans?”

“Yes, were are they? That’s an excellent opener for our approach, thank you Corinia”, Arundle remarked warmly.

“Not only those in the depth of the oceans but also those subsoil, of course”, her sister assisted eagerly, to signal her support.

“No nixes, no dwarves, no Convertors either – very interesting”, Arundle exclaimed enthusiastically.

“Every month scientists discover a couple of hundred new species. The graph of such a Tree of Life cannot be complete, that is obvious, and I think that is not the core of the problem, it is something else...” she went on.

“... Yes, and just as many become extinct, that’s also a fact...” Florinna objected.

“Excuses cannot be accepted”, Corinia thought of the ever-narrowing habitat of her new friends.

“I think incompleteness is just one aspect, but there is another more severe one. Let’s look at the side branches and what is going to happen to them, while the centre stem is growing, they are crippling, there is but one main trunk, which is topped by ‘Homo sapiens’ the crown of creation, while all other tops have been cut off. No birds, no fish, no...”

“...Right, no nothing – where is Walter then? Or Pooty... where are all the others?”

“They became extinct. You clearly see that, when it comes to direct competitors...” Corinia objected.

“The more intelligent, the fiercer the extirpation. You can see that everywhere. Intelligent life survived only in niches, or was hiding otherwise, thus the Tree of Life became a self fulfilling negative prophecy”, Arundle agreed.

“We know it better now, thanks to Walter. We are now able to ask the right questions”, Tibor replied.

“We can throw the crown of creation from its pedestal...”, Corinia assisted.

“... or more correct, as this is neither our intention nor in our hands – we can add other treetops on the same or almost the same level as homo sapiens...”, Arundle went in.

“And while we do, we can explain how Walter converted into a ‘Were-Man’”, Arundle felt shame for her kin.

“Man is the worst beast of prey of all times”, Tibor confirmed. -
“Such discernments belong to the wisdom of my people, although some are

drawing the wrong conclusions from this fact, our famous ancestor for example...”

Tibor referred to Dschingis Khan who conquered Asia and Europe in an orgy of bloodshed. “He still has his followers, as you can see...” Tibor referred to Moschus Mogoleya that was clear to all of them.

“Are we fully aware of the problem?” Arundle asked. “Walter is converting into a ‘Were-Man’. That means he has been on the human level during his development as a being in a prenatal early state of infancy. Then he developed into the super-sly individual he is now, with telepathy and all that. Are there any objections?”

The friends shook their heads. Arundle was well able to sum thing up, so that they became clear, almost like Scholasticus, whom she now recited almost word by word. – “Every individual runs through all stages of evolution of its kind. That is the reason why Conversiors can return to an earlier state of being. That means – only if Walter’s evolution includes the human level, he can return to that stage, but he couldn’t if it was otherwise...”

“Let’s look for the suitable junctions then, on the Tree of Life” Tibor recommended.

“I don’t know - Walter belongs to the marsupials. Their great time was before the mammals; and human beings are part of the latter...”

“If there hadn’t been marsupial-humans...” Florinna interrupted eagerly.

“Yes, of even fish-humans, you know, fish are much older than land-lubbers. Compared to them, the evolution of the mammals is as a needle-head compared with a football”, Tibor through in enthusiastically. The discernment of Corinia got at him flash-like though.

“That’s it” Arundle banged her forehead with the back of her flat hand. Suddenly she saw them everywhere - those crowns of creation, based on wholly different modes of evolution. The advanced mammals were only thought to produce the only crown – the Homo erectus⁸!

Walter didn’t require the mammals to become an intelligent ‘erectus’ – because in his evolution there must have been a similarly cruel beast as it crowned the mammals – a being on two legs, sly and malicious as the untamed homo sapiens in the early days of humane culture. Thus, it happened that such creature, which made him slip into the image of Malicious Marduk, overwhelmed him.

A somewhat illogical explanation – that was accepted anyway as a possible solution of the Lifetree’s riddle. Thus, they had done their homework. Perhaps they came about an epochal discovery almost by

⁸ lat. Man standing upright

accident, Arundle thought, while they didn't intend to go that far. Their 'Tree of Life' looked per definition more like a brush than a tree now, which they scribbled briefly on the back of the chart. Tibor felt like physical action. The work was done, so far so good. The afternoon was on the turn. "Come on, join me, let's dance with the wind."

A green whirlwind was pacing over soft sand and soothing sea, where Sandor and the Patagonian beauties were idling only to join him and his nose-heavy friends with a mighty uplift.

The work was done; it was time for fun before the evening descended. They held each other by the hands, a Sublimator on either side; they felt lifted up like feathers. A rather big circle hovered over the sand and up and down, until the untrained girls almost lost their minds. What a yelling and cheering that was, uneasy though, when they lost contact with the solid ground. They still couldn't believe what happened to them; but it was not the time for reflections. They better took things as granted; otherwise, they'd really lost their minds. Thus, they managed to overcome the threat of being airborne without visual device, as they went up - higher and higher - following the sun behind the green veil that surrounded them, while the sun was heading westbound, faster now as the horizon came nearer.

Below they didn't see anything but the sea, their green whirl was drilling its whitish screw right in, heading west as well. Then they won height. Again, the sun lengthened his golden arms reaching for them, while the horizon crept further to the west.

The Sublimators kept on yelling, somewhat hesitant then the girls noticed or was it the distance and the width up here, and the increasing wind that made the difference? What would happen if the hands left and right loosened their grip? The Sublimators were surely able to help themselves, but what about the heavy cargo, the helpless payload, when it became useless ballast...

As if her fear had attracted the misfortune, Arundle heard the voice of Moschus Mogoleya close to her ear. His sharp order in an unknown language was repeated three times, before his pupils obeyed. Arundle felt the grip of the hands loosen, and while falling, the mean voice of Moschus Mogoleya wavered behind her: "Fly away little dreamer - away if you can. The sea is deep and the land is low. Let's see how far you get without protection!"

Like ripe apples Florinna, Corinia and Arundle plunged into the water. The wild dance in the green whirl had come to a sudden and - as they soon realized - deadly end.

For the present, they were paddling bravely through the salty waves. The long swell was waving them gently, the water almost carried them by

itself, as long as they moved a little; but when the dark dawn lowered, moon and stars arose, and nothing was about them but whispering blackness, fear crept into their hearts.

How long could they go on? Who would miss them? How could they be found? - Three tiny spots at night in the endless ocean! - They didn't dare to think of the dangers of the depth. Hour by hour they drifted through the lukewarm water. In fact, it was still some degrees lower than their bodies, thus they began to feel chilly at first and cold some time later, and thus they ran out of energy. The muscles hardened, the salt bit into eyes, nose and mouth and made the tongue swell and the breathing hard.

Corinia gave up first. A last weak waving, then she had her sink into the whispering depth of the deadly silence. She didn't want to go on fighting. What was it good for? Florinna understood and followed her soon. - What, if the rescue-team was near? The soft wetness embodied her – perhaps a touch too greedy though, and drew her down. Such didn't matter after all. Why should she be in this world without her sister Corinia?

She felt her mind dissolving. Her life passed by in time-lapse pictures – a beautiful but all too short life! What would her mother do without them? Would she be able to find consolation? Thinking of her mother had almost torn her back, but it was too late, even if she had wanted the leaden embrace of the sea wouldn't have let her go. - Home, homeward bound into the immeasurable depth of the primordial base of life...

While being alone, Arundle noticed that she wasn't eager to fight either. Before she had struggled and argued with herself, as the others couldn't hear her anyway, but now there was no reason any more. They were defeated for the last time. What did that mind? The big easy sent its velvet veil - 'give in, don't fight, follow your fate, the world can well do without you, don't take yourself so serious anymore.'

She as well experienced her life passing by, almost like those evolutionary junctions on the Tree of Life they had figured out this afternoon. Tibor would know and would pass on their discovery, thus it was not forlorn.

The triumphs and victories faded and gave way to the defeats she and her matter had experienced while in her range. She was not able to judge, someone else would do on her behalf. Was - what she had achieved - for the improvement of this world? She knew then – it was over in the end. Thus she sank, her mind fading into the generality of everything. She returned to life's offspring in the endless depth and black tranquillity of the silent sea – 'Mare infinitum'⁹ – as she realized at last.

⁹ lat. Endless sea

Three bodies kept sinking, deeper and deeper into that mysterious darkness, where no eyes ever glance, except those of the dwellers of the depth.

In layers the sea builds up quite like the forests – grass and moss on the ground, followed by the zone of bushes mounting into the under wood, which is crowned by the late giants’ treetops at last. While in the sea things were just upside down: On the surface there were all kinds of seaweeds and sea grass, reefs grew, where the sunlight shone, comparable to bush and under wood, while the crowning treetop area complied with the secret land of the mer folk, while in former times the treetops housed a primordial mankind. However, the forests seldom exceed 50 yards in height, the sea is easily a hundred times deeper. Therefore, it wonders not, why nobody on earth knows about the deep-sea dwellers.

17. Attempted Murder or Accident?

Adrian Humperdijk was in his element. ‘Just in contrast we enjoy’, he thought while hovering through the floods with mighty beats of his flippers. He knew where he wanted to go, he felt drawn to his kin. He gained depth though and kept southbound. The first formations of the continental shelf appeared ahead - in its shade, well hidden lay the underwater state of Australis.

Adrian had to become acquainted just like all the others who dared the big jump over the ‘great pond’. This was another world over here – down under, as was said - while originally the mer-folk came from elsewhere on the other side of the world, from Bermudia to be exact. In former times had it been a dangerous long and fearsome journey for that new continent, but meanwhile a comfortable submarine train connected the continents, that took only weeks where formally months were needed.

The technique was on the march. Since the invention of the turbo-suction-accelerator and the hydro-engine had revolutionized the transport system, you need not rely on your fins and flippers in the dangers of the oceans, where the landlubbers threatened as well as the beast of prey, like bloodthirsty wild sharks and the huge octopods, just to mention the most obvious of the perilous beings. Thus in the early days only each second one managed to reach the Promised Land.

Later the emigrants formed caravans for better protection against the gangs of desperados that formed while poverty and overpopulation stroked the motherland. On the other hand were caravan trails noticeable especially at the crucial spots for the landlubbers. An encounter with them was but the worst that could happen.

Such a caravan picked up Adrian, and if they had not found him, he would be no more.

While a young lad and greenhorn altogether - without any knowledge of his hidden talents - he felt driven to the sea and followed the call. A submarine torpedoed his ship before Jamaica, and he was torn with the debris into the depth. When he awoke - days must have passed - as the caravan had reached its aim, he found himself in Bermudia, the old capital of the Kingdom of Melisandria.

Soon after, he raised the curiosity of King Melisander, and became one of his second-class assistant-trainee courtiers. He remained the King's friend ever since, although he returned to the surface only months after his marvellous rescue, as the war was over then. He met his wife in Australia where she had emigrated and soon after they founded the School of Inbetween.

His experience under water enabled Adrian to convert every month for some days and return to his second underwater world. Unfortunately, King Melisander very seldom set foot on colonial grounds, thus they hardly ever met. Otherwise, he felt happy over here and enjoyed the life under water as much as he had done in Bermudia.

He urged the King not to break off the contact with the New World; but the development tore the two parties irresistibly apart, be it for the technological advances made over here, or the joint will of the people for freedom and self-determination.

For the unity of the two parts pleaded he to deaf ears, whenever he saw a chance, as the King had become old and lazy though, and didn't enjoy travelling any more.

The call for freedom and independence became louder and louder. Adrian felt an itch in the breast whenever he became aware of such notions. Somehow, he felt connected inside with good old Melisandria and the ancient city of Bermudia, but with the politics of his old friend, he could not agree.

Thus, he was chased by similar crises then on solid grounds down here, which he urged to fly, were they after all of different kind and quality as those he monthly left behind.

*

Adrian was looking forward to the days lying ahead. At last, he would be in his element. The incomparable freshness of an underwater life

could no one imagine, who had not experienced it in person. He tried to convince his wife ashore, but in vain. She even was afraid of deep water though, and of the whirling wild water sprites in front of the panorama pane in the Grand Hall when performing their annual tournament. Adrian did not mind though, ashore she could not entangle in his under water life.

From afar, he could see a hunting party. A swarm of herrings was in sight. The yells and screams got to his ears and did his heart well. Soon he would be at home!

However, suddenly the laughter stopped, instead he heard cries of surprise. His acquaintance had to wait, Adrian got closer quickly, and when he turned around a rocky edge, he noticed a group of his underwater kin bending over three lifeless bodies, lying on the ground.

While getting closer, he noticed who they were. He had seen them happy and gay shortly before departure on the beach of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Well, he knew by experience that death could be defeated down here, but there was no time to loose. If the victims were not transmuted right away, they would soon suffocate or suffer from damage to their brains. So he uttered but a quick hello and was lucky to notice Boetie among the group, who knew Corinia well as they met regularly since that introductory feast.

In no time the lifeless bodies were lying on stretchers, a surgeon opened their throats on both sides and implanted reversible gills, and soon they were breathing again, easier than before they felt, after waking up, stunned of where they were.

Boetie and Corinia could not stop hugging and could not let go one another. “Now you are one of us”, Boetie kept on saying. They both realized how dear they were to each other. For the first time they met face to face without any device between them.

Fins and flippers had Corinia not grown, she still stood on two legs though, but otherwise she was well adjusted already, and could imagine a Conversior’s life.

Neither Florinna nor Arundle had suffered from any harm as well, physically spoken, while Arundle on her part was mentally stirred up right over the tops and all upset. Moschus Mogoleya had definitely gone too far.

The three victims had to remain under medical control - “for their own sake”, as the surgeon, who had done the conversion, put it. Adrian Humperdijk stayed with them, as he felt responsible, therefore he would keep an eye on the three, as nobody knew what would happen, when they wanted to re-convert to their regular life ashore.

Down here, he looked much younger because of his slim fish-body, while his face almost was the same as in his other life.

Under guidance they were released then and Boetie showed them around the city, accompanied by Adrian, who kept an eye on them all the time. Australis cramped under its protective shield. The houses almost reached the screen, skyscraper-like.

“The settlers of Australis did the right thing, when they first installed the huge screen that makes the city invisible. Now they can build as they like and as there is space. You can see, we run out of space that is why we build more of those tall towers, which house thousands of inhabitants”, Boetie explained.

“This doesn’t reduce the charm of the place, it’s the other way round though”, Adrian added.

“...And it’s more comfortable than you may think... well you know what it is like to live in such a tower...” Boetie agreed. Corinia had told her what life was like in the School of Inbetween. She showed them to her apartment, and invited them home. Adrian took the chance to see his acquaintances down here, when Boetie promised to stay in contact. He was eager to come home as well. “I’ll pick you up in three days” - he said, when he left. “I leave my contact with your hostess, she will ring me up right away when ever this becomes necessary”, he said and off he was, while Boetie slipped through a very small hole into her apartment and asked them to follow her. While they did, they realized how stiff they were, as they experienced some trouble to do likewise.

Even Corinia had never been in there, because of the diving devices she usually wore. They had always met at public sites, in the outskirts of the city, as the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was not so close.

Letting them, as foreigners, into the heart of the city was an evidence of great trust, and surely had to do with their converted form of being. This way they felt much more alike with the mer-folk and were able to see the world out of their perspective. Down here and under the same conditions they could imagine what life was like, and what dangers were all about, mostly caused by the people on the surface. Except for fairytales and legends, the dry land people did not know of the existence of the mer-folk; and that was good – as if they had known, they would surely have slaved them.

As Arundle had but it - Man was the cruellest brute of all, who didn’t give in before his dominance triumphed, and that meant extinction for all present or future competitors.

The girls almost forgot about the way they came down here. All the new impressions and the unknown about them down here didn’t give them a chance to think or even talk about what had happened to them. Their miraculous rescue was still too much to grasp; but of course, they would tell Adrian of what had happened to them, and why they were down here.

Arundle was sure; Moschus Mogoleya had tried to kill them. How could he have known that there was a party not far under the surface underway on herrings-hunt, while Adrian passed by on his way to Australis?

Arundle could still hear the sardonic voice close to her ear – the voice of Moschus Mogoleya, without doubt.

Had they been too careless? Tibor and the other Sublimations should have know the risk... Should they? Perhaps something happened none of them was aware of. Had the wind blown them away?

Still there had been that malicious voice...

Tibor and his friends didn't want to harm them. Arundle still felt Tibor's hand in hers; he didn't let her go just like that. The voice had spoken in a strange tongue three times – God knows what it was, before he let her go. Mogoleya was their teacher after all, he surely had his means and ways to force them under his will.

As soon as they returned, she would call for a meeting and ask for an investigation. She wouldn't let Mogoleya get away with that, surely not this time. The first attempted murder was just settled, while the second was following right away.

Arundle tried to get rid of such queries and quarrels. She had the chance of discovering a new world down here. Boetie was so nice and tried as best she could to please them. She showed them around in her apartment, it was in fact a plain cubicle with niches here and there, where you could sleep and chill. Boetie didn't live alone in here they realized when her father Milo came home after work. He was a coral bricklayer and clam-chalk plasterer – thus an able and busy man with a considerable income. “Craftsmen always owe their share”, Boetie exclaimed and you could see how proud she was of her father.

“Let's hope we do not disturb them”, the three wondered and forgot that Boetie could read their thoughts likewise. “You don't worry about that, I'm more afraid that you mind our habits; our way of eating is kind of strange though”, she let them know. “Don't you remember that curtain, which was drawn shortly before we opened our buffet outside? - Under water, cooking doesn't make sense, does it? - We love it raw, you know!”

Some time later, when they saw Milo having his supper, they realized what Boetie meant. Raw diet didn't refer to seaweed and sea grass, Milo tore apart a huge octopus in front of their eyes. Dark sepia clouds came out of the maltreated creature and faded only when the bloody meal was finished. Boetie claimed to be vegetarian but still grasped for little floating pieces while plucking sea grass she was growing, and gulped it down with considerable delight. “Help yourselves”, she offered with a vague gesture, “there is enough for all of us.”

“We are no big eaters”, the three meant lamely and picked some leaves of grass. The sharp odour burnt on the tongue first, but then tasted somewhat refreshing, still fishy though. That might come from the water in the cabinet, while still pieces of the prey floated about from the craftsman’s main dish.

After the meal, Boetie let a swarm of cleaner fish out of their cage and in no time, the room was tidy again. “That’s the way we do it down here, while others already have vacuum cleaners, but I’m for the good old-fashioned cleaner-fish brigades. Aren’t they cute?”

-“...And tasty as well”, her father added with a malicious grin.

“That’s the way he is”, her daughter said and shrugged.

“Many of those habits and customs look worse than they are”, tried Corinia to help Boetie. She even wanted to defend Milo.

“Was it not because of my Daddy, I would have changed sides long ago. Believe me, its no fun, but what can you do - you can’t chose your parents - and my father is too old for a change. We have a strong fraction of vegetarians though” she went on. “We breed all kinds of weeds and grass as we have accepted the fact that eating fish is somewhat cannibalistic and doesn’t do us good; but many have the robbing in their blood and can’t stay away from it. My father is a convinced hunter, though. He likes to hunt down the prey and eat it then in the open. Today was a kind of compromise already, he accepted because of the guests. In fact, he has his own little hunting ground. ‘There it tastes best’, he says. Well, he is a typical man...” Boetie said in an air of deep understanding and consolation. You could see what she felt. She was well prepared to forgive him his little weaknesses, even more since her mother had died.

“She got into the propellers of a tanker – a terrible accident, nothing could be done. It’s three years from now. My father never recovered. She was all he had in life.” Boetie sighed and paused. After a while she went on – “over there in the old world, the situation is much worse. The big swarms of fish are getting so rare that they even... but I don’t want to feed such awful rumours, they are too cruel. The Bermudians have of course missed the chance to think about other ways of nutrition, as we did. Since we started growing our own food in plantations, we never starved again. We produce more than we need and are able to export our surplus. If they weren’t so stubborn over there, we could help them out of their crises. However, they cry for fish, and of course, it must be livestock in huge swarms at best. That can’t be done of course, how should they survive a sub-train-trip of one month! They expect us to trail them over as it was done in the old days of the wild fish-boys on their bronco-sharks. However, the trail by now is far too dangerous. If the Japanese trawlers don’t fetch the lot, the African fishermen will get them, while desperados of our kin

take the rest shortly before the aim is finally reached. Thus, the brave fish-boys were cheated of their meagre reward.”

“Sounds like the Wild West”, Florinna giggled, although Boetie’s tale was so sad. Boetie didn’t understand and Corinia explained the whereabouts of the Wild-West-Myth. Florinna earned a doubtful glance.

On the next day, Boetie and the three friends went to a Pummel-Pump-Match; similar to the one they had seen on the day of the feast. However, today’s match was not as important. Still the atmosphere was great and the big stadium filled to the last inch, seats were not required though.

Milo accompanied them as it was his day off and cared for a good sight, by rudely pushing others aside. The voice of the commentator sounded somewhat reluctant and echoed through the wide arena. The visitors from abroad did not understand of course the strange idiom. Under water the sound took a little while longer than above, they realized, so you saw by the reactions of the spectators, what was going on, before you could hear. - Otherwise, there was no big difference, except of course for the kind of tournament, which was in a way comparable to football or rugby.

In the cubicle, a hefty fight was going on. Fishtails and flippers appeared here and there in the turmoil of boiling-like water, while the people’s heroes chased about behind that shiny puck. The sea-gherkin-Kings on both sides tore their movable goal back and forth or likewise up and down, thus the puck-shots failed repeatedly.

All afternoon the match went on. The players showed signs of fatigue, thus it became a matter of condition, which side was to make it. After three endless hours, the Greenbacks landed a second hit in sequence – and the game was over.

Thousands of fans rejoiced jubilant while the followers of the defeated Red-Sharks left in either silence or full of wrath.

Boetie was as a Greenback-fan of course happy and could not stop praising her team. She repeatedly talked about the best moves and strategic feints of the Greenbacks while they were heading for that narrow gate of the only exit on this side and ran into a severe traffic jam most likely caused by a band of Red-Sharks-hooligans, thus Boetie went silent at last.

When they finally got out of the stadium, they felt hungry and Boetie bought for them a bushel of fresh seaweeds. Milo had left right after the final score, so they were on their own and Boetie suggested a theatre performance of the classical Naiad Ballet with the suggestive title ‘ The Air Swallower’ – about an unhappy liaison between an amphipod beauty and a mix of princely blood, who could not get together because of their physical differences.

“Such amphibian beings existed indeed, but became extinct as they had to live too close to the surface, thus an easy prey for the dry-landers, though”, Boetie explained while they were queuing already for the tickets.

The ballet was challenging though as there were almost no limits for the dancers, who were carried by their element. Thus, the three visitors enjoyed the performance; although the music was somewhat odd. Boetie was used to it of course and started sobbing all too soon, deeply moved.

She seldom went to the theatre and was not familiar with such old fashioned stuff, she repeatedly uttered while silvery teardrops elapsed from her ruby-red eyes and mingled all too soon with the surrounding waters though.

On their last day, the friends made an excursion to the old shipyard, were you still could find broken chests filled with coins and pearls, as stuff the like – useless for the folk down here, except for the jewellery the naiads also enjoyed. Boetie had her own collection at home.

“Take what you like, perhaps you can use those funny hats. They don’t fit on our heads though”, Boetie pointed at some beautiful goblets. The girls explained what the use of them was and that people used them for drinking; however they could not make themselves clear, as Boetie didn’t understand what ‘drinking’ meant. “Its like eating liquid food”, Corinia explained, while Florinna demonstrated the act by raising such a goblet to her mouth. Drinking under water was of course a rather senseless undertaking they realized.

They left before they started becoming greedy, each with a sound pack of treasures, they would take home, but Boetie objected - such might raise the wrong notion amongst their mates at school. “Leave it with me and enjoy it whenever you come and see me...”

*

When Adrian came on the next day to pick them up, they were not enthusiastic at all. They would have liked to stay on, and so had Adrian, but his time was limited to the cycle of the moon and he did not want to miss the Convertors’ boat once more. Therefore, Boetie and some of her friends accompanied them back to the Convertors’ Island.

Swimming under water had become their second nature, thus they managed to keep on; even more so as they substituted the flippers by artificial devices, Adrian offered, who knew that problem when it came to long distances.

They took their retroversifictional medicine shortly before they started in order to become readjusted to the lung functions again, while the gills would then close. It was a matter of precise timing now, as they noticed shortly before they reached their homely shores, when fits of short breath shut them off the oxygen supply under water, while breathing air

was no problem at all - they realized when entering the Convertors' boat - just in time, this time.

Adrian was swimming his last yards as a man already, as his return exactly complied with the moon cycle, which was easier to control at sea than on land, because it related to the tides.

The boat was fully packed already and Billy-Joe was as surprised as the girls were to meet them coming up out of the sea scarcely dressed but fresh as freshly fished fish, so to speak. Despite Boetie's warning they had packed bags with some gems though that were softly ringing now when thrown inside the boat and raised the curiosity of their fellow-Convertors of course, an effect Boetie had foreseen.

Next to Tika, Penelope M'gamba settled who wanted to have a look on the boat this time; thus, the passengers were sitting tightly packed, as the crew required some space as well.

Adrian whispered with Penelope telling her the whereabouts of the girls' accident and how they were rescued. Penelope listened somewhat worried.

"I wonder whether this can be turned to the better", she murmured doubtfully. Adrian shook his head affirmatively. "There is trouble in the air... After all - the children weren't harmed. Imagine they had crashed ashore. How could they do that in the first place? That question's got to be answered, I'm sure..."

"Incredible – the open sea was, so to speak, for their best sake", she went on.

"Well, if you knew what was coming, otherwise it had been their death. Who ever made the decision did it under that premise..."

"You are right", Penelope agreed - "only we Convertors know of such alterations..."

*

Well and healthy with heart and soul the three who were believed to be dead, got off the boat, four days after their spectacular fall. Their marvellous rescue spread about the island in no time and while they hardly set foot on the sacred grounds of their homeland, the beach filled with eager comrades, mostly Somnors though, who welcomed them enthusiastically. Like football stars, they were lifted on the shoulders of some strong boys who carried them to their premises. Even the teachers came running and welcomed the believed dead. The local press queued for an interview and took pictures.

The Headmistress called for a special meeting immediately after lunch, when the three girls made their official report of what had happened to them. When they came to their fall, they realized considerable differences – each had experienced something else.

Only Arundle namely accused Moschus Mogoleya of causing the accident purposely. Neither Florinna nor Corinia had heard a voice whispering such incredible words, while Arundle swore she heard him speak.

Moschus Mogoleya jumped up like a wounded tiger in defence. - Yes, he did follow his moody flock as soon as he realized which way they took. “Everybody knows that the wind changes in the evening”, he said, “the children were drawn out irresistibly and the further they got, the heftier the wind became. I begged them to return but they didn’t listen, or the wake was already too strong, they couldn’t do alone, thus I tried to get in the circle and asked for an opening, and then it happened. The kids panicked and suddenly their guests fell. As you all know we returned and reported to the SAR-team right away... well, you know what happened then...”

The Headmistress waved him off - “we’ll talk about that later”, she said while Moschus Mogoleya went silent and sat back down on his seat.

Arundle was almost willing to believe him - forgetting about that ugly voice next to her ear, when she met the gaze of Tibor that was speaking a different language than his Tutor. However, there was not the time or the opportunity to exchange their memories as now the rescue team told what they had done in order to find the three missing girls.

The SAR-team only had a very vague position of the site, the area was rather large and while the night came, they had to give up soon. How should they find three little dark dots in the darkness of the dark sea?

“I was lucky to get a call from my husband late at that night, telling me that the girls were save and alive, and well adjusted to underwater living conditions... somewhat cryptic that message was, as communication is very special one way or the other, so I didn’t publish, as you never know if and how they’d return as well... Anyway, I stopped the search...” Marsha said, then paused and after a while added “the girls were in Australis, didn’t I say that? My husband picked them up underway. They were adjusted to the other mode of breathing; just like that...” she said and gave her husband a tender smile, who also grinned. His underwater adventure still wavered about his body and mind, and did their marriage well. “Ah, yes there are but two souls in my breast”, he sighed unheard.

“We were quite relieved when we learned that you survived the accident, while we considered the worst already, when the search and rescue team returned without you”, Grisella said, who had silently listened the ongoing reports with great care.

She didn’t trust Moschus Mogoleya. His statement sounded somewhat hollow and stale. The Board, whose Chairwoman she was, would have to consider carefully, what to do with him. Unfortunately, there

was nobody in sight who could have replaced him. However, the students needed guidance, especially the Sublimators, who were difficult characters.

Florinna and Corinia weren't able to confirm Arundle's version of how the accident occurred, as they didn't hear such a voice. They only felt left alone suddenly, when the hands that were holding them let them go, and they felt falling. "It all went so fast", Corinia said and Florinna nodded "we hardly noticed what was happening, when we plunged already into the water."

"Actually we didn't mind at first, as the water was warm and cosy, we thought it fun and part of the game though..."

"Of course we later realized what was really going on..."

The Professor they had seen as well, at least Florinna thought she did, while Corinia noticed that the wind was blowing probably a little stronger over the open sea.

Both had not spoken to anyone, as there had been no time and besides they had been pretty breathless. After all, they were not used to dancing with the wind.

18. The true Tree of Life

The investigation came to nothing – more precisely, there was no investigation at all! Moschus Mogoleya's version was accepted, and not only that! Arundle could hardly stand it. A murderous attempt on her life had been committed, and nobody even wanted to notice it. She was deeply disappointed, mostly of Grisella and Scholasticus. How could they have thrown dust in their eyes like that!

Florinna and Corinia didn't step in decidedly enough, thus, she stood alone. Had they not realized what was really going on? True enough, the words in that strange idiom, meant for the Sublimators, were no proof, neither one way nor the other.

While this part of the drama became subject and Arundle felt on safe grounds, had she but witnesses for her assumption, she experienced a bad surprise. Moschus Mogoleya didn't deny that he gave his pupils the order to save themselves. Thus, his argument cut off the tip of Arundle's objections. He was always a step ahead.

In order to protect his kin, he ordered them to let their guests go, based on the clear and simple calculation, that they hadn't managed otherwise to get back on dry lands. The wind was meanwhile blowing too strong, that night. Either all seven of them had to be sacrificed or only three. Thus, his decision had been rather simple, as he decided against the

strangers and for his kin; and besides – things turned out all right after all, so what was such ado about nothing good for, then?

The way he said that, his malicious smile, a wicked twinkle in his eyes - all too obvious - proved, what he really had been after, Arundle thought, and wondered why she was the only one to notice the truth.

Had he not alarmed the SAR-Team right away, as soon as he had been back? - He asked and gazed triumphantly about, while in fact he had wasted at least a quarter of an hour though, as to Arundle's findings anyway. Of course, you could hardly prove things like that afterwards. Checking watches and comparing the correct time had been of minor importance for the crew who had tried to get off the ground as soon as possible, before the lowering night made their efforts senseless.

The sentence only Arundle recalled, Moschus Mogoleya didn't repeat in front of the public now. Thus, her testimony wasn't worth a penny, no matter whether most members of the Board believed her.

Corinia and Florinna didn't hear him speak, because they had gone then. Arundle had been last, because of Tibor's firm grip or held by other invisible strings. Could he testify such dreadful words? Arundle herself wasn't so sure anymore. Only the voice as such she recalled – so wicked as it had sounded.

Had she been held only to let her know who was going to destroy her? Arundle would not let dust being thrown into her eyes, as all the others, even her best friends did, and so did the adored Professors, Grisella and Scholasticus, who lacked of the overall view they usually called their own.

The briefing went by without any clear result. Arundle felt alone and lonesome as in the old days – alone with her magic bow.

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A week had past, but the whereabouts of the investigations were still on her mind. Arundle tried to concentrate on today's lecture of the basic course 'Get to Know Yourself' that had gathered once more in compilation of the sub-circles, thus six Professors climbed up the pedestal, just as the clock stopped ringing.

Moschus Mogoleya's intense gaze made Arundle feel weak and helpless all of a sudden. After all, he was a Professor and she only a little student in her first year.

She stiffened her neck while she thought of the marvellous experience they had had down under. Without that push, she would never have tried. Both she would never forget.

As soon as she got a chance, Arundle presented the results of their little task group. The late experience confirmed their findings

unexpectedly. Thus, she was quite happy that Tibor saved their notes, while she had been away.

She started her little summary with Corinia's objection against the Tree of Life, and based all of their criticism on her initiative.

"She may as well tell you herself", Arundle said as she meant it a good idea, if she didn't do the presentation all by herself. She looked at her friends, who stuck together as usual. Corinia looked back, somewhat bewildered.

"Well, you know, don't you..." she tried again but couldn't help it. The decisive hint seemed to be gone with the wind, since they had been carried away, before they almost drowned. Had she suffered, did the lack of oxygen damage her brain, or did her close encounter with her friend Boetie, the mermaid, keep her still occupied and erased all other options?

The mermaid - that was it! Corinia remembered.

"Right, the mer folk, where are the naiads and nixes on that graph, that was our basic question. The Tree of Life is incomplete..."

"...And anthropocentric as well", her sister added. They both remembered now.

"The mer people are missing on the Tree of Life, that was the beginning of our objections", Arundle picked up her friends remarks. The students in the hall didn't look as if they understood or realized what a fundamental criticism that was. Therefore, Arundle explained in detail what she meant, while Scholasticus had the graph exposed on the overhead projector. She then pointed at the respective zone next to the strong branch of fish and was way back on the Tree of Life, a couple of Million years behind the mammals. While the most advanced beings, were here the whales and dolphins, but they weren't fish by origin but repatriated at a later date. On their level, you could find even the early *Homo erectus*¹⁰ emerging, but below sea level, the Tree of Life stagnated over Millions of years. On the graph, the fish remained almost on the same evolutionary stage, while sharks represented the most perfect species, but with a low intellectual capacity.

"You see what we mean: the branches and twigs were cut off the Tree of Life voluntarily..." Arundle said by pointing at the respective areas.

"Or the biologists and anthropologists didn't know how to proceed..." Florinna objected.

"That isn't logical at all..." Arundle agreed.

Yes, because life never stands still", Corinia added, who now recalled the whole afternoon, although she hadn't been able to remember at first.

¹⁰ lat. Man up risen on two feet

Tibor nodded somewhat confused. Since the accident, he had avoided contact. Thus, they hadn't had the opportunity to speak with him face to face - none of them. Did his Tutor forbid him to contact them?

Right now, he explained, together with Corinia, where the treetops were cut; and while they did, Tibor shook off his confusion.

"Millions of years disappeared that way and were cut off just like that; stagnation instead of evolution was the result. I wonder who or what forced the scientists to such conclusions", he asked and looked around somewhat challenging.

"The Tree of Life, as it is presented, is but a clear-cutting", Arundle picked up the thread – "you can see by a simple example. Take a tree in the backyard – where I lived, there was a tree of that kind. If you go on cutting off the tips, as my father did, in order to have more light, then you noticed how the tree tried to grow on the highest possible level, and after some years it looked like a brush. The new twigs erected straight up on the same level. If we now compare the big nature with the scissors of my father, then we see a similar effect."

Gradually the audience realized what the demonstration was about. Life had no reason to stand still at the junctions and avoid the challenges and hardships of the physical existence. In fact, that was by definition impossible, as answers were always demanded. Those individuals, who found the answers, were the able ones, bound to survive and reproduce themselves consequently. They were fitter, more intelligent, with better senses or other suitable devices helping them to manage better in the habitat than other species of the same kind.

"Life cannot stand still, nor can the evolution. Evolution means development in favour of the better-adjusted beings. The graph is offending this simple basic law of life, as you can see. Life never stood still, no matter what the graph suggests. What we see here is not the true Tree of Life. Therefore we must create the true Tree of Life, a Tree that is going to look rather different from this one."

While Arundle was presenting her findings, from the Board of Scholars reluctant utterances of agreement were heard, except for one, who kept on shaking his head or gave other signs of disagreement.

When Arundle ended - the audience in the Hall applauded frenetically, whether everybody understood the consequences of what was said, could well be doubted. Thus, even Moschus Mogoleya, who had been the one opponent, gave his enemy a – as he thought it – fair hand. That is he tapped his fingertips together, in a somewhat coxcomed manner.

Still Arundle noticed the negative vibrations from his side. He could not hide his hatred to her. Nevertheless, she was alone, without proof and evidence.

She felt carried away by the applause and pushed such notions aside when Scholasticus confirmed her findings.

“Well then, we have to create another Tree of Life – the True Tree of Life, to be precise; a Tree of Life, which can explain, how Walter could become a Were-Man, as that is the true challenge.”

“Simple as that – it’s a matter of perspective. Which perspective do we take? That is the answer. Here in the graph this is getting very clear. The humans take the perspective of the Homo sapiens of course. They look backwards and consider – this is the way Homo sapiens developed. Here is the level of the primates, and that is the level of the mamals in general, competing with the pre-mamals. Thus, it goes on via birds, amphibians, insects, spiders, worms and the primordial mono-cellulars – well, did I overlook anything of greater importance, well, of course I did. As long as I made myself clear, I don’t mind.

Is this proceeding legitimate? Does it picture the evolution, as it was? Of course not! If we look at the Tree of Life like that, we skip the real circumstances, and we distort proportions. If somebody else took his view, let’s say from the treetop of the mer-folk, the Tree of Life would be of a very different shape and emphasis.

Let us consider therefore Walter’s Tree of Life. As it does not exist, we have to draft it. What are our basic assumptions? First, we find Walter on the level of our time. We have to accept him of course as he is, no matter how singular he may appear...”

Arundle talked and argued, Millions of years passed by back and forth, and did not stick to the theoretical assumptions, which should go with them. Often was the egg invented before the hen was evolved on the one hand, while on the other mamals were supposed to lay eggs on the contrary. Still her elocution was somewhat sound. Most of the students were drifting off nevertheless, while that voice sounded soft and low at their unconsciousness, where it was recorded in the selective manner the human mind is working idle.

Things were clear so far, anyway. Who cared about details? Scholasticus was not to be satisfied all that easy. He waggled his head meaningfully, but Grisella stubbed his leg under the desk. His criticism at this stage meant killing good intentions in friendly fire.

Arundle put all her emphasis into the lecture. She wanted to convince but only one person, who didn’t believe her right from the start and that was Moschus Mogoleya. He demonstrated his scepticism maliciously, thus teasing her further and further. Had he settled back like the others and let her go, her spirit had long elapsed. Now she was building fragile constructions storey-by-storey, bolder curves and leaner stairs, and filigree embroidery as only the white unicorns of nowhere land may show the

gifted on the verge of eternity; thus presenting a rather breathtaking sight, like a house of cards that the blow of the slightest wind could destroy just like that.

Arundle knew about the weaknesses of her constructions. Facts could not be altered for the sake of a brilliant idea. The junctions, offered by the traditional Tree of Life, had not been put voluntarily at the place they were. Everything had to prove substance on the time-scale, which indeed was Arundle's biggest problem. If she moved by the fraction of an inch, she moved hundreds and thousands of years in reality – perhaps further than the known history of mankind.

Arundle endured the time until the end of the lesson, perhaps a little less convincing but still with bravery, despite the little weaknesses. The lesson was over before the obligatory discussion commenced, some of the spectators were eager to get started, first of all Moschus Mogoleya. While the well-known ringing of the bell indicated the end of the morning session and lunchtime, thus Arundle was saved from unanswerable questions and nasty remarks; she would not have been able to tackle. Instead, the knocking knuckles of the multitude, which showed their agreement and respect, raised her spirit.

Pride and satisfaction shone in her face, the knocking knuckles meant so much more to her than the general applause by clapping hands, thus she almost felt like having reached her aim in life. All of a sudden, such aim shone up before her inner eye and it was her own aim at last.

What could the malicious sight of Moschus Mogoleya harm her? He had been following her lecture, but had she been able to convince him? Would he be generous enough to accept that he had done her wrong? That she was the person she pretended to be. That she was no monster, which killed for jealousy?

Arundle tried to imagine what it looked like inside of Moschus Mogoleya, and she felt depressed. Her triumphs made him lock up and harden his prejudices. What could she do? What ever she tried, she would not be able to help him out of his prejudices. The change had to come from another side. Subjugation and flattering words was not her cup of tea. She wanted to impress and convince, that seemed her to be the only way. She did not see another one.

19. The Animations' Blue

When it came to travelling then Penelope M'gamba was hoisting her true colours with heart and soul, so to speak. Different from most other travellers, she was herself enough then; she did not depend on other means

of travelling. Her soul arose much lighter and certainly not bothered or disturbed as her aerial embodiment, which needed special attention and specific arrangements; none of the least was the eclipse of the moon. While the soul was invisible for the human eye - not so was the griffin. Therefore, she avoided flying over inhabited land, because she risked life and limb.

Not only hunters and trappers lured there everywhere, but also airliners and helicopters that threatened with deadly suction and smashing rotor blades. Any encounter with a griffin would cause severe damage on both sides.

The limited operative opportunities were of course a pity for such a mighty monster, and so it happened that she did not experience anything worth mentioning – never ever met she other griffins. She did not even know if there were others left or if she was the only one.

Travelling by soul however was easy. The soul could start without preparation at any time. In a few moments it overcame large distances, rounded the globe as fast as the light, although it could not see, what was going on underneath; therefore such mode suited for the approach only. You did not bother with preliminaries and got right where you wanted.

Meanwhile Penelope was more detached though. She did not feel the old greed any more, which overwhelmed her in former times. Now she was travelling above the ant-like people, looking at them and their more or less meaningful movements, and did no longer bother interfering into the course of things. You could do so little – that was the conclusion she had drawn of a long Animator's life.

Souls are not made for this world. They have little to do in here. For souls, there is no suitable place. Nobody wants them. They are disturbing and therefore they are often pushed aside rudely. At the same time, they are so vulnerable, and that is perhaps their greatest weakness – at least in the struggle of existence. On the other hand, this weakness becomes the greatest strength, but that does not mean very much, as long as souls are bound to the earthly wrapper.

The reason, why flying souls are so hard to spot, is due to the enormous speed with which they are travelling. Even when souls are dwelling in self-related reflections, the ordinary eye cannot spy them. This is caused by the colour. Souls have the same colour as Ether, thus they are perfectly adjusted to their background, as the blue of the souls equals to the blue of the Ether. The spectator's eye sees and sees not, as the blue of the Ether is overruling.

Therefore, you could assume that souls are not so well covered in bad weather, but on such days souls take advantage of their transparency, as they are like jellyfish or glass, or like the surface of deep water where the sky is reflecting. You seldom find water without the sky in nature,

therefore, we can hardly say, whether the sky is letting the blue to the water. With souls, it is the same though.

Animators - to cut it short – owe a blue aura. Their souls can show occasionally, which are otherwise hidden in the people's living hearts, while looking out of their eyes in moments of great passion and dear love.

Souls are too delicate for this world - therefore they must hide. Some people assume that there are no souls on earth, but they are luckily a minority.

Animators are in the merry state, (or perhaps it should read – in the singular state) of freeing their souls occasionally from the physical prison of the body, and have them roam, as it is the true destiny of a soul.

Roaming is the greatest for any soul. Everywhere souls wish to be going, no way is too wide, and no lane is too low. Curious are they and witty though, but clever they are not – still always stunned and ready for piety, and open towards the unknown. Therefore, the saying goes 'she is a soul of a woman'.

Penelope M'gamba was such 'a soul of a woman'. Her soul had all the freedom, you can imagine. Her soul had sown its wild oats, so to speak, and had seen almost everything that justified a glance in this world. It had put its witty nose into a hundred thousand affairs (most of them not meant for her proprietor.)

Penelope's soul had become almost wise, and came along with her brain all right now, which was an advantage for both sides. Penelope's soul still tended to run into impossible situations, while her brain got lost in soulless wastelands without the protective assistance of the other.

Professor M'gamba developed an entirely new concept containing her experiences in order to deliver the special abilities of the Animators. Thus, she practised for example Geography and Botany, as well as Sociology, by sending her students on soul-excursions, with the respective emphasis. The students managed to collect a lot of material that was later sorted and weighed in lesson. Even language studies were possible that way. The material collected was sometimes somewhat simple or even misleading, as the souls were interested and stimulated by other than the wanted aspects of the subject, and then it was the duty of the brain to set things in order and separate the chaff from the wheat. Be it as it may - the method turned out to be very successful and determined the studies of the Animators at present.

Penelope M'gamba had learnt from the Somnians, as they had started to exploit their special abilities for schooling - be it that the pupils put their vocabulary records under the pillow or fell in trance while in lesson, in order to familiarize with subjects of interest or of plight on the curriculum.

The success of the Somniors was not the least motivation for Penelope M'gamba to look for a similar method and do likewise. Still there was some irritation amongst those who were not privileged either way. Now only the Sublimations and the Conversors, - limited in number though and therefore all the more fishy, - were the ones, who had drawn the ass-card, so to speak. They hopelessly toiled and tilled, and did still not see beyond their narrow horizon. The situation was frustrating though for them and for their teachers, who did not see a chance for them either.

What could be done for the minorities involving them likewise into such processes of super-learning? That was the question.

A respective proposal came from Moschus Mogoleya but did not hit the point though. He asked for a General Meeting, which he got. There he made an official application for 'the Prohibition of Illegitimate Methods of the Acquisition of Knowledge' (in short PIMAK). The 'PIMAK-Act' was then to become implemented as the 'Third Amendment to the General Agenda' (3rd AGA) - the School of Inbetween based on.

The Headmistress wondered what the first and the second amendments were, and asked a pause to check with her representative, Vice-Headmaster Adrian Humperdijk, but he had not the faintest idea either, what the 1st and 2nd AGA was, while they both knew of course, what the 'General Agenda' was. Everybody knew that who was present, it was the constitution of the school every applicant received prior registration.

"Before we come to such a grave and severe step I strongly recommend looking at the problem the other way round. I would like all of you to sway in on such beneficial course", the Chairwoman suggested. She looked as if she had something in mind.

"Yes dear, the question is, what could be done to include both minorities into such processes of learning", the Headmistress agreed.

Should success be retreated, because others did not participate? The favoured students could not be brainwashed. The method once published could not be erased and abolished again.

The only chance lay ahead. The question then was how to involve the minorities into such super learning processes. "There must be a way", Penelope wondered - "Somehow, it should be possible to involve the Conversors and the Sublimations likewise."

Their focus would not necessarily be the same. It was a fact already that Somniors and Animations did not procure likewise. While the Somniors favoured languages, the Animations did well in sciences. Perhaps there were other ways still?

"How can we stimulate similar processes? That is the question. It works fine with me though", Penelope thoughtfully said, as she combined two colours, red and blue and the appropriate talents as well.

“Can we stimulate similar processes?” the Headmistress asked once more. “Is there a possibility of pouring the blue of the Animations over the minorities?”

Penelope M’gamba owed such benefits already, but did not remember how she happened to have it obtained; perhaps she was born that way.

“We must try something”, Marsha felt helpless. “Perhaps a dream seminar for everybody would do, similar to the basic course ‘Get to Know Yourself’.”

The Vice-Headmaster supported her idea; after all, he was her husband, although he was doubtful about the success. The other suggestion of over pouring with Animations’ blue on the other hand seemed him all too mysterious though.

Both suggestions focussed on substantial alterations. Marsha and Penelope wanted to widen the world of the disadvantaged in their sense.

Own ideas, how to alter their state, did neither come to the Convertors’ nor to the Sublimators’ minds, while the latter widened their horizon in flight at last.

The Convertors insisted in their singular experiences. Nobody was able to understand the physical and psychological state of being of their host animals better than they did, or was able to experience the free nature and the nature of pure being comparably intense.

The suggestions of the Marsha and Penelope meant however, that such characteristics had to be altered to a certain extend or might have to be given up altogether. The afflicted might even lose their identity by picking up strange techniques.

20. Dean Moschus Mogoleya

The managing school board saw the threatening separation with growing sorrow. While the recent murderous attempts on some of the members, whether true or not, were spreading a climate of anxiety already, the disadvantaging of the minorities poured new fuel into the flames of mistrust and hypocrisy.

The accident of the three girls could as well be seen as the tip of an iceberg, and had been the reason for several emergency meetings shortly after the return of the Convertors. The Headmistress nevertheless called in on Adrian and Penelope, who felt both much better this time as nothing had happen on the island.

Both of them had always a bad conscience because they disappeared as soon as they had delivered their cargo – Penelope in the air and Adrian under water. In the contrary - Adrian felt better this time, as there were others at last, clearly indicating that they shared his preference. He dearly hoped they were by his side from now on. Would they become true Convertors then?

Penelope relieved him from the burden of responsibility for the island of the Convertors, as she promoted the new regulation of the so-called ‘Objective Guards’, although he did not favour such a solution, because it put the responsibility in the hands of laymen. He was still brooding over a better way.

However, other worries awaited them. The murderous attempt during the previous eclipse of the moon did not remain unnoticed. Marsha waved with a bundle of letters in front of Penelope and Adrian’s noses, which all referred to the ongoing topsy-turvy. “Top secret” she said and closed the Headmistress’ office door behind them.

They had to answer inconvenient questions. Especially Penelope as a new staff-member had to justify her methods, although she felt as innocent as the others. The climate had suffered, while lessons went on regular so far. The emphasis of the term’s first weeks was gone. One pupil - his parents wrote - missed his ‘good old Boarding School’ desperately. His new comrades, the letter said, were but ‘arrogant lunatics and the teachers lacked authority as well as competence.’

“We are in serious trouble”, was the Headmistress’ comment on that. “The evil comes in from within – not from the outside. Competition, ill will, righteousness and envy are poisoning the community. What can we do? Where is the origin?”- The Headmistress asked and looked questioning and desperate into the eyes of the two heads of the Convertors respectively the Animators, as Penelope was in charge of both faculties. Marsha was almost as grey in her face as her aura was.

Poor Marsha – Adrian had best taken her into his arms, but he contented himself with patting her back quietening. “We will handle that, as we handled so much already, together we can...”

“Yes let’s shoulder the load”, Penelope agreed and pushed her mighty body forward. “I think, I have an idea of how to tackle such negative tendencies. We need a joint ribbon that embraces all of us, thus we get rid of such strange competitive pressure that had come up.”

“I see what you mean”, Marsha said. “There are good hints. With delight, I noticed Tibor making friends with the three girls, no matter what happened later. That is a beginning. We do understand each other as well, despite the colours we represent.” Marsha felt much better, now that she

did not have to carry the heavy load alone. Those letters had hit a nerve. In her mind, she saw the school being shut down and her lifework destroyed.

“The letters refer to very close discernments and go far beyond the level of information we share with our students. I cannot help it, but there is another force involved, and that is not a good one though, - on the contrary...” Adrian thoughtfully said. “I feel like being spied out, while everything that we did was turned into something bad.”

“Yes, we have to tackle both ends at the same time”, Penelope agreed. “Find the leak and help the children to form a real community...”

“...And pick up with the majority...”

“... While I thought we had solved the trouble by exhorting the Misieriors once and for all...”

“I’m afraid not”, Penelope answered – “don’t be naïve. Do you really believe such nonsense of the accident of the three girls? That was no accident. I don’t trust this Assistant Professor...”

“Right you are”, Marsha agreed – “if he is like that - his days are counted.”

“Perhaps he is haunted – that would explain his behaviour”, Adrian said with a meaningful glance.

“Tibor is rather upset since Moschus Mogoleya advanced to the head of the Sublimations, and his fellow students no less. Before, the four of them were such a nice happy folk.”

“Only when it comes to the dancing with the wind the four gain the attention and agreement they long for, otherwise it looks quite different”, Marsha remembered.

Adrian and Penelope nodded. “There are so many aspects and all of them must be considered.”

They went silent for a short while, then Adrian picked the thread up again: “Although Tibor is on the girls side, I recommend care. This time - be careful. We cannot risk any mistakes. What if it was really the wind? What if there was really no other solution but the chosen one? After all, Moschus Mogoleya was able to save his folk, and that he did not care about the rescue of the girls you cannot say either. The rescue-team was at the site already thirty minutes later. Besides, I was there with the mer-folk. - When it comes to the exact time, we only have the statement of Moschus Mogoleya. You cannot trust the girls. They were out of mind and had other things to bother than the time. They only know that it was getting dark already when they plunged into the sea at the first place.”

“Well, that is something at last”, Marsha grabbed for the straw – “sunset would be deductible though on that day, and then we know the crucial time.”

“I did check”, Adrian replied. “What Moschus Mogoleya said, fits exactly with sunset, there is nothing to criticise.”

“Well then, Moschus Mogoleya might be innocent, as far as the girls are concerned – let’s take that for granted for the time being – still he definitely is spoiling peace and is sowing bad feelings, whenever he opens his mouth. What makes him be like that? Why is he so nasty? Is it because his students cannot keep up with their fellows? Which is of course a matter of the point of view, as they surely have their own subjects the others are incapable to follow.”

“Well”, Adrian pick up the thread “Moschus Mogoleya is not yet a full member of the staff, while he is here his second year. Others came later who made it right away. Of course that is a good reason for bad feelings, I would say.”

“You cannot compare apples with pears”, Marsha objected.

“That’s the way you see it, and I presume we all see it that way, but of course it can also be seen different”, her husband said, while Penelope, who was one of the privileged, nodded thoughtfully.

“Anyway, I think I do not betray a secret when I assume him to be jealous and envious”, Adrian insisted –

“...Might have to do with their physical appearance, though - they are all fly-weights – those Sublimatiors...” Penelope agreed.

“He did not become a full member of the staff, because of his behaviour”, the Headmistress answered and her husband backed her up when he said, “we do have a responsibility and the peace on the island is sacred to us. One foul apple is more than enough, I would never have thought of such an effect. We felt too sure...”

“Many things came together”, Marsha went on, “we cannot blame Moschus Mogoleya alone for the negative turn our community experienced. He was but one factor.”

“An important one, though...”

“What shall we do now? Perhaps things had developed differently, had he not taken over the prosecution in the trial against Arundle”, Penelope objected.

“He asked for the job”, Martha answered, “and he got the job. We were all happy because nobody wanted to do it.”

“We should have discussed the matter then”, Martha agreed. - “Now it is too late. You should have told us your objections then, it is too late now anyway, Adrian...”

“Don’t argue, please, no argument between you.” Penelope lifted her arms persuasively and Marsha ducked involuntarily as well as Adrian. Penelope emitted thus a mighty load of power by her sheer presence. Perhaps that power could be used.

“I wonder whether you could have a word with Moschus Mogoleya. I am sure he will listen to you.” Adrian was enthusiastic about that idea: “Right, that’s it, you are going to pamper him and convey our appreciation and that of the whole board of teachers. That will probably break the ice. As soon as you feel the time has come, then you offer him a promotion. We need a Dean for the Sublimations as well. This position is still vacant. This might help soothing his temper...”

“And you are going to talk to the children, Adrian, they are still out of their minds, and explain them everything. Make sure Arundle understands the facts, the wind and all that...”

“There is still the pending amendment stuff, Moschus brought in the other day – very official though - PIMAK - he called it: to be exact - 3rd AGA of the PIMAK. - Wow! We must find a solution for that rubbish as soon as possible, without ruining the identities of the Convertors and Sublimations of course. I am still in favour of the Animations’ Blue, and I think I have a method of how to use it”, Penelope said.

“The ice is thin we are stepping on. He could still be haunted. We just don’t know enough about Malicious Marduk, and the way he employs disciples”, Marsha objected and Adrian agreed: “Yes, we might as well set the fox to keep the geese, if we promote that guy. I have no idea what it looks like in his forlorn soul...” and gave Penelope a questioning look. “When it comes to souls I know what I’m talking about, you can leave that to me. No soul can hide deep enough I would not see through. I can tell you, if that Moschus was not clean, I would have noticed. He is disturbed though. Therefore, I would love to build him up. He did a good job as prosecutor, although we did not like his approach. Nobody did, and that of course filled him with bitterness. It would be strange if it had been otherwise. He surely believed in what he stood for.”

The Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster looked at each other full of surprise. They had never looked at the trial that way. While that might have been the prosecutor’s fault and clumsiness, was he still no conspirator who sought revenge after his defeat. The accident over the open sea could as well have been put on stage in order to make him look guilty - by the same dark force that almost killed Tika.

“Arundle is still convinced, as she had heard that voice”, the Headmistress objected.

“Yes, but didn’t she tell us that Malicus Marduk is known for his ability to hide, did he not imitate even her father’s voice?” Penelope answered. It was high time to have a clearing word with the girl as well.

“Yes”, the Vic-Headmaster added “we should not let the wind out of our considerations. What, if someone was hiding in the wind?”

“...Or some voice...” Penelope agreed.

“Right, that would be the answer, but how can we prove it?” Marsha said – “...besides, I would like to find out why Tibor is drawn towards the three.” - Marsha had the disadvantaging of the minorities in mind, as that had been the ignition for their meeting. They might get further that way. Friendship was the most solid band. It would be all too nice if Tibor had found the key of the mystery.

21. Things go wrong

The community was thus kept busy in a breathtaking manner. The murderous attempts, the exorcism of the daemons and a strange mode of competition amongst the students had broken in and spoiled the former peaceful idyll.

The small sorrows of everyday life could hardly prevail though. There was the furniture from Germany for example, - that is; there was no furniture – three containers were missing with all of the Slyboots’ property and a little by-load for Arundle, her mother had packed, when Mr Waldschmitt cleared her room in order to install another office.

Repeated requests to the shipping company and the railways did not lead anywhere, the containers were not found. Amadeus and Dorothea did their best to arranging a homely home for their families with the limited means available on an island. They did not even have enough clothes.

“How can three huge containers disappear?” wondered Intellectus, Grisella’s clever son, she was so proud of.

Dorothea’s marriage with Scholasticus remained childless yet. All the trouble with the big move first, the packing and all that; the house had to be sold, all kinds of vaccinations refreshed or rejected, documents of all kind and for almost everything. In fact, their move was considered as an emigration by the authorities; neither Dorothea nor Amadeus had been fully aware of that.

Dorothea kept on hoping from month to month but in vain. Intellectus did not find new friends, and was homesick, while he still insisted that he enjoyed the beautiful summer, as back home the weather was unpleasant – wet and cold, and muddy as well, just like it used to be in winter.

If he was honest with himself he admitted that he did not like the heat, and he could not get rid of that boxed in feeling either, because the island was so small.

Christmas was in sight, but what a Christmas! When he thought of Christmas, he could not stop the tears. What would his friends do now? Did they go skiing as they intended? Had he only had his own room with his

own books and things – the toys not to forget he was too old for now, but still loved them so dearly.

They had given up so much, and what had they won? Amadeus, his father, was all on his side. He would have loved to return the sooner the better. They were waiting for months now and nothing happened except for that regular call, when a friendly voice regretted that nothing had changed on the furniture front.

No wonder though, that father and son were dreaming of a white Christmas with Christmas tree and candle lights, gingerbread and Christmas corals.

It was too late for such yearning. Had Intellectus set foot at school after all, but the gap between him and his classmates was too wide. He was a full head shorter in length and three years younger. However mentally he was the most advanced, which earned him not only admiration but envy as well.

Jealousy was a well-known faculty over here, he realized. – At last, there were Arundle and her friends, whom he knew for a long time. His personal worries shut him off the general trouble all about him, the community was bothered with; he was so busy with himself, that the murderous attempts, the fighting and bullying everywhere went by unnoticed, while the trouble of his father and aunt Dorothea with the furniture infested him likewise.

He understood neither his mother anymore, nor uncle Scholasticus. Why did they not mind their family's trouble? They enjoyed living between cardboard boxes and trunks, it seemed, and would not have noticed such unacceptable living conditions without their spouses' yammer.

"It is not all that bad", he heard his uncle holler – "they have nice table-ware over here. I do not know what you mean, Dorothea", he used to say to his wife while lifting an item they had borrowed from the cantina to show what he meant.

As if it was that easy - but thus they were, these intellectuals – formalities did not bother them. They lived in their own world and there they had other priorities than tableware and armchairs or make-up utensils, not even underwear seemed to mind them.

"It's so warm over here all the more now in summer", his uncle said and grinned, while his wife mentioned this problem. Nevertheless, in the next helicopter from Sydney there was a big pack of underwear for all.

Intellectus, although bound to be member of the illustrious circle of his mom and uncle, stood on his father's and aunt Dorothea's side, nevertheless.

*

The containers were not found. Three big containers full of furniture and household goods, somewhere on the way from Frankfurt to Bremerhaven and from there to Sydney – lost just like that without a trace. They were standing about somewhere, forgotten on a pier or at a railway station and nobody cared - perhaps with the wrong labelling or accompanied with a false waybill. No telegrams back and forth could help, nor detailed reports listing all items soberly.

The insurance became involved, and the regulation went on and led to the overdue process of refunding at last. As soon as the insurance would pay, the Slyboots could forget about their property forever. Nothing would be left to remind them of their past. For Intellectus it was his childhood and not all the money in the world could buy it back.

Both beautiful flats remained scarcely furnished meanwhile. Only the most necessary had been purchased in Sydney, as there had still been hope to get things back. This was another reason why Dorothea and her brother-in-law found it extremely difficult to become acquainted to the new environment. The whole climate caused the trouble. It was the social climate more than the cold they were missing now in the advent and at Christmas - as this is the time when people get together to feel the warmth of a dear community.

Like an invisible wall the extraordinariness enclosed all those chosen ones and excluded the normal people, and gave them the feeling of uselessness – necessary, but burdensome.

Other relatives tried to smuggle through that invisible wall, but that was not the style of Dorothea and Amadeus. They didn't want to be special. They felt quite well in their skin – well, to be precise – they had felt well until the big move.

The permanent challenge, the perpetual glances for the extraordinary strained their nerves. You could see how easily conceit and arrogance were developing! Trouble therefore was everywhere – as everybody could see who was not blind on his right eye.

Just as all hope had gone to get back their property, they got the news that the containers had been found in the port of Travemuende. The wagon had been coupled to a wrong train. Why the wagon hadn't been sent back, nobody could say anymore, after the error had been noticed at last. – 'Might have been the hectic and workload around Christmas', the recipients were told.

It would now take another three weeks until they could lay hands on their beloved property, Amadeus and Dorothea found out. Thus, the provisional life had to go on for almost another month.

“Such a ship is two weeks under way and then all that reloading and the like...” Scholasticus tried to calm his wife down, who didn’t want to accept this further delay.

“They could as well load the stuff into an aeroplane. I think that is the least they could do after all that trouble...” Amadeus agreed to his sister-in-law. Grisella only shook her head. – “Who’s going to pay for that”, she asked. “Well, of course the company who is responsible for the mess?”

The professors left shrugging and passed over a few yards to the main building close by. Had Amadeus and Dorothea not insisted in cooking their own meals, they would of course have been able to dine in the cafeteria as well. Thus it happened that Scholasticus more than once had to eat twice, when he could not resist having lunch with his colleagues and while he had, all of a sudden remembered that his wife was waiting with a fine meal as well.

“The few steps are no problem. This is what you say yourself”, Dorothea countered, when he committed that he could not have resisted once more, or shovelled in a second load. Dorothea enjoyed the comfort of the little siesta afterwards and so did Scholasticus. On the other hand, the lunch break was the ideal opportunity for informal talks amongst colleagues as well. Many decisions were brought on the way and if he was not there, things started without his agreement.

In fact, Dorothea hit the nail on the head – the climate in the teachers’ board was dominated by competition. This is what Grisella and Scholasticus didn’t notice at first and didn’t want to notice as soon as they realized the cruel facts. The first shining faded like mist on a spring morning in the strengthening sunlight.

At latest after the unlucky negotiations about Arundle’s dismissal from school, they realized the strong opposition hefty and discomfortingly.

Amadeus and Dorothea were of course involved. They knew about the Somniors and Animations. Even the exorcism remained not hidden, nor of course, the great fire connected with it. Therefore, they felt the Conversors rather spooky. “Aren’t they like Werewolves?” – Amadeus wanted to know, scared as he was. He had read that they ambushed people and sucked their blood.

“Aren’t those vampires?” - his little son asked back in an air of knowing better.

“The little island so close by is in any case far too near”, his father insisted. “Yes, what, if they come over here in their odd condition?” – Dorothea assisted.

Thus perplexing their spouses, who didn’t know how to handle such common sense stupidity. As if they didn’t have enough trouble already amongst their colleagues, where they at least received some acceptance.

How much flattery and even adulation there was, they didn't notice, however.

"As soon as the furniture has arrived, we are having a big party, and things may become sorted out", Dorothea hoped. She secretly made plans. Therefore, she involved Arundle and her two friends, who she trusted more than many adults in the meantime.

Grisella and Scholasticus were too important to become involved or criticised for that, as they headed the scale of light, and that was indeed most outstanding. Their status as Divinations made them sacrosanct. That was no good at all. They lost contact to the ground and their common judgement suffered even more so as unexplainable events occurred, which eventually looked like old-fashioned struggles for ranking and status.

First, there was the assault on the Convertors' Island, where Tika was hurt so badly, then Walter was converted into a 'Wereman', and the pigs died in the fire. The furniture from Germany got lost on the way, while Arundle and her friends almost drowned in the sea, being saved only incidentally.

Thus, the climate of mistrust grew and kept on growing, no matter whether the girls made the best out of their adventure later on. Nobody trusted the others; mistrust was the base of communication, - some even doubted in their own selves.

Arundle didn't keep her mouth shut. Whether asked for her opinion about Moschus Mogoleya or not - she said what she thought of him. All the more though, as such a person was now due to become Dean of the Sublimations.

Scholasticus was on her side as well. "There we set the fox the keep the geese", he remarked to Grisella who agreed: "I wonder what strange ideas the Board led. I wasn't asked. At least I can't remember."

"Well, the last word has not been spoken yet", Scholasticus confirmed.

Wherever you looked, there they were – peculiarities, wrong decisions, and threadbare manoeuvres. Almost nobody plainly said what the case was. Everybody, so it seemed – had to hide something and couldn't speak open. "Not now" they said or "perhaps later" – and then nothing happened.

The accident of the girls was not yet fully digested, when the next misfortune occurred. Peter Adam had broken a leg. He was lying in hospital in Toronto. "Won't be able to travel in the near future, it's a complicated herniatomy", it was said. "It's dangerous, even to a young healthy man like him", the physician announced. "The long term consequences are the risk."

Thus, Scholasticus had to manage without an assistant, and Grisella couldn't question him in front of the Council for the photos from the intergalactic rogues gallery. There was still a lot to be clarified. After all Peter Adams had as well dealt with the Laptopia-project. Besides, they still had to find out how Malicius Marduk had come to these photographs.

Therefore, the lost furniture arrived long before Peter Adams. The last leg went by air finally, but what a manoeuvre! The containers were shipped - as they were -through wind and rain by helicopter in the open.

While unpacking, the eager recipients noticed what had happened. The furniture had suffered so badly, that it was practically worthless. Most likely, the lengthy stay in the open in snow and ice caused severe damage, or was it the rough airlift in the end?

Thus, the paperwork with the insurance company had to start all over again. Scholasticus and Grisella insisted to keep the replacement as low priced as possible, for what reason ever and upset their spouses anew. In the end, the School decided to carry the main part of the final costs.

Amadeus almost got a nervous breakdown when he realized the extend of damage. Even Intellectus, who often was on his father's side, thought him to overdo, while Grisella felt a wave of tenderness floating through her breast. Still she had to consider the financial situation of the school that was not the best after the occurrences and the following expenditures for stalls and stables and so forth.

Two boats were out of order or finally broken, most likely those which had been stolen. Whether the thieves poured sugar into the engines could not be verified but the holes in the hull, spoke a quite clear language. Although the Conversiors could be responsible as well, when they altered their appearance too early and wildly banged about with claws and hooves.

The boats had to become repaired in any case, as well as the shelter for the domestic animals. Considering all that, Dorothea managed to get a pretty nice sum for their own personal needs at last.

22. A delayed house warming party

Amadeus and Dorothea got their party at last. Right at New Years Eve; and it became a party as it should be, with fireworks and all that. The old bunch gathered and remained undisturbed by strange elements. Thus, they opened, and didn't shy from a plain word the further the evening went, partly due to the alcoholic beverages they consumed richly in the warm – almost tropical night. “No secrets in the New Year” was the unspoken

motto of the event and was underlined by a banner later, where it said precisely that, prepared by Dorothea and Amadeus the two hosts.

It was like in the good old days. Everybody spoke freely an openly what he or she had in mind or wanted to tell since long ago. That was a gay chatter at last! Intellectus was all enthusiastic and felt really at home for the first time; partly as well because of the familiar items of furniture and other that, in the end, turned out to be still useable at last.

With the help of the carpenter, more could be done than Amadeus or Dorothea had dared to dream. The able man even managed to save the precious veneer of the big dining table and Scholasticus' desk.

"That saves the school a lot of money" Scholasticus explained to the only new faces amongst the guests, who didn't know what things used to look like back home in good old Germany, that were Marsha and Adrian, who had of course been invited.

Arundle and her friends strolled through the garden and Intellectus couldn't make up his mind, whether to join them or stay with the adults, which made him goof back and forth. Billy-Joe had brought another newcomer, who was not familiar with the old German household either, and that was Tibor. However, he integrated so well, that nobody even noticed. Unfortunately there were practically no kids in the age of Intellectus who he felt like making friends. Intellectus was a complicated character quite like his mother though.

Grisella used the opportunity of having a frank word with the girls about him. She did it for Amadeus who felt the burden of parentage heavy on his shoulders. Intellectus was too clever for him and outran him more than once, thus he felt horribly incompetent and silly. While Grisella was too busy at school to intervene and care. Of course, Amadeus saw that, but couldn't help either. Therefore, they were looking for a wide range and long run solution.

The girls promised to take care of Intellectus. "We do have experience. Think of the little prince we raised", they proudly exclaimed, when they realized the merry glance in Grisella's eyes and two tears glittering in the eyes of Amadeus. "If you could do that", he sighed.

"I can take him for a swim, whenever there is time", Billy-Joe offered and Corinia nodded "So can I... who knows, in the end he enjoys the sub-water world as much as I do." Her late visit to Australis lay some days back already.

Grisella sighted at tenderly at her son. Which way would he develop? Sometimes she seemed to notice already some kind of aura in such an early state, but she could fail. It was not easy to evaluate children. Their talents were widespread. Mother's eyes saw things their own way. What they saw had often to do with a wishful dream.

It was Arundle, though, who confirmed, what Corinia had mentioned before. Intellectus showed a strong sea-bound notion. More than that, he was able to roam under water.

Adrian nodded quite satisfied and affirmative, when the girl pointed out Intellectus' maritime abilities. Perhaps he would not be alone then soon. Together with Corinia, they would probably form conversational sub-division. –“won't be all alone then anymore”, he figured with a merry smile. He somewhat felt alone over the years, no matter how warmly he always was welcomed.

“Intellectus is spreading the typical reddish under-water shimmer. Such as the corals do and that can be found nowhere else”, Corinia excitedly explained to his eager listening mother, while Adrian was nodding from afar, and made the proud mother redden heftily, as if she was due to converse right away, which was absolutely in her range. As a Divinator, she was in command of all the rainbow colours at once and free to select one way or the other.

Of course, she had to make up her mind. A new chapter could soon start. Nobody had to care about Corinia. She was going to manage quite well and head her pace, no matter whether her aura was kind of pale though: Just a reddish fume of grey, - still dominated by her mother's heritage. In interesting combination, that is, Grisella wondered.

“It is not easy to step out of the shade of an elder sister. That's what she is doing right now. She wants to become someone special; a character of her own, so it seems”, Adrian, who stepped by, thoughtfully commented.

Florinna did not feel any notion of following her little sister. “I am sorry, but I don't feel like converting. In fact, it really is a pity that Corinia is leaving me now after all those years together. We were two but one, joint in love and harmony for so long... Our mother is scared as well and pleaded her to think over twice before the final break.”

“Well, it is hard to remain in one's sister's shadow”, Adrian commented on Florinna's frustration.

“I'm sorry, I made up my mind. This short week down there was enough. I don't want to become involved in those strange affairs any deeper. Only think of their dining habits...”

Corinia felt guilty in a way, but didn't understand her sister either. “We are still Somnions, aren't we?” she asked pleadingly. Arundle tried to help her – “we've got to find our way – there is but one way of life and that is our own.”

“You must know, what you are doing”, Florinna insisted. Corinia didn't go on arguing. Somehow, she felt stronger now. Finally, she would step out of the shade of her older sister, and that was good. She had something on her own, that was only meant for her. A new pace leading

into nowhere land, where her sister was not waiting like in the past, who had arrived there the year before already, as she had done as long as Corinia remembered, just because she was one year older.

Things were even more complicated with Arundle. She felt the big change she just experienced. Since she was on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, her development took up speed. Where was she steering? The question bothered her more than the circumstances and dangers along with it, she now realized while those perils seemed to be banned.

Marsha and Adrian took the chance to talk about Moschus Mogoleya. They might not get such an opportunity again, so they asked their hosts whether they were allowed to present another guest to the party.

Neither Dorothea nor Amadeus had any objections, when they learnt who it was, and neither did their spouses as they appreciated Penelope M'gamba likewise. The two Divinations soon realized, why the Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster had asked for support. The theme was a delicate one. Should they promote Moschus Mogoleya? Was he the right Dean for the Sublimations?

As soon as the topic was raised, Scholasticus once more uttered his somewhat prejudicial proverb – as he saw it – about the fox and the geese, but could win little more but polite smiles with it. Before Marsha began to explain the matter in detail.

She herself thought the idea grotesque – now and here - with all these open-minded people around. “Penelope was able to help us a great deal making the decision that we have to make, - the sooner the better”, she said, while Penelope entered the scene. She did so like a movie star – not purposely though as she only passed through Dorothea’s gate with the evening’s motto written on it, which she noticed with an accepting little smile. At once, she stood in the middle and all eyes looked at the colourfully dressed figure, wrapped up in the typical fashion style of her home country.

Whom she did not heartily embrace or kiss on both cheeks, she at least shook hands or gently touched. She was a master of unpretentious gestures - psychologically seen a real expert – Grisella wondered once more. Both of them realized how closely their souls were related.

Penelope M'gamba was very willing to rehearse again, what she had discussed with the Humperdijks. She was able to make things look as plausible to the party as before to the Headmistress and the Vice-Headmaster. When she came to the question of Mogoleya’s part as prosecutor in Arundle’s trial she almost managed to convince everybody that he had acted not only correct but also honourable – from his point of view, no matter whether the public was against him.

Even Arundle was now not so sure anymore about his motivation. Penelope was able to show how closely truth and reality, believe and wishful thinking were related; and how easily someone could slip into a role like the one of the prosecutor in a tricky trial being confronted with a man of genius arguing as attorney of defence and a very witty prosecute, who strongly believed in what they stood for.

“Sympathy is often a question of prejudice. Believe me, we blacks know what prejudice means. It is a real curse. Those affected, suffer unspeakably, while the other side cannot become happy with their stubbornness. Well, this should be known by now, we are here amongst us”, she finished with a gentle smile and waved through the air as if she had to clean an invisible blackboard, where she had just written.

Grisella and Scholasticus looked at each other rather uneasy. What, if the decision of the Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster had been a wise one? Should Moschus Mogoleya get a chance?

“After all, we would have to convey such a step to our colleagues and the students. That could become difficult. Mogoleya is not well liked everywhere. Even his own folks question him”, Scholasticus said, and Arundle agreed:

“...Well, Tibor is now not so sure anymore whose voice he heard in the wind, deriding me before I was dropped. First, he was certain to have heard the voice of Moschus Mogoleya, but now he thinks the voice came with the wind, while the order in the strange tongue, concerning the rescue of the four Sublimations clearly came from Moschus. Tibor admits that the situation ran out of control. He just underestimated the force of the sea-bound wind.”

While she said that, Tibor stepped at her side. He nodded affirmatively. “All dancers since then are deeply concerned. We will never do that again - not in the evening and not so far away from solid grounds. We all don’t understand what we did to our guests.”

‘Did she herself was a victim of prejudices?’ Arundle wondered. Tibor’s explanation let things look different, no question about that! She didn’t like Moschus Mogoleya, but was that reason enough to block his career? It could well be that she conveyed her prejudices stemming from the trial. She had been so sure about the voice in the wind. The hateful voice resounded in her ear. The voice she had heard, she did not doubt, but where did it come from? There was another possibility, and the more she thought about it, the more likely it became. – Still, the measure overdid. Becoming Dean would get him cocky after all. He wouldn’t fit through any door anymore then, so to speak.

She looked at Tibor, who still stood next to her, while she was considering. Would the decision have this effect or was there another, more

hopeful trace? Did Tibor know better? He looked back questioning as well and shrugged. Then he lamely said – “might do him good and we don’t have any other teacher, as a matter of fact...” he then paused but continued after a short while. “Acceptance is, what we all need, not only our teacher. Yes, we do feel underprivileged, right from the start. Don’t ask me why. We feel so important and exceptional and just cannot stand the way we are treated by you.” Tibor formed a vast circle with his hand, demonstrating what he meant. “The new privileges you acquiring are wholly unacceptable. They are putting us way back once more. We just don’t see how we can pull up...”

Billy-Joe, who listened carefully to what his new friend said, nodded fiercely. He understood all too well, as he still struggled like mad to pick up, no matter how hard he worked. “You are right, Tibor, if you were born on the wrong side of the street, when you come out of the shade, there is no chance, not if you have to compete with those from the sunny side. They have taken the lead and will never give up their positions. How could they, its all in them already what makes the difference.”

Tibor gave him a thankful glance. Perhaps Billy-Joe overdid a bit. Since he was in the joint study group of the Tree of Life, he felt on top of the world for the first time.

“You are right, we have to work harder, but it’s not impossible after all – you know what I mean, dear friend”, he warmly addressed back and Billy-Joe understood.

A short while ago, Tibor had to see the Headmistress because of his success in the study group. Marsha interrogated and investigated back and forth, and up and down, but could not come to a satisfactory conclusion.

When she heard him speak now, she joined the circle that formed around him. Perhaps she got further that way, she thought. The answer may be found in the sympathy by which the new friends felt drawn towards each other.

Neither Tibor, nor the others could say where this sympathy came from. It hadn’t been there, right from the start, he knew all too well and so did Arundle, and the whole school. Something had changed later and changed their feelings from bad to good. They felt, as if a switch had been turned, without knowing why.

Arundle picked up the thread – “when we are together, we do not notice any special talents and gifts. We are doing something useful or sometimes just nothing. That’s the secret of our working group, I think.” She well knew that she was the locomotive and required the others as attentive listeners most of the time. Still the fact was, that without Tibor they wouldn’t have achieved the latest results, she had to admit. The

alteration of the Tree of Life had become possible only because of Tibor's brilliant idea.

"If I understand you right, you want to convey a very remarkable message", Penelope M'gamba interfered. - "Make people like Moschus Mogoleya feel important or even outstanding and you change their attitude, can we agree on that?" she asked and rolled her big dark eyes meaningfully. Nobody objected, and those who had had objections pushed them aside. All agreed that they should give the man a chance.

"Well then, we will have to take over the responsibility. Let's hope for the best. Don't let us down. We need your support, that is - Moschus Mogoleya needs your support."

"Yes, give him a chance", Scholasticus enthusiastically exclaimed, "he - like everybody - deserves it... let's keep in mind, we've got to overcome our prejudices... - all of us, not just the others... *alia iacta est*¹¹ - as the Latins said", he concluded. Resentments as there still were, had to be retreated. As soon as the decision was made public, there was no way back.

'You never put all aspects into consideration. Moschus Mogoleya remained a difficult character and theirs was now a sound heap of responsibility' - was the unspoken résumé. If only a sufficient number of colleagues carried the decision, then it would be already the better half of a victory.

The party went on. After such earnestness, the guests were all longing for gaiety and lightness. Tibor asked, if someone cared for a dance and was overrun by eager aspirants, who hardly managed more than two feet above the ground, but nobody minded.

When the Headmistress tried a round and even Penelope, who proved very talented despite her voluminous appearance, the mood exceeded conventional limits. Could they only bring Moschus Mogoleya into such a state, they wishfully thought. This was the key to the self of the Sublimators, and both women decided to use it wisely.

Even Dorothea and Amadeus, the hosts of the party felt at home - the little green goblin conquered their hearts at once. He didn't show the slightest trace of arrogance - pure lust of life it was that streamed out of his tiny black oblique eyes. Thus, the party became a real party at last. Dorothea put on her oldies, and soon the adults were dancing retrogressively woven into nostalgic memories on the small square of the terrace in front of the house. Cosily entangled, almost motionless - "Only to have a little rest after all that hurly-burly", Scholasticus whispered.

¹¹ The dice are thrown

Amadeus held Grisella in his arms, as if she was a precious Chinese porcelain puppet, while Scholasticus slang Dorothea all the more at him, and she voluptuously blossomed towards him in ready reply.

Marsha and Adrian didn't stand back, while the youth trained green whirls. "A little green is in all of us, more or less. You have to get rid of the fear. Fear is your greatest enemy when it comes to taking off..." - Tibor explained. Indeed, as Arundle had noticed before, it worked, if you really forgot about your groundedness. As soon as you started concentrating, you noticed your legs and feet filling with lead.

23. The Inauguration

It had an enormous effect, when Moschus Mogoleya became Dean of the Sublimations. The Headmistress tried sincerely to point out the advantages of the new Dean. What she said should comply with the truth on the one hand and convince the audience of the necessity of the measure on the other. She managed to close the yawning gap between those challenges not to the utmost satisfaction of everyone.

At last, only faint murmur in the fully filled alma mater¹² arose recently, when she overdid one way or the other. Thus, the inauguration took its path without serious disturbances.

Now, after it was official, Arundle felt somewhat dizzy in her head. "...And what if he had then had drop us purposely after all?" – she couldn't resist whispering into Tibor's ear, who was next to her, while leaving for the break after the ceremony; but Tibor only shook his head.

They then used the break to rehearse Arundle's doubts once more. Tibor explained in detail how the thermodynamics work. "First of all the magic air always has to comply with the natural jet streams. We rise and fall with the thermodynamics just like gliders. Air holes and fall winds can knock us to the ground just as easily. By means of the uprising air on beautiful days, we manage best. Something went wrong on the day of the accident. First, everything worked fine, almost too well for such a mighty payload. We whirled about like mad, and after a while, we were drunken of lust and sheer joy as it happens now and then – thus we didn't care for the risks anymore. I don't know whether you noticed the sudden drop in temperature – well, you should have, because it was remarkable though. It felt like the ice hand of death was reaching out for us, and I was scared to death and that was shortly before our teacher entered the scene.

¹² lat. Nursing mother – that is the centre of a University.

I'm sure he is right, if he hadn't interfered we all had fallen. In fact he was right, you turned out to be ballast – aerodynamic spoken, I mean of course. From his point of view, it was our only chance to let you go; and even then, it had been too late already, as the fall wind had us in its icy grip. Thus it was Moschus Mogoleya alone who got us out of the deadly stream, while taking care for himself not to become sucked into the deadly whirl himself.”

“What about the voice, I heard, Tibor? I still have it in my ear, a sardonic voice, close to my ear. The voice was sucked with malice and viciousness.”

“Are you sure to have heard his voice? Fact is he couldn't have got so close, because of the fall wind, Arundle.”

“Well, yes, I saw him rushing by like a black bat. He yelled at you and then you let us go. You let us really go...!”

Arundle was shrugging in disbelief. She was still unable to accept such a cruel fact. Tibor blushed and murmured something like feeling sorry and that he would never ever let her go again... “I'd rather be dying – I wasn't myself, I wasn't thinking – some kind of reflex, you know – we Sublimations stay away from water – well there are exceptions of course...”

Tibor's own brother wasn't able to swim. Large waters were practically unknown in their home, except for the rivers of course, but they weren't meant for swimming. Any flooding was always catastrophic and contained forces you better stayed away from.

“Those voices you heard – you said they were very close to your ear.”

Arundle nodded - “I felt like having them almost inside – but they came from without, quite clear.”

“Then there must have been someone else, a moody air-sprite perhaps, and he must have been rather upset. The question is what have the three of you to do with air-sprites.”

“What are air-sprites after all?” she asked before Tibor got a chance to answer. As Tibor spoke of them as if they were the most natural thing in the world and a solid figure in human life.

“Are there many air-sprites?” she insisted while Tibor still sorted out how to handle such a question. “How can you explain the most obvious?” he then asked back. Air-sprites were as natural for him and his folk as is the air they breathe. He couldn't think of a world without air-sprites, therefore he found it most difficult to find an answer.

“Air-sprites as the spirits of the winds, that is pretty obvious, I don't know how I should better explain...”

When he saw her bewildered face he said: “Air doesn't move by itself. There is a reason for everything; and the reason why the air is moving are the air-sprites. There are hot air-sprites and cold ones, tender

spring-sprites and peaceful evening-sprites. There are the scaring night-wind-sprites and the cruel storm-sprites, the horrible hurricane-sprites and the malicious fall wind sprites...”

Arundle heard enough – “There are sprites for all possible winds. Is that what you want to tell me?” Tibor nodded. “That’s absolutely correct – the winds are like the sprites. It is their character that brands the wind. Moody are they all - you can never rely on them. They often only introduce an upcoming doom...”

“That is not just superstition, I understand, you do believe in what you say. Did you ever take into consideration that you mix cause and effect?”

Tibor looked at her stunned, and didn’t know how to deal with such a funny attitude. Then he shrugged and turned away, clearly signalling that the conversation was done. While Arundle noticed what had happened she tried to turn in. “Your assumption is not at all mistaken. The basic assumption of the Existential-Philosophy clearly says *Nihil est sine ratione* – there is nothing without reason...”

“That’s what I say, I know, why the winds are blowing, and I know, why they are blowing the way they are blowing...”

Now it was Arundle, who fell short a quick answer. Tibor knew, why the winds blew. His point of view might turn out to be wiser than a lot of university-stuff. Not to mention the new access to the Tree of Life he found. Was he wiser after all? Did his inherent knowledge see further and understand better what it was all about?

There were the malevolent troops of evil, she doubted not. She had learnt that bitter lesson of the Miseriors, who had proven their existence and would go on proving what lay in their range. Were those air-sprites but a handsome way of putting aerial facts into sound consideration? Some of them might not be very different from those nasty Miseriors, after all.

“We aren’t used to see things that way. I’m convinced now. I know about evil spirits, I know what Malicious Marduk did to me and to others. How could I doubt then? I just didn’t think of that right now. You know over there in Europe no one sane and sound believes in spirits any more. Nature is depersonalised of course. There is no place for flowery names and adapted attitudes. What you can’t see or hear or detect otherwise sensually, can hardly be believed.”

“Who’s not able to hear the wind?” Tibor asked in return, still stunned about such a bulk load of ignorance. “Seeing it, might be more difficult, though”, he giggled. He was reconciled at last. He enjoyed his feelings of superiority towards those arrogant Europeans. It was generally just the other way round.

Tibor knew all too well, why he was jealous and why he envied Arundle. The fact that they became friends didn't alter the general scheme.

"How come, the air-sprite knew my name?" she asked, well knowing that this was unfair, how could Tibor know?

Spirits might be sly and evil but they were not almighty. "Perhaps the sprite overheard us, while we settled on that pontoon in the lagoon and brooded over our task", he then suggested, without really believing in what he said.

"...Or Malicious Marduk lay his filthy hands upon us once more", Arundle suggested bitterly. "...Would sound more logical to me anyway; he never ever accepted a defeat – and when he settled in our time now, we won't get rid of him again, not before the final show-down in the far future..."

"... When you trap him in a Circulum viciosus¹³ so to speak, I see..." Arundle didn't quite get, what Tibor was at, but didn't mind.

"In Laptopia he is uprising a war and builds up a network of allies, who he employs with great care. Humans are accessible though for his infiltrations."

Tibor nodded only half convinced. He still didn't want to skip the eavesdropping air-sprite altogether.

"...Could well be, that evil air-sprites ally with those Miseriors of yours... No dry-lander ever overlooks what is going on in the sphere of the spirits. There are loads of turmoil and feud – more than a limited little human can bear, my Shaman says. Few humans ever returned. He claims to be one of them."

"Is it he, who had those poor pigs die at the stake?" – she asked and while she did, she pitied her words, - too late, she noticed, when she saw Tibor's face.

"I didn't mean it. Of course the boar set the stable in flames – we all know that..."

"You do not understand a bit of what you are talking about... Oh, these Europeans once more - they think they know and have a prescription ready at hand for each and everything. Spirits know well that you can only get rid of them with fire. It's got to be a really strong spirit though, who resisted his fear and pushed that fire bowl... You know nothing about that, just nothing, you arrogant stupid whites, that's what you are..." – so, she had managed to upset him severely at last. Tibor was really angry now, and she didn't know how to calm him down again. She just wanted to suggest whether he would like to join her on a trip to Laptopia, or even further to the faint virtual centre of all universes and galaxies, she lately felt drawn to

¹³ Lat. Vicious circle

again. She usually enjoyed Billy-Joe's company for that. However, Billy-Joe was so busy with himself here on the islands these days, therefore, she didn't want to disturb. As long as he had things not cleared up and straightened out, she should better leave him alone. Where she wanted to go, you needed all your common senses and a sharp brain on top.

While Arundle was still wondering, the pause was over and Moschus Mogoleya held his inaugural speech already. He was sweating and his voice quivered. He stuttered and mixed things up, so nobody understood, what he wanted to convey. A nervous giggle here and there made things not better. He then improved however; the longer he was speaking, as he consequently concentrated on the text in front of him.

Thus, his speech became somewhat monotonous and even boring, at least to those who couldn't refrain from giggling in the first place. He excessively described the work he did and the contribution he performed by improving the number and status of the Sublimations on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

During holidays, he was underway worldwide searching for talents and convincing them to join the school, as did others, none the least the dear colleague Professor Adrian Humperdijk. He was convinced, that there were many not yet recovered talents slumbering outside somewhere.

"We are at the beginning" he ended his speech full of passion; - passion he was now able to convey rather natural. Therefore, he earned a remarkable applause in the end. Overall, he had made it, even the critical colleagues admitted.

His task would not be an easy one. Such a Dean's Office had to become organized and built up, where there only were rudimentary traces of a working structure. No convincing curriculum was available so far. Thus, the whole project stood and fell with him and his abilities, as well as those of the registered students.

24. The extended Study Group

Arundle could not admit that she was terribly relieved, when she learnt that Tika was Billy-Joe's twin sister. The question that had worried her so unspeakably, which way he would decide, had thus lost its impact. Billy-Joe would remain hers – this way or the other. That was all, what counted. Some private life they should grant each other. Did Marsha and Adrian not show how wonderful it worked?

Now, as the danger was over, Arundle admitted for the first time what she had feared in her most secret vision: Tika and Billy-Joe as an inseparable couple.

She now knew of the character of their relation, and had to get along with it. Billy-Joe would remain her Billy-Joe, and that was all, what counted. They could mingle their thoughts and feelings just as they used to do. They could find out about the way things went or just watch the stars by night, while the wind tenderly reached out for them and high up in the sky, the Man in the Moon gave them a wink, before he settled next to his wife, knowing well, that this could not be seen on earth because of the small sickle he projected down there. There was no need to bother and uselessly hang around.

Arundle tried to get in touch with Tika, but that was not easy. Tika was extremely shy, especially with a celebrity like Arundle - the whole school was talking about, while she felt small and unimportant. Since she neither was gifted the Somniors' or the Animations' way, she also had trouble picking up with the others with the regular school stuff.

Unlike Billy-Joe, she was not ambitious at all and didn't want to prove her qualities. She didn't want to be the strongest or the tallest or the best, like Billy-Joe already was amongst his fellow Aborigines. His close connection with Arundle had left its traces and marked him. He met his Professors, as he liked. Everyone accepted him and his opinion weighed - in short, he also was a celebrity.

Tika knew she was small and unimportant. She possessed nothing that made her worth mentioning. She was no beauty. Her shoulders were too broad and her hips not outstanding. She didn't like her curly hair either. If she compared herself with Arundle's friends, who were of similar dark complexion, she immediately felt disadvantaged.

Only once a month she blossomed, and she did so when other girls started to yammer, or even lay in bed and suffered from migraine. She also felt then the inner unrest; felt that something happened to her body, that she was unable to control. Headaches she got as well, nevertheless she was looking forward to the upcoming days. She would experience something extraordinary. The memories of the past months let her know what freedom lay ahead.

How astounded she had been, when she noticed for the first time, that she was not alone with the inner unrest and anticipated joy. A boatload full of excited youth set sail for the first full-moon-night.

She didn't mind the others when she was a newcomer, but that changed. They now knew each other in a wholly different manner; and they all only vaguely remembered back in their usual selves what they were like.

They all changed their appearance as soon as they reached the Convertors' Island and the night fell down. One after the other disappeared in the under wood. She could hardly await this moment and was amongst the first to disappear. Only later, she learnt to take her time. Four nights could become terribly long, after having reached the climax of the highest pleasures.

One day – that is – one night her brother appeared. - She had it known at once, had it felt with the unbetrayable instinct of the other kind.

She hadn't felt the blind wrath as for those creatures from the bush lands, she was ashamed of. No murderous lust overcame her; she was even more ashamed. Her own force had her never allowed to comply with her feelings. The will alone was bad enough and raised her conscience, as soon as she thought about the dingoes of the Australian steppe.

With this dingo, things were different. She felt magically attracted by this perfect specimen of its kind, and when she realized that her interest was answered, her excitement went beyond borders.

She did not take care, and was shot. She was brought back to the human world, and stayed in hospital, where she started to sort things out. Her first conclusion had not been encouraging, nor were they later on, when she was able to correct her assumptions and found out about the factual circumstances. She still had not been able to make up her mind and accept those girls so close to him. Yet she was still too shy for an own approach, although it was by then clear that Billy-Joe was her twin brother.

A pack of dingoes had attacked the small starving clan of Aborigines where her human mother belonged. While the others escaped, the pregnant 'mother-to-be' stayed behind, and was killed by the mad dogs, while the infants survived, and were nursed by a dingo-mother.

Tika had forgotten about her human mother, the yellow dingo-mother however remained livid in her mind. She saw her good face, whenever she liked and could read in it as if it was a human face. Thus, the Dingo-mother became an exception but still didn't manage to heal the girl from self-hatred, she felt for her kin. White hunters killed her dingo-mother later and brought her to a mission house, while the other twin was left behind, and was found and adopted by a roaming band of Aborigines shortly later. Thus, Tika hated the white man too, for killing her dingo-mother, while her identity doubled.

Never before in her life she had experienced so much freedom and comfort. The School of Inbetween opened the gates of paradise, which had been sealed. She was still at the beginning and didn't dare to move freely. Her positive feelings were still blocked by her bad experience in the mission house. She did not talk about that period of life. Only when she

met Billy-Joe in the conversational circumstances they both were involved, she began to open.

Therefore, it was only natural that she stayed away from Arundle wherever she could, and clung instead to her kin, although the experiences on the island of the Convertors did not allow to trust her twin. She had had to sort out things all by herself.

In hospital, she kept sitting somewhere for hours, mostly unnoticed by teachers or mates. She had stayed for over two months there to cure the injury by the arrow. After a period of dumb brooding, she had started using that time to sort thing out. The tale of the twins and their early fate was one result of this.

It was Florinna after all, who managed to win Tika for their joint study group that had formed over the Tree of Life recently. Arundle had asked for her help, as she was unable to get closer to that shy girl. Thus, it happened that Billy-Joe got in contact with his twin-sister in his human appearance as well, while before he shied away from her just like she did of him. Looking backwards, he felt like having fled from his own past, part of which was embodied by Tika, and was now picking up.

Tibor saw Tika with different eyes. This was quite natural as no common ribbon of acquaintance held them. What he saw, he liked. Thus, it was Tibor, who managed to make her smile. He was able to do a lot his very own way. Nobody could resist the green whirlwind, he employed. “Honi soi, qui mal y pense¹⁴”, he yelled and raised her high up into the cloudless sky, but kept well off the open sea this time.

He did it his own way, and let her only go after they had returned to the ground, where she sank breathlessly right between Corinia and Florinna, whom she suddenly didn't reject any more.

It was a hot afternoon. The extended study group was brooding over the Tree of Life again. That is to say over the version they had developed, which altered the original quite a bit. Their problems on the time-scale still existed, and confused their thoughts, as all of them realized when Arundle presented their findings the other day. Late successors became all of a sudden their own ancestors. That was of course illogical and unacceptable, no matter whether they employed the Theory of Relativity¹⁵.

Their Tree of Life looked in the meantime like a Menora¹⁶, with seven, eight, or even nine arms – the ancient symbol that was inherited from the first Temple in Jerusalem. The arms of the Menora indicated the divers groups of species the higher life split: Fish, Insects, Spiders, Birds,

¹⁴“A rascal, who's got dirty thoughts in mind.”

¹⁵ The Theory of Relativity says that time is referring to the location in space.

¹⁶ Jewish sacred Candlestick

Reptiles, Mammals, and some other kind of unspecified creatures – as by their rough order.

“That can be changed afterwards, if we see the need”, Arundle argued, just like that. “When we come to different conclusions, and that can easily happen, we will of course alter our findings”, she added meaningfully. “We allow separating developments, as soon as they show clear distinctions. Things become interesting of course as soon as we come to the higher intellect: Understanding, feelings, language, tools, abilities – things like that.”

“Those gifts depend on physiological and environmental dispositions. You cannot expect a fish to develop craftsmanship without hands”, Corinia exclaimed.

“You are right – intelligence need not be limited to the forms familiar to us.”

“...And still can be more intelligent than us”, Tibor threw in and showed that he was very able to keep up with the discussion, although he was not familiar with sleep-learning and other non-physical excursions meant to improve knowledge.

Tika looked at him in admiration, but did not speak a word. Perhaps she had left already, if he hadn't been here.

“Do not forget telepathy”, Billy-Joe put in with a meaningful glance at Tika. She thanked him for his remark by blushing. In fact, she realized that the discussion seemed to be pre-written in her mind. She could not only follow it, but even knew what was coming up.

“Western technology and technological progress are not the only ways how intelligence can prove. There are fields where humans are definitely incompetent. Their senses are limited and their sensual abilities are therefore reduced. Even the dinosaurs had most likely further abilities than mammals...” Arundle said.

“Well, that can't be proved...” Tibor answered.

“Very little though...”, she agreed.

“Cities and walls endure and manifest better than castles in the air in the world of fable” – Billy-Joe objected.

“After all, they are accessible...” Arundle put in.

“That only means we cannot see, what there else is...” Tibor replied.

“We do see a little more though,” Tika said with a moody smile. She raised her voice for the first time. She had understood, the others realized. For the first time they noticed, what it was about to be an Aborigine. They were no needless surplus of the human race, as the missionaries told them. In the contrary, they stood in the centre of the development.

“I thought of forms of emotional intelligence”, Arundle put in. “Those are forms of intelligence as well; and looked at them that way,

Homo Faber¹⁷ did not prosper at all. He is only at the beginning and has to pick up a lot, of what he lost while conquering the world and cutting those off, who did better in this respect.”

While she said that, the Laptopians came to her mind, who were overdoing such a historical tendency to a horrid extent, and pampered a new quality of egotism; as Arundle and her friends experienced, while being involved in the inner affairs of Laptopia. A small minority was striving for everlasting life by plundering their fellowmen and stripping them off their lifetime.

Corinia had still another aspect of that Tree of Life in mind, which didn't comply with human supremacy. “Boetie is reporting of separatist notions amongst the mer-folk. - Others aren't any better, when it comes to moral. That's what I want to point out. Boetie told me that there are hotheads preparing for a rebellion over here in Australis. They form a secret army, breed killer-sharks and combat-whales, while the other side is taking counter-measures of course, as their spies notice any move of relevance. It's a shame and nobody knows where that once may lead.”

The study group members looked quite irritated. Nobody understood at first, what Corinia was about to tell them. When she realized it, she explained, what she had in mind. “What I'm going to say is that it is needless to put ashes on the heads of the human race. Men aren't ideal of course. They are often silly and rough, despite their intelligence. The way they treat each other is unacceptable, when it comes to exploitation and all that. Still we cannot pretend as if there were beings of a better kind. There are other beings, and they are different, but when it comes to the vital interests, then I'm afraid, all other beings become very human as well.”

“You don't want to tell us, that the mer-people are preparing for a war.” Arundle asked scared. “That's exactly what I want to tell”, Corinia answered. “It doesn't look good at all. I just don't understand how Adrian can keep so calm.”

“Perhaps he has no idea of what is going on. Who knows - whom he has to do with”, Billy-Joe wondered. “Perhaps your friend Boetie meets the right people. She is young and rebellious after all. It's always the youth who wants to alter the course of the world.”

“Things seem to be more difficult than we thought. Corinia is right. As long as we have no evidence that other species got further, there is no use in criticizing the human race. We also show remarkable deeds, not only our fellow beings. We are striving for a more general peace, I think”, Arundle put in. - “So let's stop criticising our race”, Billy-Joe added - “we are - no doubt - also part of, and ask ourselves why we ran right here on

¹⁷ Man governed by his technological knowledge

our beautiful island into such serious trouble, despite of our special qualifications.”

“Well, I think most of our problems come from these special qualifications...” - Tika added to what Billy-Joe just said.

“It doesn’t take much until a being thinks of himself only...” Tika went on.

“...Or he is full of prejudices right from the start...” Billy-Joe agreed.

“...We had that already...” Tibor objected.

“I therefore recommend that we deal with Corinias problem. That is to say with the problems out there”, Arundle pointed vaguely at the sea around, where somewhere lay the city of Australis in the depth well hidden and blossoming – still a colony of Bermudia, with all the disadvantages this status had.

“It looks as if they don’t want to be bossed about by the Bermudians. Mainly the youth feels exploited, and limited by the strict laws. Boetie even spoke about the death sentence, and even worse the ban. A punishment we just cannot imagine. There are horrible mines, the rumour goes, where the banned get slaved to death.”

“Disgusting”, Corinia said, while her sister’s comment was not meant to be really intelligent and led somehow astray: “But the King looked so nice after all”, she said and giggled nervously as soon as she realized her sister’s reaction. Corinia was not willing any more to accept shallow and unreasonable remarks.

“Best would be, we have a word with Adrian”, Billy-Joe suggested. His contribution was meant to calm both sisters down.

“I don’t know”, she replied, “you know, Humperdijk is a friend of the King. You cannot regard him as a neutral witness. Besides, I don’t want to endanger Boetie and her friends. The King’s Governor can of course figure out what’s going on, as soon as he has the slightest hint. His Intelligence Service is omni-present, and mostly manned by individuals from the Old World, Boetie says, and she’s got to know.”

Florinna was somewhat annoyed about what her little sister had said to her: “It’s nice and dandy that you take Boetie’s part, but what if amongst her friends are terrorists, who want to employ you for their sinister aims?”

“Nonsense”, was her sister’s brief reply.

“We must get facts. We cannot rely on assumptions and wishful thinking”, Tibor said.

“That’s not so easy”, Tika put in: “It’s almost wholly impossible. Each side is surely claiming their righteous cause, and blame the other side” Billy-Joe supported his sister.

“I only know, I have to get out there, I cannot help it, and you should know”, Corinia said, still upset. That made things not easier for the group.

They knew now and that meant they were taking over responsibility as well. At the same time, they were not allowed to talk freely because of the tricky subject and the unclear role Adrian Humperdijk played. Their hands were bound, so to speak.

“If you go out there, I come with you”, her sister therefore said. “I do have some experience at last”, she added. She put her arm around her little sister’s shoulders, who gently answered the tender gesture. Thus, Arundle couldn’t refrain from joining them likewise. “I do have an idea”, she said, but then stopped – “well, it’s too early now to talk about, first we have to know what’s going on, right, Corinia?”

Corinia was moved to tears and nodded fiercely. Alone she had been scared out there; but with Arundle and her magic bow, things looked quite different. Arundle suggested it a good idea informing Grisella and Scholasticus; thus, they would travel on an official mission, so to speak. The study group agreed.

“But make sure they don’t talk to the wrong people about our little excursion”, Corinia said, knowing well that this was not very likely. “Besides, Amadeus and Dorothea need some action as well. You know, since we care about Intelleetus, we understand much better, how difficult it is to live with our geniuses. I’m sure they would like such experience as well.”

“Yes, let’s ask them, perhaps they all join us”, Florinna agreed.

“Such a roundtrip would be advantageous though, we even might get in touch with the man in the street, so to speak, and could see with our own eyes, what things are about down there.”

“Yes, just like tourists...”

“That’s not all that bad... we’d be welcome after all...”

Corinia didn’t know whether she still liked the turning the conversation had taken. If she was honest to herself, she was more than helpless, when it came to the rumours about a civil war. Besides, she would have liked to see how the mer-folk handled and trained those whales and sharks; but of course were those the things she could not publicly speak about, not even in the inner circle.

Arundle said, she’d have a word with the Slyboots, and Corinia and Florinna promised to come with her. They agreed upon that they would not talk about rumours of a threatening civil war. The adults might have something in mind though, concerning the colonial discrepancies. Grisella was after all well acquainted with historical facts.

The others agreed. They felt somehow released. A real and serious problem tied them together and stimulated the right spirit. Suddenly their problems and specific circumstances seemed unimportant. Challenges and tasks like that called for joint action and helped to overcoming mistrust and

doubts. Thus, it had been in Laptopia, and so it would be again now. Their success stood and fell with their solidarity. As soon as you began to analyse yourself, you got lost in a jungle of psychological traps and traces that nobody was able to clarify, as soon as you started blaming socio-habitation or gender. People were after all simple and easy to understand, if you looked at them from the right angle.

Arundle shook her head in disgust, while such ideas came to her mind. However, if things worked like that, what could be done? ‘You’ve got to make the best out of it’, she said to herself.

Dorothea and Amadeus were heart and soul for that kind of change in every day’s monotony. Such a voyage into the unknown was quite something. The outlook of being treated like precious tourists, taken care of and pampered from all sides, was their very special secret little cup of tea, no matter what their spouses meant. Perhaps you never got enough of such attention!

Amadeus was fed up with his houseman’s lot. Besides, he felt the narrowness of the island more than ever, now that everything was settled and their home was nice and dandy after all. He didn’t know, but this problem caught many of the teachers’ acquaintances.

Grisella said, she would declare the undertaking an intercultural project, open to all ages; thus, Intellectus could participate as well as the members of the Tree of Life study group. “To be on the save side, we have to publicly announce the tour. I hope, you don’t mind?” she asked.

“If there are too many, we are going to divide the group”, Scholasticus added quickly as soon as he saw Corinia wrinkle her forehead and Arundle shake her head thoughtfully.

“Besides, we need permission from the Headmistress – but that shouldn’t be a problem; and of course from outside”, she waved meaningfully towards the sea all around.

“Who is responsible there? Whom can we contact? Do you have an idea?” – she asked the three negotiators, who brought their matter forward to the Slyboots.

“We best stick to the official channels, I should say”, Corinia declared and thought of the secret plan, she had in mind. It would become difficult. If the Intelligence got hold of her idea, the relation between the School of Inbetween and the Government of Australis would be severely disturbed.

On the other hand... but Corinia forbade herself to think any further. Her heart was pondering against her ribs already like mad. For the time being, everything was possible. Boetie had sounded so convinced and convincing the other day. Careful she must be, there was no doubt about that. She had to warn Boetie, so that she didn’t come to the wrong

conclusions; - one way or the other. In times like this, each side is willing to accept any possible support, the least mistake could ruin everything, and a friend became a foe just like that.

The more Corinia anticipated what could go wrong, the more she felt scared. Florinna and Arundle were leaving already, while she still stood in the room undecidedly. “What is it”, Grisella asked. She was shovelling about a pile of paper on her desk already and did scarcely look up.

“Yes”. Corinia simply said. She said it in a way that made the Professor to look up at her at once, and then Corinia reported, what the excursion actually intended, and what was really going on in Australis. Grisella understood at once. She had studied history not in vain.

“Such a colonial segregation is always just a question of time. Therefore there are - God knows – uncountable examples. Physical separation always means mental segregation. That’s the way it is. Nevertheless, the sudden appeal and the angry decisiveness, you are reporting, are a bit strange. But I’m not so familiar with the submarine affairs over here, nor do I know these people, their nature and humaneness, if I may say so.”

Corinia was not sure whether she fully understood what that meant. Grisella was very right. Some weeks ago, everything was peaceful out there. Where did that urgency come from now? Had there been so drastic changes in the meantime to justify such violent vigour? What was different now?

“I’m asking myself seriously...” Grisella started but didn’t go on. “Let me think a little” she then said. “I thank you for your confidence. Who else know about the matter?”

Corinia named all members of the study group, including Tibor and Tika, which provoked a tiny merry glance, in her eyes, as she became serious right away again.

“If Arundle had not argued so critical about the human race, I would have kept the secret, because Boetie relies on my trustworthiness, and now almost half of the school members know what is going on...”

Grisella promised to keep the matter strictly confidential. “Of course I can only speak for the adults, for your study group you have to take care yourself.”

Corinia nodded thankfully. She felt a little better now. ‘Silly Tree of Life’ she thought. On the other hand – if something was coming up out there ...

She still had in mind how Boetie’s dad dined. Doing so, she dared not think of a real war out there. You possibly could not let things go its pace. Besides, Boetie trusted in her. The modest amongst the rebels needed any help they could get, as they still dreamed of a peaceful change.

25. The Tourists

First, it looked as if those in the know remained on their own, but this impression turned out to be false, as soon as Adrian Humperdijk heard about the excursion. He mobilized his whole seminar, not only the Convertors, because they were not interested or even shied away from water in general and from ocean-life in specific. Instead the biologists took over and influenced the route, the submarine was going to take. Luckily, their aims did hardly differ from Corinia's, as they also were interested in the widest possible range of flora and fauna; thus, they wanted to see the whale resorts and the related training-camps.

“Whales are like cattle for the mer-folk. They even milk them. Whale milk is very nutritious and differ little from the milk of other mammals”, Adrian explained, while preparing his study group for the excursion.

The documents made of seaweed arrived just in time, and were written with insoluble sepia-ink, thus, they stood all the challenges of the underwater world.

Uncountable loads of passes and permits were required, for each and every person with special visa for the different areas, although the tourists were more or less fixed to the panorama-windows of the glass-made submarine, and could not leave without assistance from outside.

The submarine was designed to house about thirty passengers in addition to the crew, and was equipped for lengthier trips. It resisted extreme depths.

“It's the new type of alloy”, Adrian explained, while the passengers were boarding, and pushed aboard over the narrow gangway. They had other things in mind than the alloying of glass and metal, though.

Adrian knocked at a metal girder of the slim ship's fish-like body that clang through the shed, where the Nautilus was moored. “This boat is powered by a small Hydrogen Fusion Generator, which produces an unlimited amount of energy, free of any poisonous radiation. In fact, it produces oxygen as a by-product, which is required for the crews' and passengers' respiration. Thus, the boat can remain continuously under water for several weeks...”

Adrian was enthusiastic about the subject, and did not mind the lack of interest so much, as Scholasticus with the other Slyboots came in sight. They surely were better listeners than the flock in his company. He and the Captain were all too happy to show the guests around, while the gangway

was already removed, as soon as the last passengers had entered, and the boat was prepared for submerging.

They had a look into the diving bell as well as into the underwater lab, and the captain explained briefly the latest navigational devices, like the Gravitometre, that replaced the ancient flooding tanks, by calculating and altering the density in certain areas of the boat. Thus, they gained a lot of space, which they urgently needed for the passengers and for the six crewmembers.

The passengers did not lack of any possible comfort, although space was limited of course. Every possible measure was taken to avoid or compensate claustrophobic attacks, which endangered weak minds. For some people, alone the idea of cruising hundreds of feet below surface was frightening enough.

This time however the passengers were highly motivated, and therefore very fit for such a journey. They nevertheless enjoyed the comfort. The little squash-court was highly frequented and so was a tiny indoor pool down in the bilge. The mess served as a saloon between the meals, where you could enjoy all common entertainment, what ever you could think of. While the biggest attraction were the panorama-panes in the bow and in the stern, on port and on starboard. Whenever the boat was cruising through an area of interest, a curious face filled every space.

The most courageous of the students also enjoyed diving excursions. They formed the absolute highlights of any journey, comparable to the photo-stops of touring adventures on the surface. Fully equipped, the tourists were allowed to stalk on their own for some minutes in the open, outside of the boat's safe refuge, guided of course and well looked after by the crew.

The deeper the boat went the darker was the outside. Down at the bottom, where the territory of Australis began, you could see nothing outside of the beams of the searchlights.

At the entrance to the secret city, Royal guardsmen stopped them. They looked as curious inside as the tourists were looking outside. The inspection seemed to develop to the satisfaction of the guards. A delegation was invited to come out, for a first welcome face to face, so to speak; of course fully equipped and safeguarded.

It took some time until the guests had fixed their equipment and disembarked through the sluice with all their pipes and hoses. Near by lay a ships' graveyard that might interest them most, the officer suggested, while leading the monstrous gang of aliens out of the vicinity of the beamers into the darkness of the unknown, where the divers had to rely on their own headlights.

Not only the youth of all times was attracted by hidden treasures and sunken ships, but also adventurers, searching for their fortune; thus, it was a generous gesture of trustworthiness that the guests from the surface were invited to such a site.

On their way to the shipyard, the troop passed a whale corral extending to the left into the unknown, while a little further they witnessed the feeding of a school of sharks – a frightening sight though. In no time, the water changed colour by the blood of the victims, as soon as the poor beasts were forced into the sharks' cage.

After the first hunger was stilled, the sharks and their riders demonstrated all kinds of more or less artistic tricks, like chasing individual fish through a set tunnel, or mock-attacking each other. Thus, the guests became aware of their awful abilities.

Corinia was of course among the delegation. She was suited like the other tourists. Her trained eyes spotted Boetie among the distant crowd just as they arrived at the shipyard.

The crowd was not allowed to get closer. Even Adrian noticed the change in behaviour. Tension lay in the air, as the saying goes. You could feel it. Something was wrong in Great Melisandria (Adrian still stuck to the somewhat outdated name.) The shipyard was overall a site of minor interest after all, besides they had to return soon for the oxygen supply was limited.

Adrian went monosyllabic after they returned. His mouth formed a thin line and his jaws grounded in dissatisfaction. He had better stayed behind as Corinia suggested. You could almost see the deep thoughts behind his forehead. He knew the history of Melisandria and its crown colony better than anyone else.

In the beginning, the colony was destined to house criminals and deportees who were banned in concentration camps, and had to toil under unimaginable circumstances until they died of fever, exhaustion, or malnutrition.

A bad start for the colony, as men's history proved. Thus, Australis soon became the melting pot of all kinds of dissatisfied individuals or groups, who were sorted out of their homelands by powerful landlords. Guilt often was a question of wealth in those early days, that is to say - the lack of wealth. Poverty became the brand mark for the outcasts.

The King and his entourage did not wholeheartedly agree with Adrian, when he was a guest in Melisandria some twenty years ago. Adrian tried to convince the King, who became his friend, that the development could not go on like it went. All too easy - innocent people ran into the traps of clever culprits who bribed authorities to get rid of competitors and other 'surplus' folk.

The King and his ministers had then agreed, but obviously didn't do enough to stop such development. Adrian could not think of another reason for the ongoing turmoil. If this old practice was still common, he did not wonder why the dissatisfaction was on the march.

He could feel it, as soon as he outed himself as the King's friend people went silent and repulsive. Only the fact, that Corinia had her secret contacts made the mission possible.

On the other hand was Adrian Humperdijk well known in Australis. As a reporter and fanatic supporter of the 'Pummel pump' he regularly reported in the mass media. First of all the National Water-Wave-Transmittorium liked to publish his exaggerating comments, as they were meant to enforce the bounds between the motherland and the colony.

During his monthly stays, Humperdijk was therefore working regularly in the monopolistic National Broadcasting Headquarters. He knew what was going on, because he regularly checked the audience rating. They were losing listeners from month to month. Little pirate broadcasts, with limited range and professionalism picked up subsequently. 'The People of Australis prefer to be spilled by unripe waves, than to become infiltrated by the Bermudian stream of poison' Adrian read in a wild pamphlet, he recently found hidden amongst his mail.

A similar text Adrian found fixed to the panorama panes after a short night's rest. Although you didn't notice the difference between day and night down here. Adrian was upset. How could it happen that rebel rousers slipped through the mounted guardsmen and got so close – he wondered? Had he only been in the state of conversion, but he was not, instead he was fixed to the interior of a submarine. Otherwise, he had torn the banner off by himself.

It was too late anyway. The students had already read the banner and discussed how they could react adequately. With a tiny majority, they decided to fix banners from inside out, showing their sympathy with the locals. Before, they needed more information; thus, they interrogated their professor severely, to give them discernments, which he did - although reluctantly. He told them the same old story of colonial exploitation, some of them knew by heart as they came from oppressed peoples themselves or had even suffered from tribal extinction.

Corinia confirmed that the exploitation by the motherland was noticeable for everyone who went through the city and the adjacent areas with open eyes. Still you could find slaves and prisoners toiling on vast plankton plantations, or prospecting in coral reefs, were they cut the so-called 'red gold' under extremely dubious conditions without safety-regulations, and being exposed to the icy polar jet streams, while in caves under the reef monstrous octopods dwelled, which had to be milked by the

death-warranted. Such deadly task shovelled excessive wealth into the lockers of the proprietors as the precious sepia-ink was worth its weight in gold. Not to mention the bands of sharks, ambushing the labourers in the open field, where they toiled so hard for their greedy masters.

Was it a wonder then, that the cry for independence grew louder and louder? Living conditions had been unjust right from the start, and could not any more be warranted by the King's men. Adrian had ignored such crude facts as long as he could, because of his friendship with the King. Even he had to admit now, that a change was necessary. Thus, the rebellion laid its heavy hand like a threatening cloud all over Australis. Any spark could ignite the powder keg now, and cut off the ribbon between motherland and colony for good.

Such grave thoughts wavered behind Adrian's forehead, while Moschus Mogoleya, who participated as the newly appointed Dean of the Sublimations, (against the declared will of Corinia and all other supporters of the rebellious water-sprites); – he was not at all able to improve the Vice-Headmaster's mood, regardless of the fact, that he took the King's side. The riotous thoughts and ideas of the girls on the other hand, didn't help to stand the appointed lot any better. On the contrary, Adrian visualized himself standing in front of an abyss that was yawning when ever he dared to open an eye; ready to swallow him right away- just like that.

The new Dean drivelled on draconic punishment. If he had the saying, than the heads of the rebellious leaders would stick on poles out there already.

Poor Adrian stuck his fingers in vain into his ears. He could not stand that heartless babbling. Mogoleya went away rather upset: "I wanted to do you a favour. I thought you took the side of the government. I then was obviously mistaken..."

Adrian waved him off angrily. How could he explain his complex emotions to that rough guy?

"Things cannot be solved just like that. You need the right feeling as well", he explained weakly without much conviction, so that Mogoleya who turned around again, waved him off with a similar gesture.

The girls around Arundle and Corinia were of course enthusiastic about the revolution, all the more, they had just learnt about the French Revolution at school. Arundle took the chance to storm the barricade nearby the Bastille side by side with Marianne – (well shortly behind her, so she could not be identified on Delacroix's famous painting) - where the victims of the Bourbon Tyrant were suffering.

A similar ‘coup d’état’¹⁸ was in their minds as well. They only had to find the adequate location. Boetie would show them, when the time had come.

Meanwhile they sailed in their transparent submarine through the ground waves in turmoil, so to speak, and the official sightseeing programme was pitilessly absolved. The tour guide (replacing Adrian who didn’t feel like guiding any more) commented on every sight that they passed by, although the touristy curiosity had faded. The rebellious spirit, one way or the other, alerted all of them.

The party split into opposing fractions – either for or against the rebels, while some could not make up their minds and pretended to be neutral, which the others did not accept.

Grisella and Scholasticus hardly realized when they found themselves on different sides. Scholasticus took once more the side of the rebels, he couldn’t do otherwise. While Grisella pitied poor Adrian, who even suffered from a heart attack. The discord out there was too much for his empathic soul. Luckily, he had his heart pills and the nitro spray on him, as if he had foreseen such upsetting nuisance.

The Professor suspected Malicious Marduk right away to have his fingers in this pie as well. All too sudden such a split had come. Of course they had seen nasty scenes, out there at the reef from afar, where the ‘red gold’ was won under unacceptable circumstances. Had that been the limit?

“Those men get good wages” they had been told. Corinia knew it better, than the tour guide and whispered the truth into her neighbours’ ears, who passed the message on, thus it spread in the whole boat.

“Boetie told me they are slaves and convicts being held like animals in concentration camps. They have to toil for their lives and none survives for more than five years. – Boetie has to know. Her own father was a convict once. He managed to escape. This is the only reason why he survived. Boetie would not be here, if he died, though. He used to live far away outside were the outcasts dwell – the so-called Maroons. Way behind the fields, there are the hiding places of the escapees. They somehow manage to survive and wait for the day of revenge to come.”

When Grisella learnt from Scholasticus, the message Corinia was spreading, she was alert. “That’s where the wind blows”, she thoughtfully murmured. “Still, I would like to know if something unusual happened lately, as things are like that for years. That’s why I cannot get rid of the idea that Malicious Marduk picked up the thread and is waving his network of terror down here.”

¹⁸ The take over of the power of a state.

Scholasticus wholeheartedly agreed with one exception. “Why do you blame the rebel side, though? Can’t you see how the authorities are tightening the screws? I fully agree. Malicious Marduk is stirring his poisonous pot once more, but his guests are on the other side of the table, so to speak. He is feeding the oppressors once more and thus they still their greed by overdoing their cruelties. Marduk could hide very well amongst them, he’d be a well liked ally...”

Scholasticus didn’t want to accept the common prejudice that the oppressed were responsible for the punishment they suffered. He thought things were exactly vice versa.

Grisella waved off his vehement accusation of the ruling class. “It doesn’t matter where Malicious Marduk is fuelling the fire. Perhaps you are even right. Still we have to ask ourselves, what we can do, to counter-steer such ungodly development, or do you wish to come into a similar position you were in some time ago in Laptopia?”

Grisella referred to the death-sentence of that Laptopian tribunal, Scholasticus almost suffered from, while the set-up for a most horrid civil war was in due course that had been stopped only by all means of reasoning, and by the utmost bravery of a young man.

26. On Space Patrol

Tibor suffered from claustrophobia. That was the reason why he did not participate in the excursion to Australis. Knowing nothing but water above, – a layer of several miles – made him gasp for air. All other members of their study group had gone of course. For them it was a question of honour to accompany Corinia – who had started the whole matter.

Tibor took the chance and dealt more closely with his own folk the Sublimations. His brother Sandor Khan felt like himself and could not stand the idea of water above him, and Patagonia or her friend Tuzla hadn’t been invited though. Of course, they could have registered as everybody else, but they were too proud for that. They still didn’t fit into the school, otherwise they would have noticed how silly such behaviour was. A public announcement was an invitation – no matter whether directed to none in particular.

Whenever he thought of his mates, he felt bad in his conscience. He still felt responsible for the Sublimations. The fact, that Moschus Mogoleya was now their Dean didn’t change that much. They were as important as all other groups now, although the others were bigger, some even much

bigger. More than three quarters of the students in the School of Inbetween were either Somnors of Animators, while there were a few amongst them who played on other stages as well. Billy-Joe and Corinia, and some others – last but not least Arundle – were such cases. Thus, all Sublimators had noticed Arundle's talent for dancing with the wind. Because of that, her crash didn't fit into the picture, she experienced the other day, while they were out there above the sea, and Moschus Mogoleya had loads to do to get rid of the bad mark, no matter of the outcome of the official investigation.

Still his Sublimators were somehow proud of him – well, not necessarily of him, but of the fact, that one of them had become Dean and was worth as much as the other Deans.

They all felt upgraded, and therefore they didn't mind his harsh nature, even more so as he tried his best especially with the brothers, he knew of famous offspring, thus, he was almost servile with them, because Moschus Mogoleya was of low origin. That was the reason for his unacceptable behaviour and subsequently the difficulties in life.

Walter didn't join the party as well, although he initially gave the reason for the whole undertaking. Pooty discouraged him strongly though, as Walter was in bad shape mentally, while physically he was back in order. His psyche had suffered and worried Pooty. Would he ever recover from the horrid trauma, he had experienced?

The care he received in the hospital was not meant to cure his disease, on the contrary. The daily psychoanalytic exercises led him back to the roots of his disease; thus, he realized the amount of guilt he felt piled up inside. How should he ever be able to cope? Of course, the plain, clean solution that he was not responsible for the deeds of the 'Werman' was intriguing but unacceptable for an honest mind like Walter.

He was almost sure, that a daemon could only enter, where a secret preparedness existed to open up the mind for him. He had not been strong enough to resist. He had failed, and what was worst: he had cheated himself and the people with him, when he pretended to have no idea of the changes that went on inside.

After all his sharp brain was working unhindered, thus, he was able to analyse his situation which gave him back some satisfaction, and the further he came, the more he felt satisfied. The daily sessions became the pipe, where he was able to have the sum of his mental work escape and rehash - he was busy with, day and night.

Thus, an altered Walter came out, who experienced another sidereal hour when the magical stone returned. One day the stone dropped into his belly bag, and when Walter put his hand in unconsciously, he noticed the cool, clear matter in his hand, which made him feel happier than he could

say, while the old, well-known power streamed through his limbs, he had missed for such a long time.

Pooty stayed close to his friend all the time, although Walter sometimes scared him to death. Therefore, he was the first to realize the change to the better. However, Walter was not cured yet. The evil spirit remained, but he was identified as an enemy in combat. Pooty got an idea of the defence lines Walter was installing. He was willing to fight the battle, and that was what counted most.

Not all what happened on earth and what troubled the earthly beings found an answer under the cover of guilt and penance. Walter grew by means of the demand. The unpredictable fate had tossed him down the abyss of agony. He began to accept the challenge and did all he could to get out of the fatal fangs.

Tibor knew little about the inner battle of Walter's, but he felt the attraction and made friend with the unequal couple; and not only he, but also his brother and the two girls in their company, Tuzla and Patagonia, while her newly appointed Dean preferred to goof about somewhere outside in the immeasurable depth of the ocean.

Thus, the six of them sat together in confident conversation, although it was said that Sublimators rejected animals. Tibor told them of Arundles idea of a joint space mission. Since Malicious Marduk and his horrid band frightened and terrorized the scene, they thought this a good idea. Pooty and Walter took the chance for a lengthier yammering about their terrible experiences with the miserable creatures, and Tibor found some similarities with certain wind-sprites and other daemons, the Shaman from home fiddled about and tried to overcome more or less successful though.

"Arundle wanted to get advise from the great Advisor", Tibor explained, as soon as Walter paused in his lecture about the nature of the devilish bands, he was still fighting.

"Arundle is not sure about the whereabouts of Malicious Marduk", Tibor assisted. Pooty nodded fiercely: "This is why they swim out there right now. There is something in the bush, if we only knew what it is?"

"Before we go on wondering, what about a trip into the unknown?" Walter fetched the magical stone and had it sparkle, which was quite impressive. "You are not afraid of flying, are you?" Pooty asked with a jovial grin, when he noticed a slight hesitation of the Sublimators, as they never before made such a journey.

They looked questioningly at each other. Tibor nodded and thus expressed their decision: "We are with you, when do we start?"

"Why not right now?" – Pooty replied, while Walter was preparing everything for the start, and talked the coordinates over with the magical

stone. First, they would travel to Laptopia and from there, they would go on to the Advisor, whose location was unknown, but the Prince or his General would help. “Besides, you are going to meet Arundle’s friends in the future”, Pooty commented the start-up procedures, when Walter presented the flight plan.

“How long does the journey take?” the girls wanted to know. Walter and Pooty looked at each other: “Time doesn’t matter”, Walter explained. “We are leaving this dimension and show up in another one. We must leave our time anyway; otherwise, we won’t reach our target. For our return, we can decide now, whether we come back right now, later, or even earlier. I know – that sounds rather complicated and somewhat crazy, but this is how time-travelling works.”

The four felt rather uneasy though, as they were put into starting formation. Walter had them form a spearhead, and in order to do so, they had to lie down on the ground. “Do hold your neighbours with one hand each!” – Walter commanded who took the head while Pooty settled in his belly bag. Tuzla and Patagonia held one of Walter’s legs each, and with the other hand, they held each other, and so did Tibor and Sandor with the girl’s legs and so forth.

“Let’s go then”, Pooty shrieked while crawling about on the unstable space vehicle, on a last minute check. “All clear - get going, Walter. And don’t you let loose, by all means”, he yelled while the magical stone began to gloom in Walters front paws, then disappeared in no time, together with the whole lot, that was not seen any more.

The stars hushed by like giant comets behind a glooming membrane of pure energy. Not the speed of light, but the speed of thought determined the acceleration. Fog wavered in and about the heads and senses. Dissolution and strenuous congestion kept the minds busy, so there was no space for fear and sorrow. The dissolution of time in such a narrow cloak was perhaps the most peculiar experience of the trip - or should we say conversion?

On the other hand, they recognized each other unquestionable, as they settled on the cloudbanks of Laptopia, from where they let themselves slip on the battlement of the regal palace. The guards reported them right away to the Prince Regent. Obviously, they had frequent guests over here, because they didn’t mind the visitors from no-where. There was no hostility; on the contrary, the guards accepted the sudden landing with great respect.

Walter was of course well known all over the place. Therefore, nobody minded the Sublimations in his company. Walter would know what he was doing, they seemed to think, if they thought at all, as they were not designed for complex thinking like that.

Instead of the Prince General Armyless gave them a hearty welcome. He rushed towards Walter with extended arms hugged him dearly, and lost his huge cap in excitement. Pooty jumped after it and handed it over to the General, who welcomed and thanked the little lad with a touching gentle stroke.

Walter introduced his companions, who were stunned by the similarity of the General and their Professor Slyboots back home.

They were led through the towers and tunnels downwards, when Pooty explained: “General Armyless is the great-great-great-great... grandson of the Professor – it’s about the twelfth generation, if I’m not mistaken. We are here in the future, you should know. – Is your time still rushing on, as it used to?” – he asked one of the local companions, who looked back rather stunned and shrugged. “Please, Sir, ask General, please...” he said and bowed in excuse. The General was busy listening to Walter’s misfortune, though.

“You know perhaps”, he referred to Pooty and the other guests a minute later - “that the time was sold out over here in Laptopia, with the result, that it passed by faster and faster. In the meantime, measures have been taken to reverse the process. I’m proud to say, that we reached a factor between three and two...”

When they settled for a quick brunch, the General found out about the true reason why the guests had come. It was not just an excursion for the little guests. Walter thought of revenge, for what had done to him, the General soon realized.

“Right you are, my dear hero, such a humiliation cannot remain unanswered”, he commented Walter’s claim. “As soon as the Prince Regent is back, I will let him know of your desire. I am sure; he will get you in touch with the Advisor, one way or the other. His Highness, the Advisor, is rather flexible.”

After an excellent meal, the General suggested to show the four Sublimations the secret chambers and strong rooms of the bank. They had no objections and while they were underway, Pooty told them about the horrible food they used to eat in Laptopia before the big change. “The food was one of the minor problems we had to face”, the General put in. “We are entering now the darkest chapter in our history” he went on. “Things were left in the original state, as far as possible. Most parts of the castle’s basement belong to the museum now, which was installed to remind us of ‘the Age of Darkness’ we have just overcome. You may get an idea, what life was like; - the fortune of a few meant agony and betrayal of the plenty. You can hardly imagine today what it was like, just about some five years ago. So much has happened in the meantime. You can see true progress everywhere, although we still have to carry on. We are far away from

normal and are focusing a factor of below one for the near future, while we still have to cope with a factor somewhere around two, to be honest, no matter what the statistics and our scientists say.”

The four Sublimations didn't understand what the General was talking. Pooty helped as well as he could, but then realized, how he got lost in the jungle of the Laptopia history.

The museum turned out to be a dungeon. Wax-figures replaced men of flesh and blood, as well as the so-called spare parts once required for bionic implantations. The shadows and voices of the Miseriors behind the grid at the ceiling seemed so natural that passing underneath was a hair-rising affair. Worst were those plastic-bags, filled with lost souls from those who had been betrayed of their lifetime. Pooty could hardly believe that they were cybernetic imitations, just like the Miseriors behind the grid.

The four guests were deeply concerned. The flooding impressions and challenges made them feel small and limited. Their own quarrels seemed so obsolete and artificial now, while real trouble shook the universe and demanded action.

Therefore, they were happy to meet the Advisor, who suddenly appeared, as he was used to, when he learnt what Malicious Marduk was doing in the past. Arundle's late visit in the transgalactic rogues gallery had already raised his attention, and it was his duty to keep the past in its roughly outlined limits. The forces of darkness seemed to win more influence than foreseen, thus the balance was disturbed.

“Were-men are clearly against the rule, at that early stage of knowledge, and demand for immediate disciplinary action”, the Advisor said to Walter, whom he severely interrogated and than expelled from all sinfulness.

Pooty was relieved. He had suffered most under the impact of guilt. Gradually he would overcome the shyness or even fear he felt in the presence of his partner.

“You are a remarkable creature, Professor”, the Advisor firmly addressed to Walter, “You and the School of Inbetween”, he went on. “You are both problematic to an unforeseen extend, I'm afraid. Jewels like you attract the creatures of darkness. We will have to find out on a higher level how this can be handled. After all, everything has to be measured by the metre of history. Where do you belong to, you, and the experts in your company, dealing with the Tree of Life? Their findings cannot be overrated though. In fact, their results are quite something. Where do you belong, you and your human friends? That is the question, we seek the proper answer for, but I don't want to jump too far ahead.”

Walter felt much better and was eager to open his oppressed soul in confession, but before he had rightly started, the Advisor faded, as he

always did, and was gone as soon as Walter had talked himself into rage. Thus, he once more felt left alone with the hammering distress and the glooming agony inside.

27. The Internment Camp

Under the sea, things worsened from bad to worse. The friends of the rioters formed the majority, and did as they felt. They fixed two huge banners alongside on both sides of the submarine, clearly stating their opinion, not only in letters but also in clear caricatures, however not for long. Just as they passed the greenish seaweed whale meadows again, the unavoidable happened. Adrian had warned the hot heads in vain. A squadron of the ‘Mounted Sharkoneers’ stopped the boat and fiercely tore off ‘the banners of freedom’, as the enthusiastic youth called them. The propellers had to stop, and were fixed by thick ropes. Two huge whales then were harnessed in front of the bow by ropes as well and tore the boat to the Pummel Pump Stadium, where they met loads of rioters, some still tied or handcuffed and inside of solid steel cages.

The guards had a sharp eye on the prisoners, who were not allowed to communicate with each other. Guards patrolled through the rows and hit seemingly unmotivated on heads or backs, whenever they noticed a ‘thought-crime’ as they called the telepathatic contacts. The poor victims were at the mercy of them. However, it got still worse, when the submarine entered together with the Mounted Sharkoneers on their sharks. As soon as the convicted noticed the new peril, a cry of terror shrieked through the stadium and even got through the walls of the boat, thus the visitors from the surface went pale and clung together in horror. Corinia almost fainted when she noticed her friend Boetie among the prisoners in a cage.

The murder sharks bared their teeth in front of the bars, and their riders had trouble in keeping them down. “It won’t take long and they are so wild that they cut through the bars”, Arundle said. – “We’ve got to do something”, Corinia added, who wondered how she could save her friend outside.

More and more people were pushed through the sluices into the stadium. Some tried to hide under the submarine that was soon surrounded by a cluster of bodies. Frightened faces lured through the transparent panes.

Soon the sight was blocked but the screams they could still hear gave them an idea of what was going on outside.

Adrian hammered like mad on the Visa phone, but he didn’t get a connection, either to the officials outside or his own acquaintance in Australis and Bermudia and of course not to Marsha or someone at the

School of Inbetween. He tried everything no matter, whether this was likely or not. What else could he do?

Corinia clung to her sister and even Moschus Mogoleya froze the grin round his mouth, when things became serious at last. Pale and dumb he avoided the gaze of others; but they had better things to do than to blame him.

Those, who pushed the idea of the banners felt guilty of having caused the tragedy. Not even the magic bow could say, whose fault it was, but he had good advice of how to help. “We have to form a magic field of power”, he explained to Arundle – “We must bundle all our abilities and powers. We have to take us by our hands, and concentrate, thus we can set free our joint energy and form an energetic field. Under water and due to the strong insulation of the boat the effect might be influenced. However, we cannot do more for the time being. Give God, that many manage to hide under our shield.”

Happy for being able to do something, they grabbed each other’s hands and soon realized the power that was spreading about. The bow focussed the energy and led it outside through the sluices, where it formed an invisible bulge under the boat’s trunk.

Now they had to direct the refugees, who clung to the boat into the bulge. Horrible scenes happened as soon as the poor creatures understood what was going on. They were fighting for every inch, and pushed the surplus, who could not find access to the bulge into the open, where they risked a horrible end between the teeth of the luring brutes.

The pressure on the boat’s trunk was growing, when those, being outside, pressed in. Blood glistened fresh and red on the panes. Soon the sharks would be beyond control because of that sweet smell.

Those inside doubled their effort to widen the bulge by increasing the invisible membrane, but they felt exhaustion instead and the opposite was the case, the bulge shrank. The shrieks from outside increased. The roaring beasts pushed against the protective shield and tore off extending limbs. Once more, the magic bow doubled his miraculous powers while recalling an ancient ritual.

“We’ve got to alter from flesh to soul, the bow recommends. Thus, the Animations may well be able to explain to us”, Arundle passed on the bow’s conclusion. “That means”, Penelope M’gamba put in “the end is near, the massacre is in due course. Let’s call the souls then, and let them in. That’s all we can do for now.”

Arundle nodded affirmatively. The bow indicated to her that Professor M’gamba was right.

Soon the souls entered the boat while the lifeless bodies sank to the ground. The sharks lost interest immediately, and didn’t touch the corpses.

Not one of the Mounted Sharkoneers had his saddle beast to follow. Thus, the bodies lay untouched on the ground and were soon covered with slimy mud and pink sand that lowered after the brutal raid, like the drop curtain at the end of one of those tragedies of life, living beings have to endure.

By means of telepathy, carefully hiding their messages against the enemy's infiltration – a highly complex procedure that required the utmost concentration – Grisella and Scholasticus, together with the magic bow and Arundle herself as well as Billy-Joe, who did his part, those remaining outside, to hand themselves over likewise into fate's hands. Even more souls cramped in the boat, and the more there were, the more lifeless bodies sank to the ground.

Such mass dying obviously alarmed the leaders of the guards, as the Mounted Sharkoneers' Squadron and their horrible creatures retired. Ambulances and medical personnel entered the scene instead, followed by journalists.

Thus, it didn't take long until a Visa phone connection was wired to the boat. A female voice connected to a lovely face interrogated softly for the whereabouts of the enclosed, and expressed the Government's regret for that indecent incident, as she put it.

Adrian Humperdijk was far too disturbed to come about with his indignation and the protest of his fellow travellers, who all hoped to get the chance for publicity. Indeed a reporter entered the boat and had already passed the outer sluice, requesting entrance.

On a sign of the magic bow, the whispering souls went silent and retired into the dormitories. "Just a measure of precaution", the bow let Arundle know. Souls were invisible, but you never knew how capable these creatures were down here.

The visitor introduced himself as a high representative of the Government of Melisandria. Adrian had once met him at the court of King Melisander. He was a nephew of the monarch Adrian meant to remember. His name was also Melisander like most of the royal male descendents. Only the King was allowed to use the name Melisander without further identification. The present Melisander had the prefix II³ (=second over three). "He is still a potential aspirant for the throne", Adrian whispered to Grisella and Scholasticus next to him, who bowed, like Adrian respectfully in front of the splashing in visitor, whose head was covered with a ball-like basin, filled with water, thus he was able to stand the dryness for some minutes.

Adrian was still too upset to speak, and so Scholasticus took over. He shortened the introductory procedure, and expressed in clear sharp words his indignation and then protest of his fellow travellers.

You could see Melisander II³ fighting with himself. At last, he remembered his mission, because instead of breaking up the contact and rush away immediately, he asked permission to explain the general situation. His wish was of course respected.

“Somewhere in the chain of order a terrible mistake slipped in. King Melisander assures you that he never ordered the horrible attack”, Melisander II³ said, “while the internment of rioting subjects was indeed part of the de-escalation programme as well as the internment of the submarine, since its banners had been regarded as a severe interference into the inner affairs of the Kingdom. Your contacts with the rebels never remained unnoticed. We had to take severe measures as soon as we came to the conclusion that part of your fellow travellers were fraternizing with terrorists”, he answered no less clear and sharp. “If you misuse your guest status, we have to give you the adequate answer”, he ended in a royal air.

Neither Adrian, nor the other teachers held a suitable answer ready at hand. They made up their minds to never ever handle questions of that kind by census again. Life and health were indisputable, nobody could make them subject of a democratic procedure. The banners outside had led them into a deadly trap.

Adrian found words of excuse for the banners and admitted that they had made a mistake. “A qualified minority was against those banners and also against the content”, he said. “Our concern now is however another one. We witnessed the most cruel slaughtering while in the internment camp, that needs an answer too.”

“The King assures you once again that he did not give the fatal order which led to the pogrom. He deeply regrets what happened. Those in charge will have to face severe punishment.

The internment of the rioters however” – Melisander II³ went on, “had been subject to the King’s order. Open rebellion and armed uprising cannot be accepted by the state. It is our government’s duty to make sure that our laws are obeyed”, the regal Ambassador pointed out.

Adrian asked for the whereabouts and Melisander frankly explained:

“In the city there had been massive riots, marchers had plundered and raided the inner city, and overwhelmed the regular police forces. On the height of the revolt, the so-called Free State of Australis was called out. This was a very nasty and totally unacceptable development”, the Ambassador ended while questions turned in from all sides on him.

‘Hopefully nobody get that man on the track of the flooding souls’, Arundle thought, as they were of course eager to return into their bodies outside, which lay like dead on the ground. It was about time for the re-animation. The gap in time shouldn’t be too wide though for the untrained. It was a question anyway, if the souls were able to find their own bodies.

Arundle just had this in mind when it happened. The Ambassador referred to the heap of corpses at the bottom of the stadium. He would personally take care, that they were removed and properly buried he said, when Scholasticus referred to the reanimation that was soon to come. Melisander cocked up: “What is that? Reanimation...? Who is going to be reanimated?”

Even Adrian noticed how critical the situation became. After all, the court was surely not unhappy about the end the rebels had found. “Unexplainable mass dying” didn’t sound bad, and the press had been invited to the stadium to find out just that - all of them, even the representatives of the opposing media. As long as it became clear, that it was not the government, who drew the strings in the background.

Adrian whispered meanwhile into the Ambassador’s ear something about strange theological confessions, the colleague practised. “You see, among the dry-landers many believe in such soul mysticism. There is a long tradition of Buddhist origin, which prevailed under the surface. My dear colleague seems to be a follower of one of those sects. Such ideas get hold of the brightest minds occasionally. Since we separated church and state, religion became a private matter, and is now subject to the individuals.”

Melisander II³ did not agree with Adrian’s liberal view on the matters of belief. Transmigration of souls might have been a heretic aspect of religion, in Melisandria, and nobody was allowed to believe what he or she wanted. However, that was not the question of today.

The invaders seemed to have managed somehow to separate souls and bodies by what ever means of evil witchcraft and sorcery.

Scholasticus tried in vain to extinguish the flames of mistrust that sprang up at once. The Ambassador showed all signs of alertness. He even claimed a malfunction of the system. Besides, the suit became uncomfortable, thus he escaped towards the sluice and disappeared right away without further arguments or reference to the subject, and so did the souls who dived down into the mud to look for their bodies. That was of no concern in the beginning as sand covered the fallen, while the guards hailed their master, who slipped out of the fancy dress he had put on for the dry-landers.

“I wished it was night, and the Prussians came¹⁹” Scholasticus whispered, who was quite upset about the mistake he had made. “That can be done”, Arundle replied – “of course not the Prussians, but the night”, she explained with a giggle as Billy-Joe looked bewildered, and asked her

¹⁹ Famous saying before Wellington’s victory over Napoleon.

magic bow to be of help. In no time a dark sepia cloud wavered down on the stadium and reduced the visibility almost to zero.

The Ambassador released the submarine, of course, so the engines ran idle meanwhile, and everything was ready for start up at any time. One of the main gates of the stadium had been opened for them already. All headlights and beamers had been turned on because of the darkness, while more and more souls rushed out to look for their bodies and have them follow in the broad shade of the boat's trunk. "Can you slow down even further", Arundle asked the Captain who shrugged as they went on lowest speed already. "Well then, stop here and then, we've got to get them all. Some can't find their homes it seems", Billy-Joe whispered who was on watch in the back.

"We can turn the blades straight, so we give the impression of motion without moving", the chief made himself known.

"Let's hope the broad shade suffices after all..."

"Together with the artificial night we should manage to get out of here first of all – then we must see..."

"Let's hope for the best..."

"The guards didn't mind the artificial night..." Arundle said and Scholasticus nodded "Looks fine though", he said and put his night spyglass back on his eyes, and continued to check on what was going on outside.

"The room inside somehow felt emptier, although the souls didn't use up space, but they formed their own atmosphere, that made the difference. There must have been some two hundreds, but nobody had counted them. They were now diving for their lifeless bodies to ignite new life in them, thus they became able to follow the trail of the refugees in the shade of the idling vessel and the artificial nightfall.

28. The Flight

Protected by the cloud of sepia the boat approached the narrow passage that had been opened for them, leading outside of the stadium - in fact, the only possible way out and a real loophole. Would the coup work? The dark cluster of bodies under the rump was visible without doubt for anyone with proper senses and attentive eyes. What could be done? First, the head- and backlights had to do their plight. Their sharp beams blindfolded the guards at best, while a second measure was the energetic cloak that was extended once more by the joint effort of the remainders.

For an untrained eye, the shape of the rump thus became somewhat organic and wobbly – a fact, the sprites were supposed to be familiar with down here.

The guards would of course look at them from behind, as soon as they had passed the last lock. This would become the crucial moment, when the boat would accelerate, and the payload had to do likewise. Therefore, all possible concentration focussed on that instant. The senders of the energetic shield knew how important their task would become, as their will formed the snap bag for the negligent. Sure enough, the Mounted Shark Riders would follow them eventually to watch them out of the prohibited zone and even further. Therefore, the flight was full of risks and unforeseen obstacles. Would the mental power suffice? How could the refugees be kept out of the propeller? How could they be safeguarded?

Such were the questions in the minds of the wilful helpers, while the captain arranged everything for the crucial moment when they passed the final gate.

Scholasticus had an eye on the bulk astern, while the Captain slowly accelerated and the mental practitioners sent their joint energy through the spiritual sluices as had been foreseen. As soon as they passed the crucial line, he gave full power while Scholasticus nodded his okay from the stern where he stood on watch. The invisible energetic bulb kept contours and stayed clear from the propeller, which was definitely advantageous. Only someone with a sharp eye and the necessary discernments would be able to define what he saw.

The visitors from the surface had to leave the grounds of Australis on the straightest possible way without further delay, so it had been arranged with Melisander II³. Thus, the submarine headed its nose upwards in the steepest possible angle of about forty-five degrees, a situation, which made it difficult for the refugees to keep up. It hadn't been discussed but the dry-landers inside figured that they would come with them. Corinia announced something like that, as Boetie and her comrades didn't know where else to go. Dead officially, they had to remain undetected as long as the situation was so unclear. Their homes were destroyed or occupied, and so was their way of living. The whole network of conspiracy was uncovered, and the rebellion strangled 'in statu nascendi'²⁰. They had no choice but to ask for asylum.

The younger ones might well find another colony somewhere abroad and in a far future, as nobody could imagine, what this meant.

Ahead lay now an hour's permanent cruises upwards, and behind the first huge shades could be seen following the vessel on its way of escape.

²⁰ State of birth

“That’s what we feared”, the Captain said. “With that bulb of yours, we are pretty tail-heavy and might even need more time.”

“Definitely too much for the poor refugees, who are still exhausted and some are even wounded. Through the spiritual access we have, we receive cries for mercy. Something must be done...” Arundle agreed.

What could be done? How could they help? The Mounted Squadron was following only a short distance behind now. The scouting sharks ahead picked up, and got nearer. They cruised at arm-length in front of the panorama-panes. Something had to happen right away, otherwise they had lost the game, their trick was about to be uncovered, and that would mean the end for the brave rebels. The sharks and their riders could no longer be cheated.

“If we flood part of the boat, how many of the desperados would we get inside? All of them? Let’s see ...” Adrian had raised the question and Scholasticus passed it on to Arundle and her magic bow, while Billy-Joe replaced him at the watch astern. “Consider the quality of water and the turnover. They need oxygen as well, just as we do. The difference is the way they get it into their system, that’s all the difference there is...”

“We do still produce great amounts of oxygen - almost as much as double of our own requirements”, the Captain confirmed. “I wonder whether the engines will do, and of course it would slow us down to almost zero if we keep on ascending the way we do right now...”

“Well then, lets give it a trial...”

“Do we have a choice?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“First we’ve got to get rid of the superfluous liquids in the bilges and sweet-water tanks, well and some of our dormitories as well, I’m afraid...”

“Won’t be able to dine or use the lav, but in some three or so hours we should have made it – well yes, with that addition you cannot expect to be as fast as we are now...”

While the scientists still figured, the Captain gave orders to have things prepared. He began to fill the bilges and the tanks with fresh deep-sea water after having them cleared and the first disabled were launched inside.

Billy-Joe gave alarm from his pedestal astern. Their enemies had noticed the unrest inside the cluster. The sharp shark noses bounced against the mental grid here and then, and it was only a question of time, when one of the fierce beasts would succeed. The smell of flesh they seem to get into their nostrils already.

Up to now their flight went on undetected. Hundreds of corpses become alive again and assemble in the shade of a submarine, and nobody

took notice, that was even in the darkest sepia-night very unlikely and could be seen as a wonder.

“We’ve got to flood the main lounge as well and the dormitories adjacent. If we do, we might have enough space for all our guests – that is the good news, the bad is, that we would then exceed our allotted maximal weight by almost a third, not to mention the payload to follow it - this still comes into calculation, which is a doubtful question after all...” Scholasticus summed up the calculations they had done. Do birds weigh, if they are kept in the air while being carried on a truck?

He looked at the Captain and the Captain looked back as if he had a toothache, shrugged vaguely or nodded, you couldn’t differentiate - at the same time.

He didn’t mind one way or the other. Would the engine do?

“We never tested our limits though”, he then said with a self-assured convincing smile. “The boat’s got to stand that”, the brave mate confirmed – a submariner of the old school.

“Well then, we take them all. Get them in, but they will have to squeeze; it’s gonna be tight like in a tin of anchovies, I’m afraid; and for us it won’t be any better.”

The lower part of the rump was shut, and locked hermetically. The flooding pipes were opened and water flooded the decks, while the air escaped gargling. The boat seemed to drop. “Steep up the propeller, for heaven’s sake – more power on the well, if I may plead. The machinist acted right away. The boat made a jump, but the streaming water levelled the pressure.

“Let’s hope nothing went wrong outside”, the passengers still held their energetic circuit vivid, while the crew was too busy for such reflections. Then everything was set so far; the boarding of the lot could begin within the next five minutes. “We are still flooding the decks”, the engineer shouted. “Go ahead.”

Outside were the sharks.

“The sharks”, went a scream through the boat.

“Open that sluice and have them enter in tens at a time. Let’s hope they realize how serious the situation is.

The rebels realized what was going on; they had seen the dark shades as well. Once the flooding process had started, the sluice could be kept open until the latest found refuge, that is, a tiny spot to rest and respire. One after the other slipped through the hole. Inside it got tight but there were still some fifty bodies out there, and the sharks got close. The magic bow once more activated the powers of the shield.

“Did we flood the passenger cabin?” Someone asked. The engineer shook his head. That was it. While the add-ons slipped in one by one the

cabin got flooded, that meant the last resort was gone now for the travellers and the crew, who had to remain to the very limited sector of the bridge and the adjacent corridors in the bow.

From outside ropes were fitted around the rump, while the sharks stumped their noses into the wobbling energetic grid, as it emptied.

“Hurry up, we’ve got to go”, the Captain commanded, while the last rebels slipped in and the hatch was shut.

“Full power on all wells, let it go babies”, the engineer ordered. A shaking ran through the body, rivets sang. The ropes the Shark Squadron tried to tie them down with were torn to pieces. The boat whimpered and squeezed, while the propeller yammered like mad and exhaled a vast stream of foam astern. The boat did another jump, still not totally free. The mate waved the machinist to lower the speed and have the boat relax a little. “Full speed now”, he said after a little while; and this time it worked: “Up, up and away, we are free at last...”

The populated bridge was crowded that you couldn’t find a place to sit down without being hushed away immediately, as you were sitting on one of the boats life-streams or switches that had to be turned at that very moment, when you settled.

While still in due process of trimming the Captain gave the engine another challenge and headed the nose up as steep as he could at maximum power. Then he lowered the nose, when he realized that they didn’t move at all, until he found a suitable angle by some forty degrees of ascendance.

The Mounted Shark Squadron had now filed up and surrounded the boat with all signs of helpless wrath. They now knew how they had been cheated.

When the mental bag was empty, the powers faded and the energy disappeared through the loopholes while the youngsters relaxed who had carried the main lot. Their teachers were very proud of them. “You did a great job...”

The ropes of the Sharkoneers still dwindled astern while the boat accelerated and picked up speed steadily, no matter of the excessive payload aboard.

The further the slim body of the vessel went, the more speed did she pick up, while the pressure lowered on the rump. Everybody concentrated on the flight, and nobody watched the oxygen metres, controlling the flooded lower decks and the bilge.

Corinia got the emergency call first, who was the most sensible amongst the group of telepathists. When the engineer got the oxygen converter started at last, it was almost too late for the poor victims down at the lowest bilge, where the water was bilge-like by now. There lay the disabled and injured, the first being taken over.

Their own 'humane' air up here on the bridge became bad as well, because they were all sweating like mad, while still ascending in full speed. The engineer pressed some more bottoms, while the tension released up here and down there, in the bilge.

"Surface ten fathoms straight ahead" the sonar guest expelled in a monotonous air some times later; most had fallen asleep, while nothing was seen from their persecutors.

"Right-o, come up one mark", the Captain commanded. "Surface bearing thirty seconds each by now", he hollered from his stand to the bow. "By ten feet clear to emerge - all hands on deck..."

That was easier said than down. The boat cocked her nose like a cork as its back was still filled with water. Emerging was impossible with all that additional weight, the Captain realized. "Can anybody tell me, how we are going to proceed?" He asked, looking from one Professor to the other. In fact, none of them had made up his or her mind yet.

"The thin water on the surface is not unproblematic for the mer-people. They profess a vivid regulating system, though, thus, they can stand the enormous pressures of the deep sea, but up here, it takes them some effort to keep in shape, so to speak. A medium altitude of some twenty feet would certainly do and guarantee the necessary degree of comfort", Adrian explained. "Yes, I see, there is a point in it. We cannot leave them alone as long as their prosecutors are after them", Billy-Joe said and Corinia added: "They've got to get out of that lockers as soon as possible all of them, not only the injured..."

"We must find a hiding place for them nearby and safe, and as comfortable as possible", Scholasticus summed up what was said in this respect.

"What about the reef or the socle base of the Convertors' Island? The water is definitely deep enough there and you can easily hide in the mazes of the former volcano slot and protect yourself against any attack from outside. Nutrition shouldn't be a problem either. There is seaweed all over the place and the reef is adjacent... what else do you need?" – Adrian agreed, and asked Corinia for assistance in order to communicate their findings to the refugees.

The island was near by and a delegation of the sea-sprites was sent there for inspection. The place had to house some two hundred refugees for weeks or even months, depending on the further development in their home colony. The scouts found some suitable caves close to the bottom of the socle, where pressure was all right. With a little help from good friends they would be well able to defend themselves, provided they got some iron bars or steel grid to close the openings against invaders.

“Down there, we can make up our minds, how to proceed”, Boetie said. “We are visiting you at full moon”, Corinia confirmed, “and see whether the devices work out to your satisfaction, we are sending right away, as soon as we land”, Adrian added.

Meanwhile the Captain figured out the course, together with his Navigator. They didn’t want to have their payload disembark right away, as nobody knew where the murder-sharks lured. However, they didn’t manage. They weren’t able to lower the nose deep enough to head towards the ground again. “If we had tried before, we would have managed, but now it is too late. We have to get rid of some weight astern, no doubt about that.”

This meant for some of the rebels to leave the shelter of the boat right away. The crew handed all their guns and weaponry over to them. That was the least they could do. “Let’s pray they won’t find you. The straightest way might be the best, though, but you ought to know better than we do, after all this is your world, were you belong...” Adrian waved them off, while the surplus water was pressed out of the boat, as soon as the space was cleared, and soon the boat followed the forlorn little flock on its way into the uncertain.

It took only minutes until the socle came in sight and the disembarkation-procedure of the injured and disabled could start. The Captain had been able to contact the home submarine hangar and ordered – as had been promised - the necessary tools and steel bars to cover the openings of the main cave the refugees had chosen as their new base.

Some of the injured were in very bad shape, but little could be done for them. They had to be treated the way injured were treated down here. Boetie assured her friends that she would care personally for them. “I am familiar with the medicine and herbal extracts required for handling wounds of that kind. Of course I am not able to have lost limbs grow again, but otherwise, everything is done.”

As soon as the boat had been emptied and everything that could be spared, had been handed over to the refugees, it was time to say good-bye. The refugees wished to reconsider the betrayal and the early defeat, and wanted to find out, what mistakes they had made. They knew it well, for them there was no way back. With their flight, they had cut off the bonds of dependency.

As soon as the boat was free of the surplus payload and the superfluous water had been pressed out again, it began to stabilize in a carpet of foam and steam, thus the on looking rebels sought for shelter in their new home. The vessel returned to her regular trim and lifted her nose, then majestically accelerated and almost noiselessly went her way.

“Steady go” the Captain commanded. The helmsman had the rudder dwindle until the compass showed the proper course. “Slow go both engines. Lookout into the crow’s nest astern, report when clear of escort.”

The bulkheads were opened and the rests of the dirty water swapped at the passengers’ feet, if they didn’t jump up the stairs to the Captain’s stand. The muddy water was flowing steadily into the bilges and was then pumped outboards.

The man bound for the crow’s-nest astern slowly stepped towards his destination. Through the dim pane, he could see a swarm of rebels following. Some fifty or even a hundred there might be. They kept well clear off the propellers and thus, the lookout gave green light for free cruise. He could see the figures getting smaller as they didn’t keep up with the boat. Perhaps they didn’t want to get too far from their shelter.

A short while later the Captain gave orders to emerge and this time the elegant vessel cut the waves properly and aimed the surface in no time. The tower’s bulkhead was opened and the Captain was the first to climb up.

All necessary navigational devices were extended. The hectic activity that followed now was too much for the passengers. They felt superfluous as they were and got pushed about like useless pieces of furniture, so they disappeared and assembled in front of the panorama-pane. They couldn’t see the contours of the islands ahead which grew up ahead, while the first rays of the rising sun cut over the horizon.

The air was fresh over the night-cool sea. A slight swell rolled by from the south. An untrue picture of peace presented itself to the spectators’ eyes, as the terror ascended in waves. Like a threatening dark cloud the prosecutors kept coming. The Melisandrian troops had not given up. The Mounted Sharks Squadron formed the spearhead for the militia-men and the Regal Guards to follow.

The lookout astern did a good job, as he gave not in, while the band of rebels picked up. He saw the deadly danger long before the refugees. Corinia and Adrian were called to communicate with the escort and have them hide now in the socle of the home base. Shortly before the boat filed inside, it took a turn and headed towards the rebels, who now became aware what was going on. For them it was too late to return. The submarine and the devices of the port offered shelter now. They might find weapons there, better ones than those being handed out before.

The brave rebels swam for their lives now. They didn’t need a course, as they could feel the dark solid hidings of the reef with its caves and caverns, where they would be safe for the moment.

The Isle of Wisdom-tooth lay on port. The black contours of the island stuck black and familiar into the grey morning. If they led the rebels there, there was no excuse any more, the Professors figured, when the

lookout from astern reported the swarm of killer-sharks approaching in full speed. Up to now their manoeuvres remained unknown to the Melisandrian troops by which they managed to guide and safeguard the refugees up to here. Nobody would be able to prove that the rebels escaped inside the boat. Nobody could even imagine such a coup, technically spoken. However, if the School of Inbetween now openly invited the rebels, this could be understood as a declaration of war against Melisandria. This had to be avoided. Nobody could take the responsibility for that assault, as Adrian still doubted the motives of the rebels and was not at all convinced of their righteousness.

“Before I have not spoken with the King, I cannot take the responsibility for any further measure exceeding humanitarian aid.” His colleagues understood his point of view, no matter which side their heart was beating. Such fairness was necessary. There were always two sides and both had to be heard, before you came to a conclusion.

“Do they manage?” – the Captain hollered back to the lookout astern.

“It’s a tight race”, the man yelled back. “A little confusion might help... They’d better not look back... the prosecutors are at their limits as well... it seems.”

Arundle and her magic bow joined the man at his tricky post. “Perhaps a little magic might do wonders”, the bow snarled and had some tiny fireballs explode amidst the bulk of the following troops behind the spearhead that led to a considerable confusion.

“Shan’t we dive again and have our protective screen extended?” she asked when Adrian rushed by to check the result of this new manoeuvre.

“Might as well be too obvious though, perhaps we can do without”, Adrian replied. He still had the schools reputation in mind and the idea of a two-front-war would mean the definite end of the project. The situation was already turning from bad to worse, so to speak. King Melisander had good reasons to treat the behaviour of the submariners as an act of warfare. Thus, the rebels headed towards the reef, while a few already slipped into the clefts of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, when the submarine made a turning towards the upcoming armada, a manoeuvre, which didn’t meet the undivided agreement of the Professors. Thus, the Captain altered it into a confusing landing procedure in the docks, where the boat would be taken care of, after all the huddle muddle of the previous days.

This final coup made the submarine turn around half of the island, which made the upcoming Melisandrian forces to turn likewise in order not to collide with the boat. Thus, the refugees succeeded in keeping their lead, and have them slip into the groundless depth of the socle. While the enemy bounced in vain against the barrier of the reef.

However, there was no time to relax. The troopers were as well able to slip in through the clefts and caverns of the reef. Had they done, thing might have turned out badly, but without their heavy arms and without their beasts the soldiers were not half as brave as before. While the refugees sat panting and shivering in the hiding, nothing happened from the outside. Thus, they recovered and with the ancient arms, they found in hidden chambers, they became a serious factor again, very able to protect themselves and to think of strategies to outmanoeuvre the regular troopers.

Both sides were equal in number, thus the Melisandrian commander decided to retreat for the time being and have a messenger sent to the home base asking for additional manpower.

29. Under Suspicion

The encircled were as uncertain as their prosecutors, and didn't know what to do. After all, they sat in relatively save caves and could, if necessary, disappear further into the bottomless maze. Even of food, there was no lack. Seaweed wavered fat and green about like curtains before the clefts and peaks, as the daylight still got here on sunny days. While all kind of fish was dwelling in between, also well protected, as the big enemies could not enter. Thus, the reef was their chosen home and shelter.

Any invader had to figure with hefty counter-attacks. Not only harmless worms and shells populated the fertile grounds, as poisonous sea serpents or rays knew well how to protect their quarters. Other instincts of defence became alive as well, as some of the careless noticed, who negligently pick sea-gherkins or settles in front of an octopods refuge, or stirred up a sea-devil incidentally. Those who did had to bear the consequences.

As the refugees exhaled the air of prey, they appealed on the generosity of the inhabitants of the reef. Their silent cry for mercy and shelter met open senses. The rebels knew they could not defend the countless openings of such a reef. They needed help by the permanent residents, otherwise they were lost, sooner or later. The sharks could not get in, but the troopers could. In the shade of the night, when the intruders – exhausted as they were – fell asleep, and then the time would come.

Meanwhile the rebels found out who of them were missing. That was another problem. The greater they were in number, the more powerful their rebellion was. Some of the weaker ones might have hidden in the socle of

the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and while the attackers had retreated - as it looked – it might be wise, to assemble them all together.

The fact that they could rely on the local residents was of great help, in any case. The alarm system they put up was almost perfect. You could not do an undetected move somewhere near the reef. They would feel even stronger, if they were together again. The more sensible ones received the vibrations of their kin even over a considerable distance.

While the reef now turned the balance of power in favour of the refugees, they risked a spearhead-mission. When the scouts came back, they could only report the definite retreat of the attackers. A swarm of cute silver-fish took over the mission, while the dissemble joined, most of them naiads, who had been too weak at the first place, thus, slipped into the shelter of the other island, where they not only found shelter but understanding and an armament of effective weapons, even sharks had to fear.

When the night lowered, nothing was seen of the murderous sharks, just as the scout fish reported. Still you could never be sure. Such a shark was almost twice as fast as the fastest swimmer, especially in the long run.

The hours passed. Those deep-sea dwellers that were unable to glow on their own were lost in complete darkness. In such darkness sounds move incomparably far. Thus, a creature of the darkness could jump suddenly up from deeper layers of water, and meet its prey just by the smell, or the tiny movement of a flipper. Those aware, knew all too well about such facts, and the day had to dawn before the dissembled were able to join at last.

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Meanwhile on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth Adrian felt relieved. A burden was taken off his shoulders. The Converter's Island was still too close, and belonged somehow to the school, but you could deny it and you could say, that the ongoing never came into the focus of the school-management. Adrian, her husband, would straighten things out for them, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Headmistress, hoped. She could rely on him, as she had always done, although misfortune seemed to stick to their heels.

What a catastrophe! From all sides misfortune beamed in on the shaken School of Inbetween, as if they had not enough trouble with the sponsors and the parents already. Not to mention the interior quarrel about the value of colours and the quality of the gifts and talents the disciples procured. Gift or poison – that was the question – genius or lunatic – the alternative.

*

Thus was the situation when Walter came about with the message from the stars. A purified Walter, who met the disturbed deep-sea adventurers, still suffering from the strain they had just overcome.

Arundle was pale and fuzzy. Tired as she was, her speech lacked of power. Even the magic bow couldn't help. Dumb dark assumptions, soulless musings of the horrible, that came out of the depth of the ocean lured, where brilliant cascades of the spirit were needed.

Walter promised hope. His visit at the Advisor's alarmed the disappointed. Help was offered and correction advised. The course of history was in good and caring hands, and was not left alone by the godly eye, that was entitled to look both ways forward and backwards, and handled the time just like a man might draw his lines on a piece of paper. Time was a calculable and hand-able factor.

"The Advisor promised his help", Pooty confirmed and Tibor nodded, who was deeply impressed by what he had experienced on his first excursion into space and time.

"The Advisor promised to unveil the deeds of Malicious Marduk, insofar as they are intended to alter the course of history ahead of time", Tibor explained with the air of an experienced time-traveller.

"Could you get anything somewhat precise out of him?" Scholasticus asked and looked questioningly to Arundle. They knew how vague the Advisor's statements were. "Did he give you any advice leading towards a far area or pointing down into fathomless depths?" Arundle wanted to know, and Tibor wondered how well both of them were acquainted with the Advisor's way of thinking. Of course, it would have been helpful if Tibor had come with the news of a secret attack by some kind of devil who found access to the souls of the Melisandrian court. However, unfortunately, the Advisor didn't talk about the mer-folk at all, Tibor said.

"He didn't talk about the mer-folk at all, did he?" Arundle confirmed once more. Tibor looked at Walter and shrugged. "Might be a matter of interpretation", Pooty threw in. "Why not depth and mer-folk? Nothing of that he didn't say either, did he?" Pooty's attempt to be witty was no success. The situation did not allow that.

What would happen, if the armies from the depth mobilized against the School of Inbetween? Help from outside could not be expected. Nobody would believe them. Even a request for more manpower and material would fire back immediately. How could you explain to the public the change of attitude?

"We have to talk to the rebels. No matter what it is like down there", Adrian suggested and Scholasticus agreed.

"Perhaps we can find out about the initial cause of the rebellion."

"Didn't we start all that by our visit and behaviour?"

“Yes, we didn’t do much good, I’m afraid”, Florinna committed, as she didn’t listen to her little sister.

“Anyway”, Grisella summed up as she held the chair once more – we should not over judge our role, we are not so important.”

“Adrian, what do you think? Say something, please...” the Headmistress addressed at her husband, who was winding like an eel all the time, but didn’t come about to say something.

“I have nothing in particular to offer”, he said, “only my feelings; first I wanted to put it on the Conversors’ island - that we are all somewhat predisposed by all that rubbish. You know what I mean; I go there and feel like newly born, while everyday life still stick on you of course; takes some time until you get that out of your mind. Yes, that’s right, I said it to myself repeatedly – it ain’t be what it used to there down under, didn’t want to accept first of all. Who wants that after all, you live in that and by that, it’s like a drug of elixir of life, you don’t want to be cheated. Well, that’s how I felt anyway. The feeling is there. Something’s wrong, something’s foul in the State of Denmark, so to speak, you know what I mean...”

Those in favour of the rebels all too well understood, what he wanted to express, at least they thought they did. “Something is wrong in the **State** (of Denmark)” that was the way they felt and emphatically preceded on safe grounds.

“No matter our feelings, we need clairvoyance”, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk exclaimed. “Adrian’s emotions are honourable and I rely on them ... who, if not I?” she added meaningfully. “We have to get facts – from both sides. I think that is most important.”

“The development down there kicked us off our feet – things over-rolled us. All of a sudden, there was no choice any more. You had to take sides one way or the other...” Penelope M’gamba rolled with her eyes meaningfully – they all understood her, no one who had been in the boat felt differently. Only because of the cleverness of the crew, they succeeded with their flight. Who knows what would have happened otherwise.

“Our interference into the internal affairs of the state must first be proven by King Melisander after all”, Adrian meaningfully said, as he felt best acquainted with the internal affairs down there, although his wife doubted his objectivity. Things were too obvious. They could as well add two and two together down there, and come to the same result. However, Adrian had to stick to that straw, his tormented soul asked for relief.

He longed for harmony. Reconciliation, mediation, and compensation were the guiding ideas of his life on the side of his witty wife. He had managed well so far, as he knew about the secret monthly outlet. The development now picked up and the patterns of his existence clashed like glaciers, setting free a huge amount of destructive energy.

He could easily get out to the rebels in the socle, but had he the guts to try again the incalculable depth? Who wished to become shark fodder? The deep-sea travellers looked at each other, while they participated in the imagination of the honest weakling, whose respiration lost rhythm, just by the thought of the threat.

“This is another possibility of demonstrating the advantages of dream-travelling”, Marsha Wiggles proclaimed with a pitiful glance at her husband who indeed didn’t present himself as a hero.

How could he? Someone who only enjoyed the favourable sides of life failed God’s challenge for Man on earth.

Arundle, who was hit by such cruel wave of thought, felt scared, and she was not alone. A lot of bitterness had quite obviously gathered on Marsha’s side over the years, while she showed the surface of a perfect matrimony.

Corinia offered to see Boetie, who she thought to be amongst the rebels down at the socle. The friendship of the two seemed to be a good base to find out about the ignition of the riots. Arundle and Florinna would come with her; there was no doubt about that. Unwillingly they accepted Scholasticus as the official representative of the School of Inbetween. While Adrian still was not fond at all of the idea of meeting the place of his secret musings accompanied by his wife, who intended to travel to King Melisander. He didn’t even change his mind when Marsha made very clear that such visit was her definite plight as the Headmistress of the school.

“We’ve got to find out, what on earth did happen to the King. How could it be that an honest man gave such an order? Chasing men with sharks - what sick brain comes about such an idea?”

Marsha didn’t expect an answer although she looked in the round and met disgust and dismay. Something was going on down there, something of another quality and of quite a different shape. No matter what the real cause was, and whether it did matter if they found out about it.

They had managed to drive the malevolent spirits off the island. Had they retreated into the secret Kingdom? They had to find out. Did those Miseriors - instead of returning into their hellish sphere - found refuge and access to the souls and bodies of the mer-people?

The outbreak of the worst cruelties you could think of pointed that way and nursed such suspicion. The sudden outbreak of violence and insidiousness on both sides (with a clear overweight on the state’s side) pointed that way, Marsha concluded, as a result of their joint reflections.

She felt backed up by Grisella and Penelope, as they came to the same conclusion. It did not really matter, which side was haunted by Malicious Marduk, or conquered by his Miseriors. The conflict as such bore the deadly danger.

Poor Adrian was still fixed in the bonds of loyalty, while the others thought this a minor aspect. The real threat settled deeper and took the symptoms for the cause. It didn't matter who threw the first stone. If it was true what showed up, then another peril was on the march. Deadlier and crueller, and more malicious than the worst harm the mer-folk had experienced in the past by their fellow man from the surface. They were on the straight route towards extinction, if their conflict went on, taken out of their hands as it was. Forces beyond their control ruled them.

Marsha hoped to be able to convey such message trustworthy and convincing to the King. "Oh, Adrian, don't be a fool and let me alone with this", she exclaimed pathetically. "We have to deal with forces beyond our abilities, don't you see that?"

Adrian noticed the desperation in his wife's voice. So he nodded, once more eager to please, as his role demanded, but he didn't really understand what she meant. Perhaps because he understood the prevailing circumstances and living conditions better than she did.

He knew how wild these people were. The beastly nature was hardly tamed, but lured right under the surface. It got easily started. A strange daemon would always remain a weak guest, more so if he couldn't rely on the fathomless cruelties of the depth.

What did those dry-landers know about the secrets of the depth? You didn't get the hint of an idea of the unspeakable threats, and the nameless horror luring in the depth of the oceans, you got in touch with, while sharing the realities of a sub-water life amongst the nymphs and nixes of the deep.

30. On a Dream-Trip to Melisandria

As long as the night prevailed, the delegation bound for Melisandria better took off right away, while the other could wait for the daylight, as the whereabouts of the area around the Convertors' Island were not at all transparent. Before daybreak, any voyage into the crucial zone forbade itself.

The sleep is righteously called mother of dreams for all, not only for the Somniors – however, especially for them. Thus, the Humperdijks who were bound for Melisandria soon lay in Morpheus arms. To be exact –

Marsha lay in the arms of the God of all Somniors, while Adrian enjoyed the warmth and the arms of his dear wife around him. He would not have been able to fall asleep, as excited as he was. While he couldn't let go the target of the day which he suggested to his tormented mind, - laden with all kinds of nightmarish figures and spooky fancies.

Marsha was little better off. She was as excited and still argued with her husband inside; and, as it is when couples argue – especially those not affected by the bacillus of indifference – the physical sensations of their close encounter took over, and carried them away, thus bringing them to their joint aim.

Slumber came with exhaustion, and sent them on the voyage into the dreamland, where they indeed met the King who resided on the other side of the globe. Carefully hidden under a deep-sea shelf, Bermudia still was undiscovered. No curious eye of an eager explorer yet met the secret grounds, partly because of the enormous depth of some fifteen or more miles under the sea level, where complete darkness would prevail, if there hadn't been the inner light from below.

Mere coincidence had it been that a band of young sea-sprites attracted by the flashes and sounds of warfare above - picked up poor Adrian, more dead than alive – near the end of the world war and took him with them. Adrian was a survivor of a submarine attack. The war between the continents was in full swing and got at him – a merchant seaman.

'It's almost like it used to be' he thought in his dream.

Under sea level, dreaming Somniors are little more to show but a grey shadow. They hardly get contours, and look as if they are melting any minute, almost like jellyfish perhaps, those fragrant beings drifting about like nomads of the oceans.

Under regular circumstances, King Melisander would not have allowed such beings before his throne. Adrian used the time of his conversion for visits to his friends in the sea, or he met the King when he came to Australis. As it took some time to get to Bermudia – at least a week, while the conversion was over as soon as the moon altered.

The ribbon of friendship tied them together since Adrian's spectacular rescue, when he became adjusted to the life of a nix with gills and flippers and all that – except for the two legs of his, they had to remain.

The friends met whenever the moon as well as the King's duty roster allowed it, that is – they had to match. Otherwise, the King had to be content with Adrian's vague, jellyfish-like shadow like this time. However, this was an emergency.

Adrian and Marsha arrived at the worst possible time. Because of the turmoil in the colonies, the whole state was upset. The government was busy day and night. Messengers travelled back and forth and the vista-

phone-lines were busy all the time. The King himself didn't have a rest for two days. Messengers and scouts reported in, or had to be briefed. All Royal Advisers stood by foot, so to speak, ready for action at any time.

The King had to make all relevant decisions, as the state was organized that way. That was why the poor solitary man tried in vain to keep all threads in his hands. He had to rely on more or less precise reports from the colonies, and often had to make decisions on the base of vague assumptions. He couldn't overlook the orders he gave, and more than once things happened, which nobody intended.

His temper was of no help either. He was vulnerable, squeamish and irritable. He suffered from sensitivity, and missed the lessening love of his folk in the colonies. At the same time, he was unable or unwilling to see why things went wrong, as he gave his best. So, to him his people lacked of thankfulness and obedience.

Yes, ruling made him solitary. His entourage bowed and tried to read his thoughts and notions, even before he uttered them, and only old friends - like Adrian - dared to tell him what they really thought. In fact, only one friend of the old days was left, all others passed away or had gone, or were dismissed for obscure reasons.

Melisandria was a rough tough land all too well adjusted to the environmental living conditions. Thus, a pile of reforms, decided ones and others intended, never ever became realized and sucked like parasites the blood of the people's body.

"You dare to come under my eyes", King Melisander hollered when the shadow of Adrian Humperdijk appeared. "After all you did to me. Fraternizing with terrorists, mobilizing the masses against their King; a nice friend you are!" Red tears ran out of the King's tired eyes. Adrian never saw him like that.

'Even Nero gathered his tears, the saying goes. Sentimental sobbing does not necessarily contradict with cruelty', came it to Marsha's mind. The despotic self-righteous tyrant didn't even notice her.

"Show courage, Adrian", she whispered into her husband's ear. They had some important questions to ask after all. If they didn't find the proper answers, there would not be much left to be talked about.

"Your Royal Highness, here I stand as the representative of the School of Inbetween. My wife, the Headmistress, and I, the Vice-Headmaster, have been ordered by the School's Council to inquire the circumstances of an incident, that is likely to become a severe conflict."

"Of the insubordination we did hear, and as well of the obstinate role you took", the King replied. "My authorities reported to me, how you initiated a rebellion against the crown, while cruising as guests through our territories. You abused our hospitality by fraternising with rebellious

terrorists. You arranged the flight of a band of captives by means of witchcraft. These desperados are now hiding in your territory, and they are equipped with very effective arms of yours. So, before we get into negotiations of any kind, these rebels have to be disarmed and handed over to our authorities.”

While the King talked himself into rage, Adrian fumbled his notes out of the pocket of his pyjamas. Lucky enough the image of the ink on the image of the paper could not be harmed by the water or by anyone down here, nor could he or his wife. That was the advantage of dreaming. With stentorian voice, he then read the second paragraph on his agenda, without caring about what the King just said.

“Should His Royal Highness not be willing or able to dissemble our earnest worries, and our grave doubts, we would consider this as a sign of continuous provocation. We would then feel forced to skip any relation and exchange what so ever with the Kingdom of Melisandria. Furthermore, we would cancel our voluntary commitment of confidentiality of your existence and location.”

Adrian came about with the most effective trump card they had. The existence of Melisandria was one of the best-guarded secrets of the universe. Nobody, except Adrian Humperdijk and some other dry-landers on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth knew about the location of the mer-folk.

The King was startled. He looked suspiciously at Adrian who was raging with wrath and dismay. It might be unwise to stop the talks too soon. No matter how tired and exhausted he felt. Behind his headache a signal of warning hammered, and advised him to better listen to the questions of his former friend.

“We will lend you our ear, no matter of the facts being already brought to our knowledge, and which we do not doubt. You shall anyway get the opportunity to ask your questions”, the King proclaimed.

That was the kind of attention Adrian had been looking for. He pulled one of the imaginary dream-papers out of the pocket of his pyjamas, where things were written down with imaginary ink as well, and brought forward the catalogue of demands and complaints Corinia had received from Boetie.

The theses sounded like the manifesto of freedom of the French Revolution, from where they originally stemmed. Who did copy whom? That was the question Adrian asked himself, whose subject was History.

He read:

“Free Man is born, but lies in bonds everywhere. That is to say...” Adrian skipped the excessive explanation that followed and the political conclusions, and turned to the following point, he as well explained

similarly, and so he did with the third and the fourth and fifth one. Further, he didn't get.

The King yawned for a while, first secretly than in the open. Marsha pushed her husband. "The King's fighting sleep, seems the wrong time now for the small print of that manifesto. Hand it over and let that be it", she whispered.

Adrian stopped and the King woke up. The monotonous voice of his friend did him well, so he waved him to go on. "Go on, go on" and a little smile played about his lips, which had lost all cruelty. "Your fairies are so nice, we always enjoy them unspeakably much..."

"Alas", Adrian replied and his voice got a different connotation. "Let me come to the questions of the School's Council referring to the incident."

Adrian feared the answers. They didn't know whether King Melisander stood behind the barbaric acts. Now it was too late to step back. The King was alert and awake again. Was the King up to date? Did he know what was going on in Australis? In order to find out, Adrian asked the King why they had been invited for a guided tour at that very moment. The King stunned and turned to his advisers, but they shrugged. Nobody seemed to know the answer.

Adrian then explained the situation from their point of view. He spoke about the attacks they had to face and the exorcism they performed consequently.

"We are still on a hellhound's trail, so to speak. Certain indices pointed towards the sea as well, after we got rid of our tormentors. That was one of the reasons why we asked for visitors' permits. The other was that the girls who had been rescued and saved - wanted to see their saviours again. Besides it is always helpful to get to know each other and different lifestyles as well."

The King gratefully waved him to continue.

"Shortly after we arrived, we ran into trouble, and soon were trapped in an internment camp together with hundreds of your people. With our own eyes, we saw terrible scenes, when sharks attacked the prisoners, and slaughtered them just like that. We did what we could in order to protect the poor victims, by means of an energetic shield..."

"Yes, and we let them in as well, these poor lost souls after their slaughtered bodies sank to the ground", Marsha added, who spoke up for the first time. "While death held his terrible harvest, we couldn't help but let those souls slip inside. When the darkness came, we fled the ghastly scene, and with us as many of the tormented as there could. That is - more or less - our story", Adrian concluded.

The King looked stunned. He waved some of his entourage to get closer and whispered hefty into their ears, before he turned back to the faint

images of Adrian and his wife. “I know you for many years now. I called you my friend. Is this the whole truth?”

“As I said, more or less; of course there can always be added something. The one or the other detail might as well be interpreted differently, but otherwise – yes, this is the truth”, Adrian confirmed.

He didn’t say anything about the banners and the secret meetings, and the trick of the Animations, separating the souls from the bodies, he also skipped.

On the other hand he didn’t describe the ghastly slaughtering in detail, thus, Adrian felt not guilty. Marsha backed him up once more. “We are going to see an eye witness soon”, she whispered. Adrian shook his head. “There was no time for that. All they can do is show us the recording of a vista-phone call.”

So it was. A Vista-phone-Transmitter with a big screen was brought in, and soon the action glimmered on the screen. You could see the transparent submarine on her cruise. Each of the stations they had approached was shown, as well as the sightseeing they had performed, and in detail, you could see the contacts between the visitors from the surface and members of the mer-folk. Even spoken words could be heard, but weren’t in favour of them at all. Either the girls had been very careless or the cutter had done a good job presenting the most unfavourable sight of the guests from above.

Adrian pointed out that the abilities were limited when it came to verbal communication. If there was any substantial conversation then it was non-verbal. Therefore, the impression raised by the feature was misleading, whether purposely or not, he wouldn’t like to decide, he said. Marsha picked up the thread right away. “Completely illogical, I protest sharply”, she made herself known again. Thus, the King realized that their conversation had been non-verbal all the time. With the shadows of a dream you could not possibly speak anyway, they reached the brain otherwise.

The only person, who was able to communicate fluently, was Adrian. Therefore, Adrian was right.

The recordings had been manipulated to lead the King astray. Why should the conspirators had verbalised the committing passages of their talk – that didn’t make sense at all, while the addressees weren’t able to understand their talk anyway. Adrian was right, the King realized unwillingly. What was the purpose of the recording? Who wanted to provoke the counteraction, as had been exercised so successfully? Who pulled the strings from behind? Was he, himself only a puppet on the string?

It seemed so. The rebels would not have compromised themselves willingly. Had there been plans for a coup d'état²¹? Did someone wish to throw dust in the public's eyes with a so-called rebellion, provoked by injustice and arbitrariness? Did someone want to show the King as an imbecile old man, unable to make clear decisions? He now regretted the orders he had given to strangle the revolt in statu nascendi²², as had been advised by the colonial ministers in charge, or by other members of the Crown Council – he didn't remember who they were.

The King tried to remember in vain. He only knew that he signed those delicate orders, but who handed them to him? What, if there was nothing behind the rumours of a rebellion? A certain dissatisfaction perhaps, a cry for reform, that could be solved peacefully. Did he sacrifice the lives of his people for nothing?

Like Cain's mark, the cruel order would stick on him. No matter what the outcome was. Nobody should be attacked like that, guilty or innocent.

The King felt dizzy, he was overwhelmed by long suppressed emotions. He felt the guilt's heavy weight like a millstone on his shoulders. Adrian noticed the change and so did Marsha.

"Now we have to care for limiting the damage", signalled Marsha, who understood first the range of King Melisander's dilemma. The entourage noticed the change as well. They tried to drive the guests away. Doctors rushed by. The King had lost consciousness. Adrian was unable to contact him. They had no other choice then to retire.

Both of them wouldn't like to be in the King's shoes, while the course of the development also bore hope. Dark forces were at work that seemed to be clear. The King had been used as a tool. Now he had blood on his hands that he would not be able to wash away. While he did the best, he could for his people in order to turn away a severe crisis of the state. A crisis that had been artificially raised. Innocent citizens had been sacrificed – perhaps young hotheads, or even hooligans – anyhow, what a dirty game! Victims had been driven together like a flock of sheep, and had been slaughtered just like that.

Adrian felt a nameless horror while he awoke from the nightmare he just had experienced in King Melisander's Kingdom. The horrible scenes and the bloodshed of the smashed corpses would remain vital in his memory forever.

31. Negotiations at the Reef

²¹ Take over of a state's power by force.

²² While just being born.

Gentle waves were smoothly slapping at the planks of the boat. A beautiful day it was above the two close islands. The sun was shining peacefully and harmonious, while some feet below the surface the horror raged. The besiegers closed the ring even tighter around the reef, where the refugees were hiding. For the messengers from the School of Inbetween it was not easy to keep in touch.

The first task was to ally the separated with the main force. That seemed to be their most important duty. Thus, a little armada would follow the boat. Whatever could be found of diving suits had been taken to the harbour; and when it became clear that the number of suits did not suffice, tubs were brought, which were filled with seawater. By means of such devices, the aides from the School of Inbetween hoped to bring the separated to the main body unharmed.

It took some time to convince the sprites and naiads of “the one and only safe way of transportation.” They said they’d better face an attack by the sharks then crawl into such a bin or suit. They had recovered, they said and could break through the ring of besiegers on their own at any time.

Corinia finally managed to convince Boetie and then the others as well, not without lengthier talks back and forth, until Boetie had herself slip into a tub.

A note from the reef finally made it, to follow the offer and fetch the straw before it was too late, as this was the only safe way.

The preparations started at daybreak. The gap between the two islands had to be crossed three times, as only one nix fitted into each tub. The diving suits were too large or too small, too short, or too long, and double legged of course, which made it very difficult to get the flipper in. Therefore, they proved of little help. Those who tried anyway almost suffocated.

Adrian and Marsha had returned from their mission at the court of King Melisander. Their report was not encouraging. The King was no longer in charge, but the puppet on the string of undefined forces hidden among the entourage. The refugees didn’t pity the imbecile old man, who stuck like being glued to the throne. “He should have resigned a long time ago”, they said, still angry and sad for the loss of their friends and comrades, who became victims of the sharks.

Things were by far more confusing than the reasonable Councillors of the School of Inbetween had thought. Their suspicion however proved valid that the troublemakers, who stirred up the turmoil and poured oil in the flames, so to speak, were of the same quality as the troublemakers they had experienced on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth a short while ago. They seemed to act on both sides down there, and that made it very difficult for the wilful helpers from above.

It looked now as if the Secret Service had had a certain clientele on their records, thus it was quite easy to arrest them all at once in their homes and caves. The blow against the rebellious youth of the colony was carried out so secretly that even the King himself didn't know.

"We have been betrayed", Boetie commented Adrian's report as soon as they were safe under the shelf of the reef again. Safe and sound, but deprived, the little flock of absentees found back to the main body of the refugees.

Corinia, Arundle and Scholasticus, covered under huge diving suits were with them now as the official delegation of the School of Inbetween. They talked about the refugees' plans, and later, when Adrian joined them as well, also about the situation at the court of King Melisander.

Scholasticus tried to convey the point of view of the School of Inbetween, but that proved to be quite difficult. Corinia had a hard job refraining the offspring of mistrust. Adrian and Marsha (who didn't let her husband alone) reported instead first hand from the court, from the King and the entourage, and the government, as far as had been present, anyway. Their report threw an unfavourable light on the King.

The King proved his critics right, who saw in him an imbecile old man, a puppet on the string in the hands of corrupt lobbyists - only interested in the exploitation of the colony. While the King was still dreaming of past grandeur of the mer-folk, they only cared for shovelling wealth into their own pockets.

Meanwhile less than ten percent of the population owned more than ninety percent of the land. The people suffered from the effects of that system and the heavy burden of taxation in the colony. The ruling class had the poor work for starvation wages. They didn't care about safety regulations, and broke the law as pleased them. They even undermined the old privileges of the Crown Councillors if this seemed opportune.

Their straw men openly opposed the welfare side of the public affairs and a system of spies took care of any notion of dissatisfaction or critique.

These were the facts, the refugees brought forward. They all had been torn out of their homes, mostly while asleep. They were clubbed and maltreated until they finally ended under arrest in the stadium. "The rest of the tragedy you know all too well", Boetie concluded the reports.

Stealthy sighs and sobbing accompanied the reports, while others openly showed their wrath and hatred. Even through the thick diving suits, you could feel the vibrations while the huge red eyes glistened in the wild green faces. The messengers from above could feel the pain almost physically. Had they doubted so far, they were now wholly convinced.

Adrian Humperdijk was stricken once more. His poor old friend on the throne of Melisandria had been cheated and betrayed. It seemed as if

there was no way back any more. The worst had happened and no way led out of this trap. The King was responsible, no matter whether he was only a puppet on the string, and just a figure in a game, others had designed and played. What would Adrian give, if the wheel of time could be turned back? That was impossible. He knew it. Nothing could he do for his friend, just nothing!

Right now, they had to talk about the immediate action required. First of all the Mounted Sharkoneers had to retreat, which formed a cordon of besiege around the reef. Adrian would contact the King for that, who was stricken by repentance when he left him a while ago. Thus, he would surely give the order of withdrawal, no matter what his councillors objected. The order had to be obeyed then of course, by the Commander of the Squadron, and by the Sharkoneers and, most important, by their sharks as well. That might turn out to be not so easy, as the beasts were hungry and bloodthirsty. For some this was the second day of a frustrating chase already.

In a hurry a Visa-Phone-connection was arranged, which turned out not to be easy. The King was indisposed Adrian learnt, and might not recover at all. The suggested withdrawal however would be considered, if the rebels were handed over to the forces. Without King Melisander, things didn't look well. Nothing had changed. The crown council still followed the hard line.

The connection was disrupted. Adrian pressed like mad on all buttons, and indeed succeeded after a while. He brought forward his request again, but the answer was even more precise and distinct. The Squadron would remain in position until the unconditional surrender of the rebels. "If that demand is not obeyed, His Royal Highness would consider this as a declaration of war", was the answer.

The School's representatives looked at each other stunned. They all had come over to the Conversiors' island now. The crisis was on the verge to run out of control. Secretly one or the other thought about handing over the rebels, and follow the demand. What could they do, in case of an attack? Were they able to defend themselves?

For the time being, the rebels had no choice but remain in the shelter of the reef. They were glad and thankful when they learnt the outcome of the negotiations with the court. However there was no time for musing. Shortly after the talks they were attacked from behind, while everybody tried to get, what was said.

Special forces of the militia used the interference by the Visa-Phone to sneak into the reef, and attack the refugees from behind. In fact, the dismantled attackers were somewhat toothless without their sharks, they

still were armed with knives and pikes, thus, the besieged had the greatest trouble in defending themselves and drive the attackers back.

The reef got red of the blood of the wounded, while most of the injured came from outside, when the spearhead mission was surrounded and trapped in an effective counterattack, while the survivors were taken as prisoners. Thus, they all of a sudden held a valuable trump card in hands; they might be able to play out for their own good, if the chance came. They could even use them as living shields, some boasted, and dreamt of a counterattack.

The counsellors from the School of Inbetween behind their protective screen didn't know what to think of that. While outside the fight went on. Knives flashed, bodies twisted, foam was everywhere turning from white to pink and from pink to red. The women turned away in disgust, and didn't know which side they were on. They pleaded for mercy for the poor captured Sharkoneers and offered medical care for all, not matter if friend or foe.

Brave they were, no doubt about that, and didn't mind their lives and health. You could feel the deadly vibrations through the thin pane of the protective barrier the Councillors were hiding. They all got involved and couldn't refrain the breathtaking fascination of disgust. Whether they were still partisans or only thought of the victims, regardless who they were.

"Can't we do anything?" a voice yelled. They all knew, before they came to a decision, the fight was over outside. Those attackers who didn't surrender were killed merciless, while the captured were taken in triumph – hand-cuffed or bound hand and foot to the centre of the socle. There was a spacious cavern and the central, well-protected camp of the refugees.

The camp was out of the range of the observers from the surface, who now had to think anew about a solution. The latest development was not considered as helpful or favourable for the refugees, nevertheless was it necessary to look for an outlet of the crisis, and that could only be found for the whole of the people. The way to freedom and democracy all of a sudden seemed almost endless. Were they ripe for democracy?

Corinia stood up against such pessimism. She knew her friend Boetie and therefore she had a different opinion, because Boetie was different as well, and so were many others. Perhaps she was blinded by her love for Boetie and for the reality her friend lived in. Even Florinna didn't back her sister up, and shared the doubts of the others. In vain Corinia pointed out the hardship and cruelties the refugees had suffered. Still she didn't convince her friends who had just seen with their own eyes, what the rebels had done. They were not different from their oppressors and fought as cruel as their enemies. Bloodlust came over friend and foe likewise, that could not be denied.

“We are not in the position to condemn the mer-folk”, Grisella thoughtfully said. She was one of the most peace loving person you could think of, and denied the military as a whole. Therefore, Corinia considered her utterance as very helpful, while all other Councillors were still too strongly impressed by the scenes they had just witnessed and decided to stop the mission for now. Perhaps later, a way might be found out of the mess. For the time being, they couldn’t make up their minds helping one side or the other, except for medical treatment for the wounded on both sides.

The councillors returned and let the Conversors Island in the hands of the regular guards, who had to prepare the island anyway for the visit of the Conversors, as the full moon was soon due.

The refugees in the reef had to care for themselves. They had proved to be quite capable in that, as just shown. They didn’t consider further measures, despite the ultimatum.

Military action on land was very limited, but in the water, the ‘landlubbers’ - as the water sprites addressed them - had to be very careful in the future. While in the state of warfare, swimming, surfing or diving was strictly prohibited, and so was all boating. Therefore, the trip to Conversors Island became a military drill exercise this month.

Arundle was not willing to accept such limitations neither for herself nor for her friends. Walter’s space mission gave her the necessary hints. Had the Advisor not offered his help, as far as Malicious Marduk was concerned? She did not doubt any more that he was the secret agent in the background who was pulling the strings. The cruel handwriting of Malicious Marduk was all too obvious.

Arundle alone had the intimidating knowledge, while others had their experiences as well. She once succeeded in overcoming the culprit. Therefore, she wanted to face the challenge again. She already had a plan and wondered whom she should involve and inform.

Corinia she better kept off, as she was blind of passion for her friend Boetie. Florinna, on the other hand, was too close to her sister and was likely to blab it out. She could try Grisella of Scholasticus, but she had also to be careful. It was very likely that Adrian or Marsha found out, what she intended, as adults aren’t good in keeping real secrets. Only absolute secrecy promised success. The evil master and his band of devils were now warned. They couldn’t risk another fiasco as they had experienced with the exorcism. If they failed this time as well, there was no other way of persecution left – at least Arundle could not see one. Malicious Marduk and his Miseriors would be free again.

Her idea now was, that the full impact of the evil didn’t get hold of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, because of the quarrelsome, neighbouring mer-

folk. They openly invited the evil spirits and did not resist their attacks. In the opposite, the infiltration of the Miseriors seemed most welcome, as they washed away womanish scruples, and brought forward the most primitive drives of an ancient past.

32. The Universal Law Number One

The moon once more fulfilled her cycle and shone in the fullest and brightest splendour. Arundle knew Billy-Joe amongst the Conversiors. On the one hand, she was so glad for him, he really deserved such liberty; on the other hand, she desperately needed him, and didn't know how to do without him, as the task was a tricky one and was meant only for really reliable and able friends.

Billy-Joe was able to handle almost any situation by means of his bright brain and a very fine feeling for all kinds of probabilities. Thus, he had become an indispensable companion for her trips in the universe. The circumstance for the time being demanded another expedition versus the battlement of the Miseriors. Would the decision come on the moon once more? That was unlikely this time. The combatants would meet on the solid grounds of the present earth, which made things much more difficult. On earth, nobody could escape just like that. The present tense was a solid fact that could not be denied.

If you gave up the present, you renounced your fate and handed yourself over to death. Arundle didn't want to think about thing like that. She had to take the risk; too much was on the verge. O yes, she missed Billy-Joe beforehand.

Tibor had now some own space-experience and offered his assistance and so did Walter and Pooty, when they learnt of her secret musings and thoughts. They were reliable enough, though – at least she hoped. They in return assured her how honoured they felt.

Arundle wanted to recheck on what the Advisor had said to the messengers, as that was not clear at all. Therefore, she interrogated Walter at best she could. Walter's excursion into space lay some days back already, and the present flood of happenings kept him busy, thus he could hardly remember what he had heard. Arundle insisted on individual words and was not at all satisfied with an overall picture.

“The Advisor granted his assistance, if Malicious Marduk dared to interfere in the past, in order to alter the course of history. If he did that, he would offend the Universal Law Number One”, Walter remembered. “That's what he said, anyway. The Advisor promised to check the facts, and asked us to keep that law in mind as well. Those who are gifted with the ability of looking over the rim of their presence, tend to offend the Law

involuntarily, because they are careless or thoughtless... if not at all mean”, Walter recited. While he spoke, everything that was said in that meeting with the Advisor came back to his mind.

“The upcoming of Were-Man in the twentieth Century is without doubt an offence of the First Universal Law, the Advisor said”, Tibor said. “That’s right”, confirmed Pooty.

“Because Malicious Marduk took possession of me, and made me a fool against my will, as I never had Conversion in my mind. Therefore, he offended the First Universal Law”, Walter agreed.

“Besides – the Advisor wanted to check whether the School of Inbetween is allowed to exist in the present”, Tibor went on and Walter nodded. “Right, such were the two points. I knew there were two.”

“The one has to do with the other insofar Conversors are attracted by the School of Inbetween”, Tibor went on.

Therefore, he wanted to check if the School of Inbetween is allowed to do that, and if we are allowed to be at all, or if the School as such offends the First Universal Law...”

“that would mean the end then...”

“at least for the Conversors...”

“Did you tell him of our thoughts about the Tree of Life?” Arundle wanted to know. Walter did not understand what Arundle was talking. He didn’t know the speculations of the study group, but Tibor picked up the thread right away, as he was a member of the study group as well. He shook his head.

“I felt very small and minor, so I didn’t dare to interfere”, he said.

“The best would be, if we took our findings about the Tree of Life with us to the Advisor, and have him look at it. I’m curious what he will think about it”, Arundle thoughtfully said. She knew that the journey became unavoidable the more they spoke about it; no matter whether the results turned out to become unfavourable for their friends’ mission in the sea.

Sure enough, she would not travel alone. It had to be now, no matter Billy-Joe. Arundle made the magic bow clear, who once more liked the idea very much. The lengthy breaks didn’t do him any good, he then felt as if he was useless. His stay in that locker, while Arundle’s trial was due, had been just enough.

Walter and Pooty – same as Tibor didn’t hesitate for a second. Tibor wanted to play a more active part this time. Pooty felt with him and assured him that he did very well for the first time. Perhaps that was it already what Tibor needed. Had he only opened his mouth in front of the Advisor? They might have got the answer they were now looking for, and things had taken

another course. Thus, he found out, that the Advisor was not perfect either, whom he thought an almighty Spirit, no matter if he was right or wrong.

Full of good intentions, equipped with the altered Tree of Life, and many questions in mind, the little flock of brave souls got ready. The magic bow and the magical stone, combined their strength and in no time they reached their target – the grey cloud-banks of Laptopia. The fourth dimension of the space-time only remained accessible by thought. Only when the body went spiritual for a short while, it was able to overcome the tight cover of the three dimensions, in order to reach eternity beyond the time-barrier.

General Armyless was called to the main council, they learnt in the palace, and Prince Watchanot was on tour to the free tribes. Thus, Arundle decided to follow the General right away. The magic bow and the magical stone combined their forces again and figured out the coordinates of the virtual centre island of all galaxies and universes, were conferences like this met. This fictional site had the advantage of having the same distance to all populated planets, as well as to the parallel worlds.

The altering space with its uncountable numbers of universes rallied about that fluctuating centre of its own. In fact, it rested in this hub – the secret centre of power and everything.

This Isle was hard to find for those, not acquainted with the whereabouts, no matter how witty they were. “In fact, its vice versa, we must be found, that’s the only chance we have”, the bow let Arundle know, because he loved her.

As soon as the beam caught them, they were already right in the middle of the conference in full swing. They didn’t keep the proper frame of time, therefore they didn’t fit into the timescale of the existing reality and had to be adjusted in order to become active.

Their presence had to be recognised. Not only the time but also the space had to be altered for them and that was the problem right here in the middle of everything. The present tense had to be found amongst the multitude of possibilities – the so-called ‘Pleroma’²³, which ruined the brains of many clever guys in history, while such Pleroma contained the dimension of delimitation of space. That dimension was the worst to be targeted, even harder than the tenses as such.

That was why the magic bow and the magical stone had trouble in localizing the centre of that ‘Pleroma’, as their approaches couldn’t deal with the ‘multipability’²⁴ as such. Only the appearance of the Advisor saved them from being diminished right away. They felt already as if they were disturbed images on a TV screen or Somniors in due process of waking up.

²³ Greek; the absolute multitude

²⁴ The ability to multiply

Thus, they managed to stabilize beyond all probability and were able to follow the conference. That was all the more important as the subject was Conversion – more precisely - the alterations of Convertors and ‘Were-Men’ in the late twentieth Century.

The question was about to become voted. Arundle was wondering a great deal. Either the First Universal Law was valid, then there was nothing to vote about, or this law was only valid in a limited frame. If this was so, then you had to find out whether people were allowed to widen that frame, or if such widening meant the same as the frame’s destruction.

Arundle’s thought were noticed and picked up by the assembly. “Not the slightest notion remains covered. Go on young lady, go on”, the Advisor encouraged her. Arundle blushed and got confused, thus, mixing up her ideas that just had been so clear. A frustrated sighing went through the ranks.

Tibor meant to find another grave fault on the Advisor’s side, and his belief in the infallibility of God suffered from another severe stroke.

“Infallibility lies in the Pleroma alone”, pulsated an answer of the assembly through him, while the assembly generated as the incarnation of the Pleroma. In fact, their discernment formed but a tiny slice of the whole tart only.

“Back to our question”, the assembly went on – “Did someone collect evidence for the applicability of the phenomenon, or can we go on with the voting?” the Advisor asked.

Arundle tore a bunch of paper out of her pocket, with all the trials and scripts the study group had gathered in the due course of their dealings with the Tree of Life.

“I think, this is what you are looking for”, she frankly proclaimed. “We managed to have a new look on the Tree of Life of the earthen way. Look here for now, Ladies and Gentlemen”, Arundle put up a piece of paper with their first discernments. “See the difference here. The traditional tree develops here, here and here, as well as there and finally over there as well”, and she pointed like an engaged teacher from one junction to the next, and from tip to tip, and from one dead branch to another. While she described what was going on in the theory – “not in reality, there things happen quite different, time is the crucial factor. The time limited all former views. We are prisoners of the time, and time is meant to be linear and not as well cyclic, thus, mistakes can come up, like this one...”

Again, the assembly murmured agreeing. “Go on, go on...”

This time Arundle didn’t lost the thread, while she blushed once more. “See after all the Menora, the multi-armed candlestick, symbol of the Tree of all Life, as the Jews once honoured and still know today. The broad stem forms the middle. Broadness means plenty, plenty of unicells and

micro organisms, bacteria, viruses and flagellants. Unbroken you can see the broad stream of life as it blossoms and widens right from the beginning – Here until the far, far There”; and she pointed at an imaginary point outside the graph that was now projected on a big screen. There you could see indeed the widespread Tree of Life, Menora-like, as the study group had altered and designed it in many hours of intense studies.

“Tibor, can you help me?” Arundle addressed to the mentioned “You were with us after all...”

Tibor stuttered in surprise and couldn’t get a word out of his mouth in front of the honourable assembly. Then he made up his mind, and returned to the site of action at the beach. They had been sitting in the sand wondering about the different twigs and the continuation of development. Whether it fitted into the time scale or not, and if so, why or why not, - as the time factor always caused the trouble in theory.

“Let’s ignore the time-scale just for now”, he started. “Then we have the following situation.” He also earned a murmur of agreement and he felt pride too, mixed with confusion, which he managed to master. He then focussed on the seven crowns of evolution, as they quite clearly came out of his reflections.

“Man is Pars inter Pares²⁵ - “hear, hear” one member of the assembly exclaimed enthusiastically. He looked quite like a lizard, to Pooty, who followed the scene with his witty eyes, while resting at ease in Walter’s belly-bag.

“All this” – the Advisor made a wide gesture as if he wanted to embrace the universe – “came to you just like that?”

Tibor and Arundle looked at each other. Walter looked at them as well, as he was enthusiastic about the idea, he understood right away, as it was all in favour of his kind. He felt raised into the Olympus of the God-like beings – THE MEN.

“Is that it?” Tibor asked. “It is”, Arundle triumphantly exclaimed.

“To be precise, our study group found it out”, Tibor added. “While we handled the subject as well in lesson. Professor Slyboots meant this an epochal problem worth while dealing with, no matter if we could find the proper answers right now and here. He sees the fundamental challenge the School of Inbetween has to face.”

“That was well achieved, I daresay. First of all by your study group, while you came to such results”, the voice of General Armyless sounded, whom Arundle identified among thousands. A gay feeling of passion and confidence mixed with pride, while acceptance from all sides lowered over them like a warm summer rain.

²⁵The equal part of other parts

Tibor shone in the new and unused light of acceptance. That was the fountain, where Arundle gathered her inner strength, he thought, and intended to follow her on that way.

The voting about the First Universal Law took place with an enormous effort. After all a lot was on the verge and the consequences for the earth would be far-reaching. The voting was parted into several sub-votes, one of which dealt with the existence of the School of Inbetween. Another subgroup focussed on the righteousness of the attacks by the Miseriors in the twentieth Century.

A third subgroup handled the question of the individual guilt that could result from conversion. Many aspects had to be considered, as the consequences of conversion could become tremendously far-reaching.

The most important point however remained the appearance of Malicious Marduk. This voting put an unbearable strain on the guests, while the Advisor recited the results in an air of monotonous indifference. He used a wholly strange nomenclature²⁶, none of the guests was familiar, and ended with a stereotype “Accepted” or “Rejected”.

“What is the matter then after all?” Pooty whispered. “Must Malicious Marduk retire or must we take everything in our own hands again?”

“We should be glad, that the School of Inbetween is allowed to remain. As far as I understand, this is the case”, Arundle answered. She also doubted that they would get rid of Malicious Marduk, now and here in the twentieth Century, because he fitted all too well into the picture. Besides, the means of the Advisor were very limited in that respect – that Arundle knew already.

Thus, they would most likely have to deal with Malicious Marduk. He would fix his connotations to that war in due process, if they didn’t find the appropriate answer right away. The opponents were creatures who could hardly be underestimated when it came to wildness and bravery, they knew by experience. The unholy alliance between those and the Miseriors was the challenge they had to answer.

The time-scale had become obsolete by Einstein’s Theory of the Relativity of Time. The creatures, which were sitting in the sacred assembly, were the living proof for the validity of the new interpretation of the Tree of Life. Thus, the voting also resulted in the agreement for that new approach.

The Advisor spared some minutes after the publication of the results of the voting, which Arundle used to talk about some weaknesses she all too well knew were hidden in their approach, first of all the manipulation of time. The Advisor was able to show her some intergalactic aspects, by

²⁶ lat. way of naming

means of which the time-holes could be stuffed or at least bridged. He showed that in analogue parallel-worlds the applicable priorities were given, which appeared as time-holes in the linear earthen time.

“What remains unseen or unreal in one parallel-world, that is bound to be certainty in an other, or vice versa. Sounds somewhat odd, I know, but that’s the way it is, what can you do?” he exclaimed.

Arundle nodded, to her such statement did not at all sound illogical. She didn’t mind those parallel-worlds at all. As a Somnior, she was used to the oddest realities, transcending and transforming those in the real reality. Thus, she was certainly familiar with parallels and the interchanging of worlds, which caused severe clash more than once, when she neglected or ignored the interrelated switches.

The mission was over and fulfilled. The Advisor dismissed the messengers with signs of appreciation. He wished them all the best and the appropriate spirit for the upcoming far-reaching and tricky challenges they had to face on earth.

“However, who says that life is easy though?” he asked, and his laughter still clang in their ears when they felt their homely grounds already under their feet.

33. Danger on the Island

Regular schooling was not possible, since Melisandria had delivered an ultimatum, while the attack could now follow at any time. Therefore all students were not allowed to approach the sea closer than fifty paces. Any dancing performances above the sea, or boating of any kind was also prohibited, as far as the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was concerned, and would be punished with the immediate dismissal.

The Head of the Board even considered giving out a warning to all boats and ships cruising nearby, but after extensive negotiations, this point was dropped again. What reasons could they give for such a warning? Besides, nothing had happened so far, and perhaps nothing would happen anyway.

The besieged at the reef were still negotiating with their besiegers. They also asked for help and for more and better weapons. They talked about low-pressure guns and water-bombs and all kinds of knives, swords and the like.

How far could their solidarity go? Those in charge asked themselves. First of all poor Adrian Humperdijk, who was sitting like a tinned anchovies in a barrel filled with seawater. His nature could not be stopped. The first night of the full moon was the worst, but he had managed after all, so he hoped anyway: No diving, no fooling around with his friends and relatives down there, as long as the situation was so uncertain.

The other Convertors had been taken to their island as usual, despite the danger. They had been left in time amidst an armed escort convoy, manned with additional guards, while the regular watchmen swarmed already about the island.

With the weapons demanded by the besieged, they would be able to bomb all Melisandria to pieces. "The balance of power would severely be disturbed, if the School's representatives agreed", Adrian bubbled in his basin, as he took part in such an important meeting, no matter how difficult it was.

Scholasticus objected that there could not be spoken of a fair balance of powers. "As long as we suspect Malicius Marduk and his Miseriors to occupy the souls and minds of the ruling class down there, specific circumstances ask for specific measures. Therefore, I strongly recommend fulfilling the request. While we still should negotiate about the amount of explosives tough."

However, he was not able to find a majority for his position. Grisella just shook her head in dismay and covered her ears with her hands. "We do not know for sure whether this outbreak of violence is caused by Malicius Marduk, while the indices clearly point that way, I must admit", she said. Her statement was of little help.

Some of the weapons the besieged asked for, were available, although not the deadly versions but a sportive alternative that would not allow to kill. Adrian had purchased them some years ago. He then had in mind to hand them over to his friend the King, who was afraid of the increasing deep-sea research activities in the area. However, the combined Japanese-Dutch-British oil-company ran into financial trouble and gave up. Thus, the mer-folk remained undiscovered, and the danger went by. Adrian later somehow forgot about the weapons.

Explosives and shotguns did not comply with the nature of the mer-folk. The sprites preferred the fight man to man. Only then, they thought the manly virtues being fulfilled. For that reason the conflicts remained in limits, which could be overlooked, as such fights tended to serve as the outlets of the enormous potential of aggression. Quite similar to sportive activities, like the famous pump the pummel – that was the most famous sport in both lands - such activities were never intended to cause casualties.

Free-floating energy was thus bound that was not used up in the daily toil for a living.

The few samples Adrian had delivered proved to be of little value. The warriors were lousy shots. They didn't like drill and discipline, Adrian had favoured in vain. Now things looked different. Amongst the refugees some veterans remembered the weapons. Soon the idea of an armed invasion was born. The Mounted Sharkoneers still besieging the reef, were no real obstacle for those guns, the veterans pointed out.

In great hurry the veterans trained their comrades, who were now eager to perform, although it was against their nature. While not enough guns were available, they trained aiming with sticks. Soon they were all able to point the sticks into the desired direction. Of course that didn't mean they knew how to shoot, so Adrian made up his mind. The sharks attacked meanwhile even the beach and the port of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Wherever you looked, you could see the dark shadows in the water. The corpse of a guardsman from the Conversior's island was the last straw. Adrian did not reject any more. The time of revenge had come. Soon the shotguns were delivered. Ammunition turned out to be a problem, as there were only some twenty shots for each gun.

"Aiming shouldn't be a problem. The targets are big enough, though", Adrian said. "Well those sharks a fast", his wife replied. The reef defined the situation. The besieged could wait at ease until a target came in sight. That could be done, after all. "And don't worry, you don't kill them", Grisella assured them. Such statement however was somewhat counterproductive her brother-in-law thought, but he kept his mouth shut.

The besieged burst into frenetic jubilant when they saw the lifeless grey monsters drifting about, while the besiegers panicked and rushed away as fast as they could, and left the sharks alone. They drifted away or fled into the nets of the Japanese trawlers, cruising about the solemn grounds illegally. Thus, there would be once more enough shark-fin-soup for the gourmets at home.

As soon as the strait between the two islands was freed from the besiegers, an armed escort from the school made their way towards the Conversior's island. They wanted to find out what the situation was like. With great care, the boat steered towards the landing stage.

The corpse of the guardsman asked for precaution. Had the man approached the sea carelessly, and was fetched inside? Had the Conversiors gone mad? A garbled emergency call was all the taskforce had, and the corpse of course, but no hints otherwise.

They had to hurry. The last night of the full moon was due to lower soon and would wake up the sleeping converts. Adrian was sitting in the middle of the boat in his tub, and was sleeping as well. - For some reason

he had claimed the overall command of the manoeuvre, so Marsha joined him in order to have an eye on him.

Scholasticus was in his company, as well as Arundle, Tibor and Walter with Pooty in his belly-bag. Those, who didn't row or take care of the rudder, were staring thoughtfully into the water, or to the island, that came nearer fast.

Arundle had briefly reported of her excursion to the intergalactic assembly, and the result of a voting, as well as the advice they had received from the Advisor. The Board of teachers was glad to learn that the School of Inbetween had a right to exist, as had the Miseriors and their master Malicious Marduk, and that was the bad news.

Adrian quite earnestly considered if the Advisor couldn't be teased to reverse the timescale, thus the horrid slaughter in that stadium had not yet occurred, and King Melisander would have had the chance to give a different order. However, this order was not at all wrong but fitted well into the historic development. Besides, this sacrifice had already become the initial cause for a multitude of consequences, and thus, was part of the history now.

“That is the end for poor King Melisander. Nobody can help him any longer” Adrian had sighed while his lungs began to adjust and had him crawl into that tub, because the sea was too dangerous this term, his wife decided.

His sorrows made him change then right away; therefore, he didn't reach his own pool, and was lucky to jump into that tub he still was sitting in.

Arundle instructed her magic bow to alter the power of the uncountable arrows that were hiding in the invisible quiver over her shoulder from 'well done' to 'medium'. The advantage of that measure was, that any living being which was hit by such an arrow would fall asleep right away for at least twelve hours or more, depending on the physical conditions and the weight of the victim. Had Arundle only known of that modus before, she had saved herself a lot of trouble – well had she?

The magic bow was always good for a surprise, although she was so well acquainted by now with his numerous capabilities. The quiver was never empty, but filled again with golden arrows. That turned out to be very helpful at times. Besides, the arrows found their aim by themselves, as long as they knew where they were bound.

Most of the time Arundle sent them with news fixed to the shaft. Now there was war and everything was different. She could feel it, because her hands were shaky and sweaty. Arundle knew whom they were about to meet except the Convertiors – if those were still alive at all. Scholasticus

nodded gravely, still impressed by the corpse they found drifted ashore of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, when she spoke about her suspicion.

“Do you think the invasion is on the march?” – he asked and she only could nod and couldn’t utter a word because her throat was all dry.

Adrian armed in his tub with an old knife and a shotgun of the same type the besieged had managed to chase away their besiegers.

Scholasticus meant to be able to defend himself by means of his guts alone and refrained from even touching weapons of all kind. Quite opposite to Tibor who wore the traditional arms of the golden horde in a modernized version, that is two pistols and a short gun as well as a lasso around his waist. Thus, he sat straight with gleaming eyes and steered the boat towards the island ahead.

Meanwhile he had overcome his fear of the wet element. Just like some of the great heroes of the sea who had to fight seasickness all their lives. By overcoming the disease, they performed their great and famous deeds.

Quite similar did Tibor control his fear of the endless ocean and faced the challenge all the more in front of the threat from the depth.

Walter and Pooty relied on the magical stone and the insurmountable powers and forces he owned. After his horrible experience as a Were-Man, Walter would never touch a gun again.

The boat landed. The crew jumped ashore. No boat was moored to the stage although it should have been there. Scholasticus fixed the boat as best he could, while the others checked for the missing boat everywhere, but in vain. They then studied the plan of the guardsmen’s huts; they decided to see first, in order to find out about the whereabouts. They didn’t have much hope, though.

They rushed on, as the shadows grew longer. The moon would rise in two hours and one hour later at the latest the night would fall with all the unforeseeable threats of darkness, they had to experience from the Convertors and other secret beings of the dark.

Not all Convertors had the discipline of Adrian who still sat in his tub and sank from one uneasy slumber into the next chased by nightmares of the worst kind. His tub remained in the middle of the boat when the crew went ashore. As a wooden lid covered the tub, it didn’t show. Marsha wondered whether to remain with her husband but then fear made up her mind. The idea of sitting here all alone next to a helpless being, was too much. She couldn’t help her husband and he could not help her. She would touch a weapon anyway. Thus, the other suggested to her to come with them. “You are much safer off in our company, and Adrian has everything he needs for self-defence”, Scholasticus said.

Their landing did not remain unnoticed. Sharp eyes spied any move of the taskforce. Well covered mysterious creatures stuck in the hiding close to the landing strip, one of the few openings, a landing was possible at all.

The only other boat stage was located opposite on the other side of the rocky island. There the assassin once landed to perform the assault against Tika, Arundle later was blamed.

When the taskforce - led by Scholasticus with his map in his hands - finally disappeared in the bush, and was not heard anymore, except for some shouting here and then, the creatures crawled out of their hidings and carefully approached the boat.

Adrian had just fallen asleep again. He was in the last pHase, where the most colourful and lively dreams were waiting. He was thus at his ease in the tub, more comfortable anyhow than before, when the boat was jumping through the waves. Besides, the night lowered and a fresh breeze came from the sea, although it didn't reach him in his tub.

Anyway, Adrian slept and didn't notice what was going on outside. The boat was detached, no matter how fast Scholasticus had tied it, while the inside of the boat was inspected. However, nobody lifted the lid of the tub, though. The boat was then carefully pulled back into the open sea.

Half of the full moon could be seen above the treetops. She had just started her nightly trail, entitled to please the Convertors who became alive and active. Adrian woke up by the rippling of the water. Besides, it was time for him. When he realized that the boat was moving again, he carefully lifted the lid of his tub and tried to look outside. He couldn't see much, but he noticed, that he was not alone. There were at least two strangers, who were trying to handle the oars. The way they did, they wouldn't get far, Adrian thought, while he wondered, what he could do.

The strangers hadn't noticed him, obviously. Soon they gave up, trying the move the boat. They then slipped outside and gently disappeared in the waves. He hesitated for a little while and listened. He was alone, he realized. Then he lifted the lid carefully and looked around.

He was alone, indeed. The thieves had left. Where had they gone - Adrian wondered, then he also jumped outside. He felt overwhelmed by the longing for fresh water. He was fully awake now and ready for action. Besides, he had a suspicion in mind, which he wanted to confirm.

He went down some hundred yards as fast as he could. What he then saw was indeed breathtaking. He looked and checked, and looked again. They were at least ten miles away from the closest possible seaweed farm of the mer-folk. Still, he couldn't doubt his senses. Indeed, no doubts were possible.

*

The spearhead-mission under the command of Scholasticus Slyboots had reached the centre of the island, where they intended to build a basic camp. Unfortunately, they did not find any guards. Their stalls were empty and deserted. They also found trace of heavy fighting. As they had suspected when they received that garbled message and found the corpse of the watchman.

The Convertors would soon swarm out, for sure. The huge full moon now was up by three quarters and lurked through the bushes and low treetops. The flanks of the mountain in the middle of the island glistened mysteriously in the pale light, which was lowering over clefts and grottoes.

Those shags they had seen were all destroyed. Someone in great wrath had smashed everything to pieces. Therefore, the group had no other choice than to care for a solid camp, where they could resist such an attack.

First, they needed enough wood for the long night. Walter and Pooty said they would look for that, as they could move freely as the animals they were, without rising suspicion.

Fire was the best protection against brutes of all kind, no matter the offspring. While Walter took off, the others collected stones for a wall around the campsite, as the fire could not be everywhere, but was lit at the open side of the wall.

The saddest part of their mission was fulfilled, when they found out about the fighting and the fatal end for the guardsmen, while there was no trace of the attackers.

The Headmistress was the first who dared to suspect the Convertors of the bloodshed. Could they have gone out of control? Had they jointly attacked the guardsmen?

“Do what you can to protect us well”, she dramatically exclaimed. They had to stand the upcoming night. Tomorrow the spook would be over, as this was the last night of the full moon.

Perhaps they would get answers from the re-converted then. However, Arundle didn't really think they would, and doubted whether the Convertors were responsible at all for the bloodshed. The nature of destruction pointed elsewhere. That was not the handwriting of misled converted beasts.

Thus, she tried to become not infested by the morbid thoughts of the adults. She knew she could rely on Billy-Joe, no matter which appearance he took. He was no bloodthirsty beast slaughtering guardsmen and smashing their camps to pieces; and while he was one of the strongest beasts amongst the Convertors, the whole idea seemed very unlikely.

At first, the frightened stuck together and were hiding behind the wall, which would be of little use, if things came to a head. There had been

other walls demolished with less effort than they had experienced lately already. They had some weapons after all. Tibor and Arundle positioned themselves in the best shooting light. From there, they overlooked the larger part of the clearing around their campsite. Only the flank of the mountain worried them, because you couldn't see a thing at its bottom that yawned like the huge black fang of a gigantic brute, sitting in the shadow of the steep mountain erecting above.

The shade didn't diminish, but increased while the moon was rising. From there, out of the depth the attack would come, Tibor said. Arundle did not object. Thus, Scholasticus was ordered to guide the crucial area. For that reason Tibor gave him one of his pistols, which the convinced pacifist gratefully accepted now – “only for self defence” he said. As if anyone else would do differently with his or her arms.

Marsha tried to get a phone connection to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, while she was guarding the fire. It should not burn too high, but also not too low, and that was not easy to achieve.

Tibor was not happy with Marsha's obligations. Had she after all managed with the telephone, things might have turned out even worse. She wanted to send an emergency call for help, but didn't succeed. She wanted to ask for additional manpower.

The phone failed, no matter how hard she tried pedalling on the generator. Had she succeeded, she might have risked the lives of the aides out there in the dark. Nobody should be out there unprotected by night, and the submarine was unserviceable anyway, while the cruising in an open boat at nighttimes was somewhat suicidal. Only the helicopter would be of help, while landing in the dark was almost impossible, besides it was somewhere away, anyway. Adrian had sent for more ammunition for the rebels. He didn't tell Marsha though, who would have disagreed fiercely. Help from the air was therefore also unlikely.

Marsha tried it anyway but in vain. The pedalling didn't help, something went wrong thus, the batteries failed at last, and left her in complete silence. Now they could not even send an SOS call. Well, Arundle had her magic bow and still was able to send arrows. Marsha seemed to have forgotten about that means.

From the mountain peak, you could hear a moaning call. Even the heartiest felt their hair rising. Tika's song of lonesomeness touched a sensible nerve.

They heard the answer soon frighteningly close, conveying the same nameless agony even worse. The witnesses shivered. They felt torn into the depth of a fathomless mysterious nightly world. They as well experienced the absolute emptiness and felt caught without choice in a never-ending nought.

Arundle quivered when she realized whose voice was answering. Such pain hidden in a friend, tortured her. Such was the being of her converted friend, after all, she now realized. Had she known of the degree of his pain, her advice had been much different.

*

Adrian meant to have understood enough while exploring the depth of the sea. He didn't need evidence in such a situation. As fast, as he could he returned. First, he had to save the boat for the spearhead mission. He could as well count two and two together. His kidnappers had been undoubtedly assassin, and were as well responsible for the murder of the guardsman.

They came from the sea where they then disappeared again. If he hadn't seen their conversion with his own eyes, nobody would imagine such interrelation. Only by accident, it had been that he found out about the truth. Had he not been sitting in that tub, and had he not fallen asleep again, he would never have found out.

Why did they steal boats? There was only one explanation possible: They didn't want, that anyone left Convertors' island again. The invasion was in full swing, and Convertor's island was the bridgehead.

Could it be that the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was attacked already? Should he not return there right away? The spearhead mission on the Convertors' island could be picked up later as well, warning the people on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth had the highest priority. Nobody there had an idea of the deadly danger creeping up from the fathomless depth. People meant to be safe ashore. However, those tricky sprites had meanwhile found a way of leaving the sea. He had seen her re-conversion with his own eyes.

There was a big difference for them whether they crawled through the sand like a stranded seal. As it looked, they stood firmly on two legs and breathed the same air as earthbound human beings. Most likely, they were training for days already on distant secret shores for the upcoming invasion.

A trained decisive platoon would conquer the Isle of Wisdom-tooth in a coup de main²⁷. Nobody there was prepared for such a surprise attack.

Adrian doubled his speed. He had little chance of reaching the Isle of Wisdom-tooth he figured, as he was much closer to the Convertors' Island. Then he saw the rump of the boat swaying dark on a silvery carpet lit by the moon above him.

Could he tow it back to where it came? Once in full speed, it might not turn out to be very difficult. Of course, he would reduce his speed considerably. That was not the worst. He had to wait for sunrise anyway and only hoped that his re-conversion occurred within the proper frame this

²⁷ Surprise attack

time, as he had to overcome a considerable distance ashore until he found the spearhead mission. Therefore, he needed his human shape - without he would not get a hundred yards.

Thus, he could now take his time. Until the dawn of the morning still some five hours or so remained he figured. On the other hand, could he not cross the passage between the islands in five hours as well? The School of Inbetween would be warned then. Would they believe him in the condition he was in? What, if he came too late? Besides, he had to leave the boat behind, and the spearhead mission didn't get an idea what was going on. Not the mission and not the Convertors after their re-conversion – if they still existed!

They would need a boat the next morning for sure. If he only knew what was more important! If he followed his feelings he would favour the second thought. He decided to follow his feelings for this time, and continued on his way.

The heavy boat caused him trouble. He felt exhausted and his arms were aching, when he finally made it. The moon had not yet descended, when he softly manoeuvred the boat ashore and tied it fast at the landing stage.

Should he wait until the dawn of the morning? Instead, he took off for a scouting tour around the island. He might be able to discover something of interest. He didn't have much hope. On the other hand, sitting and waiting wasn't his cup of tea either, for that he was far too upset.

What a nuisance. Those sprites must have got help from the outside. Things like that had never happened. At least he couldn't remember, since he was an wanderer between the worlds.

While he was thinking, something else suddenly came to his mind. He realized an important mistake in his considerations. Why didn't he notice beforehand?

Right – that was it! Therefore they retreated. Now he understood, he almost burst into laughter - relieved as he felt.

Then he remember how much distress those changelings had already caused. However, if he was right, a great deal of the due problems found an unexpected solution.

34. The Danger from the Depth

The evil creeps into several modes of existence, and into a multitude of beings. None is safe from the attacks, as any living being is suffering as

well. Thus, most likely pain and disease are gateways to the evil in this world. While suffering, any creature retreats into its own self, and cares for nothing, but itself. Cruel hunger makes it fighting with fangs and claws for its earthen fare, killing its kin in starvation for a drop of water.

Arundle was musing thus, while Tibors eyes didn't glitter awake like they did a while ago. The night was stretching. Staring outside into the dark night tired the eyes. Scholasticus had the worst part in his section, while he bore the greatest responsibility.

Walter and Pooty in spearhead mission outside, didn't appear for ages, although they were supposed to report on each hour.

The howling of the dingoes strained the nerves by now less hefty. The empathy for their solitude vanished, while the disturbance remained and kept those awake, who were allowed to take a nap.

Never ending was the beasts' claim to the moon. They suffered perhaps from the pain of a split-up soul, banned in part into earthen greed, while the other tried to escape in vain.

Everybody interpreted the howling as he or she was able to or liked. All interpretations aimed but in one direction. Thus, they all agreed without words. The dingoes were no real danger, as long as they moaned at the moon. What else was there to take care of? There were no other beasts of that sort amongst the Convertors of the School of Inbetween. Penelope M'gamba was after all the mightiest figure as a griffin, but she was cruising high above, somewhere in the blue night, most likely miles away, or was just returning from another excursion to be punctual back for the sunrise and re-conversion.

She might even bring news from the mer-folk, as she had gone full of sorrows into the conversion this time, but couldn't resist like all the other Convertors.

Who was responsible for the mess on the island? Who killed the guardsman? Who was interested in keeping the Convertors unguarded? The traces of the attack could be seen almost everywhere on the island.

Arundle was almost sure to detect the handwriting of Malicious Marduk, but that she was reading almost everywhere, thus she doubted her own considerations. What, if the attacks were still caused by the dingoes? Their howling of tonight could still mean that they acted differently during the other nights. Perhaps they moaned because of their bad conscience. The lengthy howls sounded even more touching now.

The corpse of the guardsman stranded on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, away a good half an hour of rowing a boat over fro or to the Convertors' island. Even if the corpse had been thrown into the water right on the first day of conversion, had it hardly drifted that far in three days. Someone else

was there in the background, mean and witty, and did what dingoes were not able to do.

Arundle thought her musings so important that she wanted to share them with Scholasticus right away. When she decided to rush over to his side, a fierce cracking noise in the bush got them all to their feet at once.

Marsha pushed a piece of wood into the flames of the fire she was still guarding, thus the flames arose. The magic bow sprang into Arundle's hands, a golden arrow on the string ready for action.

Tibor got his gun against the cheek and pointed into the dark. Scholasticus - inexperienced in war matters as he was - jumped up instead of caring for a hide and yelled, "Who is it, friend or foe?"

He didn't get an answer, of course.

Arundle and Tibor shouted at once "Hide, for heaven's sake, hide." Thus, Scholasticus covered behind that wall of theirs, just in time, when a spear shot above his head that would hit him right in the chest, had he not ducked.

Scholasticus fired his pistol, and the shot went out into the dark and hit a rock where it echoed undefined. Everywhere outside the bush became alive. Hardly visible phantoms were rustling and crackling somewhere between rock and bush. Stones were rolling and rumbling, while the head of a spear flashed up in the pale moonlight; or were those the golden arrows, Arundle shot in dozens? Screaming here and there indicated that the job was not in vain, while the arrows never killed but caused a paralysis for several hours. Tibor fired his shotguns - loaded with rubber bullets only - in a similar manner as well. Unfortunately, Scholasticus had lost his glasses. Therefore, he could see even less than before. He fired into the air from time to time, thus the attackers soon noticed the weak point in the defence line.

However, Arundle and Tibor noticed the strategic change of the attackers and concentrated their fire on the black hole under the rocks, where they couldn't see the attackers either.

Spears were still showering over the wall, but didn't do much harm, so far, when the Headmistress sank with a cry behind the fire, while Scholasticus was hit in the right leg. He dropped the pistol and tore the spear out of the wound. When he saw his blood dwelling like a fountain, he fainted.

The attackers started climbing over the wall now. There were too many. Tibor and Arundle noticed that they didn't stand a chance. Stones were thrown apart and armed hands stretched inside. Tibor fought with sabre and knife, but the attackers were too quick and too many. Still Arundle and Tibor managed to resist. They stood back to back now, while

the wall finally gave way. “There’s only one thing left now”, Tibor yelled: “the flight.”

Arundle understood at once. She hooked her arms up with Tibor’s from behind, and they started wheeling about as fast as they could. The whirl they caused went green in seconds, and lifted them off the ground, right from the middle of the cluster of attackers who yelled in disappointment and threw their spears behind them in vain.

Arundle’s magic bow covered them up with an invisible cloak of defence. Then they were out of the range even for shotguns, while disappearing between the sharp cliffs that arose amidst the Conversors Island.

Scholasticus Slyboots and Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk however stayed behind. Were they dead already? Marsha still lay behind the fire and Professor Slyboots some feet further lifeless on the ground. Blood still trickled from his thigh, the floor all-dark from his blood. Dead or caught – such was their fate.

Close to the mountain peak Tibor and Arundle went down. They were safe here. The plain rock lay there in the pale moonlight, empty and deserted. Nobody could approach them unnoticed. They took a little rest after all this fighting. Arundle gasped for air. The quick start had used up all her energy. Besides, she was bleeding out of several injuries; she now noticed when they began to hurt.

Tibor wasn’t unharmed as well. How could he? A stone had smashed his cheek and he couldn’t open his right eye. A knife stuck in his shoulder.

He had lost his own arms. The gun he had thrown away, when it came to the infight, and the sabre he lost when he started wheeling about with Arundle.

Thanks to the medicine poach in the depth of her magic bow’s quiver; they were able to handle the wounds. They did as good as they could. That was not much; they realized when they looked at each other afterwards. They needed help as soon as possible. However, before they could leave for the hospital they had to look after the Headmistress and the Professor.

Besides, they better not tried to cover the distance over to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth as weak as they were, they might fall into the sea halfway.

Arundle considered falling asleep to ask for help in a dream. However, she was too upset for sleeping and besides, the images of dreams were hardly able to act physically. Furthermore, they knew far too little about their attackers. Arundle had an idea and the knife in Tibor’s back guided her suspicion into the same direction, but solid facts and proof they didn’t have.

They desperately needed Walter’s advice now. Walter would realize at once if those attackers were Were-Men. If this was the case, then they

had to avoid under all circumstances, that they reached the sea before sunrise. Provided Marsha and Scholasticus were still alive.

If the two captives were dragged away into the sea, they would be lost forever. Miseriors in their element would definitely keep once captured souls, they had in their hands.

She didn't take the time to explain to Tibor in detail what she had been thinking about, she suggested instead the obvious thing, which he accepted without any objections. Both still felt pretty weak. They knew they were too weak for a trip to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

"We have to make sure that the captives get to the sea", Arundle explained. "I only knew one who could help now, and that is Billy-Joe. He cannot be that far off the track that he wouldn't dig what its now about", she said and hoped to be right.

The howling of the dingoes still resounded in her ears, a sound so very strange and odd that she doubted her musings. Perhaps Billy-Joe was further away from his humaneness than she could imagine.

They hovered over the island deep enough to have a break any time if they felt like it, and looked for the dingoes. As the moon tended towards the east and combined with the morning dusk, their sight was quite reasonable. As low as they could they whirled about the treetops, but couldn't find the slightest trace of them. They met the prisoners instead, who were tied to sticks but obviously still alive, while they suffered badly and looked terrible. As Arundle had suggested, the band headed for the landing stage. If they went on like that, they would surely manage to get there at daybreak, and that had to be avoided in any case.

"Look, this is Walter over there", Tibor suddenly exclaimed. Arundle looked the way he pointed. She had been busy watching the captives.

"Where is he, can't see a thing in that green whirl."

"Over there in the bushes", Tibor answered and tried to point down, but that was not easy because of the whirling.

"...And the dingoes are with him. I think it would be best if we joined them, don't you think so?" Tibor said, and they descended smoothly and stopped right beside the three animals. The green of the whirl mixed with the green of the bushes, which swallowed them as soon as they disappeared in the thicket, invisible for any curious eye of an unwanted observer.

There was no time for ceremonies. They had a duty to fulfil. Tibor pointed east where he just saw the bandits with their captives and took the lead regardless of his injuries. The others followed soundless as only trained hunters can do. Unfortunately Arundle was not a trained hunter, she was neither soundless nor fast enough. Pooty slipped out of Walter's belly bag and joined her, while the others almost caught up with the bandits who were now rushing on, while the first sunrays beamed through the treetops.

“What is our plan?” Tibor thought. Had they a plan or were they just rushing on, when they noticed how close they had come. So their plan was hope: They hoped they might be able to free their teachers at the next stop or by means of the sunlight, which was deadly for the creatures, Arundle conveyed. She believed to know why.

The band reached the clearing. The sea shimmered still dark in the grey morning, while the first golden rays peaked through the metal-like surface. For the dingoes came the time of re-conversion, and Tibor witnessed the horrible procedure for the first time in his life. While just on four legs the animals stretched and expanded, or reduced; fur disappeared and was replaced by naked skin.

Arundle, who just arrived panting, threw her coat at Tika and Walter got some more clothes out of his belly bag. The re-converted Convertors dressed hastily.

Simultaneously the bandits re-converted as well, but with a very different result.

“It’s just the way I thought” Arundle exclaimed. “We’ve got to help them, they don’t know, what they are doing, think of Walter...” The big change went on. Lungs flattened and the legs didn’t bear the weight of the bodies. The poor creatures fell to the ground where they re-converted into the green water-sprites they had been before, now bound to suffocate only some twenty yards away from the water they couldn’t reach.

The captives lay where they had been dropped when the re-conversion began. Arundle and Tibor, and the others did their best to help everybody at the same time. While Tika and Tibor looked for their teachers, the others tore their former enemies towards the beach and helped them into the waves, while a boat got closer torn by an exhausted swimmer, now with the head above the surface.

Arundle was kneeling next to their teachers. She got all kinds of medical supplies out of the invisible quiver. Thus, Scholasticus soon stood on his own feet again, despite the wound in his leg and the enormous loss of blood and hobbled towards the boat that was just about to land at the landing stage.

He then discovered Adrian Humberdijk, naked as a new-born child wading ashore with a rope over his shoulder.

Marsha still lay where they had fallen. Arundle tried at best she could, but she didn’t succeed, not even with the power of the magic bow to bring her back to life.

It looked very bad. When Adrian saw her, he stumbled towards her, naked as he was and threw himself over the lifeless body of his wife, and kissed her cold pale lips again and again.

Arundle seemed to notice a pink shimmer on the cheeks of lifeless. In fact, Marsha sighed deeply then opened her eyes and slung her arms around her husband's neck. Tears of happiness and thankfulness sprang out of their eyes.

The clearing had filled in the meantime with other re-converted Convertors who had returned to the landing stage, and looked for their clothes. Others lay there wounded like Marsha and Scholasticus, some with terrible wounds, Arundle took care of as good as she could. Walter was busy as well to supply all the medicine and other utensils required.

The boat that had been rescued by Adrian turned out to be far too small for all the injured and the re-converted.

Thus, it left with the most severe cases aboard. By noon they would come back to pick up the remainders. In the meantime, they could search for the missing. There were most likely three, but the exact figure was recorded in the Headmistress's office. Adrian would know who had left with his wife already.

Penelope M'gamba rushed in very late. She had different sorrows she said, and couldn't remember the exact amount either.

She had taken her time spying out the training camp of the water sprites. Things were quite as Arundle had guessed. Some of them were obviously able to alter their appearance and become human. Those were then training the business of war under the command of a legion sergeant.

"Daily new recruits came out of the sea, while the trained ones left", Penelope reported. "They cannot learn that much in only one day", Tibor objected, who bravely stayed behind, no matter of his injuries.

"I'd say, they didn't train warfare as such, they understand their bloody business quite well. I think, they have to get rid of their fear and the instability caused by firm land, they are not used", Penelope answered. Arundle nodded thoughtfully. They all had experienced the wild warriors in their element. Even their memories made them shudder.

"The question is, if they must now keep quiet for one month like our Convertors, and stick to the rule like all others?" Tibor objected.

Walter and Pooty agreed. Walter had his own experience in that matter. However, Arundle shook her head doubtfully. "I'm sorry, but I think we cannot rely on that. Miseriors employ additional forces, and in their mean and wicked way, they override even the Totem animals, which other Convertors depend on. Sure enough, the full moon pHase is most advantageous for them as well. Still we will have to figure with such spook even on new moon, I'm afraid."

"Hope things get settled until then", Tibor thoughtfully agreed.

Those who were able swarmed about the island for the missing three. They couldn't do more now. Nobody knew how things should go on. The steep costs of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth could be defended with little effort though. There were only a few possibilities to overcome the natural barrier between sea and land. Thus, an invasion was very unlikely. On the other hand, they didn't have trained people either. The School of Inbetween was a pacifist institution and proud to be pacifist.

Who should defend the crucial spots then, there still were? The landing stage for example, and the exits of the inner labyrinth that mounted into the deep sea unexplored. A decisive troop could do great harm to the inner socle; even blow up the whole island – indeed, a hair-raising idea. There was in deed no use in hiding their heads in the sand, and overlook the danger that was likely to approach.

Two badly injured teens were lying on a little clearing. They looked bad, you could see at the first sight. The grass about was dark with blood. Walter jumped by as soon as he got the signal and tried with his magical stone to ban the fleeing life back in the bodies, while Arundle tried to stop the flooding blood. They needed stretchers, which the magic bow supplied just like that. Then the injured were carefully fixed, and carried to the clearing at the landing stage.

Time was running out, without operation both would most likely not survive, the injuries were too severe. Different from the others the two suffered from inner bleedings that could not be stopped without opening their bodies. The bow's magic plasma ran almost out when the boat with the doctor finally came. He took over with his own facilities, but he needed most of the space in the boat. Fortunately, a second boat was to come only minutes later, if it hadn't been captured or forced to return. By now, in fact, very likely – as creatures from the depth swarmed the strait between the islands.

Thanks to the boatswain, the second boat landed only minutes later. The trip had been rough though, and asked all his cleverness to fool and steer out the green attackers with their knives and sabres. Luckily, they didn't employ explosives.

35. An Attack of the Other Kind

The weather was fine and the sea flat and smooth. Thus, the return trip might not be troublesome either. The first boat was loaded with the injured in a hurry, and was packed by the stretchers and the medical supply. So there was little space left for regular passengers. It took off right away

in full speed, and landed safely only half an hour later at the landing stage of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. The other boat followed likewise in full speed as well, and landed only minutes later - packed with the full load of Conversors and their helpers – undisturbed by the fierce water sprites.

Speeding like that made it impossible for the sprites to get hold of the boats' rails. Besides, they risked to be sucked into the propellers. Still dark shades here and there were seen, mostly distant but close as well. Arundle had her magic bow ready, assisted by Tibor, while the other passengers were musing. There was a lot for them they had to digest, though.

While still under way, Arundle reported to the provisional Headmistress Grisella of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots about the new thread the Isle of Wisdom-tooth had to face. The regular Headmistress still lay in hospital out of order, so to speak.

All exits of the labyrinth had to be manned by armed guards, the girl ordered via phone, and Grisella didn't dare to object, although she wasn't fond at all of such military stuff.

The wholehearted ones amongst the students - first of all the Sublimations - offered their help, and were recruited for that important duty. All available arms were handed out. Those, who weren't on sentry-go, received military drill under the command of Moschus Mogoleya.

This was not at all what some of the students had expected when they registered for that school, as some had done so in order to get away from the military service in their home country.

When Walter, Tibor and Scholasticus, who didn't refrain from a personal engagement, finally met the armed forces, Scholasticus discovered not only his own wife but also his brother Amadeus. Both were up in arms, cuirassed and harnessed, so to speak, ready to stand his man of her woman.

Forgotten were those quarrels about disappeared furniture and provisional set-ups, they had worried so much that they even were prepared to leave the island for good. They might finally feel at home now, Scholasticus hoped.

However there was no time for such musings. Noise from the outposts didn't mean any good. Screams and shots echoed through the caves and had them all take up their arms. Was this the moment of decision? Was this the beginning of the decisive battle?

Scholasticus felt like an important leader on the battleground now who had been a helpless beginner some hours ago. He lifted the arm for the final signal of attack. When some of the outposts rushed back screaming: "They are through, same your souls!"

That was the signal for Scholasticus. His arm lowered with one of Tibor's sabres in hand, and the brave band rushed into the uncertain, shooting and yelling like madmen.

Billy-Joe shot some illuminating arrows from Arundle's magic bow. Arundle had let it to him, as she preferred to join a meeting of an entirely different kind. The magical stone also sent out greenish light, Walter held in hand. However, after a few feet ahead darkness took over again.

Nobody cared to run into the uncertain. It looked as if the attackers didn't follow the outposts on their flight, and were happy to have them chased away.

This could only mean one thing: The invasion was soon to follow. There was no doubt possible, Walter, Scholasticus, Tibor and Amadeus concluded, who formed a provisional war-council with Adrian, after the attack had been stopped.

"They might bring in heavier arms", Amadeus suggested. "Some kind of drill to get through the stone, or explosives, there are the strangest gadgets available nowadays", Tibor agreed.

"Is the submarine available again?" Walter asked. "If so, we should check immediately what's going on down there at the socle."

"Right you are, although cruising done there is a great risk", Adrian put in. He was the only one to know the scene at the socle, so he proudly took the lead of that dangerous mission and hurried to the hangar right away, where the submarine was waiting ready to go.

The Isle of Wisdom-tooth was the tip of a huge volcano-slot, that widened it's base the deeper you went, however, shortly under the waterline it was washed out by the eternal waves of the endless ocean, in which the island formed an obstacle. The slot as such could well be accessible from the very bottom, and that seemed to be the biggest danger. An invasion from there through the slot of several yards of width was likely, provided the slot was freed from sediments.

"We might as well think of torpedoes. A nasty thought though, but what can you do in times like this?" Scholasticus thoughtfully said. The others nodded. Even the strongest pacifists now felt a deep concern of self-defence, and didn't care much about the risks they took, as long as success was likely.

"BE OR BE NOT? Is that the question now?"²⁸ Pooty muffled dully from deep down of Walter's belly-bag, and made them grin, no matter of the graveness of their situation.

*

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Headmistress of the School of Inbetween, couldn't stand staying in hospital, while the world went to pieces, so to speak. Together with Grisella and Penelope, she wondered

²⁸ William Shakespeare: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

what magic there was still available. The defence strategies of the men seemed all too conventional after all.

Was there really no other way of defence then to shoot and toss? “We are on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, where the most gifted individuals of mankind unite. Would it therefore not be wise to think of alternatives?” Grisella opened the informal little round in the Headmistress’s office.

“What could Animators and Somniors do?, that is the question. Were they only entitled to run away when things became risky, and circumstances were awkward, or even unacceptable? We’ve got to find access to psychological warfare as well.”

“Right, similar to our training method...” Marsha agreed.

“We can try to free the wild water-sprites from their occupants the Miseriors”, Arundle suggested who rushed in late. “It’s high time though, the invasion seemed to be in full swing...”

Penelope agreed wholeheartedly, she had seen with her own eyes how the poor creatures were forced ashore and drilled so cruelly.

“Who’s that drill-sergeant, you reported”, Marsha asked. She had already something in mind, tough.

“That is a strange and peculiar matter”, Penelope said. “Well, that’s the idea, after all. Marsha, do you think the same as I do?” Penelope added after a short while: “That might be the decisive lever.”

*

While down there, the preparations for the submarine mission were completed in great haste, the plan for the psychological conquest of the souls slowly gained shape. Still the approach couldn’t be called a ripe plan. Only the direction seemed clear so far, while the execution lay in faint mist.

“The approach has to follow the dream scale. After that, a combined attack from soul to soul follows, so to speak, and hatred turns into love. The Miserior gets exorted and has to escape, while confronted with the tongs-movement of the doubled love. Thus or likewise, I do imagine the procedure”, Grisella explained and started sobbing because of all that love involved.

“Can we deploy so much love?” Penelope asked.

“Love’s not easy to be felt, all the more there, where hatred lives and ignorance. Love is a band between those who are affected. All other love is a kind of assertion”, Arundle objected and earned admiring glances of the party.

“How shall we love those bloodthirsty savages, after all they did to us?” Marsha thoughtfully said.

“Well, Corinia knows the answers...” Arundle answered.

“And so does Adrian...” Marsha said.

“We weren’t prim either...” Grisella objected and thought of the pollution of the oceans, the over-fishing and all that. Recklessly man exploited nature in the name of self-determination, well keeping and progress.

Thus, man was deeply stricken into a web of guilt and sins, and owed a lot to the water world. If you looked at reality that way, you could easily feel pity and empathy, and if you felt that, then love came by its own.

“An aimed attack on the dreams – that will work. We combine our power and invade the dream world of the water sprites. Then we do our best to re-convert the poor misguided creatures. Most important though, it would be to find the right ones – those, who are infested by the bacteria of war faring. It surely is a minority.”

Yes, quite a few, I suppose. I wonder whether we suffice with our number of Somniors...”

“What are we going to do with the Animations? I cannot see the joint tongs-movement yet.”

“What, if they don’t get close enough?”

“Don’t you worry, souls are more alike, they trust and recognize one another. The main thing is, not to cheat them...”

“That, we surely won’t do...”

“Yes, an we have to convey that. They must know, what we do, is good for them, as it is the best way of getting rid of those wicked occupants.”

“You’re right the Miseriors are a real plague, they digest such a location for breakfast, bloody soul eaters, that’s what they are...”

“Well then I call in the whole community except for the guards into the great hall”, Marsha confirmed. “and discuss the details of our strategy.”

“First of all - the double tongs twister, I yet cannot imagine what it is going to look like”, Penelope said, who was in charge of the Animations and therefore had to know quite well how to proceed.

“Grisella, could you play my part though, I think I should look after that drill sergeant on Devil’s Island. As a soul I am able to move freely and undetected.”

“Watch out for the Miseriors, if they get you you’ll be done for good. They are extra keen on free floating souls though”, Arundle warned her. She seemed to know, what was on Penelope’s mind.

“You wanted to tell us about that sergeant anyway” Marsha agreed.

“That has to wait, Besides, I’ve got to be sure”, Penelope answered.

“So, who’s instructing the Animations?” Arundle asked. Only Grisella seemed to know what was about that tongs twister business. Therefore, she was the only one who could do the job. On the other hand was Penelope an expert when it came to soul stuff. She knew how souls work.

“We cannot do without you, dear Penelope, I’m afraid”, the Headmistress objected.

“Well then, the Drill sergeant has to wait. Although he might turn out to be the key to all our trouble.”

“Shall we leave toe war up to the men? You cannot mean that!”

“We won’t do without this sergeant, I’m damn sure” Penelope answered thoughtfully.

Arundle agreed. She still had the thousand faces of Malicious Marduk before her inner eye – well quit a few of them anyway. She thought to hear the voice of the Advisor. She’d give her dearest shirt for his advice now, while she knew how important her job was over here. After all she had to tackle the presence instead of goofing about in the future.

“Well, I can see that Drill sergeant. After all, I do have a magic bow – travelling with him is no doubt advantageous; I won’t risk my soul after all. Protected by the magic bow, I am safe – well safer than you, anyway”, she said while Penelope thoughtfully nodded, and so did Marsha. This might be the best solution. They wouldn’t lose time, and most likely Arundle was as capable as Penelope to solve that difficult task. Failures were of course likely in such dubious matter.

*

The submarine took off. The crew performed the diving manoeuvre as fast as possible, while still short two crewmembers, which had been away as guardsmen with the Convertors, and didn’t come back. Adrian took the part of a navigator and personal adviser of the Captain, who repeatedly stated that he would not take the burden of responsibility for the whole undertaking. The boat was not yet fit for such extreme diving.

Once more man and material had to undergo an extreme stress test, when they reached the crucial depth. The frame kept sighing, while teardrops lowered and the rump was shaken by a scaring tremor, until the Captain exhaled a suffocated “halt”.

Navigation still worked. The rudder obeyed the slightest move. Thus, the slim body rounded the sharp cliffs and reefs, but didn’t go deeper in the dim twilight. Without the bright headlights they wouldn’t have see a thing.

They were not deep enough, because they had not yet met the base of the socle, however, if there were hidden openings at the bottom, they should be able to notice. Deeper, the Captain dared not dive. Through the thick glass of the panorama panes the Captain and his Navigator stared, misleading proportions, thus, the Captain employed his periscope.

His navigational orders came in low voice. He didn’t trust his Navigator any more, who risked too much and didn’t know the boat good enough.

The helmsman obeyed unquestioningly. A false pressing, an inch too much of too little could mean death. The Captain could feel the tension of the rump, the slightest contact, could cause a fatal leak in this depth.

No trace was found of an invasion. They had to go deeper, just to be sure, as low as three thousand three hundred and fifty feet, to be precise. Unwillingly the Captain agreed, as the boat was stable. The map was correct after all, the Captain nodded, while the sonic altimeter echoed, with each inch they went deeper.

The Chief ran about with a wild gaze and watched the increasing drippings here and there, while the frame started working again under the enormous pressure outside. With shaky fingers, he pointed at the torpedo ramps and had the greasers do their job repeatedly. Peacefully they lay in their beds, carrying death and distress. Two torpedo tubes were ready for flooding – another great risk down here, even an impossible task in such a depth anyway. Besides, there had been no time for exercising. Nobody knew if the old-fashioned systems still worked properly. If such a torpedo didn't get free from the tube, that would be it. Those in charge still hoped, that they had never to find out.

*

The Great Hall of the School of Inbetween was filled to the last stool. The exited voices of some three hundred students didn't want to lower. The Headmistress hammered with her little hammer on the desk. Left and right next to her, the Board of Staff got seated, as far as available. Grisella was here, as well as Penelope, who was responsible for the Animators.

Some assistants took the seats of the male colleagues, who were employed otherwise. Their duty was an important one, as nobody could say, whether the plan would work, that was going to be discussed right now.

The Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, finally managed to make herself heard. With high-pitched voice, she yelled and shrieked, and you could almost touch the nervousness, that held her in greedy claws.

The plan, she and her colleagues had discussed before, didn't really become clear. Marsha was not convincing at all. She most likely hadn't understood the joint tongs twister movement, Penelope M'gamba had referred to so convincingly. Thus, the latter regarded it as her plight to interrupt the Headmistress, who got lost the longer she spoke and uttered but meaningless stuff.

*

Arundle got an estimate by Penelope of the whereabouts of that Devil's Island, where that mysterious drill sergeant should be found. She talked it over with her magic bow. However, there was supposed to be only water at that spot. That didn't mean much. Nobody knew how many islands

there were. New ones were growing almost daily while others disappeared. The ground of the ocean was young and uneasy. It was closer to the liquid core of the earth, thus, streams of lava found their way, or raised to ground as a whole. Was that Devil's Island, as they addressed the place in question, such a site?

*

Billy-Joe hadn't managed his crisis of identity, he instead was stuck. The last full moon didn't do the Conversiors good, there was no doubt about it. However, Billy-Joe - who had been torn about before already - was about to get a horrible idea of the fabric of his Totem animal. He couldn't find the traces of the good mother, Tika was referring to. Tika seemed to be luckier though, no matter the fact that she was his twin sister. She obviously didn't meet the brute he knew.

He had to straighten things out once and for all, and that could only be achieved by refraining from the outer world, no matter what was going on there. His crisis didn't leave him a choice. He blamed himself selfish, but couldn't help it. He was unable to concentrate. At best, he had gone to the cave of his youth, the grotto with the murals paintings, where he had once found himself.

"I am terribly sorry, I cannot come with you" he sadly said to Arundle, when she asked him for help.

"It seems to be our fate that we have to manage our deepest crises alone", she said with a bitter air. Billy-Joe although he got an idea what was coming up, couldn't help it. This was not an excursion, but the overcoming of an evil threat, perhaps the greatest challenge Arundle had ever to stand.

There was more in, but the happiness and the fortune of the School of Inbetween. Still, he couldn't help it. He had to let her go unwillingly.

*

The plan, Penelope M'gamba had developed with the most gifted Somniors and Animatiors, went into the probationary pHase the same evening. A flock of Somniors intended to go on search for attackers that night and mingle into their dreams. As soon as a clear identification took place, the Animatiors stepped in. Their task was to tease the poisoned souls and then bind them with the ribbon of love - a process, surly causing trouble to the Miseriors. With the combined help of good dreams and soul cleansing the infested selves should be drawn over to the side of the good, while the Miseriors were forced to leave - this time back to hell, where they belonged.

The following nights other infested were due. Such interference would last until all the seduced were re-conquered and all Miseriors were driven away.

“I suppose, if things work out the way they should, that we manage in about a week or so. Please concentrate; show what’s inside you and what you have learnt already. I’m so proud of you. Together we’ll make it”, Penelope vigorously exclaimed.

“Yes, united we stand”, came the answer from all sides, while Penelope was not so sure, whether things would work as planned, but quite different to the nervous Headmistress, she held her feelings under control. It might have been the stress and all that, her meeting with death perhaps, that made her weak and confused – “poor little Marsha”, Penelope mused tenderly. “She needs help as well, might be worth looking after her, though...”

Responsibility was a heavy burden, which increased from minute to minute. Penelope thankful joined the chorus of agreement. Grisella put her arm on Marsha’s shoulder and Penelope did so from the other side.

The three of them saluted their audience and accepted the applause like a mild summer rain. Suddenly Marsha believed in their mission. “We will make it”, she yelled repeatedly, while her colleagues nodded with a gentle smile on the face.

The first night was the worst. Those wild water sprites differentiated to a larger extent than expected, or was it the power of the Miseriors, who sat firm dwelling like badly running sores in the interior of the maltreated creatures. The Somniors could hardly find access to the dreams of the wild sprites of the sea. Yet, as soon as the threshold was taken, a swamp of cruelties tore them in, and asked for all their goodness and force not to panic and fly away, but to stay on. Some of the lesser trained in fact didn’t know how to do otherwise.

The fabrication of good counter dreams required courage and full concentration. Some of the visitors remained in such status for the whole dream phase, and even overdid, in order to give those Animator-souls an adequate stage of acting. Had the good dream-acts been installed, the maltreated soul experienced some relief, and opened for the love appeal of the Animators.

All in all some fifty teams reported positively the other day and delivered their protocols, which had to be outbalanced between the Somnior and the Animator involved, before they could be handed into the Headmistress’s office.

After one week, the procedure showed first consequences. The submarine on lonesome watch deep down under reported the withdrawal of troops. The torpedoes could go on slumbering in their tubes, while the mounts were sealed. To be on the safe side a team of divers stuffed the caves and openings in the socle, they were of no use anyway. The submarine returned from its deep-sea mission. The guards remained

however; who took care of the upper exists of the subsoil maze. The danger was banned.

*

Was that the time for peace-talks and diplomacy? Adrian had a word with his wife, who was very interested in returning to normality. Some of the sponsors asked for reports already, as well as worried parents. Some witty little ones couldn't keep a secret.

Some had gone home for a short Christmas holiday, and were waiting now in Sydney for the helicopter. Others might not come back at all. In the aftermath, the Headmistress intended to let the whole affair look like a bagatelle. Thus would work fine, if the relations to the mer-folk normalized as soon as possible.

The Miseriors seemed to be chased away, and King Melisander and his entourage didn't understand themselves any more. Generals asked for retirement, soldiers became pacifists, the Minister of War even set an end to his life, and the colonial bureaucracy was fired. The refugees returned home, they were granted a generous indemnification. The whole mer-folk turned to pacifism and peacefulness. It was almost too nice to be true.

36. The Drill Sergeant on Devil's Island

Arundle considered taking Tibor with her instead of Billy-Joe, but he was cruising under water on that U-boat on interceptor course. She couldn't even manage to have a word with him. Well, her trial lacked somehow of decisiveness. Had she by then known what was coming up, she had been more pressing.

However, there were Walter and Pooty at last. She could have asked even Scholasticus or Grisella, and of course, Florinna or her sister Corinia, but they all were terribly busy. No one could be spared, while the alternative joint tongs twister method was still in the state of trial.

Therefore, she went alone, and tried to find the way on her own. Unfortunately, the map didn't show. She had a position, which she had from Penelope, but that was not reliable. Penelope had taken it as a griffin and might have mixed the figures up, she admitted.

"It's got to be somewhere" Arundle insisted while they cruised about for some minutes already, where the island was supposed to be.

How could they find a small island in the middle on an ocean? "It's like searching a needle in a haystack" the girl sighed desperately. They wasted precious hours by searching any island that was somewhere in the vicinity, but in vain. Besides, they didn't even know what they were

looking for – well, the beach should be busy though; as legions of soldiers got ashore while others were leaving again. Those who came would grow legs while ascending, and those who left, got back their flippers and fins.

Thus, it happened that Arundle found the place just at the same time when the first ‘attack of the other kind’ was in full swing, which Somniors and Animations performed so successfully. The measure was indeed a great success, and nobody thought of Arundle somewhere out there all alone, fighting the mightiest of the opponents.

Peace seemed in close range and negotiations could start soon. There were plans already for a peace feast with that famous pump pummel tournament as usual, a water ballet contest, a wholly vegetarian banquet for the water-sprites, and the like.

*

Arundle knew at once that she had found the right island, as soon as she approached. The bow indicated the highest possible degree of danger on his imaginary metre, and asked her to be careful.

Arundle rounded to place once, and saw the black steep centre peak, where the island got its name. Like many small islands, as there were thousands in the South Pacific, this one was not registered yet. A tiny dot more or less - amidst the endless blue of the ocean, didn’t really matter, while adventurers and explorers of all kind, showed vital interest in such tiny dots when cruising about on the search for the ultimate unknown. They might look for shelter, or wanted to fill up their sweet water tanks, or just relax and enjoy life.

When the night lowered, Arundle risked a landing. She looked for a deserted site, but close by the military camp, which the bow detected despite the camouflage.

She then asked her magic bow for the cloak of invisibility, as she wanted to approach that camp as close as possible. She was interested in that mysterious Drill Sergeant, nobody had seen yet except that griffin and Adrian who claimed to have had a look at him.

Protected by the cloak, Arundle climbed over fences and crawled through the mud, like a snake she was winding through all kinds of obstacles. She didn’t mind the bow’s warnings, while nothing happened, when he anticipated the upcoming catastrophe.

Arundle felt self-assured and wide-sighted. She paid attention to all reasonable precautions, and never lost control. That sergeant however, she was not able to locate. Only when it was too late, she realized how mistaken she had been.

*

Billy-Joe’s enclosure came to an end, an inner fight of several days resulted in a firm conclusion. He had seen the cruel face of the totem beast

of his, had weighed and considered, repudiated and decided. He now knew, there was no other alternative. His decision would be final, and would form his future life. He still could step back, while he then knew how unacceptable such outlook was.

He had to jump into the unknown willingly. He would lose something, and he didn't know whether he could stand the loss.

What he gained, he didn't know. He could only hope and yearn, if he still was able for that. Such feelings were likely to be connected with the threatening darkness of the beast.

Well, his decision was firm, he knew it, still there were scruples hammering about in his aching skull. This was another kind of pain, which would remain. On the other hand...

He didn't mind those bagatelles. He tried to get the frame in sight, and wanted to overlook the greater whole: His situation in the world, if you may say so, or just the ego – how it was nourished and stilled.

What precautions had he to consider? What was the matter with his little sister? Did he drop her once more, now that she just found him? No matter how much he cared about her in his human appearance – and he was going to do – he would never come back as the other image, she was familiar with and related. He would give away that part of his, and wouldn't know what he got back in return. Perhaps it was little, perhaps just nothing. However, it could be so much more as well, a whole universe of sensation indeed, and an entirely new mode of being.

He was ashamed for the deal he suggested to himself. It was not right to change Tika for that new way of life. Things shouldn't work that way. The alternative that he was opening was false. Perhaps Tika felt like him and felt like him painfully limited by the beast she became.

On the other hand, was he allowed to have his decision depend on Tika's feelings? What did he really know about her Totem animal? The little he knew pointed in another direction. Tika didn't know the horror, that came over him whenever he looked into his inside and faced the gleaming eyes of the beast.

Eager to please she had listened to him while he was trying to explain himself. Her passion had been genuine. She also wanted him to find out of this tunnel of horror. She cared for him more than he wanted to admit. She never put her self first, and dearly wished to see him happy.

Full of tender sisterly love Billy-Joe thought of his sister. He would take care of her, and would show her the human side of life. He would give her back the same love, she felt for him. Their joint life in the School of Inbetween offered good chances to do so.

His enclosure ended. Weakened by the fasting, but freed and raised up by a seldom clarity, Billy-Joe crawled back through devastated tunnels where he – strange enough – had been able to locate that ancient site.

No guards stop him, no misunderstanding arouse, while he was hardly able to speak. He only met happy people, and looked into smiling faces. He learnt of the victory of the other kind, which was achieved by the joint manoeuvre of Animators and Somnors – for the first time in history, the saying went. Thanks to Penelope’s outstanding strategy, and the proper action of the many.

He still couldn’t feel at ease, as he should have. Something was wrong. He thought this was caused by the enclosure and the solitude, and his physical weakness, and the decision he had come to, he didn’t dare to tell, contradicting the fact that he longed for sharing it with others.

He longed for meeting his friends. Where were they all? Corinia would be with Boetie after that great victory and Florinna would be not far. However, where was Tibor and where was Arundle? Of Tibor, they knew in the quarters of the Sublimations. Billy-Joe learnt that Tibor had fought up front in the first row so to speak, from the first to the last minute, and was now hailed as a hero by his people, wounded though, and recovering in hospital.

Arundle however could not be found. Nobody remembered having seen her lately, or wasn’t sure whether or not. The turmoil and confusion during these last days had been too much for all of them.

Great had been the tension and all that, he now learnt, and he was ashamed, as he didn’t move a finger after re-conversion.

In short – Arundle was lost; nobody seemed to know where she was.

Intimidated he broke off his inquiries as soon as he was asked for his part. Everybody expected him a fair part of the happy outcome.

His uneasiness kept growing. He imagined the worst. He felt, something was wrong with Arundle. It was not her absence alone. Something else was there and gathered like a threatening cloud over their heads. She couldn’t be still on that Devil’s Island; people had been referred to while he was inquiring. Had she not asked him to come with her? However, that had been a long time ago, before he left for the enclosure!

He then left her alone; he overheard the pushing undertone while she pleaded. Had he done so purposely? - He let her go alone, that was for sure.

“There are things, you’ve got to straighten out on your own”, he heard him say. That was what he said or something like that! He did only think of himself, he didn’t listen to what Arundle said, didn’t understand how she felt and why it was so important to get on that island.

Why did she want to get there? Billy-Joe didn’t remember. Perhaps, she didn’t tell him.

Walter was able to bring certainty at last. Arundle was gone since that same day, when Billy-Joe left for his enclosure, while Walter thought him to be with her.

“I do have a very bad feeling”, Billy-Joe thoughtfully said. He was very convincing and infested Walter and Pooty likewise. “Arundle considers the Sergeant the key figure”, Pooty said without remembering where he got that. “She’s thinking of Malicious Marduk, but that she is doing all the time!”

Pooty didn’t mean to turn them down, he only wanted to make things clearer. If Arundle was not yet back, something must have happened, there was no doubt about it. Perhaps she had missed the target and got lost in the ocean. She might have had an accident.

‘The worst things occur when least expected, though.’ Pooty knew what he was talking.

Penelope M’gamba had been at that Devil’s Island and so had Adrian, but he stayed with the King of Melisandria right now as peace ambassador and special negotiator in matters of democracy. The idea was to alter the system by implementing as many democratic elements as possible. The political climate was favourable after the King’s terrible mistake and his withdrawal consequently. The King was a broken man, while the images of the dead of the Pump the Pummel Stadium of Australis tortured him night and day. Democratic elements promised to avoid future mistakes.

Grisella accompanied him as his adviser. Marsha and Penelope didn’t let him go on his own this time and insisted her to go with him. They went there the Somniors’ way, in order to save time and effort.

“Adrian, you know, we all appreciate what you do and like you, foremost I. Still you lack of objectivity when it comes to the King and his kin.” Adrian nodded and had her words shower like rain over his head, when it came to say farewell. Grisella not only was bound to advise but to have an eye on him as well. Marsha was not willing to tolerate his secret other life down there any longer.

Grisella was supposed to care in other then philosophical matters and questions of politics likewise, while this still was the prime concern.

*

Except for Adrian, no school member ever set foot on that Devil’s Island. Penelope M’gamba vaguely reminded some pictures when she was cruising as a griffin, but didn’t recall much, and couldn’t tell how to get there. No one could accept Adrian, however not the proper way, as he didn’t use maps, compass, or other nautical devices, when travelling under water. “Just follow your intuition, and let go where it leads you, that’s about all you do... well, yes, some wishful thinking is involved as well, I’d say...”

That meant he couldn't remember either, how he found the way back from the island, while he only had to follow the warriors on their way to the training camp ashore.

Following the warriors was most likely the way he found back again, just the other way round.

It had been a busy route, though. Thus, he couldn't be of great help either, when it came to define the proper location of that island. Besides, the bulk of trouble he got involved at that time didn't leave space for other matters.

*

He couldn't have helped Walter and Billy-Joe, even if he had managed the way back, which was by now unlikely, as no warriors went there anymore after the joint tongs twister attack.

Therefore, they had to rely on their usual means. Walter discussed the matter excessively with the magical stone of his. He gave him as much detail as he could get from Penelope M'gamba.

For some reason his terrible experience with those kangaroos came to his mind again. That assured him of his suspicion, that his tormentor was to be found right there.

The magical stone didn't want to become involved in his master's confusion, and let him know that his quarrels weren't helpful at all, when it came to spotting the site, on the contrary.

The magical stone knew how touchy Walter became whenever a thoughtless remark was uttered in that matter. Walter hadn't mastered this crisis at all. You could hardly do better than excuse yourself right away. Thus, he timidly objected, whether the name 'Devil's Island' as such could perhaps be of help. They both agreed, and not a minute passed when they came to a decision.

The travellers took their positions. Pooty disappeared in Walter's belly bag, while Billy-Joe grabbed Walter's strong tail. Not a second passed when the small group disappeared, as if earth had swallowed them.

*

Arundle got closer to the centre of the evil, closer than ever. She could feel it, no matter that she did not see that Sergeant, while this could have to do with the time of the day. She was approaching in the evening, when Sergeants used to drink.

"Service is service and booze is booze", she heard her father groan, who was a heavy drinker occasionally.

Unhindered she passed the inner fortified line. She didn't see any guards. No one took care - what carelessness! She should have been warned by that, however the magic bow didn't say a thing either, so she crawled on, protected by the cloak of invisibility as she thought.

Malicious Marduk was well hidden, not even the magic bow noticed any sign of his presence; or he was not here at all. Arundle did not know what she should think of that. By then, she began to mistrust her luck. Perhaps he tricked her and her devices, she wondered.

Their first real big encounter was in the future – more than a hundred and thirty years from now – if she figured it rightly. Same as she had done, he could have made up his memories about such future encounter, where she was able to overcome him by not tricking at all. Thus, he craved even more for revenge now, despite the fact of his future defeat.

Arundle got closer to the centre of the provisional camp. No sound could be heard. Either those recruits were sleeping, or they had gone back into the sea. It was a little early for bedtime though, she wondered. However, she didn't know the circumstances, which might be very different, as things used to differ where Conversors were involved, - not to mention - even worse – Miseriors.

At the latest now, she should have become alert. Where was her natural instinct? Blindly she trusted that cloak of invisibility, although she should have known that only mortal eyes could be cheated. Besides, footprints could not be avoided under the cloak either and such she had delivered - loads. Traces that could well be seen by anybody with eyes in the head and a clear mind.

If she thought of that at all, she figured that no one was around to see those footprints, thus, she went on, curious as she was and headed towards that main building. At last, she meant to sense the opponent, and she felt her heart beating.

Malicious Marduk was near. She knew now for sure. There was no doubt about it. Only that door – and then ... All of a sudden she felt a strange tickling.

She did not care about those warriors, she did not mind, how they managed to fight ashore. All of a sudden, she cared for a far deeper fusion. How did she – for heaven's sake – come to think about a fusion? She felt she had reached her aim and wanted to be one with it. Was it her father again? Did he trick her once more? Should she always run aground at that same scheme? She would fail, she couldn't resist. A strange will took over.

Her own confused thoughts came to a sudden end. From all sides she felt the grip of hard fingers. In no time she was bound and cuffed, then seated on a stool in the middle of an otherwise empty room, as far as she could see. Even her head was fixed.

There she sat, a well-packed parcel, ready for postage. She had been fooled like a bloody greenhorn, had stumbled into a trap; - as if there hadn't

been warning signs enough! ‘How could you be so ignorant, Arundle?’ – she said to herself.

A voice got her off her self-accusations, without enfeebling her scruples, while this lay not in the intention of the speaker – quite the opposite!

She should be thrown even deeper into that abyss that opened. The speaker intended to humiliate her. He wanted to demoralize her.

In the corner of the eye, she managed to get a glimpse of him. She thought to see a round cap and the outfit of a legionnaire, a red bearded face, blue jacket, white trousers and black boots. The rest of the face disappeared under the brim of the cap. The voice was dripping with malice, but well known to her, although with a strange – most likely French – accent:

“I must wonder myself, little Mademoiselle. How can we left aside all attention? Mais oui, you was coming right. How our informant told us. This is the main chose, n’est pas? What shall we do with you now, little Mademoiselle? - Turn out the life light right away... oh no, not so hasty. Can she become no friend of us, little naughty brat, she is...”

The man laughed disgustingly, and tasted the power to the full he had over her. Arundle felt the horror creeping up her spine. She was helpless – how could that be – how could she stumble into such a simple trap?

The questions the legionnaire asked were purely rhetoric, she realized at once. That man knew quite well, what he was doing with her. Why was she still alive? Killing her right away had been much simpler, but then Malicious Marduk – she didn’t doubt a second that he was behind that mask – could not enjoy the triumph. His vanity was in his way, and that meant a last respite, nothing more.

Did she make a mistake? While knowing about the future, Malicious Marduk was not able to kill her. He could hardly do more then torture her for the moment, or try to persuade her and make her change sides. The more she thought about that idea, the more sense she saw in it. They were tied together, inseparable like Siamese twins. Encounters were awaiting them of which none of them yet dreamt.

The greatest danger was the trace of horror that was settling in her soul that way, for it was likely to influence her further decisions. Fear was the worst councillor. Malicious Marduk had once more been able to make her feel weak. Her will should be broken this way - for all future.

What did he want now? Did he fear her interfering with the water sprites? Was that the cause of the trap? Why did he trap her now? Was she the main obstacle? Did she ruin his plans? Was her coming here the kind of disturbance, which was able to ruin his plans?

Malicious Marduk didn't show her his hand, of course not. His thoughts she could not reach that way. She would in return build up all possible obstacles to stop him from reading hers. Therefore, she had to be strong; but how could you be strong when you were chained, your head and limbs aching?

Why did Malicious Marduk disguise the way he did? Why did he choose that mask? A mask like this was typical for the unscrupulous culprit he was. Then she realized it. There was just one little weakness the legionnaire had overlooked, and she would trick him out by that on his own field, - provided she got the chance to do. Now she would concentrate on her spiritual abilities. She felt the magic bow near. At last, he managed to get away, when she was captured. That gave her strength. She was not all alone.

37. Purification

Arundle stood amidst a stake erected by busy hands that grew higher any minute. Torches alighted the scene in the middle of the camp. Gusts of wind blew into the bleary flames and had them grow threateningly close to that stake.

As if a martyr the girl was chained to a pole in the middle, humiliated and degraded. Arundle faced the harshest possible end, no matter what the reasoning taught her. Only minutes from now the stake would be ignited. She felt panic. With all her guts, she managed to keep cool outside.

Her opponent was out of sight, but she could feel him near. She missed his provocative talks, which had stimulated the opposing spirit in her. She knew it; her life was in mortal danger. Her spirit faded, she lost power, and felt the trickling of mental blood dripping away. Physically she was still in order, although she was thirsty and hungry by now.

Arundle now accepted that she had been wrong, when judging Marduk's motives and chances. An unscrupulous creature like him didn't care about the future, or rules and regulations. He did not care about what was written in the stars, that they had to fight their future battle one day. He planned and executed the annihilation of his opponent. That was his kind of philosophy – the philosophy of cruelty – as simple as that!

The only reason, why he didn't kill her right away was his lust for seeing her tortured. That and the other weakness of his made him vulnerable despite all the might and power he demonstrated.

On the dark side of power, the ups and downs reversed. Weaknesses became strengths, and strengths became weaknesses. It was a simple philosophy though!

Killing Arundle would have been easy for the legionnaires right at the first barrier on her way to the centre. They didn't allow their murderous instincts to take over, because the order of their master forbade it.

The brave girl was now concentrating all her spiritual power. She closed her eyes and shut off the noise of the deadly preparations, at best she could.

The power of her concentrated thoughts would overcome time and space. There was no distance for thoughts. Thoughts worked at a distance of a couple of feet as well as of thousands of light-years – if they worked at all!

The side of the sender and the side of the receiver required certain dispositions, though.

While Arundle now knew what was going to happen, she released the Sergeant out of her spiritual fangs. She by then didn't have an idea what her thoughts could do.

The threat might be nothing but a reaction on her psychic power she emitted, had there not been that vanity – the major and fatal weakness, Malicious Marduk employed. Arundle surely never would find out why she was to be staked, not for now. She felt strong arms closed in on her, while busy fingers fumbled her loose. The shuttle with Walter and Pooty in his belly bag rushed in, delivering Billy-Joe, the saviour once more, for whom her latest desperate calls had been meant.

When Billy-Joe had his boomerang whirl, Arundle knew everything was fine. The ties fell left and right, and she was free.

The legionnaires stood by perplexed, perhaps the joint tongs twister strategy was working somehow already – anyway, they didn't move a hand while the saved and her saviours heartily hugged each other repeatedly.

The Drill Sergeant knew by then what the clock had stricken. His back up had shrunk down to the few figures still with him on Devil's Island. The mer-folk had shaken off the yoke of the Miseriors, who were banned into their established empire, hopefully for good - but you never know...

If there were no leak again, and if there were no crises in this world, they might stay where they belonged. However, crises were more likely than ever and leaks shot up like asparagus in spring. On the other hand, people had to be ready for their tormentors, otherwise the ambush failed. They had to have an open ear for the snake's hissing and whispering. Only then a Miserior took the chance, stepped in and got hold of a mind.

The Drill Sergeant took the heels in his hands, when he realized the sudden change, but Pooty was alert and gave Walter a hint. - Poor Walter was overwhelmed by sheer hatred when he met his tormentor face to face again. He was not free yet. All the awful things that had happened to him

came to his mind. He felt the emptiness where once had been sheer delight. In fact, Walter was but a shallow image. All what had done to him broiled up again and made him rage like a dragon - spitting flames and glow. He felt inside the ugly brute called Man raging, perhaps for the first time.

Pooty jumped off and away with a cry of disgust, he grabbed for the magical stone, who was getting off as well – grabbed at him like an able goal-keeper for the ball, and caught him just in time before he hit the rocky ground, where he might have broken to pieces otherwise.

With paws and claws, with fangs and teeth the raging brute tossed and bit, tore and slit into that winding piece of living flesh there on the ground in front of him, while blood splashed and soon was everywhere. The Drill Sergeant didn't have a chance. Still Arundle meant to notice a malicious grin in the eyes of the dying man, who managed to toss his sabre into Walter's heart as he fell. Light heart blood gushed forth. – Walter hit the ground with broken eyes, and was instantly dead.

Pooty stood by; he couldn't move and held the pulsating, magical stone in his little hands. The stone was almost as big as he was, so it looked, and was enclosed into a bright aura.

Billy- Joe and Arundle stood side by side. The sudden attack had surprised them as well. It was over, before they realized what was going on.

The legionnaires started gasping. Some succeeded in reaching the waterfront. They re-converted as soon as their master died. All over the place, you could see green sprites robbing for their lives.

Walter couldn't be helped, so Billy-Joe and Arundle gave the poor creatures a chance, and tore as many as they could down to the beach, where they disappeared in the waves at once.

Pooty sobbed heartbreakingly. He hugged his big friend again and again, until he was all covered with blood. When Arundle saw him that way, she thought he committed suicide and was terribly frightened.

She dropped the body she was just tearing and jumped over to him, when she noticed her error. - “Don't do that”, she softly said “we've got to save as many as we can, after all, they are our kin.”

For some the rescue was too late. They suffocated in the barracks on the way out or still in their hammocks, when the re-conversion came over them while sleeping. They might have had the wrong dreams, though.

The ban was broken with the death of the Drill Sergeant. The Miseriors followed their master, and left behind the debris of their malevolent deeds.

Malicius Marduk was not dead of course. He could not die. Dead was the mask he had chosen for this trickery.

Thus, Walter had raged in vain. One poor victim had slaughtered another poor victim. Walter should have known. His outbreak of wrath became his doom and fulfilled the triumph of his opponent.

“Who knows what Walter had done, if his mind had been clear?” Arundle mused. She wouldn’t get an answer and she didn’t want one. She asked for Pooty, who didn’t know what to do now.

He felt guilty as well. He should have foreseen the upcoming disaster, as soon as they decided to follow Arundle.

Walter had been so normal and quiet from the outside. However, the little possum should have known, he knew his friend better than anyone else. At school, they had been so busy with their own affairs – all of them. Had they had an ear for the faint sounds of the Inbetween, the catastrophe might have been avoided.

Two impressions there were, which Walter interpreted his very own way and then turned them in a fatal way against himself. First, there was the news from that assistant. Younger pupils hardly remembered him. He used to be Professor Slyboots’ assistant, who had been so unlucky while staying in Toronto. Peter Adams was his name. He broke both legs and had to stay in hospital for months.

Scholasticus declared how proud he was of him. Peter Adams was the first being he knew who resisted an attack of Malicious Marduk, although such challenge had caused him great trouble. “I do not doubt that Malicious Marduk was responsible for the broken legs as a revenge”, he once said to Grisella, while Walter and Pooty overheard their little conversation unwillingly.

Grisella objected that such an interpretation seemed somehow strange and somewhat unlikely. “However, that’s the way that rascal works, I know what I’m talking about”, she said and had her own encounter in mind.

“Those photographs fit well in the frame, Arundle brought us from her space mission. Peter Adam was chosen as a horse, Malicus Marduk intended to ride”, Scholasticus answered.

Thus, Walter felt guilty. He had not been able to resist. Unlike Peter Adams, he became the horse of this tormentor. There must have been some kind of disposition on his side, he concluded, and all his excuses melted like ice in the sunshine. Others resisted the evil.

The second aspect was even worse. Billy-Joe overcame the beast in his enclosure he just had passed. In a lonely fight, the brave boy overwhelmed his self and got hold on a higher level of being. This could also be achieved, Walter learnt while he had to admit that he had failed in this respect as well.

Such were – most likely - the musings, Walter had in mind during the last minutes of his life; and here could the reason be found for that overwhelming wrath he outlived.

Pooty and Arundle jointly lay Walter in state. They decided to cremate his remains. This might be the straightest way of setting his immortal soul free for roaming in the red savannah of his beloved homeland.

There was plenty of wood available though. For the last time, it meant to say good-bye. Arundle had to keep Pooty back by force, not to jump into the flames.

“His spirit will live on. Walter is going to be with us”, Billy-Joe firmly stated. He had something in mind though.

“I’m going to open him my heart, and if he let me and accept me, we soon will meet again”, he added mysteriously.

“Do you really believe that?” Pooty asked, still with tears in his eyes, but with a glimpse of hope. “Yes, such is my belief. Walter and I need a second chance”, Billy-Joe confirmed.

38. Democracy is worth it

The victory of reason always sets free enormous forces in man. A rumour had it that the mer-folk got the right turning in time. They awoke from a terrible nightmare. Where there had been hatred and destruction, now open-mindedness and a friendly attitude took over. In the light of reason, little could stand of the causes of disruption. In dialogue, many conflicts turned into mere misunderstanding. Besides, why should there be no different meanings?

Nobody understood why they had been the cause for violence and bloodshed. Families across came together again, clans buried the hatchet, transcontinental kinships became alive, and a lively exchange of news, as well as goods of all kind started.

People noticed how little they had known of each other, and how far the continents had mentally drifted apart. What the King tried to keep together with an iron fist – the unity became a lively fact. Joint interests there were many; and if there were none they could be invented. Besides, was the lack of community a good reason for smashing each other’s heads?

The deprived King went ahead as a good example. He retreated from all his duties and together with him the whole crown council. Those in charge had loaded a heavy burden on their shoulders, no matter whether they did so on their own.

The leaders of the riots also recognized their part in the dirty game, while some still saw mainly the positive outcome, and not the bloody route towards success - after all, the crusty old state machinery had begun to move, they argued. Thus, the gaiety about the breakdown of the old system remained in tight limits, so to speak.

Those of them capable sought for influence in the new parliament in *statu nascendi* (the state of being born) that was going to initiate a general election with the coming full moon. Their task would it be to write a Constitution for the mer-folk and have it ready for voting.

*

The rising full moon brought about a decision of a very different kind, and had to do with Billy-Joe and first of all with Pooty, and somehow also with Walter. Billy-Joe succeeded in an act of great art of life, which only few mortals ever managed: he exchanged his Totem animal.

Normally, it is regarded as a great success, if the character of such a Totem animal is altered without splitting apart. A painful procedure though, causing deep wounds in the soul.

Billy-Joe's new Totem animal was a giant kangaroo, but not just any kangaroo as you might be able to imagine. What Billy-Joe had secretly hoped - but didn't dare to publish, not to wake up unreal yearnings - became real, and made Pooty unspeakably happy. Arundle had the little possum invited to come with her on a trip to Conversior's island this time.

While the Conversiors started to convert, Pooty didn't trust his eyes, as he had never witnessed that procedure. Many of them covered with fur. Others stretched their limbs, while mouths became snouts, and hands extended to paws. From all sides you could hear more or less pleasant moaning.

The greatest surprise however was Billy-Joe when his body stretched while extending a strong tail. Finally, his friend stood there with the same old and well-known expression on the face, grabbing for his glasses and uttering a friendly 'hello' to invite him into the belly bag of his - an exemption of Mother Nature, though - and have him strive through the bush together.

In Billy-Joe's selection as the host of the wise spirit, an exceptional development took place on the Tree of Life. This was indeed an exemption that had to find agreement with all other heads of the Menora. Only for Billy-Joe, the imperial embassies of all populated galaxies were contacted. Their representatives assembled on the virtual fictitious centre of all universes and galaxies, in order to come to a decision that was then called 'Lex Walter', and was recorded as such in the history books everywhere.

An eighth top was added to the seven heads of the Tree of Life. The Advisor employed all his remarkable power of conviction to guide the

assembly his way. He finally managed to come to an acceptable majority for the initiative, and that only because he could rely on the support by General Armyless. The latter had come in person together with the Prince Regent of Laptopia, but that was not all:

Billy-Joe held a seat as well as Arundle in the Laptopian Council. His feet back in the Laptopian public – especially amongst the free tribes – was still remarkable. Him being the host of the wise kangaroo was therefore highly welcomed, as the free tribes knew about the impact Totem dears had and wise good spirits. Thus, it came that the day of his election, as the eighth top of the Tree of Life - became a great feast for the whole people.

*

Adrian Humpurdijk rallied for the new Parliament of the mer-folk during the following full moon session. Not to the least because of him, had that date been fixed. Despite of his limitations he looked forward with good chances for a seat, though.

Grisella and Corinia assisted Boetie at best they could - one from afar, the other as close as possible. Boetie was supposed to become the first Prime Minister, however, nobody knew at that early date.

Grisella's influence was remarkable and could be seen everywhere. She implemented the major articles of the Civil Rights Bill, and wrote the first democratic constitution of the mer-folk. At last, she got a chance to provide her enormous knowledge and to build the framework of an ideal state.

Not everything turned out to be realistic, and in detail, some aspects had to be modified, especially those, which favoured the authority and the leading role of the state; - but in general her code was accepted.

When the Constitution was published and the first free elections were called in, life had come back to normal – more or less. Some major aspects had been tackled. The Party of the Reef-Owners, the Labour Party, the Party of the Whale- and Shark-Breeders, the Miners' Party, the Royalists, the Vegetarians and some other splitter-groups established and sent delegates and candidates for the several democratic institutions.

A lot had to be considered and regulated. For the untrained in matters of democracy sometimes an almost insolvable task. Thanks to the help from outside such mainly technical problems could be mastered.

The parties had to establish election platforms and had to be trained in electioneering. Scrutineers had to be found and of course returning officers for the two constituencies. Boetie became the returning officer for Australis. She still kept on applying for a seat in Parliament for the Women's and Vegetarians Party – a minor group with minor chances – so it seemed.

The Election Day became a nationwide public holiday. For all times the mer-folk should be reminded of that ‘Day of the Great Awakening’, as the day was called.

On Election Day, a bare majority voted for a Constitutional Monarchy, while all the power was put into the hands of the Parliament, and the representatives of the parties then formed the Government.

“A wise decision”, Scholasticus said to Arundle, who agreed. “It is vital to implement as many forces of a people in the state as possible”, Grisella added. She dared not to believe in the solution that was finally found – therefore she was glad.

The old monarch was highly surprised, when he was complimented back to the palace. As the nominal head of the state, it was his duty to guide the Pump the Pummel Tournament that would end with the final match on the Day of the Great Awakening.

‘A wise decision and a clever move’, the advisers beyond the panorama-pane wondered, while the traditional match between Australis and Bermudia was going on outside and you could hardly see anything but foam on the centre court and of the jubilant crowd on the ranks.

Nobody quite understood that strange game over here, be it for the rules or the strategy. They missed their eager commentator, Adrian Humperdijk, who was of course on the other side on his great day as freshly elected mer-folk-representative.

Only he was able to fill the ongoing turmoil outside with sense, and find the suitable words.