

U.G.Doehn

ARUNDLE & KIN

1. Secrets of Laptopia
2. Tree of Life
3. Ground of Time
4. Uncertainty by Principle
5. Council of the Menora
6. Repetitors of the Future

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The kiss of Helios first cut loose the limbs of Chronos –

Confirmed with might their firmly settled bond.

The ancient moment solves for once - freed from unending stretch

Withdraws into a single point.

Uplifted then into mightier chains of the projected –

The clockwork of the world begins to tick.

God meets within the time.

2

His ghost expels first forms of glowing blaze –

Tiniest whirls combine to forces –

Link widening slack heaps of gathered matter.

The Universe gets orderly,

According to the one and only power,

As was forwarded and intended

By the inherited immeasurable holy law.

3

Dying Star-Mothers giving birth to generations –

Billions of years can last such day of recreation –

Is never ending though – devour in fridgeration,

And in reprimand repetition.

At last it is the light of stars, called sunlight,

Which raises life on the Virginian earth.

Aware of God's commandment and verdict.

4

Would it be accidental though, that there is life –

Becoming Man and Mankind after all –

Widening into history?

If so, we would not be and God was all alone.

That is why it should be:

God wants us here to understand creation

And to fulfill his gorgeous plan as such:

5

God wants us all to ripen towards destiny –

In deed and word, in wish and longing –

Shall Man proceed towards the Promised Land –

Uniting closely in an ever lasting bond –

With Him Who has no start nor ending –

So that each tiny spark of every individual in brightness glows –

Never to diminish but endure, and mirrored as a whole.

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Volume 1: The Secrets of Laptopia

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1.The Magic Bow

Arundle was at home and no-one else. Fierce it was, - the night gave her a scare – the weather so black and creepy all over. Flashes flashed from afar, but the rolling thunder came nearer. The wind howled like a mourning wolf down through the gate of the backyard. At least Arundle hoped it was the wind. Brave as she usually was, her heart failed her now.

Had there only been somebody, so that she had not been all alone up here behind the balcony door. Who could sleep in such a night? Mr. and Mrs. Waldschmitt, Arundle's parents, had left to the opera shortly before the weather. Richard Wagner, that could last for ages. "Don't wait for us. We will be late. There is Lohengrin

tonight” – Mrs. Waldschmitt said, as they left, and gave her a wet kiss on the forehead. “You know, where everything is, and if anything happens, you ring up Mrs. Trock on the second floor.”

The telly didn’t please any more, as there was no one to bleat. Listlessly she zapped through the channels. Until the first, close thunder rolled. Then she turned off. It is said, that TV attracts flashes, she remembered, besides, there was only trash, anyway.

She tried to read, but then she stepped in front of the window and looked at the weather, what she could see of it, and felt lonesome.

The longing for a protector became overwhelmingly strong; and, as it happens, when little under-tens’ wishes become strong, so it worked this time as well. An awesome blooming crash hit the ground, right on the balcony. Arundle shrieked, flew, and hid in the lavy. Some time elapsed before she came out again. There she saw it. Something was lying on the balcony. She could see what it was and it comforted her. She felt no fear when she stepped out and grabbed for the thing which was glowing somewhat invitingly, as if it wanted to say. “I’m yours, just fetch me, my dear little girl.” And so she did. The light had been the red eye of a magic bow, and that was now hers.

This was how little Arundle got to her magic bow long ago.

Arundle hated school, but even more was she afraid of the boarding school, her parents threatened her with, when she grew older. Her only glance of hope was her friend Florinna Hare then, like herself by now also just about going to be thirteen soon. With her, Arundle joined the same grade, since her parents moved back to the city some years ago. The nightmarish place faded, while she kept in mind only the miracle of how she got her magic bow.

So at last, she found a friend. Tears wanted to spring out of her eyes, as she thought of Florinna.

She had her problems with her mates, for sure. Arundle could well think of a reason. She just couldn’t show interest for the things her mates were interested in. That was it. The schoolyard talks only bored her. So now, she did not even simulate interest any more. Nobody would have believed her anyway.

Her mates thought her as arrogant and boring, ever since she was a little girl. No matter how hard she tried to please. If only the

teachers had been nicer. However, they made things even worse. Arundle crept into her nutshell and closed in.

During lessons, she was sitting absent-minded in the classroom, stared out of the window and was waiting that the school went by. Just at home, she threw her school stuff into a corner and didn't touch until the next morning.

Either she didn't make any homework, or she copied them in the breaks, if she found someone to let her copy.

While still in primary school, she managed to slip through quite well. She seemed to dig enough and her marks weren't that bad. Nevertheless, Mrs. Kurzius complained frequently about her at the teachers parents meetings, so that Arundle's mother refused to go there any more. She found Mrs. Kurzius an impossible person. "You wouldn't believe what she's talking about you. It's just incredible. She wants us to see a psychiatrist – all of us - not only you, but your poor parents, too."

Whereas Mrs Kurzius was by far better than Mr. Schwertfeger was, whom her father argued with, two years later. What a start in the new school that was. If there hadn't been Florinna...

Of course, there were other teachers as well. Mr. Schwertfeger only taught Mathematics, Sports and Sciences. However, her train had left the station far too long ago. She'd failed to jump on one of the later wagons, so to speak.

Since Florinna was there, Arundle felt better. She was her first real friend. However, school didn't really change.

Now with Mr. Schwertfeger, Arundle noticed that Mrs. Kurzius hadn't been all that bad, and she felt sorry for her behaviour – too late.

Arundle knew who she was, and what kind of nasty thing she could be.

Even though, Florinna was quite different – they came together at once. Florinna was friendly to everyone, she listened and wanted to please and that was sometimes hard to bear – but otherwise...

What exactly it was, that drove them towards each other, was quite unknown to her for a long time. Perhaps it was, because Florinna looked so romantic with this thick long bluish black hair and the red dot on the forehead.

Florinna was Indian, more precisely, Semi-Senoi, as she put it. and, thereof she was very proud. Anyway, she loved her mother unspeakably much, perhaps because she was a Senoi.

Arundle was not able to find out, what it was all about with the Senois for a long time. She checked the dictionary, but in vain. –

Florinna had a sister. She was one year younger and was called Corinia. Corinia was likely to be even livelier than her sister, and had the same character as her mother anyway.

And if Arundle thought it right, she was much alike her own mother as well. That was by no means advantageous for her, she realized. And she wondered how Florinna and Corinia came along with her. However, it seemed, as if both of them enjoyed her company quite a lot. Why they did, she should soon find out.

In the first place, she thought the sisters were interested in her, because of the magic bow of hers. They, as Semi-Senoi, were magically gifted enough, to realize facts, she thought. Not that she hoped for that poor reason, of course. Anyway, she would find out the truth soon enough.

Arundle was happy to meet her friends in the empty flat on boring afternoons, as she was all alone there. Now that the Waldschmitts lived in the city for almost two years again, it was close to the Hares place, just two blocks away. That was why the sisters met Arundle's magic bow or vice versa, as the bow made him known to them quite spectacularly. Arundle never ever experienced such an excitement on his side. He let the string snarl. His red eye began to twinkle. Energy pulsated and made her grow pimples on her arms. And – look at that – Florinna and Corinia could read his thoughts. So to speak or otherwise – the bow could read theirs. They understood each other without words. (As good as understanding works, without words. Spoken words are to a certain extent far more precise.)

Perhaps her parents had indeed moved because of the psychiatrist, they feared. Arundle thought this quite well to be the case. On the other hand, travelling in a crowded suburban train every morning and evening was no fun either - despite the fact of all the time, they lost this way. However, the writing of the psychiatrist on the wall in big red letters had its effects too, even though, both of them would never have committed - definitely not before each other. (As it goes with disturbed people - they don't necessarily feel disturbed.)

How disturbed her parents were, Arundle found out in comparison with her friends' family, after she was acquainted with

their parents as well. A childhood as hers had to cause severe problems in the long run.

Nevertheless, she had her magic bow at last. He was able to compensate quite a lot of her grief over the years. But at school he couldn't help either. Since her father had attacked Mr. Schwertfeger, school was almost unbearable. Schwertfeger was as disturbed as her parents were, and kept her in charge of their misbehaviour, as he saw it. He closed up on her frequently and she couldn't help but wished herself away. How silly he then looked! He couldn't say, whether she shirked once more.

By the means of the magic bow, disappearing was so easy and worked faster than an eye's wink or the thinking of a thought.

(Clear enough, you doubt your recognition, what else could you do? All of a sudden, you realize an empty seat. Was it empty all the time? Must be so, as it is empty now...)

Shortly before the end of the lesson, she sat back on her stool and looked quite innocent. What did she do here? She asked herself, as she was most confused. Switching from one world into another was quite an experience.

It was in their early days, when she didn't know her magic bow or just were acquainted to. Mr. Schwertfeger got mad about her, because of the new world map, somebody embroidered with a spray-tin. He immediately charged Arundle to be the culprit – who else.

Therefore, it occurred that the bow must have mixed something up. Because in order to disappear, you had to formulate a strong wish – 'strong and clear' – as the bow explained later. You had to say 'up to the moon' or 'what about a trip to Tobago' – clear things like that.

Obviously, there had been a slight misunderstanding, as Arundle found her all of a sudden in a peculiar environment; she couldn't deal with at all. Besides - she still carried her school bag over the shoulder, and felt much smaller and younger as well. However, she had been quite sure to sit in class already. Obviously not!

She sat on a grey cloud instead and below her, she could see the shimmering walls of a castle or some kind of important building. As she looked on, she noticed, that she kept sliding. The cloud didn't bear her weight. Just as she almost passed the bottom,

her magic bow managed to pick her up. She fell off the clouds literally amidst a strange world with funny rotundas houses and walking laptops all over the place. The screens showed their faces and two thin legs were fitted to the core, while two hands – fixed on both sides - hammered like mad on the keyboard, as if they gave themselves orders in written form all the time.

They seemed to be very busy. However, they didn't act very reasonably. They goofed back and forth without much sense. Should she try to get in touch with these creatures? She approached one of the busy secretaries and introduced herself – but no reaction. She tried it again. This time she stepped into the pace of a busy comrade. However, he just curved around her and continued on his route.

'As if they were guided by a secret centre' Arundle thought. Then she remembered Lappy, as she called her little laptop. It should be in her bag. She searched for a little while, and there she was, Lappy was there. She pulled it out, thought for a moment and switched on the international module. Lappy was in full command of six languages, that's what the instructions said. Besides, it was equipped with loudspeakers, but used up a lot of energy for that device. Therefore, it was better to turn the speakers on only, when plugged in on a charger. However, here she couldn't ask for a plug. Therefore, she tried with the battery. She hoped the battery was fully charged, but that was not the case, as she had played the settlers game in lesson yesterday and failed to repack for today.

She tried it anyway and turned the loudspeaker on. Lappy's thin voice sounded in all its six languages. Arundle made it ask for the people 'Where have all the people gone?'

But no reaction - busy and fixed to their routes, the little beings paced on. 'Are these human artifacts?' - Arundle wondered. It seemed so. Some of them slightly hesitated, while getting disturbed, but that was it. Lappy's voice faded. The battery gave up. And a little while later, Lappy was definitely dead. At least the artifacts thought. All of them stopped immediately as soon as Lappy's voice died. They circled Arundle, who tried to protect behind Lappy in vain. Arundle didn't understand, what the artifacts said, but she understood quite well, what they meant. And that was no good.

All of a sudden a militia came marching along - in front a General under a big golden cap on a mighty scull, followed by a little helmeted army. 'Finally a man' thought Arundle as the General approached. He looked quite different, not only because of

the outfit, but also for the big red face under the cap and the fleshy belly. Yes, a human of flesh and blood, he was, she thought. And he spoke reasonably well German after all. “Gestatten, General Armyless” he snarled and saluted respectfully. “With whom do I have the honour, please?”

Intimidated the little Isnogood replied and introduced herself as good as she could. The high man bowed himself down to her and grabbed her hand to raise it towards his lips, but short before he touched it, stopped. “Kuess die Hand, Gnädigste,“ he snarled. “So we are more or less compatriots.”

However, his friendly attitude led astray, as the troops surrounded Arundle rudely. The General obviously wasn't the boss in his own house, so to speak. He let things go its pace and shrugged, while the troop marched on.

Lappy was driven away by an ambulance and was brought to the ‘Clinic for disabled Artifacts’. There the doctors noticed the lack of energy and recharged it to its full power. And that was it. Arundle and her magic bow disappeared and left the strange place as fast as they could.

Mr. Schwertfeger once more had to doubt his senses. He couldn't doubt on her. Arundle drove him into despair. However, this time she felt, she was right. She didn't even touch the stupid world map.

However, things were over now anyway. While Mr. Schwertfeger went mad, Florinna slipped out of the classroom and alarmed the Headmistress. Mr. Schwertfeger was afraid of Florinna, because Henry Hare, her father, was a real Professor, with international reputation and all that... and that she knew quite well. Besides Schwertfeger was as much a racist as was Arundle's own father. Therefore, Schwertfeger tried to be friendly and handled Florinna as if she was a raw egg. In a way Arundle liked the way he treated her better. Therefore, she pitied Florinna for that and bullied her to disappear with her, but in vain. Florinna put on a little smile and replied, she had her own way of going places.

What she really meant, Arundle got to know later.

Right now the angry Headmistress posed in front of Schwertfeger and glance at him fiercely through her strong eyeglasses. “We meet after lesson. Right at the Head-office, Mr.

Schwertfeger” - and addressing to the class she continued: “Does anyone want to say something?” However, she asked it in a way that nobody dared to stand up. Besides Schwertfeger was in class and except of Florinna, nobody dared to rebel openly. Not even the tall blokes, Florinna suspected strongly for the map.

“You wouldn’t believe, what happened to me” – Arundle started her tale on the way home. And as Corinia was now with them, both girls had to tell the whole story again, right from the start. Therefore, Arundle learned what happened in her absence in class.

Schwertfeger lost control and smashed the pointing stick to pieces over her seat. and, had she been still there, he would have harmed her severely.

“If you want to, he’ll be fired”, said Florinna. But Arundle shook her head. She didn’t want to go that far.

“We say, I covered under the table and while you left for the Headmistress, I slipped with you out of the door.” – Arundle declared. “Perhaps we let him worry a little, and give him a chance to change” –

“...or leave.”

Physical punishment was severely prohibited by now; and a case like this had become a court crime. The Headmistress had had to call the police, if things had gone the strict and proper way.

“The stick went to pieces, believe it or not. If he had hit you, I wonder...”

One thing Arundle managed, Florinna and Corinia became curious about Laptopia and artifacts and all that. The far country where Laptops ran around and hunted men for mishandling their property, started to raise their interest.

“Would you be able to find the way again”, they wanted to know. Arundle shrugged, “Don’t know, got to ask the bow”, she replied. And that’s what they did. He exclaimed that Arundle had given him quite clear instructions. “Probably a bit hasty then... - she ordered and I complied“, he said. “Something like far, far away...”

Professor Hare celebrated his birthday in the garden. Arundle was invited nevertheless and was happy about it, even though she was a bit scared amongst all these grown-ups. However, the mood was relaxed. Nobody blustered of exorbitant stock merges or swaggered of fast cars.

The women didn't glue together and the men didn't hit their thighs and stuck behind the grill with a chest of beer. The people were just unbelievably normal. But in a sense, that they didn't ruffle their feathers or screamed of laughter.

Still they laughed a lot and heartily as well. And all talked to each other. The men grilled and drank beer. The women linked arms with each other with champagne glasses in hand and did a few paces. Still without force, perhaps a little too cool or even a bit highbrow – as per Arundle's father anyway, who would have mocked about such arrogant intellectuals.

Henry Hare, the person, celebrating his birthday, was an archaeologist and all his colleagues from the university had shown up. Amongst them, there was a man, who teased Arundle's curiosity, because he looked like the Laptopian General. She asked Florinna to introduce her.

“This man looks quite alike General Armyless. If I may say so – do you remember?” Corinia had joined them and looked a little bewildered, her sister shook her head. “You must remember the day, when I left, and Schwertfeger smashed his stick over me...” At least Florinna seemed to dig what she was about.

“Right – O, will you ever see him again?”

“Can't you introduce me, I got to get to know the double” Arundle insisted.

“Scholasticus – this is Arundle, she knows you unknowingly, but that she may explain to you herself.” Florinna introduced Arundle.

“By the way, this is my wife”, replied the so addressed and grabbed the elbow of one of the most beautiful women Arundle ever had seen. She was so beautiful, that Arundle lost her voice. “This is Dorothea, my wife, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau–Slyboots” – you could hear the pride in his voice, while he said that.

Arundle had almost forgotten why she wanted to meet Scholasticus. As she was quite certain, that he was no figure of her imagination, but a human of flesh and blood, right here and now.

“O, such things interest me very much, dear child” (even the voice and the articulation was the same) Arundle was absolutely stunned.

“Grisella, come over here, please. We have here, it seems to me, a very interesting case of a *deja-vu* experience. Arundle, I would like to introduce you to my sister-in-law Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots. And this is my dear brother Amadeus, her husband. We are crossed over mixed and mingled double twins, you have to know. Generally spoken, people get quite confused, although things are quite simple, as a matter of fact.”

Simple they might be, but you have to sort them out first. Arundle glanced over to Amadeus and realized a certain familiarity between the two brothers. Everything was a bit finer and more attractive. Amadeus was without doubt a handsome man, while this could be said neither of General Armyless nor of Professor Scholasticus Slyboots.

“Come on, tell us. Our families can be talked over later, they aren’t really interesting” – came Grisella back to the point. Arundle reported what had happened that remarkable day when Schwertfeger broke his stick and Arundle met the strange world of Laptopia.

“The cloud was so thick, you could indeed sit upon?” inquired Scholasticus. He was quite alarmed, while Arundle confirmed.

“This can only mean one thing – Electronic Smog – the worst side effect, you can think of.” He said severely and looked quite horrified.

“And you don’t know, where you were, and how you got there, you said?”

Arundle nodded and looked bewildered. “But with the bow I manage to figure it out again. Is that all that important?”

“The General spoke German, did you say?” – Dorothea interfered.

“...And he looked like the Professor, Madam, isn’t that funny?”

“Call me Dorothea, dear child, if you may. And this is Amadeus, my brother-in-law, whom you know already, my sister Grisella, wife of Amadeus - brother of Scholasticus.” Dorothea pointed around; just to be sure, Arundle now knew who they all were. The addressed nodded friendly, stroke her over the head, or shook her hand.

Arundle was quite pleased, even though she still was a bit confused. Who was married with whom finally? Anyway, they all were very kind. And that made Arundle unexplainably happy and gay and curious at the same time. As if a gate to a strange world had opened just for her and invited her to step in.

“What was it like again?” asked Dorothea – “General Armyless spoke not only German and the Laptocops Station was called ‘Hauptwache’, but the General performed a kind of ‘Viennese schmah’ as is possessed only by the Frankenfurters, except for the Vienneses of course...” Dorothea concluded her reflections after Arundle's report.

She listened to Arundle carefully. While she did, the portrait of the General was positively painted in the brightest colours, because she loved her husband, who seemed to be mirrored futuristically, so to speak.

“Yes, I think, I was here”, Arundle replied. “But not here, as it is today, and Lappy was treated like a precious antique piece of art, an artifact, as they call it. These walking laptops went almost mad, just because Lappy’s battery weakened.”

She didn’t want to say another word about the familiarity between the General and Scholasticus. She didn’t like the idea of Scholasticus kissing her hand or banging the heels, as the General did. That might impress Dorothea, but she didn’t like to tell her anyway. Dorothea had obviously a different opinion on ‘Viennese schmah’.

In any case Arundle cared to return, and if it was only because of Lappy, which she didn’t get back. However, that was partly her fault.

2. In Laptopia

“No grown-ups, that’s for sure” – snarled Arundle’s magic bow. He didn’t oppose Florinna and even Corinia was allowed to join them. “That’s it then” he concluded and started his calculations.

Arundle was somehow glad to get rid of such adult talk anyway. They asked her strange questions, and wanted to know more than what you knew by yourself.

The bow kept on calculating. "Just, a minute" he snarled. As if Arundle had said a word. At least not aloud.

"Shall we do anything?" Corinia wanted to know. "Shall we inform Mum and Dad?" However, Arundle shook her head „Won't be long anyway, just a few minutes“ - if she only had known.

At last, the magic bow ended with his calculations. "Laptopia" screamed the three of them; they grabbed their hands and disappeared faster than their voices faded.

And there they felt the gluey, damp clouds, just as Arundle had described them. They took great care not to sink and climbed up again and again. Busy as they were, they didn't noticed what was going on. The battlements of the castle were close by, this time, right underneath their position. When they realized, they let themselves slip down. In fact, two soldiers or also kind of laptocops patrolled on their beat. Similarly equipped like the Police force, Arundle was arrested by.

She wondered whether they could inform the General. First, the watchmen gave infiltration alarm. All doors banged and shutters put up. The guards lowered their arms and clapped with their scissor hands. Arundle remembered these frightening instruments all too well. Now she knew what they were good for.

Just as she decided to return back home, General Armyless jumped out of a hidden gate. Again, he grabbed Arundle's hand and raised it towards his lips, without touching. Arundle introduced her friends and the General overdid once more, as he banged his heels repeatedly, while shouting excessively, quite meaningless. Florinna and her little sister Corinia didn't know what this all was about, and giggled somehow bewildered. However, the General didn't seem to care much, really.

"You wouldn't believe, what a great honour such an unexpected visit indeed is. No, such a great honour, that I am happy to experience. No, I never dreamt, I ever was able to. Not in all my lifespan, as long as it might be."

With an impatient gesture of his right, he waved away the laptocops. They dropped their arms and scissor hands, and stepped back on their beat. At last, they seemed to be under control, because they continued their duty, as if nothing had happened.

"Please, do come, my dear ladies – don't you mind this little misunderstanding. They are not the brightest, even though they try hard and give their best." He shook his head, while he followed them with his eyes. "May I take the lead, my ladies? His Majesty is

already waiting. No, what an honour, that I was able to experience, not in this lifespan, I dare-say, O dear, O dear, my goodness...”

Therefore, he rushed on. The girls followed – curious as they were. Somehow, they trusted him after all, each of them thought by her. They understood themselves without words. In case of emergency they could rely on the magic bow, they said to themselves, without considering the fact, how easily they could be separated.

“His Regal Highness, Prince Watchalot” thundered General Armyless, and bowed in front of a huge throne, a tiny fat man jumped upon impatiently. The girls bowed as well and were introduced as ‘the twinkling Star-maids of the Advisor’.

“My favourite’s commencing any minute, and my wife is waiting. She can’t do without me.” Prince Watchalot complaint like a nasty child.

“His name is programme”, smiled the General and shrugged. “Anyway, what’s most important has been said. – What about a bite to eat, you must be hungry after your voyage.”

A sedan chair was brought in by two strong looking servant-artifacts and Prince Watchalot was carefully put into the soft cushions. His very short arms and legs could be noticed by the girls and made them pity this poor little creature. Impatiently Prince Watchalot made the servants to rush on. “Hurry up, you lazy useless nothings, rush, rush, my programme...”

“His TV set is just next door”, the General explained and shook his head.

“The Princess thought a TV didn’t fit into the Princely parlour. That’s the reason why.”

General Armyless shrank his forehead, rather annoyed. Then he pulled himself back:

“Princess Soshedoes avoids the public, because of her situation. It is said, that we are expecting regal new blood not far from now. It’s going to become a boy. So the dynasty is assured. But lets not hand the cow into the cooks hands, before the butcher did his job, as the saying goes, ha, ha!”

“General, we are still children, you are not supposed to talk in front of us that way.” The girls exclaimed blushing.

“Don’t mind, young ladies, From Child’s mouth wisdom arouse. Don’t argue on such bagatelles...”

“...and besides, don’t you call us ladies, we are children, and adults should behave properly. I am no lady, is that clear?”

exclaimed Corinia quite definite and the General nodded irritated but firm. He seemed to have understood.

The little bite to eat, they better had skipped. The synthetic stuff tasted even worse, than it looked. At least Arundle got the chance to ask for Lappy.

“Your Lappy, as you call it, is **the** sensation amongst the artifacts. They arranged a special exhibition only to present it properly in the ‘Museum for Post humane Forms of Life’.

The artifacts come by thousands and we would risk riots, if we hijacked your little Lappy, I’m afraid. Even though you had the right to do so. The exhibitionists treat your Lappy as a missing link in post humane genesis, and are absolutely fascinated by each of its verbalisations. We humans of course know that it is only programmed and got to stick to the input of its creators. But the artifacts obviously see it different. Because they, themselves developed and emancipated, so that they stand on their own feet, so to speak. We have lost control, long time ago. While the production still follows the old standards and the first law never is offended, that says – No artifact may ever harm a human, but got to serve mankind without exception.”

The General talked himself into fierce rage and went polite again, as he seemed to be used to. However, human he was, there was no doubt about it. “Yes, that is our problem. Where have all the humans gone?”

It looked as if there was a race of displacement. The artifacts became more and better, the humans on the other hand sillier and fewer, at the same time.

‘No wonder, for the food they get’, thought the girls simultaneously. When it came to food, the artifacts were much better off, as they didn’t need any food at all. Except for a speck of oil now and than.

It was time now to leave, before the adults at home started to worry.

“Where have you been? We were looking for you everywhere. Your father worries to tears. And that on his birthday. Now really, what did come up to your minds, my goodness?” Vasantha Hare screamed quite upset. But than embraced her beloved, and had she had a third arm, she had grasped for Arundle as well.

Open-mindedness like that, Arundle was not used to, and the sisters didn’t know malevolent secrecy. Arundle realized that she had to change.

Overall, they hadn't been away for more than an hour. Somehow, it became so quiet in the garden, after they left. Therefore, the inquiries and the big search started shortly after they disappeared. Lucky enough Vasantha had had an idea, what in fact was going on. As she understood the non-verbal stream of human communication and could, so to speak, read between the lines.

"If things like that happen to occur again, just leave a message or drop a note – especially you, Arundle – all right?"

The three of them nodded and blushed. Arundle felt guilty. It had been hers, who prevented Corinia from telling her mother. She had been afraid of complications. Once more, she noticed, that she couldn't compare Mr. and Mrs. Hare with her parents. That was something; she had to learn right away.

The mood of celebration had gone when the shade of secrecy fell on that merry day. The sun ended his route in the west and sank fast behind the houses opposite. It got chilly in the shade of the evening. Therefore, Vasantha asked her guests in. She smiled mysteriously and offered a surprise. She hoped to alter the course, to manage to turn around the rudder.

"The three little runaways want to give us a report", she said, as soon as everybody was in the house, except those who left for good. But they would have gone anyhow. The Slyboots' Clan stayed, and that was most important, Arundle thought, and so did Vasantha Hare.

Had she been hoping to enlighten her husband for the subjects of his colleagues, she had hoped in vain, as they lay miles apart. Astrophysics and Archaeology had nothing but the capital A in common.

Henry Hare was an Archaeologist by heart and guts. He and Grisella were colleagues in the Historical Seminar since the big change when the antique part of history was adopted and nominally integrated. In fact that didn't mean anything, except that now nobody knew any more, where the money went, that was dripping in, more or less regularly. Anyway, that was why they met occasionally, here and there and in the corridors, to exchange a brief 'hello' or a friendly nod.

For Grisella, history was a new field as well, while she was specialised on old languages. Anyway, that was why she got scientifically in touch with Henry Hare, who could need as much help as possible on this tricky field.

Instead of seating themselves around the big dining table, the guests preferred to stand in groups and converse. Vasantha wondered whether she should interfere, but then she decided for a change.

“Dear Henry, your daughters returned from their excursion with a present for you. And that they would like to perform right now. – Yes, dears, a little punishment you do deserve” she added when she saw the girls’ faces.

By the way, Arundle is staying with us tonight. – Yes, I made everything clear with your mother, while you were away. – No objections. Tomorrow is Saturday and you can sleep late. Nobody’s got to get up.”

Arundle embraced Mrs Hare spontaneously and thanked her by heart, while Florinna and Corinia jumped at her, so it looked, as if the golden goal was achieved at the final match of the World Championship.

Then the girls reported, what had happened in Laptopia, and, while they reported, they noticed all of a sudden, what they didn’t realize before.

“I don’t know, were exactly we were, but I know for sure, that nobody should long for such a future.” The three of them were quite certain and agreed upon. Life seemed easy for humans, because they are pampered by their artifacts in any way. They became stupid and lazy that way. All work is done by those artifact-machines - as the General preferred to address them. The artifacts seem to be quite able to reproduce themselves and to improve without human assistance.

In fact, they don’t need the humans any more. Still they pretend to serve, and all they do, they say, is done for their masters’ best. However, that’s of course nonsense. In reality, they cheat their masters and keep them under permanent control by television. They strangle their free will and prevent them from any kind of physical exercise. For any distance, they have them put into carriages or sedans. They have specially designed artifacts for that kind of labour. Because of that, humans grow crippled arms and legs, because they don’t have to do anything. On the other hand, perhaps the genes altered. Schools are totally out and are closed by now. The artifacts spread the rumour, that humans know everything right from the start, because they are humans and no machines, which have to be programmed. That sounds logical. And, perhaps the artifacts themselves believe in that. Anyway, because of that, the brains of the humans atrophy.”

“We got a prominent example for that”, added Corinia to Arundle's report. The girls looked at each other and nodded.

“Yes, Prince Watchalot was kind of gaga anyway, at least he wasn't able to rule, definitely not” agreed Florinna.

“I've got to think over my attitude towards school,” Arundle added with a heavy sigh. And this time Mrs Hare nodded emphatically and smiled mysteriously. “That'll come, no doubt, soon you will see, my dear child.”

Most of all the birthday celebrant was pleased by this ‘sensational excavation from the depth of time’, as he put it. Mr. Hare was so proud of his girls. They made him the nicest present he could think of, he exclaimed.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's ‘Phenomenology of the Spirit’ where this problem is due, did excite Grisella ever since. The philosopher demonstrated the complex system of dialectics in history by means of master and slave, and the change of roles that took place over the years. However, she was not allowed to say a word about that.

Such thoughts would lead astray the hostess proclaimed. Somehow, philosophy raised almost holy emotions, Grisella knew by experience. Even though, the basic thoughts were quite simple, however, what thoughts remain simple if you dig down to the bottom?

Arundle felt a new power rising inside. She didn't have a name for it. Nevertheless, it was a strong drive, she felt quite clearly, and it had – funny enough - to do with school. Not directly with the school, she knew, but with a kind of school, as was supposed to be. She wanted to understand – everything if possible. That school couldn't offer of course. Not the kind of school she was used to.

At school teachers were content, when they passed their time in peace, and things went its pace, as regulated by tradition. And everybody kept in line and played their roles, foremost of all the teachers themselves.

“If it comes to the point, that you lose control, it is time to give up.” Maier, one of Schwertfeger's closer friends, declared. “You won't be able to get out of such burn-out-syndrome again” he went

on and looked rather meaningful, like an eager butcher's dog, hoping for a juicy bone.

"You are fifty-eight now – clear enough – during the next seven years it will become a bit tight. But after all you are 'Oberstudienrat', you wouldn't mind a couple of hundred Pounds/Euros/Dollars."

"The term I'm going to end in any case. I won't admit publicly, how this nasty little thing has ruined my career." His final goal to become Headmaster had to be given up and that was bitter for Mr. Schwertfeger. After all, his friend Maier was right. Maier was his friend, as they met outside school as well, which was not common amongst their colleagues. They even were members in the same club.

They didn't breed pigeons or enjoyed gardening. Their club was not the usual kind of club where you could become member, just like that. Their club was a secret lodge. It was so secret, that nobody knew each other, because while they met, they wore masks. Maier as well, but because of his red thick fingers, Schwertfeger recognised him after all. - They became friends, but they kept their little secret to the other members, whom they didn't know. Some even had a voice-disturber; perhaps they were well-known public speakers.

Schwertfeger offered Maier a pair of light white gloves, like the ones he wore. They looked rather nice and fulfilled their duty. Schwertfeger thought to notice other colleagues of them in the circle – called 'the Brotherhood of Infernalina' – the official name of the organisation. - Once you were in, there was no way out again.

It was May now. The summer holidays began at the end of July this year. If he gave notice this month, he would be a free man at the end of September. - If the doctor agreed, whom Schwertfeger suspected to be club member as well.

"Well, the burn-out. Eventually it gets all of us. The heavy load of responsibility we carry on our shoulders all our lifetime causes that. So, be glad to be in reasonably good shape. However, watch your blood pressure and keep your cholesterol level in proper limits. Take your pills regularly. In the morning the Lisinopril and in the evening one Simvastatin, and of course an ASS 100, best taken in the morning as well. Now you can hike as you wish and please. Ride your bike, and go swimming... Congratulations, by the way. O yes, I'm envious. I have to go for

another three years at least. You know the Finca on Majorca. It's ours then – hopefully. We plan to spend there the rest of our life.”

Schwertfeger's revenge was a big dirty lowest rating in Maths. Arundle's mother went almost mad. The boarding school now came into clear and close range. Arundle couldn't help but disappear to Laptopia.

3. The little Prince

Meanwhile, a Prince was born in Laptopia, and flags decorated the whole city. Trumpets and choirs sounded from the battlement of the castle. The little laptops hurried even busier and more frequent around and typed as mad on their bellies.

Quite a few carriages and sedan chairs indicated that humans were under-way to the palace in order to bring gifts and good wishes to the newly born Prince.

General Armyless informed Arundle about the details of the birth. She didn't really care much to know. Luckily, Corinia was not here, she thought. Because the General spoke about things not bound for the ears of children. He said that the birth was a complicated Caesarean-cut birth, and that Princess Soshedoes still struggled for her life. Nevertheless, the mood was excellent and the court was merry and gay. The Princess would survive in any case, went the rumour. The heir was in good shape. He was in good health and had the proper proportions of a human. That was most important. “His legs and arms are quite normal”, the doctors said.

“It's a miracle”, exclaimed the General repeatedly. “Finally a healthy human being, how lucky we are...”

The General sounded as if this was the big exception. However, to rehearse Arundle didn't have the time. The audience started, and this time no TV-programme pressed on. The Prince had made up his point and a TV set stood right in the regal parlour. While he greeted his guests mildly, he could watch into the goggle box. The courtiers and ministers pretended not to notice it. However, they knew, they preached to deaf ears. Such audiences had become a mere show. Everybody did as things pleased him.

And the human ministers weren't master of their decisions either. What ever was printed went through the busy fingers of the artifacts. The laptop secretaries checked on everything and took notes, sometimes even notes of things never said. Later on, nobody remembered anyway, whether a decision had been on the agenda or not. The servants had their masters in a tight grip. However, in a way, they didn't realize, or if they did, they couldn't help it anyway.

Arundle came forward with her best wishes and presented her Lappy to the little Prince. A present, which impressed and even stunned the courtiers and artifacts, as their comrades continued to visit the almost sacred place, where Lappy was exhibited.

Things were quite strange between humans and artifacts, Arundle realized. The few people, Arundle had met, treated their artifacts like dirt. They gave them names, or threatened them to become evaporated or otherwise destructed. Still they depended heavily on them. Not the simplest actions were they able to perform on their own. The young lads boasted with illiteracy. To read and write was "artificial" as they put it (kind of womanish, though.)

"Life is too short to waste it with learning." "Have fun, as long as you can." Pick the rose before it fades."

Such were the ads you could read on the walls (if you still could read.) Alternatively, you could hear and see on TV-sets one of which was definitely located close by.

The impression, she got at her last visit, became confirmed now, Arundle thought. The few humans, still left in Laptopia, were in the hands of their servants, without noticing it, and the servants spent their masters' time just like that, in fact.

During her previous visit, Arundle had already recognized how fast the time elapsed. While they were one hour away at Mr. Hare's birthday party, they spent hours in Laptopia. That was another reason why she desperately wanted to talk to General Armyless.

There were so many aspects to consider. But whenever she started to ask a question, something else happened: A visit at either the Prince's parlour, or a parade or other ceremony, like the baptising of the little Prince in front of the cathedral.

Arundle had been asked to become his Godmother, and was quite charmed by the idea. Officially, she was referred to as the 'Star maid of the Advisor', which was some kind of official title. Everybody seemed to know, what this title meant, except Arundle.

How could they have known she was coming? She herself didn't know some minutes ago. If her mother didn't have started an argument about the bad mark in Maths, she would have stayed at home. Such a ceremony had to be prepared and arranged in the long run. So she wondered that she held the little Prince in her arms while the ceremony went on. She then was praised for her extraordinary gift. All artifacts bowed and even some of the human courtiers.

While she held the little creature in her arms, she promised by heart to keep an eye on him, when he grew up. His official name became Prince Watchalot II but she altered it into Watchanot. And that became his real name in the long run. Now no one even dreamt of how important such secret precautions might one day become.

She would have liked to stay but couldn't and was very sorry, when she had to return. She escaped unnoticed, only said good-bye to the General, who understood quite well. He permanently ran out of time himself. If she figured it out correctly, she had been away now for eight hours. Her mother would wait in front of the cinema, where she had dropped her, despite the fact of the Maths mark.

Arundle didn't yet know how she would manage to come out in the crowd. Anyway, she wished her back and sank into her seat right at the end of the film. As if the bow had timed it for her. Frustrated as she had been, she hadn't cared much about his emotions. After all - the mark was not his. He was a kind of Maths genius anyway. Had he only started to train her a little earlier. However, perhaps his Maths was not the Maths of Mr. Schwertfeger, anyway.

The reason why she happened to be the Godmother had to do with Florinna and Corinia, the other 'Star maids of the Advisor'. After they had been in Laptopia together the two were now able to find their way without the assistance of the magic bow. "We can dream to any place, that we know", Florinna explained. Arundle was fascinated and enthusiastically asked them, how to join in on such a mystery.

"That is the art of the Senoi – it's called guided dreaming" Corinia added, and Florinna confirmed: "That's why we are so proud of our mother, she passed her gift on to us."

"So, you were in Laptopia behind my back and strolled around, while I was absent. I see. So it was one of you, they were

expecting. And the General was only too polite to tell me right into the face. And took me as God-mother, because I was there...”

“...Or he thought, we had talked it over and made our decision...”

“...Be it as it may, finally the Prince became baptised and got the proper right secret name, that’s most important anyway.”

“So you are familiar with the time trouble”, Arundle continued after a short pause, while they looked into each other’s faces with a grin. The sisters nodded. “Quite so - factor four seems realistic.” Florinna uttered flatly.

“But I think you are still the Star maid number one” she added and Arundle blushed.

“There you lie at home in your beds and... - so you decide were to go, that’s the difference, I see...”

Something cut loose inside. Though, she had good reasons to think about, she thought.

“And how do you notice, when you are there? Do you step into another reality?”

“No, not really, we seem to be kind of astral bodies, weak by contour and hard to be seen, practically without weight.”

“...Like angels, perhaps” Corinia added.

“For the Laptopians it suffices obviously.”

“Just to let you know. I gave the Prince a secret name. I think we have to support him by any means. Therefore, I gave him the name Prince Watchanot.

Well, its not really brains taking, I know, but as there are names as programmes, I thought, I stick to the tradition and alter it a bit.”

“Yes, and have a look on the nurses. It’s a shame anyway, that there aren’t any humans around the baby. The poor little creature never comes in touch with...”

“...Except for the three of us...”

“Yeah, and that’s why we are most important...”

“Humane contacts spoil the dignity of the holy blood, or so, the General explained, not knowing things right either. The best would be, if we arranged a kind of duty roster to cover as much time as possible.”

They noticed, how important it was, to talk things over regularly, so they were all kept up to date.

“Let’s be good fairies then.” – Arundle exclaimed emphatically. They all nodded and grabbed their hands to whirl

around and around, and around, till it seemed as if they lost contact with the solid ground, and became all green not only in their faces.

Grisella and Scholasticus seemed to be interested most in the girls' adventures, and asked for reports occasionally.

"You got to talk the loss of time over with my presumed descendant, the General. He seems to be the only person who has an idea of what is really going on. The artifacts can't grow older in our sense of meaning, but remain, what they are. Biologically spoken, only beings on organic base can be affected by the general loss of time, they grow older faster and therefore must die earlier."

The girls understood the Professor all too well. Therefore, they rushed to General Armyless as soon as they arrived, and were lucky to find him at once. The General understood what they wanted to tell him, and had an idea too, how to stop the leakage.

"We must fill the holes in the cloud-carpet, so the time can't escape any longer, to get uselessly lost in outer space, without any effect on nobody.

You seem to think, respectively your dear Professor seems to think, that the loss of time is a method by the artifacts to get rid of us human beings.

Very interesting, and sounds logical as well, don't you think so? Therefore, they won't be interested in stopping the changes. In the opposite, they seem to cause them. And I think I know, how they managed to do so. Alas, we'll stop that, once and for all."

"Yes, but how shall we fill the holes?" – Arundle asked.

"And how do we find them, first of all?" – Corinia wanted to know.

"They are very easy to be found. All you need to do is to walk over the cloud-carpet. and, wherever you feel pushed up, there is a leak. Besides you can see the holes if you look carefully. The holes are little round whirls, and in the middle, they are empty. We can fill these holes with compressed electronic smog, which we can gain at best by the filters of the laptop factories. Suitable containers we do have as well. We fill the cartridges of our guns with that condensed stuff, and the ammunition is ready. But the workers must wear masks, because in such high concentration, the smog is absolutely deadly."

"That'll be real suicide mission then" Arundle warned.

“We dreamers might not be concerned, as we don’t show up in person, but somehow virtually. That makes the difference. On the other hand we might not be able to work anyhow in that shape.”

“We’ve got to find out” opposed Corinia her sister, because she felt quite capable to work in her dreams as well.

“Anyway, you stay away, Arundle, we try alone, and let you know.”

“The two of you won’t suffice anyway. You would be still working in a hundred years, after all.”

“Real years or Laptopia-years?”

“I think I have a better idea” the General interrupted. “We let such business up to the artifacts. They won’t be harmed anyway. However, we must make sure; they don’t realize what we have in mind. As we fill cartridges, it would be best, if we fired into the holes. That would be the best idea. We just fire into the holes and close them that way. What do you think of that? Right here, from the ground up into the clouds.” And he pointed up, where the threatening grey bank sat and seemed to look at them.

“If you really want to help us, you could produce a kind of grid, where the holes are located, so that we aim better. We could produce a hole-map. I hope the holes won’t change position that fast. – Then we follow the hole-map, and that’s it. Nevertheless, beware, not to be shot down while up there, anyway. We’ve got to take care of the right angle, because the cartridges must find the holes at proper speed to get stuck inside. If we fired too strong, we would cause greater damage than good and more time would elapse.”

General Armyless talked himself into rage and couldn’t be stopped. He instructed his human officers, the few there were left. And tried to make them familiar with the situation in general as well, so that they understood, what it was all about. As they understood the weird intentions of the artifacts, they became upset, and stood behind their General like one man.

They became busier ever since, as the humans of Laptopia weren’t used to any labour any more. In order to mislead the artifacts, the General spread the rumour, that he was preparing a big parade, to honour the little Prince, who became one year old these days. And, as the event was extraordinary, since there had been no such purpose for at least a generation, he just couldn’t overdo with whatever he planned.

At least the General hoped, he could make the artifacts believe, what the rumour said. Everywhere in the city, guns

became located, to salute such occasion frequently. Trains to abroad were under-way for the same purpose. Officially the whole country would become involved this time, as there had been complaints about the original birthday, when the countryside was forgotten. And that should this time be avoided. With the guns, instructors travelled, to guarantee the proper use, and they knew the real purpose.

As the outposts lay in deserted areas, no human wanted to be there, or if he was there, he cared to get away. That meant, that the outposts were manned by Robocops or Militia Laptocops, who didn't care, where they were. They didn't ask for aesthetics or happiness, or sense. They didn't need food or anything else like that. They needed practically nothing, except a speck of oil here and then, for the joints, or extra fine grease for the brain. They didn't need beds or books, neither toilets, nor bathtubs. For them no floor shows had to be arranged. A little TV did it quite well.

Robocops didn't drink or cause trouble. They never came home late. They were always dressed properly and never unshaven. They didn't know bad mood and didn't become overwhelmed by eagerness. – In short, artifacts were easy to handle and easy to be looked after, after they had come into existence, if you didn't figure the costs of production.

So it happened that even officer ranks were manned by artifacts these days. And they did their duty as bad and as good, as real humans could. - Not necessarily worse than their colleagues of flesh and blood, anyway. Provided, things went the straight way and nothing extraordinary happened. As they then failed, and caused only confusion, until a real officer arrived, this was the case in less than an hour in most outposts. Usually that was time enough, to correct malfunctions and to avoid major catastrophes.

Scholasticus had his doubts about the peculiar action the General intended. However, he didn't utter a word. He didn't want to discourage either the General or his followers here and there. In any case, the General's arrangements proved him a capable organizer and an able strategist. All those cannons and shells to be placed tactically and in time, was a strategic masterpiece. In no time, the cannons stood ready in the whole land and in each outpost. No artifacts became suspicious, especially not in the outskirts or wasteland, but stuck to their orders. Nobody suspected

the birthday salute for the little Prince to be in fact the beginning of a counter strategy of the humans to win back grounds. The few of them, those were left and still owned their brains, anyway.

However, his doubts troubled Scholasticus in any case. What came next, if the shooting turned out to be a fiasco? Where you able to dose the power when firing the canons? The cartridges had to find the hole precisely and then had to stop immediately. That meant its power had to be used up right at that moment, no wink earlier or later.

Such were his thoughts that punished him. The General was a man of war and well acquainted with weapons of all kinds, as was his job. Besides – did such an extensive shooting go along with a birthday-celebration of that kind?

Scholasticus uttered his doubts before the three girls – the Star maids of the Advisor – as they were called over there. They agreed and supported his doubts. Whereas Grisella didn't even want to think about cannons, shells, and all that military rubbish, as she put it. She didn't want to have anything to do with it.

“If it is only for to plug up the time-holes, I think, I have a better idea”, she uttered as they spoke things over. “It might even be a better idea. In any case, it won't be loud and much nicer to be looked at. We make a balloon action, like we did at my late birthday party, don't you remember? We fixed notes to the balloons and let them fly. And everybody could write good wishes on them.”

All looked stunned at Corinia. Arundle shouted, “That idea could as well have been mine...” and, Scholasticus patted her back enthusiastically - probably a bit too strong. He understood at once all too well and calculated the probable success.

“Yes, and that is common after all” - agreed Florinna.

“Some even let pigeons fly, but that would be impossible in Laptopia by now. Besides, pigeons wouldn't have the same effect as balloons.”

“And when it comes to the artifacts they won't become suspicious anyway. How could they? – Harmless balloons...” assisted Arundle.

“We should spend a second thought on an everlasting kind of material and enough Helium to fill them up.” Scholasticus uttered.

“How much time is there left?”

“I'd say two, three of our own days”, figured Florinna, as she had been last to visit Laptopia.

“Because of the covers you shouldn’t worry. That job will be done by the magic bow, I’m quite certain. They would be as tough and long living as are the space covers, we travel with.” – Arundle added. - But for the Helium we might get into trouble.”

“Don’t worry – everything seems to be in our scientific vicinity, after all, won’t it, Grisella?” Grisella agreed.

“Perhaps it should be wise, to have the cannonade been done. And some hours later, the balloons as a highlight for the afternoon...”

“So the first birthday of the little Prince will become a noteworthy day in Laptopia's history” – Arundle added.

“All we must do now is to convince General Armyless. However, he won’t be against the idea, I’m quite certain. Funny balloons in all colours of the rainbow rise towards the grey sky of Laptopia. As a sign of hope and glory...” uttered Grisella.

“And they will find their way on their own. All they need to do is to follow the draught of the escaping time”, nodded Florinna.

“If there is no draught, all the better, then the coloured specks stick to the sky just like that. That will surely look nice”, Corinia agreed, who was very pleased, how well her idea had been accepted.

“Let’s go, are you with me?” asked Arundle, and shouldered her magic bow. “I hope, the General has got time for us. There is a lot, to be explained to him that he has to agree with. Otherwise we do it anyway, because it must be done...”

It took them a while, until they made the General to change his mind. He feared that their action might turn out as ridiculous, and that, nobody wanted of course. Therefore, the Star maids had to put in all their power of conviction.

“We will make this quite clear in our action” declared Arundle – “but we’ve got to get so time for preparation and a little support. We can bring the covers, but some servant-laptops have to fill the balloons. We also need some larger stores for the balloons after they were filled. And they should be secret...”

“And after a prearranged sign, all balloons will be let free at once. That will look quite funny”, Corinia added.

And so it was done. Before the official luncheon, the cannons fired until the barrels glowed. After the smoke had gone, those who were informed meant to realize a slight difference. Time passed by slower. However, that could of course be a delusion. It could even well be, that the people got bored by the shooting and the noise.

The only immediate effect was that people had put their fingers into their ears. Besides, the air became even worse than it usually was.

Later in the afternoon, while some thousands of quadruple storied birthday tarts were cut everywhere in the city and in the palace garden, the gates of the aircraft hangars were opened and millions of balloons escaped into the open and flew up into the narrow grey sky of Laptopia.

In the meantime, each human being was on their feet, so to speak – been carried around by their servants either in sedans, wheelchairs or coaches. All kinds of busy servants hasted around and tried to make their way through the crowded streets.

People sat in the street on long banquet-tables shovelling in large pieces of sticky cake and gulping them with dark liquid, supposed to be coffee or tea. As coffee beans or tea-leaves didn't have the time to ripen in the short Laptopian year. And so it was with most other crops as well.

The little Prince didn't participate actively on his day of honour. He lay peacefully in his little bed, as Florinna had come through the window and turned down the TV by cutting off the power line, so that the servant laptops weren't able to fix it at once. Apart from that she caused the fire alarm and the little Prince was evacuated.

They always had to think of something, to get him out of the palace into the open, as the servant Laptop-maids avoided outdoor activities. They didn't care for action anyway, although the little Prince was a clever guy. Not even one year old, he began to speak.

As the three Star maids had promised, they took good care about the little Prince and managed to help him to some kind of normal childhood, if that was at all possible under the circumstances he were closed in. At least human warmth and tenderness could be such experience that was quite something. and, the three of them always thought about strategies how to outrun the laptop nurses.

The Prince grew up fast, faster than any child they knew. On his second birthday, he already ran around and spoke in more or less clear sentences. And while he became three, he asked for pen and paper, and began to write.

TV he disliked. And he didn't care to show it, even though he offended his father by that. His father still wanted to have him corrected and didn't give up the hope, that he would one day become a real member of the regal family. All his measures he

ordered didn't work, whether he had him put under a permanent screening from all sides, day and night. Or have him fixed into a special stool, where you couldn't turn the head any more. As soon the little Prince managed to escape, he turned back to his misbehaviour, as Prince Watchalot saw it. If the little Prince didn't see any other way out, he started to scream. and, his screaming either resulted in the appearance of one of the Star-maids or he was moved into a room, where there was no TV-set.

The little Prince developed much faster, than the speed of time increased. Especially though because the measures which had come into action, should slower the time-loss down somehow, and this was probably the case, but didn't effect the development of the little Prince, so nobody could explain either those who had an idea, what was going on, or those who didn't have such an idea, but lived their lives just like that.

As they talked it over with the General, he opposed them vigorously, as he still believed in the success of the cannonade a year ago. While the Star-maids meant this was all due to the balloons. Therefore, they didn't contradict in result but in the measure.

When it came to the little Prince, he altered his point of view, and thought him to be extraordinarily gifted and hailed by some mysterious force on his side. As nobody really wanted to contradict, things went on, and contradictions had to be endured by all of them, no matter the point of view or angel.

The General insisted on the positive development. First potatoes had been seen, went the rumour. Even horses showed up near the city, but became petrified statues after the rain and now stood around, just like that, wherever they had come from.

The petrification of the horses, caused by the poisonous rain that stem from the electronic smog clouds over the city, brought the barrel to overspill. Not only the General but also all other people blamed the Laptop factories responsible for the emission of the poisonous electronic smog. Everybody was quite sure that nothing good came from these factories. The General took the petrification as a hint to get rid of the laptop factories. A gigantic programme started. The aim was to have all laptop factories distinguished from the face of the earth and resettled on the moon. As artifacts didn't need atmosphere to survive, this seemed to be an elegant solution for all sides, besides such a programme kept all

sides busy and industrious. Means of transport had to become organised, shuttles and shuttle-ramps had to be built, not only here, but on the moon as well.

From the artifacts side, there was no contradiction or protest, first of all, but that's going to change soon. As it had to do with the first and primary instruction, all of them had internalised to protect and assist humans in any possible way and by all means. Anyway, the resettlement could begin.

For the poor horses, which stood around as witnesses of a misled policy, such measures came too late. They could be vaccinated, when somebody had taken this lot, as it was not easy and after all in vain, because after the next rain, things turned out to be the same again. Vaccination made only sense, when the horses were brought into another world after the awakening. They had to be brought into a world, with clearly different living-conditions. There was no doubt about that.

Arundle talked things over with her magic bow, but the bow referred to a new idol came up on the skies over Australia. He promised to open an ear for such rumours; perhaps there was a real chance to get the animals transformed into Australia, somehow. Therefore, the magic bow made Arundle to meet with a kangaroo named Walter and his little friend Pooty, a possum. They kept a magic stone from Uluru. This magical stone was well known amongst the esoteric world to own unimaginable strong forces.

After some back and forth because of the intergalactic General rule, which said, that no being was allowed to switch into another time at length, they finally managed to get the okay from higher sources. Therefore, the horses were awakened by means of a special vaccination-procedure, and then brought to the Australia of our days. Walter travelled on to Laptopia with Pooty and the magical stone from Uluru in order to play his part in the transaction, or was it better described as a transformation. Anyway the combined forces of the magic bow and the magical stone from Uluru succeeded at last, and the flock of ponies dashed through space and time as if it was the good old prairie back home in Idaho.

They themselves didn't trust their joint capability. Arundle and the other Star-maids were so happy that they arranged a bowling match up in the clouds of Laptopia. Pooty made the bowling ball and the bowling boy at the same time, and the bow asked his arrows to become the pins, while Florinna and Corinia took care of the ponies in their new environment. The transfer was

only possible because of the fact, that the horses didn't have a faintest chance to survive in Laptopia.

"We can think about breeding cattle in Laptopia in ten years time, if at all." – it said in the permission, the magical stone presented. An action like that he wouldn't dare to risk on his own. In such dubious fields you got rid of your magical license sooner than a junkie got rid of his driving license, the magical stone boasted and the magic bow blushed, as he never have thought anything strange like that and still held his license for quite a couple of hundred years now. As to him, the intention was all that mattered. Weird and wicked things led to severe punishment that was clear to him. And such were the offences, that couldn't be tolerated.

"Well, the indentation of a license is no punishment" – the magical stone pointed out as he noticed what kind of trap he had opened. – "But it is a matter of protection. The world as a whole has to be balanced out at any time and everywhere. - Well, it might be best, to talk things over with the Advisor, whom he seems to meet here and then or once in a while." – proclaimed the magical stone prophetically in stentorian tone.

While he did so, he could quite as well clear things up with regard to the little Prince. - "Another battleground and field of solid action to solve basics..." He seemed to be lucky though – like the German Hans who stumbles through the world unharmed. "Quite astonishing, quite astonishing, indeed" the magical stone kicked on top, rather filthy, as was the bows impression.

Anyway, the contact worked first. The magic three from Australia came into the big game and had to play their part. However, his emphatic temper would cause Walter not only trouble but ruined his life in the end, if they only had known, but they didn't.

First, the ponies were safe and Florinna, who was fond of horses ever since, was the gladdest. While in her dreams she regularly visited them and took care of them as good as could be done in a dream, especially though, because she feared long run consequences of the latter petrification. However, that was not the case. Instead, she noticed in the end that the ponies weren't able to breed or mix with other local horses. Even though, they looked more or less the same, they didn't become accepted in the outback amongst the hundreds of thousands of wild flock.

On his fourth birthday, Florinna put the little Prince on a horse back for the first time. Only in a dream, as she somehow managed to get into one of his dreams, and as it happens in a dream, he rode as if he had been riding ever since and jumped over the highest hurdles, as if he was a born rider.

In any case, Prince Watchanot had something miraculous at him. Not only was he supernaturally gifted; he also grew up incomparably fast. and, his true age didn't comply with his real lifespan. How could it happen, that he became a teenager in less than two years earth time? He seemed to be in negative correspondence with his father, who grew older as fast as the little Prince blossomed. To be correct, Prince Watchalot would have grown older, if the doctors had let him. However, they didn't. Prince Watchalot became updated instead and complied with the latest standards of medicine. What ever there was on innovations, bionic implantations, organ transplantations and the like – he caught it. His former crippled legs and arms had been replaced by regular and functional bionic replications. His destroyed heart replaced a pump. Lungs, arteries, kidneys – even vast part of the brain had been replaced. After all only an image of his former being had been left - inside he was totally reconstructed and restored.

His renovation didn't do him any good. His character changed from bad to worse. Had he been boiling with rage occasionally in former times, he now became a cruel tyrant. The whole court shivered and shook when he raced in wrath. and, that happened almost daily now.

Luckily, the little Prince was on his own by now, and able to avoid contact. In fact, he spent most time with his mother in the summer palace on the moon. Prince Watchalot didn't like the summer palace on the moon. He preferred to be with his mistresses on earth.

Except for Prince Watchanot, he was unable to produce proper semen any more, unfortunately, because of his lost identity. As most of his parts were now strange implementations, he had become genetically imbalanced. At least that was, what the doctors told him, as he realized his sterility after several months with his mistresses.

Up there to the moon, some of the ponies were let to train in the fast hall of fame and honour, where Prince Watchanot installed a kind of stable. Florinna taught him as best as she could - and, as

the three Star-maids continued to take care of him, he learned a lot from Arundle and her magic bow. However, time went on for the Star-maids too. In fact, much slower, but still, and brought about chances in their lives as well; and the visits became lesser and lesser.

The rescue programme the Star-maids had betted on, didn't comply with the expectations, at least not in the long run. Scholasticus Slyboots, the brain on this side doubted in the meantime publicly whether they had taken the right measures, especially though, if it came to long-term endurance. And he dared to question his descendant General Armyless, whether or not he had cheated them and hadn't told them the truth about the artifacts' motivation.

That was why Scholasticus had contacted Walter, the keeper of the magic stone, and asked whether he could help by looking at the situation with his own eyes. Walter, good-natured as he was, couldn't say no, and tried his best. Had he by then only known the consequences! However, nobody could even imagine the upcoming evil, and if, nobody would have taken such signs serious, - not as they were.

Had Scholasticus only foreseen, what he forced Walter to do, he wouldn't have touched the matter. But he couldn't see anything more important than the rescue-measures for the world of Laptopia. It was, after all, the world of theirs, the world of their descendants. Perhaps he would have looked for a less stony way, anyway, if he only had known. And the black shade of great evil might have been avoided, that arose and overshadowed Walter's existence from now on until doom, death and agony.

However, Scholasticus couldn't yet overcome his own nature. He was still a child of his time, as most human beings are. Only the least are sometimes blessed and chosen, like the Star-maids of the Advisor.

4. Bad news

The morning grew grey above the sea, while a feathered sky-messenger emerged on the horizon and aimed towards the far mainland. There the birds weren't up yet, to welcome the day with

their choir. Even though most beings of the dark already lay lazy in their caves and nests and shelter, some well fed, others with aching guts but tired anyway from the nightly race.

That night had been different from others, and the flying messenger had to do with that. Walter, the giant kangaroo, spread the rumour of the Star-maid, who had come from great distance and had found her way, as she was familiar with animal-talk.

The news spread about like a bushfire in the outback. - Came by the wood-kangaroos to the possums. And Pooty, Walter's little friend, spread it amongst the whole giggling flock, as if there was some kind of misunderstanding, or giggled they, because they were always giggling, as it well could have been? Anyway, from here it somehow reached the dingoes and went further on to the tree bugs and cockatoos, and to others the like. The ponies from the stars passed the message gaily on to the wild camels, as they thought they knew the reason for that seldom gift and art, because a wild little Amazon with a longbow over her back once brought them here from their faraway cage into freedom. It was nobody but her, who came to visit them; they combined quite correctly, as they had space enough in their horse skulls to develop such complex ideas.

The sky-messenger was neither an overdue creature of the night, nor a bird welcoming the day. He hurried over the black sea – unimpressed, as he was no animal at all. However, without doubt he aimed for Australia, to be more precise, for New-South-Wales and there towards a holiday resort called Heavens Gate.

Many tourists spent their time there, as was season now – almost the whole year there was season, anyway. Most guests came from overseas - Americans, Europeans – even though, there was not much to be seen. However, the tourists didn't notice, as they were kept busy all day, either on the beach or in the disco later. If not one of the facultative excursions was due, to get them to a sad Aborigine village or a dusty sheep farm nearby.

Besides, the eager tour-guides cared for their flock, so, not the slightest appeal of boredom emerged. You wouldn't believe, what was all offered. Of course, there were the usual tennis lessons and daily physical exercises in- and out pool, ballroom dancing, and after tea bingo, horse riding or crazy gulf, and the like, you could think of. 'For all those, who wanted to experience their second honeymoon', as it said in the brochure - even yoga was to be found - 'to purge the system' - as it said.

Mr. and Mrs Waldschmitt and their daughter Arundle were on their grand Australian round trip tour. At 'Heaven's Gate', a one-

week rest was due, and was quite necessary, as they still suffered from the time change and jet-lag.

Arundle pretended not to suffer, as she was used to quite different distances, but had to admit some side effects as well. They didn't sleep well. They woke up in the middle of the night, or experienced sudden blackouts at daytime.

Arundle awoke early that specific morning, while the messenger approached. Some noise from outside woke her up. She just wanted to turn around, as it was still very early, when someone knocked at the windowpane. At once fully awake, Arundle jumped out of the bed and hushed to the window, leaned over and looked out, but couldn't see anything. It took a second to get used to the twilight outside. But then she saw it sticking right over the top with its lean body in the sand surrounding the bungalow, no nine feet away, and tried to free itself in vain by shaking and quaking fiercely its feathered glittering end, met by the first golden rays of the rising sun, and made Arundle to recognize.

Light-footed the lean girl with the waving dark blonde ponytail hushed downstairs and was in no time outside and behind the house, while she realized, that she were almost naked. However, nobody was there. A few paces, and she drew her friend out of its sandy prison.

A bit nose heavy as it was couldn't take the sill obviously, thought she and weighed the arrow in her hand, because that it was. A note had been fixed and added that little extra weight to pull its nose down, after all power was used up. "Poor little something" she uttered tenderly, "how careful he had been" – she meant, what she said.

"You can trust my arrows", a voice snarled close to her ear, and the magic bow hovered down nearby. His red eye glittered, while a sun ray hit it.

Had they not met on such a grey morning, Arundle wondered, but then shook her head. She had laid hands on him in the morning, but he had arrived at night because of a fierce flash of lightning. She remembered the scene, as if it was yesterday. While she hid in the bathroom, the bow had landed on the balcony. That was, what she noticed the next morning. Since then the magic bow became her true protector and best friend, and was no thing any more, but a living being of the miraculous kind, who guided her through the

world of magic, and he made her understand the world, more so, living beings of all kind, as this came along with her emphatic talent.

“...Got to draw” the magic bow snarled, still hovering in front of her forehead. At last, she made it, and hushed back upstairs, where she unfolded the message. Luckily, she hadn’t been seen. As she was not allowed outside in the dark, while the boarding-school, her parents threatened her more openly with, than ever, hang over her head like Damocles’ sword.

“We will relax together, like we used to. Do you remember?” Mrs Waldschmitt exclaimed. Then, it had been too late, anyway. Mrs Waldschmitt came right back from the travel agency, she went to, after her day in that barrister’s office, she worked with. Just a fast booking for some ten thousands of Deutsch marks, Arundle said and shook her head with disgust.

“There’s no way back now, your father tends to step back, when it becomes earnest. But this time he won’t, I dare say. A vacation I deserve, God knows, and you too. Who knows whether it is our last, together, dear” and Mrs Waldschmitt sighed heavily.

“But I wanted to go with my friends to Greece...” Arundle protested.

“So what, your friends - this time you come with us. Do you know where we are going to? You don’t and you wouldn’t believe it either.”

Of course, Arundle didn’t know, were they would be going to, how could she? And as she got to know it her heart jumped up a few centimetres.

“Right – O, this time we want to know it. We are going to Australia.” Mrs Waldschmitt grasped her fiercely and kissed her. Arundle weakly offended but surrendered in pity. Neither her mother nor she were used to such sudden tenderness. Mrs Waldschmitt surprised herself with such uncommon emotional outbreak. She might have felt the low resistance, as she turned away and blushed.

The relationship between Arundle and her parents was quite tense, definitely not as relaxed as she experienced acquaintance in her friends’ home. There, things were talked over in the open. and, often they came to surprising results, and never let anyone down helplessly, or ridiculed, as she was so used to. Why were her

parents so ignorant? Yes, they tried, but couldn't slip out of their skin. Sometimes Arundle pitied them, even though, she suffered.

The sea rolled over the sandy, shimmering, shallow shores of the Australian South, as deep as the South could be, here deep down under, where Arundle and her parents spent their days at 'Heavens Gate'. The tiny bungalow suited their needs, as Arundle kept the roof-part all alone, while her parents settled on the ground floor, where temperatures didn't exceed bearable limits. The closeness didn't suit them at all. Mrs Waldschmitt worried most and suffered worst, even worse than Arundle, although the heat on the ground by far didn't reach the heights Arundle had to endure under the roof. Mrs Waldschmitt suffered most, but at the same time argued most as well.

Roundels friends and her parents were now in Greece. Henry Hare, a Professor of Archaeology was irresistibly drawn to the sites of ancient glory. Most likely they would camp and cook their food by themselves; Arundle imagined and envied her friends once more, although she was so much better off here down under in the land of her dreams. All the more so, as many Australians believed in the dreamland and longed to spend their lives on such faint shores of the human existence. Walter and Pooty lived there as well, besides she felt some strange draught and a peculiar longing the further she came.

'The arrow could have only been sent by Walter' she thought and couldn't think of anybody else. Lucky enough, she managed to slip back into her room under the roof. Only the bright giant kangaroo with the brain of a Professor and the ancient wisdom of the continent in the blood was able to send such a message, thought Arundle, while she unfolded the piece of material torn around the shaft. Most likely, it had been the extra weight up front, which made the arrow to tumble nose heavy to the ground, instead of jumping right into its mistress lap.

Arundle read in the light of the rising sun. The message really came from Walter and Pooty had printed his cute paw right under the text as well. Unfortunately, the arrow must have come through an area, where it had rained. Therefore, the ink was partly gone and the message couldn't be read properly.

Anyway, Arundle believed to understand, that there had been quite some confusion in Laptopia. Things went wrong lately, the goals couldn't be achieved. Therefore, the General had asked Professor Scholasticus Slyboots for help. As chef of the police, General Armyless was responsible for the exodus of the laptop factories to the moon. And he was responsible for the stuffing of the time leaks, caused by the laptop factories.

It looked, as if the directors of the factories refused to cooperate and didn't stick to the five-years-plan. First, it had been only a kind of slowdown strike, but now open violence made the situation unacceptable.

If things went on that way, the big earthen clock would soon run out of time. Laptopia was the earth of the future and lay exactly 114 years ahead (as to the bow's calculation, who wasn't sure about contemporary or Laptopian years). A good while ago Arundle and her friends managed to execute a promising programme. As they didn't hear from the General, they thought, things were all right. That seemed to be a terrible mistake.

Arundle scribbled a quick reply on the back of the note. She rolled it around the arrow; ask the magic bow to figure out the coordinates of Walter and Pooty's latest location. She also considered the indication error and the magnetic declination, just to be on the safe side. Then she shot the arrow out of the window. The arrow would find its way on its own, while it was under way en route. She hoped, nobody had observed her, as the eyes of an unauthorized spectator could spoil and weaken the magic power involved, considerably, or break it at all.

Her biggest problem right now was that she couldn't do anything for Laptopia, as long as she was under way with her parents on their tour. That was, what she had written on the back of the note. Furthermore, she let him know, where Corinia and Florinna were, and that they should be informed in any case. If Professor Slyboots hadn't been informed, this should be done right away. If that was not possible, she herself could inform them by telephone, quite conventional. On the other hand, if the magic stone from Uluru knew a better way, it would be all right with her.

It was such a pity that she couldn't involve her own parents, after all, as her friends could. They were really much better off. Their parents were open for practically everything, and the dream time was no problem for them either.

Mr. and Mrs Waldschmitt never stepped aside the solid grounds of prejudice and common sense, not for an inch, and they

were proud of it. Her mother seemed to feel the glimpse of fantasy, occasionally, but her father was a hopeless stone heart.

‘Poor General’, Arundle thought, as she lay separated from her parents on the white beach. Her parents had settled under a huge umbrella, some ten feet away. However, the wind roared considerably today and the sea rushed, so nothing was heard from them, and as she had closed her eyes, she couldn’t see them either. Therefore, she lay on her belly behind a dune as if she wasn’t there at all. So she could hang on her thoughts unspoilt.

Walter’s letter had brought the completely twisted matter up again. What had they not tried! Meeting after meeting had been arranged and in the meantime, they took their trips through space and time. While at home things went wrong as well. The changing of schools after all, while they moved back into the city; her father’s severe argument with Mr. Schwertfeger, whom she hated and who had so much in common with her father. It was but now that she recognized it. At the age of thirteen you are no child any more and don’t accept, what the adults say, just like that.

Arundle grinned, as she remembered the silly face of Mr. Schwertfeger, when she left his classroom right in the middle of a lesson, just because she wished her away. At least she was told by her friends, as she had been away and couldn’t see his face anyway.

“He was so confused; he let us go five minutes early, and couldn’t get his mouth shut, speechless as he was...”

What had really happened in Laptopia, Arundle wondered. Walter’s letter didn’t say much, as the ink had gone partly and some words couldn’t be read at all. It said little more than that the General was in trouble and needed help.

What could she do? – Something must be done, right now. She needed at least half a day. That would be better than nothing. She could gather some information, and speak some words with the General, even though she disliked his behaviour. Fortunately, it had changed a little lately.

She thought thing over and shared her reflections with her magic bow right next to her in the sand. He seemed to be fond of the idea of heading towards the future a little. It would train his

abilities, he uttered. 'For too long they hadn't been in use. One shot in the grey morning, was the only pleasure of the whole trip up to now.'

Nevertheless, Walter's reply they had to wait for, they thought, and whispered in their magic tongue, nobody understood, not even Florinna and Corinia.

"And if you don't go on the excursion to the sheep farm this afternoon? We had at least five hours that would do."

"...If Walter answered up till then..."

"...And if not, it would be no great harm either, I think." The magic bow got used to the way Arundle talked, and Arundle wondered, whether she really spoke that way. He intended to read her thoughts and picked them from her lips.

Anyway - Walter's answer came in, in time, just before lunch. Mr. and Mrs Waldschmitt held siesta and Arundle lay in her room and looked into the vast blue sky outside the window. All windows were open and the wind blew the sticky air under the roof away. The arrow swung in rather elegant this time and landed right on Arundle's lap.

"Don't act on your own stop far too dangerous stop I'm on the way with Pooty stop the revolution is on the march stop General Armyless and a forlorn few in distress stop I trust in you and your discretion stop."

No signature, no greetings – that didn't really look like Walter. and, what was meant by 'discretion'?

"Somebody must have been in desperate hurry", snarled the bow. Who could deal with a warfare operation like this, better than he did, he thought and his red eye glowed worryingly fierce while he said – "you shouldn't talk to anybody – that is what discretion means."

"I see", said Arundle flatly. As if she had spoken with her parents about such matters. She had to think about something for this afternoon. The best would be, to stick a finger into her throat and to dramatize still, she vomited on the carpet before the toilet. Hence, she wouldn't have to go to that sheep farm, for sure.

"But we have booked the excursion only for you", Mrs Waldschmitt complaint, when she saw, what had happened the more so, because Arundle looked awful and lay down on her bed as grey as the pillow.

"Do you really think we can leave you alone under these circumstances? I will inform the reception in any case, and have the doctor to look after you."

“Never mind, mum I’m much better already. I think I ate something wrong - too much ice cream perhaps. You know my weak stomach...”

Mrs Waldschmitt stroked her tenderly over the forehead. “If something happens, while we are away, I wouldn’t endure for the rest of my lifetime.”

Arundle felt that she meant it and felt guilty. “Nothing will happen, I assure you. Take daddy’s phone – ah yeah – doesn’t work outside here... But the bus driver’s got a mobile connection anyway, so the hotel could get in contact, in case something happened.”

Billy-Joe came up to her mind. He was porter in the hotel. He worked from dusk to dawn and was not even fifteen. His friendly face and open mind attracted Arundle right away. Besides, he could have been a brother of her friends with his raven black curls. As their mother, Vasantha was Indian. That was why her daughters inherited the dark skin and the wonderful black hair, they were envied for – although there also were others...

She could trust Billy-Joe. He would understand. However, would she not cause him trouble then?

On the other hand – discretion! Was she allowed to tell him, what she planned? So she thought about a kind of falsified truth, close to the truth, but not the truth, so that he wouldn’t doubt her words, as he was an Aborigine and quite familiar with the magic world of Australia.

After all, that was one reason why she was fascinated, to her parent’s disgust. When they realized, how she looked at him, and how they stuck their heads together, when they thought nobody was looking.

“You can’t behave like that. Not in your age. You are going to become a woman, you know.” Her mother said, and her father added: “You can’t let someone like him touch you. Don’t you realize the smell? - They all stink, that is well known and scientifically approved.” Mr. Waldschmitt exclaimed fiercely, as he couldn’t think of something reasonable to say. And what he really thought, he couldn’t say at all.

Even Mrs Waldschmitt tried to pull him down, when he became all too racist, after all. “That’s his way of expressing of how much he loves you” she meant vaguely. Arundle didn’t believe a word.

After her parents had entered the bus, Arundle sneaked out of the house and awaited Billy-Joe as he came back from a distant

bungalow; whereto he had guided new guests. Sweat glistened on his nose and forehead under the curly hair that was covered by a cap. His white gloves were darkened by the moist. What had he given now for a change and strolled naked and barefooted through the savannah.

Arundle waved him aside and checked whether someone looked from the reception, as she knew that her father had spread his poison. Hastily she whispered into Billy-Joe's ear. The boy nodded and then continued his pace to collect new guests awaiting him already at the reception.

"Get going," she whispered "up, up and away to Laptopia," she screamed and off she went like a flash of lightning. As if the sun reflected in the windshield of a passing car. Arundle was gone. Nobody had realized anything.

Billy-Joe would say, she went to the beach, if someone asked him. He knew the receptionists came straight away to him, anyway. His knowledge made him feel somehow powerful, even though he suffered under the white folk. They were inexperienced in many ways but on the other hand, they were terribly superior. He didn't mean to understand them.

In the meantime, Arundle entered space. The bow covered her with a protective shield, that didn't let the cold in and gave way to the reproduction of breathable air. Besides, she had a remarkable round view.

Because of the enormous speed, the stars extended in length like tracer streams on the left and right of their way, and flashed in all colours of the rainbow, while the background was formed by the grandeur and majesty of the eternal space.

The trip passed some time slopes; and Arundle got the impression as if the magic bow resisted for a tiny moment. At last, they manoeuvred through the fourth dimension, so that even the magic bow ran into slight trouble.

Arundle felt uneasy. Had the bow lost orientation? She felt an angry knock in the back. She always forgot that the bow could read her thoughts or even think them before they came to her mind. Especially though, when she didn't like that at all, as it was right now.

"I'm sorry," she whispered "But I've got to be allowed to worry, am I not? We haven't got the whole day."

"We will be there right away, and you shouldn't worry about the time at all. As we just passed one hundred and fourteen years – well more or less 114 because of the indication error. There could

have easily elapsed some more years – or of course less - that is the question, if there is a question at all. I only had to adopt the increasing loss in time that has changed to the disadvantage of the earth again. That seemed to set us back, while in reality only seconds passed.”

Indeed, as the bow snarled his explanation, the cloudbanks of Laptopia arose ahead – grey and milky and somehow fierce. They covered the earth underneath with bad fumes and caused the time to drop off and trickle away into nought and nothingness.

“Condensed electronic smog” had Scholasticus once explained such phenomenon, his friend – by the way - called him Scholly. Such electronic smog became so thick, that you could sit on top of the cloudbanks. At least for a short time, while you started to sink unnoticed.

So it became a smooth landing, the magic bow was proud of. “Laptopia landing” he called it since he had been here to experience such a strange planet, that had once been the good old earth, before worldwide pandemics broke out to make all Laptopians suffer.

Had they only known, but they didn’t. Most of them felt the happiest beings in the universe, as the eager artifacts made them believe, while their factories caused the diseases, after all.

With great care Arundle lowered and sank down through the clouds. The bow let her know, that he didn’t know how to proceed. He was happy to have come that far, he explained. Now he could tell her after all.

Therefore, her feelings had been right out there in space. At least he could admit some kind of mistake that was something anyway. Nevertheless, how should she proceed? She switched into the local visual flight mode and went along almost underneath the cloud-carpet. The glimmering grey walls of the city came into sight, as well as the palace on top. She glided along carefully in the mist of the latest layer. She wanted to avoid to be recognised by the wrong ones. She hoped, she would notice General Armyless’ big golden cap, he was so proud of.

Like back home everything seemed to be hatched in a siesta. Nevertheless, Arundle remembered it always to seem so. Things changed immediately if you did something wrong or if you only showed up, as had happened years ago, when she came here with Lappy her little laptop that went unserviceable because of the battery. They had treated her, as if she was a murderess. Never would she forget how she was arrested by the laptocops. Without

General Armyless, she'd been in real trouble. At least he proved to be a man of flesh and blood, while he was a hopeless womaniser, who took any opportunity to flirt and overdo.

Again she felt uneasy and much younger, like most of the times she had come here. Carefully she curved around the castle's battlements and still kept hidden in the last layer of the clouds. They seem to sit on top of the highest buildings anyway. A further building, she remembered, was the home of the general administration and coordination centre of all art factories and industries. While the ancient castle slowly fell to pieces, this building looked strong and proud and monstrous – the sign of an uprising new power.

All of a sudden, she realized the General's cap, right underneath, close to one of the towers of the castle. A lonesome ray from the sun had broken through the cloud and somehow was reflected by the golden laces. "Alas, the General at last" she uttered gladly and let all caution aside. The bow turned and landed next to their aim in no time.

Just as Arundle prepared to endure that hand-kissing business of the General, the face under the cap raised, and she looked into the cruelly grinning eyes of Prince Watchalot. That was a bad surprise. On his command, heavy armoured lapto-cops rushed towards the poor girl. While the magic bow managed to escape, Arundle was caught. She felt the bowstring cut, while the bow disappeared. She heard him from the inside, but was too upset to recall. Something like „going and getting help“, she hoped to have understood. Sharp scissor hands caught her. They would have cut her to pieces, if she had tried to get loose.

The bow was gone, while she was handcuffed, and accelerated to highest speed. So he managed to arrive almost the same minute, they had left. Billy-Joe was still in the move and fear grabbed after his pagan soul, as the magic bow all of a sudden appeared alone – trembling with wrath and terror. No time slips or turbulences of any kind could slow down the rage he was in.

While in Laptopia time went by and while Arundle felt mistreated and brutally punished by the cruel Prince, the magic bow wanted to make himself understood by Billy-Joe. But that was not so easy. Besides, the boy was still very busy, because of the tourists from Sweden. Some twenty giggling blonde girls wanted to become guided to their bungalows by that smart local native with the cutest smile on his dark face, they had ever experienced by a

man. This smile was part of his nature, or almost part of it, because this guiding business spoilt the character.

While he stuffed the very generous tip into his pocket, the bow managed to keep close to his back and whisper into his ear. However, Billy-Joe either wasn't in command of magic-talk or was unable to concentrate because of the girls. Therefore, it took the bow some precious minutes to elapse, until he managed to manoeuvre him aside and got him to disappear behind some eucalyptus trees. While Billy-Joe fixed the broken bowstring and got rid of his uniform, the magic bow prepared for an emergency operation. The boy seemed to have understood at last. While they both calmed down, the bow tried to communicate on a telepathic mode and was quite fond of what happened then. He started his explanation all over again, and this time he succeeded.

In the meantime Arundle was pushed downstairs. First down the narrow steep staircase of the tower on top of which she had been caught. The stairs had no end, but became even steeper and irregular in size. With her cuffed hands on her back, she couldn't prevent scratches and blows, as the guards pushed her merciless downstairs. Laptops like the Prince or the Princess weren't able to overcome such stairs. They had their servants – especially designed staircase-carriers. Therefore, the Prince followed shortly behind and forced his servants to speed up on her as well. He was willing to interrogate the victim personally, and that could only be done deep down under the palace in the dungeons of terror.

Since they met last, Prince Watchalot had changed a lot. He almost was a different person now, Arundle wondered even though she had other things to worry about now, as the stairs became even steeper and glibber on top, and she hardly managed to keep on her feet. Impatient as her guards were, they had to take care of themselves now, and let her alone.

The servants with the Prince's sedan ran into trouble as the stool were stuck and couldn't be moved either forward or backwards. Therefore, the Prince had to get off and try on his own feet. His bionic legs seemed to do their duty well. Arundle heard his cruel voice approaching and went hastily on.

However, it was not the body alone, his whole attitude was different now. He was much taller now and his former silly face now exposed an air of maliciousness. He was definitely no longer the simple TV-addict, he used to be.

Even though he had to be quite old by now as to Laptopian time anyway. Nevertheless, he looked younger than ever. His son, the little Prince Watchanot, was in her age now. Things accelerated a lot over here, she wondered. She well remembered the first birthday party, just about some three or four years ago. For the little Prince, it seemed, Laptopian time went especially crazy.

Her thoughts at least took her away from the desperate state she was in. While she came back down to the real facts of existence, she noticed her aching legs and every step into the unknown caused her extra pain. The stairs became even steeper and more irregular than ever. The air became moist and dim, twilight glistened in the greyish liquid running down the wall. Arundle assumed they were now deep down under the surface and not far from the dungeons. So she could imagine even more closely, what lay ahead.

Arundle remembered the General's warning now and how difficult it was – even for him – to keep control over the artifactual forces. Where - the hack - was he? She needed him desperately and promised by heart to never ever keep bleating, no matter how strange he behaved.

Would he come in time to save her and protect her from torture and inquisition? and, the magic bow, would he be able to bring help? How stupid had she been, all alone after so many months of absence. The little Prince was now on his own. He was almost grown up, and didn't need the 'Star-maids of the Advisor' any longer.

Had she only taken Walter's warning as serious as had sounded. She stumbled into a clever trap, designed especially for her. Somebody seemed to know her very well. Either the message to Walter had been falsified or the message from Walter to her – probably both! That made sense. How tricky with fading ink – and the warning. Indeed very clever, somebody knew how she would react. She didn't notice a thing, didn't have the faintest idea, what was going on.

Therefore, her magic bow was her last hope now. What could he do? He didn't have more than a couple of minutes in actual time. Whom could he contact, would he come alone? However, without string he was helpless himself. As she imagined his problems panic overcame her and tears shot into her eyes.

Tear blind and sobbing she stumbled on. Deeper and deeper they went. Left and right there were dungeons now and suffering prisoners could be seen in the twilight. The bottom seemed to be

reached. She was pushed forward now over slippery rocks. The air was full of terror and of the smell of pain and agony. Pleading hands reached through rusty iron bars. However, became torn back when the guards knocked them off. The screams of the punished followed them. Arundle could see now their faces behind the bars as the light increased.

The smell became unbearable. The liquid on the floor they had to wade through consisted of excrements. The end of the passage came in sight. Her heavy heartbeat must be heard, Arundle thought, while they stopped in front of a heavy iron door. The key turned and slowly the door swung open, behind which was hidden the underworld of aches and agony at its worst – the perverted brain of the dungeon.

5. The Hi-jacking

Professor Scholasticus Slyboots stepped out into the street. He was on his way to his seminar at the university. He was late as usual. His long black coat waved as the wind caught it. The Professor looked a little like a crow, bound to rise up into the air.

He still chewed on the last bites of his breakfast, while he knocked off some roll crumbs from his tie. He hesitated while he came to a jelly spot that couldn't be knocked off. He was too late to change the tie anyway.

He just wanted to heave himself into the saddle – his huge leather bag he had carelessly stuffed into the basket, fitted to the rear carrier – the bag was once more far too fat – his trouser legs being well bound with luminescent holders. Since his spectacular crash, when his trousers were stuck in the chain, he had become careful, after all.

Dorothea, his beloved wife, still stood in the doorway, as he had kissed her goodbye with a sticky kiss on the cheek. The neighbours' dog to the right barked as always and cared for the cat of the other neighbours to the left. Its mistress knocked fiercely at her kitchen window from the inside.

While Professor Slyboots realized a sudden air strike out of the nothingness that went right through the tyre of the bike's front wheel. Angry as he was Scholasticus tore the glittering stick off and identified it as one of Arundle's arrows. What a shame, he thought. That was it after all. He would never manage to be in time now.

While he waved Dorothea and shouted for a taxi at her, he examined the arrow after pulling it out of the flat tyre. What a phenomenon it came to his mind: A flash from nowhere. How could that happen? Not for a second he thought it might have been a prank by naughty boys around the corner.

While he placed the bike carefully to the gate, he tried to free the stick. He managed at last.

"Dorothea, look, what I have here", he shouted and lifted the golden arrow into the air. His wife hurried the few stairs down. "The cab will be here any minute", she screamed back as the autumn wind blew hard that morning.

"The tyre is flat", she said dully. "What a shame, just today, while you meet these strangers from abroad, you know who..."

Right, he had almost forgotten about the guests from overseas, from that island with the funny name, and his presentation. Professor Slyboots looked at his watch – ten to three, it said. Nonsense, that couldn't be. Something was wrong with the watch.

"Dorothea, my watch shows ten to three, look at that" he shouted and lifted his arm in front of her face, while he rushed back into the house. Dorothea raised the telephone lever for him. "Show me", she said. He pulled the watch off and gave it to her. "Got to turn it round, see? - Scholasticus - always up and away with his thoughts, while with the feet on the ground. What would you do without me?"

At last, he had some minutes. By taxi it would take him only half the time, at least he hoped. Just to be on the safe side he called the caretaker's office. Nobody answered, as usual. Nervous as he was, he sat on the toilet while the cab arrived. What a shame, after all.

Dorothea handed the heavy bag inside through the lowered window that Scholasticus almost had forgotten on the tray of his bike. She tried as well to get away the sticky spot of marmalade, kissed him goodbye and wished him good luck.

"You will make it, dear" she screamed, while the cab pulled off.

As she stepped back into the hall, she stumbled over the golden stick and wondered whether this was one of Scholasticus' Chinese sticks he enjoyed eating with. However, it was not that kind of stick, but an arrow, that the Professor had dropped by accident, while he came back in.

She turned the arrow thoughtfully in her fingers. What did this stick remind her of? She wondered. Just as she wanted to put it aside, she noticed the slip of something fixed to its shaft.

Carefully she got it loose and flattened the parchment or what it was. Strange it was in any case. She couldn't remember such material anyway. So she went to the kitchen, while she started to read, but stopped alerted after a few steps. "Good heavens" she exclaimed.

"Grisella, Dummy, are you at home?" she shouted then. Her sister's family lived upstairs on the first floor. Instead of her sister, a child's voice answered, that belonged to Intellectus, her twin sister's little son. Like them, Dummy and Scholasticus were also twins, but they were as well as different, as their wives were. Both twin pairs were in a way as different as they just could be. That was very strange and confused the entire world. How could nature split its gifts in such a manner? Nobody understood and the twins themselves the least.

Scholasticus and Grisella were intelligent, while Dorothea and Amadeus were extremely good-looking. and, as opposites attract each other – Scholasticus had fallen in love with Dorothea, same as Grisella with Amadeus and vice versa. Their happiness lasted for years and there was no end in sight.

"Intellectus, aren't your parents at home?" asked Dorothea and Intellectus replied with one of his 'bon mots' – he was known for: "Not at home, they aren't."

"Are they at home, yes or no, you little rascal, you quite well got, what I mean... I haven't got time for your strange jokes, anyway."

"Mum, aunt Doro wants to talk to you, right away."

Grisella's face appeared upstairs. She yawned. Dorothea flew up the stairs and waved the parchment or what it was in her hand. "Look what just came in. You've got to see that...God knows what's going on again, over there."

Grisella rubbed her eyes and yawned once more. Obviously, she was not fully awake yet. Like many intellectuals, she was a night worker and loved to sleep late in the mornings.

She was a philosopher that made her differ on a large scale with Scholasticus. However, it did not mean, that she was less intelligent. Perhaps even more than her brother-in-law, who disliked her way of life, or if not disliked, disagreed with it. Whatever the reason was, they hadn't found out yet after all these years.

"What can be all that important, to wake me up in the middle of the night?" she asked.

"Read this, and you'll understand" Dorothea answered and opened her beautiful eyes wide with fear.

Grisella read. "Someone's pulling your leg, I'm afraid" she replied. While Intellectus tore her arm down and grabbed for the parchment:

"Earthly being revoke! or you won't see Arundle again. Revoke if you care for her life. Leave our world alone. This is our last warning. Show up immediately and accept the public tribunal of Laptopia.

His Majesty, Watchalot, Prince of Laptopia by agreement and acceptance of all crown-councillors and advisers."

The signature was grammalogued and countersigned, and looked very professional even without a date, as Intellectus mentioned. He was the first to notice.

"The letter came by arrow, just as Scholasticus wanted to leave" and Dorothea waved the arrow in front of Grisella's nose. "What shall we do now? Scholasticus didn't read the letter; he was far too late already. You know he's meeting this morning with those islanders. First, we thought it one of Arundle's pranks as the arrow stuck in the front tyre of his bike. Then later when he had gone, I realized what it was all about. So I came right here up to you."

Grisella looked quite alarmed now; even Intellectus recognized how she changed.

"We've got to give him a call, right now, he's got to know, what's going on, and we must call an assembly. All time travellers, who got involved in the salvation of Laptopia, got to meet right away... by what ever possible means", she added after a thoughtful pause. "That's too much for one alone, even for someone like my brother-in-law, and that means a lot."

"We need a strategy", Intellectus agreed. "Strategies and tactics..."

"First we must get uncle Scholly home, then we'll see", his mother said.

“I’ll call up the institute, as soon as there is a break, I want to get him personally on the line”, Dorothea exclaimed decisively.

“And I try to reach the others, before I’ve got to leave myself for that hearing stuff because of that ‘School of In-between’. They seem to want me as well”, she said and you could hear the satisfaction in her voice.

“O damn it, the Hare-family is still on vacation till the end of the month. Well, in any case, we could involve the Australians...”

In the evening of the same day, about eight hours after the hijacking note, the little staff met to consider the crisis and to plot the degree of threat.

Lucky enough, just a few minutes had then passed in Australia, after Arundle’s disappearance as to the Central Standard European Time anyway. Because of the time change, Europe was way behind Australia. However, the lag could be overcome and compensated by the time travellers easily.

Walter had come with little Pooty in his front bag and brought some space shirts to overcome the distress of the outer space. While the magical stone from Uluru^x calculated the proper course, of how to get to Laptopia. As he had some experience by now. Therefore, he assured the party to manage without the help of the magic bow now.

For that purpose the magical stone absolved a couple of training units, as he had little practise in the outer space, all the more though he didn’t dare to leave solid grounds without special permission. However, as such, time-travelling business had little to do with real flying, but was some kind of transmutation, his power sufficed, at least the magical bow hoped. Therefore, the stone wasn’t certain at all, whether or not he managed the emergency trip, all the more so, as the bow took an opposing viewpoint whenever it came to the crucial point – the legal aspect. They would never come to a conclusion here.

While the magic bow stuck to the latest astrophysical viewpoint, the magical stone reflected on mystics and secrecy, and didn’t care about absolute speed, or speed at all to relate to cosmological relations.

“Could there be anything faster than a thought?” That was the question they didn’t come along with or came to an agreement.

“It is not the question of whether a thought must be thought, but how it must be thought, in order to move quantum,” insisted the magic bow, as he knew that quantum lay under the grounds of all matter.

“Even we magicians got to obey the behaviour of quantum. That’s a fact.”

Nobody was able to follow their magic talk, perhaps not even they themselves. Therefore, they sat obviously uninterested in the circle of the staff and whispered.

The magic bow had come with the Australians, and came, like the arrow, right from nowhere. Walter, the giant kangaroo, didn’t try to understand, what was going on between them, and was happy to accept their assistance.

So, Walter, Pooty, the magical stone and the magic bow gathered in the Slyboots’ home. Grisella and Scholasticus were back by now and were present, as were their spouses Amadeus and Dorothea. Intellectus was due to go to bed by now.

The Australians had brought a new face – a human being, as they specified, and was viewed curiously by the family members, whenever they thought he wouldn’t notice. The magic bow had brought him along. However, he became acquainted with Walter and Pooty right away. The stranger was nobody but Billy-Joe Karora, Arundle’s new friend, the porter of the ‘Heavens Gate’ deep down under in New-South-Wales, were Arundle vacated with her parents.

Billy-Joe, explained the magic bow, wasn’t here in reality, and the so addressed nodded and smiled his convincing little smile, nobody could resist. “It’s a question of mutation”, the bow explained. However, as the questions of transmutation weren’t the main topic on today’s agenda, the subject was dropped immediately.

Scholasticus would have liked to switch to such a scientific subject, but the salvation of Laptopia and even more, the salvation of Arundle proclaimed highest priority. Scientifically spoken they had to lower to a far simpler level of reflection.

Up to now, nothing but the exodus to the moon had occurred. Now nobody was certain anymore, whether or not, the fabrication of the artifacts was responsible for the smog and for the time loss at all. The stuffing of the time holes, nevertheless, by means of either shells or balloons, hadn’t been more but a momentary provision, and didn’t alter the course in the end.

After discussing back and forth how genuine this alarming letter was, they tried to answer the question how the letter managed to get hold at the arrow, as they couldn’t make up their minds, one way or the other. However, as a majority tended to take the letter serious, immediate action had to be taken. The magic bow seemed

to have ended discussing general matters of space travelling and time slips after all. Arundle came back to his mind now, as she was the endangered person right now. Billy-Joe didn't really understand what he wanted to tell him, so he tried Walter and succeeded in getting a new string at last. He was the only one who had an idea, of what was going on with Arundle, or could at least imagine, because he had just escaped to reappear now over here at the Slyboots' place.

So the tour was settled, after all. The magical stone was more or less convinced and agreed to certain extend. All obstacles were somehow removed. The Professor now caused the only uncertainty, whether it would be too risky to have him aboard, as the letter meant him as the head of the time travellers' team.

Walter had never sent a paper to Arundle that became clear now. The letter, Arundle received, came from the future; she was tempted into a trap. Billy-Joe reported. Before she left, she asked Billy-Joe for a favour to help her out with an alibi. That was shortly before the bow appeared with a broken string and completely out of mind, while Arundle disappeared and didn't show up, until now.

"First things first" uttered the bow who came back to his mind. Things were straightened out with the magical stone anyway, and if the humans and other beings made up their minds, they could start right away.

"I'm very sorry," said Grisella, "but I'm terribly afraid of any air travel. You can delete me from your list, right away."

"...So you better do with Scholasticus as well," Dorothea added. However, Scholasticus contradicted, as he felt responsible for the situation. He said he couldn't let those greenhorns do the trip, without knowing anything. That was not an argument, as neither Walter, nor Pooty or Billy-Joe had any experience, what so ever, when it came to Laptopia.

On the other hand, shouldn't they avoid risks? And it seemed obvious, that Scholasticus was blackmailed to come and free Arundle.

"If we only knew, who was the brain in the background? There is a devilish force involved, that's for sure. The Prince, as I know him, is a good-natured dummy in the hands of the crown council. The General is member of the crown council as well; we should always keep in mind. I think no one would blame him of such trickery. While the Prince were stuck behind his tellies and minded mainly telenovelas and series of all kind, when I met him. I

wonder, what has changed, after all. Nevertheless, I have to take the risk. Let's go then, and no more hesitation. Arundle needs our help right away."

Before they left, Billy-Joe wanted to make sure, that they all understood, or at least got an idea of what was going on in the air, and what kind of messages were underway.

Walter didn't know of any letter he had sent, either this way or another.

"May I sum up then", Dorothea said. "I'm not the fastest up here, you know" – they all shook their heads but Dorothea continued. "Arundle got informed about the revolution in Laptopia. The provisions to save the planet were sabotaged. General Armyless and his troops become isolated. He asked for help, while the ink has partly faded and the message couldn't be read properly. Arundle answers on the back of his note and sends it to Walter, close by in Australia. Walter gets this letter and shows up here, while Arundle is heading towards Laptopia, where she gets caught, as her magic bow just reported."

"Yes, a completely renewed Prince Watchalot appears under the General's cap," added the magic bow to Dorothea's report. "While I managed to escape, Arundle got caught. So I returned for help: Without string I couldn't do any better."

"Yes, and either at the same time or shortly after, or before, Scholasticus received that blackmail the same way by arrow."

"I think, it was the same arrow all the time. The first question then is how the Laptopians manage to travel into the past with one of our own arrows" – Scholasticus interfered.

It might be helpful, if we examined this arrow sorely", added Amadeus, who opened his mouth for the first time.

"... We should get the magic bow to interrogate it, after all, the arrow is supposed to be his." Scholasticus agreed and his brother blushed, as he was proud because of his brother's reaction.

Billy-Joe tried to translate what the bow said, but as he had no command of magic talk, he was bound to fail. Grisella interfered and the magical stone offered his help. The bow didn't seem to be certain either, whether or not this arrow was one of his own, or a clever falsification, after all.

On the other hand, there had been some activity up on top of the clouds. Even Walter and Pooty recalled now. "Yes, and the arrows acted as pins, while we had our bowling match on top of the clouds. That was fun, wasn't it" exclaimed Pooty. "We might have lost one or two pins" nodded Walter.

That seemed clearer now, had the bow not intervened. “No arrow flies on its own. You got to have my reputation to get them into the air and send them, where you wish to.” However, the magical stone contradicted. “I’m sorry, but that’s just not true. All you’ve got to do is throw an arrow into the air and tell it, where you want it to go. That’s it – simple as that...”

Before this argument took up speed and accelerated, Scholasticus finished the assembly and said, “...as we all agreed, it would be best, if a scouting patrol would depart for Laptopia right away.” That suggestion was accepted as they all nodded. Only Grisella hesitated. However, Scholasticus found volunteers enough and could make his choice. Therefore, he decided to take his brother with him, and Billy-Joe’s image, as well as Walter and his wife. Pooty insisted not to stay behind, without Walter. Therefore, they let him go as well. While the magic bow and the magical stone calculated the course, everybody got ready and said farewell to those who stayed behind.

This was quite a load. However, neither the bow nor the stone dared to admit. Heavy forces had to become overcome. Could it be done?

Billy-Joe’s image shouldered the magic bow. Pooty got hold of the magic stone up front in Walter’s kangaroo-bag (a kind of anatomic wonder). All travellers slipped into space fitted suits; Walter drew out of his belly bag. The bow snarled in disgust and refused to accept such device as he got his own – “much more effective” as he uttered.

Scholasticus thought it a good idea to end such quarrels as soon as possible. Now was not the time to interfere. As long as they did their job, it would be okay with him.

Arundle needed help that had the highest priority now. Laptopia was threatened by disaster, and uncertainty awaited him, probably the most dangerous adventure of all his life. Never before had he acted as the key figure in a high jacking drama.

For those who did the trip for the first time, it was quite an experience. Dorothea was overwhelmed and couldn’t stop exclaiming all kinds of Ahs and Ohs, while she continuously talked to her husband, who was next to her, but couldn’t understand a word of what she said, because of the separating suits. He tried to read lips and to interpret her gestures. While he looked at her, he would have loved to crawl into her space suit. However, that was of course impossible, even more so while in flight.

The stars went by like flare signals and tracer streams. The magic bow didn't allow the faintest hesitation this time. Even more so as he had to prove to the magical stone, how right he was. So the breath-taking journey through eternity ended after a few seconds, becoming stretched like chewing gum under the impact of more than one hundred years.

Even the travellers seemed to stretch for a moment, - to accumulate again shortly before the aim. Laptopia came in sight. It was Dorothea again, whose amazement dazzled most. At last, she saw the grey cloudbanks of Laptopia with her own eyes, she had heard of so much. She discovered the coloured balloons, supposed to stick in the time holes. Nevertheless, from far you could hear the guns firing, as somebody wanted to get rid of such reminders. Each hit caused a little explosion before another balloon disappeared.

Such gunfire made the patrol hesitate and keep distance. Whether or not they could be seen from the ground, some crossfire could do them harm anyway. Scholasticus gave signs to win height and the party went around the scenery to get an overall view. Until they came to a quieter corner, where they lowered and settled on the clouds. Now they could open their helmets. The air was breathable and talking was much easier.

Dorothea was able to spy through the gaps between the solid cloudbanks, and what she saw extended any description or image, as precise as they were. "You will never get this sharp on a photo" she uttered and Scholasticus nodded. "Yes, you always see only grey banks and deserted land or grey walls."

What she saw was so strange, so very different from everything she had ever seen or felt. Because it was the peculiar atmosphere of the planet, that got at her. "Grandiose dreariness" she exclaimed - "horrificing beauty - that's it then, what our good old earth became, isn't it sad?"

"Don't give up, nothing is lost for good though yet. We're here at last." - Walter replied, while Scholasticus translated. Dorothea gave him a bewildered glance. Did he think she was unable to grab, what Walter said? However, she didn't comment that.

Far away the shimmering city now appeared. The sky scraping buildings glistened when a seldom ray hit the glass fronts, and managed through the clouds to reach the surface. Little by little, they had a heating-up effect. The rest was then done by the Laptop industries. "The electronic smog not only serves as a time eater but also as a heat reflector. The cloudbanks imprison what ever is

emitting from the surface. Mathematically spoken, all you have to do is to solve the Einstein energy formula on the time side, that is enclosed in the acceleration and you come to the horrible result, you can see right in front of us now.” – Nobody understood, what Scholasticus was saying. What was it good to calculate such facts? First of all the obstinacies against the rescue provisions had to be stopped. Though it seemed, as if the opponent party ran the show. It didn't look at all any good for Laptopia.

Therefore, the time travellers kept on gliding on their cloud. They took good care not to sink, so nobody could spot them from the ground, or someone fell down altogether.

What should be done? The big question was. Theoretical discussions in any case, didn't help at all. Therefore, Dorothea managed to bring her husband back on solid grounds.

“Does anyone have an idea?” Amadeus asked and looked around.

“By the way, where is Billy-Joe and the magic bow?” he asked. They all looked up alarmed and gave each other astounding looks. In fact, Billy-Joe had disappeared together with the magic bow.

6. On Investigation

Just as Arundle was to be pushed into the dungeon, she felt two strong arms around her body, which came right from nowhere. She felt Billy-Joes curly hair tickling in her nose, before she realized, who he was, because in the next moment she found herself back on the battlements of the castle. She couldn't help but give him a tender kiss. For a moment, she was clinging to his muscular breast and felt his heartbeat under the warm velvet-like skin. For an instant it was, as if she smelt the natural perfume of the width and the sun of distant Australia. Then she freed herself. In the background, she heard now the well-known voice of General Armyless. He interrupted his speech and gave her a hearty welcome. Then he introduced her to his audience; he was addressing to, in order to keep up the morale.

Arundle looked at the old guardians of Laptocops. They surrounded the General's lodge, where she was now standing as well together with Billy-Joe and the magic bow, which Billy-Joe

raised in triumph. Around them, she could see a huge crowd. They all seemed to be in favour of the General and what he said.

The new blood that had just dropped in out of no-where was most welcome, as the General ran out of pushing vocabulary. As he knew, what the overall situation was like, optimism was required, but hard to solicit.

The bow felt quite well with his new string and enjoyed his master for the time being, while Arundle wondered whether he had all forgotten about her, as it seemed. She wondered whether she had ever seen him as happy as he now was: Totally in harmony with Billy-Joe's magic and the feeling of a handmade Australian string. How he had missed such a feeling. He felt like having returned to the fields of youth and the early days.

However, there was no time for extravagant feelings, as the General now stressed on the helpers and hopelessly overdid when mentioning what they could achieve.

Billy-Joe had got rid of the porter's suit and was wearing nothing but a loincloth and a medicine bag around his neck, wherein he stored all kinds of secrets. Secrets he had forgotten about, but still kept them as holy and necessary as they had been, when they found their way to him.

No wonder Arundle felt a slight spell of jealousy. Would the magic bow find his way back to her? She wondered. However, there was no time for such sad feelings now. She recalled how she just had been rescued from evil, death and torture, and thankfulness flooded back into her troubled heart.

The General just explained to his followers how important Arundle's task in the past had been. Therefore, the crowd hailed at her and demanded her to speak. That brought her back to the ground. Nevertheless, the magic bow helped her and whispered the words into her ear, she only had to utter. And while she felt his tight wooden strength in the back, her backbone straightened as well, and she grew out of her limits like the heroine she actually was, without really being aware yet.

As soon as the never-ending applause finally ended, even though it took some minutes. The General picked the ball up and pointed out that help was underway, that they were not alone and lost. "After a phase of peace, the time has now come to raise the sword. Take it as a sign. Our saviour has returned, right now in the dark hour, where the enemy stood up in unforeseen strength and number. Is that no wonder? Yes, it is a miracle - our saviour has returned. To the arms then, brave men and women, to the arms.

Our right cause must win, we will overcome our enemies, and we will outnumber them. Go tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere, our saviour has returned.”

Arundle couldn't bear listening, and Billy-Joe raised his eyes to the invisible sky. “Let's look for the others”, he whispered. “What others?” she asked back. “I'll explain later”, he answered and grabbed her by the sleeve.

The magic bow covered them with an invisible coat and transported them up above the clouds. From afar, they could hear the threatening thunder of the canons from the distant front. Warfare was in due course, no doubt.

The magic bow managed to meet the flock quite easily. The patrol just had realized Billy-Joe's disappearing and prepared to take action, but hadn't come to a conclusion yet.

Now they all surrounded Arundle congratulating her for her wonderful and somehow marvellous rescue, and thanked Billy-Joe for his clever action, while Arundle had to give them details.

The facts were told in no time as well as the reflections of the patrol group. Nobody felt much wiser afterwards. As nobody understood, what the matter with Laptopia really was. Perhaps they even didn't have but an idea, of what the crisis was really about.

“What do we really know, after all?” Scholasticus asked and gave himself the answer right away immediately.

“Prince Watchalot is leading the counterrevolution against our Laptopia-project. General Armyless and his troops lost grounds, while the enemy gained in number and territory, it seems. The balloons are shot down from heaven faster than they can be raised up there. Therefore, time gets lost almost uncontrolled. The exodus of the industries to the moon has come to a halt. I was asked to publicly confess my errors about the time loss, in order to set you free, Arundle...”

Scholasticus was interrupted rudely. While all were listening, nobody noticed what was going on around them. Perhaps the militiamen had been too fast for them anyway. In fact, they were surrounded and caught in no time by the Prince's personal elite guard of semi-human artifact-warriors. Bionic reconstructions, quite similar to the product the Prince was himself.

As “fighters and defenders of true progress”, so it said on their banners, such troops went from victory to victory. The rare free humans were fleeing into the forbidden zones, where the General's army was also hiding and preparing the counter strike.

The patrol from earth was overwhelmed in no time. Defence was not possible. They didn't even have weapons on them, except for the magic bow, but he was gone like a flash of lightning anyway together with Arundle and Billy-Joe, as if they fainted, while steel whips tied up the others.

The magic bow returned to Billy-Joe during Arundle's little speech, as he felt save here, or for some other reason. Perhaps he saw the upcoming evil. Anyway, Billy-Joe held Arundle in his arms, while they disappeared; otherwise, they had been caught as well.

Arundle felt quite shaky and looked rather pale, while Billy-Joe still held her close and tight in his arms.

"You can let me go now," she whispered after a while. However, Billy-Joe seemed not to listen. Therefore, she took his hands apart and escaped from his grip. He looked as if he came back from far away. Then he handed the magic bow back to her without a single word.

Where were they? As far as Arundle remembered the magic bow had taken them straight upwards, just away into nowhere land, as he confirmed, while she was thinking such thoughts. She pulled the string and felt the answer right in her head.

To be on the safe side, he'd pushed them a little aside in time, but a small window was still open, so they could look downwards to see what was going on down there.

"You got to understand the connections," the bow uttered. Arundle didn't understand anything.

She poked Billy-Joe in the ribs and tried to awaken him out of the dreamtime: "Wake up, Billy-Joe, I need you awake" she screamed with fear in her voice. "That's their way", the magic bow snarled, as Billy-Joe showed no intention to wake up. However, Arundle didn't give in. She felt creepy alone and didn't dare to look through the time loop, as she feared the worst for their friends.

Finally, Billy-Joe seemed to return as he grumbled, so she looked down and saw the prisoners being taken away. They were all tied up down to the legs and were pushed down the same passage Arundle remembered all too well, as she had been pushed that way as well, some time ago.

Even Pooty wore steel-ties. They were far too heavy for the little creature. He stumbled hard and almost couldn't keep on his feet, last in the row. The guards teased him and made him stumble by stepping on his tail. His screams could hardly be heard under the guard's laughter.

Somehow, those artifacts seemed to have become more human, while only in a negative sense, as they employed the same cruelties that are common to torturers of all times. Probably they were semi-artifacts by now, half human still and therefore even more dangerous, Arundle thought. Her magic bow agreed.

The General didn't show up, but his spies recognized what was going on. They couldn't do anything for the forlorn group of patrollers from afar. Prince Watchalot led the transport himself again. He seemed to know of the importance of the earthlings for the ongoing turmoil. Fit as the Prince now was, he stepped ahead on his own feet this time. His bionic transformation seemed to have ended.

Arundle had met him once at a time; he had been unable to move from one room to another without help. She had been honoured then with the highest order of the state for presenting him a remote control. The medal had ended up in Mr. Schwertfeger's locker, long time ago.

Scholasticus and Walter tried to carry the burden of capture with dignity. That was not easy, all the more Walter had to stand the screams of terror Pooty uttered once in a while. Arundle meant to see his pelt rising, while he tightened his enormous muscles underneath. His guards had not the faintest idea of his strength, especially of the strength of his legs; otherwise, they wouldn't have left them untied. Walter would run away at the first suitable opportunity, but surely not without Pooty, Arundle meant to become aware even from the distance she spied on in.

Slowly, Billy-Joe came back to reality. He yawned, stretched, and started to talk about his dream right away, although Arundle didn't want to let him take the word. She forced him to look through the time loop as well. He did so with little interest. He shrugged and said: "Little can be done right now, I'm afraid." Arundle was somehow shocked, and bewildered. How could he be so ignorant?

Billy-Joe smiled his ever-friendly smile and Arundle asked herself at that moment if it came from heart.

"For Australians dreams are no less real than reality" the magic bow reminded her, who read Billy-Joes thoughts, while Billy-Joe seemed to do the same, as he also nodded.

"We won't have the power for the whole lot," explained the magic bow, as Arundle thought of quick help.

“All right then, we get Pooty, before the dungeon. But I still hope for Walter, all the more though he still holds the magical stone.”

“Most likely the stone disappeared in the depth of Walters belly bag”, Arundle added. She felt a little better now.

“Walter seems to be kind of phenomenon”, the magic bow giggled, while Billy-Joe became upset by now, as nobody seemed to be interested in his all important dream, he wanted to get rid of. Therefore, the bow shut up in excuse.

Arundle lowered her eyes and felt guilty as well, as she had also forgotten about Billy-Joes other reality. Therefore, they listened to his report all the more attentive:

“I was flying over the blue sea and over shining islands. I saw all kinds of temples and statues over soft hills, and golden fruits grew on bushy trees. Merry people were picking little green nuts. While I came to a halt, I met two sisters. They spoke about you and their dreams, and wanted to know how they could help, as they understood you needed their assistance.”

“That were Florinna and Corinia, who are staying with their parents in Greece, right now”, interrupted Arundle, but Billy-Joe only shrugged, as he didn’t know the sisters.

“Do you care, what they said, or not?” he asked. He understood his tale as a kind of gift, he was presenting to her and it seemed as if she still didn’t really care.

“I’m sorry”, Arundle turned in. “What did they say?”

“As you can’t wait, I tell you right away, what they intended to do. They want to come to Laptopia, as soon as the night is coming. They have received your cry for help and became quite alert and uneasy. They also received an arrow, but weren’t able to understand what it meant either. Same as what happened to you, I suppose...”

“Let’s hope, they will be more careful than we were” Arundle exclaimed. “Do you know when they will arrive?”

“But that’s what I was going to tell you all the time. They are here already. And if you hadn’t interrupted and looked down to the captured, you’d know, what I’m talking about.”

Florinna and Corinia indeed were sitting on a cloudbank smiling and waving, while Arundle looked at them at last.

“Come on, have us moved over there”, Arundle asked the magic bow.

As the situation was quite tense, they reduced their welcome, although they hadn't met for quite a while, not even in their dreams, as they all had been busy otherwise.

Arundle informed them of what was going on. Then they began to discuss a strategy, how they could help the prisoners, probably with the Advisor's help, as they were the three Star-maids of the Advisor.

Pooty had to be rescued first, if Walter and the magical stone had no other idea, but that they couldn't find out from the distance. Pooty's situation became more desperate any minute. Therefore, something had to happen, regardless the fact that the Prince would be warned. As he was warned anyway since Arundle had escaped a second time.

All three girls wanted to become Pooty's saviours, regardless of the danger. Therefore, they asked the magic bow to decide, whom he wanted to go with him best. "As you ask me at all", he snarled, "I'd best go alone, as I than have all the power available and can control the lift-off effects and acceleration best, and might be able to threefold the speed. You know Einstein's formula, whereas the mass to be moved equals the radix of the required energy divided by the quantum factor of..."

"All right, all right, we are convinced" the girls screamed, while Billy-Joe didn't even know the name of the famous physicist. Trigonometry and stuff like that, he hadn't heard of yet.

"Alas, get off then" Arundle shouted and lifted the string to get out of the bow's back. The magic bow disappeared at once.

"I wonder, where he's got all that energy from" Arundle uttered thoughtfully and didn't notice that she spoke now about the same things the bow had just explained to her. She of course meant a different kind of energy; at least she thought it was of a different kind. However, was there really a difference?

Not two thoughts passed by, when Pooty appeared. He held the bowstring in his little paws in front of his breast and pressed the bow to his back. While descending, he screamed for fun:

"Dui die Dui die Oyo, what a flight. I've got to tell Walter."

However, Walter wasn't here, he recalled, and his eyes filled with tears. Without Walter, he felt left alone in this world. The girls felt moved by his sight and switch to his grief, as fast as they had enjoyed his excitement seconds ago. Now tears glittered in their eyes as well.

Then Arundle introduced the sisters to Billy-Joe and raised confusion on both sides. Neither the boy nor the girls believed their

eyes, and whenever they thought the others weren't looking, they gave their opposite a thoughtful glance.

The sisters couldn't speak up in front of Billy-Joe. But as it was in the dreamland, they made themselves understood without words, and didn't realize the boy's empathic ability, as he could read their thoughts quite clearly. They saw him grin, then understood and blushed under their dark skin and turned their almond eyes down.

"That's right" Arundle tried to get rid of the tension "to me you also looked quite the same, as if you were brother and sisters, somehow. Well, not really totally alike, but surprisingly alike..."

But enough with that, we've got work to do, what's next, anyway?"

As quite uncommon with sisters, Florinna and Corinia suggested a patrol flight around the scene. "We've got to find the General. He must be hiding somewhere with his troops. Perhaps he is able to lay siege to the castle to cause Prince Watchalot to give in."

"A little while ago we met the General, while he addressed to his followers. Nevertheless, they didn't look, as if they were ready to fight at all. I think we've got to be realistic." Arundle answered.

Pooty pointed out the desolate condition the captivated were in. "Dorothea suffered most"; he said and should be freed next. She should have been freed first anyway. "I'd have endured the torture for hours, if I had been asked" he said.

"They are preparing for Scholasticus' public revocation, I presume", Arundle pointed down.

"The regime is stressing on legitimacy. Perhaps the throne of Prince Watchalot isn't all that stable and set, as the forces we met, make us believe. As soon as the human beings realize, what he is after, the General will regain grounds again", said Pooty, as he had had the chance to overhear some of the guards' talks.

"Never underestimate your opponent," the magic bow snarled thoughtfully.

"Right, that's the worst mistake of a worrier", Billy-Joe agreed.

As if his words needed approval, a huge flying dog approached all of a sudden, right from nowhere it seemed. Its fangs were kept wide open and the threatening long teeth were sparkling in the light of the gaping hole the animal had torn into the cloudbank.

The little patrol team dropped like one man and hid in the clouds, and the gaping yaws just missed them, as they almost lost hold in the clouds. Without the bow's warning, they would have dropped right down to the ground and amidst the raging semi-artifact forces of the fierce Prince.

As they climbed up again the next attack came right away. Billy-Joe gave signs to the others to remain unseen, while he jumped up ready to fight. Billy-Joe got hold of the magic bow and in no time, an arrow flew right into the wide-open throat. The poor creature yowled and fled, however, not for long.

In the meantime, Florinna began to lose contour, a sign that she was in due course of waking up. Corinia followed soon, as she felt terribly alone without her sister over here in the nightmarish Laptopian dreamland, while Billy-Joe shouted, whether she and her nice sister could think of a way of coming back as soon as possible.

Just as the remainders breathed up and relaxed, another flying hound dog approached. This time Arundle did the fighting and successfully chased the attacker away.

Now the hound dogs came from all sides, the more they chased them off, and they needed all their cleverness to stand the attacks. It seemed as if the hound dogs multiplied, so Billy-Joe now tried another strategy and had them crash together, while he slipped through their fangs. That worked out fine, but he couldn't avoid bruises and scratches here and there, and after a while, he felt his power to weaken. This Torero-like business required the highest concentration. After all, he had to get rid of the debris that followed such collisions, which wasn't always possible. He felt the steam of rage in his face and the sharp claws scratching his back more than once.

In no time, he was bleeding. Arundle couldn't help but take over his position instead, until she got exhausted as well. While she shot arrow after arrow and no end came in sight, desperation stretched greedy claws at her and her mate.

"Pooty, what could be done? Think of something or we are done..." Their situation was hopeless and became more hopeless any minute.

Billy-Joe's movements became slower and weaker; he almost didn't manage to pull aside. The flying dogs ran deep scratches into his bleeding back.

At last, the magic bow recalled his abilities, even though Arundle neglected to call out a clear order. While she shouldered the bow and pulled her arms around the boy's bleeding body and

Pooty clung to her arm. The magic bow accelerated and disappeared flash-like.

“Retreat is the best defence,” Pooty screamed, as he was fond of such fast flights.

As soon as they arrived at their aim, Arundle wondered that the scratches had gone from Billy-Joe’s back, as well as her own. Not even scars were left.

“We didn’t retreat in space, but in time”, snarled the magic bow and Arundle noticed the satisfaction in his utterance. She nodded even though she only partly dug what he meant.

“Well, well we dropped back behind the line of time. The attack lies now in front of you, but you can make things a bit easier for you. You can’t alter the course of time altogether. Never try to alter the future.”

“Let’s put on Billy-Joe’s space shirt then”, suggested Pooty. He offered to go back to captivity in order to get one of the stone’s devices out of Walters belly bag.

The bow shifted them back a little more and after some minutes, Pooty appeared with a small packet. Billy-Joe tried it on. A bit tight it was, but what was good against the dangers of the outer space should as well do against the claws and fangs of bionic hound dogs. So, they hoped, while Florinna and Corinia appeared. Their father had made them familiar with the dog of the underworld. This knowledge might help against the hound dogs as well. After all - dogs are dogs, no matter where they were.

They awoke too early anyway and went back to sleep after a short breakfast with their father, who used to get up quite early, anyway.

They got up as they heard him rumour about in the kitchen downstairs. They told him their nightmare and where they had been, while the time loop appeared as a nightmarish vision.

Thanks to their father, they now knew what to do. “We need a mirror”, they said as soon as they arrived back again. They weren’t afraid at all anymore as soon as the attacks started, and they returned into the time slip. The whole procedure started all over again. First Billy-Joe did this Torero-like business after having shot some arrows. However, this time the few rays of the weak sun were caught in the shimmering space shirt of Billy-Joe’s. It acted like a big mirror, even more so, while Billy-Joe stiffened and stood straight.

As soon as the hound dog looked into their image in the mirror, something strange happened. They lost their entire wrath

and became tame and peaceful. They started wagging their tails and rolled up their mighty wings, and looked much smaller thereafter.

They gathered around Billy-Joe, whom they accepted as their master. He walked around between them and patted their heads, while they tried to lick his hand. Some even lifted the leg to piss against a cloudbank, and a slight yellow rain fell down to earth.

To their hidden foes such development didn't remain unnoticed, the little flock realized after a short while, as canon balls flew around their ears and grenades exploded close by.

"Mind you, would they be strong enough to carry us away?" screamed Pooty and jumped on one of the smaller dogs, while Billy-Joe, who got him straight away, looked for the strongest and biggest of the beasts; so did the three Star-maids and off they went - afraid or not. "What, if the dogs went nasty again" - Arundle thought, but the bow calmed her down. "Trust in Billy-Joe's daily mirror" he snarled giggling, as she didn't quite understand, what he meant by daily mirror. Billy-Joe's hound unfolded its wings and let go and so the others unfolded their wings the like.

"Up, up and away" Billy-Joe commanded and up they went, away from bullets and fierce attacks of misguided creatures. However, their main task, how to free the prisoners, they didn't come closer. They rounded the palace still looking for General Armyless and his followers, but in vain.

Pooty raised the question again whether the magic bow could at least free Dorothea, but he denied. "Too heavy", he snarled. Perhaps this was the true reason.

Again, they circled the palace. They dared to get closer now, as the nearby shooting had stopped. While from far you still could hear the thunder of the canons to remind them what happened to their balloons, they had managed to get up into the time holes, some years ago.

"The artillery is making fun of our balloons" Arundle shouted with anger in her voice. "So much effort and all in vain now, it's a real shame..." added Florinna and Corinia went on "How can people be so stupid and simple minded? How can it be, that they don't realize, what they do to themselves?"

"General Armyless once explained it to me like that" Arundle answered: "Their humaneness declines, while being dependent on their artifacts. The Laptopsians are getting increasingly dependent, or the other way round, less and lesser independent. All their humane abilities stagger and fade, physical and spiritual. Since

long the artifacts took over and run the show, pretending to be servants of their masters, but in fact the masters became prisoners in the hands of their servants.”

“But what’s going on down there right now, doesn’t seem to fit into such pattern, I’d say.” The bow snarled. Arundle nodded thoughtfully. We don’t understand, what’s going on down there. The whole atmosphere is quite different, somehow loaded, I don’t know, I feel something horrible creeping up, something we don’t understand, that’s for sure...”

“...And probably hasn’t got anything to do with our sorrows and worries”, Billy-Joe interrupted.

“What about such resoluteness all of a sudden, you should have known Prince Watchalot some years ago” Arundle added.

“Perhaps you didn’t know Laptopia, as it really is” Florinna suggested. “The dogs were new, that’s for sure”, Corinia assisted her sister. “...kind of strange, how they got created; a very strange and awful mix of all kinds of technical devices to a body of flesh and blood - poor creatures, that’s what they are; the way they are fitted together must hurt, I can’t imagine anything else...”

A closer look at the hound dogs proved them quite different from each other. Their reconstructed bodies belonged to individuals of all races and colours, and the mighty wings functioned like the wings of giant bats, consisting of a strange fabric. “I wonder how these wings became connected with the muscular system as a whole...”

“Some of them are overall covered by fur and look therefore quite complete and doglike, except for the wings, as the bionic connections and mechatronic devices are covered and hidden. Others are different. My dog’s a sickly poor creature hardly able to pull itself up into the air.” Pooty nodded, while they halted for a break again.

They circled the palace three times, without success. General Armyless and his troops seemed as if the earth had swallowed them.

“Someone is out there who masters the game better than I do”, the magic bow snarled. How could such a mass of people disappear without a sign? Someone fiddled around with a time loop and managed to keep them out of sight.

So the patrol landed finally in a deserted little courtyard, hopefully unnoticed. They left the flying dogs behind and entered the palace. Arundle had once been in the palace, but that was long ago. She remembered the endless passages and corridors. Here and

there, she recalled, or she thought she recalled, but then they rounded a corner and everything looked strange again. Things might have changed in the meantime. She remembered the kind of stairs, but they seemed to be the same everywhere - steep and irregular - the more though she had experienced such stairs while captured by the old Prince's guard not long ago.

Pooty confirmed as he recalled such stairs even better. Climbing up was a problem but descending an even bigger one, and while they had to descend once more, Pooty started complaining and after a while he resisted at all. Until Billy-Joe picked him up and carried him, while Pooty examined Billy-Joes Medicine pouch fixed around his neck and all of a sudden disappeared inside.

Finally, they made the base and their way led them on flat grounds. After a short while, they came to a large crisscross crossing and had the choice between at least six pathways. They felt like in a maze, and couldn't make up their minds, even more so, as they had almost forgotten, what they were looking for. Yes, of course the dungeon, where they hoped to find their comrades. However, were they still down here?

Billy-Joe seemed to be quite certain. Like a sniffing dog, he breezed heavily and hurried then on. The others followed. What else could they do?

While they walked on, the passage grew tighter and led slightly downwards. Billy-Joe's broad shoulders could hardly make it between the narrowing walls. However, the others noticed them as well, as you could hear awes and aches now and then. As not only the sides but also the ceiling came closer, the further they went on. In the dim light of the bow's red eye they couldn't see much, even more so, as they followed Billy-Joe who kept the lead, still sniffing and gaping like a hound dog, as if he was imitating those attackers, they experienced a while ago.

Only Pooty seemed to be all right. His gay voice made his comrades smile, despite the tightness of their passage. It couldn't go on like that forever, they thought, while Billy-Joe asked Pooty to shut up. Their enemies could be close now. Just as Billy-Joe was almost stuck, the passage widened and the raw rock disappeared all of a sudden. The patrol found themselves in a kind of dome. Dim mysterious light was shimmering from the ceiling and the walls. A somehow sacred appeal overwhelmed the marchers, who came to a halt. For no reason, but perhaps the kind of special atmosphere

herein, they didn't even dare to whisper. This was definitely not the entrance to the dungeon, they were looking for.

Right in the middle of the dome there was a basin, filled with blue water. Coloured mosaics shimmered from the ground. Beautiful statues like guardians surrounded it. In the middle of the basin, there was an oval star flashing up occasionally. Such splendour invited the patrollers to take a refreshing bath after the frustrating journey through the underworld of the castle.

Pooty was the first to jump in, the others followed right away. Later on, nobody remembered who the signal gave, and Pooty was certain, that he only followed an advising voice - whose it had been, he couldn't say. Anyway, in no time the whole group paddled around the little pool. Their mission had to wait. While the magic bow, when leaning against one of the statues, uttered his disagreement.

Unwillingly the five of them accepted his reminder and crawled out to put their clothes back on again.

Refreshed and merry they examined the hall, still impressed by the liveliness of the statues. How could they look so natural and alive? While they strolled around, their limbs seemed to stiffen and breathing became difficult as well; and while they still wondered why the figures didn't show faces, they began to realize, how dangerous the water over here could be. Not long ago the Starmaids freed a flock of petrified ponies to transmute them right away to deep down under.

Could these statues be petrified humans? While she tried to get in contact with her mates, Arundle felt the stiffening to get even further and reached her throat. Her words dried in her mouth and faded as if the wind had taken them away. That was it then. How could they dare to bath in such strange liquid? - She thought, while she realized her comrades to stiffen. In no time, they all filled the gaps between the statues and stood now by themselves around the basin, as if they had been there for ages. Only the fresh expressions on their faces showed the difference, as the faces of the other statues were almost gone.

Pooty was caught while he tried to hide under Billy-Joe's armpit. Billy-Joe's mouth stood wide open. He petrified while he wanted to point out on something of great importance.

Was that the end? What could the magic bow do all alone? The whole planet was in turmoil. General Armyless had disappeared with his followers - probably defeated and discouraged. Destructive forces seemed to rule the Laptopsians and

forced them into despair and destruction. Nothing, it seemed, could stop the time-loss. Faster and faster, the time elapsed and disappeared, as if a huge vampire sucked the planet's blood, so to speak, and the Laptopians didn't seem to realize, or if they did, they disappeared.

These five petrified figures could still think and communicate in a way by reading each other's thoughts. So the magic bow suggested the sisters should awake right away, if it was not too late already. Therefore, it was. Without the secret serum out of the secret strong room, the General once brought to Arundle's attention; they'd be lost for good. Therefore, Arundle tried to recall the exact location and the way they took.

Pooty once managed to steal the serum they needed to awaken the petrified ponies and prepare for their flight via the star bridge.

Was the serum still at its place? On the other hand, had the semi-human hordes of the Prince destroyed this last device of humane recovery?

Such were the last thoughts Arundle was able to think, before the doom of stone took over to govern her state of being. 'Artifacts won't need such serum. If they really want to destruct organic life, as it seemed, they weren't interested in such means of recovery.

On the other hand, was there the first law that demanded them to serve their masters. Something terrible must have happened as now it looked, as if this basic rule was none-existent any more. -

"We don't understand, what's really going on in Laptopia, that's it. We haven't found out about the forces that are pulling the trigger and run the show.'

This was Arundle's final thought and she felt sorrier for that, than for being petrified.

7. The Revocation

How did the captured do meanwhile? Dorothea suffered from a nervous breakdown. To stop her screaming, she was put in the same closet as her husband. That had been her intention and she calmed down, more or less. Whenever they became separated, she started all over again; until her husband's final tribunal was due, when she remained quite calm and decisive. Perhaps her nervous

breakdown was nothing but a show to make him care for her and forget his own queries.

They both knew why Scholasticus was endangered most, and what their tormentors expected from him – the public revocation.

Scholasticus had thought over all possible alternatives, and had stored their possible courses like a computer. So he went out not unprepared, at least he thought. However, reality differed to a far greater extent his expectations, he had himself prepared for.

He didn't have the dirty old sack amongst his expectations that was drawn over his head, so that he could hardly breathe, while being pushed forward up and down endless corridors. So he got an idea, what pains he had to stand ahead. He almost lost control while he was humiliated that way; and that was nothing, but the starter. After a while, he lost any control of the elapsing time or the direction he was led. Sweat was running into his eyes and made them burn. He couldn't breathe and felt like suffocating any minute. He stumbled with aching limbs, but was mercilessly pushed, whenever he fell.

Then they finally reached the surface, he realized, as a little air came at him, while daylight was shimmering through the fabric covering his eyes. The noises of the city came to his ears. In the background, he heard desperate cries and gunfire and the rough laughter of the troopers and militiamen.

Only hearing, but not seeing what was going on, made things even worse. However, there was no time for reflections, as he was pushed into some kind of vehicle, and pressed into an uncomfortable seat, that was prepared for to charge those laptops or lapto-cops on the beat. So Arundle had told him, he recalled.

The vehicle accelerated and lost contact with the solid ground. Where were they going? Where was he taken? The glider seemed to speed up again and rushed through the air rather smoothly. That was new. Arundle hadn't told him. Nevertheless, her visits lay years back. Quite likely, progress had changed the mode of transportation by the time. Her captivity took only minutes then, anyway.

While his guards pressed themselves quite comfortably into their seats, he couldn't stand the steel pins any longer being pressed into his back from his own weight. In vain, he tried to change position to alter the pressure.

As the guards left him alone now, he managed to find a hole in the sack over his head to spy out of the window to his right. He

could see some kind of wings attached to the carriage underneath – some kind of hybrid system obviously.

Despite his aching back, he felt better now and realized how hungry he was. His wife came back to his mind and his worries about her renewed. Where might she be now? What did they do to her? Hadn't he better left her right at home, as his first intention had been. They all had underestimated the dangers and perils of the fierce dehumanised planet, earth became. - Her beloved body in the hands of such torturers - he didn't dare to imagine.

Did she know anything of value for these creatures? She wouldn't stand the torture. On the other hand, did he underrate her? While kissing him goodbye some minutes ago, he had felt some kind of unexpected strength wavering over from her to him. While he had been busy, worrying about his own matters, she had changed under pressure and something had come up on to the outside, having been hidden deep down inside her, perhaps so deeply hidden, that she didn't know herself.

The glider was landing helicopter-like. Below he managed to see a huge platform surrounded by tall buildings – a kind of square it was, as the crowd gathered. Obedient servants brought all kinds of sedan chairs along. The healthier Laptopsians sat on the backs of their hippo tops – a hybrid horse like variety of a domestic animal.

Scholasticus just wondered how weak and helpless these people were, without noticing by themselves or being aware of.

The crowd was guided and directed by laptocops and militia-troopers of the semi-human type. They seemed to be quite alike the legal police force under the command of the General. Could it be that they had deserted? Had they switched sides? Who stood for the legal side anyway?

Artifacts weren't able to harm human beings, that was quite clear, but what about those semi-human bionic reconstructed 'time-exchange-account-converters'? Perhaps they were still human enough, to slaughter their own kind.

Right in the middle of the square stood a gallows rounded by a pile of wood. As the sack had been taken away from his head, he had gained back unhindered sight, but what a sight it was!

While being led up the stairs to meet his judges and their knights and aids, the crowd gasped in rage, as he could be seen now from all sides.

His judges formed a row; all dressed in red gowns and feathered berets on their heads. Their appearance claimed

respectfulness but was in fact ridiculous, and reminded him on eager cocks amidst their backyard flock.

That was their idea of the revocation: Public confession under torture and public burning thereafter. If his friends had no idea at hand and worked on a plan of rescue, his life would be done soon and under horrible circumstances.

Had there not been all those lamps and lights and spots or the sedans and bionic creatures amidst the crowd, he would have felt like being victim of a medieval inquisition court, as if he was going to be burnt like those so-called heretics.

Scholasticus Slyboots firmly decided to behave like one of his great shining examples. and, Galileo Galileo's famous last words came to his mind: "Eppur si muove."

While this sentence didn't quite fit his situation, it still sounded great to his own ears, and had it not been such a cruel departure, he'd have liked the idea as such, of departing from this world with his own voice in his ears, just uttering these famous words. As in his case, nobody really doubted the fact of the universal rotation as such, while people still were kept in the bonds of mental simplicity by purpose.

The projection of his upcoming martyr's death moved him to tears. However, he was too far ahead in time. Right now, he was forced up front, and his legs and feet became fixed to the ground, right in front of a bunch of microphones.

From the left and from the right strange figures approached. They wore purple robes of the inquisitors, as they used to in ancient times. Little servant artifacts swarmed about them and lifted their robes before they were caught by the rough wood of the gallows's base. As they came to a halt, more servants approached with armchairs and cushions. More servants came with large umbrellas; they unfolded as soon as the inquisitors settled on their chairs.

The inquiry could start. The questions rolled like thunder over the heads of the crowd. The crowd gave a roar of wrath, while the first question was read:

"Is it true, that you, earthly being, dared to intervene into the course of the dignified world of Laptopia?"

What could Scholasticus answer? If he said the truth, they would see this as an offensive criminal act, and if he denied, they could easily prove, that he was lying. Of course had they intervened in the course of the world, but why did they do it? That was the real question.

He decided to stick to the truth. He had little hope, that he was allowed more than a Yes, or a No. Therefore, he gurgled out some kind of utterance faintly familiar with a Yes.

“We have not understood, earthly being” one inquisitor on the right shouted.

“Louder” another confirmed. Scholasticus didn’t understand his shaky voice himself. Perhaps the microphones were manipulated to make him sound odd and weak.

“The earthly being confirms, he made himself guilty of sorcery and witchcraft, while he tried to manipulate the course of the world of Laptopia, whereby great confusion came over the Laptopian people” another of his inquisitors added on the right.

“Yes, but...” tried the so addressed, when his voice was cut.

“The defendant confirms the crime he committed, with his Yes.” The Great Inquisitor declared.

“Is it correct” another picked up the thread “that you, earthly being, form the head of a conspiracy against his Mighty Majesty, Watchalot, Prince of Laptopia?”

Scholasticus knew, that he was only allowed to say yes again. Though he tried to utter a whole sentence, but in vain. The technicians took good care and after his second ‘wrong’ word, they cut off the energy, and mixed in the fierce roar of the crowd instead. They didn’t even notice, how they once more was manipulated.

“The accused confesses his guilt” the prosecutor summed the enquiry up.

That was too much for Scholasticus. He roared with rage. He jumped up and down like a rubber ball in his ties. He screamed and raged against the panel of courtiers. He managed to get a microphone somehow and gave them names. The technicians were obviously confused, as they didn’t cut him off.

Guards came from the sides and lifted him up, to carry him away, but couldn’t, as he was fixed to the ground by steel ties. The key couldn’t be found and Scholasticus continued addressing to the people, to those amongst them, who still had left a piece of brain in their empty heads.

While they tried to keep his mouth shut, the Laptocops realized that their scissor hands didn’t fit for such a difficult operation, and failed. Others tried to cut the microphone out of his hands, but he had grabbed a wireless one, that had no string to be cut off.

His voice sounded clear and precise over the square. The crowd went silent all of a sudden. As if everybody realized something, extraordinary was going to happen.

and, such were the words, Scholasticus brought forward:

“We want to save your world. Do believe me. Your world is losing time, day by day. Soon it will be too late, and you will run out of time. We tried to stuff the time holes by means of air balloons, but the army is shooting them to pieces. Our plan to evacuate the factories to the moon was sabotaged, so the deadly electronic smog gets thicker day-by-day. We are certain and can prove that the smog is responsible for the time holes in the atmosphere. Our provisions had been taken in favour of you - human beings. We came out of the past, to rescue our future. Be reminded of your humanity. Don't let the artifacts erase you from this planet. You are still humane deep inside. I plead to you from human to human...”

Scholasticus Slyboots' voice clearly sounded over the vast site. The crowd grew stiff. Even the prosecutors and inquisitors stood the mouth open and didn't utter a word. The technicians still didn't know what to do. They were even more confused than ever before.

Slyboots' speech didn't take but a minute or so, but with enormous effect. The crowd swaggered, Scholasticus realized, being well familiar with lectures in front of a student multitude at the big universities.

If he now managed to find the right words, he had them on his side.

“Don't let them steal your lifetime. You have a right to a long and fulfilled human life. Get back your freedom and self-determination. What has come up to our beautiful blue planet? Look at those deserts everywhere. You have the right to claim a beautiful, blossoming world. Go and get it...”

His last words almost faded, while the crowd roared in agreement this time. Cripples and Grannies jumped off the backs of their carriers and out of the cushions of their sedans and danced about:

“We want freedom.

We want long life.

We want green water,

We want blue meadows...”

Semi-human troopers closed in on the crowd, and forced them to give in with electro shockers and high voltage-whips.

The crowd was split, and a platoon marched right up to the gallows to safeguard the frightened officials, still sitting on their easy chairs, flattered by servants of all kind. While the loudmouths were caught and arrested, the crowd dissembled through the gateways, where they were registered and screened. While the prosecutors noticed, who led the troopers, they went pale. It was no one else but Prince Watchalot himself. He steamed in wrath. “Swarm out, get hold of them, all of them, the whole lot. They are all arrested. There the last word hasn’t been spoken; fools, that you are. I’ve never ever experienced such a mess of incompetence...”

And all the judges, prosecutors, inquisitors, technicians, and human aids, complete or in part, who had been responsible for the public revocation, got jammed into a transporters and taken away to the dungeons “for further investigation” – as was mentioned by their guards.

Just as the Prince turned to Scholasticus Slyboots, who stood there quite unattended still in his bonds, from the other side a slim figure climbed up the gallows. Prince Watchalot shrugged in dismay, as the young man stepped in his way. It was nobody else but former Prince Watchalot II, who officially renamed himself to Prince Watchanot, after he learnt; this was the name he had been baptised with, by his godmother Arundle.

The difference between father and son was obvious. Prince Watchanot smiled at Professor Slyboots with an air of excuse. While Prince Watchalot roared with wrath, his semi-human appearance made him look a bit like one of his soldiers had there not been an air of distinctiveness and grandeur that had been added to the bionic prototype his make up was based upon.

While the young Prince was of medium height, Prince Watchalot was almost seven feet tall now, while he once was a dwarf with crippled limbs. That was before the big change.

The young man held his protecting hand over the Professor, who could still not escape because of the ties on his feet. The young Prince’s father was superior with physical strength, no doubt, though he didn’t dare to attack his son. That would have passed on the entirely wrong signal, as he still hoped his son changed sides.

Fearless he stood there, in front of his father and gave him a glance of dismay. Right from the start, the young Prince never took his parent’s side. While they enjoyed their TV-programmes the little boy longed for nature and natural items like flowers or leaves

of grass, and didn't give in until they let him his will. Day by day, he extorted the whole court with such extravagance. At the age of six, he officially changed his name and made it quite clear, that he would never step into the footprints of his father.

Since then, their course led apart. The young Prince Watchanot's rebellion against his father, also affected Princess Soshedoes, though she never let the thread being cut between herself and her son. When she died early enough, the whole court blamed the young man and made him feel guilty, even though there was no point in it. In fact, it was her husband who made her scare, when he began to alter his appearance and character.

Princess Soshedoes' smoothening influence on father and son came to an abrupt halt. Depressive as she had already been for a long time, Princess Soshedoes couldn't stand her husband's behaviour, his fooling around with mistresses and all that sex business that came to his mind, with the new body of his. That was just too much for her.

The happy years lay far behind, where they enjoyed peaceful hours together in front of the TV-set. Both still enjoyed TV, but their taste differed. Princess Soshedoes enjoyed her daily soaps, romances and love stories; while for the Prince there was nothing but sex and crime anymore, and all these operations.

First, he didn't bother her with, but the more he changed, the more he demanded of her. Therefore, the Princess fled to the summer palace on the moon, where the young Prince accompanied her.

After countless operations, Prince Watchalot didn't know himself anymore. He had a slim tall figure, and kept his neck stiff and his head up proud. His weak flesh had been replaced by all kinds of bionic parts. Even his brain had been altered to improve his eyes, he was told, but after the operation, he not even saw better, but felt different altogether.

Somehow, he became greedy and power-mad, tyrannical and cruel. He still enjoyed his TV-programmes, but only such brutal hardcore stuff, nobody else could stand.

While father and son drifted apart, thing worsened in Laptopia. and, the circumstances were not in favour of Prince Watchalot. He feared the revolution and blamed his son to be their head. The more artificial he became, the less human he was. That was his tragedy. He didn't realize any more what really was going on. All he wanted was to stay in power, by any means available, as

long as the power was his or on his side. Had he had a son of his kind, eager for power, greedy to govern, ruthless and mean!

As it became clearer and clearer, that his son collaborated with these fools from the past, things ran out of control. All kinds of rebellious bands marooned through the lands. His own general collaborated with the enemy.

That was the situation like. He and his side had held the final victory almost in hands, and now this disaster. Nevertheless, he knew his forces and he could trust in their unconditional loyalty, - could he?

The crowd was like grass in the wind that waved from one side to the other. That was today's bitter lesson. For the time being it would be best to give in and fraternize with the aims of his son and those earthly beings. His time would come again. First, he didn't give his power away, whether it looked as if he had done so, or not; and that was, what really mattered.

Therefore, he ostentatiously embraced his son, who addressed to the crowd, while they returned as soon as the troopers stopped arresting by the orders of both Princes. The late captured were released and the dungeons opened, so the crowd was told.

The young Prince Watchanot repeated more or less in his own words, what he just had heard, and that was, what the crowd longed to hear.

Meanwhile, the Professor was cut loose and stepped up front to join father and son. His message now became official, as the representatives of the state picked his words up. The guards and troops retreated.

As they had gone, some humans began to turn against their servants. Some of which tore off their own limbs depending on the state of humaneness they had achieved, while the humans cheered and hailed the poor innocent creatures. As most of the so-called humans were themselves almost alike, self-destruction seemed obvious to the more sensible ones, but they were a minority. Pitying the victims was dangerous.

The young Prince Watchanot and Professor Slyboots looked at each other in dismay and in great sorrow. 'Agents Provocateurs' heated up the tense atmosphere. The mob ran out of control. If only the general had been here. The general's experience and strategic genius would find the right answer.

The troublemakers overdid, Prince Watchalot realized, probably too late. He himself had to fear for his life now. He tried to hide behind the uneven pair next to him.

As if he had heard the outcry of desperation, General Armyless appeared with his forces – selected all-human youngsters just recruited from apart and eager to prove their worthiness.

They arranged a corridor for the fire brigade to get to the fire underneath the gallows, some hotheads had enlightened already. Thick black smoke made those on top cough, but faded soon enough away.

The key finally appeared to open the locks around the earthly being's legs, but turned out to be of no vital value anymore as he had been cut loose. Anyway, he got rid of the steeled stuff.

It was the General himself who managed to unlock the cuffs by means of a special picklock device, a present from the past that turned out to be of great help.

While doctors and nurses swarmed about, and cared for the prominent victims of such senseless outbreak of violence, the flames were extinguished, and the crowd went silent and thoughtful as far as they were still able to. In fact, nobody had intended to harm his or her leaders, no natives anyway. Who were those troublemakers, who continuously put oil into the flames of terror? For the moment, they were forced to retreat.

While the young Prince noticed the likeness of the Professor and the General, they met for the first time. "You're supposed to be some kind of six folds great-grandson of mine" Scholasticus uttered with satisfaction in his voice, as he was quite attracted by his future image. Probably a little too much alike his brother Amadeus, but otherwise, almost the same, as if he looked into a mirror.

While the service staff disappeared and the crowd dissembled, General Armyless was all too happy to lead his guests back to the palace nearby, as they noticed. While they still wondered how this could be, some passer-bys thru tomatoes and rotten vegetables as well as eggs against the governing head of the state. While the general's private eyes swarmed out to capture one of them to find out whether they were still the troublemakers or just annoyed citizens, the party hid in a doorway close to the palace. Surrounded by the General's special guard of selected youngsters, they finally managed to enter the palace more or less unharmed.

As soon as they calmed down, Scholasticus asked for the other members of the earth patrol, most of all for his dear wife. The General smiled and confirmed that Dorothea was all right. "Still a bit shaky but so far unharmed," he said. "It was all my pleasure to get acquainted with the charming young lady, I'm so closely

connected with” he went on, still smiling somehow irritatingly. “While the circumstances were even more than unpleasant,” he added thoughtfully.

“We have won just a battle, but by no means all the war, I’m afraid. Anyway, there is no reason to stick the heads into the sand or stray ashes on our heads, just the opposite.” The General now spoke up after Prince Watchalot retired into his private chambers, shortly before the captured were said to arrive.

The General knew all too well, how weak his position was. He wasn’t sure, how far he could trust his own troops, but that seemed to be the problem of the opposing leaders as well.

There was time now to report about what was going on since the outbreak of the riots. Nevertheless, it was little enough the young Prince and the General knew to report. Nobody knew where the troublemakers came from, who mingled and mixed up the crowd, whenever they saw a chance.

Rumours spread out of nowhere. People started talking about the old values and the glorious tradition.

“Whatever the earthly beings intend, it is bound to fail” so the tale read. “Our hail lays in the advanced technology only our brave artifacts guarantee. We’ve got to keep our standard of living on a high scale. If we step back, just a iota, we’ll soon be done.”

Yes, the agitators knew their dirty business. They cheated and lied whenever they opened their mouths, only a few Laptopians resisted by reasoning.

Today’s victory seemed astonishing enough and surprised the ruling class all the more though.

The General offered to his latter descendent to have the captured picked up right from where they’d been taken.

So it was done. After a short ride by glider, Professor Slyboots was able to embrace his beloved spouse, as well as his brother, as they came out of the doom of the dungeons.

What about the rest of the patrol-mission, those petrified statues round that subsoil pool? Well, the magic bow managed to find the serum without any help. He even got Pooty vaccinated, and Pooty after a short recovery gave the serum on to the other four.

As soon as they felt a little better and overcame the stiffness of their limbs, the magic bow suggested not wasting more time than

they had lost already. While he had been away, he had contacted the magical stone, and learnt of Walter's petrification as well.

Walter had been separated from the captured, for being an animal. While the humans were put into prison, his lot had even been worse. He was put into the open and got as well petrified after a heavy rain shower. He still stood somewhere nearby, his comrades suggested, but weren't sure where.

Meanwhile Billy-Joe and Pooty had shown up in the castle, to check, what was going on. By means of the magic bow, Billy-Joe managed to locate Walter in no time.

The Prince allowed Pooty to fetch a bottle of de-petrifying serum, for his beloved Walter, as he seemed to know the way to the secret lockers. He was back in a few minutes as the bow accompanied him, and Prince Watchanot himself rubbed Walters back to prepare for the injection.

It took Walter just seconds to recover. While he did, the guests from the earlier earth wondered for a moment, whether to leave right away. However, Dorothea and Walter resisted. "We've got to wait for Arundle and the other Star-maids", they said, and all the others agreed, even more the Prince; - as he had a very special kind of relation with the Star-maids.

"They're right up above" Pooty explained and Billy-Joe asked the magic bow, whether he'd be willing to fetch them as well. Since there was no danger any more around that place, he agreed at last and in no time Arundle embraced the rescued and so did her mates. Happy, as they were, they didn't care the queries, of whether or not to leave for good right away.

As they all spoke at the same time, nobody was able to understand a word. All had so much to tell and wanted to know at the same time, the other's tales.

Scholasticus was all in favour of remaining, as he wasn't happy at all, with what they had found out so far. Who were those troublemakers and agitators? Where did they come from? How could it happen, that the first law of artificial life seemed to be invalidated?

While the semi-human hybrids explained the situation to a certain extend, the fact remained, that wholly artifact troopers filled the ranks of the regular army that had attacked the crowd some hours ago, without any signs of hesitation.

Who, but the artifacts, were vitally interested in the loss of time? Where did the time go? Did it leave this hemisphere at all? -

Who took advantage of the situation, if not the artifacts? Who didn't care about time and organic life?

Scholasticus raised these questions in his mind. He'd be delighted, if he'd been able to share them with the others, even more with the General and the young Prince.

As it now looked, they all were the losers. Each and every organic form of life was endangered and suffered from the loss of time as well as from the effects of the electronic smog. Without protection, in the uncovered plain open, organic life of the more advanced type was bound to petrify. There was that serum and it was still available, but for how long and who could get hold of it?

Was the serum the price for the loss in time? Many questions and no answers - without sound knowledge it was almost impossible to influence or direct the course of the tumbling planet.

8. The Secret of the Subsoil Trails

Amadeus was feeling awfully forlorn. He was homesick already, and was desperately longing for his family. He missed his beloved spouse. He wasn't used to be alone in distress at all. He felt unable to decide for himself and on his own. He was just afraid, and didn't understand his brother, who seemed more or less untouched from what had happened to them. All that danger and peril, they had just overcome. However, he didn't want to be the only one, who wished to depart right away. So he didn't even mention it, and stayed, that is - had to stay, because neither the magical stone, nor the magic bow offered any other choice. They could have said, for example, 'those who can't stand the pressure any more should utter quite frankly their desire to leave this unpleasant scenery right away'; but they didn't.

Sure enough, the young Prince and the General, and all the poor human beings needed their help. Nevertheless, as he didn't know, what was really going on, he couldn't see, what he could do, and therefore he felt useless in a way. This was at least, what he told himself.

Further, more he didn't like the General, or, more precisely, he didn't understand him and his motivation. What was he after? Was it the power to govern or did he really care, as he said, for these desperate people?

While his brother was all in favour of the General, he couldn't get rid of certain uneasiness.

What, if Scholasticus made a big mistake, by hopelessly overestimating that man?

Amadeus intended to have a word with his sister-in-law, as he was well acquainted with the excessive extend of influence she had on Scholasticus. Unfortunately, she seemed to be not scared at all, but enjoyed the excursion again already, having just overcome a tiring trip from tedious tears to the turmoil of terror.

For him it was too late now to join another party. That is to say, while everybody seemed to follow Scholasticus' line, Billy-Joe and the magic bow couldn't overcome their mistrust as well. They managed to convince Arundle, who was quite split up. As the young Prince's godmother, she'd have loved to follow the official line pointing into - a kind of - very special direction.

So they disappeared right away, to find out more and by their own way, what they thought was really going on over here in Laptopia.

While Scholasticus figured out with the General how to proceed in order to overcome the threat of war by gathering manpower and influence, the fearless pair dived into the Laptopian abyss, that was easy enough to find, but hard to stand, as they soon found out.

Finally, after all Amadeus managed to have a more private and personal word with his sister-in-law; he had almost convinced her. Then bad news spoilt everything. and, the immediate departure was gone with the wind and couldn't be thought of at all any more.

While the General all too soon arranged with great effort a worldwide web of spies and counterspies to get hold of any information concerning the whereabouts of the a newly missing members of the patrol-team, Scholasticus quitted, as he just got hold of Walter before disappearing himself.

As animals still weren't allowed in the castle, Walter and Pooty made their choice as well and followed him on the heel, sneaking downwards again.

Arundle with her magic bow and Billy-Joe by then where over the seven hills already – so to speak, that is, they plodded through weirdness and woe, digging for what they thought to be the real facts, instead of the General's false fiction.

Dorothea and Amadeus came to an agreement. She promised to have a serious word with her spouse. Therefore, they didn't let Scholasticus get away with Walter, but threatened to join the party even though their way was leading downwards again. However, as they weren't much better equipped, they didn't feel any better as well. After all the castle turned out to be a good place to stay, and that was what they did.

Walter and Pooty took the lead, as they were the keepers of the magical stone from Uluru. That was very helpful in the maze down here.

The Professor was in his element, and so was Walter. Together they discovered very special formed stones and all kinds of layers or fancy grown stalagmites and stalactites. Both of them were in command of a bright brain and their passion belonged to the sciences.

From the outside, the difference between them couldn't be greater. And Walter, as a kangaroo had the disadvantages on his side, while Scholasticus was buried under a pile of duty and reputation. Nevertheless, all that didn't matter or bother them now. All the more as Professor Slyboots suffered under the burden and envied Walter for his academic freedom. He hadn't to care about the commitments a university demanded. He could search at his heart's desire, where and when and what so ever.

Right now they had come to most interesting sediment that had been sunken only years ago - What ever the reason had been. Some water bulb could have caused it. Some indices pointed that way, they agreed.

"It seems to me, we are looking into our own epoch's geological face, that is, in fact, their ass, ha, ha, ha", Scholasticus just exclaimed, while Walter was pressing ahead, because the slot was quite narrow they tried both looking through into the inside.

Walter's huge, intelligent-looking eyes behind strong glasses always seemed to expressing scientific curiosity. Professor Slyboots considered him one of the most interested and able students, he had ever met. Had he known how old Walter was, he'd seen him in a different light. Perhaps he'd even been ashamed, had he also known some of the facts, Walter had experienced in his long life.

He pushed instead, until Walter let him pass, polite as he was. "...Looks indeed like compressed garbage" he then exclaimed. "Look at those clear cut lines; and this is clay, good old water-resistant and impermeable clay. In the seventies of the twentieth century, such cavities were filled with garbage. People didn't even care for an impermeable layer of clay below and above - Quite different from here." He pointed with his finger to a line running above their heads. "That looks like a clay layer brought in from outside - Under the pressure of time and the weight of the buildings above, things became pressed. The outcome you can see right here."

The Professor pointed at a broad band of coloured matter, you could even recognize original items therein.

"We better close the crevice right away again, because of the smell. The gas might even be poisonous" the Professor exclaimed, who felt somehow dizzy already.

They pulled their heads back just in time, as behind their back strange things happened. While they were busy investigating the pit, little creatures hushed about. Green eye pairs gloomed and appeared, then disappeared again.

While Walter and the Professor turned around, dizzy as they were, the spook faded more or less unseen. While the scientists piled rocks and stones into the hole, they crawled about the rocky rough ground in order to find proper material. In the end, they smeared a moist paste of clay over the surface to close it up tight, and marked the spot by a blue cross and a yellow skull of warning. The Professor managed to find some chalk in his pockets, being stuffed with all kinds of useful things.

Just as they turned to leave the site, they all of a sudden were attacked from all sides. In no time, they fell to the ground, and felt their limbs bound, while Walter pushed with his strong legs and made the attackers jump like rubber balls from wall to wall, until he was almost overwhelmed as well. There were just too many. Somehow, he managed to keep up, and to fetch one of the creatures. That ended the combat. The attackers retreated, while Walter tried to get hold of the captured, which went on struggling, while in Walters stretched out hands.

The Professor approached, curious, as he was, as soon as he recovered. He addressed the creature in all the languages he had a more or less fluent command in – and there were quite a few. He had a more or less command, stressing on less, indeed, but the creature didn't react, even though it looked like a human being.

The fur he was covered with turned out to be a kind of suit. Underneath there was a little human being, no doubt, about four to five feet tall. Belly and legs were shimmering white under the cloak.

While Walter put his captive carefully to the ground, Scholasticus continued with his investigation. “Mit Deutsch ist wohl auch nix, was?” He asked. „What about English then. Speak you little English, hey?”

He went on with Greek and Turkish, Japanese, Swedish and several African tongues.

Walter looked quite amazed, if not amused, as the Professor often only had a very faint idea of what he meant a language was.

“How many languages do you speak?” the kangaroo wanted to know by his usual telepathic means.

“Only very few - You should hear Grisella, my sister-in-law” Scholasticus humbly replied. “She knows languages, you’ve not even heard of” he replied. Had he tried French, yet? He did now, but it was all in vain. The creature didn’t react.

Walter followed the Professor’s multi-language-show with great respect, although he realized some smaller or bigger shortcomings there in.

He was only in command of all kinds of beast talk, consisting of telepathy by ninety percent. While he also had studied ancient Australian tongues well and a little English as well.

With those Europeans, he generally communicated via gestures or thoughts, that most of them didn’t realize telepaths or not. While Scholasticus tried hard to find a mode of communication, Walter logged into the brain world of the capture, - not very deep yet, but still - Therefore, he realized that the foxy dwarf pulled the Professor’s leg.

While the Professor finally tried his very limited French, the both of them couldn’t help but fell into a spell of laughter while they heard: “Français ne parlez-vous aussi pas – ou?”

“No, not such French, anyway” the little creature uttered empathetically, after all.

“So the wily lad knew quite well, what I was after.”

Walter nodded and grinned, and so did the little one. The ice seemed broken, and the captured was released, as Walter followed the right track. After all, they had entered the world of the dwarfs down here.

“Let me go on”, Walter asked and Scholasticus hesitated, impatient as he was; but managed to produce a friendly smile on his face, that could hardly be seen in the dim light anyway.

It didn't take long until Walter found out about the cave dwellers. They were the last free humans, who went into the underground some two hundred years ago, while the artifacts began to dominate the surface. As time passed by, they became smaller and smaller. Perhaps due to the living conditions down here, between wastes and desert - Life became very hard and a permanent struggle. Right now, things had changed to the better, for some of them.

“Most of us are small, but we grow very old”, said the little Churinga, as that was the name, they used for themselves.

“Others can't stay. Not since you see those artifacts all about, and you see them everywhere these days...”

His name was Feodor, Walter learned, and Feodor himself was over a hundred years old.

The Churingas were experts in mining, Scholasticus noticed right away. Feodor explained to him, why he and Walter had been attacked. It was mainly because of the poisonous fumes they had released, while opening that crevice in the wall. “We figured you were spies, sent out by the Prince or his General to do us harm.” Feodor explained. After the ice was broken, Feodor turned out to be rather confiding.

“We couldn't trust you, because of the Professor's likeliness with the General.”

“Yes, I do look quite the same. Well in fact it is vice versa, but that's another story...” Scholasticus interrupted.

Carefully Scholasticus tried to improve the General's reputation; but the prejudices settled deep inside. They even risked their new friend's sympathy, they had just achieved. Therefore, they dropped the subject. There was much more of interest to be discovered.

“Look, at that”, Walter exclaimed “A full load of magical stones.” However, they turned out to be worthless imitations. At least the magical stone insisted. “With those not even the great Merlin could practise magic art” the stone declared.

Nevertheless, Scholasticus put some into his pocket. The magical stone's comments didn't convince him.

“Where are we going to, anyway?” he asked, mainly to hide his secrecy. Walter passed his question on to Feodor, who never addressed directly towards Scholasticus, but always looked rather

shy in his direction, when ever he assumed Scholasticus to be inattentive.

“Feodor is leading us to their village. It’s the nicest of all Churinga villages, he told me. And he’s very proud of it...”

“Tell him, I’m respectfully looking forward rather curiously.” Scholasticus uttered who’s just discovered something new and made them stop again. Rather alert he fumbled about a shiny substance. “Looks like melted lava” he exclaimed “As if a stream of lava had passed by. Do you notice or must I mistrust my senses? To me it seems, as if it is becoming warmer.”

Walter denied for himself, he didn’t feel anything. In order to do him a favour, he nodded rather uncertain. “Could well be, on the other hand...”

He didn’t focus on geological reflections of that kind right now. He was far more interested in the Churingas. In the dim light down here, you couldn’t see a thing; but sometimes his ears seemed to spot a secret whisper or the patting of naked feet on rough rocky grounds; all the more while they had to manage a narrow passage.

The Professor’s discovery alarmed their guide. The reason was quite different; no stream of lava had passed by. “Hurry up now”, Feodor exclaimed. “Such traces belong to a terrible creature, called ‘the Guardian of the Cleft’ he declared.

“We’ve got to get up and away from here as soon as possible. We wouldn’t have dared to go subsoil, if we hadn’t been told that ‘the Guardian of the Cleft’ was miles away. That was only three days ago. I don’t understand how he came here so fast...”

A cracking noise of stone made the Churinga to shut up. Now Walter noticed the increasing temperature as well. Then he saw the lightning. The earth was shaking under heavy footsteps, while the glowing fire was blazing through the adits.

The Churingas ran for their lives, and so did Walter and his human comrades. The adit grew narrower and turned slightly up, until they came to a chimney, inside which steep stairs led upstairs.

The climbing was rather hard. They all breezed heavily, but rushed on, as fast as they could, as ‘the Guardian of the Cleft’ rumoured nearby and once in a while sent a heavy spell of fire after them.

Would they manage - or would they all be melted to stone-squash in no time?

9. The Shaman of the Churingas

Arundle noticed the same feeling again. Her limbs turned stiff and her back and neck felt like deep-frozen, while little creatures approached right from nowhere out of the depths of the adits. How did she and her comrade manage to step into such a primitive trap again? They should have known by then, to avoid the liquids down here and jump in no pool again.

In fact, they hadn't moved at all. Her magic bow was leaning at the statue quite the same and hadn't moved for the de-petrifying potion. Billy-Joe stood next to her, with Pooty under his armpit. The whole band was standing about now who had jumped into that shining water pool.

Nevertheless, why had they witnessed Scholasticus' rescue and the liberation of the captives? Whatever the reason was, a doubling on the fate's scale or the like: here they were standing, without doubt. Solid and firm, while their images or whatever made their way and did their thing, that is to say somehow hustled about in the unknown parallel depth of time somewhere.

Anyway, Arundle recalled, that she had returned in that other reality together with Billy-Joe to search for what they considered the truth of what was really going on in Laptopia.

Here they stood stiff, stony, and little figures, coated with fur - approached from behind. As they came nearer carefully, Arundle intended to shout but only a crackly stony scratching came out of her mouth, and sounded as if someone tried to pull a heavy sack of coal over the rough ground of some ancient cellar.

In any case drew her trial to speak the attention of the fury beings towards her. As they noticed that Arundles eyes were still alive, they exhaled sounds of astonishment. Arundle didn't understand their words, but that she needn't, because she could read thoughts.

“Help us”, she thought as intensively as she could. “We’ve just been petrified.”

“You surely were in the basin of petrification, you aren’t allowed to. All Churingas are strongly forbidden to bath in the pool.”

“Yes, we have. We didn’t know of the prohibition. The water was shimmering so invitingly. We couldn’t resist”, Arundle thought more or less clearly in her strange native tongue that twisted her words about. The Churingas nodded anyway. They seemed to understand.

“Well, then we shall de-petrify you” she received as an answer.

Arundle could feel how merry the little beings were. They formed a circle and were concentrating all their emotional power towards her. Arundle felt as if she had pins and needles in her limbs, while the feeling slowly returned into her body.

Their joint strain seemed to exhaust the little lads, as they stretched on the floor, closed their eyes, and seemed to fall asleep right away.

Awake and alert as she was, Arundle could hardly keep her questions to her. First, she wanted to know, whether the friendly helpers could also help her friends right here.

It didn’t look the like. Arundle stretched and spread and made her joints crack, until she was convinced everything was functioning properly again.

Who were those Churingas anyway? Where did they come from? What did they do, down here? They seemed to be dwarves, as the tallest didn’t reach her shoulder. Somehow, they reminded her of Pooty, perhaps because of the fur-suits they wore.

Only a short while elapsed. More Churingas appeared round the pool, perhaps being called by her liberators, so she thought.

Agreement flooded towards her from all sides. She smiled and tried to keep her brain clean. The questions, which had gone through her head, hadn’t been answered. Perhaps she asked too much at the same time.

With her magic bow, she has had the same experience. He only understood clear and singular thoughts. Where was he anyway? When she saw him last, he leaned at a pillar. Well, he couldn’t be far. He’d soon return to her or Billy-Joe.

While she thought of Billy-Joe, she felt an itch. She didn’t know whether she was envious because of the bow, or whether she was confused, because he mixed up her emotions.

She called her back and tightened the lead. Those Churingas shouldn't read her feelings – too late, she heard them giggling. Her saviours seemed to wake up. Perhaps they exercised their telepathic abilities, or something; or they called each other.

While she still struggled for a clear brain, her comrades were circled as well. The Churingas grabbed each other by the hands grumbling a kind of chant, and in no time, her mates - one after the other – awoke. The girls stretched and yawned, Pooty jumped obviously too early to the ground as he screamed with pain, and asked for Walter, who was here, leading the other band of patrollers from earth, as if they had had an appointment down here.

Pooty shouldn't have jumped.

Florinna and Corinia had to hurry. For them it was high time to wake up, as they dwelled in the dreamland. Their petrification they had experienced as a sound deep phase of sleep.

“Not that our parents worry if they can't wake us up”, they meant, and thanked their saviours and said good-bye to Arundle and the others, as the flock of patrollers finally met.

“By the way, your bow is leaning right over there” Corinia shouted as she began to fade. “Don't fall in, while you fetch him...”

They both faded away like candles in the mist. It would take quite a while until they returned. A long day on earth lay ahead of them, that was almost half a week over here in Laptopia, figured Arundle, but the magic bow wasn't quite sure, whether his calculation was correct.

Arundle pressed him tenderly close to her face and felt the cool clear cut of wood, as she hadn't for quite a long time, then kissed his glowing red eye unnoticed by the others.

Billy-Joe stopped in pace and turned aside, as if he had intended something else. He welcomed Walter und Scholasticus instead as they managed to crawl out of the hidden cleft into the open of another dome.

While Arundle felt that strange warm feeling, the Churingas pressed on as the fierce roar came closer now, perhaps only three or four adits away. Arundle's doubts concerning her emotions had gone, if not with the wind, but with the fierce glow of the beast and dragon, known as 'the Guardian of the Cleft'.

Soon the humans felt their aching limbs. The adit they were following now led still upwards. The ceiling was far too narrow, so they had to pull in their heads and bow their necks, while Pooty

made himself comfortable on the back of a Churinga. He conquered their hearts in no time.

Repeatedly the Gentlemen called for a break to comfort their females – this was what they said, as they themselves gasped for air desperately.

However, the Churingas signalled to all of them now to hurry up. This narrow passage was no good place to stay. The exit to their village, they let them know, lay nearby.

The chimney got closer, closer, and very ahead, you could see the shimmering daylight. Irregular stairs led upstairs. While the Churingas, now climbed up like trained monkeys the humans suffered from exhaustion. Billy-Joe got almost stuck because of his broad shoulders.

Arundle followed him on the heel. Pooty cried from above with delight. The scenery on the surface was overwhelming, he exclaimed.

Then it happened. Billy-Joe was stuck, and this time there was no way out. Arundle tried in vain from below and pressed as hard as she could.

They had to find another way out for him. Therefore, they had to go back again. Some of the Churingas passed by, others led them astray.

“And if we cut off that rocky nose that I couldn’t pass? He asked as he settled close to Arundle and the little ones.

They asked to magic bow that came back with an answer after seconds. He’d stretch Billy-Joe in time, he said, until he was long and slim enough.

“Don’t worry, that won’t harm you at all” the bow tried to calm him down, as Billy-Joe by now became quite upset. The roar of the beast was heard nearby.

They tried the slot once more and succeeded at last. Once on the surface Billy-Joe still felt rather stretched, at least four inches he figured, but Arundle said to him, that there was almost no difference. She was not really convincing.

The views outside made him forget his queries. The cleft ended amidst a stony field bordering a blossoming valley, surrounded by a natural barrier. Amidst lay a flock of cute dwellings and formed a little village.

Arundle gasped and grabbed for Billy-Joe’s hand, while she pressed with the other her magic bow. Between green trees and juicy meadows, you could see neat short grown cattle and sheep, while Churingas strolled about up and down the main street. Peace

settled alike the dawn above the scenery, except for the guesthouse, as the landlord had put all furniture up front, while a merry dozen villagers gathered after a day's hard work.

Soon the human patrol from earth, now almost complete, except for the two Star-maids, gathered here as well. Feodor invited and introduced them, as they felt hungry by now. None had yet had a single bite to eat over here at all.

The waitress served dark ale and a platter full of maize cobs and roasted potatoes. They ate and drank on and on and couldn't stop, as they had really starved - Until Walter asked the Professor, whether he'd be able to settle the bill over here, as he had a practical mind.

"Don't worry" said Arundle on the Professor's behalf, and Walter nodded in agreement. "That'll be settled in silver and gold by magic, I daresay."

Quite likely fed up, their curiosity took over. There was so much they wanted to know, While most of their questions couldn't find an answer here. For the Churingas things were, as they were. The dale of theirs was a late discovery and Feodor was hailed for it. He had found the hidden passage one day and led his people there, right from the desert into the Promised Land.

How could there be such an isle of fertility amidst this deserted planet? That was a question the Professor was able to answer. As they thought of him, he stepped out of a barn, followed by Walter, and rubbed the sleep out of their eyes. Pooty hadn't left poor Billy-Joe alone down there in the cleft; saw his master again for the first time. For whatever reason he stayed with Billy-Joe, while Walter accompanied the Professor. Later there had been no time, as 'the Guardian of the Cleft' had been after them.

Like a madman, Pooty rushed through the seated Churingas and overran the poor waitress, who came out of the doorway balancing a tablet full of filled jugs. The falling jugs couldn't stop him. Walter stretched his arms out, while he, at the same time assisted the waitress by the means of the magical stone. Walter put her back on her feet, and managed to have her hold the tablet as she had just done, as if nothing had happened, and pressed Pooty, his little friend, tenderly to his heart. Pooty's whimpering of delight.

The Churingas uttered respect and even admiration for what Walter just had achieved, but didn't get upset or something. – Such magic seemed to be somewhat normal. Arundle also welcomed the Professor. They were together at last and could go on with the

investigation on their own. The discovery of the fertile vale and the little creatures was definitely one step ahead. Things were far more difficult over here than had been brought to their knowledge.

Pooty excused himself for his misbehaviour. The waitress didn't mind, and while they exchanged their experiences, they had luckily overcome; Walter gave Arundle a warning glance not to refer to the Professor's appearance.

Then Walter reported of 'his heroic deed', as the Professor enjoyed to refer to. While on the way up and ahead after Billy-Joe got stuck in that narrow chimney, they were attacked by 'the Guardian of the Cleft'. Thanks to Walter's protective shield that he had at hand at the right time, the dragon's glow could be defeated. No one got hurt and the whole party managed to reach the surface unharmed. While Arundle and Billy-Joe underwent that time stretching procedure, that took some minutes, to help Billy-Joe out of the cleft as well. By then the beast had left in hurry and dismay as its own glow backfired on it by reflection from the shield.

"Without Walter you could meet us down there melted and burnt in stone" concluded the Professor. All went silent as they imagined the catastrophe.

"After all, things straightened out to the good for all of us and for these little lads. Amazing how they managed to free you just by the power of their will. Quite amazing – great, great, great..."

"Perhaps it was more the power of feelings, I'd figure", said Arundle and gave their saviours a warm glance, she couldn't by now distinguish anymore as the site filled while the night sank. A fire was lit. Both sides seemed to be eager to become acquainted with each other.

While Scholasticus reported of the provisions and actions taken by the Laptopian officials, the Churingas stiffened and went silent. An almost hostile air came up. The General was not their friend, nor the troops, he was in command of. Having them check down there in the maze, was the least the Churingas wanted.

However, Arundle had too many questions, too many, to bother and pay attention to such faint feelings.

"How come, Professor, this valley is green and fertile, while all around there is nothing but desert?"

"First of all, we don't know if this is true. Is there nothing but the desert out there? However, I have two equally valid answers to your question, and I'm ready to present them to you, if the audience agrees. But perhaps they know the answers already" - Scholasticus replied and looked around, hoping to see curiosity

shining up in the faces faintly lit by the fire and the stars from above. Deep inside he appreciated the formal mode, Arundle was addressing him in, and he turned to her at best he could. He said: "One of these answers you may know already, and you as well" he waved around to where the little ones were sitting. "Think of deserts and oases. Sure enough have you asked yourself, how such green spots can exist."

"Of course, things are growing where there is a fountain head. Water is the answer, quite clear." Arundle replied.

"Very right, young lady - It's as easy as that. And water have we also seen around here, down there in the abyss. Somehow, our hosts managed to use it for their purposes. And then we also know, what they do down there, and risk their lives." Scholasticus looked around again and so did Walter, who was very ahead when it came to telepathic matters. The Churingas listened very carefully. So Walter nodded and waved the Professor to continue, who was all too glad to do so.

"I still tend to a different explanation" he went on. "It might sound more difficult but would explain why this dale never has been discovered from the air or from the outside in general, as our hosts confirmed." Walter nodded again. None of those so-called Laptops or any of their so-called artifacts had ever set a foot into the free and blessed land of the plenty.

"As you noticed, the valley is surrounded by a chain of steep mountains, which almost reach the low Laptopian sky, where the clouds dwell deep and filter the sunlight like a lens. That almost hermetically closes in the dale. That led to a kind of inner climatic zone, quite different from the climate outside."

"Right", the girl answered, "I once had such a closed-in terrarium that didn't need anything from the outside..."

Scholasticus agreed. "That's it, that's exactly how things work here as well on a larger scale of course. You have all you need inside that makes the circle of life go round."

Some raindrops fell to prove the thesis, but didn't worry the small folks.

"The question is how the sun still manages to get through, or where the comparable source of light is hidden. Without sunlight or an equivalent, there is no life, you all know. Green things won't grow without this energy. So there are but two answers to this problem, either the cloud-layer is permeable, and serves like a prisms, or there is a different source of light and energy inside the dome."

The rain now splashed down. The little ones jumped to their feet. Only some looked for shelter but most of them remained outside, where the light almost faded. A pale early full moon looked once in a while right through and down and her dim light shone over the rain-dancers, as they lifted their arms, bowed and stretched, jumped up or circled – young women, children and the like. While Billy-Joe witnessed the scene from inside the pub, he couldn't resist, but joined the dancers, immediately familiar with the rites and the mode of motion. As if it was one of the dances, he was used to, since he was a child himself.

After some minutes the rain ended and he returned and put the clothes back on, that he had torn off. He looked so happy now and the little folks circled him merrily. No doubt, he was one of them regardless the fact of his height.

Even his native tongue he uttered, more or less accidentally, seemed to make sense to them. Therefore, he tried to converse a little, and while he noticed that his talk had obviously a rather outdated appeal, he never the less made him understood. That was quite something.

Therefore, he tried to remember some of the questions, Arundle had in mind. The answers he got were most surprising and threw a new and wholly different light on the facts, as they had been since then presented to them.

Would he be able to lift the veil over the secrets of the time? Somehow, the dwellers in their promised land seemed not to be harmed by the negative effects of the loss in time or of any petrifying rain. Their plants and beasts were growing undisturbed, so it seemed. How could that be?

It was late and the Churingas left one after the other. Arundle and Scholasticus had gone to bed, as well as Walter and Pooty. Therefore, he looked for a nice spot in the open, as he was used to, and covered with his cloak.

Early next morning the Professor was up and asked him for help, as he figured he'd have received all the answers to their questions. By means of his watch the Professor wanted to find out, whether the vale circled as fast as the rest of the planet, or in other words, whether the time elapsed as fast as elsewhere in here. and, unbelievably, there was a tremendous difference.

First of all the Professor wanted to check, whether the sun was rising in the east, Then, by means of his little compass, Scholasticus tried to figure out the exact position and the proper angle at a certain hour. He repeated the procedure in sequences and

fixed the angle as well as the distance from the horizon – as he knew a relative relation, because of the high rim, he was unable to determine from the inside.

His aim was to fix the loss of time, and here he experienced a fascinating surprise. Global speed of rotation and elapsing time weren't as closely connected, as he had expected. There was a different force involved.

He reconfirmed his assumptions – ‘if the energy equals the mass times acceleration in square, then the square of the acceleration equals the energy divided by the mass. And then the acceleration equals the radix of the energy divided by the mass.’

At that point, he still hadn't laid a hand on the offspring that is the factor the acceleration relates to. As to the law of Einstein, the acceleration leads towards an increasing speed of rotation with tremendous consequences, as far as they could be overlooked at all. But at that time all life on the planet would have become extinct. All, what mattered was to undergo that development.

Scholasticus was now sure: Such and not otherwise, things had to behave. The rotation of the earth, the rotating speed about its axe increased, and if they didn't find the reason for that, the loss in time was unavoidable, and of minor importance.

Tomorrow he'd measure the sun circle. He hoped, his chronometer wouldn't cheat him. Then he knew at least the relation, he had to deal with. The faster the globe rotated, the shorter the time of sunshine became.

Walter and Arundle fetched the Professor out of his deep thoughts. Outside the rays of the ascending sun broke in the prism of the sky dome and a rainbow span over the middle of the village, intense, as the Professor never ever experienced in his life. A stubborn scientist he was, he knew, but tears dropped from his eyes, which had never viewed such beauty.

The strangers were standing in front of the guesthouse. Feodor and some of the other Churingas stood there with them, while they all stared up into the sky, when a fierce voice threatened them. Out of the no-where a scary figure appeared. Dreadlocks to both sides of his head and still two heads taller than the tallest of the Churingas despite the bended head and shoulders, Eyes like glowing charcoal gazed with dismay at the invaders from afar. All kinds of strange items were rattling with each step. “That is our Shaman” Feodor explained, and gave him a devote gaze.

The air seemed to change, where there had been merry easiness, fierce threat swaggered now about the scene, as the Shaman raised his stick in front of the strangers.

He must have been old – very old, much older than the eldest of the Churingas was who now bowed on their knees to show their respect. Only the invaders dared to look him into his eyes, - but not for long, as the hypnotic gaze seemed to burn holes into their pupils.

The magic bow behaved quite different. He had never been upset like that, Arundle noticed. His red eye sparkled like an activated alarm system.

“Strong magic” he snarled – “the strongest, I’ve ever witnessed.”

The ends of the rainbow seemed to become attracted and sucked in by the Shaman, while a gust of the wind all of a sudden closed a curtain in front of the sun, and darkness fell upon the scene. The howling increased, while coming closer. The Churingas whined and whimpered, while crawling for shelter.

The magic bow also made the strangers to step back into the guesthouse. The peace was gone; no waitress appeared to wait the guests.

Billy-Joe tried to get hold of Walter, as he had to discuss something of importance with him. The Shaman of the Churingas brought back long forgotten early memories. Perhaps the kangaroo could help him to sort them out.

Arundle interrogated her magic bow, as she suspected him to know more about that scary magician. However, the bow denied, still quite upset, and referred to privacy, he had a right in. After all, he was just a present and no property.

Arundle noticed of course, that the bow tried to get away with that. “You wouldn’t talk like that with Billy-Joe,” she moaned. The bow turned in. However, the truth –at least what Arundle suggested to be the truth - he still couldn’t tell her. “That would be too much for a young child of Man”, he snarled.

Arundle also noticed that the end of the rainbow disappeared in the inside of that Shaman. Well, perhaps her eyes had cheated her.

If the bow didn’t want to talk to her, she could still try the Professor, all the more so, as Billy-Joe seemed to be out of order, and made her feel uneasy in his presence.

Therefore, she sneaked into the other room, where she expected Scholasticus, but no one answered. She knocked repeatedly – in vain. Nobody was at home.

Therefore, she returned to her own room and reported to the magic bow, which became at once alerted. “I’m certain that we have to do with forces that want to get our Professor out of the way. Someone wants to undergo his experiments and time-checks he is absolving. There is no time to lose; we’ve got to go...”

The bow got on her back and forced her out into the dark - out of the open window. Arundle felt rather strange, but the bow calmed her down, and promised to take good care of her.

“We’ve got to find the Professor, if it is not too late already, and he’s trapped in.”

While Arundle and her magic bow went after the Professor, things turned upside down next-door. Billy-Joe, who’s feeling strange all the time since he awoke from petrification, experienced a kind of epileptic attack, with foam on his lips and shaking limbs and all that. Walter, who still was with him, got hold of him, while Pooty patted his forehead with a wet cloth, and managed to quieten him down and made him fall asleep into a death-like slumber, As his breathing seemed to fade, Walter practiced a rather professional resuscitation, while Pooty tried again with that wet cloth on the forehead.

They succeeded. Billy-Joe came back. He looked around bewildered and when he realized, who was with him, he reported what had happened. He had been in a cave full of chalk drawings on the walls, a well-known cave it was. However, he still didn’t recall where it was located or when he had been there – must have been a long, long time ago. Perhaps the memory was just a dream, and he’d been in the mere dreamtime.

While passing through some rituals to become grown-up the young men, have to go through several levels, and on each level, the realities tend to mix. As Billy-Joe reported as precisely as he could, he had to realize that neither Walter nor Pooty understood what he talked about. They couldn’t help him. The cave he referred to didn’t mean anything to them. Therefore, Billy-Joe had to sort things out by himself.

He had to go back the track of his vision, step by step, no matter how weak he felt under the effects of the epileptic attack, he had experienced. So he cross-legged and straightened his back and

imagined himself back into the cave, right to the beginning at the entrance – that big black hole, and felt a power that hindered him to proceed and provoked him to overcome. He could feel the fear again as he finally managed to step into the unknown. ‘The first steps are the heaviest’ – came to his mind, as he stepped on.

In order to prevent himself, he stretched out his arms, as he couldn’t see a thing. However, after a while, he got used to the dim light from afar and the deep blackness turned into a shady grey, while along the walls shadows appeared, forming into pictures as he stepped on. All kinds of animals seemed to be moving next to him, as he stepped on - messages to followers from those who had come this way, long ago.

Then he stepped in front of a picture and knew that he had arrived, as he recognised the scene. It was almost the same as the one he just had experienced. There was the Shaman again, tall but bent and bowed, with those dreadlocks over the face and shining eyes. A hand stretched out and pointed into the darkening sky that all of a sudden could be seen, down here in that cave. Now Billy-Joe recognized quite clearly that the end of the rainbow disappeared into this stretched out hand. Heavenly energy was sucked into that bony figure, and he felt like experiencing the picture alive again, while the figure straightened, and became stronger and livelier.

While he still wondered, the picture faded. The cave disappeared and he himself returned into the room with Walter and Pooty watching him with great interest as if they had participated in his vision, and while Billy-Joe glanced over to them, they nodded and confirmed – they had seen, what he had seen.

What did Billy-Joe’s vision mean? They asked themselves. It was one of the ancient predictions of the aborigines, they assumed. However, what did it mean? There was but one way to find out. They had to return back home into their own Australia. Right there they had to find that cave again, and someone who understood the paintings and chalk-drawings, Walter suggested, and the others couldn’t do otherwise, but agree.

“We’ve got to show up at home anyway. Otherwise I lose my job and Arundle gets in trouble with her parents” Billy-Joe said. Down there, a whole day had gone by and Arundles parents would already be back from their facultative excursion to that sheep farm.

Pooty alarmed all the others and knocked at each door, but in vain. The Professor wasn’t there. But where was he?

Billy-Joe's vision seemed to be of great importance and shone a new light on their problems, while the Shaman overshadowed the idyllic scenery of the Churinga-dale.

Could the Shaman be as well in touch with the other dark forces somehow connected with that bad Prince Watchalot and his artifacts? Were they inseparably combined with those leaks or time holes?

Could that fierce old man be the secret head of the dark forces? Nowhere else had they experienced such a strong magic. Compared with the Shaman the Prince looked like a helpless orphan despite of all his forces and armour.

Pooty couldn't find Arundle either. Walter discussed the matter with the magical stone, who seemed to know something.

"Arundle and the magic bow are somewhere out there. They want to rescue the Professor, as the magician had trapped him again this time. I'd say that is quite an overloaded and overburdened task for one, as the magic involved is very strong. So we better try and find out, what can be done."

While Walter was still reporting the magical stone drove him down the stairs and out of the house. The others followed without reasoning. Their departure back to their own earth had to be postponed again once more. "Hurry up, quick, quick, that way please, right up to the rocks and into the cleft. We've got to get back to the underworld, as the great magician's calling..."

Billy-Joe stretched voluntarily this time, almost like an earthworm and disappeared right away. Walter had to stretch as well. He grabbed Billy-Joe by his feet. They came to a sudden halt. The magical stone shone and his light was all they had. They hardly noticed the shadows accompanying them on both sides, as the passage allowed it. Bats passed close by and huge spiders span their webs here and there.

Then Billy-Joe thought to see Arundle closely ahead. He pointed at her and Walter agreed. They didn't pay attention then and didn't watch out for the perils of the passage, when 'the Guardian of the Cleft' spit fire over their heads. Lucky enough the passage was wide right there, so they jumped aside without being roasted. Walter reacted immediately and produced some kind of defender. "You've got to fight fire with fire," he uttered. Billy-Joe didn't quite understand until he experienced the way this weapon worked.

Pooty pointed the barrel of that sort of shotgun straight ahead and fired at the same time as the dragon spit its load of flames. The

dragon's head busted under the impact of the double load. - However, a second head appeared and that one was now all the more furious. They managed to hide behind a pile of rocks and fired back right into the heart of the beast. That was it, the beast was done. The dragon collapsed and little clouds puffed out of its nostrils, while the rescue team shyly passed by. Pooty almost felt pity for that creature. Then he thought of Arundle and the Professor and he pulled himself back. Nevertheless, he couldn't resist striking the beast's belly while they passed.

They reached Arundle shortly before petrification. The dragon seemed to have let her pass, as well as the Professor, only to attack them from behind. The Professor had already jumped into the water. 'Better stiff than roasted', he seemed to utter. His statue stood between the others. "Without the potions I dare not awake him", the magical stone exclaimed. "The magic is too strong, what if I make a mistake?"

Arundle's petrified toe was disenchanting right away, and while the magic bow rushed off to fetch that potion from the secret chamber in the castle, she carefully tried to step on her foot.

To the magical stone petrification was a very natural state of existence. "I for my part feel very well that way."

Arundle didn't feel like jokes, as her toe still hurt badly. The bow returned with bad news, he couldn't find the serum anymore. Had it been sipped into a hidden loop of time? Someone manipulated around, thereabout he had himself ascertained. "Strong magic" he snarled "strong magic."

Disenchanting a petrified toe was quite something. While the procedure was in due course, you could hear all kinds of strange noises waving through the dome. Finally, Arundle defeated the aches and her toe began to feel almost as usual.

They didn't have time to lose. If there was help at all, then it could be found in the past. That was why they had to return as soon as possible. They all knew what this meant for the poor Professor. As to the Laptopian timescale that could mean weeks, if not months, all alone locked up in a stony prison. - Unable to move or do anything. At least he was save there and needn't fear the strong magic of the Shaman.

The least they could do was to inform his spouse and twin brother, who stayed still with the General and the young Prince right back in the castle. "If Scholasticus can't leave, I stay here too", Dorothea said. That was a heroic gesture, because she and

her brother-in-law, who was with her, didn't feel well at all, partly because of the food, which was terrible.

Amadeus, who would have been the first to leave, now hesitated and wondered whether he could leave his sister-in-law all alone. However, Arundle confirmed that the Star-maids - who were the young Prince's godmothers - would show up every night. They suggested to bring along a kind of Ariadne's thread, for the safe return, as they were quite convinced to be able to show her the way to the dome, where her petrified husband was standing about. "That might help, anyway" all three agreed.

"Please, Amadeus go, Grisella is waiting and so is Intellectus..." Dorothea pleaded. Arundle promised to give Grisella a call, as soon as she was back down there in the resort. Whether or not she did Grisella a favour, seemed to her rather doubtful - For the time being there was little else to be done, even more though, as they would aim for Australia and not to Germany.

Scholasticus' fate had turned from worst to worse, so to speak. He was at least safe now instead of being threatened by a horrible death in flames.

If they wanted to find out about the Shaman, they had to investigate in the past – to be exact – in Billy-Joe's past, and find that cave he visualized after his first encounter with that Shaman.

What was the kind of power, he was in command of? Friend or foe - that was the question now.

"It is high time to leave" the magic bow suggested, back in the castle, where the whole flock finally gathered. The two magicians – bow and stone - whispered and stuck their heads together (or what was supposed to be their heads) and off the party went.

10. Lost in Space

The return trip into their own world would be overshadowed by Scholasticus' fate, no doubt about that. Would they ever be able to free him? What, if the charm remained and proved to be all too strong for them and their means?

Such were their musings while they prepared for take-off and were putting on their space-shirts. The shirts didn't want to fit any more; they broke while they pressed in. They'd never experienced

similar problems before. Walter's stock of protective gear wasn't endless either.

While calculating the course back home the magical stone and magic bow got lost in a fierce argument, and ended up in their separation, as each party meant to know that the other side would send its load somewhere to the moon or even worse into the open space. Fact was that the mode of calculation became less certain any minute. Nobody knew the acceleration, which the loss in time had taken up. Both of them had to estimate on the base of likeliness. That was the problem.

"Could it be that each group is turning in on their own way?" asked the missing Professor, who was right here all of a sudden - while shaking his head thoughtfully - "One group's heading for Germany and one for Australia?"

What happened? Why was Scholasticus with them and not only the Professor alone, but also his wife as well and his twin brother?

It was Dorothea, who had made up her mind and stayed behind with her petrified husband, because she had something else in mind. As there had been other successful de-petrifications, she couldn't accept, why this shouldn't work with Scholasticus as well. She had a scientifically trained mind by now.

'Science says, something is true, if it can be repeated again and again'. By that or was it by her female charms she convinced the General that the potion had to be found, and while that was done by wondrous connections, down there in the dome a similar procedure went on, as had freed the patrollers group before.

Dorothea's desire was so strong, that the Churingas couldn't resist. "Love is the greatest of all powers in the universe", Scholasticus recited later, while being safe and rescued in his wife's arms.

Right here the little ones were needed once more. They weren't happy with that job and resisted at first, as the Shaman forbade their assistance. Only after the patrollers passed on the firm decision to depart right away and never to bring 'that man' back here, they decided to help once more. Meanwhile the patrollers left for the castle to pick up those, who'd stayed behind.

While a strong 'forget-about-what's-been-going-on-charm' was laid about the earthlings by the Shaman himself, and ascertained the little ones. None of their guests could ever lead anyone to their dale.

The Professor still didn't understand the resentments against the General. Walter tried in vain to explain "As an animal you know what it's like to be chased by superior aggressive beings. Those Laptocops treat them like animals, you know, and the General is in command."

"Yes, and fact is, you look like him" Pooty added.

"We do know that the General has changed, at least we hope" Billy-Joe agreed.

At last the Professor turned in. but his experimental results and the phenomenal aspects of the secret dale where his, even though he'd been unable to find back to the place. He knew it was there and that was of the greatest importance.

Their magicians stilled fiddled around with their courses. By now, they tried once more a joint venture, but failed. They rechecked with the Professor but he waved them off after staring for a while into their sheets.

"Let's get going", suggested the magic bow and left together with Billy-Joe on their own, as the other Star-maids had otherwise departed already.

A second later the heavy load followed. Walter was up front with the stone in hands, and then came the Professor and his wife, followed by Arundle and Amadeus, who had Pooty between them. That is - they formed an even triangle.

In no time, they entered the unknown in between. Glittering garlands followed their pace, and showed off as landmarks of the Milky Way – that's what Scholasticus figured anyway. The magical stone in Walter's hands illuminated. Light floated alongside the edges of that triangle, they were in. Pure energy it was, that kept them together.

They didn't dare to move or lift their helmets, they had put on, just in case, while extra long space shirts covered their bodies, they wore against the enormous cold out there in space.

Everybody seemed somehow turned to the inside and didn't really care for the grandiose scenery passing by. They all expected the worst to happen in the upcoming time loops; they'd have to get through. They couldn't do anything, but their concentration might help the magical stone to get along a little better.

Billy-Joe and the magic bow had disappeared. They were somewhere out there. They could be very close or thousands of miles away.

While the magical stone headed in for the second time loop, the accident occurred, when least expected. Just as the concentration reached its climax, his tender emotions overwhelmed Pooty for Walter. How nice would it be to sit in Walter's belly bag, he thought. He let go the hands of his companions and crawled up alongside the outer edge of that triangle. However, as he grabbed for Scholasticus shirt, he missed the cloth right at the crucial moment, when the loop sucked them into a sharp bent. Pooty lost halt and off he whirled, while the spacecraft headed away on its course.

Walter tried to get him by a tractor ray but failed. Off he went - nothing could be done. Walter had no command over the craft. Had he changed the course, they'd all been lost.

Pooty grew smaller and smaller and finally disappeared. They were deeply shocked. Dorothea sobbed and so did Amadeus, while the Professor's brain worked like a computer. He still wasn't willing to give in and let got the last hope.

Things went out of control anyway, as they got sucked into the orbit of a strange planet and were forced into an emergency landing. Walter and the magical stone operated like madmen. There was no time for grief, said Walter to himself. The stone kept him busy. There was strong magic involved the stone reconsidered, but he was not all that harmless either, and prepared for a power play, and that meant he postponed their eve of destruction by overcoming the spell.

Was that the deed of the Shaman again? Was he still upset and not satisfied with what he'd taken?

Did he want to hinder them getting back to the roots of his power?

However, they still had an Ace in the sleeve. Billy-Joe and the bow surely made their way, and Billy-Joe was the one, who could find out, what was going on. He was the key to the secret of the past. If he found out the entire Shaman's whereabouts, he might be able to alter the course.

Such were the thoughts Arundle had, while she had their death before the eyes. The craft they formed was not built for such operations. This was no shuttle or ferry made of concrete material.

If they survived the landing, what did they expect? Where were they anyway? Was there breathable air? Would they find food? And most important, could they ever leave again?

Had she only the magic bow on her. He'd have known a way home. Walter put up everything, that was available, protecting

them against the tremendous amount of heat such a landing developed, pure energy or sound material – was all the same, when it came to that. The bad news was, the protective devices turned out to be insufficient. The good news was; there was some kind of atmosphere down there.

They had to turn around the globe several times in order to get rid of the enormous speed they still had. Then Walter touched down rather smoothly. For the last meters they used their legs, as there was of course no undercarriage, until they came to a final halt.

All of them seemed to be unharmed. They embraced each other and congratulated Walter, who sat aside quietly with big sad eyes. Pooty was not among them.

However, there was no time for grief. Scholasticus was the first to turn to the real facts. He checked the atmosphere and considered the air quite breathable. “There’s no difference to our own air – more or less...” How could they find out, where they were?

Was this the earth, after all?

“If we aren’t able to continue or flight, I’d suggest to investigate that place” the Professor suggested, as Walter shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. The magical stone couldn’t help right now. “Seems to be kind of mixed up” the Professor nodded with a sorrowful gaze at him.

Therefore, the twin-brother went off after a short briefing. Walter was no typical representative, if it came to an encounter with natives. Arundle had quite some objections but then gave in as all others came to a different conclusion, and stayed behind with Dorothea and Walter.

“Take care” Dorothea exclaimed, while the two brothers took their heels into the hands and soon disappeared behind some trees. Scholasticus was holding his little compass in his hands, while Amadeus went ahead to clear the passage, as far as possible. Up in the air thing looked quite different. Somewhere up north, there was a kind of hamlet, they recalled, not big, but hopefully big enough to find help. First, they had to overcome one hill after the other, while following their course way up north. Scholasticus felt his weight almost double and figured that had to do with the gravitation. However, Amadeus denied and said he’d feel quite normal. Scholasticus should keep an eye on his weight, - do a little more exercises.

The Professor pretended not to have heard what his brother said and fixed his eyes on the compass needle.

Whenever they happened to be alone the twins started teasing each other like pupils, they didn't mean it of course, and today they weren't really in the mood, as they didn't get Pooty out of mind.

After a brisk march, they stood up on a hill and gazed around. Almost half an hour had passed. They decided to return if they didn't find any sign of a human settlement.

Therefore, they went on and came into a valley opening an idyllic site. As they got nearer, they discovered a hidden rivulet with clear fresh water. Was that water as drinkable as the air could be breathed?

"Let's have it a trial" Amadeus suggested and bent down already. "Tastes great, here, try yourself" he exclaimed and scooped a handful to bring it to Scholasticus, who carefully tried himself. Then nodded "We won't die with thirst" he said and turned to leave. They tried another hillside, and then decided to return. At least had they found water? So they went back to fetch the others.

Walter seemed to be the thirstiest, perhaps because of all the tears he had wept. Having drunken they felt hungry. However, food was there not, At least any they could identify as eatable. They strolled on anyway, somehow relaxed and indeed came after a short while to a small town that looked quite inviting; still they decided to be careful.

Walter and the magical stone were leading the party. The stone put up a safety-screen that only was partly safe, as it didn't protect from behind. That had to do with the amount of people, "which makes it hard to manoeuvre anyway" he exclaimed as he noticed the silent obstinacy still brooding about. Whatever had happened, his fault was it not. And he wanted to get that straightened out once and for all.

"We'd have never landed over here."- He pointed out.

"Would Pooty have got lost in any case?" Dorothea wanted to know, and upset the magical stone and Walter as well. "That God alone knows" the kangaroo murmured. "What might he be like" Dorothea sobbed and didn't notice Walters anger. Her tears floated unhindered now as there was no shortcoming on the waterfront neither on her nor on Walter's side, who even had managed to fill an extra bottle down there in that rivulet.

The first houses of that village came in sight. Cautiously they came nearer. Up to now, they hadn't met any of the inhabitants.

However, that could be mere accident. Here as well the night lowered down like in Laptopia. No one doubted anymore, that they were on earth. However, what earth? That fertile green didn't indicate Laptopia. "Most likely we fell into a gap in between" suggested Scholasticus. He was right. They were in the twenty-second century, about seventy years away from their own world. This was what they learned while passing by a filling station. Some guys fuelled their gliders, and the serviceman whom they asked for the time, pointed inside the shop, where they not only saw a clock but a calendar as well. In the red marked square they learnt today's date, it was the twenty-third of July 2069. They had left home by the twenty-second.

One of the rare calendars in the castle way back in Laptopia had also shown the twenty-third but the year had been 2131.

While they looked around in the shop the hunger came back, water was no food after all. The young men took what they wanted without paying, they realized.

"You ain't from right here, ain't you? The serviceman asked and gazed over to Walter. "We belong to the circus on the march. Won't stay, too small a place, that is, isn't it?" Scholasticus explained. The serviceman nodded.

"Put your finger right in here – that's it, don't be shy..." while Dorothea attacked the beauty section. "Unlimited credit..." the man added and grinned. "Go ahead Mister" and he addressed to Amadeus who couldn't make up his mind.

Like Dorothea before, Amadeus felt a kind of prickle-tickle in his finger, but that was it. "It's gonna be charged on your account, quite easily, isn't it? Now there is no arguing any longer as there used to be in former times. Who's willing to be charged, anyway? Time isn't money after all, am I right? Nobody likes it, none of the ordinary people we are. - May be different when your father is a time-director or some other kind of time-manager.

On the other hand, life is so much nicer now, short but hearty, that's what I always say. 'Enjoy the day' as it says 'Carpe diem' – that's Latin, kind of queer language anyway. It's easy to tell, but try it, if you're fixed down here to the gas hose, but I don't complain. I think there is enough free time still left. – Your beast's gotta stay out, understand, no animals allowed in here..."

Walter understood and Arundle stayed with him.

"What, if they check on us and realize that we are not from here?" Dorothea wanted to know.

“I think they have what they wanted. I hope you get along anyway, you’re still young, aren’t you?” Scholasticus whispered and rubbed an itching finger. “Let’s discuss later and do our shopping, and then let’s get away as soon as possible. Walter signalled, the magical stone found a way to somehow get away...”

That’s good news as I presume we won’t find any help, not down here anyway...”

“Such a nice man” Dorothea exclaimed. “Yes, he’s not responsible for the system he stands for,” agreed Amadeus.

“But that doesn’t make it any better...”

“Do you really think they are paying with lifetime instead of money over here? - And how does this work?”

Scholasticus nodded “don’t know either” he answered.

“Somehow it’s gonna work” Dorothea assisted her husband.

“I reckon it’s like blood donation” Arundle interfered. “There are those bloody blood banks all over the place.” Ah, and the difference now is, they charge you time instead of blood” Amadeus agreed.

“Sounds crazy, I know... In case of blood you’ve got something in the bag at last...”

And if there are now bags for time, bags containing time more like bank accounts or so... I mean your money in the bank isn’t right there even though it is there and you can pick it up any time. That could it be perhaps...”

Nobody objected while they settled for a brief lunch and unpacked the neat colourful packages. Soon they realized that taste had obviously changed. They heartily bit into the sandwiches but stopped after the first bite. The bread tasted like sawdust and the sausage like a mix of smashed underwear and cat food. The rare fruits they had found, tasted just like nothing.

“If I’d known, I hadn’t spent a single second of my life”, Arundle, who hadn’t put her finger into the slot machine, anyway, was grumbling. “Nor had we, if we had known. But we couldn’t open the packages to try, could we?” Dorothea replied.

Therefore, they better starved, at least the women. Walter ate one apple after the other. “Kind of fills your belly anyway”, he murmured. If he’d been, alone he’d have tried the grass as well.

The magical stone made him known again by pulsating in Walter’s belly bag. He’d been alert before already, but Arundle made him stop and keep quiet while the young folks were still around.

The magical stone was full of life. Impatient as he was, he presented Walter with one menu after the other. He calculated all kinds of courses and ways to here and there, coordinates back and forth, right back or all the way home, as if this was just peanuts. It seemed, as if their visit to that filling station had cut something loose.

“Well then, we won’t be asked twice, let’s get going” Scholasticus commanded and his brother agreed “Go Johnny go...” They felt quite like the boys, still hiding in their insides. Such a merry turning of their fate was indeed a big surprise. Amadeus never managed to overcome his homesickness.

Pooty came to their minds and calmed them down. Again a triangle was formed. The space cloak expended and the helmets were fastened, while Walter ran through the checklist, a last knob of the imaginary cockpit was pressed, and off they went into the mysterious darkness of space.

Without any more complications, they arrived back home. Walter even managed a stopover in Frankfurt, Germany, that took no longer than ten seconds and in no time; he deposited Arundle in front of the bungalow she was staying. Billy-Joe had arrived a short while before. and, he didn’t come alone!

What had happened? Like a punching ball, a something shot up right into his arms. Billy-Joe recalled. He’d have only to stretch his arms out and open his hands - As easy as that. Lucky enough he did, as he by then didn’t know what he was catching. “Well, yes it was Pooty, who came there alongside, as if this was predicted. Kind of confused and frightened to death he was, believe me.”

“Well to me it was the end. Lost in space, what can you expect?” Pooty answered.

He put his little paws around Walter and Walter was sobbing again, until he was blind of tears and his glasses needed another proper cleansing. They strolled off into the bush and promised to wait for Billy-Joe and Arundle who had both to check the state and mood his master and her parents were in.

11. In the Cave of the Shaman

Billy-Joe turned in last minute. He managed to slip into his porter’s uniform, and then rushed to the reception desk, where the manager stood awaiting him.

Arundle pretended to come back from the beach, by then dark as the night had fallen in. She'd fallen asleep she said, while she rushed into their parents apartment. They were tired after a long tiring day amongst sheep, and sheep, and sheep. They had raised an argument but forgot who started it, again once more about her – what else?

Therefore, her appearance was highly appreciated as she took the referee's part in that sad lifelong bitter match without ending.

She stayed until her father began to snore and figured they were sound asleep then. She heard Billy-Joe whistling nearby. The magic bow snarled impatiently, while Walter and Pooty were seating merrily right together. They'd have to be very careful out there in the outback, as the drunken white hunters manoeuvred about in their rattling vehicles, shooting anything animal like that came before their headlights.

The moon was standing high in the sky, and was shining pale and mysteriously down into the wild bush land that began right behind the settlement. Dark was it not, but Arundle tumbled anyway over roots and twigs, like a hungry earth pig on the beat, as Billy-Joe put it giggling. Therefore, she grabbed for Billy-Joe's arm and then it went better. Billy-Joe must have had cat's eyes.

Occasionally Walter chased ahead with Pooty in his belly bag, and then waited until the two humans caught up. Had he been alone Billy-Joe had picked up that fast trot he was used to and could keep going for hours. He couldn't carry her and for Walter's belly bag, she was too big. So they figured, they would hardly manage, before daybreak, Billy-Joe figured as he intended to start the search right back at home with his old mentor, the medicine man Kaúua Bereróo.

Sure enough, Kaúua Bereróo could help him understand his vision. He might even help to find the cave, he'd been in. Billy-Joe knew, he had once been in there. Repeatedly the image of the magician flashed up inside him, as if he carried a photo right in his soul.

While they rushed on, Arundle felt that she came to the end of the flagstaff, so to speak. All that happened in these condensed hours of fear and hope down there in Laptopia, their horror trip through the naught and now such unusual nightly operation – yes, that was just too much.

Please, leave me behind" she begged. Her head was in turmoil and her legs felt like lead. The late de-petrified toe hurt. She was limping and softly moaning, while Billy-Joe tried to support her as

well as he could. Pooty came by occasionally to look after her, and managed to draw a little smile from her.

‘Enough’s enough’ she thought, when Walter, who took the lead, halted. The village lay right ahead, still in deep slumber, although the bush drums had advertised their coming.

However, Billy-Joe wasn’t sure, whether to postman whom he had phoned, managed to forward the message correctly. It was the only telephone around here anyway. Perhaps he’d passed on everything right, but nobody cared. After all, what was so important to spoil the dreamtime?

Arundle fell asleep right away, while Billy-Joe met his mentor Kaúua Bereróo, who’s been waiting for him. He sat smoking a long pipe and seemed to be dreaming with empty open eyes. However, he answered immediately when Billy-Joe addressed to him. He’d been waiting for him, he said. The bush drums had done its job all right.

Billy-Joe reported, what had happened, and while he did, he noticed, what a crazy tale that was. He didn’t trust his own ears. When he came to the part of that vision of his, at the end in that dome or what ever, Kaúua Bereróo broke into fits of laughter. He’s laughing and laughing until the tears came running over his filthy wrinkled cheeks.

Billy-Joe stopped bewildered. As the time had gone on, he decided to leave right away; he’d have better things to do than being pulled by his leg by a lousy old fool. He’d best wake up Arundle and return to the resort, all the more so, as Walter and Pooty had left right away. They didn’t like those Aborigines either, and didn’t care to get in touch with them. They had their experiences with those humans. “Humans are all the same. and, exceptions prove the rule - had Walter let them know - right away and right from the start of their friendship.

His mentor was still laughing, while Billy-Joe got up. ‘He’s not even able to say good-bye the proper way’ he thought and looked down with dismay at his former teacher. It could be the age, or drugs damaged his brain. However, Kaúua waved him to stay. He tried to keep those fits of laughter under control. “If you knew,” he sighed. “Get your friend and whistle for that sly kangaroo. I’m going to lead you to that cave, right away. It’s not far...”

The night still lay upon the dale, while Kaúua guided them down the valley to the end. Some twigs hid the entrance. Everybody would have passed by without noticing.

He bent the green apart and said "Here you are. This is your cave" - Then began to laugh again.

Billy-Joe looked at Arundle and turned his eyes upside. He'd been ashamed of his teacher, whom he had spoken of with the greatest respect, for such disgusting behaviour.

"No, I don't come with you. The only one, who can help, is you, you alone..." the former mentor said and broke out into another fits of laughter.

"You can take, whom you like. It won't help. Or perhaps it will" he gazed into Arundle's grey eyes. "She seems to have the clear view..." he said and started laughing again.

Kaúua's hearty laughter affected the girl; the old man's twinkling was all that impish. O no, he was not at all senile. His brain still worked better than ever, Arundle thought. She got an idea of what was really going on, and the more she thought about it, the better she liked the idea. Well, they had been far astray his laughter seemed to confirm.

That way it had to be, it couldn't be otherwise. They had to beg for the old Shaman's forgiveness.

However, they still had no proof or evidence. Therefore, she stepped ahead in front of Billy-Joe - brave and curious at once. Walter managed to conjure some torches out of his belly bag, so the magic bow could save his precious eyesight, which Arundle held ready for action in her hands, an unnumbered amount of arrows being available all the time.

Her eyes seemed to flash even in that dim light and her thick hair waved while she stepped on firmly.

"What a girl" came it to Billy-Joe's mind, while he trotted behind Walter and Pooty in the belly bag, as he'd have led the gang. They were in his cave at last.

On the walls, you could see now the first drawings - animals and black little men aiming all kinds of arms at them. Walter spit horror-struck when he saw those drawings and so did Pooty. "Just disgusting" he murmured. "Murderers" Pooty replied, while Billy-Joe overcame that silly fits of laughter that always comes at the wrong time. Still he felt some kind of pride. "That is many thousand year ago", he explained.

"Nevertheless" grumbled Walter - "simply obscene such slaughter. They aren't much further these days, I'm afraid" he went on in a sad air - Billy-Joe's giggling still in his ears.

Arundle came to a crossing and didn't know which way to chose. "Someone else got to take the lead", she shouted and

stepped aside to let Billy-Joe pass by. That she shouldn't have done.

Billy-Joe tried to get hold of her, but too late. All he had in hand was a tuft of her hair, while she's sliding down a steep slot - screaming.

Walter, Pooty and Billy-Joe were standing about like petrified, unable to raise a thought. Arundle's cry faded, while she departed deeper and deeper. Finally, there was silence after all.

Was she still alive? Did she lie there in the abyss, limbs smashed – unconscious? Dark nothingness wavered up from below. Any sound or sign? They strained their ears – in vain. The opening was just wide enough for a small person like Arundle. Neither Billy-Joe nor Walter would fit in.

“What could be done” the boy moaned and looked at the companions. “Hadn't I left her lead, by all means...”

“Don't blame yourself unnecessarily. I think I do have an idea. Come on, let's try, how about that?”

“Do you mean to go down?” Billy-Joe asked full of hope and doubt.

“Well, yes, of course. Who else is there anyway? Walter, could you make me a fine, light, unbreakable rope?”

Walter nodded. He didn't quite get what Pooty was after.

“Well, I go down and see what's going on down there, simple as that.”

In fact, Pooty was the only one to do the job. That offer meant a lot for him, as he was not the bravest, as far as narrow black deep holes were concerned. Besides, he hadn't yet overcome his space adventure, not at all.

Billy-Joe looked meaningful over Pooty's head at Walter. Had they the choice?

“If you could do that”, Walter then said to his little friend “you're going to get the Golden Rescue Order GRO by the AFA , I can ascertain you here and now, and your name...”

What his name became diminished as Pooty screamed with a mix of horror and delight when slowly sliding down the slot.

“What's the AFA then?” - Asked Billy-Joe while already busy to letting Pooty down hand over hand.

“That's an organisation – Animals for Animals – a subdivision of the UNESCO” Walter explained, while Pooty cried “Let go, let go, it's a kind of slide anyway...”

Walter did as he was commanded. For safety, reasons the rope ran over his mighty back, and Billy-Joe safeguarded from the other

side. Just in case. The rope went down – fifty feet, a hundred and fifty feet – three hundred feet...

Walter put his foot on the rope as more and more rope went through.

“Slow down now, slow down a bit – can’t be that far” Billy-Joe uttered as mark twain passed by – that is the 200 yards mark, or used it to be in the old days.

‘What was that? Yes, it is the sign – two short one long – now get going – up again... - regular hand over hand, - a hell of a job.’ There was more weight on the rope than just Pooty.

“I need a break,” Billy-Joe groaned. “Tell you what we do. I take the rope over the shoulder and pull all the way down that corridor. At the end, I let you know and come back to go on the same way, understand?”

The sly kangaroo nodded out of breath and in no time Pooty’s face appeared followed by Arundle – unconscious. “It’s the air down there – you can’t breathe.”

Billy-Joe tried a respiration and after a short while succeeded indeed, as the girl opened her eyes and when she saw who took care of her she smiled and blushed.

Thanks to the magic bow, Arundle had suffered no greater harm, as the bow had functioned as a kind of surfboard.

The magic bow retreated for a temporary repair, while Arundle got back on her feet.

“What a ghastly gruesome hole that was” Pooty prattled; he seemed to be fit like a gym shoe, as goes the saying. “See, what a fancy cap I found down there” he went on. Walter looked, but Pooty had disappeared.

“Hey, what do I look like” he heard Pooty’s voice right from no-where.

“Look, Pooty’s invisible” Walter exclaimed in surprise, when Pooty tore off the cap and appeared. That looks a kind of strange.

“Let me see” Arundle said and jumped up. She felt quite shaky still. Pooty tried his cap back on and disappeared again.

“That is a magic hood,” the bow snarled. “...Belongs to dwarves and trolls.”

“We may once use it well,” Walter said. “Keep it in a safe place, at best right in your own little belly bag, if it fits.”

Would it be wise to continue their search? Was it all that important, that Billy-Joe found out about his past and future?

As there was still enough time left, they decided to go on.

Just in case, they tied them together. Billy-Joe was leading this time and the magic bow - regenerated as he was by now - sent his light shining bright ahead.

Billy-Joe stepped on and on. He seemed very certain, so nobody dared to disturb him. "Visionaries you shouldn't bother" Pooty whispered. Just as Walter, who went last, intended to interrogate the magical stone.

The exterior changed. The corridor opened into something that seemed to be vast.

Arundle could feel the strain Billy-Joe overcame - She knew, they had arrived. Billy-Joe chased along the phosphorescent walls. Stopped, went on and stopped again. The others - still being tied together - had to follow.

At last, he found, what he was looking for. He stopped in front of a man's high stone statue. Walter got the magical stone out, as this was a matter of his concern. The stone added his bluish light to the light of the bow and to the green of the phosphorescent walls, resulting in a strange kind of mixture of almost white light.

Billy-Joe murmured nervously, stepped back and forth, stood still, got closer, and then back again. Finally, he nodded. That was it. With better light, he'd been surer, no doubt.

What did he see? Arundle couldn't see much. Was it, what she expected him to see? A dark figure, most likely a man, bent forward, the head somehow vague, supported by a stick. The mass of a man, perhaps...

"More light" she screamed. Then she remembered her camera. It had a flash. Such sly little thing could even develop the pictures right away. She had hidden it under the arrows in the invisible quiver, and hadn't used it for ages.

She shook out the arrows hastily to the bow's mistrust, but finally got it, deep down below. "First the arrows back" the bow commanded. "You do that" turned Arundle on to Billy-Joe. After all, she did all that for him. "Hurry up, and could somebody cut me loose from that blooming rope?"

Walter took care of the rope, while Billy-Joe collected the arrows back into the quiver.

How many shots were there, and what was the battery still like? She couldn't see anything through the seeker, so she tried her best.

'Now or never' she thought. The flash flashed once and that was it. No more power was left.

As if of pure gold, Arundle was holding the developing copy between her fingers and softly waved it. Here it was far too dark to see the outcome, while the photo went in shape slowly.

Billy-Joe stood as if nailed to the ground in front of the original. In his vision, things had been clearer. Still he was almost certain to be at the right place. However, when he had hoped to find out the truth about that Shaman over there in Laptopia, he became disappointed once more.

That statue, was it related to that Shaman? If so, what did that mean? Why had they been so sure, to find out about the last secrets of that mighty mean magician? Up to now, what had they found but dead stone?

At best, he'd rush out and get some firewood. If he only could see more, and the way wasn't all that long! Didn't find Pooty a magic hood? That was a clear sign; magic was involved, questionable magic as well, if you listened to the magic bow, who should know. What came from gnomes and trolls should be questioned after all.

Whether he could ask Pooty to lend him the hood? It is said you could see better with a magic hood on. Pooty, instead of handing the hood over to Billy-Joe tried that out himself. "You're right, much better" he said. "I think, I see something now! – That can't be, now I understand, that's why they were laughing."

When Billy-Joe put the hood over his bushy hair, he still didn't dig a thing. Well, he saw a little better, but what he saw didn't provoke him to laugh.

Did he overlook something? What did the others see, but he didn't. "More light" he pleaded desperately. "There shall be more light..."

Through the dome went a whisper and red flakes shone up. "You have called us, young master?" a strange voice asked. Billy-Joe and Walter became afraid, as they didn't see anyone, while the statue became alive all of a sudden. It extended into the room and filled the space in its vicinity.

They seemed to stand no longer before the sculpture, but right in it. Around himself, Billy-Joe not only saw Walter, Arundle and Pooty with that magic hood in the hands, as he just dived to the surface. He also discovered Arundles friends, the so-called 'Starmaids of the Advisor'. They seemed to have returned in the dreamtime.

However, not only those Billy-Joe could see – in the background, he noticed an endless number of little figures. The

dome was filled with them and they all turned towards him in respect.

‘Seems to be a vision though’ he said to himself, to quieten him down, as he really was scared now. As if it had mattered if something was real or fictitious – not in his Home World of Inbetween, where there were many realities.

Those respectful little faces in the rear made him uneasy somehow. While Walter gazed at him quite amused. Finally, Walter also understood what Billy-Joe’s teacher knew and Arundle suspected.

Her photo might help. It had to be ready by now. He asked Arundle, and she gave it to him. It was a good photo, as good as Polaroid pictures can be. Clear and sharp – it had but one disadvantage. The head was cut off.

Still, what did the rest remind him of? Somehow, he felt acquainted with this headless statue. He tried hard to remember, harder than ever and felt the headache coming.

“Sorry, I’ve promised” Arundle shook her head in excuse. “Gotta keep that secret - There are things one has to find out by oneself.”

The Star-maids whispered mysteriously. “...Things between heaven and earth...” – “...all in one and one in all...” – faint whispers reached his ear, but still no answer.

Pooty still played around with the magic hood, he now claimed his personal property. Had that anything to do with him?

His fruitless thoughts seemed to chase those little ones away, as they disappeared. Light, that had shone into his eyes diminished. Things went back to normal again in the dim light as before.

Was there anything left to be done or tried? As far as he was concerned, the cave turned out to be a complete failure. Neither about the black magic, nor about the Shaman’s person did he get any sound discernment. And the trip to Laptopia was a failure too. The world out there was as strange and locked up as it had ever been; - after all, it was the future. So what can you expect?

Right now in that cave of his, the figure seemed to show that Shaman, or showed at least similarities. But had Billy-Joe expected to learn about the source of his power (or his connections with the fading time, the leaks in the sky and all that), he got terribly disappointed. They didn’t find the roots of the Shaman’s power, instead they found an old dirty hood – all right, magic as it was, it was no ordinary hood, but still...

The statue didn't show up in clear light, a headless picture was all they had in hands. Billy-Joe couldn't say whether he was the Shaman of the later Churingas, besides, what it mattered, if he was. Did it change anything? The answer was no, a clear and straight forward - No.

Much younger that statue was, well, they were back in time over a hundred years, so that seemed quite natural. A young tall man he was, broad in his shoulders, so that headless photograph proved. Without head, Arundle's photograph was of minor importance.

While the magic hood indicated magic. Had he himself influenced the scene? Was that magic his after all? Billy-Joe insisted that he was no magician at all. His headache grew stronger the more he kept brooding. He was no ponderer by profession.

12. Back to the Roots

Corinia and Florinna accompanied the explorers back to the exit and then to the village. There, Billy-Joe sent a message via that only telephone in the vicinity, saying that he stayed sick with his family in the bush.

The receptionist called back and wanted to know, whether he knew anything about that German girl that had disappeared again. The manager had been quite upset, when Billy-Joe didn't show up this morning. "You know that old racist, don't you" she said, - she was considered as 'none-white' as well, that was why her heart was beating with the aborigines.

Arundle learned that way, that the local Search and Rescue scheme had been activated because of her, with all kinds of helicopters and land rovers manoeuvring all over the territory, and so did the coastguard along the seaside and the coastal area as well.

Arundle had no choice; the magic bow had to be brought to action once more. "This is a genuine emergency," she declared. "How many wishes do I have still free?" she asked her bow. However, he snarled some unidentifiable figure that could as well read thirteen or thirty or thirteen something like thousand or so.

The bow had probably invented a limit in order to keep her on the ground – that is, to certain extend to the ground, anyway. As lift-offs belonged to their joint procedure!

He brought her right back to the beach in front of the hotel. She pretended to have just awoken, while she strolled towards the young men, who stood there gazing way out into the broiling sea. They looked at her, as if she was a ghost or something the like.

The operation was cut and cancelled. Mrs Waldschmitt couldn't make up her mind whether she should be angry or glad. Thus, her shrill voice expressed both at the same time. Her father on the other hand was a great surprise. Never had she seen him so plainly happy as in that moment when he dearly embraced her.

They spent lunch together and Arundle learnt what had happened while she had been away. The boarding school seemed to become a real factor in her future life, her parents made quite clear, and sounded very decisive.

However, she didn't argue this time, but put that thought aside, tired as she was after a long night. Had she spoken about those things, that had happened, while she had been away, she'd have risked being handcuffed or jailed, most likely. Her parents even threatened her to smash that bow of hers to pieces. To tell them the truth didn't make the slightest sense, what so ever.

She retired with some sort of excuse that was meant to spill oil on the waves, but didn't really succeed. She had an appointment with the other Star-maids and was looking forward to share some secrecy with them, while away – this time only in the dreamland.

She had to let them know right away, what the outlook was on several levels. They needed to know more about those things down there in that cave. While she considered this, the Professor came to her mind and of course Dorothea his wife and Amadeus as well. She scribbled a quick note on a piece of parchment-like material and fixed it to an arrow.

'The Churingas including their Shaman are most likely allies in the fight against the hidden dark forces in the background. More details will follow. The excursion into Billy-Joe's cave was a great success. However, he hasn't found out yet. Love, Arundle'

"Via star express, please" she said while she wished the arrow away.

"Will be on the breakfast table yesterday morning" the bow snarled and giggled as he usually did, when he meant to have made a joke.

She then fell asleep, up woke up only minutes later, as she didn't return to the village, where she intended to meet Corinia and Florinna, who were sitting in front of the men-house, talking with Kaúua Bereróo, but met the horrible Mr. Schwertfeger, her teacher, who was after her.

That nightmare scared her so much, that she couldn't fall asleep again. Therefore, she had to ask the magic bow again to take her to the meeting-point, as it was bespoken while they dissembled early that morning.

Kaúua just had explained to the sisters Billy-Joe's where about.

"If he knew" they exclaimed, as Arundle stepped into the circle. She nodded and settled and relaxed. Meeting her friends again calmed her down.

"While waiting till Billy-Joe recovers, we could have a look at Laptopia" Corinia suggested. She hadn't been on that horror-trip lately.

"Our lot is Laptopia," she and her sister shouted. "What are we still doing over here?" Arundle assisted, while the magic bow agreed with excitement. Bravery it was, what he liked.

And as easy and light as a thought is thought they became transferred and found themselves sitting on top of those heavy damp clouds, as were so typical for Laptopia covering up over the capital.

They looked down to the ground, but what they saw, didn't make them happy. Quite the opposite! The poor Laptopians were gathered in hundreds, who had dared to agree with Scholasticus. They had been filmed by video cameras, while they listened and applauded his little speech. Now they were torn out of their houses and gathered in the central stadium, as the dungeons were overfilled already.

In that stadium they had to camp in the open, without food and drink. While the visitors from the past gazed down, they realized that they were unable to help.

"I can't help it, but to me, the General's a kind of trickster, fooling around as soon as we are out of site." Arundle wondered. "Something could have been done to protect those poor dumb things. Why didn't they hide or run away, as would have been likely under such circumstances?"

"After all the young Prince is on our side, I'm sure" Corinia replied. "But is he in command of the forces?" her sister said thoughtfully.

“Well, his influence seemed to be limited. That’s true.”

“But at least he managed to bring forward a phial of that precious liquid you need for de-petrification” The young Prince had indeed come along with the serum, while the Professor got de-petrified already by the combined mental forces of a group of Churingas.

“As we now know the real identity of that old Shaman, we can at least delete him from the list of suspects, can’t we?”

“But if he wasn’t responsible for all those mishaps and boo-boos on your return trip – who else?”

“Could well be, that you have been sent by purpose into the wrong century.”

“...Don’t forget about Pooty. You can’t say he’s gone lost purposely.”

“Can’t you?”

“You mean that was no accident either.”

“That’s what we gotta find out right now.”

Arundle visualized poor Pooty’s gaze while he drifted apart helplessly.

“I don’t know. Up to now, I’d always seen a connection between both occurrences. Hadn’t Pooty gone lost, we’d stayed in our track and hadn’t run out of control, as was the case. Otherwise, we wouldn’t have stranded in the wrong time.

You see, the Professor once explained it like that. Imagine this is the earth as it is today.” Arundle stuck an arrow into a cloudbank. “And this is Laptopia.” She drew a circle around the cloud and stuck a second arrow right from the other side into the bank, so that the arrows pointed head to head towards each other. “Now we push right through here” and she pointed at the two arrowheads. “While the time meanwhile is turning all around the long way of that whole cloud...”

Determinisms govern the universe. We can see today, what happened millions of years ago. We know that, - it’s been proved. All the same, we’ve got to see what’s coming up. What lies behind, also lies ahead.”

Florinna and Corinia waved her off. They were not in the mood for such heavy stuff. “We’ve got better things to do, or do you want us to wake up?”

“Would you seriously deny that there are living beings who can look at the same time in more than one direction? Not all are as limited as the humans” Arundle murmured rather defiant. “Many insects are able to do that.”

“But that isn’t the same as looking into the past and into the future at the same time” Corinia objected, while being partly convinced already.

Arundle accepted that they didn’t come here to discuss the miracles of the universe, but to cure the definite problems of Laptopia. However, she thought, that they had hopelessly manoeuvred around - until now. The real cause remained hidden in the dark.

“We don’t know who’s pulling the wires, can’t you see that? ‘Qui bono’, that is to say, who is winning? Our first answer might be too simple. The artifacts aren’t necessarily winning by the ruin of our world. I still doubt, that the destruction of the human world is their final aim; after all, they need some kind of home base as well.

People don’t spoil their existence. So why should they destroy them? No, it doesn’t make sense to me. Even if it was true, that the factories, where those artifacts are produced, were responsible for the smog that probably led to those time-holes the time was escaping through, this didn’t mean necessarily, that they wanted it that way. After all, their existence is basing on time as well – without time there were no existence, what so ever.

Take that strange scene where we landed by accident. We came right into the beginning of a new system of values. Instead of money, it was then lifetime that governed the economy. That is an entirely different approach. Does it lead astray, as we considered, or is it leading right into the heart of the secret reason, behind all that?”

The sisters couldn’t intimidate Arundle by threatening her with their withdrawal.

“...Tell you what, while we are here. We have to get into the inside. We understand just not enough. We still see things from the outside, that’s why we don’t know what the matter is.”

Arundle was all too right. However, it was a matter of fact that they were sitting on top of that cloud talking and talking. In a couple of hours, they would wake up and nothing was achieved.

They already began to think like the grown-ups, they realized, who always hurried, and made others to hurry the like, without noticing, why things went to pieces that way.

“I’d like to meet the little Prince, now that he is grown-up. He’s quite different, don’t you think so?” Florinna said.

Corinia was interested in the Shaman of the Churingas most. Getting there was no problem in the dreamtime. That had nothing to do with the forget-about-charm.

“And I think, I’ll see the General, and find out which side he is on.”

Splitting up over here was always a risk, they knew, but that way they could tackle three challenges at once, and their time tended to become precious as well.

The sisters were gone anyway. Arundle tried to transmit her worries via telepathy, but didn’t get an answer. It was perhaps the distance.

13. New Danger

Arundle made up her mind and followed Florinna, because she had no idea were to look for the General. He might as well be with the young Prince in the castle.

At the same time, Corinia made it. She was safe, as she moved in the dreamtime. Therefore, her approach was hard to be noticed and normally couldn’t be attacked, if not affected by a special charm. She didn’t need crawling subsoil, but was right there in the village.

Arundle couldn’t find Florinna, or the Prince, as she didn’t travel in the dreamtime. That clearly was a disadvantage, she realized. Therefore, she entered the castle unprotected so far. Now she’d needed the magic hood Pooty found in the abyss.

Well, her magic bow safeguarded her and affirmed his presence by pressing her back.

He read her thoughts. “Invisibility belongs to the basics of witchcraft and sorcery. You don’t need a filthy old hood for that” he snarled.

“Is that so? Well then, would you mind, if I became invisible right now?”

“Here you are” the bow answered. “Now you are invisible but not inaudible. So take care and shut up, if I may say so...”

They kept silence at the right time, as they passed a pair of guardians, who strolled about everywhere it seemed. The Princely family seemed to be scared of assassins, from what side ever. The

liberation front seemed to be still active and alive, and so was the state-department of defence with the regular troops.

First she had to find Florinna. If she found her, she'd also found the Prince and even the General, hopefully, if things were, as she expected them to be.

Searching was hard for the magic bow, while under the cloak of invisibility. They had to follow the corridors and passages and couldn't slip right through the walls. X-raying was also difficult, that is in fact impossible.

"He is not here," snarled the bow after a strenuous stroll under the cloak.

"What now?"

"Well, let's try at the Churingas... the fast way please" Arundle asked. "At least we'll meet Corinia. I wouldn't know where to look for the Prince and Florinna anyway," she thought extra strong for the bow to have him read her thoughts. They were still hiding under the cloak of invisibility, although they hadn't met any guardians lately.

The magic bow led her down again, the hard way. That forget-about-charm seemed not to affect him and Arundle recalled as well at least that dome, where they still saw these statues standing about.

Could they be of help? She asked, but the bow denied. He'd be unable without the de-petrification-potion or the spiritual power of the dwarves. Arundle should have known already, but perhaps that was now the effect of the forget-about-charm: She'd just forgotten. Therefore, Arundle decided to free those poor creatures as soon as possible. You don't feel much, she recalled, practically nothing, to be precise, it was, as if you fell into a deep sleep, dreamless and deathlike, very strange anyway.

The beast down here, she had as well forgotten about, and the bow didn't remind her, as it seemed to be far away or still not in the mood, because of the heavy injuries obtained during the last big battle.

They found and managed the slot to the hidden exit. While Arundle climbed up, the dragon made itself recognized. "You better be prepared" the bow snarled and tossed the quiver in position, while he jumped right into her hand. Just at the right time. 'The Guardian of the Cleft' had been waiting round the corner, but couldn't keep its deadly glow with it long enough. As soon as Arundle saw the mouth opening, she shot and hit right into it. The poor beast retreated, and Arundle hurried up as fast as she could.

The daylight was still out of sight. Now in that steep staircase, another attack would be deadly.

“What about a protective screen or something. We become roasted if the beast comes back.”

“T’was about time, dear,” the bow said. “By now you should know how to deal with me. Without wishful thinking nothing goes.” He began to sing:

“Take your heels into the hands
Get up to the promised lands
Little girlie hurry up!”

The bow was singing. Arundle was so perplexed, that she forgot to crawl on. He’d never ever sung in her life.

However, it seemed to work, as the heat from below didn’t grow mortal, while the beast roared after them in vain.

Arundle could see the daylight now ahead. She climbed on as fast as she could, while the bow kept singing his song all over repeatedly, and that’s what she did. She put her heels in the hands and climbed as fast as she never had climbed any ladder or stairs. Some last desperate steps and there she was, and with her magic bow, who proved once more how worthy and miraculous he indeed was.

The glow shot up high in the air. That beast roared and could be heard all over the peaceful dale like a volcano’s eruption.

“That was definitely not the fast way” she complaint as she crawled out into the open.

“No, right you are... wanted to check my memories, that charm you know, well didn’t really affect us after all, did it?”

Arundle checked her shoes “Won’t do any longer, but otherwise, you are right. “Thanks anyway, for that song and all that... I think, I’ll never forget.”

Those cautious Churingas didn’t rely on the ‘Guardian of the Cleft’ alone but Watchmen strolled about the place on their beat. They overlooked the flank Arundle had appeared, and had of course noticed what was going on. The villagers assembled, while Arundle was captured. In vain, she looked out for Feodor.

The magic bow was hiding behind Arundles back and she raised her hands, hoping that sign was still common. The Churingas looked quite different now. They were armed with modern firearms and hand grenades, or energy-swords and protective devices, that made them look like hero turtles, as they wore them on the back for the time being.

Some of the comrades recognized her after all, so she was released and guided down to the village, where she met not only Florinna, but Corinia as well, and young Prince Watchanot chatting with the old Shaman. Not only the villagers had changed, but also so had the old Shaman. His eyes still had that sharp glance but less fierce now. He seemed to be a real wag, while he looked right into her eyes, but still not addressing towards her.

Was it wishful thinking, as she thought she knew now, who he really was, or had he really changed? Perhaps he changed, because he also understood now, what was going on? He might in the meantime have become aware of the role he'd have to play in that open-end-drama, where everybody has to play his or her role. But he was one of the chosen few, who knew their part, way ahead.

Something happened to the people over here. Was it an encounter, a revelation, some kind of brainwashing? Arundle decided to remain careful and to withhold herself from any kind of approach. Should that Shaman do otherwise, she could somehow let him know, that she knew about his identity.

Florinna adored her Prince in an embarrassing way; even more, because she had been one of his godmothers and a kind of aunt, though. While he grew up unnaturally fast, he was in due course to overtake.

A crazy world that was! Corinia made signs to stop her and to calm down, while the Prince seemed to enjoy the situation and was turning in on her offer. He seemed to have forgotten about her role as his nurse only months ago, that is to say years in terms of Laptopia, where the time elapsed four times as fast.

They conversed intensely about the changing of fashion and its mode of returning in circles. All too seldom, something new happened.

“True beauty can't be forced or hindered” the Prince said with a winning smile. Florinna smiled back.

Arundle thought it high time to interfere and asked whether they had talked about ‘the problem’.

The Prince blushed and turned in on her air. “Well, I'm here to support the Churingas, as they joined our forces. So they have access to our material now and are well equipped, as you can see – Laser rifles, guns and swords, as well as shields of the best material ever. Every man who's passed the initiation is going to be trained

in the use of chasers of the latest kind. Those are self-freeloaders, developed for the police forces. You can see, we trust in our new allies. Those managers down there in the factories wouldn't believe their eyes, if they knew where their products have gone."

Prince Watchanot then reported what happened after the tribunal. First, he had been lured in with all kinds of verbal concessions. However, the more reputation his father won back, the harsher the tone became, until one day he was forbidden to enter the senate.

That was it then. He had lost his seat in the crown council. That was the final sign for him to fly out here into the forbidden zone. While the General kept on for some time to undermine the rude revenge of the Prince.

Therefore, he managed to find volunteers by the thousands, willing to "give their lives for freedom, justice, and blue meadows", and the like.

"Without my true General Armyless we'd stand right there unarmed and helpless, with the back to the wall, so to speak. He's doing a wonderful job - organizing the opposition, and most important he has access to the depots and the weaponry of the former forces. If we manage to organize the ostracized tribes, we'll make it. No doubt about that. The victory will then be ours."

While speaking such meaningful words, the young Prince turned to the folks around, raised his voice and spread his arms, as if he intended to embrace them all.

"If it must be, then son stand against father and brother against brother. The future of us all is on the brink. No sacrifice can be too grand. I shall go ahead as a wide-shining herald of the plights and duties of us all. My poor misguided old father is the figurehead of our enemies - the so-called artifacts. With disgust and horror, I foresee the moment, when we stand against each other in weapons. However, I shall not hesitate one tiny single second to do my holy duty for the fatherland. As it will be done for the sake of the world, of us all. - Should it come to the last, be it - as it is for our just and righteous cause."

The crowd extended jubilant cries. The Prince waved graciously. The three Star-maids became silent and thoughtful. Things were out of control in a kind of strenuous rather strange manner.

The Churingas hailed and cheered the Prince. He became 'Our Prince' now. Too long, had they suffered, and were now all eager to fight. They had been hiding for generations, subsoil and in the

underground, chased by horrible semi-organic creatures and brutal agents of a pitiless state.

Arundle searched with her eyes for the Shaman, while the Prince spoke. However, she couldn't find out whether he listened at all. He was sitting near the fire that burnt right in the middle of the main cross-road, he was chewing some sort of tobacco or else, deeply turned inside, meditating.

The Churingas had lit a big fire. Some of them prepared for a feast, while the others were singing and dancing already; quite similar to the way they did, when Billy-Joe joined them in the rain.

Was there any connection between the Aborigines and the Churingas? Arundle asked the Prince, what he had actually meant, while mentioning the so-called 'ostracized tribes'.

The young Prince was all too happy to show himself informative: "Laptopia is in fact a kind of fiction. Right from the start my family ruled a very limited world – that is to say the people of power in the background, as a matter of fact. The vast wastelands outside the metropolis were of no interest what so ever. While there still people were dwelling somehow. Nobody cared.

The regime never bothered or cared with these kinds of subhuman beings, as they were regarded at by the metropolitan nobilities."

The Prince sighed thoughtfully while he went on: "Although I can't be blamed personally, I am deeply concerned. Nobody knows how many people there are outside. The rumours say they live in kinds of tribes, similar to the Churingas, and some managed to arrange some sort of worthwhile life. Whereas I'm very surprised, how well the Churingas mastered their fate. I must admit this is my first visit to a tribe.

As far as we know, those tribes fight each other more or less regularly for fertile soil and things like that. If they stood together, they would become a mighty force. That at least is the General's point of view, as he knows those tribes best, having been in charge of the laptocop police forces responsible for controlling the wastelands out there.

All those tribes are the enemies of Laptopia, as they all suffer the same treatment by the metropolis.

The General was busy lately to combine and armour the tribes under his command. It looks very likely, that he's in due course to succeed. All kinds of treaties had to be absolved, arranged and formulated. The proper persons had to be found and the like. It is a hell of a job, believe me. Not all are so kind and open-minded as

the little folks down here, who are, so far the littlest of them all, but bravest when it comes to heart and guts, I daresay.”

Arundle overcame a swimming of the head, while she realized the dimension of the conflict. No less than a World War was threatening before the big clock came to an end in the doom of destruction: the time ran literally out. For the last time in history, the weapons would speak their cruel bloody speech that allowed no misunderstandings. Was that it? Was that, what they had fought for? Was that, what they wanted? Was there really no other way? Was there no way out?

Things had started so harmless. With that funny balloon action for example – more like a child’s birthday party it had actually been, when they in fact celebrated the little Prince’s first birthday.

Before the Great War really broke out, each alternative trace had to be tested, every likely possibility had to be considered and taken into account. Everything had to be done, to slow the process down, and to hinder the war or to avoid the outbreak. The last straw should be grasped for, in order to give peace a chance.

For the three Star-maids war was worst. However it seemed now, that a peaceful solution was very unlikely. The fronts were set and hardened at any day. Both sides came forward with a perfect solution, that wasn’t perfect at all. While the Freedom Fighters cared to hinder creeping doom and final disaster, the Government claimed to stand for progress and continuity, neglecting of course the effects of the loss in time, which they denied at all.

Therefore, the girls decided to go back to their world, as they couldn’t help it: - things were not longer under their control. They awoke from their nightmare, and Arundle, who had had to divert into wishful travelling because of Mr. Schwertfeger, went by ‘bow-craft’, so to speak and came right back in time.

The old Shaman of the Churingas had reached his aim, when he diverted the earthly beings. The one now on the way seemed to have understood, so he let her go unhindered.

14. A peculiar Disease

Well, in fact Arundle was not in time, as she thought first. Her parents didn't let her cheat them anymore, she realized, when she ended her trip back in bed this time.

"Aha, as I thought. - I knew, I was right. That is your daughter, Roland" Mrs Waldschmitt raged with anger and was totally upset.

"We had agreed, you'd care for that sorcery stuff and the like. You take away this bow, right away" Mrs Waldschmitt screamed.

However, when Mr. Waldschmitt tried to grab the magic bow, he jumped out of the window.

Her parents continued uttering all kinds of threats. There was of course that blooming boarding school again. Otherwise, she had learnt not to listen anymore. Most of the stuff they uttered was not to be listening to anyway. The longer they jelled and shouted the more helpless and confused they became.

Both sides knew that the door was closed between them, closed in fact from both sides. Arundle had departed and had left the kinder-land of childhood.

Sad it was, but so it was. Mrs Waldschmitt retreated sobbing and Mr. Waldschmitt rubbed his eyes in dismay. While Arundle's impertinent yawning had led to a final furioso.

Once more, it had been too late to look the facts into the face. Mrs Waldschmitt felt ashamed for her behaviour.

"Roland, you could have stopped me. You know how little it takes me to lose my nerve." Mr. Waldschmitt only shrugged and looked for his paper, back at the breakfast table.

Any word was too much now. If his wife was in that mood, he knew, he could only make mistakes.

"I see, if the paper's come," he murmured heading for the counter. His papers followed him daily as he was a computer specialist and had ordered to have them all sent at him all along the journey.

As soon as she was alone, Arundle fell asleep again. She knew her bow in the right hands. The bow had returned to Billy-Joe, he let her know via thought-hotline.

She had intended to having sent a message to the sisters in Greece, but as the bow had gone and she was asleep, she tried in the dream world, and invited them to a meeting with the Professor in Frankfurt. The threatening civil war in Laptopia was worthwhile discussing.

While she was sleeping, she had a quite different dream. She was in a hall full of people, who were sitting or standing face to face. In the first row, she discovered her father, next to Mr. Schwertfeger. They talked intensely together, and as per the looks they threw towards her, they were talking about her. In vain she tried to eavesdrop on them. When a large ear came at help. She grabbed for it and put it to her own ear. Thus, she managed to understand parts of their conversation. "...As you know, the director is quite upset" she heard Mr. Schwertfeger.

"...You are responsible for the orderly procedure, no failure can be accepted. We can't risk any more mistakesfor the time being... you are responsible, that Arundle under no circumstances understands... **before the time has come...**"

Mr. Waldschmitt listened rather uneasy. His responses incited Mr. Schwertfeger, so she was lucky as he raised his voice.

Then Arundle noticed even Mrs Kurzius, who spoke to her mother, and here they dealt with threats and warnings and things like that. Mrs Kurzius didn't look at all nice and soft, as Arundle got her to know. Quite opposite she looked in an air Arundle had never noticed before.

The way her mother answered was much more aggressive then her father had been.

She yelled: "Your Mr Director can kiss my backside. What have I to do with the twenty-second century, I have enough to handle in the one I'm in, understand?"

Mrs Kurzius grew pale and looked quite deranged and upset, and looked around nervously, to check if anybody was listening.

"We do our best, have tried everything" Arundle's mother went on. "Shall we jail our child? Why make you not sure this sorcery ends? You all pass the Ass card only on, so to speak. You make it easy for you. You cannot load everything on the poor parents..."

Arundle noticed that Mrs. Kurzius grabbed her mother's arm, but Mrs. Waldschmitt shook the hand off. Arundle almost felt pride for her.

Unfortunately, she didn't understand what Mrs. Kurzius whispered in reply. First, her mother wrinkled her forehead, but smoothed as Mrs Kurzius went on, and listened the longer the more attentive, until she produced a kind of nodding after all.

Here Arundle's dream ended as sudden as it started. While she awoke, her heart was beating and she was sweating. She didn't

manage to understand her dream as anything else but the accomplishment of her latter argument with her parents.

What on earth had Mr. Schwertfeger to do with her father, and after all Mrs. Kurzius with her mother?

While Arundle suffered under Mr. Schwertfeger Mrs Kurzius had become a symbol of freedom and understanding. Mrs Kurzius never lost her temper; she knew always the right answer and was there to listen to the sorrows and needs of her pupils. You felt well taken care. Not all the less Arundle understood her role in her dream now.

Did she go too far in her denial of the grown-up world? Mrs. Kurzius hadn't been perfect anyway. Why did she slip into such a negative role in her dream? Was she on the way to become as unjust and self-reliant as her mother?

Something else made her feel even uneasy about her dream. The adults cared most to prevent her from finding out something that was obviously of great importance to them and consequently to her as well, as she should under no circumstances find out what it was.

Why did that director fear she could find out 'before the time'? Who was that director anyway? Neither Mr. Schwertfeger nor Mrs. Kurzius had referred to an existing director of their school; they'd never have looked so reverential.

Arundle decided to talk about her dream during the upcoming meeting; she'd intended to visit in the dream world. However, sleep stayed away from her, the more she was waiting for. Florinna and Corinia were by now there already. She hoped they'd started without her. The sisters knew all the important facts anyway.

When she finally arrived at last, they had a wholly different theme. Dorothea lay in bed sick and Amadeus was shortly before. Scholasticus suffered as well, but didn't want to show. Dorothea's disease had started with her forefinger. Two days after their return from Laptopia, she awoke in the morning with a thick forefinger. Neither fomentations nor cataplasms did any good. The finger kept on aching and got almost black. Their doctor couldn't help. At night, she couldn't sleep. She awoke after four to five hours and had to wait half a day until she fell asleep again. She had been a good sleeper. Ten hours she overslept easily as a rule.

Amadeus experienced the same symptoms, and he couldn't be helped either. Scholasticus' forefinger swell as well, but he slept as usual, as he needed not more than four hours a night.

He said, he'd never sleep more than three to four hours and the swollen finger didn't change the routine. However, he felt uneasy as well.

As soon as Arundle arrived, she was overwhelmed by all kinds of suggestions. They all had their versions available. Amadeus suspected the petrifying water, they had been in contact with in Laptopia, while Grisella pointed out the negative effects of the poisonous air over there. Scholasticus believed he had hurt while fighting the dragon. "Could well be the dragon's poison..." but he knew of course, that his spouse hadn't had any access to that scene, nor had Amadeus. Therefore, they only shook their heads. Nobody found the answer.

Arundle wanted to change the subject. As the civil war seemed unavoidable, and required immediate action. Why were those Laptopians all of a sudden ready to fight, - with all kind of armour and nuclear bombs and all that? Arundle couldn't even mention such facts.

"If my finger keeps on swelling" Dorothea complaint "an amputation might become necessary" - she made a dramatic pause and looked around to see the plain horror in the girl's eyes, as the others knew already, what she was afraid of.

Amadeus was waving his swollen finger and said that he could hardly stand the pain. While Scholasticus still tried to present a manly air. However, you noticed his worries as well.

"Have they all gone mad", the Star-maids whispered. "You just can't talk with them..."

"And if we try to find the cause of the disease? Arundle, you were there all the time, don't you remember an incident the three of them were concerned. Or is your finger swollen as well?" Corinia was asking and grabbed for her hand but couldn't find anything wrong with it.

"Scholasticus was either alone underway or with Walter. He was very fond of the stones down there, though. Dorothea and Amadeus shadowed the General, whom they didn't really trust, while we stood petrified down there at that pool until the Churingas came to free us, as they did with the Professor and Walter before. After that, we stayed with the Churingas and their mysterious Shaman. That was it, I'd say... Well, yes, our fiasco in space. Pooty got lost but was rescued by Billy-Joe and the magic bow while we stranded in the wrong decade... Well, and finally we returned home safe and well, that's about it, isn't it?"

“Watch it, not so fast. The wrong decade interests me” interrupted Florinna. “Perhaps something happened, while you were there, something, only the three of them experienced.”

Arundle shook her head thinking... “Well, we stayed together all the time more or less, except when Amadeus and Scholasticus found out about that village. However, Dorothea stayed behind as I did. Later, after the two scouts returned we went all together to that village and found a filling station. Ah, yes before we drank water out of a clear creek. – We all drank, I’m sure.”

“You drank as well, are you sure?” Corinia insisted.

“Well, yes, we all were thirsty. Scholasticus tried and okayed the water, so we drank, simple as that. Well, I won’t swear I drank. Walter didn’t drink, I think. As an animal of the bush, he is more or less independent. Billy-Joe didn’t drink, as he wasn’t with us. Therefore, I’m the only one left. Did I drink or didn’t I, that is the question now...”

“Suppose you didn’t drink, then we probably found the answer and the cause of the disease. Our three poor patients over there” - she waved at them pitifully - “became infected by the water they drank. That could be the solution then.”

“We should analyse the water, that would bring light into the matter, and we knew what shouldn’t be in there” assisted Florinna to her sister’s thoughts.

“The question is how to get such water. I’m here without the magic bow”, Arundle added. She agreed with her friends’ ideas, as she still couldn’t think of any circumstance only the three of them had experienced.

“But how can we get this water?” Scholasticus asked.

“That’s the problem. Without our magical helpers, we are lost. Dreamtime travel doesn’t help, as you can’t take anything with you.”

Grisella wasn’t all that sure “What, if the water isn’t the culprit? Could there be no other causes? Think twice, before you eventually go wrong.”

“I can’t risk anything anymore, my parents are totally upset already. So I got to play the dear daughter for the rest of our journey, I’m afraid.” Arundle explained.

“There is only Walter,” mentioned Scholasticus. He knew by now how difficult Arundle’s parents were.

“I can send him a note as soon as I get back. The quiver is with the bow and the bow with Billy-Joe – I hope.” Arundle explained.

She was the only one of the three girls left. Her friends were gone. In your dreams, you were not the only master of the show. A moment of boredom and that was it. There is so much to be dreamed of.

They'd solve the problem somehow, they hoped.

Arundle felt alike, being still somehow disappointed, as nobody had cared about that bloody civil war coming up over there.

It hadn't been the water, although the analysis took as long as the acquisition. Scholasticus kept Walter's telephone number amongst his papers. When he finally got it, the phone was either busy or nobody answered. Thereafter the magical stone couldn't find that blooming July in 2069, when the water was first taken. However, Scholasticus insisted. At least the month had to be the right one. Their emergency landing had been on the 23rd of July 2069, they had found out in that filling station.

The stone made it at last, but in vain, as the water was okay. Ordinary average H₂O, including some minerals and good-natured micro organisms, that was all. Scholasticus counterchecked again at home, just to be on the safe side.

Those three forefingers still grew on - in size and colour. Dorothea and Amadeus stayed at home or in bed. They couldn't sleep any more. Grisella was in despair and didn't know what to do.

No one took care of Intellectus after school, while she held lectures at the university.

Scholasticus tried to overcome such malaise by work, but he wasn't himself either. All day long, he was acting somehow dispersed and fickle. This was only caused by his worries about his dear wife, he insisted.

He couldn't stop thinking what the real cause had been. He tortured his brain. There must be something only the three of them experienced. The calendar in the shop of the filling station turned out to be the key to the proper solution. They had been shopping. Instead of paying their bill, the serviceman asked them to put their forefingers into a little box called 'Time-Exchange-Account-Converter' beside the exit – or was it the entrance? He didn't recall that. That was it. They shopped while Walter had to stay outside, as an animal. Arundle stayed with him to make him feel not so bad.

While they did, they'd felt that strange tingling for the first time. That was it, the cause was found. However, did that really matter?

That same night he and Grisella brooded over the answer to the question, what could be done now. Right up to dawn, they puzzled and searched for the answer, why they reacted that way. Their reaction could never be normal, but had surely to do with the fact, that they came from abroad, that they didn't belong into that time.

The serviceman had explained to them how this - 'Time-Exchange-Account-Converter' (TEAC) worked. By registering you became connected with your lifetime-account, and you were charged in seconds and minutes, or even hours instead of the common currency.

Time had become the currency and money was useless. "Things have been straightened and brought back to the roots. Life-time is in fact the only realistic equivalent to everything, you could think of."

Strange that had been, indeed!

"You put your finger into some kind of slot and your lifetime is sucked out."

"Reminds me of a vampire – life-time instead of blood" Grisella resumed thoughtfully.

Their registry exposed them as forgers – that was it. Their swollen fingers were some kind of allergic reaction, or the revenge of system. They had been the wrong people as they had been non-existent, that was the answer – simple as that.

While being there, they didn't think much, but felt hungry and thirsty and of course had they been curious as well, especially Dorothea, who plundered the beauty-shelves. While his own brain had had a break. Scholasticus shook his head and wondered.

What could be done? They had to cancel the booking, in order to balance the system back to normal, and delete their subtraction. Only then, they had a chance to get back their sound fingers and the attempt was cancelled.

"Best would be, if we went back there and initiate the storno function right there in the original 'Time-Exchange-Account-Converter'. It's only three days ago. I mean things like that do happen as well in the future. People don't change that much, I'd say." Scholasticus nodded. This seemed to be an excellent idea, he thought. Grisella was of great help, even though, she hadn't been out there.

They informed the other members of the original patrol team. Walter and Pooty agreed wholeheartedly. “We lend that thing and bring it right here, and then back again. What the hell, do I have that magic hood for?” Pooty exclaimed.

Scholasticus took a little while to make up his mind, then agreed. This procedure would be much more comfortable for Dorothea and Amadeus than to go there again. You never knew whether they were arrested and so forth, because if they were trapped, as he was trapped in Laptopia, things would turn from bad to worse.

With that hood, Pooty should be rather safe. The ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’ was no big affair, so he’d be very able to carry it, to where Walter was waiting, and in no time, they were here. Probably it would even be wise to return the registrar back again afterwards. “Well, it all depends whether it’s got a WLAN connection or just a LAN. In any case he’d better take some tools and familiarize himself with such devices in general.”

Once more, the two true friends headed towards the unknown, - way ahead in the twenty-first century.

15. Operation Forefinger

Had they thought, - a smaller party made things easier for the magical stone they’d have failed. In fact, the stone experienced the greatest troubles straightening the line and keep the course. The deviation was incalculable; he’d transmitted right into Walter’s brain. His registration system had by accident copied all those false data, so he was able to get hold of them right now. If things had worked out the proper way, this data had been deleted, and they’d have most likely gone lost again.

They altered the course to Laptopia, and tried to utilise the turbulences in the second time loop – this time the other way – and managed to get into the orbit. Astronomically spoken that meant a deviation by half of the way to Laptopia. However, the shorter the distances, the greater became the risk of a sound deviation. To steer towards an exact point in time, like the twenty-third of July 2069, was almost impossible.

“Plus or minus 300 hours is the minimum range, I’ve got to be entitled to” the magical stone let them know, when Pooty asked how sharp they would hit the target.

“Then our journey could well be in vain, as I got to get the time-exchange-account-converter shortly after the use by our candidates, Pooty exclaimed. Scholasticus had given him very precise instruction. The ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’ without the fingerprints was as useless as with their fingerprints buried under thousands of others. ‘We need the exact repetition of the case’ had he concluded. Pooty only repeated what he was told. As his job was it to pinch the thing under his magical hood, then take it back to the present time, have the three candidates put their fingers back in and then press the storno function. That should be it, so far. They hadn’t made up their minds, whether it was necessary to return the ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’ back to where it came from or not.

If they failed, which was not very unlikely, there was a second option. Amadeus raised it. His idea was, to go back to the scene and leave before the transaction occurred.

Scholasticus thought that a splendid idea, although he saw a serious problem connected therewith. ‘But that’s gotta be discussed, as soon as this nightmare is over’ he said, and patted his brother’s shoulder benevolently.

‘The ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’ we need in any case. If possible from the twenty-third of July 2069 at noon or shortly before...’

So they went away carried on the wings of all their friends’ best wishes, which might have been the final extra little portion of luck required on a trip into the unknown.

The magical stone managed a landing right at the same spot, close to that rivulet, they’d drunk of. Everything looked the same, but that didn’t mean much. So, they headed for that village, while Walter avoided the open. Not far from the place of action, they separated and Pooty put the magical hood on. They didn’t know yet the date or time, though it looked like noon anyway.

“Have a look at the calendar before you start cutting the wires or pull any plug. And cut them one by one, if necessary.” Walter admonished him like a father, he’d best gone with him, but that wasn’t possible.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be back in thirty minutes. Let’s hope that thing isn’t too heavy. – Good Lord is that hood hot, I die of that heat.”

Pooty's moaning faded while he withdrew. Hopefully he went silent and didn't make any noise.' His little friend wasn't all that careless, he went on thinking, while he couldn't get rid of his anxiety.

What had he given, if he had been on the way himself instead. Unfortunately, he was too big to fit under the magical hood. Besides, he'd have hardly been able to move in that cramped shop. Being invisible didn't mean you needed no space. With his tail, he'd easily have cleared the shelves by accident.

Pooty approached the village. He was sweating like mad and the hood slid him over the eyes. It was too late now to roll up and fix the rim, besides he didn't know if you had seen the pin or the like.

He found the filling station. "Biomethane" it said on the board. The guys in their gliders were about. The attendant was standing in front of his shop.

What was that? Along the street a strange flock of miserable creatures appeared. Pooty suppressed a giggle. Here they came: Up front Scholasticus, followed by Dorothea, supported by Amadeus, then Walter with Arundle. He couldn't see himself, as he was lost in space then.

How sad Walter looked! Pooty's eyes went moist with empathy. Had been kind of strange feeling, tumbling through space all alone...

Right here everything worked fine. Pooty waited until the three humans put their fingers into that slot machine. He grabbed for that little pair of nippers in his tool bag. He would need it right away, but in vain, there were no tongs. Could he do without?

He had, but one chance, or perhaps two. However, the second alternative was dangerous.

He ran out of time. Dorothea just put her finger in.

"Ouch, what a scurry," she uttered. Amadeus and Scholasticus followed soon after, the attendant asked them very politely but rather sound to waste no more time.

It was too late to run back for the nippers, but as a possum, you had sharp teeth. He uncovered the first wire then cut it with a mighty bite. Then he took the second. The plastic tasted horrible. He took great care not to eventually shortcut the circuit. Again, things turned out to be fine.

While he just wanted to grab the time-account-exchange-converter, the attendant came in. Luckily, he spoke with Scholasticus and Dorothea. They just explained to him that they belonged to that itinerant circus down there at the brook.

As they turned for the door, Pooty saw he chance and slipped away together with them through the open door, the heavy TEAC

[‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’] under the arm, and rushed as fast as he could to the hiding place.

“I’ve got the damned thing” - he gasped from afar. “Well then, let’s go” Walter shouted and off they went, and fast as a thought.

Things went almost too easy, beside the missing tongs. While still in flight, Pooty reported how it went and Walter hummed with agreement. “That’s kind of talented improvisation, you came about”, while Pooty mentioned the missing tongs.

However, there was no time to tell the tale, as they landed right in front of the house’, where the Slyboots’ lived. They met the whole family and the other members of the meeting as they had just left them. “That was fast, wasn’t it” Dorothea said with surprise. Scholasticus looked at her enchanted. How nice it was, that she enjoyed the little things in every day life. He felt drawn towards her, but suppressed the notion of going over to her and taking her in his arms.

Pooty came upstairs still the heavy ‘TAEC’ under his arm. He didn’t let Walter help him, as he wanted to hand the prey over by himself.

“Off we go into the laboratory”, Scholasticus exclaimed and hastily grabbed for the ‘Time-Account-Exchange-Converter’. “The two of you do come best along right away. We connect the thing with our central calculator and then, so I hope, we find the reverse code. That’s our only chance” - (he lifted his thick fore-finger) - “to get rid of that. - Well we could have cut it off, of course” he added - “Let’s hope that won’t be necessary.”

Grisella, the only healthy, who’d come along with them, offered to take the patients to the lab and as well back home after the transaction.

“You stay and relax, and play with Intelleetus, if he cares” but he didn’t. Walter wasn’t all that unhappy about it. Pooty had settled already in Walters belly-bag, now feeling the tension, and Walter felt tired as well.

For the girls there had been no space in Grisella’s car. Therefore, they went away, back home where they belonged. Arundle returned into Billy-Joe’s village. When all of a sudden the awful Mr Schwertfeger appeared. She couldn’t get rid of him. What the hell did he wander about her dreams like a ghost?

Billy-Joe was still somewhere in the taboo-zone, where no female was allowed, that was why she couldn’t see him right away. In other words she couldn’t do anything right here, so she felt overlapped by nightmarish attempts, although there were still holidays.

In her dream, she was quite upset. The whole board of teachers appeared now. “But we are free in our vacations”, she heard her shouting, and she shouted so loud, that she woke up, as it sometimes happens in a dream.

In the lab, Scholasticus explained meanwhile the theory of determination. Nobody understood much, but that much got at him or her: you can't change the past uncharged. Either the consequences fetch you up, or the future bring trouble, you'd better avoid.

“We had to put our fingers into this TEAC-device. We didn't have the choice.” That was the mere truth. Pooty confirmed as he witnessed the scene under his hood a second time. What the Professor said was true. The attendant hadn't let them leave.

Everything was arranged in the lab. Scholasticus had checked and rechecked the parameters. Everything was ready. The TEAC had been reversed and was functioning quite orderly. The manoeuvre was not easy to understand. The same amount of life span had to be readjusted into the device in order to have the future system rebalanced. Of course, they had to bring the TEAC right back the same day and reconnect it with the general system. Only then, they'd most likely be able to minimize the risk of the three probationers.

“Sorry for that, but it is essential and necessary”, Scholasticus said as soon as the operation was done. They left the laboratory and returned home where they found Walter and Pooty sound asleep on the central couch of their joint parlour.

The first step was a great success. The forefingers immediately grew normal after having been fitted back into the TEAC. The storno function got set in reverse action and a receipt confirmed the operation, coming out of the slot.

The patients hailed and patted the brave time-travellers. However, their job was only done half. As they had to return the device, and fix it back to the future system. “If possible before midnight, as that is usually the time when the bookings are transmitted to the central main mother account server. It is essential that we don't appear, or remain recorded in the mother-server.” Scholasticus explained.

He seemed to know, what he was talking. Happy as they were, they had to accept, that the threat still wasn't all over. First Pooty and Walter had to bring back the device.

Arundle, who wasn't able to fall asleep again after Mr Schwertfeger's interference, eventually made it and was right back to enjoy such miraculous healing.

“Imagine – without fore-finger,” Dorothea said. “Unthinkable” Arundle agreed. “I’m so happy, I just can’t tell”, Dorothea stretched her fingers, and then folded her forefinger. “Awful” she exclaimed and quickly stretched it again.

“What does determinism mean?” asked Amadeus his brother. He shouldn’t have asked that, as a detailed lecture of almost half an hour was initiated. Nobody except Grisella was able to understand, and of course Walter.

Arundle tried to listen for a good while and understood that determinism was another word for fate. In other words, nobody was allowed to leave the track of life once chosen. If he did, the consequences were incalculable.

“I think we are lifting the secret of these new type of accounts,” the Professor just mentioned. “The charging process is as simple as that, and somehow just great in its simplicity. However, what this does mean for the afflicted can’t be overlooked. Neither for the individual, nor for a whole society” he thoughtfully concluded. “That’s a subject for you, Grisella” he went on. “That is your field of action.”

“We still don’t know, who could draw advantage from the system” she proceeded. Scholasticus replied, the answer was not very difficult to be found, and he smiled.

“Do you remember the debate about added-value, we undertook in the first half of the 21st century at all major universities, and not for the first time?”

Of course Grisella remembered. Angrily she lifted a brow. It seemed to her as if someone had asked her for the colour of snow.

Added value meant that a certain portion of the values the workers produced, was taken away by the factory-owner. Expressed in working hours that meant nothing else but that the workers worked a certain part of the day without pay.

“To give an example” he went on “they work four hours for their wages and another four hours to increase the wealth of the proprietor. Whose wealth was growing by the time, if there was no one, who managed to cheat some of that wealth away somehow. Hundreds of strategies had been developed for that purpose - the stock exchange was invented.

Scholasticus intended to point out, that by means of the TEAC-system a method had been found to get to the time without any diversion via wages and benefits. Scholasticus’ thought seemed logical to her, still somehow eccentric. She didn’t understand enough of the huge new servers to figure out, whether such ideas could be converted into reality, as he seemed to be convinced of.

She now should think about some kind of model and consider the consequences in reality, based on a system of time as principal value.

While he took off to spot the usufructuaries. He probably imagined that those, who had access to the lifetime accounts of the multitude, had found a method of prolonging their own span of life therewith.

Grisella was not sure at all, if she would enjoy her part, all the more as she thought it a spooky and absurd idea. She still hoped things would turn out differently.

Arundle got her out of her thoughts. As they all were all right again, it would be high time now to talk about the threatening civil war in Laptopia. "We've got to think about our role again and what we can do to give peace a chance."

All agreed - philosophical reflections had to be postponed. Even though they led right away and straight - just into the centre of the whole spooky matter, and was the malignant super-key to all the worries they employed.

Yet, they didn't know. Therefore, they jumped on that train while that means of transport was in due course to become superfluous, so to speak.

Arundle's report indeed employed their attention to an unforeseen extend, and blocked out, what had been inflicted by the finger-malady, they so luckily managed to overcome, as Walter and Pooty succeeded in returning that TEAC-device without any further complication.

16. A brilliant Idea

They came back on to the ground of the real reality that mattered, as far as Arundle was concerned. She disliked such funky self-reliance and egocentricity, while the world was breaking apart.

Well, it was not their own world but still a world, whether really real or just an approximation to what reality meant, who could tell?

Thanks to Walter and Pooty's dedication, the threatening civil war in Laptopia caught the attention of the former patrol into the forlorn land at the final end ahead of time. Had they not overcome the disease, no one had returned to the matter. They had been stuck in their own tiny reality.

Long enough had it taken and time enough had been wasted, as Laptopia ran out of time, both in real and literally. Highly armoured

opponents were standing against each other. One spark sufficed and the powder-keg blew up, so to speak; - as in reality the weaponry was monstrous and disastrous, so the world as a whole would fall apart and go to pieces, and no life, at least no humane life worth while living, would be possible any more.

For many years, the conflict had been put aside. Now, all of a sudden, it seemed too late to stop or even slow it down at all. For the first time the explorers acted and discussed the legitimate stuff in the proper attitude. No more complaining about swollen fingers, and sleepless nights, no egocentric malady! No less than a threatening future overshadowed mankind and entangled - way ahead - the weary hearts of the chosen few, who knew.

Florinna and Corinia popped in, as it was common in the dreamtime, and the three Star-maids told their tale of desperation and disaster:

The troops of the young Prince and his experienced General Armyless consisted of runaways and fuzzy-heads from the metropolis on the one hand and on the other hand, of volunteers, they recruited right in the forbidden zones among the free tribes. Those were wild and forceful fighters, who, after lifelong residence in the underground, finally saw the day of reckoning with the system right ahead.

In great hurry, the volunteers had to be made familiar with modern weaponry of all kind. They needed discipline and endurance, while their virtues weren't always and in any case needed. Long distance bombardments for example, required a cool heart and a sure hand. While fury and bravery helped a lot in the infight.

However, the General employed his core of experienced troopers and made them become officers in charge of the basic training of the volunteers. That didn't always and everywhere work perfectly well, but in average he came along with it, as such troopers were more or less human as well.

The degree of humaneness was after all the most important category to be employed, if it came to judge, which side someone was on.

On the opposite side things seemed to be exactly the other way round, as far as the Star-maids allowed themselves to believe in the reports of the spies, flooding the enemy.

Under the command of Prince Watchalot (the young Prince's father) stood the platoons and regiments of the artifacts like one man. Never in history, had there been a similar army. Equipped with an

arsenal of the most terrible weapons the world had ever seen. Moral considerations were non-existent amongst them. They were practically inhuman, even though - for practical reasons - they still employed a fair amount of genuine human spare parts, not the least of which the brain was.

The war, if it came to that, would be led by all means and without considerations of any kind or respect at all. Thus were the facts.

The wars of mankind had long been forgotten and there were no witnesses left, who could bring about the horrors of warfare. What did the righteous cause matter, the opponents claimed for their aims? Both sides reclaimed the higher right to be on their side. Nobody could imagine, what the world would look like afterwards, or if they did, they might conclude, that it couldn't look much worse than it looked already.

As the patrollers from a former earth knew - either by own memory or by vivid recall what it was like, those Laptopians didn't seem to have any idea of what came really about them, if they went on as they did.

The young Prince could only see the bloodthirsty vampires sucking the life stream out of the people, defending a system of injustice and exploitation that had been established and hailed as the answer to the exploitation of the past, when the money-system finally became obsolete and was overthrown at last. The money-system, that maltreated and threatened mankind for thousands of years.

However, the world didn't become the promised paradise, not for those outside, and not for the descendants of the early generations of the Laptopian usufructaries of the first hour, because the artifacts entered the stage of the world and began to play their ambiguous role.

The young Prince stood up against his father, but without the true General Armyless, he'd stand no chance. The General on the other hand wouldn't have changed sides without those visitors from the past, (and so hadn't the little Prince without his Godmothers - the Star-maids.)

And that was now the burden Arundle and Scholasticus felt on their shoulders, and so felt their friends and relatives with them - more or less.

If it came to the worst, there was no difference any more, whether the cause was righteous, because the means to overcome the opponent didn't fit with the cause at all. The General was probably the only one who could imagine, what a war was really like. He knew that some of the weapons, if they were used, would cause irreversible damage to the world and led to the bitter end of mankind.

However, even he wasn't quite able to imagine the horror of destruction on doomsday. Having not witnessed the heaps and piles of corpses, or the screams of terror, the unimaginable pain of the tortured, the General didn't share his ancestor's point of view even though he was much alike and could have been his twin by appearance.

"War is the worst", Grisella concluded and all nodded in agreement.

"To imagine we have initiated a war, drives me crazy" Arundle uttered in disgust.

What could be done? How should they go on? How could they alter the course?

Scholasticus now felt every single word of his inflaming speech burn in his soul, he addressed the crowd with in front of the tribunal. His little triumph tasted stale and bitter now. Had they burnt him instead, he'd feel better now!

They all had only stirred up the rebellion. No word of mediation had come from their side. Nobody raised the question of the philosophical dimension of the time-quest.

Was a lengthy life on earth really most important? If it came to the question of to be or not to be, you grabbed for the tiniest straw and might end up with the conclusion – better a short happy life, than a long life in agony and distress.

The philosophical school of hedonism was dedicated to such kind of questions, Grisella declared to the astounded audience, as was again assembled. The desire to live on and the longing for happiness contradicted more than once, she pointed out. She stunned her listeners and made them realize their narrow boundaries of their thoughts. All too obvious they related to their own mode of living. They couldn't even imagine that there were other kinds as well. They had judged the objective facts and had made decisions, as they thought them obvious and self-evident. They had influenced social systems and eventually changed their course. As a consequence the Laptopsians were threatened by total destruction and the end of all life what so ever by warfare of the worst kind.

"What we've started, we got to stop, no matter whether this means our defeat. If we manage to cause our side to put down the weapons, we might be able to avoid the war" Arundle suggested.

She had to run away once more, if she took over this task (as she didn't doubt for one second.)

Her parents would turn upside down and put her into a boarding school right to the coming up term. "Be it as it may," she murmured

defiantly. The contingency of the world was, Lord knows, worthwhile the sacrifice. After all, the boarding school wasn't as awful as she feared, while she still felt that strange itch in her belly. "All to its time" she tried to cheer herself up. Right now Laptopia was on her mind.

Grisella's philosophical explanation made them feel helpless in a way. What could be done? None had an idea. It was too late anyway, things had gone too far, and a decision seemed unavoidable.

So they all looked up, when Grisella took the word again and asked, whether they knew the story of David and Goliath. A kind of hesitant nodding made her doubt, whether they all knew the tale as was written down in the book of Samuel. Therefore, she told the tale of the great war King Saul and the Israelites fought against mighty invaders. Little David overcame gigantic Goliath and the war came to a halt, as the Philistines retreated to the coastal area, and let the Israelites alone. Saul went mad and David made himself king by the help of God and united the twelve tribes in one kingdom.

The reason why she told the tale was the fact, that war faring had been avoided by the brave deed of little David, who managed to overcome the giant by means of a sorely placed sling-shot to the forehead.

"In other words" Arundle took over "we should try to tease our enemy and make it a question of honour and have the righteous cause win. Two chosen leaders on behalf of the mass - that sounds good to me..."

"That's exactly what I had in mind" Grisella replied. She looked around again. Scholasticus Slyboots didn't seem to favour her suggestion. He didn't believe in simple solutions to difficult problems. "Reality unfortunately is more complex than the myths of the peoples."

Dorothea eventually assisted her sister. "As far as I'm concerned, I like Grisella's idea."

"Can you imagine the young Prince fighting his own father? - I'd say it's kind of nightmarish to set son against father" Amadeus objected and supported his brother in a way.

"The young Prince needn't necessarily step into the footprints of young David. What about the General?" Dorothea suggested, "of course he'd have to volunteer," she added quickly, as she realized what she demanded.

"Who knows, perhaps there is a totally different challenger amongst the tribes" Amadeus brought forward. "Someone who can handle the sling as perfect as young David did."

“I think, I’d know someone” Arundle exclaimed. “He might not be familiar with ancient slings but with the boomerang. A dangerous weapon in the hands of someone who understands to handle it.”

“You don’t think of Billy-Joe, do you?” asked Florinna while she knew that Arundle had no one else in mind.

“What has he to do with the whole affair?” Dorothea asked. “I thought it was a matter of the local opponents, so some sort of local leaders had to handle that case.”

“Perhaps Billy-Joe has more to do with the inner affairs of Laptopia, than we foresee”, Arundle answered and gave Florinna a bewildered glance.

“That, you should explain to us” Scholasticus interfered.

“I’m not all that sure, so I better keep my mouth shut. Anyway might it be a good idea to pass Grisella’s suggestion not only to the young Prince and the General, but to the old Shaman of the Churingas as well.”

“- And of course to Billy-Joe” Florinna supported her friend Arundle. Both of them smiled meaningfully.

“I even believe that Prince Watchalot only accepts the challenge, if he can be sure to win; and, against his own son he would probably look not so good, not to speak of the General. We’ve got to find someone he is not at all afraid of, that’s very important”, Arundle explained. No one objected.

“Are there other propositions?” Scholasticus wanted to know. Grisella’s idea still met not his full acceptance. “In the end we favour an idea we’ve not the capacity to fulfil.”

Again silence settled, while deep thoughts swaggered the room. No other idea came in sight. Of course, the war could be avoided until it broke out. Theoretically, you could imagine that one party stretched their weapons and gave in without resistance. However, the consequences of such step were no less imponderable than the war itself. What, if the winning side didn’t grant mercy and slaughter the defeated?

The duel as such, seemed to be at least a vague chance to unprime the conflict – but only then, when David won. However, what happened, if the duel didn’t end with ‘David’s victory? The free tribes couldn’t expect mercy. Prince Watchalot had their villages burnt down and their people diminished. Their way of living had no future then. Thus was the conviction the future-explorers all shared.

If they weren’t able to surprise the vast majority of the enemy, they shouldn’t dare the duel at all. A primitive naked savage, the relict of ancient times, was exactly what they needed as a surprise. Now it

seemed most important, to get him into the match in the most unsuspected mode.

“Let me do that” said Arundle with an air of conviction. “I’m sure it will work.” The first step was to have Billy Joe become accepted by the Churingas. If they did, the other tribes would follow without further objections, as the Churingas seemed to play an important role among them.

The mousier the challenger was, the easier he’d be accepted by the Prince. A victory without bloodshed and greater military effort was exactly what orthodox Laptopians required, to demonstrate the righteousness of their cause. All the more for that sordid secret source hidden somewhere in the depth of space and time.

Arundle just tried to make herself clear when Corinia, who’d been silent for a good while began to flicker. Florinna followed a minute later and she felt the same notion shortly before awakening.

“Your way of travelling is a great gift, and an ancient secret technique of the Senoi, who are Malaysian Austroids, coming over the Pacific” a voice from outside broke in. “Your mother descends on her mother’s side in direct line from the Senoi, you should know.”

The voice belonged to Henry Hare, the father of the two and caught them, while waking up, so that Arundle still could hear it.

“Participating to the life of others in the dreamtime is really the utmost you can achieve” Mr Hare continued (he had learned from his wife, as his own talents with regard to dreams were poor.)

“Don’t forget” Arundles voice was heard. ! I’ll be right on the way to Billy-Joe and have him understand what’s needed. I’m sure; I’ll be able to convince him. So we’ll meet again in Laptopia as soon as possible...”

Corinia and Florinna faded. Arundle saw them nod, so she disappeared herself and found her back under the roof of that bungalow they resided in on vacation at ‘the Heaven’s Gate’.

‘Well, let’s hope things came over as clear as they got to be’ she wondered as she rubbed her eyes. ‘Had been kind of mess again over there...’ Mechanically she grabbed for the magic bow, while she remembered that he had gone with Billy-Joe, flying her father’s wrath.

If she disappeared again that day, she’d be done and her parents sent her to that blooming boarding school right after the holidays. Well, she’d have to take that risk. She might get away with it somehow. Florinna and Corinia were much better off. They could talk about everything, she thought, while she stretched and yawned. ‘They can turn to the other side and make them be right back in Laptopia, lucky ones...’

She jumped out of bed, grabbed her swimsuit and blanket and rushed down the stairs.

Her father was sitting in the lobby smoking, but as he wasn't allowed to smoke by the doctor, he had to smoke secretly. Therefore, when Arundle came downstairs, he stuffed the cigarette hastily into a jar of marmalade.

He looked at her and pressed his forefinger against his lips. Arundle sighted back gaily and whispered while she slipped out of the front door, "That'll be our little secret." She made a sign of smoking with her fingers. "I'm out - down at the beach, will be back by five or six o'clock..."

Before Mr Waldschmitt was able to protest, she had gone and was flying towards the beach and on further to Billy-Joe's village. In the meantime, she knew the way. So much luck made her happy for the day.

The morning was still young and the air was still fresh. She got along pretty fast, much faster than in the dark, and so she arrived all of a sudden. The shags and cabins amongst some dry sad wigs, that had once been a kind of cope, arose out of the rising sun it seemed, till she found herself standing at the centre court, looking in vain for somebody, whom she could have asked to get Billy-Joe out of the Men's House she still thought him to be in.

She finally met him not far away, not in the Men's House but with his old teacher Kaúua Bereóo. Billy-Joe sat at his feet attentive listening to some serious teachings. So she kept herself hidden for a good while, a kind of holy shyness made her stay away.

A small fire burnt between the two men. Kaúua threw some herbs into the flames from time to time and the fire was glowing in the nicest colours.

As she stared into the flames she noticed a kind of trance approaching. However, she didn't allow it, as she had to stay awake. Laptopia was waiting and they had an important task to fulfil.

Her strong will gained grounds. However, some minutes elapsed until she got a chance to raise her voice and speak with her friend. After all, she didn't have the whole day.

As Kaúua noticed her mood, he friendly stopped and signalled her to take over.

Arundle felt ashamed. Most likely Billy-Joe experienced some important initiation. In fact, Kaúua told the tale of the distant liberator who'd come from the stars and freed his people and led them to the promised land – something like that; perhaps also to save them out of great dangers and perils, or both.

Kaúuas language wasn't all that clear, although she had picked up some vocabulary and structures of Billy-Joe's native tongue already. She hoped more than she knew that Kaúua transmitted the appropriate message.

Had she needed a confirmation – here it was. Billy-Joe's multiple identity became clearer and clearer. She didn't doubt anymore as she still had, while on the way out here. The instruction ended. Arundle noticed the magic bow hiding in the felts the mattress covering the entrance to Kaúua's cabin.

The sun was up now. Time was precious not only here but even more over there, in Laptopia, as she wanted to be back by five o'clock. That gave them some thirty Laptopian hours – more or less, if they proceeded right away.

She didn't know, how much time it would take to convince all the parties involved, beginning with Billy-Joe, who eventually knew by now, what stood in the stars for him.

Finally, the duel had to be fought and won – quite a big bit in so little a time, indeed!

She felt somewhat dizzy as she imagined what was lying ahead and felt rather uneasy while the palaver seemed to find no end. In fact, the villagers now formed a circle around the scene; quite alike that scene over there in that vale the Churingas claimed their property. Hadn't there been the difference in height, everything was almost the same. Arundle felt strongly reminded of the Churinga village.

No wonder, she said to herself that Billy-Joe now belonged to them. As she thought that, Billy-Joe jumped to his feet smiled at her his winning smile, (that smile he smiled while they first met, and conquered her heart right away.) He caught the magic bow and invited her to leave right away. "Here, your bow", he said and shoved the bow down to her. Arundle tried to hide her embarrassment. She fell into some kind of exaggerating activity with the arrangements for departure.

Billy-Joe seemed to have understood the role he was going to play. Indeed, he liked it. "Yes, we've got to hinder that war, right you are" he confirmed, while she was summing up what had been talked over by the chosen few over there at the Slyboots' place recently, and what they had finally agreed upon.

First, he had to convince to Churingas. He'd have to make quite clear, that he was one of them, and that this was no ambitious fiction but sound fact. Therefore, they had to accept him as their chief, and be it only for an interim period, until the job was done.

“Since I at last know as well who I am, things won’t be so difficult any more, I’d say” – he agreed. Arundle nodded, still somehow confused, as she tried to imply some data to the bow, she thought were necessary for him.

“As long as the old Shaman of the Churingas can be kept on our side, we have a good chance to make it” Billy-Joe confirmed.

The magic bow kept on calculating. Arundle checked repeatedly and hammered on the virtual keyboard the bow had extended for that purpose. “Kind of Learning by doing method, isn’t it?” he snarled. “Not all that bad – but – how often did we make the tour?”

He produced a second extended version of the protective space shirt of his – extra large for Billy-Joe – and moaned, “nobody cares, how much effort it takes me to do all that for you, nobody even notices it...”

Then things went straight and smooth. Out in space you could see those coloured streams and stripes again as the stars stretched while they chased through those time loops, and risked to be driven out of their proper course. The higher their weight was, the stronger the forces grabbed at them. It still was some kind of great adventure anyway; no matter how often you’d have experienced it. Arundle knew for sure, she’d never become tired of such trips.

Without a hitch, they landed on top of the thick dark clouds of Laptopia right above Laptopia-City. They circled above the pinnacles of the palace and took care to stay away from the mighty towers of the miraculous Laptop-factories. Not even General Armyless was able to give information, what was going on in there. “It’s essential, you stay away” was all she got to know.

While Pooty once almost went lost, while checking for that mysterious potion, she now knew that there was obviously something in it. Pooty was lost in the endless corridors, and finally managed to return – but without the potion this time. Pooty had, as it seemed mixed the floors up and found himself all of a sudden in a most strange kind of dome, that reminded him of a slaughterhouse, as there were all kinds of body-parts hanging from the ceiling – mostly human, but not only. Since then, he didn’t dare to go there anymore. That de-petrifying potion seemed to have gone anyway.

“Who ever disappears in there, will never be seen. This truly is the house of no return,” he acclaimed in disgust, whenever the topic came up.

Therefore, Arundle stuck to the General’s advice and never tried to explore the forbidden area any more.

“Some kind of bionic studies had been practised, and were still going on - with those organic ‘spare parts’” she learnt from the young Prince the other day.

“You won’t find anyone without replacements.”- He’d then said. “We all acquire an able hand of the surgeon once in a while. It all began with ruined organs, like lungs or kidneys or livers. It was a good thing, though. Unfortunately, we didn’t stick to that stage. As progress went on, each and every thing became replaced. Some hidden force in the background – a name – Malicius Marduk – appeared out of the no-where, it seemed. Since then research grew fiercer and greedier any day. All kinds of horrid experiments were undertaken, the result of which you had fought with in the clouds and subsoil as well. – Yes, the dragon is such a creature, as are the flying hounds.”

Arundle and Billy-Joe remembered all too well those attacks; they only managed to overcome by magical means.

17. Who is Billy-Joe?

Arundle and Billy-Joe were looking for the General and the young Prince and of course for their troops. They couldn’t be seen, as they were not here – and that was for good reason.

However, they found something else - something that made them scare. Laptopia-city looked like one single huge army camp. In almost every house, troopers had taken quarter. Through the streets soldiers marched, as well as supply trains and brigades of small weaponry. The heavy arms were too big for the streets between the tiny town houses.

In the field outside the city, brigades and platoons formatted to flanks accompanied by tanks and howitzers. Huge towers arose into the sky and almost met the narrow cloudbanks, filled with all kinds of weaponry and manpower to operate them. Movable fortresses they were, and unbeatable they seemed.

Steel flashed; one soldier was like the other hardly less than seven feet. Big grey helmets covered the heads; a harness made of steel stripes protected the broad chest. The limbs, as far as they still consisted of flesh and blood, stuck in tin-covers. Each man wore a shield of steel as well in the left, while the right hand carried a horrid laser-chaser.

Those standing about in the ranks knocked with their handguns against their shields occasionally, while their throats produced a fierce uproar, and made Arundle and Billy-Joe almost freeze their blood in their vessels. - It was the kind of opening, the old Prince Watchalot demanded for his daily address to the troop.

Arundle and Billy-Joe obviously had just popped in.

The rough voice of the Prince spread wide over the vast field, as soon as the troopers' uproar faded.

'What had become of Prince Watchalot' Arundle thought. She still kept in mind his childish behaviour from the days when the little Prince was born. 'They might have exchanged his vocal chord by strings of steel' she wondered.

"Titan, surely titan" the magic bow made himself clear. "Adorable is such a technology in a way but also horrible" Arundle committed, while Billy-Joe nodded unwillingly.

How should he - in front of such troops - challenge the Prince to a duel? How should he even dare to think he had a chance to win? Was that not pure hypocrisy? Right now, he felt the lack of imagination.

His hand reached for the boomerang with hard grip. Billy-Joe was left-handed – perhaps a little advantage.

He looked down his naked breast, his loincloth and the white legs. He reassured himself of the stripes of yellow okra on both sides of his nose. Then he grabbed for the chain of mussels around his neck and the plug through his lip. At last, he felt the medicine bag full of secret magic around his neck.

Prepared he was, thereof at least he doubted not, whether his armour was sufficient, was another question. While he imagined his opponent, doubts got hold of him.

"Let's get away" Arundle heard him whisper. She nodded. They could be discovered any minute up here so close. The bow carried them out into the deserted open land. Thereto, where they expected the army of their friends. Concentrations of troops as they just had experienced, didn't remain unanswered in times like this. Sure enough their people stood nearby, no less decisive and ready for action all the like.

So it was - behind a low chain of hills no twenty miles away from Laptopia-City, they found their friends' camp. They were looking all but threatening. Gay was the scene – more like a fair than warfare, and reminded Arundle to an ancient painting, she once had seen in the National Gallery of Amsterdam. For Billy-Joe, who wasn't familiar with things like that, they looked like fans of the late champion, just having returned from the final match. All over the place, happy faces

could be seen and old acquaintance would be met here and there, occasionally.

Colourful tents stood all about, while armed people strolled through the passages, and everybody seemed at their ease. No harsh commands, no rattling of heavy equipment and banging of steeled shields and the like. Those spies from the other side, who surely spied about, had to report only the favourite and desired.

Billy-Joe fitted into such a troop, like a hand into the glove, sure enough. However, that might become their advantage. If they managed to lull in the Prince and his Generals, they stood a realistic chance to challenge the leader and have him risk a duel, as it seemed little risk.

Of course, they'd have to point out the historical dimensions of such duels in order to stimulate the delusion of grandeur, as nurtured by dark forces in those misguided minds.

That could become Grisella's task, Arundle decided, while hers was the proposal as such. Grisella was in command of facts and consequences and knew the arguments from all sides – if she only overcame her fear of flying.

Grisella had never travelled by air. Not even on vacation, not to mention the empty space. The idea alone made her dizzy. She'd never have given her over to Walter, no matter whether he was equipped with a magical stone; as it would be Walter's part to take the whole band along again, no doubt about that. Only Florinna and Corinia were able to travel alone up into Laptopia in their dreams.

Scholasticus Slyboots admired them for that, he was totally disabled in this regard – this was his conviction anyway, true or not...

"Perhaps because I'm no girl" he suggested to the giggling teens, as they proposed, he'd come with them this time and not wait for Walter.

The Scholasticus they dreamed of wasn't even able to let the awoken Scholasticus know such proposal. "You've got to imagine" Florinna reported while shaking her head. "As if we had proposed something impossible" Corinia assisted. "Blocks us simply off, how could he..."

So Florinna and Corinia were already there, right in the middle of the camp at the young Prince's tent, Arundle noticed, while she landed with Billy-Joe and her magic bow right next to them.

- No, they didn't know about the others, whether Grisella was able to overcome her fear this time. Scholasticus would come definitely – with Walter and Pooty that seemed to be certain. "But we

weren't able to get through to him" Florinna complaint. "He's totally disabled," Corinia confirmed. "It's not his fault, is it?" Arundle answered. "Nobody is perfect."

"Walter will do" Billy-Joe stepped in. He couldn't quite overcome his uneasiness, all the more, he saw himself surrounded by that merry camp-life, contradicting sharply the burden of the task waiting for him.

"Do you know, what it looks like over there?" he asked the young Prince after an almost formal welcome. His voice sounded rough from anger or strain. Arundle noticed how deeply he was involved in that role of his already. That wasn't at all helpful. Perhaps the Shaman of the Churingas knew a way out and stood by with advice and assistance.

The young Prince waved Billy-Joe's objections away. We have our own spies as well. The tins rattling brainless monsters don't threaten us at all."

"The morals of the troop can't be better" his true General assisted, who just stepped in from a meeting with the Chiefs and Shamans of the tribes. They had held over a strategic reconstruction of the likely battlefield. Satisfied as they all looked, the meeting seemed to have been rather successful, the Star-maids noticed, while Billy-Joe still was too occupied to oversee the total whole.

Was there something the girls didn't see and Billy-Joe all the more so?

"Do you have a secret weapon?" Arundle asked the young Prince right away, who looked over to his General questioningly and slightly waved his head and shrugged, while he said "Wait, and see."

Time went on and nothing was heard of the Slyboots.

"And if we go ahead because of Billy-Joe?" the girls wondered. But the Prince and the General were busy all the time. Officers came and went. Scouts and secret grey shadows, their spies and secret agents, hushed in and out, more or less unseen. There you couldn't think of a quiet talk the girls noticed and felt quite superfluous and disturbing.

"You see what's going on here" the young Prince sighed and looked passionately at Florinna. "Look around outside, if you may, please..." the General suggested as well, as the secret reports he'd just got handed in, weren't meant for unauthorized ears.

Therefore, the Star-maids followed Billy-Joe who had gone to look for the Churingas that is to say for the Shaman to be precise.

While they strolled through the rows of tents, they noticed how difficult it was to find anyone special. Those tribe folks looked much

alike, although the Churingas were of smaller size, and didn't settle separately, partly because they now really cared hard to overcome notions of separatism, which overshadowed the relations between the individual tribes in a sometimes almost disastrous manner.

While now, an air of likeness freed the minds and blew stubbornness and conceit away, giving way to a broader kind of general brotherhood.

Not too long ago, it did well happen, that arguments extended and precious blood was spilled, not only with those Laptocops and militiamen under the General's command, but amongst their own kind, for ridiculous reasons.

For reasons - if not ridiculous at all, could have been sorted out peacefully, if those young hotheads hadn't been, who were all the more important now, as they turned out to become the backbone of the freedom-forces.

The girls, while strolling on, looked into friendly faces wherever they came. Even enthusiasm arose, where they and their deeds were known.

First of all Arundle had set her footprint into fertile grounds, so to speak. Everybody seemed to know her, and all kinds of myths had been woven around her deeds and person already.

With her the conflict in Laptopia hadn't only got new fuel and spread about, but became sound and clear after all. The General probably wouldn't have tried to win the tribes for his cause, and the young Prince hadn't separated from his father, while the tribes understood the righteousness of their cause.

They did not only bother for their small and poor freedoms, as was the right to roam and settle. Now new and a new and horrid outlook - the doom of total destruction threatened the world, and they were the only force to stop the total ruin. The reign of Laptopia ran the world into disaster and destruction. If the forces of freedom didn't succeed in breaking the evil ban, it would be it, once and for all.

The many variegated tents of the vast camp didn't stand in rows and ranks but crisscross all over the place, except for a few straight alleys in any direction. Otherwise, things had developed their own way. Almost natural had they developed rounding of all kinds quite similar to the habits at home. Central or sub central openings were used for a variety of purposes. Artists presented their art as well as acrobats or wizards close to sunset or shortly after.

The women cooked there at noon and the young men as well as a growing number of girls trained in weapons in the afternoon.

Since Arundle had come to them with her magic bow, quite a few remembered this ancient art of warfare now, and asked the smiths to have bows of steel made for them, because no wood was available any more. The youths kept Arundle and Billy-Joe busy in the afternoon, showing them how to use it. They didn't have magic arrows, which hit the target in any case, thus aiming was a frustrating exercise for most of them.

While the golden arrows of the magic bow operated somehow kind of independent, and never missed a target once programmed. However, the steeled arrows, if they hit, were much more powerful and cut right through the thickest armour.

Time passed by in no time. The girls weren't used to the short Laptopian days, and before they got fully aware, the night fell down on them.

All over the camp bonfires flamed. This was the time for tales. Therefore, the Star-maids went from fire to fire and told the tale of David, who overwhelmed Goliath, more or less with bare hands. While gigantic Goliath was heavily armoured, David fought with bare hands and had no other weapon but a slingshot. God was with him, and the Philistines were defeated.

Repeatedly they told that tale and went from fire to fire.

As the light of the day faded, thoughtfulness took over. Never, as far as they recalled, had the tribes ever succeeded against Laptopia. In fact, they had been chased and forced to move further and further out into the desert to get rid of the grip and the arbitrary rule of the Laptopian authorities.

So, they knew about the strength and superiority of the artifacts and semi-artifact troopers. Those who knew what lay ahead weren't optimistic at all. Therefore, the idea, that one out of their ranks stood up to challenge some kind of Goliath, found open ears.

The seed was laid. The idea was born, and a question kept their minds busy, who the chosen one might be.

Many brave-hearted young men spent the night brooding over this idea. Who would not like to become a hero? To stand up in front of everything, adored and hailed by friends and feared by foes?

The night went by. The new day arose and straightened up reality. In the light of the day, no one dared to step into David's footprints. The dream was one thing, reality something else.

What about the girl from abroad, the girl with the magic bow? Well, no! One out of their ranks should it well be...

Meanwhile, Billy-Joe and the old Shaman of the Churingas debated on the subject. Subsoil they went for their oneness, and rebirthing procedure. Billy-Joe recalled some of the rites the Shaman initiated, as if they were his. Did he himself not light the fire once upon a time?

The Shaman produced all the common deeds and gifts, and sang along the common way, thus referring to the same origin, Billy-Joe doubted not. The language, the friendly mood and attitude were leading to the only possible conclusion – the Churingas were descendants of the same offspring as his own kind. What they lacked in size, they had picked up in decisiveness and bravery.

Thus came the hour of truth. Billy-Joe could feel it. He was due to step into the world of final secrets and wonders. Long hidden discernments opened up and light fell in from the divine. He didn't know yet, but felt some sort of vague notion of what was to come. Unimaginable it was and intangible all the same – senseless quests of faint desires and longing impatience, who he was and what he'd do.

The heavy weight upon his shoulders he felt divided into less than half – yeah, thus he felt: he wasn't alone, while he - arising for the multitude - stood up. He'd only be the lens through which such forceful rays proceeded. A kind of eye he was a kind of outer surface, whilst from inside the combined forces of oppression amalgamated with the wisdom and the knowledge of all true divinity. The lust he felt and lightness of the other kind, right due to be reborn down here subsoil in darkness and dismay – the dialectic strategy of the unknown, and earthworm-like he twisted and sought shelter, while outside crude realities obeyed. Necessity was the one, but sacrifice the other – the true and binding fate of his, guessed he unknowingly.

So, was it wasting of time down here amongst intangible necessities, should he not train his physical appearance? Combine thus both the spirit and the flesh to wishful thought and likewise thoughtful strong desire? Safe sat he here subsoil, and yet was well connected, and overheard and overlooked the scene up there, an agent and his guider – the hound dog on the lead – of the invisible.

It was time to say good-bye, Billy-Joe decided, and made his way out into the open, and found himself right in between on future battlegrounds. The spot was chosen all too well.

While he returned, he set up a plan for his training and started on the way. Since he worked in that hotel, he didn't have time for such basics. Without a daily exercise of at least two hours, things developed into the opposite direction, as every true artist well knows. Such a boomerang was a terrible weapon in the hands of a true expert.

These days - it was still used for hunting. However, in former times, men used it against each other, and you could easily behead someone with it.

He walked on steadily as the camp lay some miles away. The chosen meeting point lay in between almost half ways. It was essential though, to fix it here, thus was the secret strategy.

He needn't concentrate while he walked on and had his arms and hands work hard on the boomerang. The thoughts went back to where he came from. He still not knew all what had happened. He saw the Shaman with the inner eye. He saw him straighten up and clear his body to a convenient shape. Hair and wrinkles seemed to flatten, while Billy-Joe realized a sense of humour in his eyes.

A kind of mirror had he been, he fearfully admitted. However, while he wanted to ascertain him, the image disappeared again. An old man sat there murmuring and serving the fire with all kinds of ingredients, and lifted his left arm in a kind of helpless gesture, so it seemed.

As he had wondered over such an unfitting appeal, his concentration lacked, when something happened that he didn't get, occurring outside of the range of sight. He'd understood, but didn't recall what. Important had it been. He felt attracted all too much. The Shaman's image was it not but something else. Angry he was, and well delighted at the same time. The Shaman was old and weak, and limited, but still produced a wholly different behaviour, or was it the sight that fixed him in hypnotic gaze? While that went on, it seemed, as if he faded and returned in oneness of the strangest kind.

"What's wrong with you, Billy-Joe" he heard himself say. His own voice sounded strange, as if from the outside, and met his ears right from outside. "That's caused by echoes of the cave" he explained to himself again, but shook his head as he said it. Even his thoughts didn't obey the command of his will. He felt them strange and peculiar between his ears rumouring, as if he was miles away and not himself. Had it the fire been? The strange ingredients had made him cough.

One last sign. "For once, let me look right into that mirror, and for all" - he heard him scream. "Then I shall recognize the me I am." Smilingly the Shaman shook his head, stroked his hair out of the forehead, and sank down.

"I'm tired to death," a voice whispered, and it was Billy-Joe, as if he spoke these words himself. He felt and thought and was alike that sunken figure there, pressed down by heavy weights of endless years.

Indeed he felt, as if he was inside, and while inside, he felt outside as well.

Had a drug while subsoil at that cave influenced him? While he thought back, he recalled the laughter. The old Shaman laughed on and on without reason. Was he the cause of such Homeric laughter? What was so funny about him? Had he not better things to do? Thus had he thought, while time was pressing.

Of little help was what he found beneath. He cared for preparation, not belief. Some spooky fits of nothing real -. A lot of the unseen was here presented, unspeakables were heard:

At last, those tiny ones he'd thought to win. –

Their Shaman was he and their kin.

He couldn't stand the evil foe,

Without a help, within below:

“Oh Billy-Joe, oh Billy-Joe,

You know now who we be?

I am but you, and stand for thee.

We are but one, you stand for me,

The light of wisdom shall now burn in curiosity.

Mine is the other outer world - together one we be.

I lead your arm, I guide your ear, I see with eyes of thee.”

While smoke spread about, he now realized why. He should learn but not too much. He should understand but only what was relevant, and most of all, he shouldn't bother what he saw and live his life right on, as if nothing had happened.

A full century lay still ahead, if the prediction fitted well his lifespan. What ever he did, what ever happened tomorrow and ahead, he somehow knew, he would live on, no matter what he did.

Therefore, he had such difficulties. His mates and friends all understood what was about to happen. He now understood, what it really meant for him and for the outcome of the duel. He understood the sacrifice, and that made him feel very sad and sorry.

His life appeared as if a river, with bents and curves, and knots and loops of the unknown ahead, but without end, as that was somehow still unknown, but still lay on beyond all so-called certainties.

The past he knew on the one end, and now he knew the future on the other. He didn't want to know and tried to overlook the discernment. The idea alone made him dizzy: a full century ahead and more than that, his lifespan spread. Yet could he be certain to return or had he to stay on?

The phantom of the old Shaman then shook his head and grinned some kind of bitter smile. “We care to get off thee” he said, “You don’t belong to me.”

15. The tournament of the little warriors

Walter came spinning in after all with the full load again. There had been problems while crossing those loops, he reported, “no wonder with such a cargo” - but otherwise thing went all right so far. He pointed at the payload and sighed. Both Slyboots-families had been aboard. “One lively pert child and four adults, one of them hysterical” he added and shook his head. Grisella blushed, but didn’t say anything.

Arundle reported what was going on. Things seemed even worse than expected, while the idea was well spread and so far accepted. She suggested that they all should go on to further spread the tale of David versus Goliath.

While approaching, they had a chance to have a look at the other army. Therefore, they were utterly stunned as they met now the freedom fighters’ camp, that hadn’t changed its appeal at all. All the more important did it seem to them to have things settled peacefully.

Intellectus proceeded to the orphans, to tell them David’s tale. The poor little ones had lost their parents already even though the war was not declared. Fact was the soldiers of the state hunted those natives down like prey and slaughtered them, regardless of sex or age. The rumour went that hunting parties organized safaris through bush and desert just for that one and only purpose.

The story of David therefore fell on fertile grounds. Intellectus arose an unexpected uproar amongst the orphans, and the elder ones, those more or less of the same age as Billy-Joe, wanted to volunteer right away and gathered in the morning before the head commanders tent to register.

What could be done? General Armyless thought for a moment, while he looked at the youngsters. Easiest and best would probably have been to discourage them and have them sent away, but that would have been the wrong signal. When it came to the worst, every single man could help and foremost those with the right spirit.

“What about some sort of contest?” he considered, and raised the question with his officers. A public contest would spread the idea even

further, and demonstrate the eager will to fight. Some sort of public tournament he had in mind. The best and bravest of all young men could register.

When it came to the question of arms, things turned out to be not that easy any more. Nobody wanted the little warriors to get hurt, while fighting for the first position. On the other hand, the fighting had to be somehow serious.

Scholasticus suggested a kind of chivalrous joust with blunt arms, to minimize the danger of injuries, while the show-effect would be enormously.

All officers agreed at once, as Grisella was able to describe quite lively, what such a tournament was like. All kinds of medieval armour were required, as well as horses and saddles and the like. So, the magicians got busy once more. Horses and other mammals became extinct nearby, because of the poisonous rain. Therefore, it wasn't all that easy to get them here.

The preparations kept the youngsters busy and made them feel important. Arundle promised to care for the missing items, and came about with wooden swords and shields, as well as helmets and harnesses and lances for the joust. After all the magic bow performed his masterpiece: a flock of ponies fully equipped and ready for to go.

The youngsters were excited. Most of them knew how to ride a horse. Sword and shield weren't unknown either. Only the art of jousting proved to be difficult.

The boys began to fight right away and kept the referees busy the whole morning. When the spectators increased in number, the official jousting could begin.

"Oh, Billy-Joe, where have you been" Florinna asked: "You can't imagine what's going on right here. We're going to have genuine medieval tournaments. All the little ones have registered, and want to win the contest to challenge you. While we thought everything was under control."

"Our idea was a great success. The David-tale's going to make history over here. We only had to mention your name..." Corinia added.

"Funny enough, nobody objected" Arundle agreed with a little smile on her lips.

"Well, until Intellectus stirred up the orphans. Each of them wanted to become the final challenger at once" Florinna explained. "Thus the idea was born for such an contest."

"Scholasticus had the idea..." Grisella said.

“You might as well be challenged in the end,” added one of the girls.

Billy-Joe had just returned and still was in deep thoughts. The old Shaman was on his mind. Somehow, he seemed to accompany him still. Billy-Joe got things straightened out and had decided to regard that old man as a kind of ‘alter ego’. Present and absent at the same time, but still a kind of burden, though exhausted.

‘No wonder’ Billy-Joe thought, who knew him near to death. However, death he didn’t fear. Death promised him a century to live on; or was he mistaken? Was his life done and over, while he was here? Was there no guarantee? ‘Calm down, old boy’ he heard himself addressing, ‘how could you die, before you came to me?’

Billy-Joe looked into the face of his ‘alter ego’ a last time. He knew now, they wouldn’t meet again. No advice would be given, no hint and question raised. While Billy-Joe was filled up to the top with unanswered request. He’d have at best known everything and didn’t, at the same time. He didn’t even dare to ask about what’s coming next. He had wasted his time with useless quests about his identity. While everybody seemed to know the truth. Hints had there been all over the place and from all sides; only he had been unable to understand. They had all better known, then he himself.

Did he really see the old Shaman’s figure disappearing? Was he a limping ghost there at the tents? He still had the chance to run after him, to hold him tight, and let him not escape. However, his legs felt like fixed and planted in the soil he stood upon. The old Shaman, his ‘alter ego’ faded, and while he realized, the telepathic connection cut, he learned about, when it was far too late.

He had been connected, his life had he had in hands. With poor results compared to such a lengthy distance. And, most frustrating after all - he still didn’t know what was coming next. Had he only been more attentive, while his mentor taught him, back down in that cave, so full of hidden traces on their own earth in the past. All kinds of hints and signs had there been and tales had been told but met him inattentive or even upset, because of the horrid laughter, he still had in his ears. Making fun of him seemed to be the old man’s privilege.

He’d well been able to grab for the truth right there already, amongst his ancestors, those paintings on the wall. Blindfold had he been, and concerned with the wrong questions. Whatever there was swaggering about him, from now on his life would never be the same, no matter of the outcome in that tournament.

It was high time for him to get started and become aware of the hidden gifts, slumbering in his self.

The boy sighed in desperation. The coming up burden pressed him down, and the fading image of his 'alter ego' made him sad. He saw his end in him. No matter how far away it was, so was it but his end.

There was no time to pity his self. He pulled himself back on to the grounds and turned to the exited girls.

Again, he'd only listened half. He had to ask and had things explained once more, the way they had developed.

Those knights' tournaments arose his curiosity. As they opened an entirely different view on the near future. He wouldn't be sad, if another took over and carried on the cross, but he knew this couldn't be. He was the chosen one. A merry deep warm feeling flooded through his body, as he thought of all the brave young men, who were prepared to give their lives.

So, he fully agreed with the idea. While the chosen form didn't quite meet his expectations. Better ways came to his mind, at least five different ones, to proving strength and bravery, as well as strategic guts and cleverness.

As soon as he saw, what was going on in the field of action, he changed his mind. Had there been other than those fancy dresses, the competition would have met his wholehearted agreement. – One more peculiarity of those white folks, he thought and smiled. For the unity of the tribes, such contest was indeed a good thing.

“For real such make-up would be far too fancy,” he wondered. Even Scholasticus agreed. The little ones didn't look frightening but rather ridiculous in their harnesses and helmets and all that brightly coloured waving stuff at them.

The afternoon came and the tension was growing. The mighty voice of General Armyless rolled like thunder over the heads of the assembly. A lot of folk had come to see the spectacle. The General was in his element and his words fell on fertile grounds.

He spoke about courage and bravery, decisiveness and the spirit of sacrifice in general and in specific, and mentioned the little warriors standing down there in the arena prepared and all eager to fight. He addressed them as 'heroes of liberty', worthy to be mentioned in one with the freedom fighters, who lost their lives for their righteous cause.

He also mentioned his role as 'Chef de Police' he had been for many years. He apologized for what had happened in his name and under his responsibility, while he pointed out that he had never failed personally. He'd never accepted injustice and despotism or acts of inhuman cruelties. His only real offence had it been not to have

changed sides and organised resistance and opposed the regime actively until the earthly beings, most of all, Arundle, had opened his eyes and had made him see the wrong intentions of the secret forces behind the Prince and his family.

“To be more precise in fact, the clear will on the artifacts side to have mankind in general become extinct. Those are the true forces”, he said, “who lead the fate of Laptopia right into doom and destruction. Mankind run out of time and that’s what they intend. The poor misguided Prince over there” - he vaguely pointed towards the enemy’s camp - “and the few officers and men still human, are the puppets on the string of the secret hidden leader. The system of exploitation must be broken, and the time thieves discovered.”

“All time to the public – Same time for all” the crowd scanned. The tournament could begin. The first pair got prepared. Both knights lowered the lances and raised the shields, then let their ponies go. The small hooves thundered over the hard ground. The lances shook frighteningly, although their tips had been blunted, the appeal was still the same.

The riders met in the middle of the course. The lances crashed, both youngsters fell to the ground, but stood up in no time and drew their wooden swords, and began thrashing at each other. After some minutes, the referee stopped the fight and declared them both to winners.

“We took the best of course,” the General explained to his guests from the earths, being seated in the regal lodge, hastily set up for the purpose.

“Those, who didn’t make it to the tournament, were of course very disappointed, so I raised them into petty officers ranks amongst the Special Forces.

If we had them all down here to fight, we would sit here until the next morning...”

While the eve settled down all too soon, some kind of winner crystallised, and the question was, whether he and Billy-Joe should go for a last combat.

Billy-Joe stood up. He tried to explain to the tribes, what he and his alter ego just had experienced, while standing here, another part of his was struggling more or less with death. He in fact was the would-be-Shaman of the Churingas in the future, he declared. The future was in fact the presence – not so much for him, but for them. “Well, quite confusing that is, but none the less true.”

He’d come over here to fulfil his future task anyway, but as the image, that stood right here in front of them. The immediate task

ahead was a kind of precognition of what lay in the future fate's hands. He hadn't asked for that role, in contrary – for a long time he had been unwilling to accept such duty. Until finally he gave in.

“What ever I do“, he exclaimed excitedly “I'm convinced, that my death is lying a century ahead. A century doesn't mean a thing for eternity but a lot for us humans, namely a great gift and a heap of wisdom and responsibility.”

Nobody understood, what the tall dark boy up front tried to make clear, and that was good, because the spies of the enemy were surely amongst the crowd.

The General had instantly the same idea. He raised his finger to a warning - “Psst, spies...”

Billy-Joe understood at once and gave his speech a turning. “Although, I know for sure, that death will get me tomorrow” he thundered over the crowds heads “I also know, that victory is ours at last. Yes, I will die tomorrow. That is certain, but my death will not be in vain, quite the opposite. My death will bring freedom to the people and peace to me, when I return to the forefathers of my people. You shall know that I come back one day, to be precise, the day after tomorrow, to fulfil my duty in this world, like I do today and tomorrow.”

Things now became very unclear, not only for the spies, as was meant, but also for the crowd.

So it often is in times of war, - the greatest nonsense does a good job, if presented in the right mood and spirit as was done by Billy-Joe. It didn't matter, that he mixed up the time-levels a bit. In fact, he wanted to point out, that it was his duty to represent the combined army of all tribes and Laptopian humans, and was bound to survive, which could only mean, that the victory was his as well.

The idea of his sacrifice and victory on the battlefield had come to him either because he followed the advice of the General, who thought it necessary to confuse the spies, or was it because the old Shaman took over again, who was steering their joint vessel to the mount of their river of life.

His speech would serve the purpose, and the spies had no other news to tell, then the message of his early death. If Prince Watchlot could be convinced of that, he wouldn't hesitate to risk the duel, because the effect would be fabulous, if he won. Therefore, it had to be certain, that he won.

General Armyless hit Billy-Joe's shoulder in excitement, when they heard the crowd's agreement. “War is by ninety percent

psychology. In times of war many things are decided on other grounds than on the battlefield and in open slaughter.”

Down there, on the field of action and honour the last two opponents laid their weapons down, while listening to Billy-Joe’s words. The General promoted them to be lieutenants and set them in charge of two mounted battalions.

The crowd hailed again. The shadow of death had passed by and faded. The tournament was over. Tomorrow the death-bound stranger-of-their-kin would lead the army to a glorious victory.

It was a restless night to come. The tranquillity of the previous night was gone. Nobody told tales at bonfires. Everybody was busy instead. Parts of the army were on the march already. “Up to the front” the heroes of the tournament exclaimed, who went ahead as officers in command.

In the meantime, under the personal guidance of the General, the secret weapons became excavated. They had been well hidden under the tents. Many workers raised their hands in order to dig the huge machines out. In the darkness nobody was able to notice, what they looked like and what kind of weapon they were.

As the camp was cleared finally, the so-called ‘Dirty Harries’ - as their cannoneers used to affectionately call them – began to move. Slowly first, but then after a while they warmed up, and gained quite some speed. Therefore, they managed to pick up with the army on the march at length. The troops opened by the zipper principle and let the machines pass through. They should take the lead by the General’s will.

Furthermore, it became high time to have the wings swarm out and to form the ‘triple tongue flanks’ (one of the General’s strategic masterpieces.) The Headmen - that is Headwomen (as there were quite a few women amongst the officers) knew the orders, and had their troops do, what had to be done. Therefore, the manoeuvre worked out fine.

As the morning dawned, the troops had reached their positions. The furthest flanks couldn’t be seen from the city, they hid behind low hills.

Surprise would be the General’s main tool, because he had to hinder the use of biological and nuclear weapons under all circumstances, because they did little harm to the more or less

artificial troopers of the enemy. For that reason it was essential to get the 'Dirty Harries' unnoticed by the enemy, and as close as possible into the proper positions.

"The right distance is all what matters. If we manage to have them in our range, we'll just dust them in, I daresay" the General said with a kind of ambiguous smile, while he was due to man the central Headquarters with his staff, that had been prepared right in the centre, and opposite the crucial spot, where the duel was to be executed that was arranged and agreed upon by the two High Commanders in command of the opposing armies.

"Mind the distance. The best results will be achieved at an average maximal distance of five hundred and ninety-nine feet. Therefore, it is essential to adjust our metres most accurately, and mind the curtain-fire and the bound flank-fire in exact intervals. Make sure no one hits the sack. And now the last watch-check, ladies and gentlemen. The show may begin any time on my command."

The earthly beings were sitting in the glider parked nearby, pale and disturbed and out of their minds, while the General gave his last orders.

Did they really believe the machinery of warfare could be stopped again? Once the decisions were made and the orders given, to be executed any minute, as per necessity?

Billy-Joe and Arundle didn't stay with them. They had gone with the Chieftains of the flanks to get as close to the crucial zone as possible. The first option still was to challenge the enemy's leader for that representative duel and to negotiate for an ultimate seize-fire, if you may say so - a conditional surrender of both sides.

Only if the other side wouldn't accept the seize-fire, the secret weapons would become activated. "You can only wish them, that they accept our suggestions" the General uttered most self-assured. Where did he take this certainty from? The timided earthly beings asked themselves. Pooty just came back from a tour to the enemy and appeared from under his magic hood, to report what was going on over there, and what a terrible fate the enemy had arranged for them.

"They are going to vaporize us with their nuclear grenades and have us then changed into some kind of cannibal seaweed, to give us the rest." Thus, he had heard the Prince boasting in front of his officers.

"Under no circumstances we should get closer than two hundred yards" Pooty said while turning to the General, who just came in to have a look after his guests. "This is the critical distance for their nuclear power guns."

“Well, then let’s hope it won’t come to that,” the young Prince murmured. He was not as convinced as his General and looked more like the little boy, he in fact still was, thought Corinia, who had a clearer look on him than her sister.

Laptopia-city came in sight when the morning mist faded. The General gave the sign to hide and so did the whole troop as if one man. They were just outside the critical range of the enemy’s nuclear power guns, at least the main body of their troops, while the flanks had to get a little closer for their own secret plan of action with the ‘Dirty Harries’.

Not the sharpest eye spied the giants behind the hills. “They’d have to have x-ray eyes, to see our ‘Dirty Harries’” the General snarled between his teeth and nodded satisfied, while he put the spyglass off, with which he had checked the horizon on both sides.

He sent messages to the commanders of the flanks to let them know, how satisfied he was with what they had achieved. Again he stressed on the strict order to have the ‘Dirty Harries’ kept on stand-by, and have them under no circumstances put in action, without notification, by the ultimate sign or by secret order.

The magic bow’s arrows sent orders. You needn’t necessarily have them operated by him personally. So the commander-in-chief held a bundle of them on stock to use them as required. You’d only have to throw the arrow into the air and utter the aim. The rest was done by itself.

“While in the interim channels of time some arrows have lately been manipulated, things seem to be safe in one zone, as is here the case”- the bow confirmed the other day, while this matter had been discussed with the General and his staff. That was the reason why arrows now served as messengers again.

On the way to Australia at least one of the General’s messages had been caught and falsified. Not even the magic bow had been able to find out, how this could have happened.

While they had met to discuss that messengers’ problem, the General used the time as well, to explain the function of the secret weapon – the so-called ‘Dirty Harry’. The guests from Earth wanted to know all about it, mainly because of the General’s stunning self-confidence.

“Yes, well, I think it’s about high time to explain to you what a horrible weapon that is” the General just started, when Arundle stepped in to the headquarters, reporting that Billy-Joe had just left with the negotiators to meet the other side in the neutral zone.

So the focus of course changed, and everybody cared for more details, but there were none so the General went on:

“I didn’t want to raise a false euphoria because - first of all - the undercarriage is still in the proving phase. Never before, we managed to move such weight over soft grounds. A totally new construction was therefore necessary, in order to achieve that. Failures had there been quite a few, I must admit. However, in the end we succeeded.

- Well, in fact, I wanted to explain the principle as such, as to how the ‘Dirty Harry’ operates. We didn’t choose the name accidentally, as you can imagine...”

“How much does such a machine weigh, after all?” Scholasticus wanted to know, and arose the others’ temper, who wanted to know at last, what the mysterious machine actually did.

“I’d say some two thousand tons. On solid grounds, transportation is no problem, but in the loose sand, things turn out to be quite different, and sand is, what we need. Sand is the Alpha and the Omega, if I may say so” the General giggled.

“But what are you actually doing with the sand?” asked Amadeus.

“To that I come in a minute, let’s go on step by step. First of all the question of transport. As I said, we are still testing. When we started, we tried with heavy transporters as they are used for heavy transports. We strained the axes and when we noticed that this didn’t suffice we, added more axes. On solid grounds, we then managed quite well. However, our problem wasn’t solved, as we needed sand - a lot of sand for the operation, or at least soft ground to become vaporized to sand.

Finally we found the solution. We based our thoughts on another principle, namely that of a heavy-duty-glider, as are used for the mass-transportation of people and cargo. Thus reduced costs and increased mobility. Any site could be reached...”

“Much to the pity of the folks out there in the forbidden zones.” Florinna threw in, but the General shook his head. “Oh no, we wouldn’t try that, there is no reason, we didn’t bother about the forlorn outskirts of civilisation anyway. However, that’s a different story and has to do with the atmosphere. If the geological conditions are given, you find almost invisible spots all over the planet. Some kind of bubbles they are. They arise out of no-where and seem to create a very favourable climate inside.”

“The General was in due train to explain the functioning of these mysterious devices called ‘Dirty Harry’” Scholasticus interrupted.

“Right, our secret weapon. Where did I stop? Ah, yes, the question of transportation, indeed our biggest problem. As I said, our streets are in poor shape, because we don’t use them anymore, and except for the landing, we don’t need solid grounds either. So we are independent from the street system.”

“How about the cargo transport? There must be a hell of a lot of goods transported all over the globe, as so few things still grow, and most of the people do live in the centres, or am I mistaken?” Scholasticus asked and gave the General another opportunity to wander astray.

“Right, the cargo, the cargo is transported by air as far as possible, the remainder goes by rail, mainly from centre to centre as our rail-system is rather small and limited to the major routes.

Unfortunately, the rail is also of no use to our secret weapons, for the given reasons, no sand and no flexibility, as I mentioned before.

Well then, to shorten this brief summary, dare I say, that I’m not only a gifted tactician and remarkable strategist, but also a remarkable inventor.” The General sighted around, but didn’t meet the eyes of any earthly being, because they weren’t used to such frankness in ones own behalf.

“Yes, I myself had the brilliant idea of an airbag transporters system, that meets the most extreme requirements, while functioning undisturbed, as we may see soon. For loads of such dimensions, the principle of buoyancy won’t suffice any more that can easily be proven. Say, you wanted to lift a load of two thousand tons by means of buoyancy, you’d require such a huge wingspan and such an enormous acceleration, that you would erase the landing port just like that. You wouldn’t be able to operate near the ground, in other words. But as you have to operate on the ground, (otherwise the machine won’t do the job), you can forget about buoyancy. This principle won’t work.”

Amadeus and Dorothea yawned; they had obviously problems following the General’s sermon, while the Star-maids still tried to listen. Only Scholasticus was following and gave the General an awakening glance to have him continue.

The duties of his position forced the General to deal with other questions. In front of the headquarter the guides and messengers were waiting with piles of arrows in their hands, all wanted to be read and answered.

“I’m afraid, I have to disturb you, my dear friends. It seems to be impossible in such weird times to finish just one thought. The plight

calls. – Well, I hope we won't ever see these horrible 'Dirty Harries' at work."

With such final statement, he turned to his business. While the others began sorting the arrows by urgency and arrival time, and awaited the answers, as soon as they were written to wind them about the shafts and have the arrows leave towards the given destination.

Soon the preliminary headquarter hummed like a beehive. The General's poor elucidations were soon forgotten, even though nobody knew, how the so-called 'Dirty Harries' worked. Nevertheless had they learnt, how difficult it was to transport them and that they needed sand or the like to operate.

The furthest front reported the direct contact with the enemy. Soon after the message arrived, that the messengers and Billy-Joe had returned safe, after they had passed on the challenger's conditions.

"The trick had been successful" the report said: "When the Prince looked at his challenger and saw, what he saw, he burst out into laughter, and was even more self-assured when he was allowed to chose the weapons for the duel. Thus, the Prince agreed right away, still laughing.

The seize-fire declaration was signed simultaneously. All conditions had been accepted. Billy-Joe signed the declaration of defiance as well, which said that all traitors had to be handed over to the authorities before the tribes' deportation, and all arms had to be laid down immediately. A list handed over with this declaration contained the names of the General, the young Prince, and most officers.

The Prince-regent declared 'generously' – as he put it -, he'd grant the tribes free retreat and no further reprisals in case of his 'very unlikely' defeat, while the 'poor misguided citizens of Laptopia' could return to their homes unharmed."

"Now everything is up to Billy-Joe" Florinna whispered, rather scared, as she read on. However, the General gave it a malevolent wave and grinned impishly -"paper is patient" he murmured unheard.

Should those earthly beings believe what they wanted. He, for his person, was certain, that he wouldn't give in to the Prince regent. Same as the tribes, by the way. They wouldn't lay their weapons down – under no circumstances. He was absolutely sure about that. The Prince regent's so called 'generous offer', was in fact a farce and impudence.

The General trusted in strength. He knew that acceptance stood and fell with power. Those, who took the other point of view, were bound to lose.

19. A peculiar Duel

The last preparations for the duel ended. In the no-man's land between both armies, the site was fixed for the two opponents.

Although it was early in the morning, there was quite some action on both sides. The troops got ready to accompany the show. A good dozen of aids and servants swarmed about the Prince regent and assisted in replacing limbs and other parts, he laid off at night, because they were too heavy to sleep with.

“Watch out, you silly bump” the Prince screamed, while the harness touched his head. The hand with the whip twitched and one of the semi-human assistants rubbed his cheek, and whimpered.

The Prince was somewhat nervous now. Had his decision to accept the challenge been all too hasty? Still it was not too late. Perhaps it would be wise to send a double, than to take the risk.

Then he imagined the frantic exultation of the crowd after his victory over that creature – after all nothing but a naked savage – and his determination returned. Such a bath in the crowd he didn't want to miss. Like all despots, he was greedy for acceptance.

Once more, the pale Laptopian sun arose at the eastern horizon and was shining right into Billy-Joe's eyes on his lonesome trail.

He'd have to take care to get out of the sun as soon as he arrived.

He was too early. He had left the uproar of the camp. He needed the solitude, to meditate and to get in contact with the secret air of power making him strong inside. Furthermore, he contacted the strange ground, that wasn't so strange after all, as the sand was sand of their own. Still some rotten twigs were standing between solitary rocks as it most likely had been already over a hundred years ago.

In the left, he kept the neatly polished boomerang. The evening he had spent to sharpen the inner edge and harden it over the fire.

Such an insignificant piece of wood became a terrible weapon in the hand of an able warrior. With a little magic, you could achieve unbelievable things.

He lacked of experience. He knew most techniques but he hadn't practised them. Well, soon he'd have the opportunity.

To be on the safe side, Billy-Joe made himself invisible, by squatting down into a shallow trough, and then covered himself with a little sand. Nobody had seen him thus, not even while standing right next to him.

His opponent he couldn't see yet, but he heard the noise from over there, where the enemy's camp was, carried by the wind. The black spots disappeared before his eyes. That reminded him of the sun and to make sure he wouldn't have to look at him again unprotected. His sight was clear and sharp and he felt much safer. Although, the heavy load of responsibility pressed him down.

If he lost, he'd hand the tribes over to the hands of their tormentors. The Prince regent's revenge would be terrible.

Billy-Joe searched for the inner balance and tried to turn such unnecessary reflections down. Instead, he made himself aware of the ground he lay upon, the coolness of the early morning was still evaporating from subsoil, and combining with the muscular tension and the flow of blood and energy in his body.

His breath calmed down. All senses opened wide, and noticed everything around him – much more than usual. Every sound, every vibration, he became aware of, not the slightest movement passed unnoticed.

His hiding-place was well chosen, right next to the battleground. He'd be in position with only one quick jump. From both sides the troopers pressed in up to the fixed lines on both sides. The duel was set to start at eight o'clock. Although Billy-Joe had no watch, and Laptopian time was pretty odd to him, he became aware, that the time had come.

Both sides were allowed to get as close as two hundred yards towards each other. That meant they'd have to keep at least a distance of one hundred yards to the site of the duel.

During such a crucial state, no arms were allowed either to be moved or carried or shown. A general disarmament for the time of the duel couldn't be agreed upon.

Such rules were valid for all. Thus, the Prince regent had to leave his followers behind and walk the last one hundred yards alone. His aids handed his guns, pistols, grenades, and cartridge belts to him as well as the laser-sword and the enormous shield.

He tottered and swayed under that load, but then marched on with slow heavy steps, while all the stuff jingled and rattled about him. If Billy-Joe had fallen asleep here, the alarm clock now came.

However, he wasn't asleep at all. The walking fortress was not able to move fast. But his weapons were faster than fast and were able to hit a fly's eye in flight. Therefore, Billy-Joe had no illusions. He could only hope that he was even faster - both, physically and mentally.

The Prince regent had almost reached the site of action. From his side hails and hollows accompanied him and turned sardonic as nothing happened on the other side. So the Prince lifted his Tommy gun and strewed a fierce circle in the round, leaving a black trace behind.

For Billy-Joe, who didn't let him out of his eyes, this was the signal - his time had come. With the elegance and the power of sand viper he jumped out of the hollow, he'd hidden in. The boomerang's whirling about his body likes a rotor, and made the rays of the laser gun the Prince fired at him splash towards all sides. They splashed even more while the Prince increased the frequency, by that it happened that some of the rays became reflected in a way that they came back to the origin. Thus, the barrel exploded and the Prince let the gun go with a fierce cry of anger and pain.

A disappointed murmur went through the rows on his side, but became suffocated by the exultation of the others. The General and the Professor nodded at each other with an air of pride. 'What a devil of a fellow that is. We knew it, didn't we?'

Pooty and Walter jumped about in a kind of mad-mannish dance. The Star-maids kept laughing and Grisella and Dorothea embraced each other, while Amadeus had tears in his eyes. His hand was holding the hand of his son very tight, who knocked him softly on the back to have him calm down, while he overlooked the scenery from his seat in the General's lodge.

Those who couldn't see or hadn't watch Billy Joe's manoeuvre, asked others, who had seen, about the whereabouts and details, this seemed to be a kind of wonder as a matter of fact.

Right from no-where their hero had come, had had his boomerang whirling and his mental energy floating, thus a laser gun believe or not - broke, as if it was a toy. Such the world had not yet experienced.

The Prince looked bewildered and stunned at the useless thing in his aching hand, and then threw it away. With his still good left hand, he ripped a grenade from his girdle and threw it at the enemy, that is, where he had just seen the enemy.

Billy-Joe reacted flash like. He threw the boomerang and hit the tiny black iron ball right in its trace, so that it turned up and disappeared in the grey clouds of the Laptopian sky. With a flash and

a fierce bang the grenade exploded in the air and opened the sky for a shower of sunrays to come raining down on earth. Glowing drops spread about in the no-mans-land between the fronts. Just like a New Year's firework.

The boomerang sailed comfortably back to its master, who eventually caught it, just like that.

The Prince was now completely stunned. The troopers at his support moaned. While the other side broke out into frenetic exultation. The General knocked Scholasticus' shoulder a little too fast. Grisella kissed and hugged her sister. Intellectus boxed his father on the nose by accident. The Star-maids formed a circle and whirled about. All over the place, people hugged and jumped and screamed full of enthusiasm.

The Prince tore another grenade from his girdle and threw it away. It was just in the air when he drew his laser pistol and fired wildly about.

Billy-Joe managed to hit the grenade and send it up again, where it exploded and rained down in glooming drops. The boomerang travel on and turned back to where it had come from. However, Billy-Joe was jumping in the meantime like a rubber ball back and forth, to get away from the laser rays. The Prince's fire was unspecific but still fire, and the hot rays felt as if glowing needles passed by his unprotected body far too close.

He couldn't take care of the boomerang, and noticed it too late. In his head, a flash exploded, when the hard wood hit his skull. Blood splashed. Billy-Joe went to the ground like a fallen tree.

The shock of his followers could hardly be described. They didn't believe their eyes while they stared at the spot where their hero just had been seen standing straight and upright or whirling about like a madman. That was it then.

Frenetic jubilee on the other side made the heavy loaded Prince stagger at his fallen opponent to give him the rest, if he wasn't done yet. He tore his laser sword. The earth shook under his heavy steps, while his troops jammed their harnesses and stepped with their own feet the same stumbling rhythm that made Billy-Joe's followers freeze their blood in their vessels.

Scholasticus shook his head, he couldn't believe what just had happened, and gave the General a fearful glance who couldn't believe his eyes either.

Florinna and Corinia woke up by accident, so they disappeared from the scene. Arundle rushed over to Grisella and Dorothea, when

she found herself standing all alone all of a sudden. Intelleetus looked for shelter, and so did Pooty, who jumped into Walter's belly bag.

All over, pale and horrified faces were to be seen. However, the paralysis was not complete, the 'Dirty Harries' slowly, inch by inch moved towards the busy jubilant followers. The ranks and files knew their plight, and the ideal distance came into range. In no time, they'd be ready for action.

The young Prince made himself the greatest accusations. Why had he let the youngster go on his behalf? Now the poor boy was lying in his blood. Too late it was.

The Prince was busy with such thoughts and didn't notice what was going on around him, while the troops still moved on gradually in order to have the machines pass by.

"Stop it", he heard himself screaming, when he noticed what was going on. "Stop it right away, back with the things. We agreed to absolute and total surrender in such a case."

Yes, he was willing to stick to the given word. The General was not willing, nor were the tribes and the Laptopian rebels as they could well imagine what their fate would be.

The Prince thought of other more divine things like his reputation in the face of history and things like that. If doom was their fate, they had to carry it with dignity such was his opinion. Unfortunately or fortunately he stood alone, or almost alone with that.

The General did as if he hadn't noticed the Prince or what he wanted. He shrugged and pointed at his ears to indicate that he didn't understand. The noise was indeed tremendous. The Dirty Harries stopped anyway - they were in position.

On the other side, the jubilant troopers still howled and growled in frenzy. The young Prince screamed again more or less unheard

"We surrender and lay down our weapons. We stick to the treaty - word by word and without conditions."

The General shook his head; the young man didn't seem to know what he was saying, and while troopers piled their arms to visible heaps, he had the Dirty Harries secretly loaded.

Arundle couldn't stand the uncertainty, nor could the magic bow, who brought her to Billy-Joe. Pooty also ran at him invisible under his magic hood. He'd been diving only into Walter's belly bag to get the hood, he later explained.

In the meantime, deep down subsoil, right there where Billy-Joe had fallen - hit by his own boomerang, something very strange went on. The old Shaman still awaiting his death to come, prepared himself

for the next world. Only the decision of his youngster held him tight over here, - he knew, he'd be still needed. Something to come made his presence necessary - for one last time his art was required.

He concentrated all his power and might on what was going on above. Thus, the boomerang hit him almost physically and tore him off his mental feet, so to speak.

Now he felt his weakening life stream flooding back and forth and up and down, conveying thus his abilities to the bleeding body in the sand. First, they met the boy's muscular reflexes when his hand stretched out for the boomerang, which after it hit the skull jumped off, and up again, only to come now down the same instant when this hand stretched out for it. That was quite something.

The hand grabbed the wood with unconscious grip. The arm extended, guided by a strange force, and hit the Prince, when he bent down to stab the boy to death, right in the neck, precisely at the slot, where the helmet normally meets the harness, but due to the Prince's bent, didn't cover at that very moment.

Arundle and Pooty stared bewildered and totally confused at what was going on, and while the boomerang cut through the uncovered neck, Billy-Joe came to his feet in triumph.

The Prince's head fell first, the body followed right away. The head rolled on, so it seemed, but in fact, Pooty under his magic hood tore it.

Down subsoil in the cave, the Shaman sank to the ground instead, while Billy-Joe arose. His soul said good-bye. His work was done. So he finally went to bed for a long, long rest.

Billy-Joe's recovery didn't last long, he was still bleeding like mad. Therefore, Arundle practised first aid that helped for the moment. Again, the brave boy tried to get on his feet, but failed and sat swaying on his back.

However, the fact that he was sitting, was enough for his followers: Their hero was alive, and that was all that counted.

The Prince regent had lost his head and so had the whole army. As it is in authoritarian structures, so it was here as well. You cut off the head and the body falls apart.

The chaos was indescribable. Troopers fled in desperation. Vehicles chased about, tanks over-rolled whole platoons still awaiting in order the commands of the chief-in-command who had lost his head literally.

While the one side hailed their victor, the other saw him fall and vice versa. The defiance turned into victory. The heavy weapons on

both sides were brought into position. Both sides had the head seen falling, but their conclusion was different, as far as artifacts were able to differentiate.

Their stubbornness made them stick to the course and the semi-humans amongst the officers couldn't get a foot on the ground. Such was the limiting factor that caused the whole army to collapse.

Nobody could make up the official opinion whether or not the victory was theirs. No B-plan was there in the backhand, but straightforwardness made them jump from left to right and back again.

The question was indeed, whether the rescue action complied with the regulations or not. Thus were the questions the young Prince and the General had to discuss. Right now, they - who just were more or less helpless - witnessed an army in dissolution.

The turmoil reached the summit when one of the mighty battle-towers caught fire and after some minutes crashed into the troops killing hundreds.

The fire spread even further and another tower crashed only minutes later. Help didn't seem to be in sight. Therefore, the young Prince decided to send help, while the General took care of the orderly retreat back to the position of the day before, where the camp still waited and a flying hospital that came into use now, but for the enemy.

"Well, humans are humans" the doctors smiled "even if they're only semi-human."

Billy-Joe still staggered about the battleground and couldn't believe what had happened. Just to be sure, he grabbed the Prince's head and moved with it back home to his people. Occasionally he lifted it - the crowd thought it was in triumph, and hailed but in fact, it was for a different reason.

Billy-Joe seemed to be out of his mind as he murmured and conversed with an invisible companion. - No, it was not Pooty under the hood:

"We're going to find a suitable body for your Majesty" Arundle heard him say. "But at first I better take you to your son, if I may suggest."

"Who are you talking to" Arundle exclaimed quite confused., Billy-Joe didn't listen and went on, heading right to the former headquarter, where the General and the young Prince were standing to coordinate the rescue operations.

Carefully he lifted the head up to them. The young Prince screamed in horror, and went pale and almost lost consciousness.

The General asked for a glass of water and supported the young Prince who swaggered, and almost fell, while the head began to speak. That was too much for the young Prince. It took some minutes to get him back.

“Always was somewhat shaky the son of mine” the head uttered with a smile. Arundle, who had followed Billy-Joe on his strange walk through the lines, seemed to notice the same old voice she was used to in former times. She came closer curious and so did Pooty, followed by the Slyboots.

The young Prince recovered, all the more his father declared he felt excellent. “I’m so glad to be rid of the heap of tin, the doctors have put on me,” he said. “On the other hand I can’t do without body in the long run.”

“We’ll look for that,” the young Prince answered. “There are bodies enough out there right now” the General nodded. “I’m sure we find a suitable one.”

“I’ve got to get back to the palace for the operation. So hurry up, declare peace young man and have your father repaired”, he giggled like a goat.

The scene was somewhat peculiar and very strange, so Dorothea overcame a sudden chill and Grisella turned in dismay, while Intellectus covered his head in his father’s arms.

The proclamation of peace was outlined in no time. The head of the Prince was displayed on a pedestal covered by a cloth to lend him more dignity. Thus prepared, he read the declaration together with his son. Their joint peace treaty was transmitted all over Laptopia and was supported by readers and flyers later on, to get the broadest possible acceptance.

The war was over before it began. All active troops were sent home or returned to the police forces under General Armyless’ command. The superfluous weaponry was deposited in special troughs or subsoil caverns. The tribes went back to their sites, with all kinds of guarantees and things, but didn’t really care, as long as their liberty remained untouched.

Without a rebellious semi-human head, the artifacts fell back into their common pattern. The first law was strictly obeyed again, under all circumstances. Precautions would be taken to avoid future excesses of that kind, so the saying went.

The Laptopians maltreated their servants and made them responsible for the outbreak of the civil war, even more when they had

suffered under the quartering of the soldiers, while the city had been made base camp of the misguided Prince regent's army.

The young Prince Watchanot had his bodiless father taken to the clinic of the palace. A suitable body was soon found. Arundle hadn't been mistaken: by getting rid of his body; Prince Watchalot lost his negative approach to life and his fellow-beings. Freed from the electronic apparatuses, he almost became natural. A heavy burden had been taken from his soul, when a warm heart was beating again in his breast instead of the titan pump.

20. The Rioters

Prince Watchalot soon recovered after his operation. He managed well with that basic change he underwent. The doctors were completely satisfied. However, after a while he began to experience extremely hefty changes of the mood. Euphoric phases altered with deep depressions. Dumb doubts turned him upside down, while reflecting on what lay just behind him.

What would His Secret Majesty say to his decision? Could he share his secret knowledge with his son? Was he ripe for that yet? Could he trust anyone at all? (That was the most general quest and made him feel sick.)

The fact that his son and those earthly beings from the past didn't have the faintest idea of what was really going on was sometimes unbearable. Whereas the answers seemed to him as obvious as the day-light.

He was fed up with responsibility. He'd loved to retire and take up his former life, when he and his wife had spent their time sitting in front of one of the hundred TV sets of the palace. Princess Soshedoes was dead now, and the comfortable life at her side was over forever.

He'd never been interested in politics, and now he was forced to make politics. He had to come to decisions and had to mind pressure groups – even to lead the country into war. Why all that? He still didn't understand enough of the intentions of the secret circle in the background.

At first, he felt good, when he hadn't had any idea of such level, but that went by soon. He had lost his cruel air together with the titan limbs, and power couldn't attract him any more.

The young Prince stayed by his father's side day and night. The palace was taken care of by the General's guards. "Safe is save" was the General's saying. Such an occupation wasn't laid down in any treaty, but wasn't explicitly prohibited either. Besides, the General exchanged the whole commanding level of the army, and had a sharp look on the degree of humaneness. No semi-artifact human was allowed to command humans. A complex system of grades regulated the chains of dependence. His final aim was to free the forces from all non-human artifacts-in-charge.

Thus, it happened, that almost each soldier of organic origin was promoted to an officer's or petty officer's rank. That of course led to other problems, because not all were actually suitable for a leading position.

Artifacts of semi-human conditions, who had been responsible for or in charge of oppression or mistreatments amongst the civilian population were arrested and returned to the labs and factories from where they originated, to become either wholly deconstructed or altered into an acceptable state of being.

Most of them ended up on the moon that was the cheapest solution. There they were out of the way and couldn't harm any longer, while labouring about with the fabrication of wholly artifact servants. That seemed to be a useful occupation.

By then doubts arose of whether the production of artifacts was responsible for the loss in time. Nevertheless, the hostile emotions arisen by the occupation demanded such measures. The city of Laptopia had suffered to an unbearable extent by the quartering of the troops. That was why the bad feelings dominated still the public opinion. Therefore, the moon programme was highly appreciated, whether or not it had to do with the time-loss.

The loud-mouthed in the taverns and clubs raised their voices and asked for total extinction of all artificial forms of life. They told fancy tales of servants having beaten up their mistresses, or carry-on-laptops having thrown their masters into the dirt of the street.

Fierce cries for revenge arose to answer such behaviour as well as that of the officers, who had maltreated the people by presenting themselves as occupants and masters. Genuine humans – so the rumours had it - had been forced to the lowest labours, you could think of.

The mob raged through the city by night and knocked down whatever artifact was unlucky enough to be still underway. Therefore, it didn't take long and the streets were covered with smashed laptops. Angry owners made them jump out of the window. They lay there still

somehow alive and uttered all kinds of strange nonsense, as to how deeply devote they were to their masters and so forth. Garbage trucks came by to collect the debris occasionally.

Official announcements to deliver surplus artifacts to defined hotspots were scarcely attended. The Laptopians seemed to enjoy their private revenge. The police was permanently underway - not to protect such poor creatures – but to help with or take over their destruction.

“I ordered that naughty thing to creep into the oven, and what did it do? You wouldn’t believe it - it resisted my order. Such unacceptable behaviour cannot be tolerated, can it?”

“He dared to shut off the dryer against my explicit order – I’d made him sit in, to teach him a lesson. I wonder how he managed...”

“The filthy fool resisted the bath I’d prepared for him. Somewhat strong it was - some sort of acid anyway. Well it takes strong means to get rid of such awful smell they deliver them with...”

The victory over the artifacts served as an alibi for the lowest instincts. By all kinds of ridiculous means, the Laptopians proved their superiority. And the worst were those, who formerly sympathised with the old regime of Prince Watchalot. Most likely they would have tortured the free tribes in a similar manner, the young Prince wondered, while reporting to the crown council.

The young Prince, who was now in charge of the government, asked his ablest scientists to find out the reason for such behaviour. Why were the Laptopians so full of hatred? That was the question.

One major field of action seemed to be the psychology, first of all, the psychology of the masses. The mass couldn’t be treated with the methods and medicine of the individual cure - that was the problem. Fact was that there were severe malfunctions caused by a specific way of life and the appropriate mode of education.

Deep down inside a huge amount of self-hatred slumbered more or less depressed in every individual. First of all, in those individuals with artificial limbs and incorporated spare-parts. They obviously developed symptoms of self-denial, as it was typical for the whole phenomenon as such.

Little could be done against such implantations, when it came to vital organs. At least a ground seemed to be set, where a therapy could start.

Ways of guidance had to be found. While the outcome of the field research seemed fairly clear. The study was unable to explain, why a

similar or the same virus infected the free tribes as well. They had nothing to do with bionic spare-parts or organ-transplants of any kind.

Here and there marauding bands swarmed in from afar - about the outposts or even came to the city to chase down frightened servants or carry-on-laptops still underway by night. Once even a former Laptocop, who earned a little extra as private eye, had been attacked, while on nightly watch for a prominent customer.

Those were no frustrated former followers on the wrong side, but youngsters who had earned their merits lately by supporting the cause of righteousness.

The scientific investigation quite obviously didn't meet the clue. The initial cause for such violence lay deeper or somewhere else. The hatred had different roots. What were they to do now? What could be achieved by the given means? There was no answer in sight. Therefore, the young Prince looked elsewhere and contacted helpers from afar. He sent the Professor an arrow, whom he thought ablest. -Arundle had let him three arrows for emergencies.

The earthly beings had departed the same day of the victory. Walter took the Slyboots home first and came back for Billy-Joe and Pooty, whom he left behind, as their destination on earth was different. That was one reason, but most important - he didn't want to risk another overload, still being aware of the severe problems, they'd had the other day.

Arundle had in fact left right away by means of her magic bow, as soon as things seemed straightened and set. She just arrived in time for dinner.

Her parents had used the day to talk things over, and had come to some kind of conclusion. The boarding school had come into a very close range. It seemed to be more a question of the costs and other whereabouts, than a question of one or none.

Since Florinna and Corinia's parents had raised the same question, Arundle wasn't that scared any more. If she managed to join her friends, she wouldn't care where the school was. She'd go all the way down to Bombay and learned Hindi or so, if she had to.

Her friends were bound to change right next term. They were in the right age and Professor Hare looked forward to have his wife with him all the time, while excavating somewhere abroad. That was one of the reasons, another was far more thrilling, and had to do with the talents, both girls were blessed with.

“Talents are one thing, training and constant exercise the other”, her mother explained. The school she had in mind seemed to meet the requirements of both parents.

“Most likely we’ll join a boarding school, right next term,” Florinna explained. “But it’s not just a boarding school like all others”, Corinia added.

Then the girls explained. A school of the other kind it was, while the name was peculiar enough already “School of Inbetween” – “strange, isn’t it?”

Such plans altered Arundles attitude. In fact, they changed everything upside down. However, her parents mustn’t know yet. They still should think that she didn’t want to leave home.

The international family of Hares didn’t meet the expectations of Arundle’s father at all; her mother was a little different. Therefore, Arundle talked things over with her somewhat more open. Mrs Waldschmitt generally agreed upon the idea, that Arundle joined the same institution. “If we can afford it” was her final comment, “and your father agrees...”

Arundle received the Prince’s urgent plead three days after her return. The message came from the Slyboots. Scholasticus had been the addressee of the Prince, who referred to such horrible things as the battering of servants and other riots of that kind. Most alarming – so the message went on - was the fact, that the tribal kids formed gangs and terrorized the outposts or even the outskirts of the city.

The message had suffered again on the way through the time loops, as they seemed to do ever since. Scholasticus had repaired at his best and summed up the Prince’s text.

His own note on the reverse side of the parchment started like that:

‘Two weeks had passed in Laptopia, while things deteriorated. Prince Watchanot and his General didn’t know how to proceed. ‘We don’t have the right to fence our little heroes in, after all they did for peace and freedom.’

Scholasticus suggested an urgent meeting, preferably in his house, and asked, whether she’d be able to let Walter and the sisters know, and of course Billy-Joe, who’d become a permanent member of those meetings meanwhile anyway.

The Waldschmitts stay at the Heaven's Gate ended. From here their route took them straight to Uluru, where Walter and Pooty were waiting.

Billy-Joe had been fired for not turning up and was free now. So Arundle suggested, he should try as a freelance tour guide, and offered her magic bow for assistance.

Billy-Joe was in desperate need of money, because he supported his clan folks. Without his income from the hotel, they couldn't do.

Good was indeed that they could meet any time now, all the more the bow liked Billy-Joe and accepted him as a mate and master.

"All you need to do is utter the wish to be with me, and you'll be right next to me" Arundle explained somehow bleary-eyed, before she lowered her eyelids, while she blushed.

Billy-Joe was confused and scratched the floor with his foot. Somehow, he felt secure on the contrary, and sure to make the same amount or more he'd earned in the hotel.

"You'd be an excellent guide. It doesn't matter, whether you know all the sights. The way you look is sight enough. I'm sure, you earn more than you did in the hotel, with the bow and all that."

In fact, bows didn't belong to the standard equipment of an Australian origin - they knew both. So the body-paint would do and the didgeridoo, and, of course the boomerang he was so proud of, after having saved a world with it, so to speak.

"Ah, yes that note from no-where - I had almost forgotten of that. Scholasticus is making a fuss about nothing again, I'm afraid. Well, I'm not quite sure what he wants. The Prince's letter isn't readable once more, so we have to rely on the Professors interpretation. While we tour through the land, you may see Walter and Pooty and have them travel over to Germany, and you pick me up for that meeting the Professor is so eager about."

Arundle waved with the note she had received from the Slyboots. It was indeed in bad shape. "...Didn't look better before" she said, while Billy-Joe shook his head when he looked at it, then gave it back.

The Professor's scribbling didn't mean more to him than Egyptians hieroglyphs. The letters of the Prince's letter on the back couldn't be filled with much sense either.

"Such messages suffer while travelling through the time. Or someone - kind of eavesdrop on us again - as it happened when you and Scholasticus got trapped the other day." Billy-Joe commented.

"Something's going on, that's for sure. It sounds like a state-crisis again, as far as I read Scholasticus, who seemed to have understood more than we have.

Well in fact, if you compare both notes, you may come to a similar solution. Things went out of control. The public morale dropped to the dumps. The police can't help it. But this time the artifacts seem to be the victims."

"So let's go then. Walter may have arrived already and the girls from Greece as well. It's night time over there anyway." The bow intervened, and off they went, as soon as they grabbed each other's hands.

They met the Slyboots in their joint parlour. Scholasticus just explained the situation. In the meantime, a more detailed report had been sent over by the Prince, also partly blanked but overall quite sensible.

"A scientific investigation by Laptopian scientists hadn't brought concrete results, but led astray. The scientists found a psychological explanation for the violence in the city. The scientists first believed that self-hatred was the key to the problem. They found out, that self-hatred came from the state of being the individuals were in. The lower the human likeliness declined the more the self-hatred increased.

In other words, if you were totally human, then aggression, self-hatred and violent acts against artifacts of any kind, were not your problem. As to the scientists the Laptopians hated their implantations such as bionic spare-parts, artificial limbs, and all kinds of electronic devices in the body."

"Yes, and this thesis turned out to be pure nonsense - soon was proved. When tribal gangs came pressing into outlets and solitary hamlets or larger villages, and after some successful attempts, even to the outskirts of Laptopia-City. Those youngsters consisted of pure unspoilt nature from top the toe, so to speak." The Professor went on.

Billy- Joe nodded. "It's the time, quite clear. Don't you see the point?" he asked. "It's like in your own world. Nobody has time anymore. No wonder your people become nervous or even aggressive after a while. If you are always late and don't see how you could change, you have to become neurotic, don't you see that?"

"Well, and in Laptopia things are much worse. Time became the most precious good of all. And people can feel the time running off, dripping away like fresh blood from a damaged vessel" - Arundle agreed - I only have to look at my father. Even now, when we are on holiday, he hurries from one appointment to the other, so to speak. Well, in fact he keeps himself always busy and has always more to read, to phone, or to think about, than he is able to achieve. 'While on holiday, you are still in this world' he argues, when mother pleads for some spare minutes. As far as my father is concerned, I can clearly see

the connection between lack of time and violence - more clearly than any other. Self-hatred on the other hand doesn't seem to be my father's concern, I'd say. If you knew, what he thinks about you... No, no whatever builds up in him is turned inside out right away. I'm sure you became aware of that, didn't you."

Arundle didn't know how right she was. Her father had come to her mind just like that. She didn't quite know, why. That came later, thank God, the bitter truth became obvious later, and racism was his minor problem, compared with the others.

Scholasticus saw the point Arundle and Billy-Joe rose. He asked his sister-in-law, if she saw any point in another scientific approach. The Laptopian scientists had obviously come to their limit that was the reason why the young Prince wanted them to interfere and help again, if possible.

Grisella agreed wholeheartedly and saw the point right away. She was certain, that she was able to overcome the weaknesses they had discovered in the psychological approach of the Laptopian scientists.

21. The Expert Opinion

The '**Institute of Applied Anthropology and Comparative Ethnology**' of Professor Dr. Dr. Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots was very busy.

Grisella was modest in her everyday-life. Titles didn't bother her. She didn't care about the outward appearance, while secretly she was as proud of her birth, as of her titles and academic degrees. For the latter she had done a lot. With redress she realized, that by her person the old prejudice of the unavoidable mental decline of the blue blood was not only brought to a halt, but became reversed.

Prince Watchanot's desperate notes from afar were responsible for such hectic state in the Institute. All computers were humming their melodies. Busy assistants hushed about, carried weighty files of printouts, not all that different from those Laptopian laptops, they were wondering about. Grisella evaluated one study after the other that she had performed by the detailed advice, she'd received from her brother-in-law, the Professor, who was in contact with the Laptopian regent.

At first, she realized how difficult it was to elapse the adequate parameters. In fact, such studies referred to an entirely strange cultural epoch with very different prepositions. Nothing could be taken for granted. The simplest modes of being had to be questioned and eventually re-evaluated. The so-called anthropological constants, most studies started off from and relied on – either in ancient or present days, had to be questioned.

The human factor was most likely not the dominant one any more. Too many social affairs were steered by artifacts, sometimes in the third generation, so to speak, and lived their own lives in autonomy and autarchy, which reflected back on all human affairs.

Thanks to Walter and his magical stone from Uluru and with the assistance of the General's police force, a flock of eager young scientists found their way to Laptopia. In order to overcome Grisellas 'Mobil phobia' the magical stone had arranged something very special. Instead of the invisible cloaks he used to transport the cargo in, he produced for the same purpose a rubber-like black box that made Grisella feel much safer, while others felt like being closed into a coffin.

The magical stone killed – so to speak - two birds with one stone by such alteration. Grisella travelled free of pain and the young scientists didn't see anything, and didn't even realize, they were travelling at all. To them the black box was a kind of gate, they passed through.

As soon as the young researchers arrived, they began to investigate. They were probing into people's private affairs and snuffled about in the dwellings of the average Laptopians. They asked a lot of more or less sensible questions, while filling in all kinds of forms and tables, about habits and customs, and, of course, - reasons for the outbreak of violence. They also measured the psychic threshold levels of violence and frustration and the like.

Violence was the main topic of the investigation, the aim was to find out, why the probationers were so easy to upset, and why they were seeking for scapegoats and made them responsible for all kinds of mischief, foremost the artifact whipping boys.

'Scapegoating' seemed to be a general pattern of the whole society. Every now and then, a whipping boy tuned in. Whether they referred to the forbidden zones or the tribes, the mammals, the earthly beings and finally yet importantly the artifacts – without scapegoat, life didn't seem to work.

As far as the time was concerned, the scientists had an eager eye on. Time was the subject of their main hypothesis. Permanent lack of time, furthermore the loss of time, caused severe problems.

The question was how such mechanisms precisely worked, and what could be done to influence that. After all, the investigation should not only bring forward discernments into the Laptopian society, the idea was also to alter the course to the better.

As a result, the investigation was intended to produce ways out of aggression and violence. And to show clues for tolerance and harmony among all beings (including artifacts.)

The result of many labour days confirmed, what Arundle and Billy-Joe had suggested right from the start. The scientists regarded time as the crucial factor of the highest priority, so to speak - the inner core of their hypothesis.

The lack of time made life difficult for the majority of Laptopians and caused all kinds of aggressions. Scapegoating (not self-hatred) was the outcome of this. The whipping boys were the artifacts at the time being. The Laptopian society longed desperately for time. Time was the most precious value you could think of, and leisure was pleasure.

An ever-lasting life was the key to happiness. In fact, it was the potential as such – people wished to know and wanted to ascertain themselves repeatedly of the potentiality of their singular and personal life without any end.

You could think that a society of that kind didn't know boredom. In fact things turned out to be just opposite.

Such a paradox asked of course for investigation. As a starter, the scientists thought boredom to be the dialectical function of the lack of time - a mode of compensation, so to speak. In fact, they didn't quite understand, what did that either mean.

Their explanation had somehow to do with fear. The increasing and permanent lack of time resulted in an overload of fear, they said, and disabled the probationers to think of anything else but the lack of time, and this fear turned thus into boredom – somehow.

This hypothesis was in fact some kind of speculation and therefore didn't contribute to the enlightenment of the situation or to the state of being in general. The facts as such remained:

People, who don't have time, and suffer from the lack of time, feel empty and hollow, in other words, are fed up with boredom.

In fact, the investigation was of great value to the sciences, even though the outcome for Laptopia was poor. The results were all too well known over there.

Several doctor's theses were initiated and met an interested academic audience, while still in the state of progress. The comparative Anthropology experienced an almost revolutionary boom. The world of science spoke of a discovery of epochal dimensions.

Professor Dr Dr Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots experienced (much to the disappointment of her brother-in-law) the unexpected international attention of an enthusiastic audience all over the scientific world and even above or below, so to speak.

Professor Scholasticus Slyboots namely thought himself to be the discoverer of the strange world of Laptopia. The merits, his sister-in-law were in due course to harvest, in fact were his, and his alone.

The Laptopian secret was somehow destroyed, and was no secret anymore. Even though, nobody understood the mechanism of the mode of transformation as such. Stepping through 'the time-window' (as Walter's black box was addressed) was still a secret and only available for the selected body of the project. Anyhow – Scholasticus was upset and felt almost the same violence the project was about.

For the first time in the history of mankind the aspect of the future came into a reachable focus. 'Responsibility for the Future' became the 'word of the year'. While in fact things went wrong right from the start. Irresponsible time-hunters showed up out of no-where with all kinds of safe working programmes, and made millions in no time, selling them to a greedy audience.

The fact that they had the money to become cheated that way didn't make things better. All of a sudden, the public realized what was going on: The future had begun already. The idea of the exploitation of time was born, and was only a question of time, after all.

There were no limits. The big bosses, when they grew older, but as well, scientists, physicists and politicians were most interested. The 'Time-Value-System' (TVS) fascinated all those, who longed for power and privileges – the ruling class, in other words.

The Laptopian problems came out of focus all too soon. The cause of the study, namely the horrid aspects of mankind's future, didn't bother the public really.

Aggression didn't mean much in a society where crime and violence belonged to every-day-life, whereas the new values fascinated and stimulated the people, and most of all the ruling class.

The question to the scientists was, how the Laptopians managed to control and master the time to such an extend. How could it be, that time could be deposited on a bank account? As one to the theses out of

Grisella's team suggested. That found its way out to the public - unauthorised, as Grisella pointed out.

Scholasticus had severely prompted on her not to lift any of their very special secrets, like that of the swollen fore-fingers for example, and of course the consequences, and the way things had been corrected afterwards. Such topics were prohibited under all circumstances, and Grisella had promised to that. Now a leak had opened, she could explain neither to herself nor to the public or to her brother-in-law.

The publication suggested that the author knew more than what the investigators had found out. He seemed to have a wider view on the subjects as most of the engaged scientists.

Most likely had there been a revolution in between, (most likely on the turn of the twenty-second century), because no 'Time-Exchange-Account-Converter' (TEAC) were in use anymore. The whole system had obviously changed. Subtler methods seemed to have taken over in the Laptopia of the investigation.

One individual was finally spotted, who had investigated in the central library of Laptopia-City. He found clues to a 'radical social turnover of epochal character'.

When he traced further, he almost got lost in the maze-like labyrinth under the castle. Nobody had been down there for ages. And there he found an almost complete file of historical documents - (that's what he said afterwards.)

Furthermore, the eager investigator excavated a complete third volume of the 'History of the TEAC-System' and made it the base of his sensational publication, Grisella found out.

"It's better that way, than one of us had let the cat out of the bag, or my people in my Institute, where we fuddled around with these damn TEAC-things lately", Scholasticus turned in when he realized Grisella's acute difficulties, and what she had found out about the leak.

"I just can't tell, how disappointed I am" Grisella ended her explanation and excuse. "Even more, because we came emotionally so close by now, after all. I'd have put my hand into the fire for each of them..."

...While I made absolutely clear that every bits and pieces had to go over my desk before publication..."

22. A School of the very Different Kind

The Waldschmitts' tour to Uluru led them right through the half of Australia. Such a bus-tour was part of the roundtrip. While on tour you should assemble impressions of the landscape and things. However, scenery passed by day by day rather monotonously. None of the travellers cared for what passed by outside, but were reading or chatting or had a nap.

Mr and Mrs Waldschmitt had an argument. They always had one – either with each other or with Arundle, who was sitting right in front of them.

Arundle was bored without her magic bow. She was in a bad mood and as aggressive as a sand viper. All the problems she had in mind didn't allow her to read. In fact, she was waiting for the evening to come. That was the time; she used to meet Billy-Joe, who was travelling from station to station, as did the bus, by means of the magic bow.

This took just seconds, so he had enough time to guide tourists through the land to all kinds of wonders and sights, the scarce land offered, or if it didn't, he invented them. He performed strange rituals, sometimes even strange to himself. He had invented them right away, or he blew the didgeridoo, he'd purchased in a souvenir shop, as well as a box of body paint – 'to be washed off easily' - it said in the instructions.

He earned quite a bit, definitely more than at the hotel, as Arundle had predicted, and he liked his job. Nobody cared about the bow, and if someone did, he said, it was a present to his grandpa by Shaman-Chief Sitting Bull.

That's why he possessed a little extra power. And therefore, he was not allowed to let it, not even for a short tiny moment of taking a photograph. In fact, he knew how precious the bow was to Arundle.

Every night they met in front of the hotel, while Arundle's parents sat in the hotel-bar for a slumber-drink.

Sometimes it happened, that Florinna and Corinia joined them, and then they rehearsed the action taken after the crippled message had come over to them from Laptopia. Both girls thought Arundle's reasoning about the latest violent outbreaks quite enlightening.

With their own parents, they had talked things over. Their parents had also suggested a scientific investigation, similar to the one, underway right now. The girls agreed - not wholly convinced - when

they learnt, who was in charge. (They then didn't know yet about the leak, but learnt the following night.)

The project was stopped, because of the leak, Walter was available again and promised to await Arundle and Billy-Joe at Uluru.

Florinna and Corinia felt at first somehow superfluous under the bright shimmering stars of the Australian sky by night. Arundle enjoyed the scene all the more, when she took the chance and lay well hidden in the warm sand together with Billy-Joe.

They didn't do anything. They just lay there glancing up right into this sky. They felt somehow forlorn and taken care of at the same time. Mother Earth underneath bore them and made them feel the oneness of the universe, so to speak.

Billy-Joe hummed and whistled some kind of melody or uttered strange sounds, while she plaited his curly hair. They were together, that was it, and felt the universal harmony they were part of: one in all and all in two.

Florinna and Corinia almost were in due train to wake up. They didn't want to disturb. Then the sky reached out for them as well. Their oneness might have been slightly different from that of their friends – so what?

It still was a great feeling, and had to do with what they had in mind and for what they had really come.

In fact, it had to do with the coming up school-term and the letter; they had received from the 'School of Inbetween'.

The night proceeded, a cool air made them shiver. The mood passed and they sat up, all four of them.

"We got the papers after all, believe it or not" Florinna exclaimed.

"Yes, both of us, isn't that great?" Corinia went on.

"Our parents strongly recommend you should apply as well, right away." Florinna exclaimed.

"It's just the right thing for Arundle as well, our mother said" Corinia nodded.

"Really, she said, that you'd have to, indeed..." Florinna said.

"Yes, but what about the test? How can you be so sure?"

"Well, the test was really easy, you know..."

"See, we were invited to meet one of their scouts."

"Yes and that was it."

"We talked things over and after a while she okayed us through – both of us. It was peanuts..."

"We did it all by night, while dreaming."

“Won’t be a problem - for both of you, anyway” – Florinna said, with a long thoughtful glance over to Billy-Joe who followed the conversation with a strange expression on his face: A mixture between admiration and desperation.

The worries about Laptopia’s future had covered up Arundle’s genuine sorrows concerning her own near future - to come about - next month already. She had agreed to her parent’s idea of sending her to a boarding school, when she learnt, that her friends’ parents had had the same idea.

Now a decision was made. Her friends had been already accepted at the ‘School of Inbetween’. ‘What a strange and funny name” she thought.

“It’s high time now to register and have the scout look after you, while asleep. Won’t trouble you, I daresay”, Corinia smiled.

“Won’t be no problem for both of you”, Florinna added laughing.

“If things work out fine, we’ll meet live and in person next month on that funny Isle of Wisdom-tooth. A secret island hidden somewhere in the hemisphere anyway. So, wait and see...”

“We’ll wait, and you see...”

“It’s kind of special school...”

“Very special, indeed...”

“The School of Inbetween is quite different. It is for girls like us. You find the queerest subjects, you could think of.”

“And the oddest combinations as well. Say you were interested in Fortune telling, then you’d be wisely advised to combine with Sleep learning for example...”

“Or mystic’s go best with magic...”

“Well, of course there are conventional subjects as well, but not only, that makes the difference.”

“Lots of sports and things, of course”, she said with a look at Billy Joe’s broad shoulders in the dim light of the stars.

“And for a chosen few there is an extra isle, near-by...”

The sisters uttered what came to their mind, more or less unsorted.

“...And for those who cannot afford the fee, there are generous scholarships.”

“Yes, I think this school is the right place for all of us” Florinna looked around again and ended up at Billy-Joe.

“It is a wholly international affair, so to speak.” She continued. “The students come from all over the world.”

“Rather big, as well...” Corinia went on - “And you can pass all kinds of exams, like psychology or gardening or deep-sea-diving...”

“Our parents said, they hadn’t had a chance like that, while young...” Florinna said.

“All you’ve got to do, is ask for the application file...” nodded Corinia. - “Just like that...”

“And there are no other tests, you said, are there?” Arundle asked.

“Well, yes and no, you’ve got to fill in a lot of forms, you and your parents...” Florinna said: “But the only real test is that scout, you know... - well and some kind of questionnaires as well, I’d say, am I right, Corinia?”

“And the scout is a woman?” Arundle wanted to know.

“Well our scout was a woman, no doubt, her name was Marsha, am I right, Florinna?”

She nodded. The sisters only had to look at Arundle to see, what was going on with her. She was all in favour of the School of Inbetween on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, deep down under, untraceably hidden, a kind of no-where-land, so to speak.

“We’ll be picked up in Athens for the new term next month, by some kind of shuttle, travelling all over the world.”

“In Sydney we will change for the last hop...”

“So nobody can find out, where the island is.” Florinna confirmed.

“I think we will be picked up by a helicopter.”

“Only three weeks from now, I’m really looking forward to the end of our holidays this time...”

“Well of course we will have to say good-bye to our mom and dad, sure enough – still we’re really looking forward...”

“What a name that is – ‘School of Inbetween’ – between what, I wonder” Arundle said and didn’t expect an answer. I’m sure; my parents won’t let me go. The boarding school is supposed to be a kind of punishment in my father’s eyes, hard work and discipline, to become prepared for the hardship or even cruelties of life. My mother sees things not much different. They want me to become as hunted and driven by the lack of time, as they are. They don’t want to see me happy, I’m afraid.

“Let’s see. I ask my mother to call your mother. They came along pretty well, as far as I remember” Corinia referred to Mr Hare’s birthday-party, when Arundle was allowed to stay over night.

“We ask for that special application file, designed for managers, executives and analysts and so forth. I’m sure they’ll find the right tone. Perhaps the scout will come to you. All you have to do is let her

join your dreams, if you're able to – and you are very able, that's what we know..."

"And so are you, Billy-Joe, yes, yes I caught you, you know quite well how to move and select the right track while dreaming." Florinna said, while she blushed and so did Billy-Joe. Perhaps she should have an earnest word with her, Arundle thought, but then pushed such dark clouds off. She definitely had better things to deal with. Well a word amongst mates might be useful anyway...

"School of Inbetween probably teaches the art of uncertainty and vagueness as well and the name derived from that..."

"Could well be..."

"In the executive's application file the global aspects and the international attitude will be focussed, I presume" Corinia said. She seemed to have had a quite different conversation with her scout, Florinna thought.

"Major computer-companies are sponsoring the School, that might perhaps change your father's attitude, don't you think so?" said Florinna, while Arundle nodded with a little and hopeful smile on her face.

Billy-Joe had to earn money, and couldn't afford to spend it for such a purpose. His clan depended on his income. His little sisters and brothers would starve without his support.

His stepfather was a heavy drinker and spent each penny he could lay his hands on, in alcohol. He wondered what could be done to stop him drinking. He knew how little he could do.

Sometimes, when desperation stretched greedy fingers at him, he wondered, what good there was in a lifespan of over one hundred years, as predicted on him, while his near future was sad and dull.

The longing for knowledge almost hit him physically, and he felt like a dry sponge in need of water, to become alive. Even more, when he had learned everything his mentor, Kaúua Bereróo, was able to teach him.

Since he met Arundle, a wide new range of life had opened. With the impatience of the youth, he insisted to step in right away.

Florinna and Corinia were about to leave, that is, to wake up. They promised to care about the application-files and the scout's visit.

"Would be best to have things sent to you by mail, right here, while still on tour. Otherwise it will be too late, I'm afraid." Florinna said.

"And for you, Billy-Joe, we order an extra pack. There is always a way, don't worry, and it'll be found, I am sure. There is no reason

to hang down your head, poor boy”- little Corinia said in a motherly air.

“...Won’t take long, and you can check through the folders yourself. It’s very personal, though. Somehow, they seem to know us already – wait and see...” and off they went - fading like mist in the morning sun.

Some days elapsed. Uluru had been reached. Billy-Joe took the honour of guiding the Waldschmitts through the red rocks, where nothing was beside the heat. The red rocks were glimmering and the light hurt in the eyes, while the back and the feet were aching from the steep climb in the boiling heat.

You didn’t notice anything of the magic of that site, while the tourists flooded up and down the narrow path, leading to the top.

“You must have been up there, while here” Mrs Waldschmitt insisted, when Arundle recommended going back for her father’s sake. Mr Waldschmitt stood gasping dark-red in the face and longed for air in vain.

“You go on, I stay right here and sit down over there in the shade below that rock,” he panted. “You can pick me up, when you come back...”

Arundle wondered whether she should help with a little magic, then dismissed that idea. Her father would have minded, for sure. He stubbornly denied the existence of the supernatural, when it came from his daughter. She had caused enough mess and trouble already with that bow of hers.

Had Arundle by then only known, what else was hiding behind such clear-cut positivistic position.

Billy-Joe was first to get the mail, while the scout seemed to have visited them simultaneously. “Mine was a man” Billy-Joe reported, “didn’t ask him for the name... well, yes, we had some kind of conversation, so to speak. That was it. After five minutes he rushed off, said he had a lot more checks. I’d be okay anyway, no question about that, he said and vanished.”

Arundle sneaked out of the dining room where the busload was having dinner with floorshow. She met him as he was checking through the thick bunch. Many questionnaires had to be filled in, as

their friends had told them. A friendly letter reminded him to fill in all forms carefully, before sending them back.

“This seems to be some kind of description of the place, even with some photographs. Looks rather pricey, I’d say. I doubt very much me fitting in,” he murmured somehow disappointed. At that time, he hadn’t yet read the small print on the reverse of the personal application form.

Arundle was no less sceptical as to her application. “You only mind the money, for that - a solution will be found, but what shall I say. My only hope are Hares – and of course, my parents’ wished to get rid of me. However, for that, I’m sure they know other solutions. – Alas, come on, why don’t you start reading. What does the article say?”

23. Nobody’s Wish and Will

Billy-Joe began to read:

‘Nobody shall wish to oppress an other – thus reads the motto of the School of Inbetween. As freedom is most important. Only while free, (wo)man can unfold all her/his capabilities, and all her/his abilities. Not in solitude by her/himself, but in communion with each other, a human can become a whole human. This is in short the guideline and conviction of the School of Inbetween.

The School of Inbetween is located on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, somewhere in the South Pacific. The island consists of one single volcano-head and is formed like a molar tooth (where its name comes from.) The edge erects high up almost perpendicular but of different height (at some spots almost one hundred yards.) The island looks like a medieval castle, or, as suggested here, like a Wisdom-tooth – thus combining appearance and contents. This was the idea of the founders in 1984, when they constituted their ‘School of the specific kind’, (the latter School of Inbetween.)

While ‘nomen est omen’ – wisdom became the declared aim of efforts, as wisdom fills life with sense.

From a geological point of view, the island is still young. There are volcanoes some hundred miles away still alive. This might have been the reason why the island never was settled, although the interior offers a somehow limited but succulent flora, growing in the fertile

lava-soil. Only a few species found their way on their own over the sea.

The rare human passer-bys regarded the island as the seat of spirits and demons, - another reason for staying apart.

The island does not only erect upright down to the sea level, dangerous riffs also surround it, so it is impossible for ships to land here. Except for a secret passage through an adjacent atoll, there is no possibility to land even with a small boat.

The School of In-between itself is located with most buildings on the inner plateau – an almost circular flat volcano-slot head, about three quarters of a mile in diameter.

An extension of the same volcano is close by. The main island erects black and repulsive at least some fifty yards out of the foaming sea around.

Down to sea level, lead some hidden stairs (besides - there is a cargo-lift as well.) Right at the bottom, you find a small beach, where the pupils may bath and swim, or surf and sail.

From the highest peak on the opposite side, skydiving is possible. Trained skydivers may find their way back on their own; all others will be picked up by boat.

The central building has grown downwards, down into the ground, that is, down to sea level. The cabins of the first hour you still find, but the teachers and students now live in the subsoil tower.

On the surface, you can find all kinds of agricultural devices, stables, barns and cabins, for a variety of animals, next to fields and meadows and orchards.

There are by now some hundred people living on the island. Therefore, we can't produce all our food, but have to import more than half.

A picturesque cascade is sparkling some thirty yards down from the highest erection, immediately next to the little helicopter-port. The water is pumped up by means of hydraulic pumps and comes from the so-called 'seawater de-salter' that was invented in the early days.

The lack of fresh water had most likely been another reason, why nobody set foot on the isle. Of course, you find fresh water here and there, after the regular rainfalls, but no fountain or rivulet may be found.

The main reason, why people stayed astray, was still another one. When the rough wind from the south gets caught in the interior, the crater starts humming and howling like a band of madmen, and more than one low grader woke up by night, while he meant to hear some kind of werewolves or the like, and was probably not even mistaken.

The elder ones get used to the noise, as the southern winds aren't blowing all the time, but in fact, seldom enough, that is in July and August, when the winter is at its peak, and temperatures fall almost to the freezing point.

Otherwise the climate is friendly, although wet around the year. Rain is falling often but short and bad weather is moving fast, because the island is small.

Inside the subsoil harbour at the lower end of the atoll, you can find all kinds of boats and yachts, even a submarine.

Excursions to neighbouring islands or to the mainland help to avoid boxed-in feelings. A couple of hundred people so close together can hardly stay apart. Therefore, lessons last from morning until evening, and a library, containing a great variety of books, offers the chance to sit back and retire.

Its beauty compensates the tightness of the vale. From the cascade on the one side to the stairs down to the marina on the other, any detail may please the spectator's eyes. Nobody, not even the founders, have ever become fed up by such sights.

The houses are a feast for the eyes by themselves with the glittering black walls, the red roofs and coloured window-frames and doorways. Palm trees accompany the footpaths, and orchards invite for a stay, while the cascade is rushing in the background.

The interior of the main building offers even more surprises. The building extends downwards. Most classrooms and all students' dormitories are subsoil. Pupils rest in common rooms, so nobody may feel alone. Only the single teachers have their rooms on the ground floor (teacher-families live in their own houses.)

A wide, light- and air-flooded centre well, and exotic plants all along the walls, simulate nature in its origin. The light is led in by a tricky system of mirrors, while the air circulates by means of pumps.

Varieties of halls house all kinds of facilities. Cosy bars invite to relax. The only two discothèques of the island, might be somehow outdated, but manage without drugs and alcohol. Beside narcotics, you find almost everything, the youths may dream of. It's impossible to refer to anything, that isn't available or is obtained right away.

The indoor arenas comply with international standards. Most common ballgames can be performed there. Even polo is no problem. The sauna next to the indoor pool is located at the sea level. Over the whole south-easterly front, you find huge panorama-windows letting the daylight in, not only into the swimming-hall but also into the adjacent facilities above.

However, the outer facilitations mean little compared to the inner. The School of Inbetween is living on by its spirit. As nicely as the southern sun is shining, compared with the inner light, that is shining bright inside out, the sun looks somewhat pale.

That inner world can't be described in the same manner as the outer. Everyone namely has this world in the inside obviously. There are also blossoming gardens, and flowers grow and it's going to be built there faster, braver, and mightier than the ablest builder ever dared. The buildings of the spirit, the castles, built in the air, the fairylands and dwarf-dwellings behind the seven hills, can only be seen by the inner eye, as be shone by the inner light, and hidden from unauthorized, profane gazes of bleak curiosity.

Occasionally a gifted writer or artist may turn the inside out on paper or canvas, or have it sound in immortal tunes.

The magic of the instant, that is, the instant of eternity, may release its splendour and open wide for such an individual, to give her/him a faint idea of the unlimited ability of our wholeness and the reality to come.

However, beware of leaden gravitude and morbid earnest. Asceticism won't be regarded as a singular gate to the no-where-land of hope and glory and may turn out as misleading.

The senses shall be free, and shan't be oppressed. The School-community knows but one limit: The freedom of the individual mustn't serve as the proposition to limit others.'

Billy-Joe stopped reading because the paper's finished. He sat there silent, and so did Arundle for a while, then she said "Well, that's it, I suppose, there you feel drawn to, don't you?"

Billy-Joe nodded. "You'll see, we shall manage. If we really want to, we'll get there..."

24. Mr Waldschmitt's Annoyance

"See, what I've got here", Mr Waldschmitt exclaimed. He sat at the breakfast table with his wife, close to Uluru right in the middle of Australia and read his homely morning paper. Normally it was sent to him daily by mail. However, while touring through the land, things

didn't work properly, so a thick pack ended up right here at the turning point of their voyage.

What a nuisance that had been, all the more he'd have had plenty of time reading while being seated in a bumpy boring bus all day long.

"Doesn't make sense, spending a hell of a lot of money over here, while giving up everything" he argued. Arguing was his major occupation since he was here. The service didn't meet his expectations. Dust was everywhere, it came through windows and walls just like that.

"Is that my problem?" he used to say, when his wife pointed out, that there was another sandstorm raging outside. Therefore, the personnel just couldn't help it.

"You've got to care for clean rooms under all circumstances, I repeat, under all circumstance" - he addressed to the manager. "It's your job not mine. What do you think would it look like in my office, if I accepted any of such excuses. Where there is a will, there is always a way. Believe me. From us you could learn a lot. German law and order, that's what you need over here. Well, had I the command over here, things would be different, I assure you. You wouldn't believe how fast a world can change with a little discipline..."

The patient service personnel didn't really care, while listening to such tirades. They knew their men and protected themselves inside as good as they could, whenever the 'German Danger' was about.

"Well, at least my papers are here, that was after all about high time" Mr Waldschmitt ended his tirade at the Eden Hotel close to Uluru. He grabbed his bunch of papers and rushed into the dining room, where his wife was awaiting him impatiently.

"Where were you again, Roland, your coffee is almost cold. Wait, I get you a fresh cup. Now sit down finally. What can I get you?"

"What I always have" Mr Waldschmitt grumbled, still upset about the poor service and the reluctant morals. Mrs Waldschmitt hurried to the buffet for scrambled eggs with ham and German 'Schwarzbrot' (not such English gummy-stuff) and some Swiss cheese, and returned heavily loaded, only to meet her husband deeply involved in his papers.

"That is unbelievable, such an impudence..." she heard him shout. However, this time something in the newspaper raised his anger. There he had discovered an article - after all on the fourth page - under the headline 'News from Science'.

"They have snatched our idea, that's unbelievable. While we have been so close already" - he was screaming red-hot with anger, when

he raised his face from behind the paper. He grabbed for the coffeepot inattentively and raised it to his mouth.

“Yah, my lip, that thing is steaming hot” he shouted and threw the tray by accident off the table with all the scrambled eggs and ham and Schwarzbrot and Swiss cheese, and the coffee pots (Mrs Waldschmitt had taken one for herself again as well.)

The bunches of papers went the same way - the same way unread, over the Jordan, so to speak, and were ending up their short-living lives in the juicy mess on the floor.

His impetuosity caught attention of cause. From all sides servant came rushing by, asking how to help and whether a doctor had to be called.

Mr Waldschmitt only shook his head, so he and his wife were complimented over to another table, while a cleaner with bucket and swab approached and began to clean up.

Mrs Waldschmitt rushed off again towards the buffet to get the same load of breakfast again, while Mr Waldschmitt still held his burnt lip. Then all of a sudden his papers came to his mind, most of all the article he'd been raging about.

“Halt, halt, um Himmels Willen (for heaven's sake)”, he screamed at the cleaner, who just was in due course to shovel the worst mess together, and looked somehow irritated towards that funny redheaded man, who had switched into his native tongue by excitement.

While in fact in general he seldom left the German language and accepted the uncomfortableness of the Australian English to take over the communicative command.

“Halt my Zeitung, I need doch my paper noch” but it was too late, the whole bunch just landed in the bucket and couldn't be saved anymore so full of scrambled eggs and coffee as they were.

“Nu, come with the feet on the ground, my Lieber, they're online – even down here, I'm sure. You go and get your article in the office over there, it's as easy as that.”

Mr Waldschmitt patted his wife's backside, as she bowed down at him to serve the second breakfast of the day.

“You are a clever old house, that's what you are, although you aren't the brightest up here” and he pointed at his forehead with a dirty grin on his face.

Mrs Waldschmitt blushed over the compliment she'd heard, while forgot about the rest. Even compliments of that kind had become rare in their matrimony.

Mr Waldschmitt greedily gulped the food down; the whole affair had been stimulating his appetite, and while eating was telling his wife what had annoyed him in that newspaper article.

“Some rotten band of researchers stole our idea, believe it or not” he was mumbling and spit his wife some Schwarzbrot-crumbs on her dish.

“What idea, my Lieber, nu, what idea?”

“How shall I explain that, to you after all? – We started of with an entirely new concept. It has to do with relativity, so to speak. Time is no fixed quality but a state of being that differs with an observer’s point of view. Has to do with Einstein, of course, and is nothing new. Everybody knows that in the meantime. It all depends on what you are making of it. We in the club, I’m proud to say, managed to proceed a good step ahead, not only theoretically but in practice, that’s the point. We can prove now, that you can deduct time on the one hand and that you can add time on the other.” While he said that, he stressed on **deduct** and **add**. As if that was all-important.

Mrs Waldschmitt nodded eagerly, as if she understood what her husband wanted to tell her. In fact, ‘the Club’ her husband had mentioned, was a thorn in her eye, so to speak, for a long time already, because he spent his free time there, and when he was at home, he chatted with his fellow-members on facebook or the like. That wasn’t much better either.

“...As I said, in the article they reported about some researchers, who copied our approach. And they even claimed to have overcome the threshold of the future entirely, while we are happy to spare a couple of seconds and that only with mice, while they gave the impression of having been there by themselves. That far I read...”

Mrs Waldschmitt went on nodding. “Now you contact the reception right away and have that article printed for you. I’m really curious of how it goes on.”

Arundle stepped - still sleepy - through the entrance of the dining room.

“No word to the child, especially not about ‘the Club’,” Mr Waldschmitt was hissing in his wife’s ear. “This mustn’t interest the witty thing at all. Besides, no word to no-one, is that clear?”

Mrs Waldschmitt nodded eagerly while swallowing the wrong way. Her fits of coughing sounded almost natural, so Arundle didn’t notice her parent’s secrecy.

Besides, her head was full of other things. Since she had read the description of the ‘School of Inbetween’, she couldn’t think of

anything else. How could she manage to be sent to that boarding school?

Arundle had just sat down, when her father jumped up and headed towards the reception. "I go then, Spatzi," he said with such a meaningful glance at his wife, that Arundle heard the bell ringing at once. However, she pretended not having noticed anything.

She saw through the entrance her father talking fiercely at the receptionist, and was asked behind the counter after a while, only to come out again after some ten minutes or so.

He waved with a piece of paper over to them and seemed quite satisfied. "I'm upstairs, huffle-puffle," he roared. Mrs Waldschmitt nodded back somehow humiliated, while everybody in the lobby looked up and at her.

It took only minutes until Mrs Waldschmitt also tried to retire. Nevertheless, Arundle took her time with the breakfast, and her mother didn't want to be impolite and leave her all alone. So she drank her fifth cup of coffee and ate another roll with jelly, although she was all fed up already.

"Your father and I wanted to get up to that cave up there where the pupils got lost on Valentines Day. You know that tale, don't you? I fact it's a movie 'Picnic on Valentines Day', don't you remember?"

Arundle nodded. "I'm meeting Billy-Joe" she was in due course to utter, while she recalled that her parents mustn't know anything about her relationship with him. So she altered her saying into "... well, with Belinda Jones actually, an English girl, I met here in the hotel - for a round of squash or so", she altered her faux pas rather elegantly.

"That's a good idea, love, but beware of the heat. And don't forget to drink, your body needs that..."

Arundle nodded acquiesced and Mrs Waldschmitt went upstairs after her husband, to pick him up for their excursion. The shuttle-bus to the Rock left every fifteen minutes.

Arundle kept waiting in the lobby until she saw her parents descending. She waved at them a farewell. "Until lunch, dear" her mother called.

"Take care" Arundle replied. As soon as they were out of sight, she rushed to the lift. The white sheet lay on the desk; it was the copy of an article from a newspaper. She noticed the actual date and looked at the headline. Then she knew, she was on the right track.

<< Sensational Discovery by German Scientists.

>> A Professor together with her team of scientists of the renowned J.W.v.Goethe-University came about with a sensational discovery. 'Einstein's theory of relativity was transformed into reality', they say. That would mean nothing less than the conquest of time. In their sociological survey at a place called Laptopia (such is the name of our future planet) they give us a very negative discernment into the planet's future. 'Creation runs into trouble' the Professor said.

One of her assistants even topped her conclusion. 'There is a war going on. A war about the most precious good of the future', the young man declared, and referred to his actual publication titled 'The Time War'.

'Far too soon' said the Professor, have these so-called facts been published. 'The eager young man clearly passed the line between fiction and science. The publication can hardly be called even 'science fiction'' so the Professor. 'Nothing but speculation of the worst kind', the Dean went on.

'The time is not at all at our disposition. There is still a long way to go, before the problems of time travelling will be solved. Mere coincidence and surprising circumstances made that singular sight into the depth of time and space possible.'

The scientist made clear, that there was no substantial perception whatsoever, of how to handle that doorway to eternity. 'But if there was, the booklet wouldn't be worth the paper, that it is printed on.'

'I'm deeply hurt by that malicious and wholly unacceptable breach of confidence' the dean concluded.

We will keep you informed of the further development.

Before copy deadline, first comments by renowned futurologists called the whole affair a canard. ><<>

25. Trouble at the Institute

Arundle was sure the article referred to Grisella's investigation, although the report didn't mention any names. How came, her father was interested in such research? Why had she only learnt by accident from the newspaper how far the survey had developed already? Furthermore, how could it happen, that a book had already been written about the subject? Even though Grisella seemed to deny, what was published in there.

That would explain why Billy-Joe and herself had looked out for Walter and Pooty in vain. They eventually should have been here at Uluru, as they had agreed upon.

Walter was obviously in Germany and arranged that strange time-travelling business there.

Arundle didn't dare to take the article with her, but put it back right where she had found it. She hoped it was quite the spot, it had been before. Her father was absolutely fussy about details. He'd noticed the tiniest change.

She hurried out of the hotel, turned around the parking lot until she came to that eucalyptus-grove, where Billy-Joe camped right in. He was just about preparing his breakfast. Over an almost fume-less open fire, he was cooking something lengthy, fixed to a stick.

Could well be a snake, Arundle thought and shook in disgust. Billy-Joe's smile, when he saw her, gave her a warm feeling, nonetheless.

He invited her to sit by the fire and offered a cup of coffee, but she shook her head. "Had breakfast just a minute ago", she said and settled on a pile of blankets. Still panting after a quick run, she reported of what she just had learnt from the paper. Billy-Joe listened carefully, and was thoughtfully chewing the snake.

"I don't understand, why Grisella didn't inform us – no call, no arrow, just nothing. Why had I to read that in a paper? They seemed to be busy with that investigation for quite some time by now."

Billy-Joe nodded again and murmured ascertaining, while he was chewing that tough meat, he'd cut off a piece from time to time, while he's gulping it down with a sip of steaming hot coffee from a rusty tin-can, its opened lid a handle formed.

Arundle was scribbling a harsh note on a piece of paper, tore it round the shaft of an arrow, she pulled out of the invisible quiver of her magic bow, and put in the aim, and off it went, straight up north, through the cloudless blue sky, disappearing soon behind the horizon. Thankful and tender the bow snarled at her with some kind of a giggle: "A shot a day, keeps the doctor away." While she followed it with her eyes, she wondered, whether the bow was out of his usual equilibrium, for reasons she only could guess, but didn't at all disliked.

"I'm going to take good care of you soon" she let him know. "Shouldn't we go and have a look by ourselves, don't you think so?" she asked and looked Billy-Joe right into his eyes. "Why didn't they let us know?"

“Perhaps their message didn’t get through,” Billy-Joe suggested without conviction. No one had ever heard of an arrow, which totally missed the aim. While they were quite familiar with garbled messages.

Therefore, Arundle only shook her head. “Nonsense” she uttered, “complete nonsense, there must be another reason - and a good one, after all. There had been that trouble in the institute, if you could believe the paper. Who knows who’s behind that again? – My parents are out of the way until noon, anyway, they climb about in the rocks. That gives us almost three hours. Enough for a short visit.”

Billy-Joe eventually had had a tour, but that he’d skip, if his ‘toadies’ didn’t wait – which they most likely did. That would strengthen their prejudice about the unreliable natives. That was also some kind of touristy delight, he decided with a smile, and so did Arundle.

“Well then” he said rather decisively – “off we go, let’s get away – here is your bow, after all.” He pushed the magic bow right at her, and while she took it, she realized that warmth flooding right through her whole body from tip to toe, so to speak.

She grabbed for Billy-Joe’s hand murmuring senselessly, and an instant later they stood before the Slyboots’ house in Germany.

There it was morning as well, but the morning of the day before. They seemed to have arrived even some hours earlier, because nobody was up yet.

In fact, Intellectus and Scholasticus were out of the house already, the one at school, that had started again already, because Intellectus went to the Waldorfschule (a private public school, that didn’t comply with the order of public holidays.)

Scholasticus was at the university. He held his basic lecture like every morning from eight to ten.

Grisella was still in bed and Dorothea was sitting at the breakfast-table. She didn’t know much about that survey.

“Grisella has sent several messages and tried even on the telephone but couldn’t reach you. She wondered, why there was no reaction from your side, anyway. Well, at last you came, - might be even better, though. I think I get my dear sister out of bed right away. I’m sure, you aren’t here just for fun.”

“Right you are” Arundle answered – “besides, I’ve got to be back by half past twelve Australian local time. I have to see my parents for lunch then. And I don’t want to upset them again, because... - but that’s a different story, we’re going to tell next time.”

Had she only spoken of their plans, and then they’d been told, that Scholasticus and Grisella accepted a call to the School of

Inbetween. Negotiations were about to come to a positive conclusion. The Slyboots families after all were already sitting on packed suitcases, so to speak.

Grisella appeared in no time. Arundle told what she'd read in her father's morning paper and wondered again, why her father was so interested in the project. "Somewhat strange to me too", Grisella said with a long serious glance at her.

"Yes, strange things are happening, dear child. Ugly things... I had that feeling all the time, while the project was underway. As if we were spied out – and then that leaks here and there. In the end, I hardly dared to trust myself. Where did that guy come from? All of a sudden a student appeared. His name is Marduk, first name Malicious – strange enough, isn't it? Seemed to be a programme more than a name. He cheated himself into the group. I thought my assistants did handle that, and they thought I did. We woke up far too late. Walter and Pooty and most important of all - the magical stone - disappeared of course right away, but it was too late already. Let's hope for the best in that respect. Without our so-called time-window, he won't get far on his own. Anyway, this man set foot on forbidden grounds, and that's all my fault, mine alone. As if our poor descendants won't be in trouble enough... Lucky though - had Walter the brilliant idea with that magic black box, otherwise..."

Most of Arundle's questions had been answered by this brief and somewhat muddled report. She glanced over to Billy-Joe, whether he had something in mind, they should ask. However, he didn't say anything.

"What was the outcome of that survey, anyway?" she then asked. Grisella explained as clearly as she could, what had been done over there by the investigators, and what had been proved, while the causes still weren't so clear yet.

"If I understand it right, your studies confirmed our suspicion."

"Yes, responsible for the outbreak of violence is the permanent loss in time, while all other causes seem to be only aspects of the main cause, if I may say so", Grisella explained and went on: "Well, of course you shouldn't neglect the culture gap as well. And the role of the artifacts is by no means clear at all."

"But what does that mean?" Arundle interfered. "What are the consequences? How shall we help those poor creatures and their brave leaders? That is the question, and I'm afraid, you didn't get much closer to an answer."

"Well, I don't quite agree, at least I wouldn't put it that way" Grisella objected vaguely. She knew by heart that Arundle was right.

The survey did only confirm what was known already, or what had been suspected. Besides, the study couldn't exclude other components, but that Grisella was not prepared to admit as well. The factor time was one amongst many. Not all the time of the world could guarantee a peaceful world. Therefore, a lot more was required.

"In fact we are confronted with a horrible alternative," Grisella concluded: "Either Laptopia runs out of time or the Laptopians kill each other beforehand. The outcome is the same. All our efforts, as far as they tried to stop the loss in time, led into greater trouble. The worst would be, if we were responsible by interfering."

Arundle had had a similar idea. Still she doubted and saw unsolved contradictions. Her father came to her mind, although he didn't fit into the picture at all. He had had a negative relationship with time, ever since she could remember, had suffered under the lack of time and the pressure of time. If he all of a sudden began to ask similar questions, something else was in due course, something, they had no idea of yet.

"That guy, who wanted to profile on our account, was dismissed right away, exam or not. He has to see how he'll manage on his own with his inaugural dissertation. That's his own fault. He should have thought about before he ruined everything", said Grisella, still in rage.

However, that didn't help. Neither they, nor the Laptopians would get rid of such plague. Arundle and Billy-Joe looked at each other. They'd never let things out of their hands again. Had they only known, that Grisella was swarming into Laptopia with a whole bunch of scholars, while they had thought of a more theoretical survey, back home in the ivory tower of sciences.

It was too late now for accusations, but not for to stand the challenges, that were lying ahead of them. Even more because things were deeply connected with Billy-Joe's personal future. He would experience that in time by himself. The development over there in Laptopia was therefore also his cup of tea. The question was, whether they could still manage to lay some kind of positive germ for a lucky outcome. The upcoming failure mustn't be the end. Even now, there was still enough hope left for Laptopia. Good men endured and tried hard. The young Prince, General Armyless, and even the altered old Prince Watchalot, who managed to reflect on mischief and misbehaviour. So many people were longing for a worthwhile life, were defending their liberties and traditions, all those brave tribe folks, most of all the Churingas...

If they managed to trace down the parasites, which were steering processes of decline and decay, even the time might be safe in the end.

Wherever they followed a track in success, strange things happened elsewhere and overran the present trouble. News was falsified. People were moved like puppets on the string, were altered or sacrificed or finally disappeared at all. And behind all that stood the time. Be it hidden under other derivations, or plain and open, spotting at another culprit that soon turned out to be the false one again. A war all of a sudden seemed to be unavoidable, artifacts rioted, or the humans raged about and destroyed their artificial servants.

While Arundle spread out her thoughts like a patterned carpet, Billy-Joe was ascertained as well, as to the role he was playing. Most important would be after all, to keep a clear sight on the overall picture, instead of being stirred up by any detail. It would be of great help for him to study together with Arundle, and to exchange knowledge and experience, and to be attracted and influenced by her clear brain. Arundle, no doubt, was able to clear things up in order to get an overall view.

Even Grisella had to accept, that Arundle achieved more in a couple of minutes, than the project in days.

“We can only hope, that the regent family and the General manage to restore peace long enough, until the secret circle of parasites is spotted” – Arundle summed up her thoughts – “that’s what it’s all about.”

“That means some of us should have another close look again. Would you know, where to begin?” Grisella asked, somehow intimidated.

“Well, I won’t say anything right now. That place isn’t secure. All our movements and notions might well be watched and spied out. Hopefully not also our thoughts and feelings... well, that’s not my idea” Arundle lifted her magic bow and gazed about meaningfully.

Grisella didn’t say what she had intended to. She asked instead: “But how shall we be watched and who should do that?”

“If they manage to stop our arrows, they employ quite some power. I guess they have erected already a stronghold at present. I won’t say more for now...” Arundle said with another meaningful gaze.

As soon as she finished, an arrow came in. It was the one, they’d sent this morning in Australia. Arundle checked the time. The arrow hadn’t been stopped, or over read and falsified, as the note was identical word by word, with what she had written.

Perhaps somebody tried to throw dust in their eyes, now, when they had uttered their suspicion. Sure enough, they’d find the arrows sent by Grisella just like that, as soon as they returned. Therefore, it

would look as if they hadn't searched carefully. That, in fact, they hadn't really done, as they had had other things in mind.

Arundle promised to keep in touch this time. Best would be to meet in the dreamtime, the Australians and the other Star-maids were so familiar with, while the Slyboots didn't seem to be gifted enough for that.

"And if you go right at that culprit, what was his name again?" Arundle asked. "Marduk, Malicious Marduk" Grisella answered – "but he's gone of course."

"He surely had someone to back him up," Billy-Joe suggested. "Somewhere we've got to start anyway, and you definitely wouldn't be forced to fly" Arundle picked the thread up.

Grisella thought this a good idea. She still was very upset. How dared that boy making her look like a fool in public, by publishing things, he didn't have the faintest idea of. He might even still have friends in the institute. Someone must have brought him in, at last. Of course, she had to be careful. The best would be, she talked things over with her brother-in-law and her own sister. Together they might have an idea of how to proceed.

"What can be done, we'll do. I'm going to ask Scholasticus in any case, if he'd like to come along with you to Laptopia again. No, that won't work; he isn't familiar with that dream stuff, and you wanted to go that way this time to be less vulnerable. Am I right?" Grisella asked.

It was indeed a great advantage, whenever you got into trouble, you could wake up. That worked most of the time, if you didn't wait, till it was too late..."

Arundle was going to see her friends anyway, they might as well travel together with Billy-Joe, who wanted to come along. Since he knew his role in the future world of Laptopia, he sometimes felt as if he was there already.

The sight of an almost endless life ahead, made him easy. He knew he wouldn't miss anything, no matter how things looked right now. –

The School of Inbetween came to his mind, while he got aware of such outlook. Anyway, without Arundle, Florinna and Corinia he didn't know if he had still wanted to go there.

"See what you can do. Remember everything is of help, each hint. Things like - why my father had the idea of wondering about the problems of time. If I had the time, I would first overhear my mom. Would that be not a good job for Dorothea? We will be back the week after next. Perhaps you can arrange something. You could right as

well talk about me as the troublemaker. Well, you could do me a favour then. I want to leave home for a boarding school, but it has to be a special one, and therefore I need any support, I can get. I want to get to the ‘School of Inbetween’. That’s a very special school, you know...”

“Of course I know, my dear, don’t you know, that I’m going to teach right there next term? It’s somewhat secret, you know, don’t you? – and things aren’t settled yet for you?”

“Well, yes and no, they want me, that is to say, they want us, as Billy-Joe applied as well. But now my parents have to agree, and that’s why I can’t go any risk.”

“Don’t you worry, dear child, we are on your side and won’t let you down, nor your friend.”

Arundle nodded very gratefully, while Grisella went on: “We are going to make the big move at the end of the year, if things work out fine and we like it there. I’m sure we will. Scholasticus is going to have his own professorial chair and is able to research in his beloved border fields.”

“Well, ‘nomen est omen’” (the name is programme) Billy-Joe put in and felt good about the admiring glances of the women.

“Yes, that fits the name: School of Inbetween, right you are, thank you” Grisella gave him a warm smile, then went on: “I wasn’t fond of the idea of going there by plane. But you can of course go by ship as well.”

Arundle looked over to Billy-Joe and her glance expressed her thoughts. ‘Things gonna work out alright for both of us.’

It was about high time to leave. “We gotta go now. Give our regards to all we love, and don’t forget my mother...” - and off they went, like a flash of lightning.

26. The Equilibric Balancer

At lunch, Arundle tried a normal conversation with her parents. Instead of sitting at the table monosyllabic as usual, poking listlessly in her plate, she asked about the excursion, and tried to be friendly, anyway.

Mr and Mrs Waldschmitt didn’t know, what was going on. First, they wondered, but didn’t really mind, when Arundle managed to

twine in nasty remarks here and then. Her morning had been boring to tears, “that English girl is exacting” she said, she had been with.

“Well, next week, we are leaving anyway” her mother replied. “Why didn’t you come with us?”

“Yes, it’s about time to get home, isn’t it?” Mr Waldschmitt agreed. There was still that long bus-drive ahead of them.

Her parents didn’t see much either in those caves, Arundle learnt.

“Plenty of rocks of course – ‘viel Steine gabs und wenig Brot’” (many stones there were but little bread) – her dad recited laughing. Arundle’s empathy improved his mood quite a bit. Why wasn’t she always like that? - He thought and sighed.

From Belinda she had learnt what happened at the breakfast-table, Arundle was chatting on. “The spot can be still seen in the dining-room.”

“That was quite something” her father nodded giggling. “While burning my tongue I kicked that tray off.”

“That happens when you read while eating” Mrs Waldschmitt couldn’t avoid to mock, but turned the conversation exactly to the topic Arundle wanted.

“You can find lots of interesting news, I’m sure, Arundle patted on the pile of papers waiting to be opened.

“This morning there was something about Daddy’s Club, you know” Mrs Waldschmitt nodded. “Nonsense - had nothing to do with us. In fact it was about a scientist, who stole our ideas.”

“What kind of ideas?” Arundle asked miming curiosity. Some of her father’s club members appeared occasionally at home. Arundle faintly remembered their frightening appeals. They picked up her father or disappeared in his father’s room, and didn’t want to be disturbed ‘under no circumstances’.

“And I thought you’d play chess or something” Arundle remarked just like that.

“Well, you never knew, that your old man had it in him. – Oh no, we don’t play cards, we think about the world in philosophical terms, so to speak. Believe it or not. In a way, it was you, who gave the first kick. Do you remember when we moved? We had so many things in mind. Well, so things turned into the better, anyway. Out there I’d never met the club-mates.”

“Your daddy means our move back into the city. You didn’t feel well outside in this suburban environment. That is the time, your father’s referring to. We had so many good intentions... well, after all, things turned to the better somehow, don’t you think so as well?” her mother said pleadingly and tears glittered in her eyes.

Arundle nodded, patting her mother's arm softly.

"That was the time, when I began to think about the time. That is to say, we in the Club made ourselves familiar with such problems, I should say to be more precise" Mr Waldschmitt explained.

"I see" Arundle answered "and that was it about, in the morning paper, am I right?"

Mr Waldschmitt kept poking undignified in his teeth so Mrs Waldschmitt uttered pained – "please Roland, behave, I beg you."

"Heard anything from Einstein?" he asked without attending to his wife. Arundle nodded. "Its about him, to be exact, its about his discovery of the relativity of time. That's what we deal with in our Club. It's an old dream of mine, though. Do you remember, when I told you this tale about our vacation at the beach of the Sea of Tranquillity? Had of course only taken place in our fantasy... well, the moon – the moon had always been a kind of resting pole in the ocean of time. Always, since I was a little boy. I imagined the man in the moon taking me by the hand and leading me into his wonderland, where the time stands still, and everything remains as it always is..."

Mr Waldschmitt got red eyes and sniffed, and Arundle had a lump in her throat. She indeed remembered. That was a long time ago. Her father had been sitting at her bed and told the story of the man in the moon, he had made up for her.

"Well, sometimes I think, the worst mistake of you little ones is to grow older and older... of course you can't be blamed – nobody can – that's the way it is" Mr Waldschmitt sighed rubbing his eyes.

Mrs Waldschmitt gave him a pat on his back. "Don't you get excited, think of your heart. How did you come about these old affairs? – Well, yes, Arundle had been such a nice little thing, hadn't she? Much different from now – and how much we did love you, both of us, well, well, if we just could turn back the wheel of time, for once, but of course this doesn't work, it's turning and turning, and we are the ones to become overrun..." now Mrs Waldschmitt sighed and sobbed.

"Please Daddy, just for once, tell us the part when we went for a swim, just the two of us in that Sea of Tranquillity", Arundle pleaded in a most childish air.

That was too much for Mr Waldschmitt. He bathed in tears and covered his face at the bosom of his spouse, who pampered him with tender care.

Arundle was conscience-stricken, but her father soon recovered. While he looked up again he was smiling as he hadn't been smiling for a long time.

“Well, as you wish, but I hope you won’t get bored. My stories are not extraordinary at all.”

“Perhaps we better go upstairs” Mrs Waldschmitt suggested, “there nobody will disturb. We can order some ice-cream, what about that?”

When the room service knocked, Mr Waldschmitt was in the middle of his endless moon-tale. The Man in the Moon played an important role in it. In the Sea of Tranquillity, all kinds of things were floating about. Under water, you didn’t need an oxygen mask and when you dived deep enough, then you came to the entrance of the fairyland. That was where the Man in the Moon resided.

He was some kind of Santa Claus and occasionally he laughed his Ho, ho, ho. Only Daddy knew the language of the Man in the Moon, therefore Daddy had to translate for little Arundle everything, what the Man in the Moon said.

Arundle felt small again. She’d almost crawled on her daddy’s lap. Instead, she kissed his cheek, and his eyes went red again.

It was all too true; his tales didn’t burst of originality. The Moon man’s Land had more in common with the toy’s department of a warehouse. So, Mr Waldschmitt soon ran out of suitable items to be mentioned.

“I was not allowed to skip the slightest detail, while you were young” Mr Waldschmitt recalled and paused somehow exhausted. The emotional strain as well as the continuous talking made him somehow vulnerable. He felt as if a suit of ice was melting away and a soft kernel appeared hidden deep in the inside.

“Never did I find an end to my tales. I went on as long as it took, until you fell asleep,” he explained and looked thoughtfully into the naught.

“Well, well, could I ever manage to return, I’d give - you name it – for that.”

Arundle understood. What he meant, she couldn’t give him, despite all the magical power of her bow.

“I think one of your problems is, that you are all too modest, in a way. You have to take, what you long for most. You never had time. As far as I can think back, you always were in a hurry. Why didn’t you take your time?”

Arundle looked at her parents not at all childish anymore. The old bitterness ruffled her voice.

“You may be right, we’d better have taken the time once in a while, and things had gone a different course with us”, her mother

agreed, while Mr Waldschmitt already raised his invisible armour to parry the attack of his witty daughter.

“That’s said just like that – take your time. How can you take something, you don’t have? You have no idea, what it’s like outside there. It’s high time for you to wake up” Mr Waldschmitt yelled.

“Now, don’t be unjust”, Mrs Waldschmitt tried to quieten him down. “First you tell us your old tales, and when we take you by the word, you have us to shut up. As I understood, you were busy with such problems – on a scientific level. Well then, it works, or it doesn’t, you have to make up your mind. First you tell us, how far you went, and then it says ‘wake up’, if one claims a tiny crumb of the cake, so to speak.”

Mr Waldschmitt had told his wife of an experiment with two mice. A mouse in America grew younger, while a mouse in Europe grew older in some kind of equilibrium, as far as she had understood.

“Well alright, thank you for to remind me. Our major problem is to prove, that the European mouse grows older by the same amount, the American mouse grows younger. The equation is kept in balance; no law is offended, like in real life. The difference is that one mouse has the advantage on its side, while the other the disadvantage – so far so clear now?”

You could almost feel Mr Waldschmitt’s enthusiasm physically.

“That’s of course but one step, but the direction is the right one, I’m convinced of. Soon we will manage to connecting people with our ‘Equilibric Balancer’ and then – in the long run – the outcome will be everlasting life.”

All of a sudden, a strange greed appeared in the eyes that had been filled with tears of love a minute ago, and now pure madness had taken over.

Arundle was frightened. She could feel the strange wave of madness passing by. Mrs Waldschmitt felt uneasy as well. “Come down back on the ground, Roland” she said “and eat your ice-cream before it’s melting.”

However, Mr Waldschmitt couldn’t be stopped. “Just imagine” he went on “you have all the time of the world. Imagine what you could do. You could achieve almost anything, you could think of.” He was not easy to discourage and continued to paint the outlook in the brightest colours.

Mrs Waldschmitt tried any way “I don’t know, if I wanted to become one hundred years. What would it be like? You know everything; you’ve been to all the places you’d dreamed of while you

were young. I see boredom, an awful lot of boredom. No, I don't want to live forever."

"You and your negativity, you tore us down all our lives" he answered bitterly. "As a matter of fact we are not that far yet. It's just a dream. Right now we can only prove the state of the mice, that's all."

Nobody broke the silence that came about. You could hear the spoons clicking while they had their ice cream.

"I now see, how right you are, I'd like to get prepared for that real life, Daddy just mentioned" Arundle tried to lead the conversation on another track. She had heard enough about her father's ideas and about his strange club. It was high time at last, to talk about the School of Inbetween. She wouldn't get a better chance.

"Whenever you are discontent with me, you're threatening to put me in a boarding school..."

"...It's only, because we can't help it, you're just too much for your poor old parents" Mrs Waldschmitt tried to ease off.

"No, no, let it be Mom, I quite clearly see, that you are right - often enough. I don't do enough for school, and while you are busy the whole day, a boarding school might be the best."

"That's what we mean. Who's gonna care about you, while we are away? Of course, I'm conscience-stricken. On the other hand you are old enough, don't you think so?"

"A boarding school is no bad idea at all. When I learned that my friends are going too, I made up my mind. But of course I'd like to be with them again, they are my only friends."

"Have they registered already?" Mrs Waldschmitt wanted to know. That would indeed be an elegant solution she thought and gave her husband a secret glance, to be careful now and watch his tongue.

"Yes, they have registered, and it's a fine school too, wholly international, very modern, with computer-lessons and all that. Pretty far away, though. You can get there only by plane and helicopter, I understand."

"Well, that won't bother us, will it, dear?" Mrs Waldschmitt didn't know how to answer, because the distance did matter a lot to her, but she didn't want to put a spoke into her daughter's wheel. Therefore, she said nothing. A school like that was perfect for Mr Waldschmitt who thought of his club-mates and colleagues. "What about the terms of admission?" he wanted to know.

"Well, my friends had to pass a kind of exam. Otherwise, you are not allowed to enter the site. The School is located on an island in fact."

“Would that exam be a problem in your case?” her mother wanted to know.

“No, of course not, in fact I’ve passed it already. I did it just for fun, to see whether they’d take me as well. And they did... well they would, if you agreed, of course.”

“That’s my daughter” Mr Waldschmitt boasted and had a broad grin on his face. (Whenever anything advantageous occurred, he referred to ‘his’ daughter.)

Mrs Waldschmitt didn’t answer, although she had a harsh reply on the tip of her tongue.

“Shall I ring them up, for the formalities and things? Would you have me registered then?”

Mrs Waldschmitt looked at her husband, and as she saw him secretly nod, she nodded as well.

“Oh Mom, I’m so glad, thank you, thank you. You’re the best parents in the world.”

“Well, we didn’t speak about money yet. I’m no nabob, you know. More than one thousand marks per month we can’t afford, hope you understand that?”

“My friends are even two and their father earns quite normal, I think. If they can do, we should do as well.”

“Tax-wise you’ll be deductible a hundred percent.” Tax-calculations were Mrs Waldschmitt’s subject at the counsellor’s office, where she worked.

Arundle checked the clock. It was almost three o’clock now. The time-difference between here and Greece was about eighteen hours.

Fifteen plus eighteen equals thirty-three minus twelve or even twenty-four...?

Well it didn’t matter; the news was all too urgent. So she rang up, and had it ring a while, until a sleepy voice answered, so she knew, it was nighttimes in Greece.

“Do you know what time it is?” Vasantha asked after she realized whom she was talking to. “It’s two o’clock in the morning.”

“Oh, I’m sorry, my calculation must have been wrong – by the way, it’s me, Arundle.”

“Of course it’s you, who else dared to call in the middle of the night.” Mrs Hare answered with a smile, Arundle couldn’t hear, but somehow see.

“Could you tell Florinna and Corinia that things worked out fine for me as well? Therefore, we’ll meet over there on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth in two week or so, from now. Tell them, I’m looking forward so much, I can’t tell. – Oh no, don’t wake them up, just tell

them, and thank you, thank you so much for everything... Well, yes our flight leaves from Sydney... Well I'm not sure, whether I'll be with my parents, would be waste of time and money. At best, I'd stay right here and jump on that helicopter in Sydney... I'm sure; they'll let me know. Thanks again, good-bye for now, take care..."

"Who's that?" Mrs Waldschmitt asked.

"That was Mrs Hare in Athens, that's a city in Greece, you know."

"Sure, I know..."

"Yes, and it seems that everything was alright. Florinna and Corinia will be picked up by the school-shuttle in Athens, and will be taken right away to that island, you know. That would make things easier for us as well - don't you think so? We'd save a lot of money though, and I needn't travel back and forth. You'd sent me my stuff by air-cargo, don't you think that a good idea, mom?"

Mr and Mrs Waldschmitt were deeply impressed; this young lady of theirs seemed to be grown up all of a sudden.

Arundle was busy meanwhile ringing the secretary over there in the Sydney-office. "The application-file's been sent out today by urgent mail, a friendly voice let her know. "Everything's been explained in detail - parents' share of the costs, conditions of residence, possible exams, and the like.

Single parents need the signature of the absent party - this doesn't apply? Then all the better. All copies will have to be signed twice. That's it... good luck and have the application sent back as soon as possible. Thank you..."

Right next morning a thick envelope with a fancy stamp lay awaiting for Mr and Mrs Waldschmitt at the counter.

The school's insignia was displayed in capital letters in Latin - OMEN EST NOMEN -

"Rather impressive", Mr Waldschmitt commented, while opening the envelope with shaky fingers.

It took them the whole morning to go through all the documents, and fill them in, as applicable. The parents had to answer as many questions as the students. Nevertheless, by noon they had made it and off the file went, right back to where it came from.

A phone call the next day informed them, that Arundle was free to jump on the school's helicopter in Sydney or being picked up by the school-shuttle in Frankfurt, Germany. "While I suggest the first proposal. The copter takes some two hours or so, only. That's quite a difference, isn't it?" the friendly voice recommended.

Therefore, she'd be there even before Florinna and Corinia. Arundle almost busted, while she embraced Billy-Joe repeatedly, telling him the news.

When an arrow came in from Grisella, signalling green light for Billy-Joe as well (Grisella had arranged things via secret channels), their happiness exceeded beyond all borders.

For the next two years, Billy-Joe's family would be supported with the same amount; he's at present been able to obtaining. That was his major concern.

27. The Moon of Laptopia

A dusty bus-tour lay ahead on a different route, but that was hardly noticeable. Mr Waldschmitt was better prepared this time, a thick pack of unread magazines lay beside him, while Mrs Waldschmitt was sitting next to her daughter to enjoy the last days, they were together. They wouldn't meet for month or even a whole year. Arundle was no child anymore; she was a self-assured young lady by now. Not in years (not even fourteen years of age, though), but in fact.

It's always hard for a mother, to see her only daughter off for good. Such were the feelings, and although they lasted, you couldn't bear them all along a dusty bus-ride. Things were said, repeatedly, and after a while, mother and daughter went silent and clung to their own thoughts.

Laptopian worries came back again to Arundle's mind. The moon was attracting her attention, she couldn't say why, or she could, but didn't want to admit. Since that conversation after lunch, where things turned to the better between her and her parents, the moon didn't get out of her mind again. Something was in her, and didn't want to keep quiet.

Arundle hesitated to suspect her own father, but his romantic love for the moon, and his crazy greed to master the time was the kind of coincidence, she couldn't ignore. What was that all about the club, he belonged to as a member? Was he the blind tool of evil, secret forces, similar to those the Laptopian Regent depended on, before he lost his head?

It was high time again to get over there to Laptopia. Only there she could find out about the moon-programme, as it was going on, and how far it was of help to get rid of the riots.

Walter, the magical stone, and Pooty were in desperate need of a long good rest, after the disastrous service for Grisella's investigators' team. Billy-Joe and her magic bow were somewhere abroad and not available until tonight, so Arundle decided to take a nap. She bedded her head on her mother's shoulder, and in no time, she had fallen asleep.

The advantage was all too obvious. If things turned out to become disadvantageous, you just woke up. Of course, you mustn't miss the proper moment; otherwise, it could well happen, that you were trapped.

Florinna and Corinia seemed to have had the same idea, because they arrived shortly after and so did Billy-Joe.

The four of them met at the palace (in fact they had an appointment there) although Arundle would have liked to meet on the moon. In the palace, they met the young Prince and General Armyless. The Prince looked sad, and while asked, what the trouble was, he said, his father was in bad shape.

He guided his guests along the corridors to the hospital, and stopped in front of a shiny door, behind which sat the former Regent on his mighty throne. He looked awful.

"After a period of recovery" the young Prince explained, "he fell back into fits of depression and suicidal notions. It's a shame. Look at him, the way he sits there. I even cleared the throne for him again, but in vain. The doctors can't help it... he's getting at anyone in his vicinity. We had to lock him up. There is madness in his eyes. Poor Dad, I just found him, to lose him right away again."

"And outside it's all the same", the General went on, "madness where-ever you look. Now madness rages through Laptopia. If only the pogroms did stop. Each night dozens of youngsters become arrested, raging in the outskirts, and destroying everything and everybody, they get hold of."

He looked at Billy-Joe: "We've got to start with those kids. It has to stop. That would be a great challenge for our champion, whose deed is unforgotten. I'm sure they would listen to him. But we need you live", he went on. "Not as a vague shadow though, somewhere in a blurred dreamland, I'm afraid. What's wrong with that stone of yours and the magic bow? Aren't they working anymore?"

Arundle could feel a heavy load of aggression waving over to her from the General, and so did the others. No wonder for all that strain

and responsibility every day, she thought in excuse. After the victory such a disappointment, that wasn't fair. Now all this, and from the entirely wrong side, namely from their truest allies.

They had to be careful. First, they had to stick to their plans, as they tended to alter their course to the needs of their hosts. This time they would examine the moon, searching for those who secretly pulled the strings.

They'd tackle such problems as soon as possible, but for now, they had to check the moon, Arundle explained. She didn't mention the survey, but confirmed the General's remark about the magic bow, to pamper his mood.

On the way back Arundle guided the conversation to her subject while asking about the moon-programme, whether it worked and how far it had grown. Neither the Prince nor his General seemed to be up to date. The local trouble kept them busy and focussed their attention.

The young and the old man looked at each other somehow bewildered. How could they forget about that programme? The General tried to remember the latest state, and only recalled, that many shuttles had come back, because they weren't allowed to land "for technical reasons" it said. Some of the autopilots reported debris in the orbit.

"We were at the point to divert the whole programme to Mars, if it wasn't for the distance. Another idea is to build a huge satellite station. But what ever we intend, we've got to deal with acts of vandalism, even out here in space."

The General sighed, while the young Prince shook his head. "We just don't know, what can be done. Wherever we look, whatever we try, it's all the same..."

"...Murder and revenge is everywhere. Most of these poor creatures from these factories are by now almost human-like, with feelings and an independent brain of their own, produced to serving their masters," the General explained.

"On the other hand we've got to understand our human fellow-citizens, who suffered a great deal under the occupation by the regal army of my father's, while he still was all different" the young Prince agreed. "Those semi-human artifacts in fact switched the roles and had their former masters become their slaves. That's not forgotten, and never will be..."

Why were the shuttles hindered to landing on the moon, or were even destroyed? There were no humans on the moon – well almost none, she learnt, but were those few the culprits? That could be

checked. Arundle was very convincing and in the end, she got them all.

The guests from earth and the young Prince were standing on the battlement of the castle, watching the moon (the battlements stuck through the clouds.) Unfortunately, the moon didn't stick to the expected role, as she had shrunk to a small sickle, as if she wanted to keep her secrets. The guests didn't have time to wait for two weeks until full moon again.

Therefore, they arranged with the General for a shuttle and managed to get on board right away. "We are going to send the complete bionic laboratory – all kinds of precious spare parts for the cosmetic surgery, and so forth. If someone up there wanted to gain wealth or power, he'd be well advised to capture that load. A lot of good can be done with it..."

"...That's right, but also a lot of evil. Think of my poor father, there is little hope for him" the young Prince interrupted.

"Anyway, they'd indeed be nuts, if they destroyed that" the General concluded - "but, you never know these days."

Billy-Joe still felt guilty, whenever the old Regent was mentioned, as he beheaded his former opponent. He had cut the man's head off and he felt now responsible for the bad shape of the Prince. No matter whether it was the body's fault or not.

"The body is sound and well – it's the mind that's sick", the doctors said.

Why did he cut that head off? Billy-Joe thought this repeatedly and still hadn't come any further. He still had no answer for that. First, he found excuses. He had been out of mind, almost dead. He had been led by another will. He had been copying a historical sample. Finally, yet importantly, he had been forced to give a clear sign of victory.

All that was true, but still – why did he cut that head off? None of the answers, he found, did fit.

Billy-Joe hardly dared to look into the Prince's sad eyes, and while the young Prince always found excuses and even hailed him for his deed, Billy-Joe couldn't calm his bad conscience down. Somehow he wanted to heal that awful wound he'd cut.

If he succeeded in that, the suffering body of whole Laptopia might as well be healed.

They might find a clue on the moon, as Arundle suggested, she was almost certain to find the key to the secret right there. Where else should they look? They had tried almost everything with poor results. While strange things went on at the moon, almost unnoticed and out of control.

Therefore, the young Prince supported the new approach and gave it a very last chance. They either succeeded or lost on the eve before doomsday, so to speak. Before they all went mad, and tore each other to pieces, they might as well grab for the straw in the moon-man's hand.

Whatever was going on at the moon, they'd soon find out. The shuttle was due to leave in two hours, while the constellation was best at that time.

Disobedience and carelessness had been responsible for some of the accidents and for most incidents, but this answer was not sufficient at all. Sure enough, the war had influenced all artifacts, wherever. And the moon was still in their hands, - nothing would work without them. Artifacts were responsible for the production in factories and in agricultures; artifacts controlled traffic and communication – in one word, they ran the show.

It was about time to get on board. They proceeded to the shuttle ramp, where the General was awaiting them. Once more, he pointed out, how dangerous and useless the whole enterprise was. Obviously, he still didn't trust the artifacts, and that was indeed no wonder.

"What, if they arrest you right away after landing?" he warned all too impressive, the girls thought. Did he still hide something? Did he know of facts, he didn't share?

Arundle declared that she had to go for her father's sake, and won't stay back under any circumstances. She told her friends and the Prince, what she had told Billy-Joe before about her father's club and all those strange ideas and experiments they dealt with.

"I've got to know for sure," she said, while entering up the steep gangway. For those old-fashioned freighters you still needed a space suit because no air-circulation was installed or gravity.

A last check at the hatch assured them of the functionality of all applicable devices. The intercom was tested and the seatbelts fastened, while the hatch closed, and with a mighty sizzle, the engine took over against all forces of gravity.

"Lift Off" it said and up they went, faster and faster.

The Rubicon was passed, so to speak. The pilots up front were experienced astronauts, regardless of the fact that they were artifacts, how else could it be?

They knew their job and even the General stood surety for them, the young Prince declared.

If nothing stopped them, they approached the moon in a few hours. They would turn into the orbit and circle around a couple of

times, to lose speed before landing in the ‘Sea of Tranquillity’, because there was the landing strip and no water, like in Mr Waldschmitt’s tale – once upon a time – for little Arundle.

They wouldn’t see the Man in the Moon either. Arundle smiled somehow sad – it had been nice, though.

How many hours had her Daddy been sitting next to her bedside, how could she ever forget about that? Had he been the same squabbler then?

“Do you remember, what your father was like, when you were a child?” she asked the young Prince, who’s sitting right next to her. She didn’t consider the intercom-connection. It took a while until he realized, he was meant. ”Well, no, things didn’t work that way in the palace. The little Prince rarely met his parents, I’m afraid. Well, I had you, I do remember you, of course... - and I hated all those TV-sets, though.”

“We surely didn’t do enough, I’m afraid” Florinna went in, while they all overheard the intercom.

Billy-Joe was still busy with his heavy thoughts and bad feelings, while Corinia joined the conversation, and participated in the revival of the Prince’s early days, where she played her role as well.

“It won’t take long now,” the Prince said. “With my mother I used to come here once in a while. Our summer palace was up here, you know. I can’t remember, when we gave that up, must have been shortly before she died. Travelling didn’t do her any good, anymore.”

The young Prince pressed some buttons to get in contact with the pilot. “We’ll be right there in exactly fifty-three minutes, anyone cares for a refreshment?” The guests from earth denied, they remembered the food, that wasn’t convincing at all.

Now that they knew, how close they were, the old bad feelings returned. How trustworthy were those artifacts up front really? Would they manage to land properly? If they were reliable, what about the ground staff? Could they trust them as well? Would they be diverted or even sent right back? The worst case of all was of course a fatal emergency landing, but that they didn’t dare to think.

“The summer palace is inside deep down subsoil,” the Prince explained to cheer them up. “It’s rather spacey down there and very comfortable. Well at least it used to be, might have changed in the meantime.

Quite a little world on it’s own, with artificial sunlight and fresh air and all that. You feel so light and easy because of the low gravity. Well, I still have been lonesome somehow. In fact, I’ve been lonesome all my life” he added after a thoughtful pause.

Compared to the orgies of light and fury - travelling by shuttle was like riding on a snail. You saw little through the tiny bull-eyes. Space threatened black and empty and somehow fearsome. The reason for that was obvious but couldn't be seen. It was all a matter of speed. That was why things remained where they were. While the magic bow used an entirely different mode, that based on the power of thought and the might of desire. By that two means the necessary energy was mobilized, and dissolved the image of solidity of the visible, shining up then, as a kind of firework and light effect in the vicinity of such mystic space shuttle.

Scholasticus once tried to explain that principle, but Arundle doubted, whether she got him right, or whether he got the principle right, that still was the question. There was a lot between heaven and earth that couldn't be explained, and the power of the magic bow was certainly one of those things.

From up front the squeaky voice of the pilot was heard. "We now turn into orbit - No unforeseen circumstances - Landing in twelve minutes - Get ready for landing - Fasten your seatbelts - Move your seat into an upright position - "

The tension was growing and could be felt almost physically. Would they succeed? Could they trust their pilot?

"It's too late now, the point of no return has passed. At that stage we won't escape the moon's gravity", the Prince explained. "But all goes fine, seems to be a routine landing after all.

The guests tried to spy down to the surface, but the bull eyes were narrow and might need a cleansing as well, so they could see very little.

"Ah, right there, that's supposed to be the Sea of Tranquillity" Arundle explained and pointed at a huge basin with an almost regular rim.

"Looks like the effect of a mighty collision" Corinia said, somehow absent-minded. She might as well be leaving the scene.

"Over there must be the landing strip," she added, while obviously returning to the site.

"I think, I'm sick," her sister groaned, while pressing into her seat. "If things turn from bad to worse, just wake up, before you vomit into your helmet" Arundle advised, while Billy-Joe added - "would reduce the sight, though."

Corinia couldn't help but burst into fits of laughter and even infested Florinna, so that she forgot all about her sickness.

While they had fun, the Prince was tied down to solid grounds. He could not escape, because he wasn't asleep. 'Not in this world

anyway,' Arundle thought, feeling somehow light and easy, though. 'What the heck was the matter with Florinna, didn't she know the state of being, she was in?'

The old landing gear was rumbling over the uneven strip, the spider legs quivered, while the shuttle turned and slid to the left as if out of control, but then erected like a wounded warrior for the last blow, and came to a sudden halt. That was it.

"Kind of rough landing" the Prince commented. "Up here on the moon, almost without atmosphere, landings are always a certain problem, as the buoyancy's got to be artificially produced, that makes the touch-down not easy for the pilot. My mother hated these landings. Well, yes, as I mentioned before, that was one of the reasons we gave up the summer palace.

- The installations seem to be all in order, that's a good sign, I daresay." He pointed at the buildings and at the vehicles approaching. "Those artifact-systems are self-sufficient, they regenerate without input from outside. That's why I just can't understand why the shuttles couldn't land. That doesn't make sense at all."

The stairs were there and the hatch swung open. They all climbed down the steep ladder, still stiff in their suits, and pretty weighty, although the low gravity of the moon reduced their weight by two third.

A friendly ground hostess welcomed them and guided them halfway down the stairs. Her smile on her shining face was somehow frozen.

"Metal endures the environment better than any organic tissue. The radiation is just too much out here", the Prince explained when he noticed the bewildered glances of the girls.

"It's all routine" he shook his head, wondering, while he entered the ground-vehicle awaiting them at the bottom of the staircase, to take them to the arrival hall.

Before passport control, they had to cue. The grim loptocops behind their counters took their duty rather serious. They studied the travel-documents carefully the Prince produced for them. They had to open their helmets now, to show their faces. Florinna still suffered from airsickness and appreciated the fresh air.

The Prince was busy with all the formalities. He filled in all kinds of forms for them and finally assisted with the precious cargo, to be unloaded and stored properly for the disposal of the beauty-clinic-to-be.

“Those shuttles weren’t refused at all. The schedule works fine; things are, as they should be. I don’t understand that. Should that only be a matter of communication? I wonder, where the General got his information from.”

“You are right, such information came from the General. Was it to hinder us, getting here?” Arundle wondered.

“While we are here, why not show us around, little Prince?” Florinna asked - she seemed to have recovered. The Prince just waved her off and asked one of the hostesses instead to guide them about.

“It won’t take long. The moon is everywhere almost the same” he said, when Billy-Joe indicated, that they didn’t have too much time to go.

So it was, after a couple of minutes they decided to return and wanted to have a look at the summer palace instead, the Prince strongly recommended, because this was part of his early life.

Arundle was looking for other traces, that also had to do with the past, and with her father and his fancy tales.

She even imagined some kind of secret circle hiding somewhere and watching every step they made. Perhaps they were only safe, because they were protected by the dream world, they were in. So, Arundle decided, not to talk about such matters now. She didn’t want to confuse her friends. Perhaps someone arranged some kind of show for them.

No matter how this visit would end, she wouldn’t give in. Next time she would come here by means of the magic bow. Things would look entirely different then, she was almost sure.

Right now, the young Prince was guiding them around in the summer palace. The site, where he spent, as he put it, “some of the happiest hours of his early life.” The palace was indeed beautiful, and overloaded with all kinds of precious items.

Greek pillars draped with jade wine leaves and golden grapes hosted Hercules and Atlas carrying the world on their shoulders. Huge paintings covered the silk-bespanned walls.

Neat little golden chairs and stools next to even more golden tabulates, invited the visitors to become seated and relax, while eager servants attended hardly visible near-by.

Floors and corridors were covered with marble tiles and mosaics of the highest quality; - Gates and fences, stairs and handrails here and there and almost everywhere; - all glittering in an orgy of hidden light, while here and there voluminous crystal lustres professed the illusion of myriads of enlightened stars.

The splendour was overwhelming, the brilliance indescribable, and the sheer brightness managed to heave you beyond imagination, provided, you had an air for magnificence.

The small group sat down on one of those ‘Isles of Tranquillity’, as the young Prince called them. Servants, more humane looking than ever, hushed about in their ever-lasting beauty and grace. Neither Billy-Joe, nor the young Prince were able to keep their eyes with them.

Florinna pushed her little sister and the two of them started giggling, while Arundle frowned and touched Billy-Joe’s sleeve; he turned right away towards her and blushed, as did the young Prince, and, as if someone in the background had monitored the scene, young male-servants appeared with baskets full of fruits, and trays filled with the orders, by no means less handsome as their female counterparts.

Now it was the girls’ part to try and keep their eyes with themselves.

While they had their snacks, nobody dared to lift an eye, or wink a lid, neither to raise the attention of the servants, nor of the comrades, - one was as uncomfortable, as the other.

Food and drinks were delicious, and the more they were eating the hungrier they became. They felt a never-ending desire, and could have eaten on and on. The young Prince set an end to that, when he noticed the greed, and asked the servants to take everything right away. Then he had them rise.

“We didn’t see a quarter of the palace,” he explained. However, his guests were unwilling to proceed. “If you go on teasing us, we could easily wake up” Corinia said and all four of them nodded.

“Well then, think of our task. We aren’t here just for fun.” Nevertheless, his guests had forgotten the reason. They felt heavy and fed up and unwilling to move on. The Prince himself didn’t feel well either. Therefore, he said that, and raised the question, whether this could have to do with why they had come here at all.

“What, if we’re close to a significant encounter, and some-one tries to make you stay away and give in? So let’s combine our forces.”

“Yes, let’s put all our strength together...” Arundle confirmed with a thankful glance at the Prince.

“We are now getting to the ‘Hall of Fame and Honour’.” – the Prince explained and raised the attention of his guests. They indeed became curious and were pressing towards a splendid portal, they were soon passing.

The hall, they just entered, was very large. It was indeed so large; you couldn’t see the other end. On both sides, there were busts and

statues, and engraved plates, and brief memoirs. Nobody could ever read them all.

Arundle noticed that her spirit rose. She overcame the lethargy, and managed to somehow infest her friends as well, only Billy-Joe was still slurping behind with leaden legs, and lack of lust.

Arundle was looking for hints, referring to her fathers club. "Watch out for dates earlier than the year two thousand. I only know very few of my father's club-mates, almost none by name, but perhaps someone is mentioned, who succeeded in some kind of pioneer's deed with reference to time-control or the like. Anything might be of interest, anyway."

While the girls read on, they noticed, that they were on the wrong track. "We're far too early, here are only ancient Greeks and Romans, on my side" Corinia yelled. Arundle and Florinna were somewhere in the middle ages, and were approaching modern times slowly. "Galileo, Copernicus, Bacon..." they didn't skip anyone" Florinna hollered back. "Let's jump ahead some hundred yards" Arundle suggested and hurried on.

"Well here it's getting interesting, after all", she gasped and remained in front of Einstein's torso, who was standing there, so typical.

"My father refers to him explicitly," she told Florinna. Corinia, on the other side, caught up and entered a new dynasty. She had now already come up to the twenty-first century. She didn't find any presidents or prime ministers and the like, anymore, but Princesses and Princes.

Someone with the name Princess Jet stream delivered a child in 2065, that is – a son – bound to become the Regent, but came to death under mysterious circumstances, as he grew on, Corinia read.

"Here is probably something of interest. Emperor Rolandus, born in 1949, coronate Emperor in 2080 (or 60 – the number had partly vanished.) 'His Imperial Highness, Rolandus, Caput Mundi' to be exact. What a title – and that man grew really old. Look, how tall he is", Corinia shouted. "And there - the title even gets on – 'tenet urbi et orbi' - it goes on." Corinia waved the others over to her side, so they could see 'Emperor Rolandus' with their own eyes.

"That's Latin, isn't it?" Billy-Joe asked when he picked up. "Yes it is" Arundle answered somehow absent-minded, while the lad grinned. (The Fathers at the reservation wanted him to become a priest, but he ran off.)

“He then was, let me see, 2060 minus 1949 – then he was one hundred and eleven or even one hundred and thirty one years old, when he became Emperor” Corinia figured.

“Pretty old, wasn’t he?” Billy-Joe wasn’t convinced – “as old as I’m going to be or even older, anyway”, he said, but the others didn’t pay attention. So he didn’t ask, whether the old Shaman of the Churingas might be found as well. Perhaps he was not important enough or not long enough dead, though. Or most likely a ‘persona non grata’ (that was also Latin and meant a disgraced person.)

Billy-Joe was alert now. He also began to search, as he knew, what he was looking for, instead of following with the Prince, who didn’t show much interest either. Down here, he said with a smile, he used to skate.

The old Shaman was then found, at last, standing not far away, and opposite, amongst the philosophical and spiritual big shots. You could clearly identify the untidy frowsy appearance. The torso seemed much alive. You could feel the strange appeal somehow. That was because Billy-Joe knew him well and would never forget the circumstances of their joint subsoil - up soil venture.

‘Let’s hope then, I won’t become that filthy old bump in reality’ he thought, ‘and the prediction won’t become real, and have him end up like this.’

As the power for that biblical duel had come at him from that Shaman, that was sure enough. That he recalled, although other events of great importance superposed such memory in the meantime.

His last encounter deep down in that cave came to his mind. Once again, he could feel death approaching and meant to feel the eerie grip. The emotional part was easier to recall, while he still didn’t know what really had happened on the factual side. Fact was, he stood up and fought and made it after all. Not knowing what he did and how he managed. He did, what he had to do, and appreciated what he did. Even the worst part of it.

The young Prince by his side made him feel guilty whenever he noticed the sad gaze of his eyes. Billy-Joe shook off in vain such memories. The close encounter with his ‘alter ego’ didn’t do him any good, although it was nothing but a marble bust.

Arundle didn’t feel good either. Could that Emperor really be her own father - as some details indicated, or was that an accidental coincidence, perhaps even arranged by that weird forces, she still conjectured behind all this.

The name and date of birth suited all too fine. On the other hand was there the aristocratic appeal of the statue. That Emperor Rolandus looked all too haughty.

A marble Semi-God with the laurel-wreath on his head, and a snooty smile on his lips – at last a little sign of familiarity. And the father, who had told her the tales about the Man in the Moon came to her mind, when he sat at her bedside, telling with his monotonous rough voice more or less concise details of the hidden fairy land under the Sea of Tranquillity, to make her fall asleep. Details she knew in fact better than he did, because she had often to correct him, when he happened to forget what was to happen.

The Prince stepped by. He looked thoughtfully at his guests from earth, but didn't say a word. They all felt the strange mood and a threatening anxiety. Billy-Joe and Arundle somehow infested the sensible sisters.

Had they found out anything of interest? Well, Arundle seemed to have met the very strange image of her father that made her uneasy, because she didn't know what it was about. While Billy-Joe was reminded of something, he didn't like to touch, and wanted at best to have thrust aside.

Something was there, and forced them to refrain from muddling along at the site, and to care, as not to be drawn still deeper into affairs, they didn't understand, and clearly went beyond their capability.

28. The Man in the Moon

Corinia began to flicker first. A definite sign that she was due to wake up.

“We're coming back,” Arundle yelled, as she realized the same symptoms at herself. Her inner unrest couldn't be suppressed any longer. Something was there, that forced her to wake up without delay.

She didn't hear any more, what the Prince answered in return, while she found herself sitting upright and all awoken in her bed in the hotel-room.

Outside there was dark night. The thin sickle of the moon was due to disappear, and looked somehow sad just over the horizon. For a

moment, Arundle felt the unbearable loneliness, the pale celestial body emitted, and fled back to her childish idea, she used to pamper, while she was small. - One of her father's tales dealt with such topic. The Moon man's wife had died and had left him behind in sad solitude.

She pulled herself back, and slipped into her dress. Then slid out of the window. She jumped down, and pricked her ears for a moment, but everything remained calm. Nobody had noticed her. Then she rushed to Billy-Joe's camp, as fast as she could in the darkness and almost broke an ankle while tapping into a rabbit hole.

Softly cursing, she hobbled on to the eucalyptus-grove, behind the parking lot. Billy-Joe could hear her come from afar and helped her for the last fifty yards or so.

"You steam like a steam-engine" he said with a smile. Arundle pointed at her leg and had him support her. "Let's hope nothings will be broken, anyway" she stammered –"that'd be it. Is the bow ready to go?"

She didn't have to explain anything - that she knew. Billy-Joe knew exactly, what he had to do. He nodded and got the magic bow, leaning right next to him at a tree. The air of weakness had gone; they'd been both caught in while still dreaming. Now they were awoken and had their wits about them.

While on the way to Billy-Joe's camp Arundle wondered in vain, whether the Emperor could be her father. Most likely, her leg's been pulled, and the question was, who's been pulling. After all, dreaming was somewhat fragile.

Wishful thinking was an important part of the world of dreams, and more than once things happened to become real, and of course vice versa, as now was the case with her. She'd been afraid of circumstances that most likely never would become real.

Before 'the big jump' (as he put it) the magic bow longed for some familiarity with his mistress, he didn't see for quite a while.

"Just to be sure, she still is the same," snarled he with a giggle (he somehow managed to do both at the same time.) So he did. He seemed to be satisfied with the outcome, so he was shouldered and the hand took Billy-Joe, and off they went towards the strange far moon of Laptopia.

While approaching that future moon, Arundle didn't care much about the beauties of space-time-travelling, but had to think back to her father, as he had appeared in her dream. She saw a being with two faces, one she was familiar with, while the other was strange and repulsive.

“Dreams are funny enough” Billy-Joe confirmed although Arundle didn’t say a word. ‘Must have read my thoughts, though’ she wondered. However, there was no time for musing, when they turned into the orbit around that strange celestial body of Lady Luna below them. Full and round she was again, out there in the dim light of the eternal night of the universe, and was - in no time – one hundred years older.

At best had it been, if the bow took them right back into that honourable so-called ‘Hall of Fame and Fortune’, but somehow it didn’t work. Either the coordinates didn’t fit or the entrance was denied. They could not get near that summer-palace.

They goofed about on the devastated surface of the moon. They passed through the Sea of Tranquillity with huge jumps, for the low gravity. Arundle didn’t feel her ankle anymore, but didn’t know if this was a good or a bad sign. They felt careless and gay, as they jumped on and on. Arundle imagined the basin filled with water, (that special kind of moon water, where you still can breathe under water.) Her father’s image appeared sitting at her bed, telling his Moon-tales.

What, if he stood behind all that, what was going on in Laptopia? Arundle couldn’t think of anything worse.

Like kangaroos, they jumped. Without any pain in her foot, she took hurdles, no world-champion managed down on earth. It was pure fun. The easiness went up their heads, and made them high and dizzy. Billy-Joe was already giggling like a fool, and Arundle couldn’t help keeping her leaden sorrows, and saw them floating off, as she joined him laughing without reason. Each jump made them feel lighter.

Out of breath Arundle finally gasped “Let’s stop that senseless hopping, we’re gonna get crazy, after all.” It took her a while, until he got her, and halted, out of breath as well, she realized with satisfaction.

“What’s now?” he asked, looking around. “Something should look familiar, though.” Arundle shook her head: “Not to me”, she said “but it should, after all we had just been here some minutes ago. Let’s look for landmarks.” In their dream, they had also passed the Sea of Tranquillity, or part of it. At least the terminal must be there.

“Well, the horizon is much nearer here, and the moon is so small” Billy-Joe guessed, when no building came in sight and no characteristic landmarks either.

They couldn’t go on and on. That didn’t make sense. The ground they went on was entirely strange to them. The whole moon was strange, though.

“That isn’t the same place we have just been” Billy-Joe agreed. “Yes, we are lost” she answered somehow pitifully. “Besides, the bow signals, that we run out of oxygen. If we won’t get to the palace in the next five minutes or so, we’ve got to return, right away, I’m afraid.” The magic bow confirmed to that by having the string vibrate, so that Arundle could feel it.

While things went crucial that way, the well-known hills appeared next to the entrance to the summer palace. “How strange is that?” they wondered.

“Back or forth?” the bow snarled as they took their time to think things over. “Well then, let’s go ahead, don’t you think so too?”

“Yes, let’s try again once more” Billy-Joe agreed and on they jumped.

The closer they got, the stranger things looked again. That was no solid stone anymore, but of much softer fabric. The wind they produced with their wide kangaroo-hops - even in the thin atmosphere of the moon - made the fabric flap. It turned out to be just ordinary cloth – some dirty-greyish pile of cloth lay there. At the far end, they discovered gigantic shoes pointing upside down, while at the other end a face bowed down at them. They realized their error.

“Right -ho, ho, ho, ho,
I’m the Moon-man though.
While only the sickle is to be seen,
I’m free to relax with the greatest esteem.”

The Moon-man was leaning at his bundle of dry wood he’d have traditionally collected to take it home, and have a fire made with it, for to cook his meal during daytime, when he couldn’t be seen.

With his right hand, he upheld his head. In his left, he kept a long tobacco-pipe, and on his head, he was wearing a night-hood. His face was almost round indeed, and reminded of the full moon.

He was of course much smaller than the shadow, which was seen from earth. “That’s caused by the rays of the sun”, he explained without being asked – “somehow reflecting and enlarging things on the surface a thousand-fold.”

He was still gigantic as he laid there like a chain of mountains, on the edge of the Sea of Tranquilly, his favourite bed. Whenever there was a chance, he had a little nap. As soon as it was getting dark on earth and no clouds were in the sky, he stood up, topped his bundle on the shoulder, to have the proper shade reflected, down on earth.

“Stretched to the floor, down on the ground

Make things go round, and round, and round.” –

He said with a giggle. - “Besides, nobody notices, what I’m doing anyway. The times are long gone, when people stared at the moon.

“Who then tells these days?
The Moon-man’s finest tales?”

Arundle just wanted to answer – ‘but my father did’ – when the Man in the Moon went on talking, as if she didn’t say anything. He might as well be deaf.

“How nice of you to see me in my solitude
A boy as handsome, as the girl is cute.”

“Please ask him for that entrance to the summer palace, our oxygen...” Arundle whispered and hoped that Billy-Joe’s manly voice wouldn’t be ignored.

She was right. The Man in the Moon answered right away.

“Is that the site, they were building some years ago, and these shuttles came in like busy hornets? Nice times though, after all, had to take care of them. Once it still happened. One was caught in my coat, and puff – I stood in flames. Well, in fact, it was just the coat, lack of oxygen up here, you know. My wife put the fire out in no time.” The Moon man sighed – “well, she is gone by now, over there she lies forever...”

- “Oxygen, oxygen’s our problem right now...” -

“That shuttle, what happened to that shuttle of yours, you mean? - Well nothing serious, I suppose, they fixed it just like that, no harm to you, little earthworms...” he sighed again -

“...You call it summer palace, don’t you? - Why not? See right here, under my armpit, that hole? That’s it, right there – and in you go. See me on return, please, you’re always most heartily welcome...”

‘How nice of you to see me in my solitude -
A boy as handsome, as the girl is cute.’

...Your names, though, just in case someone should ask...?”

However, it was too late by now, because Billy-Joe and Arundle had disappeared into the inside already. With a little more air, Arundle would surely have asked for the Moon-woman, she was interested in,

even more though she had heard of her by her father already. So there was a good reason to continue the little conversation.

As soon as the second sluice shut, they smelt the refreshing air right away. Even the magic bow took deep breaths. "That was tight," he snarled. Only he knew how tight. The way back would have become a serious problem for the two human beings. But that they needn't know.

Inside here, Arundle and Billy-Joe recalled many things, the magnificence and splendour, and all that. They hurried through the corridors, searching for that 'Hall of Fake and Furore' as the bow put it, (he didn't seem to be in favour of.) There, they hoped to find the Prince again. They couldn't think any further, but they knew of course, that there were tasks awaiting them, tasks of the strangest kind, those could only be fulfilled by their real presence.

The overall challenge was defined by the time-thieves, if they existed at all. Arundle was almost sure of that. All too obvious had those interferences been. There was someone or something hidden in the background, - some kind of evil being - that provoked turmoil, distress and disaster, and somehow her father was involved. He had to do with it, here the root for his madness originated.

Right now, they were guilelessly goofing around in that palace; its beauty didn't mean anything to them, because they had better things to do. Had they only met anyone, friend or foe, they could have asked.

Arundle recalled, what they had been told by the General before taking off to the moon. The moon was supposed to be in the hands of the enemy.

Again they passed those splendid halls and came to the place, where they had been served such delicious snacks, you couldn't get enough of. The waitresses and waiters stood about as last time and were as beautiful and handsome as before. Thirsty and hungry as they were, they accepted the invitation like they had done before.

While they had their snacks and beverages, they realized again, that they couldn't help but stuffing things into them with uncontrollable greed. They had to mobilize all their will to get away from there, and without the magic bow, they probably wouldn't have managed at all.

The fact, that they were already right next to that so-called 'Hall of Fake and Flurry' or something, made them proceed and got them on their legs again. They now remembered any detail, and the further they went, the clearer they got.

They finally made it to that so-called ‘Hall of Glint and Glory’ or whatever its proper name was. They stepped alongside all those celebrities, looking for that Caesar Rolandus and the filthy Shaman, and of course for their little Prince and guide.

The hall was still so large that they couldn’t see the end. It seemed even larger and taller, when sunlight flooded down from the ceiling, and a fresh breeze was flattering their noses and made the heat fade, they’d been expecting.

The bright light was somehow mirrored in the plates at the pedestals, and was as well glittering in the jewels, been fixed at the ‘Learned and the Chosen of all Times and Modes’.

The two of them could hardly keep their eyes open for such flooding glow. Therefore, - for a reason, Billy-Joe wasn’t able to render account of, - he asked Arundle, whether she’d read the name on the platform of the old Shaman’s statue.

Arundle couldn’t know the answer of course. Somehow, Billy-Joe later was glad, that he hadn’t told her. And while he still wondered, why that had come to his mind, he heard Arundle exclaim: “There he is, that’s him, I’m sure this is the Caesar.”

29. The Caesarean Audience

They found the Prince still standing in front of the Emperor’s statue, as they had left him. He was just studying the writing on the socle. It read:

‘ROLANDUS CAESAR IMPERATOR CAPUT MUNDI
TENET URBI ET ORBI’ -

‘Emperor Roland – head of the world holding the lead of the earthen round’ – the magic bow translated for his mates at best he could.

“There you are again” the young Prince exclaimed, when he looked up, seeing Arundle and Billy-Joe, still gasping for the short run on the last yards. “I thought I’d lost you.”

Billy-Joe nodded – “so you did, but we are back again. Although it wasn’t easy to get back here”,

“...not easy at all”, Arundle confirmed and raised her magic bow. They reported on their odyssey, and on the Man in the Moon, who’d

helped them. However, the Prince hadn't heard of him. "Never heard of a giant, dwelling up here," he said.

Billy-Joe just wanted to give him a lengthier explanation of the giant's whereabouts, when Arundle interrupted sharply: "We've got to talk about that Caesar, right here. Is there anything you can tell us, little Prince?"

"Not that I know, nothing more than it says here anyway. - Well, in fact, he was mentioned at school, I think, but I hardly remember anything" the Prince said reluctantly. Then he made up his mind and came about with a sound explanation:

"The Caesar, it is said, doesn't interfere into planetal government, but leave it up to the Regent or President and the associated Councils. Somewhere out there" – and the Prince pointed vaguely into no-where - "the Caesar is reigning amidst a mighty court on some kind of virtual facility of no dimensions.

Bothering about individual planets is absolutely quite impossible, because the universe is the empire in fact and of immeasurable size. That's why he has Regents or other representatives all over the places, where the inhabitants developed that far. There are a couple of thousands, I'd guess – or millions – well, I can't tell. - Nobody knows exactly, how many, and nobody can tell, whether the Emperor is alive or has ever been living. Not in the sense, we mean it, anyway. I don't know anyone, except my own father, who came near that residence at all, or even met that so-called CAESAR IMPERATOR face to face."

The young Prince couldn't go on. From afar, from the other end of the Hall, horns and shams resounded, while drums caught up, and trombones fell in, only to carpet the supra-light Haendel-trumpets, taking the lead while things developed, that is, the marchers caught up and set foot, like an eager band of angels running after Thee on Doomsday, maybe.

The brilliance went beyond all borders. Over the whole width of the unspeakably wide hall, a wave of sheer splendour, of never-ending delight of the most fabulous kind, came travelling on. Like thunder the myriads of footsteps resounded, despite of the light-footedness of the marchers, because there were so many of them. Carrying all kinds of sumptuous sedans, gorgeous stools, fabulous canopies, and other stuff the like, not to forget those ostrich-feathers and ivory-teeth and King Salomon's ebony beauties, - well, you name it, after all.

"Talk of the devil, and he will appear..." Arundle whispered. She's convinced to face the Emperor's Court.

"Who may be seated in those sedans?" she thought and her heart was beating hard. Was that her own father? She looked at that statue

so very unlike, except for the little smile on the lips, but that was surely not enough.

“I don’t think the Emperor himself is giving us the honour of his personal encounter,” the Prince said. “His Majesty’s surely sending an ambassador,” the Prince hissed.

Billy-Joe and Arundle nodded rather nervously. “No soldiers though, seems to be a good sign to me, I’d say, don’t you think so?” she whispered, while Billy-Joe hid the magic bow behind his broad shoulders, because the bow was indeed a weapon, so not to spoil their peace-loving appeal.

The head of the pageant got at the Emperor’s statue, but still was no end to be seen.

“And if that is him anyway?” Billy-Joe whispered while the first sedans were carefully lowered and set to the ground, and servants with tiny little stairs jumped in, and the Master of Ceremonies had hurriedly erected the throne-chair, and the inner circle of stools and cushions arranged.

The Master of Ceremonies looked at the Prince and his guests from earth. He meant them to kneel and lower the head, as soon as the curtains of the sedan were drawn open, and not to look up again, before he gave the sign to do so.

The Prince was familiar with such ceremonies, and he supported the Master by conviction. That was not easy, because Billy-Joe hated such gestures of inferiority.

Arundle was not much better. However, the Prince argued and begged and tried to persuade them not to spoil everything beforehand. So at last they lay on their knees, at least Arundle did, while he and the native boy knelt only on one knee that was supposed to look more elegant and male-like.

They had their eyes under control and looked straight down at the ground in front of the throne, awaiting the things to come.

A short while later, they were allowed to look up. The inner circle was filled now and someone – maybe even Caesar himself - was seated on the throne. Courtiers of minor a ranking were standing behind those sitting.

Some fifty pairs of eyes watched every notion of the petitioners, and His Majesty himself produced the same little smile as the statue did. Arundle doubted not – His Majesty was really His Majesty, no qualm about that.

“We were told of you, my dear children” His Majesty opened the unequal intercourse, and waved them closer to be seated on cute-looking little stools. Arundle and Billy-Joe kept their mouths shut,

even though they'd been addressed to, and let the Prince do the talking, because he was used to such ceremonies, and would do no harm.

Looking upright from down under, Arundle could only see the imperial mouth and nose-tip, nothing else. If she had hoped to find out about his identity, she was mistaken. Therefore, she didn't get any closer to the mystery. Of course, she could have asked, "Is that you Daddy?" but she didn't dare.

Beside the little smile, she hadn't come to any further familiarity. Like the statue, the original was draped with a laurel-wreath on the noble head, and a tunic on the slim body, and sandals on his small but otherwise unspectacular feet.

The throne was far too big and mighty for him. He reminded Arundle of the Roman Caesar; Mr Schwertfeger had been so fond of, much more than of her father. She better gave up on that entirely. The little itch of disappointment didn't really hurt.

However, there was no time for pondering. Just as they were seated on those low uncomfortable stools, the Master of Ceremonies introduced the Emperor. It was a sheer endless list of titles the Master had to read on, the most important planets and solar systems were mentioned.

After that the Master of Ceremonies recounted the glorious deeds, the battles and contracts and peace-treaties and so forth. Peoples he had saved, progresses he had proceeded, and governments he had replaced, or supported, or installed, or deleted, or left alone.

The guests from earth got uneasy. Time was not endless at their disposal; in fact, Arundle was supposed to be in bed by now, and would do so, if she hadn't been woken up by an unidentified or even unidentifiable cause.

The Prince remained calm and at ease, he seemed to be familiar with the procedure.

Arundle knew, she had to be back, before her parents finished with their breakfast, but definitely before the bus left, because otherwise the bus wouldn't have left at all.

Besides, she had to talk things repeatedly. They had to think about many aspects and to arrange all kinds of things you didn't even think of. Where did she get her visa? Could that be done right here in Sydney? For how long would she be allowed to stay? What kind of insurance, vaccination, precaution of what kind – were necessary?

Billy-Joe wasn't much better off. He had to deal with his local authorities and to sort out mainly the financial aspects.

The Caesar up there wasn't Arundle's father. He couldn't be – not in a hundred years.

The Master of Ceremonies came to an end. The Prince now introduced them and pointed out the merits they earned serving Laptopia. He hopelessly exaggerated their role during the war and the riots, and all that.

Then he spoke about the Prince's father and how he developed after the defeat. He mentioned the plague and the epidemic madness that was spreading all about, and the Prince asked for advice and assistance, he was gratefully promised.

Despite all that, the Prince added in the end something that made Arundle suspicious. He said, he'd be able to handle the situation, with his General's assistance.

The main cause was settled that way. They had come up here to find answers, and had got them at last, no matter how strange the procedure was and how poor the result.

So she thought it wiser not to mention Grisella's survey now. The Prince knew what to say and how to put it, and how to run the negotiations. There might be another chance to talk about the loss of time.

When the Prince finally ended, the Emperor whispered with his advisers. He waved those who stood apart to get closer and listened to them as well. Finally, he came to a conclusion. He made the young Prince the new Regent over Laptopia and all planets and satellites of the solar system. The General he nominated as Minister of the inner and outer peace of the solar system as well.

Arundle and Billy-Joe, as well as Grisella and Scholasticus, he appointed 'extraordinary members of the Laptopian subdivision of the Crown Council'.

The final decision had to be acknowledged by the Parliament of the Ranks. However, His Majesty was convinced that his proposals would be confirmed.

The meeting ended. Arundle gasped and almost suffocated, while the young Prince looked pleadingly at her, not to spoil everything they had achieved by superfluous remarks.

They got up again, knelt and lowered their eyes, on the Master's of Ceremonies advice. The music picked up, everybody sat down or stepped on, and the whole glamorous lot slowly disappeared.

"You know now, that the Emperor is on your side", a voice whispered, and from behind, a pillar a small appearance stepped into the open and introduced himself as the Advisor.

Billy-Joe was just whispering, “he knows about everything, I suppose he’s got his spies everywhere” while he noticed that mysterious figure, and felt overheard. The whole procedure that just had passed, didn’t meet his taste at all.

Arundle agreed, the authoritarian attitude wasn’t her cup of tea either. Thus, the Advisor caught them on the wrong foot.

“He is no democrat, you’re right” she said. “At least we got an impression, how big the empire is. This wasn’t clear to me.”

Billy-Joe agreed. “All of a sudden your own problems seem small and meaningless,” the Prince confirmed – with shining eyes, he was glad, about Billy-Joe’s discernment. Besides, he appreciated his designation, and was prospering under the impact of the new role he was going to take over.

“Will we get a chance to bespeak at least some minor problems, or must we do all by ourselves? I’m thinking of the medical problems of your father, for example. Someone’s got to know more about that, and what had been implanted in his head.” Billy-Joe wanted to know.

They had almost forgotten about the Advisor, who was standing beside the pillar unnoticed. He was hardly more than an image and a voice - as he harrumphed and sighed somehow sorrowful.

‘Why not have him listen to what we have to say’ Arundle thought, while she noticed him. ‘He and all the spies, one of whom he most likely is.’

Instead of the Prince, who looked rather alert because of his father, the Advisor himself took the word.

“One reason why the Emperor is so fond of you and your proceedings is the fact that there is always a revolution underway to be dealt with. Fact is that we are the minority in the universe, while the powers of darkness still keep the majority. That’s why we would give up ourselves, if we gave in. In the democracy, the children of light would become hopelessly overruled. We aren’t yet in the position to settle back and have things grow in peace and liberty. The fires of darkness glow everywhere, and beings get attracted by the evil gloom, no less than by the glorious trumpets of true faith. Right now, there is one name appearing everywhere – Malicious Marduk – he is the challenger of the aeon. We don’t know, how far his influence has yet been growing, but, I’m afraid it went further than we know. He won’t give in, until he and his Miseriors reign in chaos. Your dear father, the former Regent of Laptopia, can be seen as a pitiful example. He changed sides and enlisted in Marduk’s ranks. Now that they lost him back again, they won’t let loose, and that’s his present tragedy. He’s to be torn to pieces, and there is little to be done...”

The Prince nodded and sighed, while Arundle asked for that loss in time – “Is time not your major concern?”

“Oh no, quite the contrary; the leakage is one of the most horrible weapons. Time is a precious good, probably the most precious good of all. The battle at present rages about such questions. It is said, that the Emperor and Marduk had been once friends and came across while exploring the secrets of space and time. After all, it’s all a question of to be or not to be. Where there is no time, there can’t be anything. Time and space correlate, and depend. Time is the dimensional key to the universe.”

Arundle felt dizzy – „we saw that all too tight, though“ she said – “we thought someone stole the time of the others to improve his life on their behalf, quite similar to what was done with money.”

“Basically looked at, exploitation still exists” the Advisor confirmed. “You are right, what we experience these days is a new form of exploitation, a variation of the old power-game, that has been confirmed once again. The dualism in space may approve such. As it looks, there is no clear position possible any more. Nobody can be sure of his or her righteous point of view. In the end, they all tend to become selfish and ignorant. The poison of greed and hatred and envy is crawling into all modes and forms of being. Who can be safe of Malicious Marduk, after all?”

“Not even the Emperor himself?” – Arundle asked and the Advisor confirmed: “You’re right – not even the Emperor!”

“And why are you telling us stuff like that?” Billy-Joe wanted to know. “You yourself belong to those slimy courtiers, don’t you? Why should we trust in you?”

“You are absolutely right, I’m member of the court and my duty is it, to uncover with you the secrets of the universe, to what ever possible extend. You have to understand, that’s most important. Without proper knowledge, you may overshoot the mark again. As long as you don’t get the proper idea of the total whole, you’re serving Malicious Marduk involuntarily. I need not remind you of that barbaric act of beheading the former regent, my young friend,“ the Advisor said with a thoughtful look at Billy-Joe. “With deeds like that you are heading straight into the open arms of Malicious Marduk; - might have been him anyway, who assisted you with the ultimate blow. How did you feel? What was it like? Do you remember? – See...!”

Billy-Joe looked to the ground uneasily. He knew exactly what the Advisor meant.

“It’s so easy to have right turn into wrong,“ the Advisor confirmed. “You’ve always got to be alert.”

“I would like to return to the question of exploitation - if I may”, Arundle stepped in. She pitied her friend though, while he looked very ashamed, although she had been against the one to one copying of the biblical guideline, right from the start. It had been Billy-Joe himself, who insisted in such an awful fulfilment of the prediction, or what it was. He could have all the better shown mercy. If things had then turned out so much different for the Regent, was still another question.

Right now she didn't want to speculate about that, because the question of exploitation seemed far more burning and crucial, with regard to the riots raging down there in Laptopia.

“You said” she addressed to the Advisor “exploitation only changed the mode, but is leading to the same results, I agree. The reality down there proves that without question. So the wrath uprising now, is the same, as was the wrath of the oppressed and exploited of all times.”

The Advisor agreed: “You are on the right track, just go on.”

Such agreement didn't do her any good. All of a sudden, she didn't know how to proceed.

“Well, that's about the end of my idea, I didn't think any further. I just wanted to make sure, that all class struggle always had to do with exploitation. In other words, the cause of revolutions and civil wars, no matter whether they've been fought in the name of justice, freedom or 'Lebensraum' always is the same. Exploitation does overshadow and imply all other causes.”

“And how shall things go on, now?” Billy-Joe asked, still thankful for being released from the trap he was caught in.

“Find Malicus Marduk” the Advisor answered and stepped back behind the pillar and vanished, just like that.

30. The Return

The shuttle back to Laptopia was ready to start. All precious cargo was unloaded and taken to the newly built warehouses.

The Prince was glad to hear, that things had worked out fine. He returned as a new man, raised and praised by the highest possible institution, he could think of. His Majesty himself approved his promotion.

The paperwork, as unnecessary it may be, had to be done and was done as promised, while he found the file awaiting him at the captain's locker on board of the shuttle, signed and sealed by convention and tradition, and he was delighted to obey.

“May I express my highest esteem and appreciation, Your Highness, on behalf of the whole moon-garrison. Your prompt appointment as Regent is our undividable and singular honour and praise of the glorious day, from now on to eternity - hosting His Majesty Himself, not to speak of the heavenly chorus and courtly herd; - may the crystal blue moonflower – unbreakable as it is - remind you of that glorious and unforgettable day; - we for our parts, will keep in our hearts for all our lifespan.”

The moon-band got the sign and blew with all might into their trumpets and trombones, while the crystal blue moonflower was handed over. The Prince spoke a few words and thanked for the hospitality. The garrison defiled, accompanied by the band, the hatch was closed, and off they lifted.

The more personal farewell had been done before in the VIP-lounge. Billy-Joe and Arundle didn't know what to say. Their thoughts went ahead and they figured that they had run out of time once more. That wouldn't do them any good at all, with regard to the changes both of them were projecting. They couldn't risk any of their 'pranks' as Arundle's parents put it.

“Well then, little Prince, we've got to say good-bye now, for some time. All our best wishes are with you and your brave General, the new Peace-Minister. May the power be with you” Arundle exclaimed pathetically while she gave her little Prince, who now was a mighty Regent, a big mighty hug and so did Billy-Joe.

The Prince was looking forward rather optimistic, to overcome the worst obstacles together with General Armyless the new Peace-Minister. The leaks weren't all found yet, but the problem of the precious time was well known by now, and would be handled on a broader level on their behalf. There was no individual solution possible for Laptopia alone. The whole universe was affected.

That didn't mean to give in and do nothing. Equality and justice were the keys to peace that seemed to be obvious. His duty was it, to arrange for just shares and equal rights for everybody and to find niches for the artifacts as well, if they promised to keep the law and have their poisonous industries removed to the moon or even further.

That was his understanding of democracy, because he was no dogmatic feudalist at all.

The rioting youngsters in the free zones were another field of action. The riots had to stop, that was clear after all. He then would guarantee full territorial autonomy. Furthermore, he would introduce Nutrition- and Healthcare-Programmes, as well as a 'Villages-Improvement-Concept' following the model of the Churinga-village. Finally, yet importantly he would stimulate all efforts concerning education.

Thus were his ideas to tackle the chaos, Malicius Marduk was spreading about.

The magic bow got ready for the trip, as soon as the shuttle had gone. He checked all data again and had a trial just in case. Then he compared the data anew, but still wasn't completely satisfied. "Well then, a couple of minutes might do", he snarled, while Arundle tried to make him find his legs, so to speak. While Billy-Joe was shaking his head thoughtfully, and murmured unintelligibly. Even Arundle couldn't help it.

"Let's get away, I'm fed up", he bluffed to retreat Arundle. He didn't look friendly at all, in fact kind of scary, hadn't she known him.

"Who's Malicius Marduk after all?" Arundle asked inaudible and shook her head with anger. "Nonsense, that Emperor is not my father and Billy-Joe's remaining my Billy-Joe, that's it."

His doubts couldn't be banned again. The old Shaman and the big counterpart of the Emperor seemed to be secretly connected, and so was Billy-Joe. That was his problem right now. The Advisor's revelations were uncomfortable, no doubt about that.

Even more, if the old Shaman was his future 'alter ego', Billy-Joe figured, - although a long time ahead. Without the Shaman, he'd be lying dead out there in the desert of Laptopia, disfigured and forgotten.

"And if the Advisor had appeared only to catch us for the Emperor - and make us change sides and be bribed - first the Prince and then we?" Billy-Joe's still was muttering, while they went to the start-up finally.

Arundle took the virtual keyboard. She couldn't care about the worried comrade of hers, she was all concentration now.

“What did you say?” she uttered “who’s gonna be cooked and knifed? – All of us? – Yes, but why?”

“We’ll be cheated, that’s what I mean. What would you say if there was no Malicius Marduk? If the Advisor had just pulled our leg, and that name out of his pocket, to drive us crazy, and to turn us round? - Could well be, couldn’t it? It worked fine with that little Prince of yours. He is heart and soul for his Emperor, isn’t he?”

Arundle had to admit that there was a point in what Billy-Joe said.

“Let’s get back first, okay?” she answered. Lucky enough, they still had Grisella and Scholasticus. Soon they all were together on that isle and they’d even get closer.

Arundle couldn’t help but was looking forward, despite all the trouble and agony all around. She was looking forward at her little private piece of happiness.

Behind the parking lot, in that eucalyptus-grove, at Billy-Joe’s campsite, a bad surprise was waiting.

“There he is” a voice shouted when Arundle and Billy-Joe appeared out of no-where. The voice belonged to a ranger of the National Park. Billy-Joe was thrown to the ground and handcuffed in no time. Arundle just managed to keep her bow, while an assistant tried to get hold of it. “That’s mine,” she yelled. The ranger let go at once. She wasn’t maltreated at all - only because she was white, she thought, but that was not the true reason.

Mrs Waldschmitt stood mouth open next to her husband, her eyes all red from tears, and couldn’t believe her eyes, when Arundle all of a sudden stood right there. The poor woman didn’t understand what was going on.

“Thank God, it’s you...” she exclaimed repeatedly.

Mr Waldschmitt stepped to his daughter and gave her a hearty hug. “Thank God, you’re safe and sound, dear...” he murmured softly.

“We got that garbled note and the eucalyptus-twigg. Well-done, dear, clever girl. See, that’s my daughter” Mr Waldschmitt exclaimed with a meaningful glance at his wife. “And there the rangers found this” and he pointed at the untidy heap, Billy-Joe’s stuff was piled to. “So we derived a conclusion...”

“Did you really?” Arundle interrupted “well, yes - you put two and two together and made five, I’m afraid. That’s no kidnapping-stuff, what a nonsense, we were having a bit of an exercise, - had a lap around the grove though...”

Arundle recalled that garbled message – something about urgent help and distress that had come in at last. The twig she'd taken for the smell. For some reason, Mrs Waldschmitt had had a look after her daughter before breakfast. Somehow, she felt uneasy and didn't know why. Arundle's bed had been empty, the message lay at the table, the room was a mess – thus the idea was born, eagerly picked up by the local authorities.

Later Mrs Waldschmitt reported the 'crime-case' repeatedly. "It happened shortly before Arundle left us for good, so to speak, her new boarding-school down there on that island with that funny name. I still don't know whether our decision was right..." and every time she used to sigh deeply and painfully.

"I found that message on the table, it looked strange enough, - can't really tell why, and of course I read it. Couldn't help but reading it, anyway. I called my husband, and he called the police right away. The suspected kidnapper was caught. It was one of the native boys Arundle was somehow familiar with. We didn't like the idea at all, but Arundle had her own mind on that, and we weren't in the position any more, to check on her relations.

The message turned out to be part of one of their stupid pranks; they played at each other or at someone else. In fact, we never found out about that. Somehow, her friends, who stayed in Greece at the time, had to do with it. - She claimed to meet them at night, while sleeping - in the so-called dreamtime. But that's of course nonsense." Mrs Waldschmitt was certain about that.

Arundle had to turn on the charm in order to convince the ranger, and asked her German friends to interfere. Therefore, other authorities were involved, and proved Billy-Joe's integrity, as nominee of the scholarship at the School of Inbetween. So, he got free at last.

After some days in prison, he was the picture of misery, when Arundle was allowed to pick him up. But some good was in the whole matter, Billy-Joe pressed as hard on the proceedings as Arundle now, and stood with both feet on solid grounds. That did him only good, because he tended to run astray, and all too often got lost.

Had there been reasons to question his promotion, the injustice, he'd suffered, straightened the road for him, with extraordinary generosity, quite unlikely to governmental authorities, even in a clear case like that. The period was extended and instead of two years, his clan would be supported over the whole distance, and he was free to study on, as long as he wanted.

The lady at the office was moved to tears, when she became acquainted with Billy-Joe's biography. Such a valuable and gifted person had to be supported.

Arundle's father was of different fabric. Her tales couldn't move him. Somehow, she had to explain to him the unexplainable. The truth wouldn't help here. If she told him, what was really going on, she'd have been sent to a psychiatric asylum instead of the School of Inbetween. So she had to invent a fantastic prank, her friends in Greece had played on them.

In order to make it more acceptable for her father, she invented all kinds of internet-tools to overcome the distance, because this was to his taste. The message, her mother found, she said, was some kind of garbled fax, and indeed the key to the prank.

She didn't really expect him to understand, what this was all about, because there was nothing to understand.

"It's like a bottle post somehow," she explained: "If the bottles are in the water for some time, the writing begins to fade, that's about the same effect we experience, on our mode of transportation. Our messages have to overcome rain and wind and weather, quite like a bottle post on its way over the Atlantic..." she paused to check the effect, then went on:

"The poor fellow, who had been arrested, brought the message to me from afar – he ran day and night for it. It turned out to be my own message; - now 'returned to sender', so to speak. Instead of being rewarded, he then was arrested. That wasn't fair..."

Even her father agreed. He seemed to be satisfied and didn't dig any further. He was quite relieved, - his daughter didn't seem to be as close to that boy, as he had suspected.

Arundle giggled childishly when she repeated 'Return to Sender - Address unknown' – a pop song-title, even Mrs Waldschmitt was familiar with. She sat back with a smile, while trying to recall the melody.

Everything seemed to be in order again. Billy-Joe, who worked as a porter at the 'Heaven's Gate' already, should have been known to them, but they didn't remember. For them, these 'dark folks' all looked alike, and so it was vice versa.

"Strange games" Mr Waldschmitt concluded shaking his head. He checked the note; the police had given back to Arundle after Billy-Joe's release. Mr Waldschmitt snuffled at the fabric, rubbed it between his fingers, and looked at it from all sides, then shook his head. "Strange, very strange – is that common over there in Greece?"

Arundle looked bewildered, she didn't want things to start all over again. Therefore, she nodded and murmured something about ancient culture and strange habits.

Mrs Waldschmitt padded her husband's back and moved the pile of papers at him that now came in regularly every day. He took the bait, and started leafing through the magazine on top.

Nothing special happened on their way the Sydney, beside the common touristy programme, that was supposed to be very interesting.

Had Arundle not been so fully engaged and occupied, she'd been able to enjoy the natural beauties of the landscape. She was deeply in her thoughts. She dreamed with open eyes, thought of this and that, and imagined the would-be life waiting for her – all the new impressions finally, and understanding everywhere, and similar interests, though. She also was kind of aficionado of dear Billy-Joe, all the more, he'd been suffering innocently. Nobody was allowed to ever become aware of, the least he himself.

Where might he be now? The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs had arranged transportation for him and some other gifted youth. They'd be taken by plane to Newsealand and from there by helicopter to their final destination, as was arranged with the Headmistress of the School of Inbetween. The Ministry insisted on a complete record of the whereabouts and the location of their protégées. Thus, the coordinates of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth were confidentially recorded.

For Arundle things worked out even straighter. All of a sudden, she found herself standing at the copter-port. Her parents waved a last good-bye from the visitor's platform, and then left for their own flight back home to Germany.

Her stuff would be sent to the island by air cargo, and would be picked up right from her home. "Kind of strange, such service..." Mr Waldschmitt grumbled. Why are these people all wild about that child? Do you understand that, dear?" He shook his head again, suspicious like an old dog. Somehow he felt envious anger, he wasn't able to define.

The Waldschmitts had arrived at home safely and had soon taken up their common activities. Two big parcels with Arundle's personal

belongings had been picked up by a parcel service. All other things of hers would be sent together with the household goods of the Slyboots by ship in November from Bremerhaven to Auckland. The Slyboots moved with all their mobile property for good.

- Obviously, Grisella and Scholasticus had made up their minds already, and signed in on the school board of the School of Inbetween on a long-term basis.

It was too late now. Mr Waldschmitt would never find out, what really was on his daughter's mind. That was it. Yesterday she'd been a baby in her nappies and today she was fully fledged – and naughty even more – well, and kind of witty as well. Mr Waldschmitt was somehow proud of his only child, nevertheless.

Mrs Waldschmitt had packed only the very necessary items. The porters had to go upstairs twice to fill the lift. Arundle wouldn't believe her eyes. Mrs Waldschmitt didn't forget the books and the old copybooks, and none of Arundle's toys. Especially the stuffed dolls and cuties, those were by now under the bed, suffering a dark dusty lot there.

Arundle should decide on her own, what to keep, Mrs Waldschmitt figured, while on the verge of tears – now that Arundle's room was cleared, and looked so empty and disconsolate.

Mr Waldschmitt meant to install a third office instead, he eventually didn't need.

“Was that necessary, Roland?” Mrs Waldschmitt asked. “Well, you wanted all those things to be packed, didn't you?” he hollered back in defence, because he himself didn't feel good at all.

“Why couldn't we leave everything the way it was? Oh Roland, we probably made a mistake.” Mrs Waldschmitt busted into tears. Arundle would come home only once or twice a year and soon she wouldn't come again at all.

“On the other end of the world ... – was that necessary? ... Are you sure, we didn't make a mistake, Roland?”

Roland wasn't sure either, but he couldn't admit, he sighed and vaguely waved about the empty room: “It's too late now anyway – the dice are thrown, so to speak” Mr Waldschmitt answered, and laughed uneasily. To his wife it sounded somehow cruel.

31. Arrival at the Isle of Wisdom-tooth

While Arundle entered the school-helicopter, she noticed the difference. The helicopter was still a helicopter, and the pilots were real pilots, as well as the pupils were noisy children, especially the younger ones; the friendly airhostess, who welcomed her on board and guided her to her seat, was like any airhostess. Still there was a difference, as soon as she left the grounds of the outer world, to enter the world of the School of Inbetween, which extended somehow as a thin extension all the way to Sydney. Almost like a flower, which sent its rays out into the world, such Arundle imagined the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. She was on the way right into the centre, right now in a couple of minutes!

She left not only her parents behind and the annoying school. Mr Schwertfeger – her old enemy – had her picked up there as well. He had become assistant director of the comprehensive school she attended, while she thought she'd got rid of him for good. He was teaching right in the same class of hers, until that incident, when he lost control and ruined his carrier. Florinna didn't think him all that bad, but Arundle still couldn't stand him even five years later. Too disgusting had been her first awful experience of the life at school.

She also left the touching boredom behind. How she hated these endless afternoons in the empty flat – her listlessness to only open her bag. While her fear of punishment and bad marks was immeasurably growing, and she had to fly into the world of dreams and imagination, while her excursions turned all too often into nightmares. – With one mighty stroke, this circle of evil was disrupted.

Could it be that she overestimated the School of Inbetween? There were teaching only human beings as well, after all. – Sure enough, but what kind of! She said to herself and thought of Grisella and Scholasticus. Besides, you could choose your courses yourself and weren't dependant on a dull teacher and his dry stuff...

She left behind the turmoil of Laptopia to a certain extend at last. A bit more distance would do them all good. The pile of problems there seemed invincible. It was almost impossible to find out, what was true. They met indeed always new problems in the strange world of Laptopia, the further they stepped in and got involved. From all sides you felt drawn and everybody claimed to be right, while the other side was wrong.

There were of course facts, which couldn't be neglected. – Why could it be, that some people seemed to live on forever, while others

ran out of lifetime all too soon? Such question would remain, no matter what the legal aspect was.

Well, during the next months she'd have the chance to tackle questions the like, with Scholasticus and Grisella, looking together with them for solutions. – The hint of the Advisor, to search for Malicious Marduk, was after all not as wrong as Billy-Joe thought. For him, the new task was just another manoeuvre of the Emperor, who wanted to fix the young Prince at his side and to throw dust in their eyes. To have them chase on the wrong trace, and to get away from the real roots of evil.

Such were the questions and quarrels Arundle put aside, somehow forcefully, to be looking forward to what was coming. To begin with, she enjoyed her meal. She had strawberry-tea and after that a peppermint-cocktail, while she was eating vegetable-pie with rice balls and hot ginger-curry sauce and for desert she had kiwi cream tartlets on coconut-wafers.

While she was eating, she was listening to some kind of strange music, she had never heard before, but let her been carried away voluntarily.

As the copter was travelling at a lower altitude than the jets, she could see the blue sea quite clearly, and when they met ships, you could see the people on board waving. They were heading towards southeast, as you could see by the position of the sun.

After the meal, Arundle took one of the brochures from the bag in front of her. However, it was the same she had been reading already together with Billy-Joe, describing the School of Inbetween and the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Instead of reading, she tried to talk to two girls on the other side of the gangway – she was seating alone on her side. The conversation turned out to be difficult, because they came from Korea and their English wasn't the best. Besides, the helicopter made quite some noise. Therefore, they ended up in friendly smiles and polite nodding.

Nevertheless, Arundle found out that they came from Seoul and that this would be their first year at the School of Inbetween, just like hers.

Whether Florinna and Corinia had arrived yet? It was about high time to meet in reality; the dreamtime wasn't quite the same. Something was missing anyway.

Billy-Joe would soon be coming in, or he had arrived already, that she didn't know. His departure from Auckland was bound to be today anyway, and Grisella's ship was due now any day as well.

The two scholars intended to use the long sea journey to get prepared for the upcoming challenges. Theirs it was, to be a little better prepared than their future pupils, who were only looking forward.

The helicopter got ready for landing. Arundle felt her heart beat. She glanced down through the little bull's-eye, but couldn't see anything except the blue sky and the sea.

The helicopter went down over the port bow, while she was sitting on the other side. Just shortly before touchdown she noticed the typical ring of rocks – as was described in the brochure.

A last sway, a knock and the grounds were contacted. The rotors lowered into a deeper twittering, were lower and lower and finally died. The hatch was pushed open. All passengers jumped up, as if there had been a secret sign, and began feverishly rummaging for their hand luggage. While the first rushed down the stairs already to welcome their promised land. Some jumped up into the air, others fell on their knees and even kissed the ground, as their nature and customs demanded. Arundle wasn't alone in that either.

While she stepped out of the hatch, she saw Florinna and Corinia from afar running towards her. They waved and shouted, and Arundle waved back, when she stepped graciously down the stairs. She felt like grandeur. She shouted neither for joy, nor fell she down on her knees. She stepped proudly, like a Princess over the thick soft green. However, after a few steps she lost control and rushed forward and in no time the girls were taking one another in theirs arms.

That was a hassle! “You've got to go through that sluice,” Corinia pointed ahead. “You've got to get graduated” Florinna explained, when she met Arundle's questioning glance. “Let's hope you'll join us,” Corinia said mysteriously.

They took Arundle's luggage and followed the others to the Arrival Hall. “Now you've got to make up your mind” Florinna said. “You decide which gate you go through”, Corinia confirmed. “While the two of us went through the same gate” – “Even though, we were separated, and didn't know the decision of the other” – “In order not to influence one another...”

“That's therefore called the ‘Sluice of Disposition’, you gotta know. You know our preference of the Dreamtime...” Florinna added and sighted quite meaningfully. “We aren't allowed to say more, I think we told you too much already.”

Some kind of artifact approached on soft purring wheels, Arundle noticed pretty stunned. He pushed the two girls aside, away from Arundle, and had her follow him to the starting point. From there, she had to make up her mind on her own, and go through one of the gates. They all looked the same at the first sight. Arundle felt left alone and helpless as well. She tried to concentrate on the task anyway. She knew, she was supposed to follow her intuition. She decided not to think for the best alternative, but to let things go. She closed her eyes, and stretched her hands out, and stepped slowly foot-by-foot towards those gates.

Soon she realized some kind of attraction, while the noise around seemed to fade. She felt as if she walked along a line straight ahead towards a light – a kind of window, though. She felt curiosity and even fits of homesickness. As soon as she arrived, she felt certain, that she had made the right choice. She opened her eyes and pressed the door-handle of gate number four. The door swung open and she stepped into some kind of corridor, she couldn't see the end.

Did she make the wrong decision? The certainty left her. She wasn't sure at all. Then she closed her eyes again and stretched her arms out, and hoped for the right revelation. The corridor had to lead somewhere – most likely down to the dormitories, Florinna and Corinia had spoken of. If her choice had been right anyway. She decided to step on until the feeling of certainty returned.

She walked on for a good while. It took longer this time – until she noticed a similar notion than before. Would she compare the attraction now with the attraction before, it was only a little creek instead of a demanding clear stream. Thus made her decision a triviality.

She could step through any of the doors, she felt, there was only little difference, whether left or right. Unreal enough was that fancy descending corridor with its uneven floor. She didn't doubt to be dreaming. The magic bow made him known for the first time since she was making up her mind. He confirmed her notion and had her come to an end. "Get on in" he snarled and kicked her in the back.

Arundle pushed the door on her left open and stepped into a large hall. Up and down merry youngsters of all ages were seated at a long table, having their lunch. Everybody was talking and laughing and yelling so there was a hell of a noise in there. A similar artifact as the one, which had attended her before, pushed trolleys laden with all kinds of dishes along side to serve and wait the hungry lot. While from all sides and through all doors, other newcomers – like Arundle - stepped in and looked for an empty seat.

Arundle was of course looking for her friends. However, she couldn't find them at first amongst the buoyant lot.

Corinia was waving all the time, she had noticed her at once, and Florinna went to get her by.

"Later, such hullabaloo will come to an end" – "Let's hope for the best" – "It's always the same at the beginning of a term."

"It's their first term either" Arundle thought, when Florinna led her to her seat, but didn't say anything. Her friends were right anyway. After all, they were all dreamers and noise for noise's sake was not their major concern.

"Here you are at last," Corinia yelled as they arrived. "We thought, you had tomatoes on your eyes, as the Germans say."

"Come on, sit down between us" Florinna waved elegantly with her free hand. The golden arm rings jingled. "After lunch, we'll show you where we live."

"You'll be amazed, I daresay" Corinia predicted and her eyes sparkled. "Or not at all" Florinna said with a smile.

"Shall I get you anything, or would you come along, then you can see, where the food comes from and where you find the menu of the day as well? Today we are having red lentils, mangos in sesame coating or cheese-nut-wafers with lattice, and peas in almond-sauce, and for desert, there are banana-cookies or ginger-rice-tartlets. Sounds great, doesn't it?" Corinia said while waving the menu in her hand.

Arundle nodded and grabbed for the menu, then read on, on her own –

"Ginger-chicken stuffed with Lemongrass,
Bamboo-Sprouts on Coconut crème,
Fried Bats in Tamarind-sauce..."

"What's that?" she yelled frightened. "What do you mean?" Corinia asked back while she waited patiently until Arundle had read the menu for the whole week.

"Well those fried Bats."

"O, no those aren't bats. It's an Indonesian speciality, I think. They are made of yams and strange spices. They taste good and are called bats, because they look like bats, simple as that... You know, we are down here in the Pan Indian corner; there are other areas as well. Italian may be found on the other side for example – well the food refers to all kinds of tastes and customs, because we come here from all over the world..."

"I'm only having the desert," Arundle decided at last. She wasn't hungry, she had had a snack on the helicopter just an hour ago. Besides, she was all flustered. She poked about in that coconut crème

and waited impatiently until her friends had finished. They sorted in and roughly cleaned their dishes at the conveyor-belt. “Thus, it’s got to be done” Corinia explained.

After that, they led Arundle to the lift that took them down. Deep down, almost on the last floor, the lift halted. “Have we only chosen for you” Corinia explained. “Well, not only for you, for us as well” Florinna added. “Deep down in the belly of Mother Earth” – “Or even under the sea” – “I’d say both” – they explained while Arundle was standing in front of the most spectacular panorama, she’d ever seen. Above them, the dark blue ocean gloomed mysteriously. Behind thick panes, there were all kinds of fish swarming about, as well as octopods and starfish and other unidentified species amongst the black rocks of the former volcano-flue.

“You can turn the light off” Corinia explained, and pressed a button, and the window went dark.

“That’s your locker, by the way.”

“And this is your bed...”

“And over there, we sleep.”

“We’re supposed to be ten all together in that room. Over there are Mailun, Songül, Ilsa, Tabea and on our side Imogen and Sumai.”

“You are right, one’s still missing.”

“The boys have their own dormitories...”

“And they are all dreamers, like us...”

“The other girls anyway...”

“Beside us, there are soul-wanderers and flying dancers, and others, who can even change their appearance.”

“We were combined for our talents – all of us. Everybody shall get, where his or her talents demand. Therefore, we all pass through the sluice. Of course, there are multiply gifted beings, also amongst us, I’m afraid. Well, during the regular lessons, we come together anyway.”

“Is that true, there is no general time-table?” Arundle asked. “Well yes, and no, you’ve got to participate in certain basic courses, everybody has to. Otherwise you can’t go on.”

“...Has to do with your talents...”

“We all found out about that by our mates. Some of us are already in their third year. We might have difficulties in picking up, I’m afraid.”

“What am I going to say, I’m even one year younger than you are.” Corinia went in.

“I thought, you choose your subjects and your teachers all by yourself” Arundle exclaimed, when she heard the word ‘time-table’ - a disciplinary item, she couldn’t stand. In fact, she hated timetables.

“That’s what you actually do,” Florinna answered. “Some mandatory lessons there are, anyway.”

“I see,” she said, she recalled to have read of such freedom in the brochure.

“...Has to do with your talents” Corinia repeated, and thus it went on from both sides:

“Except for the regular school-stuff – languages and so on...”

“O no, languages don’t belong to that category, not for us dreamers anyway – we call it sleep-learning, we pick up languages just like that...”

“All we have to do, is dreaming ourselves to a place and mingle with the folk, simple as that...”

“Many things are so much easier for us. Think of Geography, though.”

“Has school started yet?” Arundle wanted to know.

The sister shook their heads. “Lessons begin, when we are all together.”

“We just had a look and spoke to the others.”

“You can speak with almost everyone.”

“Everybody is so friendly...”

“Most of them are” – Corinia met a peevish caretaker, who was the exception from the rule, so to speak.

“It’s everywhere the same, after the vacations.”

“And keep in mind the routes you gotta take and your floor number and the like, you won’t find anyone who could help with that.”

“If you like, we’ll show you around right away.”

“We don’t know everything either...”

“And you can test, whether you manage to find back to the dining-room...”

“Well, I’d like to pick up Billy-Joe, he’s supposed to get in by now. Then I’d like to see Scholasticus or Grisella. Billy-Joe and I have to talk urgent Laptopian stuff over with them, might be of interest to you as well...”

“It’s a pity we can’t get Scholasticus or Grisella for teachers” Corinia went in. “They are no dreamers, I know, but what about their subjects? I’m sure they have to offer matters of interest.” Arundle rejected. “Philosophy and Physics are good for everybody all the more for us...”

“Besides I’m all interested in the secret teachings of the magical stone and my magic bow – probably more than in that dream-stuff. Dreaming to me is a kind of loophole and a vehicle, rather than a matter of its own,” Arundle said. The sister weren’t all convinced, because they didn’t owe a magic bow.

The three were on their way to the helicopter-port, to find out about Billy-Joe’s arrival from Auckland.

“That’s were teachers live” Florinna pointed at the neat houses along their route. Arundle knew from the brochure, she and Billy-Joe had studied carefully. They had to wait for another thirty minutes or so, they found out at the terminal.

“Shall we have a look at the cascade?” Corinia suggested. The cascade’s supposed to be underneath the copter-port. They could hear it from afar, when they approached to the cliffs. They looked for the footpath that was said to be somewhere, but couldn’t find it. The cliff lowered straight down everywhere.

“Perhaps you gotta go through the terminal,” Arundle suggested.

They gave in while the time elapsed and sighted down into the foaming sea at the bottom of the cliff. Thus, they almost missed the helicopter when it was approaching.

They rushed back to the terminal and waited impatiently until Billy-Joe had made his decision.

To cut it short: he also belonged to the dreamers, as they had hoped.

While the Australians mostly belonged to the so-called Somniors, the Sublimations (the flying dancers) - and Animations (the soul-wanderers) often came from China or Tibet or even from the Siberian Taiga. That probably had to do with the temperature, Billy-Joe suggested.

He was somehow ill at ease still. Arundle thought to know the reason why. It was a combination of his ill experience as her false kidnapper, and before a precarious closeness to a dubious spirit. Both didn’t leave him untouched, though.

He only knew Florinna and Corinia from the dreamland and had to become accustomed to their presence in reality.

Other Animations came from the jungles of the Amazonas or from the heart of Africa. However, the conditions weren’t fix of course, otherwise no tests had been necessary.

“You’ve got to measure the brain current, I presume” – Billy-Joe suggested. The method didn’t meet his full support; neither did the idea of sleeping under the sea level. He was used to sleep in the open under the wide sky. “That’s going to be solved, and shouldn’t be a problem” the girls suggested.

The afternoon went by. The newcomers had stored their property in the appropriate lockers; they had made their beds and became acquainted with their comrades. Verbal communication wasn’t all that easy. Understanding took quite some time, and time passed by, just like that. So many new impressions made their efforts worthwhile.

Arundle tried to contact the Slyboots, but in vain. Nobody could tell, whether they had arrived, as shipping was almost impossible in the vicinity. They could have changed the means of transport by now for the last hop from either Auckland or Sydney.

Arundle and her girlfriends met Billy-Joe again some time later in the dining room for dinner. He wasn’t happy with his campsite, though, because it didn’t quite meet his desires. He might as well have been upset, because of the strict division of the genders; he wasn’t used to, Arundle presumed, but didn’t speak about.

Billy-Joe had found a lonely terrace at last - on the first floor, in the teachers’ section. There he’d put his hammock and blankets. Nearby was a roof, in case it rained. This was not quite the true nature he was used to. No open fire was allowed or hunting and cooking his own meals.

Billy-Joe’s menu was even more colourful than that of the sisters at lunch, Arundle noticed, while she joined him. Although she had eaten this and that already, reading it was another strange experience:

‘Grilled Ring-Snake’

‘Poached Lemur Stew’

‘Broad-headed Moggot in Aspic’ -

for example, tickled your palate the wrong way. Therefore, she got her a pizza like at home, and while they seated together, each of them eating their own stuff, they all of a sudden felt very strange. They wouldn’t do that again in future. Instead, they would travel from country to country food-wise. They wouldn’t really starve after all.

“I’m not so fond of maggots anyway,” Billy-Joe said while he’s just cracking one.

“My parents even eat snails,” Arundle answered bravely. She wouldn’t have liked to kiss him at that very moment.

Although it was night, it was still light outside. The evenings were stretching by now pretty well, as the isle lay slightly south of the Tropic of Capricorn. Now at the beginning of September, the summer was about to come down here, and the longest day of the year wasn't far. Wherever you looked, the green was dwelling, juicy and overwhelmingly fertile, you could almost hear those strange screams of the sheerest, never-ending lust of just being.

Arundle and Billy-Joe had discovered the access to the cascade and walked about the pillars and rocks, breathing the fresh foamy air from the sea, that was swaying around the isle, and couldn't get enough of the sight.

They hadn't been able to contact Grisella and Scholasticus, but learnt at last that the Slyboots were here. "You can have an appointment tomorrow morning after ten o'clock with Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots" - Arundle exclaimed with a high pitched voice, imitating the obedient secretary.

"That's supposed to be our Grisella" Arundle explained when Billy-Joe looked rather stunned.

"Let's hope, she'll manage to be out of bed at that time" Arundle giggled. "In any case the four of us will go there, the Slyboots got to know. - Can I send them an arrow?" she asked.

"We've got to deal with quite something, though" Billy-Joe nodded, "all the more both of us have their own opinion on the matter" - "And differ quite a bit" Arundle confirmed. Because she tended to trust the Advisor's 'General View', while Billy-Joe thought the Advisor's tale a sophisticated manoeuvre of the Emperor.

"Let's not get this evening spoilt" Arundle suggested, but the sisters, who joined them at the cascade, insisted that they had to come to an agreement right away. Arundle asked for paper and pencil. While Billy-Joe reported of what had happened after the sisters had left.

"That was in the not so-called 'Hall of Honour and Humbleness' right at the feet of His - so-called - Majesty. Do you remember?"

Billy-Joe wasn't able to hide his personal opinion. When Arundle returned with scratch pad and pen, and some tape as well, he had the sisters on his side. They wrote a message, stating how dubious the Advisor's role was, and how the young Prince was bribed with a title and the governmental power, while the mess was still the same and madness was raging.

Of course Arundle's own point of view differed quite a bit, but that she could make clear in the meeting, she thought. The advantage of Billy-Joe's version was that their interference in the internal affairs

of Laptopia became necessary again. Therefore, the message was sent uncommented towards to – what they thought to be - the new home of the Slyboots.

They didn't want to part, none of them, the least Billy-Joe, despite the quarrel. Therefore, he suggested having a swim either downstairs in the indoor pool or outside. However, it was too late for the lagoon. They knew of course how dangerous it was, to swim in unknown waters by night.

The girls were back in no time with their swimsuits on, because their dormitory was so close. Billy-Joe didn't owe a proper swimsuit, so he had to borrow one.

Things like swimsuits didn't help him to become familiar, - none of them, while all Australians shared his point of view, when it came to such aspects of the so-called civilized life.

At last, he found a suitable trunk; the guard had lots on stock. He was then last in the water, while the others were already entering up a kind of artificial island, where an artificial sun was still shining.

Arundle looked like marble between the two sisters.

'The skin of the whites make them look more naked, then us' Billy-Joe thought, and a strange itch hit him between the shoulder blades. He couldn't turn his eyes away from her, but his feelings had somehow been touched by their argument.

Besides – so much had they together obtained: They had been petrified statues, after having jumped into strange waters. They had almost been cooked by the dragon, and torn to pieces by the hound-dogs. In fact, each of them wouldn't be alive anymore without the help of the other. Right here they were safe and sound, and at ease. That made the difference.

Such he said to himself and dived under the little isle for quite a while, because he was used to that, and could keep his breath for a good while, until the girls got nervous and came down looking for him.

While diving, almost nobody could keep up with him, but on the surface, he swam doggy-like. However, his mimetic appeal made him copy the elegant nymphs in no time, while they were going their lanes. He managed to keep up after the third reversing.

Arundle was still swimming with him, but couldn't keep her margin and gave up. She joined the others on that isle again. She

pressed and arranged her long dark-wet braids as elegantly as a mermaid might have done.

Billy-Joe didn't mind swimming any more. He would give everything right now, if he was wrong, and the Advisor was right. Because Arundle believed in what the Advisor said. Nevertheless, he couldn't get rid of his doubts, no matter how hard he tried. It was not the whole truth the Advisor told them, and not the real cause either, of what was going on in the future universe of Laptopia.

For good reasons he didn't trust him. However, Arundle didn't share his experience, which had little to do with Laptopia. In fact, they were older and homemade, so to speak.

The meeting next day with Grisella didn't bring them any further. Billy-Joe and Arundle presented their opposing positions, but Grisella wasn't much slyer afterwards. Both points of view had something in it.

Perhaps it would be the best to have a look at what was going on in Laptopia, after the Prince had taken over the governmental authority. If things changed to the better, and the riots and attacks got lesser, the course might be the right one.

"Time isn't everything" Grisella pointed out. "From a philosophical point of view, a long life makes sense only under specific circumstances. As life has to give reasons for its own sake. Life is first of all a matter of quality, while length is first of all a matter of quantity."

With big eyes Florinna and Corinia witnessed Grisella picking up speed and getting warm. Soon they had problems to concentrate on what she said and to follow her bold connections and conclusions.

That didn't bring them any further, Arundle thought, and asked for Scholasticus' whereabouts.

That meant to interrupt Grisella's flow of speech and thought harshly. Nevertheless, the engaged Professor didn't mind, or she didn't show, but said, that Scholasticus was due any day now.

He was taking care of he former protégées. "His University don't let him go, before they didn't take their exams. That means Scholasticus has to jet back and forth almost every second month or so. However, until next summer things should be straightened finally – that's what he hopes anyway. Then we'll also have done the big move, hopefully."

Grisella stopped for a moment, and then she picked up her philosophical thread, where she was interrupted.

“Let’s come to the point then. I recommend the two of you have a look of what’s going on in Laptopia, while a couple of weeks or even months passed by over there. Our further action shall then depend on the outcome of your survey. Is that a word?”

Arundle looked at Billy-Joe and he looked back at her and then at the magic bow, whose eye went all red and gloomy. If the magical stone had been in the vicinity, they could have waited for Scholasticus, who might as well had liked to join them, because he had a clear mind and a sharp brain, while on the other hand he was a hopeless fan of his descendant - the General.

“Walter is on holiday,” Arundle said. “It’s only fair to leave him alone for a while. He’ll be showing up, he promised.”

“Without the magical stone the trip couldn’t be done”, the magic bow interfered – “not with the Professor and the two of you, I mean.” He gave Arundle a push in the back and kicked Billy-Joe with his lower tip.

Grisella was glad to hear that, but didn’t show. “As your teacher, I cannot recommend, what I recommend now, I’m afraid. So I just do it: Would you then mind, going on your own again? - I won’t go – no way. It was hard enough in that black box, anyway.”

She got shaky and went all upset, just thinking of that. Besides, her own mission had turned out to be a complete failure in the end. The results were poor, but the worst thing was, that her survey opened the door for Malicious Marduk.

32. Bank-Account-Time-Exchange-Converter [BATEC]

“...But it’s done my way” Arundle said to Billy-Joe, who somehow behaved like a stranger, still insisting on his questionable point of view. Otherwise, she wouldn’t follow the Professor’s advice, she said.

Billy-Joe hesitated for a moment – almost too long for critical Arundle, but then he nodded and the two took to their heels. “The isle’s waiting for you and will be the same tomorrow” the sisters yelled, but they had gone as if they vanished into thin air.

The magic bow took them right back to the regal palace of the newly appointed Regent of Laptopia. And they busted right into an audience. The delegates of the tribes were just bringing forward their demands and complaints. Arundle and Billy-Joe decided to stay hidden behind their pillar, because they hadn't been discovered yet, and to eavesdrop what was said.

What they heard raised Arundle's mood. No month had passed, since they said farewell to the Prince on the moon, and now the ambassadors came already forward with their complaints about the realisation of the promised programmes.

"That means, of course, something's happening" Arundle whispered into Billy-Joe's ear, who nodded reluctantly. The complaints were about the teachers, who weren't empathetic enough, and didn't know anything about rural life out there in the countryside; – and about the water supply that didn't work as promised, because people didn't come to an agreement with their neighbours.

Four weeks on earth meant more than a quarter of a year in Laptopia. Anyway – hats off for such results. The Prince and his governing team had done a very good job. Nobody stepped forward to complaining about riots or attacks. Even Billy-Joe doubted, whether he had done the Advisor and the Emperor wrong.

"I think we heard enough" Billy-Joe nodded and followed Arundle into the open. The audience was ending anyway.

When the Prince noticed them, he jumped off his throne and rushed down the stairs of the pedestal to welcome them with great delight.

Then he introduced his crown councillors and explained to the assembly the role Arundle and Billy-Joe had played in the late history and what they had done for Laptopia, while a lot was known to most of the delegates already.

Like himself, he explained, 'His Majesty Himself' had appointed Arundle and Billy-Joe.

A reverential whisper hushed through the ranks. When the Prince guided his guests of honour to his pedestal, the whole assembly bowed or sank on their knees. In vain, Arundle looked out for General Armyless.

"The General is tied down by imperative duties, I'm afraid," the Prince explained, before Arundle could even ask. Her questioning gaze was enough. "Our Honourable Minister of Peace and Defence is performing indescribably fabulous deeds, as is brought to our attention by daily reports. We can be highly satisfied."

The ambassadors retreated, and the assembly dissolved. "Let's have a bite to eat, I'm starving. Such meetings don't find an end. It's always the same" he explained with a satisfied smile. "You came just about in time. Last month I didn't have given a penny for our project. But by now they are all different, as if they had been exchanged."

Arundle congratulated her 'little Prince' she still used to address him, for all his successes. "After lunch I'd like to show you something" the Prince said with a mysterious air "perhaps it helps to dissemble your doubts – well, well, I know – you don't agree with many of our steps taken or projected. You think of free elections and the like. That is not out of sight, not at all, I can assure you."

Billy-Joe blushed and felt uneasy. His beheaded opponent came to his mind. - "What's your father like? Is he any better?" The Prince denied: "Physically he is still a wreck, while he is clearer now mentally. The process of degeneration can't be stopped or even turned in direction. More important for him might be to come to peace with the world. He is soon departing. Fortunately, the horrid fits of depression tend to decline as well in force as in sequence. He won't recover, he is a broken man" the Prince ended "You will understand more of my father's problems, when you have seen, what I'd like to show you."

The humble meal was served. Billy-Joe and Arundle took care not to help themselves excessively. An untrained eater could hardly swallow the synthetic stuff, the Laptopsians consummated. Everything was over-flavoured, but worst was the strange consistency. What ever you chewed produced a slimy layer on tongue and palatals.

The tribes rejected such development, thus food was another field of action to be tackled.

The Prince enjoyed his meal, while his guests joined him politely and swallowed every bite down with the liquor only little better than the food.

Therefore, they were all too happy, when the Prince suggested to go ahead with the intended excursion of his; that was going to take some time.

They didn't leave the palace, but went downstairs again such irregular stairs, they recalled. This time they didn't get to the dungeons but to a huge shiny safe.

"That's the secret access to the State bank and is reserved for family-members only." The little Prince declared, while he got a huge bundle of keys at hand to open the seven locks of the door with seven different keys.

“My father couldn’t keep the key-code in mind, therefore he had installed those locks instead” the Prince explained. He turned one key after the other and at last, the door swung open.

“Down here, you will find the wealth of Laptopia” the Prince said and asked them to follow him through endless corridors again, with safe deposit boxes on both sides. “Behind those hatches immeasurable wealth is deposited, perhaps not behind every hatch anymore, as things began to change, but still...” the Prince went on. “Here is all the money, after all” Billy-Joe nodded.

“Who’s talking about money, though? Money has lost importance a long time ago. Money is of interest only for historians and coin-collectors. No, down here you find the preserved time, mostly converted into energetic quantum. Because it is not easy to preserve time. In former times, the loss was immeasurably. By ninety percent of the boxed in time get lost by preservation. You have to imagine... Arundle you may recall your space disaster, when you got lost in time. You were lead into the area when the business with the time prospered. Then nobody had the faintest idea of what was coming all too soon. Such losses were then taken for granted. Then, when people lost youth in no time and grew older almost visually, things turned into the open but it was too late already. You couldn’t stop or reverse the trend just like that. The monetary system had been replaced by the temporal system irreversibly. Some order was necessary to keep the society going, if people didn’t want to return to the very basic exchange of goods. And soon it became clearer and clearer that the wealth of nations assembled in the hands of fewer and fewer individuals, to an immeasurable extend beyond all historic comparison.”

While the Prince talked, they stepped ahead, still along the corridor and between those rows and rows of lockers, behind which the preserved lives of a countless multitude rested, fading unused.

“Whom do those lockers belong?” Billy-Joe asked. The Prince gave him a long thoughtful glance then said: “I don’t want to lie at you. All you see in this area belongs to my family. My father was crazy about such wealth. The worst was, he bought on the black market whenever his contingent was exceeded. But we will come to that soon...”

Arundle noticed by his look at the Prince, what Billy-Joe was thinking. He wasn’t very wrong, though. If the Prince had wanted to throw dust in their eyes, he could have lied or kept them away from that horrid family bank of his.

“In those lockers there are hoarded up values of whole lifetimes, what a waste...”

“And if you give the time back to its proper owners?” Arundle asked.

“If that was as simple... believe me, I had done it. Whatever we do with that” and he waved helplessly around “we won’t solve anything but only stimulate the black market. You can’t through values in, and hope of no effect. What do you think the heirs do with their relatives’ lives? They gamble with them, try to increase their value and of course extend their own lifespan, but that would be the least of all problems...”

Since the great currency-reform, when the exchange rate was voluntarily put up from two to one and the free time-trade was limited, you can’t distribute time, just like that. In former times, there was even a state-lottery, and the winner of the week cashed a check over eternal life, as it was called in those days. Of course, nobody lives on forever, but a couple of hundred years can well do, all the more since the currency-reform I mentioned.”

“What does that reform mean?” Arundle asked.

“When the free commerce with preserved time became more and more intransparent, and parents sacrificed their own children for their sake, and riots arose not all that different from those we experienced, the Emperor decided to interfere. The time-exchange-converters all over the country were drawn back. The time-exchange-stocks were closed down everywhere. Existing accounts were frozen in, and instead of the time-currency, they tried to install a credit-system, similar to the old money-related system. But things weren’t handled wholeheartedly enough, I’m afraid...”

They had come to the end of the corridor by now, and were standing in front of another huge strong room, the doors of which blocked the corridor completely. This time the Prince used a secret code number to unlock it, and the mighty hatches swung open.

“We are entering now the so-called ‘Workshop of Renewal’” the Prince explained.

“Be careful, what you see is shocking...” The Prince’s warning came just in time. The room was filled with body parts like in a slaughterhouse. Legs, arms, and torsos were hooked up the same way, but here the parts belonged to former human beings - that was the difference.

“What the hell is this?” Arundle yelled. She couldn’t stand the sight, her stomach rebelled. It took some time until she dared a second look. The first impression had been misleading. This was no dead

meat, bound to be eaten. Such extremities seemed to be alive and ready for action. All kinds of artificial spare-parts were connected with bones and sinews. Everything looked clean and well maintained.

“From here most hospitals procure the spare parts for transplantations. You find almost everything here, suitable for any blood group and as fresh as on the day of extraction. Those who get equipped here and don’t miss the inspection-intervals, are provided with an almost perfect body, that lasts for ages, so to speak, while the spirit and the soul need some extra service.

My father was a good example. Had he not lost his head, he would have gone on forever. But the price he had to pay, was high, extremely high in his case, from a moral point of view.”

“The corpses look so fresh, they must come from somewhere” Billy-Joe exclaimed. The Prince nodded. “Those are the victims of the system. They have sold themselves or have been sold by others. The creditors cash those who plunder their account before the time has come. Their executives - the so-called Miseriors - have no mercy. Meanwhile the situation became better for two reasons. Since spare parts of that kind” he pointed at the disgusting scenery – “became superfluous and have been replaced by more elegant and less cruel methods. The keyword here is cloning.”

“And we wonder, where the aggression comes from” Arundle said, shaking her head.

“How come, we didn’t find out? Grisella’s interviewers inquired in any possible way, and asked the people over and over again.”

“I think it was fear, that made them keep their mouths shut,” the Prince suggested. “If you don’t know it otherwise, you take such things for granted, and you don’t talk about them anymore. You wouldn’t question the daily sunrise, would you?”

“Are they going to be slaughtered while still alive?” asked Billy-Joe in disgust.

“That’s not necessary. The life-light extinguishes, as soon as a Miserior presents the Proclamation of Exitus (POE). They then get hold of their victims, who exhale their living soul, that’s put into a special plastic bag. This way such life has definitely terminated” the Prince concluded.

“Would they die anyway?” Arundle asked.

“Most likely” answered the Prince – “but it never happened. The creditors have been so keen about corporal spare parts.”

Arundle shivered.

“You spoke of reforms, that followed. What did change then, after all?” Billy-Joe asked.

“Well, first of all the extend of such practice was concerned. Nobody was allowed to deal with ‘time-related articles’ – (as such corporal human entities were called) - uncontrolled any more. Each transaction had to be registered, and most importantly - was charged. In some cases by an enormous tax-fee, depending on the wealth of the proprietors.

All ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converters’ got withdrawn, which had been positioned in each supermarket or other public facility of any kind.

Can you imagine, the youngsters spent some ten to fifteen years of lifespan for a trendy glider, just like that? All they had to do, is put their finger into that TEAC – (that is the ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’), and the thing was theirs. That was indeed pretty seductive and you had to have a strong character to resist. Then - what does the youth care about age. The bill was then presented all too soon. Those who had chosen this seductive main road to immediate happiness, didn’t do - as a rule - for more then five years or so.”

“I see” Billy-Joe said “and by that way all the youthful corpses came here to become cannibalised. How awful...”

“Disgusting” Arundle, added.

“But that was it - the creditor’s executives cashed with ‘mind and body’, that is, the whole being by terminating their lives. I have to confess, that the corpses were much better off, than the souls. Although there are only rumours spread about, nobody has ever confirmed. The Advisor spoke to me of unbelievable excesses, though. He’d be the one to explain all this much better than I can. All the more Malicious Marduk comes in right here, he is meant to be the Big Boss of the Miseriors.”

The mysterious Advisor appeared right at that same moment from behind a pedestal. He bowed politely and greeted the Prince’s guests deservingly, but didn’t show, whether he recalled them.

“I’ve found about that one” the Prince declared and pointed at the Advisor, as if he was an object. Arundle thought him to be almost rude. ‘Was the Advisor after all no man of flesh and blood?’

“I think, he is something like a thought”, the Prince went on. “Try to touch him, then you understand, what I mean.” The Prince stepped forward and grabbed into emptiness right through the Advisor. “See – nothing but pure air. He’s an image, nothing else.”

The Advisor smiled softly and bowed again: “But I fulfil my duty” he said.

“His Majesty gives his regards to the young lady and her disapproving companion.” He smiled again and bowed heartily

towards Arundle and a little stiffer to Billy-Joe, who sighed at him somehow confused but still disapproving.

In the meantime, they had entered another room. Here the atmosphere was even denser and more uncomfortable than before. Arundle didn't find out at first, what the cause was.

The Advisor accompanied them just like that, and even took the lead. "As far as here, even the Prince hasn't gone" he explained, and pointed at the strange bubbles fitted to the lowered ceiling. The bubbles looked like blown up plastic bags Arundle thought after a second closer look. Each was neatly closed and labelled, and was filled with some kind of milky something.

The Advisor grabbed for a bag, opened the string and softly knocked on the top. From inside a thin screaming was heard. Arundle saw two little hands trying to get hold on the slippery skin, but were slowly gliding towards the opening. Before the grey shadow could fall, the Advisor held his hand under the opening and pushed the being right back. The frightened eyes in the little face, which Arundle noticed between the thin stretched arms, closed. A thumb got to the mouth. The being rolled in like an infant in its mother's womb, while the Advisor carefully closed the string and fixed the bag back to the ceiling.

"Those are the lost souls," he explained. "That's all the better, then up there" and he pointed up. The ceiling, the bags were fitted to, was a kind of trellis. "Behind - something terrible is lurking" he said and pointed at big dark shadows, who made faces at him as soon as they realized, that he was referring to them.

"They know exactly that I can't get at them," the Advisor said. The monsters were shaken by fits of horrid laughter.

While the Advisor had opened the bag, they had stretched greedy fingers at the trellis but couldn't get through. "There is nothing the poor souls are more afraid of than those Miseriors" the Advisor explained – "those emissaries of the criminal Marduk – and there is a good reason for that. In their bags, they aren't free, but they have peace after all and may find a useful place somewhere. But woe betide them, when they fall into the hands of the Miseriors."

"What do they serve for, and where do they come from?" Billy-Joe wanted to know. He cut Arundle off that way because she had intended to ask for the horrible fate as victims of the Miseriors.

"The lost souls originate from the debtors and form the most valuable part," the Advisor explained. While cashing the debtors, they are extracted first from the terminated corpse and are caught in those

plastic bags, as we just have seen, before they can escape into nothingness.

They are condemned to become victims of the Miseriors anyway, therefore they accept any other solution. They serve as a kind of lubricator. A dead leg for example becomes only alive again by means of a living soul. The soul is the most important factor of the transplantation.”

The Advisor waved around in a circle. “All those souls wait for an opportunity to be used.”

“But is that not dehumilating? Souls are bound for higher purpose. To become a leg’s soul can’t be it” Billy-Joe went in somehow upset again.

“That could well be, but such complicated philosophical questions we may discuss somewhere else. You have seen how frightened the soul was, while I tried to get it out of its bag. It has noticed the Misieriors earlier then you did. That was the reason why it didn’t want to be knocked out of its shelter.”

“Is there no way of getting rid of the Miseriors?” Arundle asked and looked uneasy up at the ceiling. One of the monsters just made a face at her.

“I’m afraid, no” the young Prince interfered. “Our hands are bound. We can control the state-official sector and we can try to get hold of the black market as well, but against evil spirits from other spheres, we are powerless. As long as Malicious Marduk keeps control over the twilight zone of the Miseriors, we won’t overcome the black marketeers. There are other means required. Means we expect you to obtain.”

The Advisor nodded: “Nevertheless what lies in our hands must be done, to get control over the black market and the black marketeers. Otherwise, all our efforts are in vain and devaluations turn out to be inefficient. You see, we came to the factor four by now. Nevertheless, the last word hasn’t been spoken. Our combined efforts may let us focus on factor three again. You never know what’s written in the stars.”

33. The Black Marketeers

Arundle and Billy-Joe looked at each other uncomprehendingly. The Advisor - while noticing such glance - nodded reassuringly and declared: "It's like that, - well no, I better try historically." - The matter was harder to explain than he thought.

- "One of the actions that was taken to calming down the riots, (I referred to in the beginning) was to bring everybody back to the same level. In other words to spread the time regularly - as far as possible. The Emperor decided for the first time a general devaluation of time. Beginning with a fixed date the time was devaluated by ten percent, that meant, the time was shortened by one tenth. Seconds, minutes, and hours - all measures of time were shortened by one tenth. At the same time, the free trade of time was abolished, and was limited to the state-controlled sector.

However, we didn't consider the black market. Just as our actions began to work, the black market began to boom: - time, TEACs, corporal spare parts, souls - everything you could think of was traded on the black market. The demand regulated the supply, and soon the worst possible forms of slave trade revived. While we were still busy, handling that devaluation.

After some ten years or so, we were down to fifty percent. Can you imagine - the night has only six hours - at night people couldn't be cheated, the body required its rest, while during daytime at work we could have easily quartered the quantum" the Advisor smiled.

"No matter how often we devaluated. New secret strong rooms were installed uncontrolled. (The one we are in right now was of course authorised.) Greedy bumps were purchasing and dealing under cover. The consequence was that people died again earlier and earlier. The average age was sinking dramatically again, while our plan figured the average age of seventy earth-years.

The black marketeers caused confusion in many ways. They initiated slave trade and headhunting on the one hand, and satisfied the most primitive and cruel notions on the other, as they found clients enough for their dirty trade.

Again the underdog youngsters had to die far too early. It was like a pandemic plague. This development led to considerable obstructions. Riots and upheavals were the consequence. First of all the youngsters, - who couldn't lose anything but their chains -, rioted and terrorized the quarters of Laptopia-City, and even got them under control, while the Miseriors didn't miss such opportunities to stimulate chaos and cruelties of the worst kind."

"And always one name appeared: Malicious Marduk..." the Prince added. Again, the Advisor nodded:

“Malicious Marduk became the big opponent of the Emperor. The Miseriors, you must know, are mentally very limited beings, although full of malice. Without guidance by Malicious Marduk, they are easy to be seen through, and we managed to keep them under control.”

“What terrible things are they actually doing?” Arundle wanted to know.

“That’s a good question. All I can do, is to refer to the lost souls” the Advisor answered.

“Amongst the living no-one knows for sure” the Prince interfered – “and from the souls you wouldn’t get an answer. Nevertheless, the pain must be unbearable, otherwise the souls wouldn’t clamp to their plastic bags. Although, it is natural for souls to roam. If they prefer to stick to their bags, while Miseriors are waiting outside, there must be some good reason though” the Prince explained. Again the Advisor agreed, but not all whole-heartedly, perhaps the Prince was simplifying a much more complex matter.

“There is one thing, I don’t understand” Billy-Joe objected thoughtfully, “How can time be devaluated?”

“Well, principally it’s simple. You shorten the time by increasing the speed of rotation. The faster the rotation, the shorter is the day. The earth turns around in twenty-four hours. Today we have come to six hours, from your point of view. We Laptopsians still have our full lot nominally. Time passes faster. In order to balance the increased centripetal force you have to increase the gravitation as well. That means the core increases in mass. That is the true secret, only the Emperor is familiar with...” the Advisor bowed gracefully while mentioning the Emperor, and the Prince hurried to do the like.

“That is but one half of the process,” the Advisor agreed. Arundle nodded “I just wanted to refer to the orbits. They have to accelerate as well, of course. Earth must go round the sun four times as fast, in order to shorten the year to a quarter, am I right.”

The Advisor and the Prince looked respectfully at her. “Very right, young lady. The whole solar system has to be involved. Only then major catastrophes can be avoided,” the Advisor confirmed.

Not only Arundle realized that this was too much for Billy-Joe. He didn’t know anything about this matter.

“The physical whereabouts in space, as far as we know them, will become a major subject soon, if you’re interested. – Scholasticus himself will be our teacher, I strongly presume.”

Billy-Joe also bowed now. He hardly managed to hide his embarrassment, while his attitude changed.

They left the hall of the lost souls. Arundle did a long last look at the ceiling and behind the trellis, where the Miseriors kept waiting. “What are they waiting for, anyway, there is nothing for them to gain?”

“Well, it sure does happen that a bag burst” the Prince replied. “Sometimes they even try to make them burst” the Advisor assisted – “although they are limited, when it comes to physical power. On the other hand, they can go anywhere unhindered. You may have asked yourself how they manage to be even in here,” he continued.

“That’s a real problem we do have with them. You can’t get them, and that’s Malicious Marduk’s advantage” the Prince picked up the thread.

“We are coming now to the most inner heart of the bank, the best preserved secret, so to speak.” The Prince explained while fiddling about with a strange lock, where he had to dial certain numbers on a huge wheel. At last, the hatch swung open and gave way to a narrow passage they had to crawl through. Inside there was a strange humming noise. The air was thick and felt like lead in the lungs. Whatever it was, it emitted from countless wires and cable-connections leading from block to block and from box to box, endlessly piled up to the ceiling, while millions of little lamps were flickering in different colours. Relays clicked and rattled. Boxes were moved and drifted apart, and docked elsewhere.

“In here, not even Miseriors dare to come” the Prince whispered. “They couldn’t stand the power grids,” the Advisor added. “I myself have trouble remaining stable. I’d prefer us to leaving right away.” He added and Arundle could see what he meant. From all sides invisible hands were pulling. His appearance destabilised, and the more he tried to keep contour the worse he looked.

“This is the only access in here. If you have enough, just let me know and retire from here. It’s no place to stay...” the Prince said, still trying to behave. Seen had they little, but felt even more. Still they hoped for an explanation.

“That’s kind of nightmare” Billy-Joe said with a shudder. “What’s going on in there?” he wanted to know, when they all were standing in front of the closing hatch. The Advisor still tried to keep in shape but in vain. “What burdens you’ve got to bear after all” he sighed, while the Prince tried to answer Billy-Joe’s question.

“The simplest answer would be that we just had a look into the TEAC-accounting process, or what’s still left, anyway, but of course this is not as simple as that. It’s surely not, what you think accounting

is. There you wouldn't get far with your type of mathematics, I'm afraid. Much more, I can't tell myself. I'm no bionicist nor cyberneticist either." He looked at the Advisor, who was still busy keeping control. "Accounting will have to do. That's what is done there, as a matter of fact" was his brief comment.

Arundle felt weak as well. The Prince looked at her questioningly – "I think, you've had enough for the time being. Do you want to go back?" he asked. They all agreed. He called four very small gliders, one for each of them. They jumped on it and off they went quick like arrows through the glittering corridors to the inhabited areas of the palace that was by no means as elegant and comfortable as the summer-palace on the moon, Arundle noticed during the last part of their excursion.

"Let's hope we can keep that all in mind. I think we got to talk things over with Grisella, before we plan further" Arundle suggested, who would have liked to go ahead and look for Malicious Marduk on her own right away. However, where should she begin? Nobody knew, where he was, and whether he'd be as easy to locate as his Miseriors.

Besides she had to talk things over with her magic bow, before she planned any further steps. If that was enough already.

The bow namely realized narrow limits indeed, he didn't like to admit, but couldn't help it – since quite some time already.

The Advisor said good-bye immediately after they had returned. The Prince looked at Billy-Joe then asked whether he should show them the one or the other of the projects in due train. Arundle believed him anyway and Billy-Joe was by now also almost convinced of the Prince's integrity and agreed with Arundle.

"Give the General our best regards, please, little Prince" Arundle said, while preparing the magic bow for departure back home. "We will contact you, as soon as we get an idea of how to tackle those black marketeers and Malicious Marduk. In the meantime, you'll have to manage on your own. Enlightenment is a mighty tool, but is of course not everything."

The Prince nodded – "You are right, there will always be enough people left, who will follow the false promises of the criminals, and what is even worse such criminals will find enough victims, I'm afraid", the Prince confirmed. "As long as we can't do more for the underdogs, they will continue to sell their lifetime for a little extra comfort, if they get the opportunity. And that even the best police couldn't hinder. So try hard and see what you can do, - in you we trust..."

34. The Conference

Scholasticus came back from Germany one day later than Arundle and Billy-Joe. He had imagined his start on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth a little different, and was fed up already of all the flying back and forth, while he did the route just a second time.

“You’ve got to think you are a pilot” Dorothea recommended, although she was of course very happy when she had him back in Frankfurt so soon.

His brother Amadeus, also missed his wife desperately already and couldn’t await the big move that was planned for November. The house was sold already and the furniture packed.

This meant for Intellectus to say good-bye as well. He would join the first grade at the School of Inbetween.

Physically he was eventually still too small. However, he had inherited his mother’s brain, so it was obvious to everybody that he would make it.

He would have to leave his mates behind, and that was the bigger problem. On the isle, there were of course other children, some in his age, mostly the sons and daughters of the teachers and the employees. However, there weren’t as many of course, and they spoke their native tongues.

Intellectus nevertheless was really looking forward and could hardly wait the day of departure. He was missing his mom as desperately as Amadeus was missing his wife, who was gone by now for over a month already.

Amadeus longed so desperately for Grisella, that he intended to ask Arundle, if she could help him by means of her magic bow arranging for a secret visit on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Then the workload because of the removal ate him up and he forgot to ask. Besides he had mislaid the arrows, he’d been keeping since his brother had left. That was why he couldn’t send her a message.

The more obvious idea, just to lift the receiver and dial a telephone number, didn’t come to his mind. Perhaps because he mistrusted the spooky business with that bow and stone and all that magic, anyway, and still had enough of such kind of experience.

Thus, he only asked his brother to give his beloved and acquaintance the dearest regards.

“You’ll see, the last weeks will elapse just like that” Scholasticus reassured his brother, when he tried to soothe his wife, who was all in tears. “I’ll be back in no time, still got lots to bespeak, though...”

“Never, never ever shall I turn in on such a deal again, I promise,” Dorothea said to her brother-in-law still sobbing, when they waved behind the taxi that took Scholasticus to the airport. Amadeus nodded fiercely: “So ain’t I, so ain’t I, I promise...”

Soon after Scholasticus got along with the jet lag and the hardship of the long journey as well as the demands the new position put on him, Arundle and Billy-Joe finally got the opportunity to report of their trip to Laptopia.

They had also regards to pass on, from the Prince and from the General as well, which they hadn’t met in person, because he was in a similar situation as was Scholasticus, and was almost buried under a tremendous workload as well.

“This Malicus Marduk brings in a wholly new dimension” Scholasticus said thoughtfully after Arundle’s report. “And you both are convinced of his real existence by now, aren’t you? – I wasn’t all against Billy-Joe’s scepticism, in fact. – Well, then let’s take it for granted, and things are as the Advisor pronounces. Then we all went pretty far astray. I’d even say we looked like fools with our balloons and the stuffing of the so-called ‘time-holes’. Those black marketeers poked fun at us, no doubt. And all those hassle about the factories - seems to have been all in vain. Such had nothing to do with the real causes, but why was there no one to interfere? Those in charge seemed to agree, didn’t they? – Well those on our side anyway... They knew about the truth, didn’t they?”

“Well, yes and no, a lot was known afterwards. The young Prince is still young, but he picks up very fast. Many facts he learnt by advice from the Advisor, though. While the General probably knew better sometimes. The old Prince Regent definitely dealt with those ominous black marketeers, that’s proved by now, and that is one reason, why he has trouble now to recover, and get rid of his depression. It might be too late for him anyhow.”

“Then the black marketeers initiated the riots – they were the secret agents stirring up the crowd, I see” Scholasticus said thoughtfully.

“So it was Malicious Marduk who falsified our messages. He and his Miseriors dominate the sphere in between - the presence and the future, that makes sense...” Billy-Joe objected.

“While we were chasing on the wrong trail...” Arundle agreed.

“And we opened the door and let him come right into our presence. Him and his Miseriors. What a nuisance...”

“Do you mean it was Grisella’s project, Walter’s magic black box that served as a gate...?”

“Well, I’m afraid so it was...”

“There are still some absurdities left,” Billy-Joe said. He was thinking of the old Shaman of the Churingas, and wondered how he managed to become so old. Could he have managed on his own? Without the black marketeers’ evil methods and dirty deals?

Of course, he was even more bewildered, because it was him, whom they’ve met as a statue. It was him as an old man. That could mean he was a definite link between the presence and the future. Was he therefore involved in that dirty time-swindle? Did he unconsciously anticipate, what was coming up? What did the statue mean; they’d met in that so-called ‘Hall of Glory and Glamour’? The statues, actually, as there were at least two crucial ones, and Arundle had her own lot to carry on since then.

They had been in the summer palace on the moon of Laptopia for the first time, together with the little Prince, who then became Regent by imperial promotion. Arundle had been turned around as well, just like the Prince, while they were promoted to Associate Crown Councillors.

Billy-Joe by now noticed the way the other members of the meeting looked at him. Nevertheless, he wasn’t prepared to give in completely. A tiny rest of doubts remained despite the convincing facts he’d been confronted with. Therefore, he shook his head silently, even when he noticed Arundle’s disappointment.

It has to be cleared what name there was written at the bottom of ‘his’ statue. Such had to become clear first. Perhaps someone tried to pull his leg, by mixing up badges or something. He knew of course how thin the ice was he was on. In a way, he was convinced already, if there hadn’t been that little strange itch right between his shoulder blades...

Scholasticus raised his eyebrow, somehow bewildered – “so what?” he murmured – “we can do without almost the like...” He intended to have a word with Arundle, whether a rehearsal of Billy-Joe’s whereabouts might be worthwhile. She knew him better than they did, but the responsibility was still theirs.

“Well then, Arundle, how shall we proceed?” he asked. “I think we’d best follow the Advisor’s advice and look for Malicious Marduk”, she answered. “But where shall we begin?”

“That’s indeed the question. This time it might be necessary to involve Walter and the magical stone as well, I presume” Scholasticus said. “Besides, I would certainly like to come with you, no matter whether I’ve got the time or not. I see the urgency, so other thing must wait.”

Grisella nodded affirmatively, she hadn’t interfered yet, but like Florinna and Corinia, she had been following the dispute and didn’t wholeheartedly agree with the way Billy-Joe was treated by the Professor. The question of democracy for example hadn’t been touched at all. So – was there really no point in Billy-Joe’s doubts, after all?

“I still think our ideas and the actions, we were taking, worth while,” she said – “there is no reason to stray ashes on our heads. Even if now comes out that the time-reduction is caused by purpose, and we have to consider the fact, I understand. We have to accept that the Emperor has the power to do so, which I personally would like to question. Be it, that he is the Creator of the world himself.

Still, I wouldn’t go as far as the Advisor’s proposal predicts, that our survey opened a loophole for Malicious Marduk to slip in. It might well be vice versa. Anyway, I agree, it is worth while now trying to get rid of him for Laptopia’s sake – after all, it’s our future as well...”

“I agree, and to me such outcry of injustice still goes on and is in no way annulled yet” Florinna added.

“The time got reduced for everybody, but the court didn’t seem affected at all. The court lives on in it’s Olympus forever. No wonder others try the same and grab for a ‘fair’ share of the cake” Corinia agreed.

“How did the former Regent happen to fall into the hands of the black marketeers?”

“Right, that’s a good question, I’ve asked myself as well” Billy-Joe turned in. “Perhaps it’s the Emperor’s fault anyway?”

“You think the measures of cutting the time-trade were insufficient, I see. Too many exceptions were possible and accepted. Too many kept their privileges, and those, being exempted, managed to slip in by means of the black marketeers?” Scholasticus summed up what’s in the air.

“Perhaps all of them stick together with those black marketeers” Billy-Joe suggested – “all the upper class of Laptopia while threatened to become reduced to an average sized life, and do without privilege.

That would answer Corinia's question" Arundle assisted. Billy-Joe was all in favour of how things were bespoke and looked at. All he wanted was to dig a little deeper and see what's hidden under the surface.

"I just don't like that simplifying mode of black and white colouring. After all, everybody takes good care of himself, no matter how strongly they're fighting for general justice and equality. Those people in charge we met didn't suffer from the shortcomings of the system – friend or foe. Perhaps for them the foremost task is to keep the circle of the upper class closed..."

"For you, someone like Malicius Marduk is a kind of Robin Hood, isn't he?" Grisella said thoughtfully. "Well, if we consider him to be the one drawing the strings of the rebellion..."

"Still, we can't overlook the fact, that the black marketing is a very dirty business..." Scholasticus replied.

Grisella agreed wholeheartedly - "...it's indeed a shame, no question about that. On the other hand, we must probably accept that some inventions can't be shared by the masses. Perhaps we have to weigh and find the sound equilibrium. There are surely enough gifted heads, who deserve a long life, because they do a lot for the public..." Grisella thought of the philosophers and scientists.

"But someone has to make the decision" Scholasticus answered. "...Can't be made by the individuals alone, after all. Everybody feels somehow VIP. – Without a catalogue of objectives, you're surely lost at once. Here the Emperor steps in. He represents the law. Without some kind of order, things won't work. His allotment has to be somehow accepted, otherwise chaos is the consequence. Malicius Marduk is the culprit; besides all the evil, he represents and produces. There is no way out for him. To make that very clear, once and for all – Malicius Marduk is no Robin Hood. He doesn't take from the rich to help the poor. What he does, is just the other way round, he takes from the poor and gives it to the rich, to make them even richer."

Arundle felt dizzy in her head. There was so much in it that needed closer bespeaking. She felt lost and couldn't feel the ground under her feet. Certainties turned out to be vague assumptions and so called facts mere fiction.

There was something in Billy-Joe's argument demanding to watch out for the shades and to take care of Black and White painting. There were so many open questions. They understood very little of the greater whole and groped their laborious way tiresome and slowly towards greater connections of the most complex kind.

What ever they thought and the many doubts there still resisted, the Advisor was fond of their assistance that at least seemed to be certain, and he asked them to look for Malicious Marduk. Arundle was sure he had more in mind, than they understood, but either didn't want to tell them, or wasn't willing to tell them, because they weren't able to understand.

Arundle was sure that they were able to do the job. Had she been asked, why she was so sure, she wouldn't have been able to give a clear straightforward answer.

She trusted in her magic bow of course, and she believed in such brilliant brains as Grisella's or Scholasticus', and last, but not least she trusted in Billy-Joe, who had proved his loyalty by risking his life for the well of the future mankind.

Besides - the magical stone would be with them, how could they then fail. There were of course Walter and Pooty, who were standing for something great, even they weren't able to fully understand themselves. Such were no hints where to find Malicious Marduk of course, nor what to do, as soon as he was found.

Arundle felt her curiosity to be sweeping away the rest of doubts there still remained. What was hiding behind the sonorous name? Rebel and avenger of the disinherited or the destructive outburst of hell? Who was Malicious Marduk?

35. The Feast

Arundle's curiosity had to wait. She and her friends had other things to do, and were tied up in their own world, where Malicious Marduk hopefully didn't set foot yet.

It was part of the tradition of the School of Inbetween that the previous grade arranged a feast for the newcomers. As in previous years, the girls and boys did their best to welcome their new mates. The whole community, who was by now together, was enthusiastically looking forward to the feast.

Days ahead of the great event, there was a hustling and bustling back and forth the corridors. Little troops of volunteers in fancy outfits gathered and parted. The mixed band named 'Loblolly Girls 'n Boys' prepared on stage and did last rehearsals of their show until late at night behind locked doors.

Early in the morning when the 'Loblolly Girls 'n Boys' were still sleeping, the ballet met and after that the Theatre-workshop practised on the same stage. The stage was the busiest site of all – indoors as well as outdoors, as a very special kind of water ballet exercised behind the drawn curtains of the panorama glass front. Nobody was allowed to see, what was meant as the biggest surprise.

Magicians and jugglers tried to hide, but were found almost everywhere executing their conventional tricks, while some dared to mix in with real magic. That of course was risky, as they were still beginners. So the natural gifts got involved already, and the weaker characters meant that to be of little artistically value. A false opinion that would become corrected soon.

Those who wanted to bet could do so on conventional tricks or on magic and vice versa. The quota was updated every morning on the general board of information in the main lobby.

Those artists, who managed to lift people or other items up into the air, stood a good chance to win the public's attention. But it had to be spectacular things that were then travelling through the air, let's say a spectator sitting on his chair, or the like. That is - spectacular objects, nobody before had tried and succeeded.

Thought reading had a low ranking. Most knew something of that on the isle of Wisdom-tooth. Reading thoughts here was as stunning as the human ability to talk elsewhere. Thought-control on the other hand was something else and was a favourite objective, that most of them lacked. Failures now and then amongst teenagers, who were discovering new and surprising emotions, led to abashing laughter occasionally.

They all had heard a lot of such emotions, and a lot of whispering was about. However, it was a definite difference to experience things like that on your own. Being 'overheard' that way, was definitely a very strange situation.

Not everything was convenient though, and was welcomed, while the positive tension overrode the scene. The mere fact of being together with your mental kin for the first time in your life – was quite something. Such an experience no one would like to miss, foremost none of the newcomers, as this was the offspring of the greatest emotions and the deepest discernments into their own selves, they had ever experienced in their young lives.

Occultists, fortune-tellers, and other esoteric of that kind, didn't catch the attention, they may have expected. You had to present a real spirit from abroad on stage; otherwise, you would earn a meagre applause. Even better would it be, to have your ghost speak on stage

or do something spectacular that at least caused a shiver or an involuntary outcry.

This year, the rumour rushed about, you could expect a real sensation. "You're going to see" so-called insiders knew, "something you wouldn't believe your eyes." No wonder was it though, that the tension increased and reached an almost critical level.

What ever there was otherwise, that kept the newcomers busy, the closer the feast came, the more they focused on it, and everything was put aside, although Malicious Marduk wasn't all forgotten. Still he and the world of Laptopia had to step back for some days, which was in his case absolutely no disadvantage, as there was a clear intention by Arundle and her friends, to get hold of him.

Of course, they couldn't leave right away, even more though, as nobody could tell, how long the expedition would last, not to speak of the perils on the route. They didn't even have a plan, and had no idea, where to begin with the search for Malicious Marduk.

Scholasticus still hoped for a revelation, but that used to be Grisellas part. Besides, Walter, Pooty, and their magical stone hadn't shown up yet, although Arundle had sent for them.

- Might have been wiser to invite them to the feast anyway, then to send suspicious messages, that could easily be overheard, as was done in the near past.

Arundle somehow hoped it was Malicious Marduk who disrupted their communication, as that gave them at least a hint, where to begin with and to concentrate on.

The arrows, not really intelligent though, spoke of some kind of invincible barrier on the way out and in the isle, that made them alter their course for some seconds, before thing went normal again and smoothed down to the proper legal way, they were used to - that was gliding over sea and land at an altitude of the virtual kind, that was invisible for every-day people, no matter how close they got, be it in airplanes or other means of transportation.

The closer Malicus Marduk was, the easier would it be to trace him down, Arundle wondered. She felt almost swept away by such alluring prospects, when the preparation for the feast got a somehow dangerous turning.

So much would be done for them, the newcomers learnt from the Headmistress, that the community felt free to utter a legitimate desire and that was an introduction of each of them presenting her- or himself and at the same time something typical of their origin.

The idea as such made Arundle's heart beating harder and wetted her palms. The rumour as such stirred the newcomers' ease and

brought them back to the grounds, while they had be drifting apart and closed in their imagination, first of all the dreamers, of course.

That now changed everything from one second to the next. And all thoughts, no matter how urgent they were, got banned at once and let room for only one topic: “What am I going to do? What shall I perform? What I’m going to look like? What will the others think of me?” Not only Arundle hated such modes of self-disposal. They all had the same problems. They all had to find an individual solution. Arundle knew she wouldn’t do without her magic bow – in order to disappear with him, if necessary.

“Present yourself and something typical for your land or locality, feel free to improvise, you are the only one who can prove what’s going on anyway. Don’t be shy, the spontaneous ideas are often the best” the Headmistress said with a smile.

“...Same procedure as last year, Ms Marsha?”, her husband, the Vice-Headmaster, asked with a grin, as the set up was indeed the same every year. “Same procedure as every year, Adrian” the so addressed Marsha replied with a pleasing smile. “One or two minutes will do, the others want to get their chance as well” the friendly Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, added, while she went through the protocol with the newcomers, and fixed with them, what had been just a rumour, into sound fact.

“Your predecessors gave their best, so I’m sure you won’t stay behind.”

There she was, all alone and on her own. Billy-Joe didn’t think twice. He would perform one of the ancient dances of his people, he declared all at his ease. Lucky Billy-Joe, Arundle thought. For him it was easy. Florinna wanted to do something with horses, although her engagement had suffered lately, actually, since she led the herd of Laptopian ponies via transmutation over here to Australia. However, she didn’t mind, she said. She could as well join Corinia, who wanted to perform an Indian dance, she had lately learnt from their mother.

“How would you get a horse on the stage, just for two minutes?” Arundle wanted to know while they exchanged their ideas. The sounder her mates felt, the weaker she became. It was a shame. She didn’t have the faintest idea, what she could do.

“Perhaps I try with mass-hypnosis” Florinna laughed. She didn’t want to unveil, how she planned to overcome - “such a negligible obstacle.”

“And I?” Arundle yammered. Nobody had an idea. Not even Grisella, who she actually wasn’t allowed to ask, as she was member of the board.

Grisella was nervous for a similar reason and was brooding over an introductory speech. She had to introduce herself same as Scholasticus and two other new scholars. As the first impression is most important, she wanted to give her best, same as the others. Therefore, the adults were under a similar, if not a harder pressure.

Very late, almost in the last minute, she then had after all finally an idea, worth while thinking it over, and while she did, she changed completely. Her doubts were gone just like that, and she walked about with a self-assured smile on her face.

Thus, the big event got closer and closer. The Day broke on at last and met a beehive-like in obstruction, so it seemed; in fact, everything was more or less under control of Adrian Humperdijk, the Vice-Headmaster of the School of Inbetween.

The crucial part would be solved right before the fealty supper at about seven o'clock in the evening, as dawn was only an hour ahead, which had a slight effect on the outside performers. Anyway, things should have been settled by half past nine or so. During dinner, the band would perform, and as well, some kind of floorshow on stage by the theatre-workshop, if they managed with the limited space, they had to share with the band. That was some kind of a problem, the Vice-Headmaster pointed out in his appeal for tolerance and respect. The ballet, the choir, the magicians, and the like, were all packed into the dinner-frame of not more than all in all two to two and a half hours. That was indeed a tightly packed programme, if not an overloaded one – “as usual” so the Vice-Headmaster, and not at all unlikely was a very special friend of his to be introducing himself and his environment, of the most secret kind, so the Vice-Headmaster hoped. He didn't know, whether at all yet or to what extend, as that was of course a matter of secrecy, and would be decided upon at the very last minute.

Practicable would such performance be after all, as the aula faced the sea's underworld by a huge glassine outer wall. You had only to open the curtains and illuminate the outdoor scene.

The Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, opened the feast with a whimsical little speech, that took the tension off to a certain extend, and smoothened the atmosphere noticeably. She was followed by the new teachers, who introduced themselves and their subjects in brief, and how they wished their subjects to be understood in general, and what they intended to do in the upcoming term.

The Vice-Headmaster, Adrian Humperdijk, overtook the role of a taskmaster. Eager to get out of his wife's shade, he overdid his role. Therefore, he caused confusion with the new teachers, instead of facilitating their task.

Grisella's voice became shrill of nervousness and anger. She managed her little speech nevertheless without major booboos. Her trial to focus a proper light on philosophy was a success, and earned a big applause.

Grisella was a mousy and inconspicuous person quite opposite to Penelope M'gamba from South Africa, who followed her on the microphone. The difference between these two women couldn't be greater. Ms M'gamba was a mighty and very impressive appearance, all covered up by an even more impressive colourful dress, as she was used to from home, that made her look even mightier and bigger, as she in fact was.

She had a heart of gold and an almost supernatural emissive power of the most embracing kind, nobody could resist. Therefore, she gained the hearts of her future pupils just like that.

Her subject was herbalism. She knew all the healing herbs, and of course the poisonous ones as well, that were growing in the African jungle. She gave some hints beforehand and her mighty voice rolled like thunder over the heads of the assembled and filled the room, even when she soothed down to a mysterious whisper, while mentioning forbidden secrets, in order to stimulate the curiosity of her – mostly - female audience and made them shudder or even gave them creeps by mentioning the spirits and daemons of the forest, who were supposed to be living in plants and waters or in hidden caves and hollows subsoil under the mighty roots of the jungle-giants. Attention was guaranteed, no question about that, and they would all meet in class again.

Scholasticus was a similar nature - energetic and charismatic the like. He attracted the male audience, by referring to the secrets of the universe, and therewith didn't stay behind those of the jungle, but even overrode them, as the outer world was even more mysterious and in a way stranger than everything that was experienced over here. Thus his hints were raising the curiosity – (by no means less than Penelope had been able to) - of mainly male youngsters.

Even some girls felt the contradiction of the radiating warmth and attraction of the cold and somewhat distracting infinity. All the more, a handsome assistant Scholar of Astrophysics was next to being introduced. He was Canadian and his name was Dr. Peter Adams. Scholasticus was in contact with, for quite a while. He was happy to

know him at his side, he said, and gave way at the microphone, as Peter Adams was quite capable in making his point. Somewhat sloppy and American style he presented himself witty, but didn't try to override his Professor, when it came to their joint subject. His boss had said enough of that, anyway.

After the new teachers Vice-Headmaster Humperdijk took over again and ran the show his own way, while had been slightly gone astray because of Grisella's intervention. He called the new students by name, one by one and asked them to the stage. They marched on one after the other, twelve by number, and were seated on two tables right next to the stage. Later they could go back to their friends the Vice-Headmaster pointed out all conciliatory and pliant. He wanted to win back grounds after Grisella's annoyance, which hadn't passed unnoticed.

Florinna and Corinia looked fantastic in their Indian habit, Arundle thought, while she looked quite alike every day. She had refused her to change her usual dress for such a purpose anyway.

Billy-Joe was also all dressed up for his performance, that is, he had undressed and wore nothing but a loin-cloth, while his body was all painted white with yellow and black or red stripes and circles and zigzag-lines here and there.

His martial outfit wouldn't go with his convincing smile on his face. Not only Arundle thought him once more absolutely attractive and handsome.

The candidates were asked to introduce themselves in alphabetical sequence. So Arundle was one before the last – (W for Waldschmitt) while Florinna and Corinia were due right before Billy-Joe (H for Hare and K for Karora.)

Corinia's dancing her Indian dance almost perfect, and Florinna had Walter's magical stone, who managed to arrive last minute, to bewitching a holographic piece of Australia on stage, with wild flying ponies and original landscape, accompanied by all kinds of suitable accessories and gadgets. Florinna was riding light like an elf, and was disappearing behind a veil of mist all too soon. She nevertheless received the first standing ovations of the day, while the question arose, what her performance had to do with her offspring.

Billy-Joe asked the magical stone to let him the scenery as well, what he did. He even produced some raindrops as an answer to the rain-dance Billy-Joe performed once more. The same he had been practicing lately over there in Laptopia, while staying with those little Churingas in that solitude vale, where the green was still growing amidst an otherwise vast and deserted wasteland.

The sound of distant drums from no-where got closer, while the rain stopped. Billy-Joe was climbing hand over hand now up an imaginary tree, while in the next moment jumping with mighty hops through the bush. Pooty couldn't stop laughing and almost suffocated in Walter's belly bag.

Then Billy-Joe had his boomerang dance and whirl above the heads of the assembly, that came always back to his hand like a well trained dog.

The Australian scenery vanished from the stage, just like that, and the two Korean sisters, Arundle had met in the helicopter already, performed the perfect balance of mind and body by a number of acrobatic exercises. They doubled each other apparently without exertion, and proved their inner harmony by doubling out of site, behind a wall between them.

On and on the show went on, so to speak, until it was Arundle's turn at last. She couldn't do without magic as well, and had the bow produce the thick leaden clouds of Laptopia, where she performed a bowling match with Walter and the bow, who was ejecting some kinds of little arms and hands quite similar to those the Laptopian Laptops called their own.

The arrows from the invisible quiver served as skittles and Pooty got himself rounded to some kind of bowling ball. After each strike he extended and hobbled back to the bowlers, that is to Arundle, Walter and the magic bow, making fun of his little arms, and called him artifact.

The skittles had their favourite bowler, and so had Pooty. Pooty was screaming and howling like an imp while underway as the ball, while the arrows bent sideways either to avoid or to provoke being hit.

Walter was thus made the winner, as Pooty was the wittier of the components, and on his side. Though the performance was big fun, the question arose again, what such had to do with Arundle's origin, but could easily be proved and witnessed by two of the new professors, who also originated in Germany. Arundle somehow promoted to something very special, and that was quite something amongst all those special ones gathered right here.

She could feel all those good vibrations and was happy while she seated herself back between her friends, panting and sweating, and Walter joined them with Pooty in his belly bag. How happy Arundle felt. Billy-Joe was back, clothed again but still some colour in his face, grinning from ear to ear, all in favour of her that she could feel.

That was the kind of acceptance she'd been longing for all those lost years behind.

A timid little boy was last after her. She pitied him, as nobody took notice of him any more, and while he realized, he'd have almost died of shame. As soon as he returned to his seat, Arundle got up and went over in order to comfort him. However, that wasn't easy, as they didn't understand each other. Therefore, she kept standing helplessly at the table. The boy gave her hostile glances and then turned round to show his back.

"Take care of the Tartars," a voice whispered, while she returned to her friends. The pigheaded little Tartar gathered his kin round him reassuringly.

Arundle meant to do him well, as she knew such feelings all too well. Even the anger and overwhelming wrath she knew, and didn't misunderstand. If you were stuck in such a hole of inferiority and despair, you had no chance to get out on your own, without help. She'd have had to consider that. Such emotions took their time.

The feast went on. After the introductions of the newcomers, it was dinnertime and the buffet was opened. In no time, everybody was queuing right where their tastes demanded. The menu reflected the variety of the people gathered on the isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Signs in some twenty languages tried to guide through that jungle, or did they confuse more than help?

"Let's stick to the South Pacific buffet once more" Corinia suggested and her sister, as well as Arundle and Billy-Joe, agreed at once, as their tastes met more or less right there. Meat was somewhat exempted though. That didn't really bother them, not even Billy-Joe, who couldn't make up his mind yet, whether to wholly change sides for good, as the girls had done. In case someone still felt hungry after such fleshless fare, he could try a second helping somewhere else at the huge buffet.

You wouldn't believe what there was. The menus alone were worth studying, as they were written in many different languages.

For a starter the friends choose baked white radish in tamarind-sauce on fennel bed with sassafras rasps, followed by a big bowl of gado-gado salad for all. After that they had filled Arabian vegetable-pancakes garnished with lemon-grass, bamboo-sprouts and Soya sticks. For dessert, they had refined coconut-crème on banana-cookies coated with nougat-almond-crocant. With the meal, they were drinking avocado flips and sweet cucumber-met. They gormandised at best they could, and felt like in the seventh heaven.

While they were on the fat of the land, a young trainee-wizard of last term's beginners, demanded the attention of the betters, who hoped to double their bet-quotas, and some even succeeded.

As soon as he left the stage the Loblolly Girls 'n Boys took over, and the fed-ups enjoyed a bit of a physical exercise after the heavy meal (or in between the courses.) Thus, the time passed by. It was after ten o'clock already and the younger ones began to yawn. It was their bedtime. While on stage the ballet tried their best. Besides, those from afar still suffered from the jetlag and had problems adjusting themselves, because they came from all parts of the world either for the first time or just returned after vacation.

The ballet gave in and retired. The stage was empty at last and the lights were dimmed. Even the last had eaten up by now and the tables were roughly cleared already, when the curtains in front of the huge panorama-windows were drawn to give way to the outside underwater world shimmering deep-blue in the light of countless spotlights, before the mysterious black of the distant background.

Those seated next to the windows jerked in shock involuntarily, even more while those spots were instantaneously turned on.

"I'm sure it's the water-ballet again" Arundle heard a voice whispering near-by, but it was something else. The rumour didn't fail. From afar out of the dark, you could see the strangest band of beings approaching. Widespread over the whole width of the outlook, a whirling line of glittering fins and scaly flapper-tails came nearer.

Beautiful mermaids with ruby-red eyes and silvery hair kept elegantly swaying back and forth. Their green bodies were richly decorated with corals. They were accompanied by handsome nixes of the same complexion and outfit. No less attractive to the girls, than the maids to the boys.

Those were no disguised divers of the diving-school, who fixed their legs together and covered with some kind of flipper-bag. These mermaids and mermen were real, you could see right away.

Through the assembly went a sigh, while the Vice-Headmaster, Adrian Humperdijk, stepped to the centre and placed himself right next to the pane. Opposite outside an elder merman with crown and sceptre did the like. His white beard waved softly with every movement. His big wild eyes were wide opened. A soft thunder raged through the hall, while he knocked at the pane with his sceptre.

"I'm going to pass on word by word, what King Melisander has to say" the Vice-Headmaster explained with an air of prominence. At last, there was an opportunity to step out of the shade of his wife, the Headmistress.

“I’m proud to call King Melisander my friend” he went on and reminded Arundle of Professor Slyboots and General Armyless, who he shared the figure with, and the theatrical mode of gesturing.

Adrian Humperdijk and King Melisander met many years ago. Adrian was deeply devoted to the king. The king had saved his life in nineteen forty-five when he managed to rescue him out of a sunken submarine. Adrian stayed some months with him in the mysterious world of the deep sea, and was another being when he returned to the surface back into the world of the ‘drylanders’.

From then on he devoted his life to the deep sea, and did everything he could to improve the situation down there, that is, he tried to minimise the perils and the persecution of the creatures in the sea.

Adrian was never member of a university. All he knew, and he knew a lot – more than most in his field - he’d learnt by doing in practice, and he was the only person, who knew about the secrets of King Melisander’s hidden kingdom.

Academic merits remained beyond his reach until he met his future wife Marsha Wiggles and the School of Inbetween on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. There he soon found the recognition, he deserved.

He remained in his wife’s shade, which he was deeply devoted to regardless of that. She gave him the opportunity to go on with his sub-sea investigations and surveys. While she was the boss.

Meanwhile, King Melisander held his speech and like most monarchs, he had to read it from a manuscript. He spoke about peace and acceptance, and about coexistence. But he also complaint about the ruthlessness of the fishermen and sailors with all their dirt and poison. They were so carelessly throwing their garbage into the sea, and what they did to the fish was even worse.

Thus, most habitats were shrinking considerably or had gone altogether by now. Some peoples were on the verge of extinction. The infant mortality rate was alarming in some areas. His own people was hardly better off, than most of the land bound natives of the world, King Melisander explained.

His words touched Billy-Joe’s heart, and raised the rebellious nerve in him, because his own people’s fate was much alike. If he could, he’d swum out there between the nixes right away.

His intense notion stirred up the magic bow, who made Arundle aware. She rechecked with him, who spontaneously agreed, and all of a sudden, the two of them were dancing midst the water-folk.

The magic bow miraculously produced little oxygen bottles out of the invisible quiver as well as flippers, so they could keep up with the

mer-folk. Billy-Joe was an experienced sponge-diver anyway. Hand in hand, the water ballet was thus dancing to the sounds of shell-horns and coral-flutes.

However, this was just the beginning. Wherever they could, the naiads and nixes mixed with the divers of the diving-school, now swarming out at best they could. Unfortunately there weren't enough oxygen bottles on stock, or were half empty, so, after a few minutes, most of the divers had to return, and view the show from inside.

Corinia got the chance to participate in a genuine seahorse-race – a strong desire; she'd been bothered within her dreams. However, she couldn't keep up with the wild racers in their native element, while her seahorse did its best. After all, she managed to stay on the horseback and passed the finish in the saddle.

Arundle took the chance to have a closer look at the mer-folk, while she saw Billy-Joe somehow communicating with a very nice nymph. She wondered how he did it. The nymph giggled and waved elegantly with her green arms or was nodding or shaking her head and had her silvery long hair wave like sea grass.

Her light green complexion went well with her beautiful big red eyes. The whole appearance was very feminine besides the fins and the flipper that could have easily gone with a dolphin. While the merry game of the naiads and nixes strongly reminded of a school of dancing dolphins.

One of the mates of the naiad, Billy-Joe was conversing with, lost patience, when the conversation didn't come to an end. He circled the two and signalled how he felt. Arundle got kind of nervous as well, so she pointed at the gas-bottles, which were indeed running out of oxygen, and took him by the hand back to the dry land, that was done by means of the magic bow in no time. As soon as they got rid of the diving stuff Billy-Joe reported, what he had learnt from his sub-sea friend. "She said, she knew you, while you were a little girl" Billy-Joe reported. Arundle shook her head. She didn't remember a similar situation, when Florinna joined them, who seemed to have overheard what they'd been talking.

"Must be the old story", she said "when we got stuck in the dreamland, while our house burnt down... yes that was quite something. We were inside that big bubble..." – "Yes and deep down under the sand in those dungeons..."

Florinna hadn't got an oxygen-bottle so she had had to stay inside, while she watched her little sister and her friends fooling around outside. She was happy to have them all back, when Corinia

approached at last, still kind of feverish and all upset by the race she'd just performed.

"Corinia did the job, while we lay in coma, without her, we wouldn't be any more..."

"Right you are, that was quite something..."

"Our flat was totally ruined, while we lay in hospital with smoke poisoning."

"Yes, and you stayed with us overnight..."

"The dungeons could only be opened by the magical stone from Uluru..."

"Do you remember the Princes?"

"You mean the frogs."

"Right, I wonder what happened to them..."

"I don't want to disturb you", Billy-Joe intervened "but look, what's going on now out there."

36. The Pummel Pump Match

Outside in front of the crystal panorama pane, the water-sprites were busy forming some kind of playground by fastening ropes at eight corners to the rocks, that were available and seemed to be bound for such purpose. "We are going to watch some kind of water-ball," the Vice-Headmaster, Adrian Humperdijk, explained.

"You can compare this sport with our hockey" Adrian went on, while outside the teams got ready. "Instead of clubs, you use heavy water pumps in order to manoeuvre the puck, that looks more like a jellyfish though. The players try to drive the puck through the opponent's sea gherkin-circle. Pummeling at the opponents with the pump is a bad foul and is punished with a penalty blow at the sea gherkin-circle.

You play with three swimmers each, those are the field players, and one so-called gherkin king. His task is to have the sea gherkin-circle move along the basis line. He moves the seagherkin-circle with a lead in the one hand, and a little one-handed pump in the other. His task is to pummel the jellyfish-like puck out of the range of the seagherkin-circle. So he has a great responsibility, and most of the

times it is up to him and his ability, whether to win or to lose. He has to avoid of course pummelling at the attackers as well. Such a foul is called 'NAP' (Not Pummelled the Puck), and is meant to be the worst foul, while in the penalty zone.

Each round goes on until the first score. The losing team may ask for revenge. After two lost rounds in sequence, the match is definitely over."

While the Vice-Headmaster still was explaining the rules, the match had started outside. From the basis line the yellow team started the first attack. Flash like the players hissed through the water. The pumps emitted white foamy rays while the jellyfish-puck chased ahead.

However, from the other side the red team parried the attack with their pumps and had the jellyfish-puck reversed back to the attackers. A red pump pummelled one of the yellow swimmers. The referee (all in emerald-green) had his horn blow to the first penalty.

The fouled swimmer executed by means of his pump, and fully hit the puck, that rushed towards the red team's seagherkin-circle. However, the gherkin-king was alert. He tore the lead just in time, and the puck missed the circle by the fraction of an inch.

Now the attack reversed when the reds chased the jellyfish-puck towards the yellow seagherkin-circle. This attack also ended with a foul of the gherkin-king, but the penalty pummelling failed as well.

Those defender penalties were hard to avoid, but if that happened, or the referee didn't look carefully, dramatic scenes developed in the middle-field. The water seemed to be boiling so wildly, you could hardly see anything of the swimmers. The jellyfish-puck was the only thing that appeared here and then above the turmoil, or even disappeared in the outside sphere and had to be replaced by another.

Corinia watched the match from outside together with groups of naiads and mermen behind the seagherkin-circle, in order to support their team, but also to see the puck flushing through the seagherkin-circle, but that didn't happen on either side. The yellow and the red team fought much alike, and neither side outnumbered the other. That had a lot to do with the gherkin-kings on both sides. They were clever and fast and didn't make serious mistakes.

"They are simply the best," her neighbour just said. Corinia wondered, why she understood her. Right at that moment, the spectators raised their arms in rage. The yellow team hit the circle.

While the exultation on the one side couldn't find an end, the losers tried to attack the referee and the yellow swimmers. The late penalty that led to the score hadn't been correct, they kept yelling.

“Revenge, revenge,” the multitude shouted. Obviously the match wasn’t over yet. The teams retired into their invisible quarters, very back in the dark, and the band returned with horns, shells, and sea-drums. Both teams needed medical care, because the match not only cost power, but also led to bruises and minor injuries.

The red team from Bermudia needed psychological support, after the harsh throwback. The yellow team was at home here in Australis. This was a home game for them on their home ground and with their fans backing them.

If the Bermudians lost again, it would be the third defeat in row, and King Melisander would be very sad, because he was a great fan, and so would be the whole Bermudian nation.

For many of them a defeat would be almost unbearable. Many fans had come by intercitysubmarineexpress, others did the trail on their own, and were almost seventeen intervals (that’s roughly one month) underway, - a risky and strenuous way of travelling, that could cost one’s life.

Those, who could afford, therefore took the intercitysubmarineexpress, and spent a season’s income on that.

Thus - all the more - the threatening defeat hurt. The first stroke was the worst, though. Those who had come on their own couldn’t believe what was going on. Some thought it high time to return right away.

Then they recalled all the hassle and strain, they had suffered, while coming down here.

They first had had to catch the Coastal Counter stream and the Brasilstream. Had you reached the southern tip of the American continent, you had only to find the cold Southpolarstream. And if you had managed that, you could have let go and only take care, that you didn’t freeze, while the enemy now was the cold; until you came into warmer areas near Newsealand, much like the Bermudian intercitysubmarineexpress.

Having thus risked their lives, the fans wanted to become rewarded, of course.

Corinia’s new friend named Boetie was all prepared to explain to her the conditions and general way of life down here. Life didn’t seem to be all that much different from life on solid ground. Well, of course other sports were performed...

The break was over. For reflections of such kind was no time. The teams returned to the battlefield. Vice-Headmaster Humperdijk commented the exciting moment.

He was a follower of the Reds, and therefore he didn't like the situation at all, like his friend the King, who looked rather moody.

The young advancing colony on the other side of the world threatened to become a real competitor not only on the playground. The conditions of life were more advantageous over here than at home, where pollution was dramatically increasing and oil platforms began to conquer the deepest depths of the Caribbean and acquainted deep-seas, thus limiting their habitat to an unacceptable extent, not all that unlike to what was going on in the near-by Amazonian rainforest with the native tribes, dwelling right there.

The mer-people came originally from under the shelf of the Bermudian triangle, but had settle elsewhere as well in the meantime, wherever they had found favourable conditions.

Finally only Australis remained, the advancing colony on the edge of the world, that was located at an ideal site, not far from the mainland under a protecting shelf and more or less left alone by those drylanders.

Australis was heated from the depth with volcanic heat, and that was one important precondition of survival for good in such depth.

Again, the battle raged back and forth. The penalties seemed to be unavoidable, Corinia wondered. Some tricksters even might be hushing into a pump-ray purposely.

Boetie agreed: - "still there are slight differences, the Bermudian cheat and foul were ever they see the slightest chance to get away with" – well, she was from Australis.

Corinia's air got thin. She promised Boetie to view on from the inside and keep her fingers crossed for the Australisans.

The Vice-Headmaster was taking his reporter-job serious. Even though everybody could see with his or her own eyes what was going on, he commented every move that was done in the field. His shrill voice reached the last corner of the hall, Corinia noticed while returning back, as soon as she got rid of her wet swimsuit and diving stuff, and was back in her clothes.

"...And again rages Paplobb, the Red Sprite, he is called. He has the pump ready for action. – There - the puck, a good pass from the right, and almost... too bad, what a pity, the yellow gherkin-king – otherwise not a brilliant performer - was lucky to get the gherkin-

circle somehow out of the reach. Was that correct, or did he leave the basis-line?

That in fact was a good chance, worked out by the brave sprites from Bermudia.

But here comes the attack from the other side – watch out Pablopp... Oh, the puck is through, doesn't look good. A yellow flash is there, his ray grabs the puck, whirls it about... now the attacker is in an ideal position, - and that doesn't look good at all for the brave sprites from Bermudia.

A fierce whirl, all foam and turmoil. What was that? Is that the flag, there at the corner? Was that it? I'm afraid so. That is the decision – the fateful second. Yes, I'm afraid so, that is the decision. Over and out the second round in sequence.

What a shame. The Bermudians – all of them, the sprites on the field as well as the spectators dissolve in grief. The worst case occurred. This is the end of the glory. This day becomes the doomsday of the once glorious Bermudia. A small colony, at the end of the world, challenges the motherland. What a shame, what a pity, who can bear this?

Let's stay with the victorious side for a moment. Sheer joy and frenetic applause without end is to be noticed. The onlookers almost drive crazy. Somewhat strange though, somehow savage-like, I'm afraid. Well, such are the colonies; you can't compare those savages with decent people anyway...

Such are the hard laws of the arena, shame on the defeated. Was it the strategy? Many discussions had there been. Did those colonists hit harder, more brutal and careless? The last word has not yet been spoken, though.

What's needed for now is a new beginning. Probably a wholly new team, as it had been speculated by certain insiders. We will see.

What a joy on the other side. The young sympathetic team all in yellow. Trainer, aids and athletes hug over and over again. From the sides spectators press in...

The cup remains in Australis. King Melisander is soon handing the trophy over again to the Australisan team-captain. Over there you can see the preparations for the solemn act.

There are the seasnail-hornblowers already. Indeed a remarkable sight – the pride of the United Kingdoms of Melisandria and all the united subseatowns and enclaves.”

The Vice-Headmaster went silent at last, his shoulders quivered, he was sobbing, while the cup was soon to be handed over to the local heroes again.

Corinia had joined Arundle, her sister and Billy-Joe, while back in the hall. The three were infected by the one-sided report of the Vice-Headmaster, and looked somewhat bleary-eyed and all sad, although they hadn't had a decided position. Therefore, Corinia cheered them up by pointing out the facts, and what she'd learnt from Boetie.

"Enjoy the victory of our side, we are no less 'deep-down-unders' as they are, after all, you should always keep in mind. They're our close neighbours. If we like, we can go for visits any day out there..."

The three didn't quite get, what Corinia wanted to tell them. Then Arundle understood first. "You are right, Corinia, we got infected by the Vice-Headmaster's partisanship, without noticing. We should indeed enjoy the victory of 'our' team, after all, we are some sort of Australisans, aren't we?"

"Going to be Australisans, you mean" Billy-Joe added with a smile on his face, because he was Australian, more Australian than most, indeed.

Outside the ceremony went on. The band was playing the anthem of Melisandria in full length of almost half an hour – somewhat monotonous back and forth, while the proud team could hardly manage to stand still, who lined up before the King's pedestal, right opposite the crystal pane.

The whole lot of mer-folks was singing wholeheartedly, and most kept their knobbly froggish fingers at the forehead and gazed over to their king.

King Melisander was sitting straight and proud on some kind of throne, and looked as if he was the one to be honoured. He took his time and had a word with the defeated as well, and waved them to his side, right next to the advisers and crown councillors, before he gave the cup back, almost rough, though, his face all bleak and motionless, while the victorious team went on shaking hands, pretending they didn't notice the affront.

For the mer-folk a splendid buffet was waiting now, which looked quite different from the buffet on this side of the crystal pane, that had just been plundered by the students.

Vice-Headmaster Humperdijk ended with his reportage. The dining habits of the sea-sprites and naiads were hard to get used to, and wouldn't earn them sympathies over here. Therefore, he had the curtains carefully lowered. A last hand-waving by Boetie – Corinia thought her to see amongst others, heading for the 'buffet' – that was it, the curtain fell, so to speak, over an irreversible end of the feast.

37. Searching for Malicius Marduk

While Walter and Pooty with their magical stone were here, because of the feast, they could as well go on searching for Malicius Marduk. Therefore, Arundle and Billy-Joe called all who were in the know together to discuss, how to proceed. The magic bow talked things over with the magical stone, and Scholasticus was brooding over a plan as usual – besides, he was prepared to have his assistant involved. “Peter is absolutely reliable,” he whispered into Arundle’s ear, while she looked somewhat bewildered. “He is specialised on time-hops, that was one reason why I asked him to come over here.”

The buffet in the great hall wasn’t yet completely cleared, when the ‘Taskforce Laptopia’ got ready – as Scholasticus quickly baptised their enterprise. –

“Only to please Peter,” he said, (because Peter Adams was used to such kind of labelling.)

Arundle was bound to take the lead as pathfinder and scout all alone with her magic bow, while the three men would press in Walter’s virtual spacecraft; not a magic black box anymore, because Grisella stayed behind.

Neither Florinna nor Corinia minded such exclusion and Grisella was almost delighted, although she didn’t show, and fare-welled them with feminist nonchalance.

“We may accompany you in our dreams” the sisters ascertained Arundle, who’d fly somehow alone, not only as a scout but also as a – going to be – woman.

Corinia would use the time when Arundle was absent to widen her newly fitted connections with Boetie and her world under water. Florinna would join her, she said. Corinia still didn’t understand why communication between Boetie and herself was no problem at all. This was just one field of action; she wanted to put an eye on.

The magic bow and the magical stone could neither agree on the exact route to be taken, nor on the target, until Scholasticus intervened, as he feared the whole enterprise would end in a fiasco, before it began.

Thus, conditions weren’t ideal during these last minutes before departure. “We are going to start our search right in that damn ‘Hall of

Fake and Frustration' for heaven's sake" he was hollering, while the magical stone was just in due train of disappearing in Walter's belly bag, and Arundle's bow was raging with anger and dismay, his red eye kept flickering like a neon light on the verge of ruin.

The moon as such was quite about Arundle's taste, whether or not Scholasticus' idea was somehow original. Nobody had a different idea anyway. Peter Adams didn't have, he had no idea at all, and did what his boss wanted him to do.

"We will have a look on the other side" Scholasticus said, although he hadn't yet been there and only knew of the site what he had been told. He'd never been in that hall of fame, and he didn't even know the proper name, or didn't want to mention it, - like all others, who didn't know why.

"You know that statue of the old Shaman, or your alter ego, so to speak, young friend" he said and patted on Billy-Joe's shoulder with a generous air. "We might be able to get in contact though. I can't imagine the Emperor and his entourage showing up just like that. There had been a good reason for that. Perhaps you got some mechanism activated at it was the statue that made the court appear. Well, they didn't seem to be real, am I right? The Advisor, wasn't he himself the one, who did confirm that he was just an image? Perhaps the whole set-up was nothing but a holograph, a kind of virtual material transmitted just for you..."

Arundle agreed; she liked the idea, and now she recalled the funny kind of communication. In fact, there had been no communication, not in the sense of the meaning. What was said had little connection with what was answered, and vice versa. Even the Advisor, who presented himself in the liveliest air, failed often enough to refer to what was said or going on.

"Such a mighty Emperor can't be everywhere at the same time, so what else could he do, but send virtual copies everywhere..." Arundle agreed.

"On the other hand, is Malicious Marduk not hiding just now? This might be a good reason why you were contacted." Scholasticus thoughtfully opposed his own idea.

"Well, I could think of another good reason" Billy-Joe said. "Perhaps Marduk wants us to find out the truth about the whole imperial construction and the false picture we get."

"Sounds somehow sound" Scholasticus agreed, while Arundle wanted to protest, and so he added, "no matter what your own position is..."

“Can it be beyond our limited borders, that things are going to dissolve in contradictions?” Peter Adams intervened. He was thinking of the opposing interpretations the light experienced, whether it was pure energy or energetic bits – that was still the unanswerable question of the century. For both sides there were good arguments available, proofs and counterproofs. However, the dualism remained as a fundamental discernment into the condition of existence.

“What are we going to do right now?” he asked and widened his arms as if he wanted to embrace to universe. “Don’t we turn our logic upside down, by leaving time and space, to step in again at another point in time and space? Of course, that contradicts with our common laws of nature. And still it is possible...”

“Only with magic” Arundle threw in. “So what? Shall that be a contradiction?” Adams answered. “Magic is always still the not yet known, what we aren’t able to explain. I stress on ‘not yet’. One day, people are going to understand such phenomena, that seem so unexplainable to us now, I’m convinced.”

Adams was glooming of exaltation, his eyes were blinking, you could see his enthusiasm. Scholasticus agreed wholeheartedly: “That’s the right spirit” he said and patted the shoulder of his new assistant in an air of generosity. However, the assistant only listened to the praise and didn’t get the undertone, so he blushed of pride and joy.

There was a far more exciting example than the contradiction inherent in the phenomenon of light, if that was possible at all. Were they not on the verge of the mightiest contradiction of all, and hadn’t Billy-Joe helped them up on such a difficult level of seeing reality, that is, of producing a kind of image that bore the contradiction as its centrepiece and absolute momentum?

The magical stone and the magic bow still didn’t agree on the route. The magical stone wanted to take the safe route, offshore, so to speak, always in eye contact with the land, that is – the earth, while the magic bow preferred the free jump out of the window, so to speak.

Such a jump had its disadvantages, as you never knew a hundred percent where you’d land. However, this way was much shorter and – once taken – did its thing, while the other way required the full attention of the navigator.

It would only be the safer way, if the navigator didn’t make a mistake. And mistakes were very likely, the time travellers recalled. The landing in the wrong age was still on their minds.

All too well, the time-travellers recalled the false landing some seventy years abroad. Afterwards they understood, why that had happened. However, that didn't eliminate such a mistake.

That was why the magic bow insisted on his approach, as he more or less guaranteed the entering point time-wise, though a minimal deviation with regard to the exact site, was possible. However, that was the worst that could happen.

Malicious Marduk couldn't harm them - that was another positive side effect. Getting into such a time-hop was impossible, while the offshore route, which was favoured by the magical stone, was meant to be an invitation for all kinds of pirates, luring ashore, which was very likely, the magic bow said, while the magical stone denied.

"No case of piracy did occur during the whole past millennium," the stone yelled rather upset, because of such an allegation.

They parted after all, and while Arundle was underway, the bow let her know, he doubted very much whether the hard-headed stone was at all able to do a time-hop.

Even he wouldn't dare a time-hop with such a payload. "But why can't the stubborn stone admit that?" the bow asked. Arundle didn't answer and kept her thoughts hidden.

The big trek was meanwhile also on its route. Billy-Joe knew the secret entrance to the summer palace in the Sea of Tranquillity. The entrance was under the armpit of the resting moon man, if he kept his exact position, and if he rested.

Arundle also hoped to find the entrance again. If not, she could divert to Laptopia, and ask the Prince to get her to the summer palace, by moon shuttle. There was time for that, because their route was so much faster than the male trek.

Meanwhile the trek kept steering through eternity and Billy-Joe was still in good hope, as far as their aim was concerned – the so called 'Hall of Honour and Humour', or whatever.

"With his excellent sense of orientation the magical stone won't have the slightest problem" Walter said, while Billy-Joe was describing the hidden entrance under the armpit of the moon man in detail.

"Make sure, the stone understands that you can only find it, in case the Moon-man's resting. Otherwise I don't know. We had problems finding it, so you never know..."

Billy-Joe remembered all too well how difficult it had been, to get access to the palace, while trying the second time.

Arundle still raced ahead. Left and right, the stars were streaming. An indescribable feeling of lightness and freedom came over her, she'd almost forgotten about. She felt somehow stretched and almost bodiless, as if she consisted only of consciousness. However, that was surely just a feeling, and perhaps she was only dizzy. Since she had been a little girl, she suffered from spells of seasickness, like right now.

However, the sickness reminded her of her body, and that meant she didn't dissolve, and reassured her again. Coolness came back, and well being. She was even able to enjoy the trip, that came to an end.

Below, Arundle discovered the metallic shimmer of the Laptopian clouds, and ahead a huge full moon was rising, she was approaching quickly, until she turned into the orbit at last.

She felt the pressure of gravity - tons of weight clung to her body; she'd have to escape again by now, and meant a harder strain for mind and body as the acceleration at the beginning of the time-hop.

Had she then had a feeling of dissolution, she now felt quite the opposite - of becoming squeezed. She couldn't remember comparable extremes, though she'd done quite a few trips ever since. Something was different this time. Was this up to her?

However, there was no time for reflections. A last turn and there she stood right in the middle of the Sea of Tranquillity. Not far, the chain of mountains indicated the edge, where the moon man rested, if the constellation or the weather allowed.

With mighty hops she paced towards her aim - the armpit under which the entrance to the summer palace lay hidden, or had been last time. She didn't know a different entrance.

Arundle felt rather alone and the surrounding here on the moon stimulated such feelings. Right here amidst the grey dull rocks and dust the vast space got at you harder and more unavoidable than ever. She felt the horrible lonesomeness of the moon for the first time wholly unprotected, because she was here alone for the first time.

Not even the moon man spoke to her. He hadn't noticed her yet, when she popped about the height of his knee, and had still some long hops to go before she came into his sight.

The magic bow tried to help and had her make jumps of twenty of even thirty yards, instead of only ten. Had the moon man been so tall? Last time he had been shorter.

Under her helmet the sweat was running. She could almost see nothing. In vain, she tried with her sleeve to clean the outer pane, yet the mist was inside. She contacted the bow and had him know her

problem, but he snarled defiantly. He's working hard, he let her know. Quite obviously, the technical challenge of airing a space suit properly exceeded his abilities.

In fact, he also felt uneasy. Things weren't as they should be. Difficulties came from the wrong side. He had to admit that he was lost. He hoped more than he knew whether they approached the summer palace. Like Arundle, he hoped to find the entrance under the moon man's armpit.

Something disturbed the local navigation-system. Not very different from the disturbance he experienced before, during the time-hop. Now there was nothing he could use as a landmark of orientation.

From the others he didn't hear, see, or notice anything. Nothingness wherever he turned to. Yawning empty swallowing naught - and where there had to have been life - at the shuttle ramp and the terminal, there was nothing, not the slightest bit of a building. Nay, this wasn't the moon of Laptopia; they must have landed in the wrong segment.

However, before Arundle and her magic bow were able to jointly reflect on the subject, she felt stopped in her pace and lifted up and before she realized what happened, she was in an entirely different world.

It took seconds to shake off the shock. Then she noticed the Advisor, who came rushing towards her from the bulk of the entourage, with a friendly smile: "My dear, how nice to see you again" he exclaimed enthusiastically and bowed continuously.

"May I guide you? Did you have a pleasant journey? You're being expected, though." While Arundle hesitated: "Come on, please, would you please follow me? This way please, if I may... Their Majesties awaiting you."

Arundle missed to ask a question. Of course, she wondered how she'd come here. Perhaps she could ask the Emperor, while seeing him face to face.

She still wasn't sure about his identity. The statue in the so-called 'Hall of Rhyme and Riddle' or what ever - didn't look like her father at all, not even as a could-be, or might-be father.

On the other hand, she remembered the strange glances and most of all her own funny feelings.

Well, but had it been a wonder in such a situation? When did you meet a real intergalactic Emperor of all worlds?

However, things turned out to be different again. The Majesty, the Advisor was guiding her to, wasn't His Majesty, instead it was Her Majesty.

Her Majesty also sat on a throne amidst a huge hall on a pedestal, where Arundle was demanded to halt and bow. Her Highness was seated so high, that Arundle could hardly see the tip of her nose. Besides, her head was all covered by a veil.

“Right away towards hell’s gate, what must I hear?” Her Majesty opened the conversation.

“But have one brought about some seating accommodation for our honourable dearest guest, though” her voice sounded clear and lovely. Her order was hurriedly obeyed. A huge red armchair was carried about, and Arundle was seated and while she did, she felt being lifted and raised up on the pedestal some twenty yards afar from Her Majesty almost as high.

Arundle sighted as inconspicuously as she could at her counterpart, and Her Majesty seemed to have a similar interest in her. She not even smiled generously, but looked her straight into the face, all behind that veil of course, that showed only the eyes clearly.

Something made Arundle feel familiar somehow, in a very special way. However, for lengthier reflections there was no time. The Advisor raised right next to her on a neat stool and explained how he just managed to rescue Arundle.

Not the entrance to the summer palace had been waiting for her under the armpit of the moon man, but the trap of Malicious Marduk.

Without noticing, the magic bow had entered the sphere of the Miseriors. They didn’t have difficulties in presenting such images all the more the big boss took the director’s part, and guided them as it pleased him.

“Had your friends not announced your coming, no-one knew you were about somewhere” Her Majesty confirmed.

“Well, well after all we got you out there just in time” while Arundle hissed at her bow rather sharply. “Your bow did as best he could, I’m sure. However, never underestimate the slyness and power of the evil. “Let this be a teaching” the Advisor added, rather unnecessary. As if Arundle purposely almost went into the trap of Malicious Marduk.

She argued with her bow, because she hated his selfish air, and the way he treated the magical stone, whenever possible. There was absolutely no sense in it.

While she reflected on such matters, she felt lowered to the ground. The audience was over. When she reached the ground, a door opened and Scholasticus, Billy-Joe, Peter Adams and Walter with Pooty in his arms stepped in and rushed towards her as soon as they realized who she was.

The magic bow tried to hide behind her back, while Pooty got the magical stone out of Walter's belly bag. The stone was glooming obviously happy and was in good mood, while the magic bow felt ashamed.

The men's tour with the magical stone didn't meet any difficulties. The Advisor met them in the Hall of this and that, and got them up here, because the moon was too dangerous.

The Miseriors had conquered the greater part of the moon soon after Arundle and Billy-Joe left with the Prince.

"They are interested in the organ transports and the 'lubricant' associated with. The Prince once explained how things work. Souls are being used and transplanted together with limbs or lungs and the like, while souls make them alive. But of course they can as well be eaten by the Miseriors and that is what those lost souls fear most." Arundle explained.

"I wonder whether they notice down there, what's going on meanwhile." Billy-Joe added.

"I'll have a look at that, your Highness" the Advisor bowed, while the Princess got off her throne and pedestal to mingle with the common folk from afar.

Billy-Joe seemed to amuse her and raised her curiosity. While he noticed, he got confused and tried to hide behind Arundle's back, like the bow had done a minute ago, but was of course far to big.

"Malicious Marduk, I understand, is located then, is that so?" Scholasticus concluded. "The little accident of yours did have some good in it, though."

"Right, didn't you yourself say 'find Malicious Marduk'?" Arundle asked the Advisor – "Well, now he found me. That's all we need. I wouldn't mind being the bait, if that helped, to get hold of him."

Scholasticus and Peter wondered how cool she was, all the more, when she went on "while you, my dear Billy-Joe, resist such measures. Thus goes on since you beheaded the old Prince. Somehow, you're not the same anymore." Billy-Joe shrugged uneasily, but didn't say anything.

"What are the referential imperial intentions, Mr Advisor, Your Imperial Highness?" Scholasticus asked straight forward. The Advisor gazed over to Her Majesty, but she avoided his eyes. However, seemed to know the answer. The Emperor was at the other end of the galaxy and wouldn't be back soon. Therefore, the Princess was on her own and had to come to an agreement with the Advisor.

“Who’s going to eat the hare before it’s shot?” The Advisor answered on her behalf.

“May we learn as well, what your plans are, Professor?” Her Majesty asked.

“It doesn’t really matter, what I think, I’m afraid. Still it is all-important to know how to proceed after we trapped the enemy. Beheading seems no option though, I understand, because this leads astray and causes all that harm, the poor boy’s experiencing right now.”

In fact had Scholasticus - together with Walter and the magical stone, Billy-Joe and Peter Adams – developed an interesting scenario that convinced by its primitive simplicity, and was at the same time absolutely sophisticated.

Her Majesty nodded agreeing while Scholasticus explained how to proceed. – “In brief terms” –

“You may understand - not to go into detail. You know, walls got ears, so to speak – wherever power is concentrating” Scholasticus went on with a meaningful look.

Again, Her Highness agreed, while the Advisor look disappointed, not only Billy-Joe, but also Peter Adams noticed. Scholasticus was far too busy, to put things into the right words. Arundle took her time to take a closer look at the Princess.

Arundle was now almost sure about the identity of Her Majesty, and felt more confused than ever.

She couldn’t ask straight forward what relationship there was. Was the Emperor husband or father, uncle or brother? She had to find out otherwise.

The last secret of the confusing game wouldn’t be unveiled. First, they had to capture Malicius Marduk. However, whatever they did, they’d have to avoid Billy-Joe’s consequence. No matter who’s blood was meant to be saved.

Scholasticus and Peter started with their preparations. The magical stone also asked Walter to get started, and so Walter grabbed Arundle by the leaf, while she didn’t listen to him. He needed her and her magic bow for a very special duty.

Billy-Joe’s task was to involve the Advisor into a conversation, and get as much as he could out of him about the old Shaman of the Churingas, and the whereabouts of him, because it seemed not so clear anymore, whether or not he switched over to the realm of the dead.

Her Majesty retired. Rather offended, when she meant to realize, that she was of no use. While Arundle wanted to have her on her side.

However, that wasn't likely to happen. They went a high risk, and Her Highness was far too valuable, and would be needed furthermore.

That would be quite something if Malicious Marduk trapped Her Majesty instead of vice versa.

Meanwhile things developed. Scholasticus and Peter calculated the amount and the size of ice cubes needed to build an igloo with a diameter of four yards and a height of two and a half.

The magical stone and the magic bow checked on their ability to produce negative energy. Which wasn't very difficult for them, while they hadn't settled their dispute.

Walter and Arundle were covered in blue flashes the two of them produced, and shuddered under the shockwaves, while adjusting the exact poles of the grid, bound to capture Malicious Marduk.

"You've got to imagine the functioning of the grid like a stake net" had Scholasticus explained.

Billy-Joe meanwhile found out about the location of the Shaman. The Advisor even agreed to guide him there. Together they would produce magical water that had to be frozen to ice. An ice cube producer was available on the space station, because alcohol was a severe problem among the entourage. Most of them drank whiskey, and quite a few wouldn't do without ice cubes. That was why such an apparatus was unalterable.

Most difficult was the amount of water required. The physicians calculated an enormous amount of water, much more than they had estimated. Even after they reduced the size of the walls, they still needed too much, so they reduced height and radius by half - that still meant a lot of water.

While water was a problem, freezing was it not, because temperatures went down far below freezing point as soon as the night fell in. Therefore, the production of cubes turned out to be the slightest problem.

Every member of the team was busy when the plan came into phase II. Again had Arundle to talk over the dangerous mission with her magic bow. Purposely-wrong coordinates were incorporated in order to make Arundle land at the wrong site. Again, she did that suicidal run towards hell's gate that is the moon man's mouth. She prepared for the jump, her bow holding tight in both hands.

It was a matter of seconds now. While in flight they had to produce the negative power grid between the bow and the magical stone, who followed unattended a tenth of a second behind with Walter.

While still in the hop, the bow covered Arundle with a protective shield against the acid in the belly of the moon man – because she had to rest some time in the stomach and the bowels. Long enough to have the evil spirit of Malicus Marduk exorted, only to have him captured again in the stake-net-like grid. Therefore, Walter with the magical stone kept waiting outside the moon man's mouth, all attentive. The bow and Arundle would follow the extirpated daemon on the foot, and wouldn't give way until the energetic stake net was closed behind him.

To cut it short - things then happened as planned. Thus, Malicious Marduk was captured, and was taken to that igloo at the space station, that was built meanwhile. The captured daemon in the electronic stake net raged like mad, but in vain. A band of howling Miseriors accompanied the payload but in safe distance, incapable and helpless without their master. The combined powers of the magical stone and the magic bow were too much.

Meanwhile the ice cube producer produced ice cubes by freezing the holy waters, the old Shaman managed to lead over here from the dreamland, where there would break out a draught. Billy-Joe was murmuring secret words, while the sacred water was sprouting into the apparatus, as well as into the cube models outside in the cold of the night, where it took only seconds to form an ice block of considerable size.

A ferry took the cargo right away to a separated plateau, that didn't have any other access. Right there, bricklayer artifacts were building the igloo, guarded and led by the two astrophysicians.

Solid frozen water was the only medium Malicus Marduk couldn't get through – all the more if it was of holy origin. The idea was, to imprison the chief daemon in this icy prison, until the Emperor decided how to proceed.

The igloo was almost ready. For the last crucial part, the torch was used excessively, that was necessary to have the blocks glued together. The cubes got shortly heated from all sides; to have them glued together all the better. The ceiling was thus closed and the inner supporting posts were removed. While from the outside a shower of icy water closed the tiniest openings. Peter Adams was checking the walls carefully. Then the igloo was ready to host the perilous guest. The hatch stood open and would be shut and sealed immediately.

And there the flash like cage appeared, as if coming out of nowhere. The flashing blue of the negative bipolar energy grid, that was formed a stake net, mingled with the blueish appeal of the igloo, while the contents of the stake net was pushed through the hatch to the

inside, and while the grid still protected the open hatch, a thick solid ice block was pressed into the opening. A last spraying with an icy shower, and the work was done.

Malicious Marduk was in prison. You could see him jump about and hear him yell and holler through the walls. Here and then, his face was seen, as he pressed it against the ice, and what Arundle then believed to be seeing, made her blood freeze in her vessels.

38. Who is Malicious Marduk?

Like in clockwork, the wheels worked together. There had been no failures, and things worked out as planned. Scholasticus was proud on him and his assistants. None of the elements failed. Everybody did his or her job.

The news of the Emperor's enemy's capture was spreading in no time on the virtual space centre. Soon the entourage came looking on. The little shuttle went continuously to and fro, while the igloo stood apart on a separate spot.

The guards allowed only a few moments in front of the ice walls of the igloo. They had to keep a safety distance of two feet, because the hot breathing might get the ice to be melting. Repeatedly Peter Adams checked on the thickness of the walls, and had the crucial spots been sprayed right away with holy waters. They didn't lack of the cold, though, out here in space. Nevertheless, the visitors required an acceptable temperature and the prisoner as well.

Arundle needed some time to recover from the sight of the prisoner. She still didn't understand, what was going on. Scholasticus had spoken of a plan, and she had participated unquestioning, but where did the idea with the igloo come from?

"Hints there were lots" Scholasticus declared humbly. "I'm sure you remember your visit at the safe rooms below the palace and the lost souls in those bags? I had the opportunity to have a closer look at such a bag – Billy-Joe was so kind helping me, and so was the bow of yours. And what did I find out? The bags were filled with water – to be precise there was a thin layer of water between two plastic skins. So I concluded, that the water was responsible for keeping the Miseriors off the souls. What else had they been useful for? From here, it was a short way to the plan of capturing Malicious Marduk under water, - and what was more suitable than an igloo?"

If it's impossible for the daemons to get into such a bag, it might as well work the other way round, provided, the same conditions were fulfilled, and here came Billy-Joe into the game. He had to prepare the water in a special way. The idea to that prison I lent from the chaos theory. As the degree of order increases reciprocal to the reduction of temperature. Order is the sheerest opposite of what Malicious Marduk spreads about, order was the ideal trap in combination with frozen sacred waters, into which you, Arundle, had to entice Marduk. His interest in your person might not be hidden to you – you surely know by now why...”

Arundle nodded thoughtfully. She didn't expect the chasing of the Emperor's enemy to be that easy. “You mean he didn't hide at all, but was waiting for me to become trapped. However, why wasn't it possible to catch him earlier? As I understood the Advisor, our main task had been to find Malicious Marduk first of all.”

Billy-Joe agreed – “we were told, the ring of black marketeers got to be destroyed, and that could only work after the head was cut off. That seemed to be clear to us, though...”

(Billy-Joe couldn't get that beheading business out of his mind.)

Scholasticus didn't have a concise answer – “It would perhaps be best to inquire for another audience” he therefore suggested. “Peter and I are almost ready, and the guards should manage by now on their own. We have to leave it up to them over here, how to proceed. Things have to be cleared with all that black market business, that Billy-Joe mentioned rightly. Those Miseriors have to be handle somehow, despite all these lost souls, who will have to find their rest and peace. -Yes, there's still a lot to do, and our assistance might be needed.”

“We should bring our suggestions forward with the upcoming audience,” Scholasticus added after a short break.

“If it's been granted, which I doubt” Billy-Joe said dryly. “As we learnt, His Majesty has departed.”

“Who said that?” Arundle asked. But Billy-Joe shrugged – “you're gonna see, there won't be any audience.”

Arundle still was widely confused. The distorted face under the ice couldn't be banned from her mind. She didn't know whom she'd been able to talk about. That was her thing alone; she had to get along all by herself. What did her father, and her problems with him, bother the others?

Had she been sure about her impression? One hundred years was a long time... - but still...

Was it the fact, that she suspected him for a long time? He had been hidden very well, no doubt about that. Still – her suspicion had increased. She was seeking her father in the prisoner, and only Billy-Joe would believe her, while she didn't dare to trust her feelings. Scholasticus had referred her to Grisella and Grisella had told her of the images the unconscious fooled us with. Hadn't she searched for her father in the face of the Emperor already? She needed certainty!

The audience was granted, despite Billy-Joe's pessimism, but without His Majesty himself, and did lead to nowhere. Instead of His Highness, who granted them all his excuses and apologies, the Advisor listened to all their 'very helpful' suggestions, and promised to prove them thoroughly and keep them in consideration.

"As soon as the order will be established and the criminal elements got eliminated, time will get reevaluated step by step. You will see. – We will see you as precious councillors in future and as our dearest guests, won't we?" the Advisor ended the session.

"The fate of the culprit will be decided upon elsewhere" he meant casually and overdid, Billy-Joe thought.

"You see, death is no substantial category in the range we are dealing with right now. There are different modes of suffering, though, and penitence – if I may say so. Each force has its counter force. The laws of the universe are sound and set" the Advisor added somewhat mysteriously, and was in due course to retire.

"Something's better than nothing, but isn't good enough, though, and can always be improved. Malicius Marduk's devoted to the naught, I'm afraid. He is the agent of the roll back, the servant of annihilation, so to speak. That's our problem."

Scholasticus nodded enthusiastically, he felt well understood and confirmed in his research.

Arundle hadn't been at the audience. She had other things in mind. Had she been there, she might have altered her doing. Perhaps she had noticed, how dangerous it was to personalize the relationships in the universe, because you always found aspects of existence that were mirrored in your own breast. Was she – like her father – attracted by the longing for grandeur?

Or was that not true? - Her father wished to live on forever. The idea alone filled his eyes with a mad shine. While she couldn't stand mediocrity - that was her weakness.

Arundle put such scruples aside. First, she needed certainty. Who was that creature in the igloo? She had to know and the magic bow accepted her will. If only he had protested aloud!

While looking for certainty, Arundle stepped over a dangerous border and not only brought herself, but the whole universe into great danger. With seeing eyes, she rushed into a disaster. She couldn't do otherwise, she had to! The face behind the icy wall didn't let her go.

Arundle mingled amongst the visitors, heading for the prisoner. Together with them, she pressed into the ferry and was sluiced about the igloo a couple of times. However, the prisoner remained a dark shadow, sitting in the middle of his prison and didn't care about the on-lookers.

She had to think about something special to attract his attention. The group she was part of, was already guided back to the ferry. The hatch opened. Now Pooty's magic hood had helped, but it wasn't here unfortunately.

The bow once said – came to her mind - it would be easy for him to make her invisible. “Hey, bow, what about it?” she thought - “can you make me invisible?” The bow uttered an unpleasant purring. He didn't like such challenge, but then gave in. “I won't help you any further, I hope, you know, how dangerous it is, what you are intending.”

Now it was Arundle who grumbled, “Don't you worry, I'm taking care,” she kept thinking lamely. All she was longing for was a piece of certainty, and for that she'd take any risk. What did they really know about Malicious Marduk after all? Only what others had told them. Who had spoken with him? – Well, she forgot about the trouble in Grisella's institute and the black marketeers, and all that.

‘I've got to find out about my father’ she stubbornly insisted. Billy-Joe was even buried with his alter ego, and I shouldn't be allowed at least to talk to such an acquainted imago?’

The bow somewhat reluctantly agreed. Arundle's longing conveyed a grain of truth, although she ignored the danger. The prisoner was still a mighty opponent, perhaps the mightiest in the universe.

Would the magic bow protect her? He wouldn't let her down, Arundle was sure about that...

First, she had to manage with the crowd until late in the evening, still coming wave after wave from the ferry. Arundle was invisible now, but she took the same volume as ever, and had to take care getting out of the way on the narrow platform, thus it frequently

happened that people collided with the invisible obstacle and looked bewildered at their neighbours, whether they gave him a leg.

At last, the artificial night lowered over the satellite, right in the shade of her big sister – the space station – that was swallowed by the moon's mighty shadow again.

Without the sunlight, temperature dropped immediately, and Arundle got cold. What did that mean for the prisoner? She wondered.

The last ferry just left. She had no time to spare. First, she had to make herself known to the prisoner. While still hidden under the magic cloak, the bow had supplied, she knocked at the icy cuirass, which was embracing a being of flesh and blood.

She had pity on the poor prisoner, while being terribly cold outside. Inside it surely was worse.

The guards had retired into their cabin near-by, but still kept an eye on the igloo, as their order demanded. – They were told 'neither let the prisoner nor the igloo out of sight – under no circumstances'.

Up here, nobody was experienced in safeguarding magicians or daemons. What would the guards do, when the creatures of the night came? They had no experience what so ever, while it was almost certain that the Miseriors would try something at night.

Arundle knelt right at the igloo. She knocked at the wall and listened, then knocked again, but nothing happened. She might as well drill a tiny little hole for the thin microphone, she had in the magic bow's invisible quiver.

The bow warned her to do that, but how could a grown up person slip through a tiny hole? She had to contact the prisoner in any case, that was the least she could do for him, who might be her father – while that question had not yet been answered.

"Well, if that is your father – what then?" the bow snarled, he seemed to know the answer. Arundle didn't dare to think what would be then. She just couldn't imagine, and didn't want to. In fact, she wanted to ascertain herself that Malicius Marduk was not her father, but at worst one of his blokes from the club. He might even be Mr Schwertfeger, whom she'd liked best for that.

The Emperor, whom she had suspected before, was most likely not her father. That was the reason why she had changed her mind and was favouring his enemy now.

The cold was creeping through the magic cloak she still was covered with. In a few moments she'd be frozen to ice. She had to hurry.

At last, the drill got through. Arundle put the thin microphone through the hole and began to whisper her father's name, and who she was, and things the like, but there was no answer.

At last, some kind of awful growling was heard. The frozen brain seemed to take some time to get started again.

The humming and grumbling went on for a little while, before first words were heard. The prisoner spoke at last. His voice sounded surprisingly well tempered.

"Yes, I'm your dear daddy" Arundle heard him purr. Her heartbeat almost stopped. Then she reassured herself. What did she expect?

The prisoner would of course catch any straw he saw to get out of the prison.

How could she prove whether he really was her father, and how could she stop him from mentally crawl into her thoughts? She could feel already such attempts from inside the igloo. The magic bow gave her another warning.

Sweet longing for lost harmony kept trickling into Arundle's heart, and made her feel small again. Buried love broke off and tears got into her eyes, while the pity with her poor old daddy was melting a remarkable hole into the icy cuirass.

Again, the magic bow tried to get her out of the endangered zone. However, her unfulfilled yearning was stronger, once awoken. The hole in the wall of the igloo got bigger, - bigger, almost fist-like it was, and during the day, Arundle would have noticed her error already.

Malicious Marduk and her father didn't comply, although there was a certain likeness. The diabolic sight he presented, detected him as a swindler.

"Come on in, dear daughter" the voice said invitingly. Arundle obeyed, while the magic bow resisted. So she just slipped out of the string, before she disappeared inside.

However, the magic bow wouldn't leave her alone in her worst hour. He followed unnoticed, when Malicious Marduk's attention was with the girl.

The race was won. The silly humans meant to have captured him against his will. Even the Emperor hadn't known better. All these fancy lords and ladies of the entourage had come to see him.

How could one do with such a band of toadies? -Angels? - Fools would do better. Well, his own followers weren't any better either.

He knew, why he dissolved from the Emperor. Although they had to share power now. As long as he was allowed to act freely, he wouldn't mind. Well, the limits were all too obvious by now, and that was not the end.

If he managed to get this clever girl over on his side, he'd have gained grounds again. Of course it wouldn't be wise to slaughter the cow you wanted to milk, but a little blood for the time being, would do no harm. If he didn't manage to get Arundle on his side, he could let her disappear – she and her eager friends, who once set him free.

The space was immeasurable. Whole galaxies disappeared. Didn't he have those spies from the past led astray once? Well, they somehow managed to return into their time.

There was still that damn time-string everything was moving alongside and wasn't bendable. Such mysterious connections even he didn't understand. There was a lot of ruinous stuff on the trail of fate left or right.

Now he'd have to trickle some poison into an innocent soul, and find the lever to make her stagger. He had discovered some clues – hypocrisy was the one, while the other was double binding, though.

Arundle heard him laugh a cynical laughter. She felt as little Red Riding Hood may have felt when the weird old wolf swallowed her at last. She'd been betrayed and cheated, and knew it as soon as she entered the igloo.

A grave-like dark hold in the ground was waiting for her, wherein a wide gorge yawned. She felt drawn by an irresistible force, and was sliding downwards, as fast as the gravity demanded. Strong arms were holding her. She felt seated on a cushion and was gliding softly now.

Now she could see where she was. This must be space. But how different did it look, everything was upside down.

Instead of light stars, you could see stars with dark blue tails of comets through milky greyness of the naught, forming strange figures here and then.

She didn't feel better, since she had left the ice channel, and the pressing arms had diminished. Still her heart was beating full of empathy.

She knew where she was: This was the land of the lost souls, and Malicus Marduk was master here. She was in the centre of his empire, where all his power focussed, while his weakness was revealed as well.

Malicious Marduk had been able to get Arundle at his side, but what was the price? He wasn't any better off than all the other

creatures of the Zone of Uncertainty, who stuck to an earthly life, until their debts were settled, and someone came to have them redeemed.

The brave girl with the caring bow over her shoulder had come to him. Had he been sure about his matter, he now felt how far he went astray. Not he conquered that brave heart, not he opened the door to hypocrisy.

The opposite had happened. Arundle's goodness didn't only burn a hole into the ice, but also burnt into Malicus Marduk's mind.

She overcame her fear. Her pity tore the walls down between the world of the living and the world of the dead. She had carried him home at last.

Malicious Marduk felt free and redeemed. He left the chaos behind that would be altered now, because his destructive hands had loosened their grip.

The band of Miseriors, who were slow thinkers, didn't understand, what was going on and probably would never do, if not God in His never-ending goodness altered His judgement over them.

They kept on following their master, because they didn't know, where else to go. Malicus Marduk was their only stronghold; they got shelter from, and had granted them their kind of existence.

Meagre times lay ahead; they'd have to understand soon enough. Malicious Marduk was not the same anymore. A new spirit conquered the world of the living, a spirit, Arundle brought forward and came about with her. There was no place for them, where such spirit prevailed.

Without malice, things would turn upside down. Here and then a lost soul was not at all promising, a meagre fare would that be. What a difference, compared to the times of the richly laid table while the black marketeers served the ruling class. They were all on the go.

Those holes were stuffed, and no sluices left open. The spheres were separated, and if there were exemptions, it would mean little for a hungry band of Miseriors. The eternal damnation, they were charged with, had them back.

39. Entanglement

The howling of the desperate Miseriors kept yelling in her ears. She covered her head with the pillow in vain. The sound was inside.

She couldn't shake it off. Arundle was back in her bed. Had she come back?

Had all that been only a nightmare? She still had Malicious Marduk's fatherly voice in her ear. Everything had been so real.

She got up and stepped over to Florinna. She lay in her bed in a peaceful slumber, like Corinia and the other girls in the dormitory.

What had happened? Had she been dreaming all that? The excursion to the imperial entourage on that virtual space station, the capturing of Malicious Marduk, and her stupid visit inside of his icy prison...

Had she dreamed all that? She had best liked to wake up the sisters. - That wouldn't help, because they hadn't been with her. She had to wait until the morning to see for Billy-Joe – so much care had to be. The school regulations demanded that, and she didn't want to break rules right from the start.

On the other hand – what did small-checked regulations mean, where the fate of the whole universe was concerned? What would it mean after all, if she was responsible for the escaping of Malicious Marduk?

His capturing had been so real. Something inside her resisted, calling that just a dream.

She could of course go to see Scholasticus right away. That would be the easier way – but would she be allowed to see him in the middle of the night? She had to have a sound reason for that. The truth would sound wholly illogical and unbelievable to the ears of a simple caretaker.

She couldn't help it; she had to get to Billy-Joe. No matter what the regulations said. At least she wanted to see, whether he was back as well.

She had been sneaking on her own to Malicious Marduk – but was she also repelled on her own? When did she see Billy-Joe last? Where were Scholasticus, Walter, Pooty, and Peter Adams?

She could have asked her magic bow, whether he knew anything, but that didn't come to her mind, instead she put her clothes on and sneaked out of the dormitory.

Billy-Joe still preferred to sleep in the open. Arundle had to get up to his favourite terrace that lay in the teacher's section already. Therefore, her excursion was somewhat dangerous. She risked to be dismissed from school. She asked her magic bow, if it would perhaps be better to make her invisible, while she was sneaking through the forbidden corridors and staircases. Elevators had been unwise to be taken, though.

The bow did so, to please her. Invisibility meant to see less, so she didn't see anything at all in the dark now, while before the red eye of the bow helped at least to keep her course. Therefore, she asked him to have her return into visibility; while she got deeper and deeper into a kind of maze, and didn't know where she was. She had definitely left the students' section by now, and whatever her excuses might be, her presence was hardly explainable.

At the doors, she read the teachers' names on both sides, while it was lighter now, and she could switch back to invisibility. She hoped almost desperately to find Billy-Joe's terrace at the end, where he was dwelling with special permission.

However, when she came to the corridor's end, she had the choice between two turnings. Both sides ended in the dark. The bow wasn't prepared to assist. Either he didn't know himself, or he still was upset, because he thought the idea of visiting Billy-Joe in the middle of the night, somewhat crazy. She could have easily waited until the next morning.

Had Arundle's character changed under the influence of Malicious Marduk? Somehow, she wasn't the same anymore. There had been a lot of nonverbal secret communication between the two, right since their first encounter. No one else knew of the secret contact. Only Arundle had been contacted while the angelical guardians safeguarded the others already.

Arundle didn't dream the manoeuvre of how she was picked up. In fact, more and other things happened while she was rescued. Her thoughts had been searched and overlooked. Malicious Marduk thus gained access to her state of being.

When he noticed, that Arundle didn't have come far to understanding the true nature of the time-loss, he dismissed her right away, after having her branded with an invisible, virtual mark of Cain for her hypocrisy, she'd have to carry on as a burden.

More important for him and for the world was, that the encounter didn't remain without consequences. While he still meant to have control over the brave girl, it was the other way round. All his sorcery didn't help; not even the 'forget-what-you-experienced-spell' he managed to put on Walter and his payload.

Malicious Marduk wasn't the same any more. The girl's pity had softened his besotted heart. The brave peace fighter stepped loose an avalanche of mercy that had been dwindling above since the beginning of time.

By that he got over rolled and turned inside out and upside down, he hardly knew himself anymore. While he slipped into thousands of roles and was hiding behind uncountable masks.

Some people had been easy victims, others were a real challenge, and in Arundle, he found his master – that is – his mistress at last.

Arundle turned to the left. One way was as good as the other, she thought, and the magic bow behind her head let her know, that she was right. She rushed on, as fast as she could now. The red eye of the bow was again her only source of light.

She felt uncertain after messing about for such a long time. Besides, she felt miserable and regretted her spontaneous notion to go and see Billy-Joe by night. While the memory of the nightmare didn't let her go, but came back in waves with invertible impact.

She'd have given everything, if she were lying in bed again. Last week had just been too much. She felt exhausted even more; she had fought a dubious battle, and still didn't know the outcome.

She was lucky with the direction, though. The corridor mounted into a moonlit terrace. Fresh air from the sea welcomed her. She breathed deeply and relaxed. The worries and fears she had felt while coming here, were all gone by now.

She found Billy-Joe under his favourite tree. He was sleeping right next to Walter, who slept with open eyes, and was all-awake as soon as Arundle approached. Pooty stretched his little head out of Walter's belly bag and twinkled sleepily.

When he saw Arundle, he slipped back into his warm bed inside the belly bag. Billy-Joe opened his eyes, without the slightest move. Still Arundle noticed it, when he whispered, "What's it like?"

He asked just like that, not at all meaningful. "Well, so, so" she murmured. "Couldn't sleep though – kind of nightmare, you know. Got to know something from you."

Billy-Joe nodded invitingly and raised an eyebrow. "Were we together on a space lab, some hours ago?" she whispered "and did we capture Malicious Marduk?"

"What?" Billy-Joe asked back and rose halfway – "where were we? Who did we capture?"

"Well, yes on that space station of the Emperor. We built an igloo and you provided holy water with that old Shaman of the Churingas, you know, while Walter and I installed that negative grid and entered the belly of the moon man, where Malicus Marduk was hiding right there..."

Billy-Joe shook his head then said – “Your bow and the magical stone didn’t agree on the route, so we gave in. We’ll eventually try tomorrow. You are right though; the moon of Laptopia is our aim. But it looks, as if we won’t go at all.”

“I’m sure, I was there. You were all there, you, Scholasticus, Peter Adams, his assistant, and Walter, and Pooty. You were travelling with the magical stone, and I with the magic bow of mine. It’s the plain truth, I assure you.”

“ – Looks, as if you went on your own; or you only dreamed” he said, while Arundle shook her head with anger: “You were there, as sure as I’m here now, dear bow, do you understand, though?” However, the magic bow was either not willing to comment on that, or he wasn’t so sure.

“Before we go, you’ve got to tell us, what you experienced, no matter whether it was a dream. - ...Sounds interesting enough, I’d say”, Billy-Joe answered.

Arundle would have liked to get the whole band together, all those in the know. The others most likely had the same blackouts as Billy-Joe, Walter and Pooty, who looked at her somewhat bewildered. Nevertheless, even she accepted, that this was impossible, all the more up here, where she wasn’t allowed to be.

Therefore, she explained everything in detail, and while she talked, she got rid of the tension, step by step.

Things were said soon. Then there they lay, under the dark blue sky and myriads of stars above, while the moon was descending, and far in the east, another day was dawning.

She’d better disappear right away. Reluctantly she dissolved from the sight and was diving back into the labyrinth of corridors, to find her way back to the dormitory under the sea.

Had she hoped to become enlightened the other morning, she failed. Although Scholasticus listened sorely to her adventurous tale. None of those in the know recalled anything.

“The search for Malicius Marduk appears to be somewhat difficult” he summed up her report. “Malicius Marduk is master of illusion, so it seems.” He sighted meaningfully over to Arundle. The others nodded. Arundle felt almost ashamed. Was she crazy? – She asked herself.

“Anyone’s got an idea, what should be done?” Scholasticus went on and looked from Walter and Pooty to his assistant Peter Adams, who was sitting next to Billy-Joe, Arundle, himself and Grisella, who

wanted to be part of the circle even though she refrained from travelling to Laptopia again.

“Whatever Arundle’s vision was, we have to take it as a warning” Grisella said while patting Arundles arm. Scholasticus and Peter Adams agreed wholeheartedly.

“That wasn’t only a vision” Arundle insisted, “I was really there, and so were you...”

“But you said, you felt strange, when you got transferred to the Emperor’s space station” Billy-Joe answered.

“Please, try to remember” Scholasticus insisted “what was it like with that tractoring beam?”

“And where was that space station anyway?” Pooty wanted to know.

“Must have been close, though...”

“You didn’t have trouble in getting into the moon-man’s belly with your grid, you and Walter – well, but Walter doesn’t remember...”

“Let’s ask the magical stone then” Walter recommended –

“...whether he can imagine such a gird and have it built with the magic bow, though...” Walter suggested and got the stone out of his belly bag.

He forgot the quarrel between the stone and the bow; or did he hope the two would give in, while the world was in desperate need of their cooperation.

Nevertheless, their contradictions weighed still heavy. In vain, Scholasticus pointed out the endangered existence of the whole universe.

“The ever-faster turning systems threaten to collapse, eventually. It’s all too obvious that the rotation of the earth isn’t responsible for the loss in time, but all other systems are involved too. The planetal orbits around the sun must have increased as well and in the meantime fourfold. Otherwise, the days won’t fit with the months. The consequences for the biological ecosystems are of course disastrous. No species are able to endure at length. How could that be, after all? Imagine a whole year packed into three months. There isn’t much left for the seasons. How shall things grow properly then?”

Even such reference couldn’t alter the attitude of the squabblers.

“In principle such a negative grid is no problem at all” the magical stone said to Walter. Arundle got the same answer from her bow. Of course, she had known before, because she had seen that grid at work.

Whether you were able to catch such a clever culprit by that means, seemed to be very doubtful though, they agreed.

This was of course bullshit, and the bow should know, or had he also forgotten the last night?

What could be done? Under no circumstances should Arundle go. Definitely not alone with her magic bow. Arundle was afraid, though, and didn't contradict. The diabolical image was slumbering somewhere inside.

She knew, she had stepped over a border, she'd better have accepted untouched, and now found herself amidst the unbearable.

This was not the right way, neither for her, nor for her father. In fact, she didn't want to be bothered any more.

She had been so happy, leaving such problems behind, while entering into the world of the School of Inbetween.

Was that all illusion? A fancy dream and wishful thinking?

The meeting ended. Billy-Joe wanted to take Arundle's part, although he was scared too. Therefore, Grisella suggested to having a word first with the new Prince Regent and his true General. Because it wasn't at all unimportant, how they handled the Laptopian problems. They might even get hints where to find Malicius Marduk.

Scholasticus offered his help. He, Walter, and Pooty could do the job. The others agreed wholeheartedly, and thus it was done.

The cause of the quarrel between stone and bow remained untouched, though. What ever this meant.

Before he left, Scholasticus gave his assistant last instructions. The preparations for the new semester were in due train. Everything had to be ready in two weeks time. Scholasticus didn't figure to stay late, but - 'you never know', he said to himself. Sometimes you get involved, and couldn't leave as you wished.

In fact, the journey was short. Scholasticus, Walter and Pooty were back by noon. And before those in the know went apart for their afternoon occupations, he reported of what was going on in Laptopia.

The riots were all over now, he learned from the General, and the black marketeers were stopped. Whole Laptopia got relieved.

"The established programmes work more or less perfect, with regard to education and fresh water supply, and the food production. And the young ones see a perspective, now that there is nobody trying to cheat them anymore.

- The universities revive, slowly but continuously. Humans do many tasks that had been delegated to the artifacts before.

- Of course, nature is still suffering. Nevertheless, there are attempts to improve here as well.

The transfer of the Laptop-plants ended. The whole banking system is under governmental control, no black marketing is possible any more...”

“At last, at last, I was going to doubt my own mind” Arundle uttered triumphantly. “And while I interrupted you, I should ask you who those black marketeers are?”

“Just a minute, I’ll come to an end soon, and I’d be delighted to answering all your important questions, most of all yours of course, Arundle. While I’m not sure, whether I will be able to answer them satisfactorily, though. A lot will remain in the shade, or even in the dark, I’m afraid. – But let me go on, in order to give you a rough idea of what is really going on.

On the time scale, such figured Laptopian astronomers, mighty disruptions are coming up. The return to the standard is definitely on the way, so it is said. In intervals, the time is going to be redefined. Such is posted everywhere in the country and is no longer kept secret. The Prince wants to settle everything a five years’ plan, by means of the imperial forces and our valuable advice from the past, so he said, and gave his regards to you.”

“I still would like to know who those black marketeers are.” Arundle insisted. “They can’t all disappear, just like that. Someone has to be in charge. Such structures are complex and need a lot of know how...”

“Many black marketeers got arrested, of course not all. You are very right, it is absolutely difficult to prove the criminal acts”, Scholasticus answered. “But since Malicius Marduk was banned, - thanks to you - and returned back to where he belongs, things are on the move. Most hiding places and warehouses or safe-lockers, with those awful body-parts and soul-bags were dissolved, and either returned or delivered to governmental authorities.

By the way, such black marketeers worked quite similar to the drugcartells of our times. Even the pressure on the street pedlers is the same. The pedlers are desperate youngsters, whose account is almost empty. They have the alternative to become cashed themselves or to raise funds by seducing their mates and companions.”

“And the bosses? Were they the bankers?” Grisella wanted to know.

“Well, yes and no. I’d say the cores of the culprits are infested subjects, governed by Miseriors. Their souls are as dark as they could

be, while they live their miserable lives on forever. - Seems as if they sneak into a human being and take over the reign, and guide them from inside. Otherwise it is hard to understand, why the black market was booming the way it did. You probably know – Miseriors eat lost souls, and need them for their own forthcoming; - and, souls only get lost, when the life span was sold out, as it happened on the black market. There the marketeers were wading ankle-deep in their elixir of life, so to speak.”

Arundle shuddered with dismay. What an abyss did there open! Thoughtful silence lowered over the assembly. Almost everything was said and explained, while the terror had come to a halt.

Yes, it was empathy and pity that banned Malicius Marduk, the ‘spiritus rector’ of the horror scene...

“Have a look, what I’ve got here” Scholasticus broke the silence and got a handful of coins out of his pocket. 1 A it said on the top and around you could read in small print ‘Bank of Laptopia’, and a large number.

“You’ve got to turn it round” Scholasticus said with a smile, when he didn’t notice any reaction from her side. Arundle did, as she was asked, and looked into a somewhat stern face of a young woman, she felt acquainted with.

There was also an inscription in a circle: ‘Star-maid of the Advisor’ it said. However, there was something else. She couldn’t read the letters, because they were upside down. Pooty jumped on her lap and yelled: “‘Arundle Star-maid of the Advisor’ it says.

Now what? – You are stunned, aren’t you? Now you are famous. Imagine, you are a real currency...”

And so it was. In Laptopia people dealt with ‘Arundles’. The economy returned to a moderate form of the money-system.

“You have achieved more, than you were able to foresee. And your dream hadn’t been a dream, nor a vision either, but sound reality” Scholasticus said.

“General Armyless spoke with the deepest respect of you” he said looking around, triumphantly, then turned to Arundle and added: “In the whole land you are revered as a saint.”

Arundle grinned somewhat ill at ease: “That’s typical for the General” she murmured - “He’s always got to overdo.”

U.G.Dohen:
ARUNDLE & KIN
2.THE TREE OF LIFE

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**

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

**

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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 Conversiors. What Conversiors 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.

“Somnions 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.

1. 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 repetitioners 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 sensastional 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 Humperdijk 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 Somnions 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 Sublimationsⁱ

“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 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 Animationsⁱⁱ.

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 repellant.

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.

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 Humperdijk 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 foreword 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 beshone 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 Divinations

“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 Somniors 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 Animations call it the Soul, as the soul travels on. Animations 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 Animations. In their faces, you could see doubts. They were all still deeply impressed by ‘the Dancing with the Wind’ of the Sublimations, 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 Animations.

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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 Animation, 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 Conversionists 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 Convertors, 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 Somnors 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 Convertors 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 Convertors 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 Humperdijk 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 Convertors 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 spoilt 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 extent, 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 Somniors 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 Divinator 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 Humperdijk 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 than 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 Conversiors 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 coming - he experienced for days now, but had increased since he had set foot on the 'Isle of the Conversiors'. 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 Conversiors 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, than 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 Conversior 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 conversional 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 Conversior 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 Convertors – 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 Convertiors, 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 conversional 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 Converters 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-Joe's 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 Conversiors 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 Conversiors 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 Convertors 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 Convertors 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 Conversiors 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 Conversiors 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 breakthrough 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 Convertors 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 conversation. 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 Conversors. 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 Conversors?

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 Conversions 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 gloriole and privilege. Heavenly revelation did not allow such discernments into the mode of being - she would have to procure then... - 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 Convertors 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 Conversors, 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 nautilus.

"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 Conversors 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 Malicius 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 were 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 Conversiors’ 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 Conversors. 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’ⁱⁱⁱ, 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.”

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 Malicius 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 Malicius 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 Malicious 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 Malicious 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; Malicious 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. Malicious 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 Somnions’ 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 Corinia 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 Malicious 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 Sublimations present shook their heads with annoyance, because of such faux pas^{iv} 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...

"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 Animators 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 extend.

Arundle was meanwhile fumbling about that clasp of hers. "I'm afraid the prosecutor's triumph was too soon. Some people think we Somnions 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 than 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 Malicius 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 Convertors.

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 where 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 Malicious 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. Malicious Marduk is a kind of chameleon. – Still, the

case is different, as the young man, I recognized, called himself indeed Malicious 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 Malicious 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, thing 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 Malicious 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' 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.

"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 soothingly 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 Conversors. His wife, the Headmistress, stood for the Somnors 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 Somnors, since he discovered how advantageous such travelling mode was.

The Animations - the strongest group next to the Somnors - 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 duel 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 Animators 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 Animators, Adrian Humperdijk, for the Convertors, and Moschus Mogoleya for the Sublimators.

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 reinstalled. 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 Sublimations 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 thread^{vi} 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.

"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.^{vii}

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 Conversiors - Penelope M’gamba and Adrian Humperdijk - started gathering their flock – full moon lay two days ahead.

The Conversiors 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 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 Conversiors.

"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 Somniors, 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 Somniors, 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 Convertors' 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 Conversors 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 Conversiors 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 Convertors 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 erectus^{viii}!

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 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 Sublimations 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 Sublimations 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'^{ix} – as she realized at last.

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 stroke 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 Converter'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 nix 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, where 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 Conversiors’ boat once more. Therefore, Boetie and some of her friends accompanied them back to the Conversiors’ 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 Conversiors' 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-Conversiors 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 Conversiors 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 Somnions 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 Sublimations, 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 Sublimations, 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*^x 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.

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 coxcombed 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 mammals in general, competing with the pre-mammals. 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 mammals 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 Somnors, 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 Somnors 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 Sublimators and the Convertors, - 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 Convertors and the Sublimators likewise.”

Their focus would not necessarily be the same. It was a fact already that Somnors and Animators did not procure likewise. While the Somnors favoured languages, the Animators 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 Animators 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 Animations, 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 Sublimations...” 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 Somnors and Animations. Even the exorcism remained not hidden, nor of course, the great fire connected with it. Therefore, they felt the Conversiors 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 Conversiors' 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 Malicious 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 Intelletus, 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 Conversors 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! Intelletus 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 Divinators 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*^{vi} - 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 Sublimations, 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.

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 mater^{xii} 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 Tibors 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 Arundles 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.

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 Malicius 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 Malicius 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 viciosus*^{xiii} 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 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 Conversiors' 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 conversional 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 Conversiors 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 pense^{xiv}”, 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 Relativity^{xv}.

Their Tree of Life looked in the meantime like a Menora^{xvi}, 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, 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. Thing 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 Faber^{xvii} 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 Laptopsians came to her mind, who were overdoing such a historical tendency to a horrid extend, 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 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 Laptopsia, 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 safe 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 then 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, were 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 Gravimetre, 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 yaws 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 mal-nutrition.

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 near-by 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’^{xviii} 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 where 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 Malicius Marduk picked up the thread and is waving his network of terror down here.”

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. Malicius 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 Malicius 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 Somnions or Animations, 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 Sublimations 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 Sublimations 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 Sublimations 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 Sublimations, 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 glow 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 then 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 telepathic 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 came^{xix}” 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 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'^{xx}. 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.

"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 Conversors' 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 Conversior'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.

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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 Conversiors’ 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 Somnions 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 fraternizing 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 flew

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'état^{xxi}? 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 nascendi^{xxii}, 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

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 than 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 Convertors' 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 dismounted 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 Conversiors Island in the hands of the regular guards, who had to prepare the island anyway for the visit of the Conversiors, 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 Malicius 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 Malicius 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. Malicius 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

Conversors. 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 Malicius 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’^{xxiii}, 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’^{xxiv} 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 Somnions in due process of waking up.

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", pulsed 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 Pares^{xxxv} - “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.

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 nomenclature^{xxvi}, 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 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 Malicious 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 Malicious 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 are 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

Conversions 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 Malicius 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 Conversiors – 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 Conversiors and other secret beings of the dark.

Not all Conversiors 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.

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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 Conversiors' island again. The invasion was in full swing, and Conversior'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 Conversiors' 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 main^{xxvii}. 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 Conversiors' 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 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 Conversiors 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 Convertors 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 Conversiors dressed hastily.

Simultaneously the bandits re-converted as well, but with a very different result.

“Its 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 Humperdijk, 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 Conversiors 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 Conversiors, 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 Conversiors 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-rising 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 fist 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 Convertors 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, save 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?"^{xxviii} Pooty muffled dully from deep down of Walter's belly-bag, and made them grin, no matter of the graveness of their situation.

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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 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 Animations and Somnions 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.

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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 seen 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 Animations.

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?

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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 Animations, 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 Animations 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 Animations.

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 Animations and Somnions – 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 Somnions’ 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 than 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 Convertors 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 Malicius 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, Malicius 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. Malicius 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?

Malicius 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 Malicius 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 she 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.

Malicious 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^{xxx} (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^{xxx} 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 Humperdijk 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.

Volume 3: The Ground of Time

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We slip into naught on the tidal of time –
 Endless naught – all alone in itself.
 The beginning of time bore such endless naught –
 Unimaginable naught all alone.

Endless naught, unimaginable naught
 Was in the beginning of time all alone.
 Endless naught, unimaginable naught
 Was in the beginning of time.

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1. Holidays

What fun it is to live, Arundle thought while hefty gusts tousled her long dark-blond hair and fetched at her coat as if the fierce air wanted to tear it off. The grip of the icy wind made her feel somewhat light in a peculiar way. She felt as if she only had to stretch her arms out and fly, leaving behind all weight of the Earth. Up and away into the world, still full of secrets: Terra incognita – the unknown land - was still there. However, not behind the far ocean as it used to be in former times. Today, greater wonders tempted, and treasures of another kind in the depth of being and the width of the universe.

From her high site, the fifteen-year-old girl overlooked the wild cliffs of the South side of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. From far you could see the huge waves rolling by and burst at the steep surf. - The misty air took your breath, while stimulating the senses and spirit. Arundle looked with laughing eyes - which had the same colour as the grey tossing waves - at the two boys in her company.

Tibor Khan was the smaller one, and he was likewise full of life and joy. The black plaits on both sides of his broad face fluttered in the gusty winds. You could well imagine him on the horseback of a wild Mongolian pony of his homeland. ‘Freedom and width he makes you feel, just like that’, the girl thought, while she turned to her neighbour on the left.

Billy-Joe Karora was almost seventeen. He couldn’t share the joy of his mates. He shuddered in the icy winds from the polar South. His dark skin on torso and legs shimmered bluish. Still he didn’t want to urge his friends, instead he tore the threadbare rug tighter about his body. He was obviously not properly dressed for the weather. While his companions wore coats, he had nothing on but a loincloth under his cloak, as he was used in his homeland - the dusty red steppe of the Australian South.

Arundle and Tibor had picked him up from the helicopter. They had had to wait some time. Because of the gusty winds, the landing had been a problem.

“Let’s get inside” Arundle ordered when she noticed her friend’s shape. They fetched him from both sides and rushed towards the low shack, which served as departure and arrival hall.

It was Easter time. On the Southern half of the globe that meant the summer was definitely over. Many students of the School of Inbetween stayed at home with their families now. Even those, who had chosen the School of Inbetween, because of the

mysterious and secret air, and of course for the special talents they could develop right there.

In Sydney, their parents had picked up Flo and Cori – Arundle’s best friends. The family planned a pleasant Easter in Upper Egypt, where Professor Hare was busy with Archaeological excavations. Their mother was all too happy to embrace her two girls after almost six months of absence.

As mothers do, she went on calling them Florinna and Corinia. She didn’t like the fashionable abbreviations, they employed at school.

Now that the break was completed, the pain of disruption grabbed for her soul, despite of the nightly visits. Thus, it mingled into an otherwise happy married life side by side with her husband, who was all too happy to have his spouse with him at last.

Weeks and months full of excitement and dangers lay way behind. Peace reigned on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. The friendship with the mer-folk did last, so it seemed. The Miseriors had been completely dismissed, and competition could not prevail in the mild air of understanding and congenial assistance among the school’s community.

You could feel nothing any more of that provocative misunderstanding or the envious hostility. The flattening hand of tender love stroke smoothening even over the most eruptive natures - it was love indeed that banned self-righteousness and stubbornness just like that, and opened cranky minds as well as pigheaded moods.

Malicious Marduk had been dismissed for good with his devilish band of Miseriors. – Well, you never could be sure, though. Nothing was easier than to find a place on Earth where prejudice, mistrust and hostility governed, and invited the culprit and his desperados to start their cruel game anew. They were always chasing for lost souls; thus, trouble attracted them like honey the bear.

Seldom enough people managed to drive them away in time. All too often, the daemons gained grounds and a broad track of destruction indicated which way they took. Man believed in seductive whispers; - leading people astray was easy. They willingly followed their betrayers into doom, until it was too late, and they were caught in chaos, misery and death.

Adrian Humperdijk, the Vice-Headmaster of the School of Inbetween, had been elected for parliament as the representative of the Conversiors - way down at the bottom of the sea in Australis. Thus, he was able to guide the development. He had a competent staff at hand on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Not only his wife, the Headmistress, assisted him with all her experience and with considerable knowledge. There was also the mighty Professor Penelope M'gamba, and of course the Slyboots' - Arundle's old friends from Germany.

There was Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif and Greifenklau-Slyboots, sister-in-law of Professor Scholasticus Slyboots - she was an experienced adviser. Adrian could rely on her advice in all political matters, although he was not inexperienced himself in that respect.

The conflicts, the school's community had experienced, had been settled likewise. For the disadvantaged minorities useful solutions were sought and found. They had their base in the experience of the last months. As it often happens a thing that turned out to be useful in one field of action was useful in another as well. Therefore, the joint tongs twister love strategy by which the Miseriors had been exorted, still worked fine with the minorities, enabling them to pick up with the majority.

The new method had proven validity in the conflict with the mer-folk, and was the female contribution of defence against the dark forces, solemnly developed by women, and at first intended to solve internal injustice, while later extended, after having proved successful with the Conversiors and Sublimations in matters of equilibrium.

The joint tongs twister movement however severed as a mode of cleansing the souls of the befallen warriors, and made them get rid of belligerence and hostility against each other. Thus, both sides gave in and agreed in armistice. One by one, the warriors re-converted into peaceful compatriots. In the end, only Malicious Marduk had been left, masked as a legionnaire together with some conversed subjects of his infantry on Devil's Island.

Arundle almost suffered a cruel death on that site - far away and alone with Malicious Marduk, and wouldn't have endured without her dear friends, who came to rescue her.

Poor Walter then killed the Legionnaire, and he was killed in return. The horrible pictures of his cruel death would stay in Arundle's mind forever. Like a fury, the giant kangaroo tore the

surprised legionnaire apart, who managed to push his sabre into the raging beast's heart while dying.

Injustice was it that poisoned the climate and gave Malicious Marduk and his Miseriors a chance to get hold of the minds. Those Somniors picked up a language in no time just by sleep-learning and so did the Animations with their favourite school stuff by sending their souls on trips around the world, no matter the fact that souls had their own minds, and favoured subjects normal people didn't care much. Souls were kind of romantic and emotional beings, which got their impulses from eternity, though.

Sublimations were able to ascend into the air, as well, however their range was limited, and the Isle of Wisdom-tooth lay far away from peopled areas, but was surrounded by the sea, while bigger islands or the continents were hundreds of miles away. That was the reason why their ability was of minor value when it came to become acquainted with foreign cultures.

Most of all however suffered the Conversiors. Their ability to convert didn't help at all, when it came to learning. At least they claimed, while this was perhaps not the whole truth after all, as they familiarized with Totem animals and their mode of existence to an outstanding extend.

Anyway, such injustice initiated the research of the congenial study group and mounted into the joint tongs twister strategy, which was so successfully employed later as well in overcoming the war.

What was useful as a learning aid also served as a means of altering lost souls. Besides, such activity was a good exercise for the majority, as it trained the ability of joint action, which was very necessary. Such became clear during the Miseriors' invasion.

In pairs, selected Somniors and Animations were brought together with the disadvantaged. The Somniors sneaked at night into the dreams of their charge. They invited them to far targets and showed them what was to come. In the meantime, the Animations extended their souls to free their charge of fear, and guide them out of the safe port of the body, by implementing some of the own longing for the unknown and the width of the world.

All three of them then started on a journey into the unknown. Such voyages were extended after the first successful trials, and worked in the same way, as did the strategy of the Somniors and

the Animations. In other words, the charges also became involved in the majority's learning process.

They learnt to grab for things just like that, almost as easy as their tutors: What they experienced by night in their dreams formed a memory track, and had to be memorized and utilized during the day – that was essential to fix the stuff.

Arundle had chosen Li Mei as a partner. Together they cared about Tika, a Converter and Billy-Joe's twin.

Tika was even more lost after Billy-Joe had changed sides, no matter whether her brother cared more than ever about her. It was obviously not the same.

After the common start-up difficulties, the three managed quite a lot in the meantime. Tika had a good command of the main Polynesian language. She had an overall view of the geological structure of the globe and understood the solar system with all planets and satellites. All that in less than two months time, since the hostilities were over.

Not all triple teams were as successful. Still it became clear that the gap between the colour groups got smaller every day, since the new programme was in use.

Even the disadvantage of the tutors, who couldn't train their own abilities while teaching, was more than balanced by the increase of emotional intelligence caused by such procedure. Besides, the pairs were exchanged from time to time, as there were loads of aspirants for the job.

Li Mei and her sister Li Chang had left for holidays meanwhile. "The time of the cherry blossoms is the most beautiful time in Korea, at least there, where we live", they told their partners in the programme, while they left with excuses.

Tika immediately fell back into solitude, because Arundle was unable to find a substitute for Li Mei right away. Meanwhile Tika missed the joint trips more than the monthly excursion to the Convertors' Island. Even more because Billy-Joe was not the same anymore. After all, what had a dingo to do with a giant kangaroo?

Convertors were troubled by vacations anyway. Those who were unable to bridge the cycle, had to skip all such intentions.

The coming up of the full moon had been the reason for Billy-Joe to return from his homeland. He had had enough from his family-clan anyway, whom he saw with different eyes now. There was no consanguinity holding him, he now knew, still some

sentimental memories. However, his little sisters and brothers were so glad to see him. They enjoyed the glamour of his celebrity appeal, - him, who had been able to break through the narrow boundaries of the Aborigine-ghetto.

Arundle preferred to stay on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and so did Tibor. They both had difficulties with their parents, although for different reasons. Therefore, they remained on the island, no matter whether they were almost alone with the Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster, who had no other place to go. Arundle did not want to comply with her parents' expectations and Tibor was not able to do so. Especially his father was a cruel tough guy fully aware of the breed he came from.

“Moschus Mogoleya would be the right one for my father”, Tibor explained, while they spoke about their parents. “I am too weak – have I ever been. Not necessarily physical, as I could stand my lot, but when it came to the animals, I could not keep up. You don't believe what animals have to suffer. It's heartbreaking though. The steppe is unbelievably hard in every way. As a chieftain to be, you have to put always an extra lot on top, so to speak. That's the tribute our family has to pay to our famous ancestor the most outstanding forefather of the steppe – Tschingis Kahn.”

“I see, and you refuse to act likewise, - sounds familiar to me. In my case it is also a question of lifestyle somehow”, Arundle agreed thoughtfully.

Billy-Joe entered the Convertors' boat right at the same day of his arrival, together with Tika and the others. Pooty was with them, no matter whether he conversed or not. He was looking forward to meet his dear friend Walter again, who was mother and father in one to him. He missed him badly for more than three long weeks every month, because Walter returned only as the converted Billy-Joe.

Glad was the little possum and so was Billy-Joe because Walter did not cause him trouble. Even the headaches, he had suffered so badly were negligible by now. The old philosopher didn't bother him at all, quite the opposite – he got good advice that way and no sequence elapsed without improvement. He learnt

of things, he would not have dreamt: – about the grandeur and wisdom of the endless cosmos; its fabric, nature, aims and causes. He learnt in a different mode from inside out, quite opposite to the common way.

That was why his being Walter was enrichment for him he could rely on and digest when he was himself again, and had him advance in giant jumps of a giant kangaroo. Thus, he focussed his way in life and cleared the mist before the last mystery somewhere in the dark future where the Shaman of the Churingas stood crooked and stunning. A sight, moving even more into the unreal, the more Billy-Joe was conquered by the presence.

Very few students and teachers had dared to leave on Christmas holidays, because of the ongoing turmoil on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. That was the reason why everybody left on Easter this year.

The Slyboots were Northbound with all hands on board, so to speak. Even Grisella had overcome her phobia. Intellectus got the chance to refresh old friendships. He was not the only homesick, his aunt Dorothea suffered as well, and so did Amadeus.

Grisella and Scholasticus combined the trip with old obligations at their former university, where they still had some candidates pending.

Life on an island in the far South was attractive though. Still something was missing, no matter how beautiful the scenery was. Besides, reality did not meet the expectations, neither of the Professors, nor of their families. Be it because the human nature did not allow such, or were the circumstances against them. Fact was that many things went wrong. Thus, the Professors had to ask themselves whether the cause was on their side or whether they suffered from the effect like their families.

If things hadn't gone wrong right from the start, and more of the promised harmony and love had shone up, the spouses reflected, things had worked out the way they should have. However, they got into a time of confusion and change that might even have to do with Grisella and Scholasticus. Such was one critical aspect of their considerations, while looking back from a distance of time and location, being here in Europe.

It was too late now anyway as things had turned to the better. The school's community overcame great peril and tackled considerable challenges with bravura. Thus, the whole enterprise

was on the verge of change and might turn out to become exactly the promised state.

Staying apart from the island was in any case enrichment for both families. They might learn to see their island with different eyes.

Those who did not leave and remained on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth were only a handful, so to speak. There was the Headmistress and her vice, as well as Peter Adams who had just come back. Adrian was right now busy with his underwater mission. He had to take care of his seat in the Parliament of Australis.

Peter still needed a walking stick. Malicious Marduk had broken him both legs in Canada the saying went. Adams himself just meant he only fell unlucky. However, the circumstances of that fall were remarkable such he committed frankly: While entering his car, it started rolling. He got under the tyres somehow, being strapped by the belt for inexplicable reasons. He only survived because a brave passer-by jumped into the rolling car and pulled the break.

“How could that break got loose in the first place?” all experts asked each other and themselves repeatedly.

“...And the gear must have been released as well”

“Not with an automatic...”

“If you choose the parking position the wheels block, just like in each other car...”

“I’m not so sure...”

Anyway, it had been a strange accident that still upset the minds, although half a year had passed by now.

Arundle had a different theory. As to her, Malicious Marduk took revenge for the fact that Peter Adams withstood his attempt to seduce him as a host, but successfully rejected his attack.

“This is something, only our good old Peter is able to do”, Scholasticus used to proclaim whenever the conversation touched the matter. It was a pity that they had missed each other.

Scholasticus was very fond of Peter and didn’t question his abilities or his intelligence, while his imagination needed perhaps improvement: “Perhaps a little more of that unexplainable sense for the unknown out there, would do him good. On the other hand, who knows how things had turned out otherwise – two broken legs might still be better than a broken heart”, and he sighed deeply whenever he thought of Walter as he just did. The unlucky chain of circumstances that led to Walter’s death had to do with

his lack of resistance against the attack of Malicious Marduk. That was one way of looking at the tragedy. There were of course other ways as well, and no less legitimate. However, nobody would ever find the proper answer to that tricky quest.

2. Delayed Return

Peter Adams was hobbling through the empty corridors of the School of Inbetween, when he met Arundle and Tibor who were on the way to the Headmistress' residence, because the central kitchen was closed. Therefore, the caring Headmistress did the cooking for the remaining few. - "Although cooking is not my favourite occupation", she declared. - "However, someone's got to take care of you."

It was Good Friday and nobody expected a marvel. "We'll surely have fish", Tibor suggested who was by now acquainted with Christian customs, and willingly opened for the good-natured Godson, whom he felt sometimes closer related than to the confusing and scaring spirits of his people.

Arundle took him with her lately in a joint dream into the Holy Land, where they mingled secretly with the multitude while listening to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus convinced him, although the feeding of the five thousand did not impress the boy. "The true wonder is the charity", he reasoned, "wherever it's conveyed convincingly, like in case of Jesus. - Won't be easy to act alike, though..."

They had the suitable theme for the table talk. The guests settled around the big dining table. Peter hobbled in last, and sat down next to Moschus Mogoleya, while Arundle and Tibor were sitting opposite. Marsha was still busy in the kitchen. "Do help you with the drinks" she yelled and continued rumbling about with pots and pans.

About a dozen had stayed behind, while all other left. Most of the remaining were now sitting around Marsha's dining table, while the Convertors were away, because it was full moon.

The gale was about to give up that had been raging over the island, and the sun broke through the Northbound clouds, turning now Easterly. Thus, the afternoon promised to become nice – nice

and mild like the weather used to be in the South Sea most of the time. Only occasionally, gusts and showers burst over the island – mostly in autumn around Easter time, while Christmas was in the summer and Thanksgiving in spring, when sowing time.

They had fish with potatoes and salad, and for dessert homemade tart. Unfortunately, the fish was too big and too fat. The Headmistress had it – as she stressed – for two hours on the grill.

“Could be, that the grill was kind of short though. Perhaps I turned the heat too high. Well, as I said, I’m not a born cook”, she declared with an encouraging gaze.

The guests helped themselves and didn’t show, while they shoved the rare bites into their mouths, while trying to get rid of the burnt skin on the outside unnoticed.

The salad lacked of dressing, the bread however was all right, and so was the water in the jug.

As soon as Billy-Joe was back, they would have a barbeque party, Arundle decided. You could rely on Billy-Joe’s cooking.

The Convertors might even come back today. The moon was on the verge. That was the reason why Marsha was so nervous and unable to concentrate. The absence of her husband however troubled her probably less by now than the full moon itself, who she was addicted in her own way meanwhile.

Even Moschus Mogoleya enjoyed talking about charity and the reconciliation of opposing entities. Such conversation was able to compensate the frustrating meal. Marsha was far better in ethics than in cooking, and was all too willing to familiarize the assembly with all kinds of different rites and myths of resurrection.

Later when they had cake and coffee more physical desires claimed attention, and when the Sublimations suggested a little dance for digestion, an inappropriate gaiety arose. In circles of three or four the guests whirled over the meadow, now and then lifting off for a measurable hop, while the bodies fainted in a green whirl that diminished however all too soon.

Moschus Mogoleya was whirling likewise, however soundless and without visible mimic, Arundle noticed, when pressing into his circle, curious as she was.

Patagonia and Tuzla, the two Sublimations from Patagonia had also decided to remain on the island over Easter. Arundle wanted to have a word with them as well. Funny enough all Sublimations stayed behind. Family ties were either weak or there

were other reasons. While in Sandor's case things were quite clear: he didn't want to let his brother behind, although he didn't share Tibor's problems.

"We are the free spirits of the winds", Tibor shouted for joy, when the four Sublimations did a round of honour. Their Dean accepted gratefully. Moschus Mogoleya was different now, and tried to please, even Arundle noticed, who was his sharpest critic.

While his disciples whirled about, he took a seat next to Peter Adams. Peter was not able to dance because of his legs. He didn't share the negative attitude towards Moschus Mogoleya, and didn't accept such European perfidiousness – as he saw it. This attitude might as well be the reason for his success with Malicius Marduk.

Thus, the two were soon involved in conversation, while Arundle and Marsha talked about their limited abilities when it came to cooking. In fact, both could hardly await the return of the Convertors, but they didn't want to show.

Marsha feared about her dignity and Arundle didn't want to sort out the confusion of her feelings. Thus, Peter Adams, had he known, had had good reasons for his argument.

Arundle was not fond of cooking, she admitted frankly while she raised Billy-Joe's abilities into heaven. As to her, Billy-Joe was a real magician in the kitchen. With the simplest means, he came to outstanding results.

When Arundle opened up, Marsha did likewise and admitted that one reason why she stayed away from the cook pots was the fact that her husband did such a good job in the kitchen as well.

Becoming aware of their likeness, they started laughing, and Marsha hugged Arundle, whispering, "It is high time we grow up, isn't it?" while pinching her cheek tenderly.

Arundle blushed and shook her head unwillingly. "I'm in no hurry, definitely not" she said and meant it. The Headmistress didn't mind and wondered whether the one thing had to do with the other.

His promotion did Moschus Mogoleya well. His harsh appeal fell off him like the skin of a reptile. Even his attitude changed and the way of thinking - as far as his vocabulary was concerned. That was why Peter Adams had no objections, no matter what the accusations were.

The two chatted like dear old friends and didn't even touch those tricky spheres, Arundle always got across with that man – his stubbornness and malice.

Soon the men were deeply involved in the philosophical aspects of Sublimation. Peter Adams was a patient listener. His short remarks and stimulating glances led Moschus even into further and wider musings about such substantial mode of being.

Late in the afternoon the small boat landed with a good handful of tired Convertors, most of them happy, some turned inside or looked rather lost, as if they didn't know what to do with the dream, which set them free now.

Adrian Humperdijk shot like a cork out of the waves, gasping and only half alive. He had missed the boat and had to follow it on his own. The guards wanted to leave for a late Easter holiday, and hurried therefore. Good Friday was two days ahead after all and Easter still to come. The re-converting had not been able to object. Each was busy with him of herself, therefore the boat had left without the Vice-Headmaster.

Scratched and exhausted poor Adrian crawled ashore, shortly after the landing of the boat. Still a hefty swell was going outside and the waves were breaking at the reef and the rocks, thus he had had trouble to find the small gap of the mouth leading to the little port.

Marsha was upset and worried. She would have a word with the guards as soon as they came back.

Adrian had been lucky though. His re-conversion overcame him while swimming. As this process takes a few minutes and requires full concentration and peace, the poor man almost drowned, when he let himself dive to the ground. Besides he had to swim some five hundred yards when he finally managed to struggle back to the surface, where he had to get along with the swell then.

(Those who ever tried to swim in the waves over a long distance and keeping the course – know what the talk is about.)

Only because he still was embraced by his other self allowed him to get along. What had happened? In all the years, a thing like that never happened. Well, of course the workload in Parliament was eating him up, so to speak. As soon as he arrived in Australis, he got involved in all kinds of obligations. He had only four short days for the job, other representatives had a whole month.

Still that was not the reason of his delay. He had not left too late, and he didn't goof or went astray. As to his calculations, he had been right in time. Why then had he been too late? The guards didn't feel guilty either. They hadn't left too early - quite opposite.

Fact was, they had to get the helicopter for Sydney, and while the schedule was not fixed they still had to hurry as the copter needed daylight. The weather had been somewhat nasty though.

Still the guards had given Adrian an extra half hour, after the last Converter had slipped out of his other skin, so to speak, and returned to a human shape – either stretching on the benches of the boat or trying out their legs ashore.

Had his inner watch failed? Adrian wondered. - Would be quite likely with all that hustle, he thought but still didn't really believe.

First, he was glad to have managed at all. He let his wife embrace and cover him gently with his fluffy nightgown, and guide him to the dining table, where he ate cake and sipped steaming hot black coffee heating him up from inside, while the sun did the same from outside. Although he had to protect his eyes and asked for his sunglasses.

Something was wrong with the course of time. Was something wrong with the moon? Or did he grow old and slow? Down under the sea you didn't see the moon, but you noticed the tide waving up and down in clear cut measurable intervals analogues to the satellite, thus, forming the base of the mer-folk's time metre system. Had the retarding factor changed? He asked himself: Nonsense - and if at all, only by seconds!

Adrian tried to come down and have those teasing thoughts get quiet. The garden scene was likely to change his mood. The young folk had forgotten about his little misfortune anyway. The newcomers join the circles and the Sublimations had a lot to do. Soon they were all swaying up and down like elves, even those afraid of leaving the ground.

The moody exuberance inflicted Adrian as well, and when his wife tore him into one of the circles, and he noticed the extra power in his fast moving legs, increasing ten times by the touch of the others, he felt the lightness and the happiness of the instant likewise, while whirling up and down as never done before.

3. Penelope M'gamba's Easter Excursion

Penelope M'gamba intended to utilise the time effectively. Her chances were favourable. She took her annual vacation and booked a flight from Sydney to Cape Town, where she travelled to the furthest tip of the African continent. She stayed with friends in Cape Town, who knew about her peculiarity. However, she had to be careful anyway. Such a griffin was no harmless finch – one of the sort you found everywhere in the world. A griffin was the biggest organic flying entity ever, which made an eagle look like a sparrow.

When such a huge feathered beast – all the more in its fable outfit – was seen somewhere, the papers were full of it and the attention enormous. People spoke of aliens or dragons and dinosaurs out of no-where-land.

Such attention had to be avoided by all means, and that was most likely possible by remaining invisible; and invisibility was best achieved by roaming in devastated areas.

Penelope M'gamba did something she felt was not deferrable any longer. She had deferred it all too often though. Almost for one year now she pushed her plans aside – to be exact since September, when she started with the School of Inbetween. The new task took hold of her and didn't leave space for other musings. The new job wholly absorbed her. The quarrels with those water-sprites, a threatening war and the new challenges of the chosen few and the gifted didn't leave space for her own welfare – or more precisely - for what she had to try out once in her lifetime.

While the invasion with all the horrible consequences required a clear mind, and a clarity she was not always able to procure, as well as the overall view, she was entitled to keep as a griffin. For other musings, there had been neither space nor time.

'Now or never' she then said to herself while she felt the full moon coming and all obligations gone more or less. Besides, nobody became suspicious while everybody left anyway. She knew all too well that the clarity she required had not yet come back to her. She felt confused and stirred up and couldn't judge the risk she ran.

Her soul had spied out the area she meant, because she felt drawn back to her old home to the inherited spirits and daemons of Black Africa, where her cradle once stood and her coffin would go. However, you could not rely on souls. Their impressions were different and did not comply with human minds. Their priorities were different. Thus, Penelope did not achieve that way what she

was looking for. The soul was either not willing or not able to give her the appropriate discernments. – Could well be, that souls were not made for such obligations.

Had Penelope been able to travel in the dreamland like her dear colleague Marsha, she probably had found out on such smooth and elegant way what she longed for so desperately. However, that was not in her range – she was unable to guide her dreams, unable to focus on her subject, no matter how deep her yearning was.

Everybody had his or her limits, no matter how regrettable that was. Here she found her own. She had to take the risk, had to see with her own eyes and had to explore this strange part of the world with her own senses.

In theory, she believed to have tackled the problem sufficiently. Now she had to deliver the proof for the hypothesis that could stand the critique. That would not be simple.

What, if the measure turned out to be not precise? Was there an objective metre, as was required? Would the climate or the weather act as an unacceptable interference?

With impatience, she guarded the moon. Everything was set. She was well prepared. She had all her material with her. She had sorted it over and over, had spoken with colleagues - with those who criticized her subject as well, not only with the others who were in favour. There was no objection left. If you once accepted the facts, you had to turn in on the consequences likewise.

“Up to date...”

“Sound and reasonable...”

“If it stands the empiricism, I wouldn’t mind...”

Statements like these she heard of her colleagues. Still her argument was faked, no matter how sound the chain of evidence might be – at least to a certain extend.

What she was really looking after, and why she risked such a dangerous expedition into the unknown, she did not even confess to herself, because who ever became aware of her secret motivation would turn away from her – if he or she was a colleague of hers anyway.

Others would break out into fits of laughter – in fact, Penelope was - no matter how strong and healthy she looked – no teenager anymore. In her age, such notions would be regarded as ridiculous, and unacceptable, especially for a woman, and no matter how harsh Penelope felt about such injustice, the world was organized that way. However, it was not hers to alter the

course of fate for those, who benefited. All she wanted was an exemption for her and her kin, and such necessity she was quite able to prove with all her scientific material she had on stock.

Someone who intended to measure with two metres had to be measured with two metres as well, because he or she stood above the common grounds. For such the iron rules of human community on Earth, did not apply unlimited.

Penelope M'gamba didn't talk about her attitude, not even with the most open minded of her colleagues in the School of Inbetween, who could stand quite a lot and were open for the most extravagant circumstances, you could think of. Why didn't she open? She might have been supported, though. She might have avoided some diversions and many obstacles, if she had tackled her fate right from the start, instead of grabbing for any straw that led astray.

The dice had been thrown. Penelope M'gamba was sitting in the airplane, and would land in Cape Town in a few hours. There she would recover and gather strength for two days before the full moon became round. She had taken care for everything - also for the fact that the moon phases differed a little at her destination to those on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

She heard her heartbeat whenever she imagined what was following then. Especially the start bore plenty of unforeseeable circumstances. She had to look for a deserted area. She hoped for her friends, who she intended to involve to a certain extend, while she would keep the core of the secret to herself. For the last solitary step, she had to be alone and had to find good reasons why they were sent away. She had mailed beforehand, thus her friends knew what she was expecting of them, and they had signalled their preparedness.

"The cape is a deserted area, if you get out far enough and walk the last mile when the land rover cannot go on. Nobody lives out there. Except for some curious tourists you won't find anybody." However, tourists were exactly what Penelope feared, as tourists were the most curious people in the world. They were curious by definition.

The start up procedure of a griffin would be the kind of sensation they were after. Equipped as tourists were, they would shoot the nicest pictures, and in no time such would spread all over, and you could find yourself on the covers of most magazines of the world; if not in a documentary probably titled: 'The last

Flight of the Griffin' or 'The Return of the Dinosaurs' or something like that. You could surely imagine the consequences.

Once in the air, Penelope would be relatively safe, if no pursuer was there and no attention otherwise. However, a storm could also be endangering, if it was a gusty one as there were always hefty winds around the cape, especially now while the summer said good-bye.

Not everything was foreseeable though; here, deep down on the horn of Africa - Cape Horn or Cape of Good Hope – she wasn't sure any more, but didn't mind as long as she stayed at the back of beyond. More important than a name surely was the fact that the area suited her needs, and her target lay in range.

When she was up in the air, she had to win altitude. She had to gain height, had to get up further than ever. She had to get access to the icy West wind drift with a Southerly twist as per the time of the year. When she managed that, when she did not freeze or crash because of frozen wings, when she did not collide with an airplane – after all it would be night then, because she needed the night and the light of the full moon, while she had to avoid the daylight.

Only the power of the full moon could help her in the forlorn icy desert, where the air was thin and even for a griffin hardly breathable. Well, and then she would have to look out for something else; she didn't dare to think about...

"Don't sell the bear's skin before you have shot 'm", she said to herself to calm down. However, she couldn't get rid of such vision. At last, when all obstacles had been mastered, would she still have the power? Had she not to consider the return flight as well? She only had two days for her search. Would that be enough?

- Surely not for her calculations. She knew the results already. Theoretically, such part of the task was solved by now. After all, everything depended on the set up of the experiment, which was well known in the meantime; - so well known that you could read the formula on the back of T-shirts, worn almost everywhere. While very few understood the meaning of that equation.

The outlook on all that ice now let her shiver, or had she been drifting over into the dreamland? Was what she thought useful to stir up her hot blood? Even up there, in that icy field of action where a yearning griffin belonged?

Never had she met a mate, she had always been alone – no matter if the solitude was limited. She still felt the emptiness. She knew what she was missing. A Griffin likes the icy solitary heights and is itself enough, does not demand more of the being.

However, here and then the yearning for a mate, or for proximity, or for another fervour then for the icy height may overcome the beast of zeal.

“In contrast only, we enjoy”, murmured the half awakened, while she pressed hard into the cushion and had the chair crack like a morbid racket. The airhostess rushed by and whispered into her ear, in order not to wake up other passengers, who were so sound asleep.

“In fury came a nightmare over me”, Penelope replied, then shrugged and turned her head apologizing.

The hostess returned only half convinced back to her jump seat in the aisle, where she stuck to for the weather. “A bumpy flight, no doubt”, she thought – Bad weather, a strenuous overbooked night flight – Easter traffic, after all...”

The young woman looked at her watch. Two hours before the landing it was. Time for the breakfast - perhaps the Captain showed mercy and forbade the hot coffee or tea because of the many air holes today.

The moon got round for Penelope on the Cape as well. Up to now, she was on schedule. Her friends dearly cared for her. They really had been glad to meet her again. Penelope didn't feel like a burden. She had been waiting for two days for the full moon, as planned. The days had passed just like that. They had to talk about so many things.

The secret Isle of Wisdom-tooth stirred up the minds of their host's children – two clever boys age ten and six. They didn't give in until Aunt Popee came about with proper coordinates, which indeed indicated a tiny dot in the vast blue of the ocean, that was marked in no map. “Well, it's a secret island. Besides it is so small, therefore nobody knows of it...”

The boys still doubted whether they would find an island right there, but they were of course too young to find out.

“The main thing is, they are content, and have something they can keep as a secret, and may soon enough give away to their

friends”, their mother said with a questioning look at Penelope who answered that they could do little harm with what they knew.

The night lowered. Few clouds rushed by in front of the moon. The wind was blowing steadily when the land rover rumbled North after Penelope had been dropped.

She had asked for that. She wanted to be alone. Nobody should witness her conversion and her departure, not even her best friend. “I’m terribly sorry, but this is not possible”, Penelope used to murmur, as everyone in the know was of course curious.

Even those Convertors on Convertor’s Island didn’t witness her conversion, because she only did, when she was alone, and never took off from the same spot. She waited, until either the little beasts had gone or she escaped in the woods or stayed behind right away, and departed at nightfall back home.

Right now Penelope was not at all satisfied with her position. She looked thoughtfully up into the sky, while she listened at the same time to her inside. She noticed a gentle draft beside the headache that increased minute by minute.

She still was able to control her conversion to a certain degree. However, she could not go beyond that point of no return, as nature then took over and throttled the free will.

Thus, she rushed to the nearest cliff, and hoped that she was there before the conversion. She spied about anxiously if someone was near-by – it had been too late anyway. The conversion was in due process. She was changing into the fabulous being, as was her fate, and took off only minutes later like a black shadow up into the wind and weather stricken sky. With heavy strokes of its mighty wings the griffin won height and became smaller and smaller, and soon was only a tiny silhouette before the silvery round face of the moon, which seemed to be its aim.

4. Adrian Humperdijk’s Time Problem

At first, the Headmistress had best cancelled the holidays of the guards for punishment. From the legal aspect, she was certainly allowed to do that. Her obligations went even further – a dismissal was in the range as well. The tasks of the guards were quite clear in this respect. They had to take care of their flock like the good Shepard without exception and that included of course

those being in the air and under the water as well, all the more these days with all the horrible happenings in the near past.

On the other hand was it not easy to find volunteers for the job at all. Those who had been originally chosen had left for good some time ago. They had given up one by one, and had left no disciples as in former days. The challenges were too high, besides the duty was boring and as it now looked, dangerous as well – there had been even a casualty.

The guards had suffered most from the cruelties of warfare. The Headmistress knew that all too well, and had to think twice before she published what was on her mind. Of course she was allowed or even forced to expect the proper services as outlined, on the other hand she knew her husband as well. He was not the being to accept regulations or stick to set rules when converting into his wild state. He himself didn't feel like one of the Convertors of the Island. Therefore, she needed a gentle hand and a sensible approach, instead of harsh righteousness. This was no matter of legality alone.

Adrian had caused his trouble most likely himself. His wife knew his generous gestures and boasting he produced – "...over to the main Isle ain't no problem – not for me, that's no distance – after all I'm a water-sprite myself, ain't I?" he used to boast in triumphant air, not only in front of his scholars but as well with the guards near-by. Such statements didn't remain unnoticed, though.

Thus, nobody thought him to run into trouble, while missing the boat. He might have done purposely, the guards may have thought, if they thought at all. After all, Adrian was the only Convertor related to the waters of the sea so far, although other hopeful talents began to shine up.

Corinia and Intellectus also felt attracted by the wet element. You couldn't call their taste a talent yet. Things had to develop and ripen before a clear trend could be stated.

In short, the accusations against the guards were dropped without any further consequences, except for a dunning letter of warning they received from the Headmistress. Adrian however, undermined such impact by stating that his fight in the waves hadn't been existential as he had in fact been in danger of life, while his lung functions took over before he reached the shore, just in the narrow passage between the reef and the lagoon. Thus, he now waved aside as had been just peanuts for an experienced expert of the waters.

The guards rushed off into their holidays, and to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth peace would have come at last. Would have come, if Penelope M'gamba had returned from her voyage as well, which she didn't.

After all Penelope M'gamba, the most reliable and trustworthy person you could think of didn't show up after an excursion that was planned for four days. Marsha called the address she had on file and stirred up Penelope's South African friends who thought she had returned right back to the island, when she didn't show up after the said period.

"No, of course she didn't come back. The distance is far too wide, after all such a being is no aircraft, although it is a mighty entity, sure enough" the Headmistress let Penelope's friends know, who now started worrying just as Marsha and her husband as well as all the others who learnt of the disappearance.

Marsha had been the only one who knew a little of Penelope's intention. That was why she worried so much. First, her husband, and now Penelope – had Adrian been lucky after all, while Penelope failed? Something must have gone wrong, the Headmistress doubted not. What had happen in the icy heights?

Penelope herself had hesitated for a long time - too long perhaps? The summer had suited much better for such an enterprise. There had been no time then, all that trouble with the water sprites and daemons everywhere, not to mention the accusations against gifted students and honourable creatures. Otherwise, she would have had to wait for a whole other year, but that she did not want, for several reasons. "The cape is always windy, no matter when you try", she argued when asked why she was not willing to wait for the next summer:

"Griffins love wind and favour gale -
Heed neither snow, nor ice, nor hail.
They laugh those storm-sprites right into the face
And never mind a roaring race..."
- She used to sing.

"Well, must you choose the wildest autumn storms at the Cape of Good Hope? You've never been there before. If you were certain about your matter, after all, but you aren't. You fly into the uncertain, you only have a suspicion, that's all..." However, no objection helped, what Marsha said was gone with the wind as soon as the words were spoken.

Now the trouble was there. No musings helped – Penelope was in trouble. Marsha was sure about that, she could trust her feelings.

Marsha felt she could not hide the knowledge. When she asked Adrian, he confirmed.

“Call for a Grand Council, that would be best. I’m sure Arundle has an idea, she has experience in matters of that kind”, Adrian suggested. Thus, Marsha took the first opportunity and that was at the lunch table – much bigger the Council couldn’t grow anyway...

She didn’t know a lot, Marsha realized when she spoke about her worries and about Penelope’s intentions. She noticed she had trouble already in describing the approximate location roughly. The area Penelope might be was huge – almost the whole tip of the African continent and the sea around down to the Antarctic hemisphere.

“Penelope intended something else than gathering and confirming facts. This was the official obligation, while she really was after something much more personal. In fact, she is looking for a mate, since she learnt of rumours of a huge bird, in the Southern zones, she was alert, her plan was born and gained shape, and now she is on the way. The last griffins are supposed to dwell out there, perhaps on secret islands – somewhere there...” and the Headmistress vaguely pointed at an area somewhere between the tip of Africa and the Antarctic continent. For that purpose, she rolled out a big map after the meal on the dining table, and all bowed over it, as if there was something of interest to be seen.

“Besides, she is tracing down something entirely different – a scientific problem that came up lately, however very important. While you never know with Penelope what importance means. – Well, she wasn’t born yesterday, she is no fool. She knows about solitude and lonesomeness and all that... however why now? This is the point I never was able to clarify. Could well be, that the other aspect is more important and if that is the case I could say very little about the location, in fact, nothing at all...”

The Headmistress looked around helplessly. She knew about the abilities of the present remainders, not the least her own. She had not been able to contact her friend, neither awake nor asleep, neither in the dreamland nor by the worldly means. She tried every night since she got that phone call from Cape Town, and stayed there in vain in her dreams. Had there only been an

Animator present, perhaps he or she had been able to get in touch from one soul to another. After all Penelope M'gamba was the Dean of the Animators. However they were all gone and would not come back before the end of the holidays.

"What can we do? There must be something, we can do" the caring Headmistress concluded.

Arundle looked up. Of course, they could do something - what a question? Almost undignified Arundle shook her head, while noticing such ignorance. Everything was on her file. Besides, she had been under way with her magic bow a couple of times. Why did the Headmistress pretend she didn't know that? Or did the poor confused woman not dare to ask her right away?

Arundle looked over to Billy-Joe, who was just whispering with Tibor. Had they the same idea?

"By means of the magic bow it shouldn't be a problem to search the area in question" she flatly said just like that. "We could try, that's the least we could do", she went on a little less convincing.

The Headmistress had been there in her dreams a couple of times without the slightest hint, though. Penelope M'gamba could indeed have disappeared without trace.

Pooty, the new custodian of the magical stone found refuge in Billy-Joe's Medicine Pouch after the death of his big friend. That was practical, as Billy-Joe was supposed to have that pouch with him all the time. In fact, this had been the idea of the magical stone, taking care of the proper proportions of both of them.

In such a pouch, space is limited of course. Therefore, things had to be arranged magically. As soon as Pooty slipped into the pouch, his size reduced considerably, and so did the size of the magical stone likewise.

Pooty had to become used to the strong smell inside, and as well to the spooky acquaintance of those secret objects, Billy-Joe had been collecting while still young. Then thought them of major importance.

Meanwhile the little possum got used to the environment and felt at home with the magical stone. Therefore, Billy-Joe had become the true guardian of the stone, while Pooty's obligation was the proper handling.

Could well be, that the magical stone didn't want to make Pooty feel useless, as could have easily happened, while Walter's image somehow lived inside of Billy-Joe. Therefore, the likeliness had something in it, to have him become the true and only custodian.

Billy-Joe and Pooty did no longer depend on the magic bow. In fact, the magical stone was able to convey a much higher payload than the magic bow. Both pretended to be hefty competitors therefore, and had the most ridiculous arguments on that matter. While the magical stone referred to quantity, the magic bow insisted on quality, as the only proper metre of success. They never agreed on the results, no matter how alike they seemed.

With explicit blessings of the Headmistress and the Vice-Headmaster of the School of Inbetween, the little expedition took off for South Africa to the Cape of Good Hope. The name itself was an encouraging indicator, Arundle hoped and so did the others. The bigger group with Pooty, Billy-Joe and Tibor formatted already, when Arundle came back with her magic bow, she had to fetch first. At lunch on Marsha's porch, she didn't dare to bring him, not with Moschus Mogoleya around anyway, although she had liked to do so.

She didn't like to become separated from her magic bow and felt somehow naked without the pressure of the string on the shoulder.

Unfortunately, there were areas where no weapons were allowed, and she could argue as much as she wanted. There were still stubborn minds that insisted him to be a dangerous weapon. Arundle felt like Don Quixote fighting the windmill, when she tried to straighten things out and referred to all those scissors and knives in use, but in vain. No matter how she argued there was always someone around who stressed on paragraphs, rules, and regulations "that must not – under no circumstances or exceptions - be offended."

The main question therefore was whether the magic bow was a weapon, or a useful tool, or something entirely different, perhaps even a living being. As long as his status was kept pending, there was no other choice than remaining in the dark cupboard; where

he was banned while the tribunal had been in due process. Such imprisonment did him more harm than he let his mistress know.

In the darkest hours he had earnestly considered searching for a new master, in order to bring the indecent being in the shade to an end, he was condemned to in intervals since Arundle set foot on that island.

Now they were on the way once more up and away into the unknown that bantered behind the horizon. All dark thoughts were gone. Good-natured the two wizards calculated coordinates and other details of such minor hop, which might even fall under the limitations of the magicians' guild.

When it came to define the flight route however, they started another argument. The bow saw no need in a stratospheric excursion for such a short distance, while the stone insisted on that dimension. He reasoned that they interfered with the regular air traffic otherwise, and that he didn't feel like being bothered by such stinky noisy monsters, which endangered their passengers to an incalculable extend.

The magic bow thought this argument far-fetched. The likeliness of a collision was one by ten millions. Thus, he accused the magical stone of hysteria and paranoia. The magical stone in return thought this an unacceptable offence.

He nevertheless checked about this stratospheric business and had to admit that the bow was not all that wrong. Thus, he let himself down to a sloppy: "divided on the march, united in victory", and disappeared with his disciples.

Time wise, they knew both, there was almost no difference. The route didn't play a role. Important was only the destination that had to be hit precisely. An instant of retarding might even turn out as an advantage, as it could otherwise well happen that they trampled each other on the heads.

For Arundle it was easier, she could step a pace aside - and that was what she did, while the stratospheric rocket came down: Impressive – like a meteor or a falling starlet. They were lucky for not having spectators though. Did the bow descend just as shiny?

The gloomy sinister cape welcomed them appropriate. A wave of icy crystals showered over them, and the gale rushed into their hair and clothes as if it wanted to strip them bare, while the cold got at them: indeed an unpleasant site.

Somewhat helpless the little flock gazed about. Where should they begin, and how should they start? What were they looking for after all?

Whether man or bird, in this wilderness both were lost; grey rocks and grey sky, grey veils of frozen mist spilled about by reckless waves on naked cliffs and rocky mounts – torn and martyred – over and over by gale and surf - for millions of years; while still remaining steadfast and sound – land’s stronghold at the end of the world.

5. Trapped

The spell of the full moon embraced the conversed griffin - that is the just-had-been Penelope. The higher she went, the safer she felt. Under her wings pushed the suppressed air and made her feel light as a feather. No matter how strong the winds were blowing - it was all a matter of cleverness and balancing, while the target always remained vivid – an undefined target though, as height was what she wanted. Height and width above the clouds under the myriads of stars and in the light of the silvery moon – so round and closer near-by as ever.

After the zone of clouds was passed, no veil of mist spoiled the silvery clarity; while underneath the wavering cloud-carpet, silver-white and shiny - reflected the moon’s brightness almost as light as daylight: moonlit night-light, so to speak.

Hefty strokes by strong muscles produced the necessary warmth in such icy clarity. The blushing feathers protected and covered body and limbs. Only where a witty air-sprite found a gap and slipped in, the itch of frost got at her – seldom enough. A warning, though, not to overdo, while the finger of death touched living flesh. A warning, not to become careless, not to hand herself over entirely to the lust of roaming, and become all overwhelmed by such yearning.

Clairvoyance and overall view were the two faculties that determined the self of a griffin. Nevertheless was there another unknown drive. A yearning of the strangest kind, thus she had never experienced before – as far as she remembered. However, it was not her plight to remember now. Griffins don’t have a long term memory. They live in the moment and follow the instantaneous inspiration. Their rapid eyes move and react as fast as thoughts do – flash-like; that is as fast as the light. Of course,

the body would not reply appropriate, how could it? It was hardly as fast as the speed of sound. Such contradiction bothered Penelope in both of her modes of being. Souls didn't have to handle such contradiction.

What had happened? How did she get here? Why did she feel that unknown yearning? Did it hurt? Did she suffer?

There had been that bumpy ride out to the lands end – the last yards over rocky paths almost crawling; what a pitiable mode of movement. It was Man's mode – Two-legers movement on slippery grounds in the darkness of a stormy night in the wilderness – causes a man to stumble more than to walk.

The time is pressing, the minutes fade, the moon light here and then either pushing or drawing – and then the target, the conversion finally, she knows about and she is looking forward, despite the iciness of the night.

Then, the first liberating strokes; arms, are no longer arms, and legs have no longer to carry the weight of the Earth. While warmth is pushing through the skin – everywhere you feel it growing. The jumps get wider. Wind grabs after, you pushing now, forming a cushion while the wings open wide and self-assured.

The mind is different now somehow doubling the identity, while the jumps get fewer until they finish for good. The land stays behind, while the trail leads ahead and the jubilant width take all over.

A second shadow comes out of the moon's nowhere-land. Who is there dreaming? The shadow is getting real. All questions are going with the wind. The browsing elements wave away all misgivings.

The eye doesn't trust – first the one and then the second – both see, both realize, what cannot be: the image in the mirror, it's got to be a mirror! Right here, where the silvery face of the moon is near.

White is the moonlight on the wings. How wonderful, does she not know her colour? It has to be the moonlight though! Tonight there is a special night, just like the location. All different shining is the light, more direct in thick bundle; - as if it came from no-where-land, with regards from Arundle.

Is our moon not always white? The memory won't mirror. Do live the instant, that is it. - The impulse floating through the frame from top to toe, and versus likewise. Now spreading wide the feathers though – do live now right away, don't hesitate the day is

yours and so is now this hour. The here and now is what accounts - be you yourself, be now, then it is right - such should it be, the silver-wings all over. A mighty trunk uncovers then still gloomier and whiter. The simmering moon-be-stricken night is closing in all over. Your image falls, be careful now, wild furious, cheerful flatter. So meaningless passes away all decent now and gay, right over you and lowering, no air-sprite though but him.

The time stand still the wing-pairs glide they do in harmony, pulsating hearts immeasurable - the instant is what counts. Time's swallowed by eternity.

No way and aim the shadows glide along as long the silvery moon is shining bright, while in the East the daybreak dawns.

The first rays do not hurt yet but wake unpleasant feelings. The sun's still weak, while stratospheric mist arise and overwhelms the night.

It is high time to hide.

Like stones the griffins drop from high, there where darkness prevailed, drop through the layer of the clouds, dive into whirls of air below.

'Le blanc' the white is guiding though the mate over the waves. Penelope knows without words that he knows what she fails, and what she needs to stand the day.

An island, rough and rocky though, hardly more than a prolonged mount erects from the wild waves, but offers solid ground. A niche protects the loving pair - is granting space and shelter, before the break of a stormy day, with ice and snow and worsen. They raffle feathers and move tight. The air is even colder, while sleep is reaching out for them; the lids soon lower closer, while outside scarce rays glisten through the clouds so dark and thick. The couple dreams the night again, noticing what happened, and what they did. A mate they found in these vast wilds, where griffins became fables - much stranger than the strangest kind, - relicts of a lost world.

Three days of self-forgotten musings follow. On the fourth and last day, Penelope tries to wake up, but she cannot. Her task weighs heavy but not heavy enough. Sweet carelessness embraces her mind, she even forgets about the way home, and remains here, where the clocks go different.

She feels the mistake, before it gets her, but it is too late. When the moon lowers for the last time in this cycle, she is trapped on that small island. She has missed the chance to return.

She wouldn't have managed anyway without help, and that she wouldn't have got. The conversion comes about with a bad surprise. Her mate has left. Did he return to that icy home that matched with his white plumage?

The dream is over. Not only the spirits parted, Penelope had to realize. She was lost and hardly got hold of the reef, while re-conversing.

For the upcoming days, she has to manage on that rock in the surf, while already anticipating in her heart a threatening secret her mate and that island were involved. She is not the only one to have something to hide – a secret though, and by no means uncovered. There is something inside that wants to get out, but is not allow to break through the wall around the unconscious.

Is it love? Penelope wonders. She had a different idea of love, surely no less overwhelming, and no less fulfilling, however, different. There were notions she could not empathize and did not dare to touch. Something was there, which she was afraid of or even felt horror.

Le Blanc released musings she never anticipated. She blamed the being of a griffin for that, but she knew already that she was wrong. The horror kept creeping from all sides at her - somehow bound to that miserable rock in the vast ocean.

She pushed aside those threatening musings by force. Other questions had to be answered. "Where do I find water? How shall I keep warm? How do I feed?" Thus, were the real questions of the day, and would worry her for the upcoming weeks until the moon gave her the chance to fly away.

On that forlorn island, there surely was no fountain. No tree, no bush was growing, scarcely more than seaweed had she yet seen.

A first inspection confirmed her worst suspicion. Up to the middle of the island a crown of sharp rocks, all covered with white smelly bird-excrements, raised up, almost insurmountable. While she didn't see any use in trying to overcome anyway.

She would not get far; there are steep slippery walls everywhere. Shelter she would find in the crevice, where she spent the past days with her mate, but she is unable to find now. The island looks devastated and not at all inviting now, without the comrade and his ruffled plumage. The cold gets hold of her. She spends the day collecting seaweed and weaves a cloak to cover up her nakedness, then dry and warm up in the sun that is shining a little warmer around noon.

The rain of the previous days formed shallow pools of sweet water, thus, she is able to still her thirst, although this water is not at all pure, but drinkable at last. -Between the cobblestones the tide uncovers, she finds little crabs and shells to fill her stomach. The cloak fits better now while dried, and makes her feel almost comfortable in the sunshine, while the sun breaks through the clouds occasionally. She wanders about restlessly, still worried by the heavy thoughts. Memories break through repeatedly, whenever she closes her eyes and takes a rest in the sun. Behind closed lids she sees vague images and faint pictures of the previous nights, she can still not seize.

She didn't fulfil her task – even worse: she lost her task somehow, it drowned in the mist of emotions. Instead, she won a mate. However, did she win a mate? Didn't he disappear just like the task she lost?

She could feel the yearning again. Where was Le Blanc (she even had a name for him)? The rising sun kept her busy; therefore, she only vaguely recalled the scene. The re-conversion shouldn't surprise you in the air, but had to take place on the ground. Did the same thing happen to the white? Had he to care for himself, just like she did?

This was one possible explanation and the most advantageous too. By means of the name, the mate became more personal. Le Blanc she called him and couldn't get enough of repeating these syllables in that foreign idiom. – Again she experienced those exceptional moments and felt the air of eternity, although such happiness was faint – just a trace and feeble manifestation. Those timeless moments could well be called the lovers' paradox – as they opened the gate to eternity, however, didn't last but for an instant. This was the ever-lasting secret of all creatures no one will ever unveil.

She had approached her task, however, on a strange way and much different than she intended. She didn't get far, and didn't get more than a first impression, though, of what she was after. Still – the discernment was of an incomparable depth it seemed to her, and promised dimensions; she had not been looking for right here. Things turned out to be different than expected: Instead of clear-cut measures now this... that was quite something!

The wonder of love was the answer to the question for the essence of time. Was that what she wanted? Did she foresee deep inside such connection? How else had she been able to get in touch with such a misleading challenge?

Penelope regretted nothing, even if she was destined to starve to death right here. What she had experienced was worth the price she now had to pay. What she had experienced was worth any price. She knew she would not be able to top such summit in life. She had broken through borders her soul never dared to dream of.

However, the dream was over now and there was no reason for her to die. Therefore, she reckoned to send her soul back to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth for help. Her friends and acquaintance would worry by now. However, she dismissed that thought right away. She couldn't risk any more experiments. Soul and body hardly stuck together: the cold and the starvation branded her with an ungodly indicator.

The string, which holds both sides together in an earthen life, was overstretched already. She required all her will to keep alive. Under such conditions, the transmigration of her soul was far too risky. Her soul, had it left her body, would most likely not find the way back.

Penelope M'gamba would not have been an experienced Professor, if she had construed the signs of physical conditions otherwise. She couldn't stand such an excursion in her situation. Her only hope was that a search-party from the Isle of Wisdom-tooth would look for her. She now cursed herself of not having agreed upon secret marks. In fact, she had done the opposite by erasing all traces at best she could.

Nevertheless, she still hoped. Those witty youngsters would not give in. She would not endure a whole month on such a site; she knew for sure, and wouldn't stand another conversion. The days and weeks ahead seemed endless. She wasn't even two days on that island and began to talk to herself, while she followed her monotonous occupation. The search for sweet-water-holes turned out to be more difficult every hour. No rain had been falling, so the likeliness of dying of thirst got closer. She still had the choice of freezing to death, if she didn't improve her garment.

While hoping to find some of the precious liquid she climbed about a steep rock, she hadn't been yet. She slipped and almost fell. - "...Or I'm going to break my neck first", she murmured sarcastically, while she finally managed to master that obstacle. She let herself sink to the ground exhausted, and waited until her breath became normal. Her palms ached, and she noticed bruises. When she finally turned her head and looked to the other side, she thought she was dreaming. The sight contradicted all reasoning. As if she had entered paradise, she felt stunned and moved to

tears. A soft green valley opened. Mild air wavered by and pleased her face and bare limbs. A low layer of clouds covered the face of the sun and didn't quite fit the idyll.

Down there the temperature would surely be some ten to fifteen degrees warmer, the Professor figured. Before she wholly recovered from stunning, a hefty rain showered down. As fast, as she could she tried to find shelter. She crawled into a crevice, where she was safe, but it was too late anyhow she was wet all over the body.

The rain made her feel very uncomfortable. The water was burning on the skin. It became slimy and didn't go away causing itching pimples, she could hardly get off. Soon she didn't have fingers and nails enough to get rid of the pain. Her movements became slower; she could hardly move, and before long, she got tired.

6. Saviours in distress

The magic bow was faster, - not much, but a little. He didn't notice any sign of danger, he let the magical stone know, who took the stratospheric diversion because of the possible endangerment by aeroplanes. Thus he arrived a second later at the Cape of Good Hope.

Their target lay far away from any populated area. There was no tree or bush. Grey in grey floated sea and sky in one - where mist ended the sight. You could hear the roaring sea. Whenever the wind halted between gusts, you could hear him moaning and howling over the land.

Advice neither the magic bow nor the magical stone had at hand. What should the patrol then do? Where should they begin? Were there traces? Had Penelope, if she had been here, left signs?

Arundle was almost sure that the wise woman hadn't left without leaving any trace, while being on such a tricky mission full of uncertainties. Billy-Joe and Tibor agreed, and while they both were excellent scouts they began right away to search their landing site in circles instead of listening to the ridiculous quarrel between the bow and the stone, who still couldn't give in.

Arundle shouldered her angry bow and followed Tibor, while Pooty, the new custodian of the magical stone, slipped into Billy-Joe's Medicine pouch, where he tried to calm down the stone.

Both scouts headed for opposing directions. A signal should give advice if they found anything of interest or even a definite trace that their Professor had been there, that is a griffin, because of the conversation.

The scouts circled one by one, as planets do or satellites, while the radius became wider. They took care not to leave gaps. Of course, they could overlook something. However, both were sure not to making any mistakes.

After several hours of unsuccessful search, and while getting close on their cycles, they decided to call it for today. The daylight was fading. Besides, heavy rain was falling.

Thanks to the miraculous abilities of the Australian magical stone, the overnight rest became rather comfortable. The magical stone supplied the small party with a transparent cover, as it is used in space missions, and with mattresses and blankets. There was only limited space inside that cover, however it was warm and dry.

The magic bow pointed out that he was able to produce in-flight garment for space missions, but such was of course not required. They didn't have to roam through the universe, but had to stand a cold night at an indecent site at the end of the world. Therefore, his reverence made him look somewhat audacity.

Arundle was ashamed of her magic bow, and even Billy-Joe shook his head mischievously. The permanent quarrelling of the two magicians strained the nerves of the patrol considerably.

Arundle searched for something eatable in the invisible quiver. Water, they had enough. The rain did not show any signs of ending, instead splattered on the provisional roof. She found wonder cookies, which made the hunger vanish after some bites, but left behind a strange taste. They might have been still from Laptopia, Arundle wondered, but the bow let her know that he himself had produced them. They were similar to manna, the bread from heaven, he explained. In fact, nobody went sick.

When the night lowered, the comrades fell asleep at once. The hardships of the day demanded its tribute. Besides, the Somnions wanted to practice their art. Would they be able to find the site, where the missing Professor was?

Being right here they might have a better chance to fetch some of Penelope's vibrations than in bed at home, provided the Professor was still in the range.

Nobody knew the distance griffins were able to cover. With all their might, the Somniors tried to find Penelope M'gamba in their dreams. However, as hard as they tried, they did not succeed. Somewhere out there the dream world ended. They felt like hitting an invisible wall. Neither Arundle, nor Billy-Joe ever experienced a similar phenomenon.

In their dreams they rushed through the devastated wastelands of the Cape region and soon lost all hope, despite the promising name that had been given to the cape – perhaps by people like them, also searching in vain, full of hope. Where ever their voyages led, and whatever pictures they saw, they didn't find other than their own memories within the boundaries of the wall, they were surrounded by.

Of course, they discovered the friendly Professor in her African garment. They even saw a griffin – an image the Professor wanted to suppress, however, had been subject in one of the lessons of the basic course "Discover yourself", where the students had witnessed a sudden conversion. An incident the Professor had at best tried to push aside and eliminate in their minds.

Even each other the dreamers met, while they roamed about reckless. They tried every trick, raised high up in order to win a better overall view, or got close for a closer discernment view, as the visibility was poor, even in the dream world. No matter what they did, the invisible wall was there and made all efforts useless.

They felt like striving about the invisible end of the world, meeting invisible grounds that were forcing them around and aside, either up or down.

No wonder they started thinking of Malicious Marduk, as this was a typical set up of his. Arundle felt magically attracted by her memories as if they centred about a fixed idea. In her dream, she could already feel the maniac attraction longing to take hold of her. Forgotten confrontations pressed forward.

She saw the thousand faces in the intergalactic rogues' gallery, and felt being pulled by her leg, - or she was struggling for survival, while greedy flames reached out for her body, and myriads of spiders headed for her tormented soul.

Such nightmares overwhelmed her uncontrolled. She was thrown about, lost all contact with her own world, and became

entangled ever deeper into ruthless turmoil. Instead of mastering circumstances – as she usually did – she felt sinking deeper while losing her faith and her Self. Her own powers faded, they gave way to a terrible force, demanding unconditional surrender.

What happened to her? Did that happen to her? Before Arundle could make up her mind, she felt ripped off her sleep. Tibor shook her heftily though, while she sighed and moaned as if she was due to die, scaring him to death. Besides, the day was dawning outside.

Billy-Joe was hardly in a better shape, as was his friend, and Pooty was worried likewise. When Arundle finally sat up and looked confused around, Tibor had time to assist his little friend. Together they managed to wake Billy-Joe up as well.

Those Somniors were indeed confused and absentminded. They were not even able to communicate with each other. Monosyllabic they mused about their heavy thoughts. Thus, it was Tibor's task to plan the second day of the search.

Going on goofing around in circles was of no use, he reckoned, as they still didn't know if they searched at the right site from where the Professor had started. The magic bow and the magical stone brought them here. Most likely, the area complied with the plans Penelope M'gamba had discussed with the Headmistress, although no geographical details had been fixed. Nobody figured then how important such detail might become one day.

For breakfast Pooty handed out those strange tasting cookies once more, no one minded anymore. Caringly he had put some cups out in the rain when he awoke, thus, they now had something to drink. He shivered because of the cold outside. Ice crystals formed on the surface of the water already. They had a quick and frugal breakfast, then they slipped into flight shirts the magic bow provided, being very happy that he could demonstrate his abilities. Those shirts were absolutely insulated, and guaranteed to keeping the inner warmth. They were light as feathers, and hardly disturbed the movements of the bearer, which soon would turn out to be very advantageous.

Arundle and Billy-Joe hadn't yet found out of their apathy completely. Did they think of giving up? Tibor wondered, but he didn't ask. Quite opposite to the Somniors, he had slept very well.

"I think we investigate the area, now that the day has us back" Pooty suggested. He looked invitingly at Billy-Joe, while being busy already with the magical stone, who seemed to agree.

He had the space cloak disappear, they had been covered by during the night and Pooty got ready for take off.

Billy-Joe got somehow infested by such activities, and the black clouds on his mind dissolved. Tibor shouldered the magic bow and stood ready: "May the dear lady join me for a dance?" he asked gallantly and bowed like an experienced courtier, while his earnest friend produced a little smile on her cheeks.

Soon the green whirl hushed about the sinister greyness of the cape. Tibor meant his method to be favourable, as you could see clearer, then on the ground. Besides, he was master of the wind and enjoyed what he did.

"Such a real flight has the advantage that you are closer to reality", he exclaimed. "We see from above like an eagle. Good eyes help of course..."

Arundle did not grab at first what he meant. Of course you saw better the slower you cruised. With the magic bow or the magical stone you were quick like a thought, thus you saw nothing while moving. As soon as you arrived, you were able to see again, of course.

Tibor and Arundle danced as only Sublimations do. They lowered and raised or even stopped and investigated for any likely trace of their missing Professor - a very realistic procedure. The weather got better, the fog moved out into the open sea and the sight became excellent, thus, Arundle realized what Tibor meant.

In the clear light, the land looked almost more discouraging than before when it had been veiled by mist and foam.

Arundle had no objections against this way of investigation, but trusted her eager friend wholeheartedly, who was now pointing at any detail he considered unusual. His energy inflicted and convinced the girl. His sharp eyes you could trust. If there were a trace of Penelope M'gamba then they would find it. She was sure of that, while her friend almost burst of self-confidence. Now that he felt the weakness of the admired friend, who needed his help and protection.

The fresh air cleared Arundle's head and freed her from the nightmares of last night. She was looking now for traces of the missing as well.

A feather, a bushel of hair, a piece of cloth, even a bundle of clothes - a pearl, or an earring, a hair cliff, - things the like. She couldn't have thought of everything, while busy getting started.

Perhaps she had not been alone while conversing and the helpers took care of her utensils at a safe place.

Should they search for those helpers? That would be an entirely new approach, instead of cruising about the devastated land out here.

She tried to contact Billy-Joe, to have him participate in her thoughts, but in vain. On the telepathic way nothing worked, there was absolute silence. She felt somehow packed into cotton wool, and her feelings reminded her of the nightly dreams, when most sinister.

Where had the other team gone?

The cape's lands end with its wind-stricken grey rocks and all the water in turmoil got closer. Arundle checked with Tibor, who was not yet upset or confused, while he didn't know how to proceed either. It might be wise to contact the magic bow, he finally admitted. He passed the message on to the bow over his shoulder, and got an answer right away. The bow was telepathic-wise still available, while the limitations Arundle had experienced in her dreams were real, when it came to Billy-Joe who obviously was behind the barrier.

Was Penelope M'gamba also trapped behind that wall? Had the magical stone somehow managed to get through as well?

The magic bow accepted Arundle's considerations, no matter of his feelings towards that Australian stone, whom he reckoned to be trapped as well.

"Stepping into such a primitive trap looks like him", he said in an air of self-esteem.

Now good advice was dear, so to speak. "What are we to do now?" Arundle wondered. They couldn't leave their friend alone. What else could they do, but follow? However, didn't they risk to become trapped likewise?

"Would it be possible to approach that wall first of all?" Arundle asked her magic bow.

"First we have to get down" Tibor interfered. Arundle let all the wheeling business up to him by now. While considering the alternatives, she totally forgot about turning.

Underneath the surf brooded dangerously close by now and sent dashes of foamy water up at them. Tibor was absolutely right. With joint forces, they tried to win back the land. However, the up-frisking wind pushed them outside into the open sea. As if there was someone who didn't want them to come back on safe grounds.

Interfering with the magic bow right here in the middle of a turning momentum was very risky. It would have meant to change

from the wheel-force of the Sublimator to the magical force of magic bow. That would be very risky if possible at all.

The bow signalled that he could hardly do more than help a little. "Some things don't work at the same time", he declared, when Arundle's voice broke of nervousness, while the icy fingers of the raging waves touched her – otherwise so brave heart.

Tibor worked hard and sweated like mad. The more he tried the fiercer the wind blew. What he gained he lost in the following gust.

When Arundle realized how Tibor was fighting for their lives, she unfolded the slumbering abilities of the Sublimators after all, which had never been demanded. However, it was too late. Tibor noticed thankful her efforts and didn't give in, although his power was fading. He couldn't go on like that. They would both soon drop like stones into the ocean. A horrible outlook - or they let the wind move them the way it wanted. Drifting in the wind would be a likely option though, the brave boy reckoned.

The magic bow over his shoulder let him know that he was caring. Dropping into the ocean was of course not a very likely option, the bow agreed, while going with the wind, bore a realistic chance to endure until land was found, and they were trapped right behind that invisible wall like the Professor, somewhere out there in the icy wasteland of the polar region.

In fact, an alternative didn't exist, Arundle realized soon. Her rough powers turned out to be of little help. After all, they jointly managed to produce some kind of gliding that kept them up, as if they sat on an invisible cushion. They had only to care about katabatic winds, thus, trying to keep the altitude or even get higher. The higher they got above sea level the safer they sailed on the steady drift up there.

Ever faster the journey went. Neither Arundle nor Tibor cared about course or steadiness any longer. They were gliding just like that. Tibor came down and at rest after all. The magic bow signalled no dangers ahead, while the temperature kept sinking. Well protected in their suits the seekers didn't mind. They even relaxed somehow. After moments of desperation and fear of death, they felt safe as long as they went on for the time being. They sat in that trap behind the invisible wall, they knew all too well. They didn't know what was waiting for them.

Were Billy-Joe and Pooty trapped likewise? Had they also left the safe land? Travelling with the magical stone worked different, they knew. The wind could not harm them the same

way. Sudden gusts would not lead them astray. The invisible wall however was also made up for them. Therefore, it was very likely that they shared the same fate.

Thus, Tibor and Arundle mused while drifting along with the wind. They opposed no longer but let him do his plight. He was stronger than they were. Where the wind got his strength, Arundle could only guess. She immediately thought of Malicious Marduk. Had she and her friends not been once dropped while dancing with the wind? They had been driven out into the sea where they dropped into the waves, and would have died without the help of the mer-folk.

The cause of this accident never became clear. No matter what Moschus Mogoleya said who blamed the youth of levity. As if the scene was right there, Arundle thought to hear that voice close to her ear. An awful voice full of malice it had been. She had blamed Moschus Mogoleya at first - that turned out to be an error most likely. If it was not his voice, then it belonged to her old enemy Malicious Marduk, whose thousand faces surely went along with a thousand voices as well.

Arundle cocked up - the imaginary voices in her head stopped. She couldn't say how real they had been. Something had changed all of a sudden. Tibors back also stiffened, she could notice the strong muscles. They still were whirling the Sublimatiors' way and held each other by the elbows - back to back. That way you had a better overall view than with the common position when dancing with the wind, where you held your partners by the shoulders and looked into their faces.

What had happened? Was it the wind? The wind indeed turned down, but there was something else. What was different from a moment ago? Nature was keeping her breath, so to speak. Arundle felt like falling. Did they fall? Tibor negated. He had a sure feeling for differing altitudes. They still kept the same level. That couldn't be the reason. What was it then?

Arundle kept falling. She could not get rid of that feeling of dropping into a bottomless depth. Was it the sudden tranquillity? The layer of the howling fierce winds was missing. Was that it? Sure enough - that was it. She dropped into such tranquillity; - that was the answer!

Arundle listened to the whispering silence as if she expected an answer, as if things would be explained to her right away. Of course, she couldn't expect that. Why should such silence justify the fact that it was silent? While Arundle listened so carefully, she

sighted about her in disbelief. She increased the pressure on Tibor's elbows, in order to signal him to listen to such silence as well, as there was something in it that didn't belong there.

You could not call it a noise, while it definitely differed from the silence – a kind of crackling, like a ball of something undefined, a multiple whisper perhaps, acquainted and strange at the same time. Where had she experienced such happening? She was far too stressed to get Tibor or the magic bow involved.

7. The Island of the Petrified Giant

Pooty was well familiar with his new task. Such a start always made him feel sad, as he couldn't help but think of his friend Walter; at the same time he was proud of his new occupation as custodian of the magical stone. Had someone told him that he once would take over this honourable task on behalf of Walter, he would have thought him crazy.

However, it was like that. The magical stone was his property – or more precise – they had founded a personal relationship. Pooty was not only happy but also felt the heavy burden and the load of responsibility.

Billy-Joe gave himself into Pooty's hands. The magical stone made suggestions for the route and the target, as well as the general circumstances of the journey, and Pooty had to decide. Such decision-making was not easy for him, as he often didn't know or couldn't imagine the consequences.

His role before had been different, but he was too proud now to admit such shortcoming, and ask Billy-Joe for help.

Before, his task had been different; he had made suggestions, while Walter made the decisions. Such job-sharing had been advantageous for both sides.

Therefore, he tried to involve Billy-Joe now, but in vain. His companion said that he didn't know how to handle the magical stone, and he didn't feel like learning it in a crash course right here at the end of the world and in a hurry. "I've got enough trouble at hand, believe me", he said. "That's not my business. You figure out the route. I'm sure the two of you will manage. You know what we are after. We are looking for our lost teacher. I don't know more. No one knows better. Somewhere outside there,

she must be. She had intended to start from the Cape of Good Hope in order to carry out her experiments. However, the time is now over. She should have returned a week ago and will have been re-converted for quite some time – if not...”

Billy-Joe stopped meaningfully. Neither he nor his companion wanted to imagine what could have happened. They wanted to be sure, one way or the other.

The magical stone offered several options, how he intended to proceed and, as Pooty didn't want to admit that he didn't understand the complex explanations, he agreed after a pause he thought to be sufficient, while he did anything but muse over what had been said, then agreed by nodding with a meaningful expression on his face.

Billy-Joe trusted both of them. He asked no further questions, and the group took off. They disappeared from one second to the other.

Had Pooty known what he had agreed upon he'd surely have objected. The coordinates the magical stone had given to him, lay very close to the Antarctic continent. A steaming spot right in the middle of the vast white landscape where only black water occasionally broke through the swimming fields of ice.

They were much too far beyond any possible target a griffin could probably reach in four days. When Billy-Joe noticed the ice fields, and concluded where they were, shaking his head, though. No bird could get that far and be it the fastest and the best trained. What had come to the magical stone's mind?

The Antarctic Continent down there was some eight hundred to one thousand miles away from the Southern tip of Africa. Nevertheless, the magical stone signalled they had arrived. As to his calculations, they were right over the site, where the Professor was hiding.

He said he had explained at length what had to be done, and Pooty had agreed, but he could as well repeat he musings for Billy-Joe right away. While it might be a little late now as they had just arrived. Therefore, he suggested them to go down and do their plight, that is - to look after the Professor who might be in no such good shape. Besides, a strong power attracts them thus, he could no longer resist.

“We've got to get down, no matter if we like it” he let Billy-Joe know, whose bewildered looks at Pooty made the latter uneasy. They both didn't know what was going on when they

realized that they were surrounded by steam all of a sudden, and were standing instants later in the middle of a green fertile vale.

The temperature was astonishingly mild they realized. Of course, they enjoyed such fact even before they stood on the ground. Who could have expected such a site after their stormy stay at the Cape, where the temperature had hardly been above freezing point?

The whole place was a real surprise. Billy-Joe stuffed the magical stone into his Medicine Pouch and Pooty soon followed while shrinking to the acceptable size. The two were quarrelling once more, but Billy-Joe pretended not to notice.

Without delay he headed for the high rim of the vale, where a steep pillar raised his attention. There was nothing else he could do anyway; therefore, he wanted to have a closer look at it. There might be something of interest behind that limited horizon.

Thus, he proceeded, and while he did, he got time to muse over the peculiar phenomenon of the local climate. How could it happen that such a jewel of fertility hide amidst the wasteland of ice and snow? Where did those mild temperatures come from? The vegetation resulted from the mild temperatures, he doubted not. He might be able to spot the origin of that warming up energy.

He had forgotten about the Professor, he realized who came now back to his mind. Did the Professor know about that secret island? Did she want to unveil the secret of the mysterious energy that was heating it up?

If so, what was her business at the Cape of Good Hopes? Had only the magical stone be a little more comprehensible! He pitied Pooty now who had to deal with that stone all the time, since Walter's smoothening influence was gone. Since then, the magical stone was different. You could without doubt realize a certain bewildering tendency towards impatience.

Deep inside Billy-Joe knew the answer - although he was not sure about that either. Walter was only partly gone, and stayed with them all the time, just as he did. He was now the key to several mysteries. Should he not reconsider his own role instead of putting all responsibility into the hands of poor Pooty, who was obviously not able to bear that heavy burden alone?

Right now, he had the chance to interfere and have an open word with the magical stone. Did the latter hide something? Did he know more about the secrets of that strange island? Did he know about the magic involved? Because magic it was that made

the place so different. Did they dance like puppets on the string of dubious forces. Billy-Joe could only wonder now why he had taken no interest in their target beforehand.

Billy-Joe arrived at the figure topping the rim considerably as an outstanding post. The bottom of the valley was almost flat while the rim erected steep he noticed when he got there – almost vertical some six or so feet tall, polished like of human hands. Billy-Joe tried to climb up but couldn't get hold neither for his fingers nor toes. He doubted not – that wall was of volcanic origin. He was inside the cratered landscape that had been filled over tens of thousands of years, while the warmth from the inside of the Earth still nurtured the place to bring forward such amazing result.

Thus, he had an explanation for the polished pillar in front of him. Magma had formed that figure for some reason. Not humans polished the stone but Mother Nature herself by pressing liquid glow out of her inside.

Almost like an unexceptionally tall man, in fact a giant – the figure appeared. Was that a face up there? Was that a head full of wild untamed braids on top of broad shoulders? Were that arms, he meant to be seeing pressed against the sides of the unnaturally torn body?

The human figure was more a guess than real. The idea of facing a petrified member of the human race made him shiver. What cruelty, what a horrible fate. Petrified in death behind a coat of glassy fabric! Billy-Joe trembled of horror. Right in front of his eyes on the bottom of that rim he had tried in vain to climb, were the feet – disappearing now in the filth of grass, as if kind of green slippers.

Through the glassy layer, the frightened boy even noticed the bloody skin over maltreated ankles disappearing in long leggings. Who ever stood there was a giant no question about that.

Billy-Joe stepped back some steps and tried to look into the face of the being. However, he could see only a filthy beard over the wide chest. He was certain now – this was a human being of exceptionally extended proportions, covered by a layer of glassy coating. Petrified instantaneously from one moment to the next - perhaps while sleeping in the middle of the night, the boy wondered. However, who would sleep in such an upright position? Still it looked as if the victim didn't expect what was

going to happen. Who would allow to become petrified while still sensible and clear in mind?

What ever had caused the sudden change, without surprise it could not have happened.

Like a monument - erected for eternity - the giant custodian overlooked the vale – in an upright position, with raised head, the sudden stream of lava must have surprised him. Without pre-warning and solemnly dedicated to him personally, so to speak. Unlikely, Billy-Joe thought – indeed almost impossible. Could there be another reason for that petrification? The boy wondered. Wouldn't you duck if danger came from above? The poor man didn't expect what happened to him. Only if you were definitely unprepared, such horror could have been poured over your head.

Billy-Joe shrugged and looked upwards from where the evil might have come. What a scary site! Nothing could be seen now, of course. His gaze ended in the layer of low mist over the island. In the prevailing twilight, you could hardly figure the proper distances. Not much light came through the solid layer of clouds. The sun behind could hardly ever be seen. While you could expect rain frequently.

As if his thoughts were heard somewhere, it started to rain, first some drops only but then fell a solid shower that ended as abruptly as it had started a little while later.

The first drops hit his skin like needles. He tried to find shelter as he suddenly understood – but too late. Before he reached the cleft nearby, he was wet through. Pooty checked what was going on when he heard the raindrops splashing on the skin of the Medicine Pouch. However, Billy-Joe didn't tell him of the likely danger they were in, and only asked him to keep quiet and stay dry.

They might find a safer place behind the rim of the valley, as this was definitely an odd place to stay. Thus he stepped outside as soon as the rain had stopped, but the grass was slippery he realized when he tried to climb up.

He was an excellent climber and was able to get hold on the steepest walls with fingers and toes only. He drew himself up a small edge, just a foot broad - enough to step on and stand up. The low ceiling of the cloud-layer ended with the ground contact, thus the sight was bad. The coastline on the other side vaguely shone up with the foam of the surf – lighter than the prevailing grey all about. The grip of the cold fetched at him from there: Not an inviting site! Instead of handing himself over to the uncertainty,

he balanced along the rim that lead around the island. Although the ground was slippery, he managed quite well.

On the right hand side, there was the valley – some fifteen feet below now, while the wall erected to the left again, thus, he got a hold right there.

What did he want up here? Instead of balancing up along the rim, he could as well walk at ease down on the warm grounds of the valley. That would be more comfortable. He intended to use the next opportunity and try a big jump into the green grass.

His fear of a disastrous shower pouring death and doom over his head had obviously been mistaken. There were no signs of any volcanic activity. The Earth didn't quake, no fire or overheated liquid spit out of hidden slots.

How long did that giant statue stand there? Could he look him in the face from where he was now? If he wanted to go on, he had to climb around him anyway, while jumping down right here might be too big a risk as the ground look insecure. There was no use in breaking a limb though, he figured. He intended to have a closer look at that statue anyway, without knowing why. It was pure curiosity after all.

While he got closer, the mist increased as if someone or something wanted to hide that sight before him. Uneasy did he feel – something was wrong, something else this time, different, if not worse of the image a while ago, while nothing really did happen.

Uneasy as he felt he approached that statue which was getting mistier the closer he got. He still didn't get an image of the face – only the tip of the nose stuck out of the thick dark beard behind that semi-transparent coating. What did he expect? A well-known face? There were not that many giants among his friends – actually none at all. From up here the giant was no real giant after all – only a very tall and voluminous man, about seven or eight feet of height, he figured; still in the range of a real human somehow.

At best he could Billy-Joe tried to compare himself with that statue. He turned and twisted still close, checked with one hand lifted above his head and thought to feel the shoulder.

He didn't pay attention while stepping back into a gap that opened all of a sudden. Billy-Joe felt torn backwards and stumbled into emptiness. Before he realized what had happened, he was sliding on his back down on a kind of chute almost vertical

into the depth. Any moment he could knock his head on the concrete at the end. He covered his face with his arms. However, there was no crash. The wild ride didn't come to an end – almost vertical now - he fell more than he glided. He felt the frictional heat – or did he feel the heat of the depth already? After all, he went all the way down a nook.

The hotter he felt the slower he fell – the shaft now turned and got flatter, while the heat increased unbearably where the skin touched the concrete. He must have been full of blisters and bruises on arms and legs and on the back. His clothes had long gone to pieces.

Billy-Joe twisted his body as well as he could to find those parts of it that ached the least. Instead of fearing the end of the trip, he was now longing for it.

He lost any sense of time. Thus, he couldn't say how deep he had gone, when he finally found himself at the end of the horror trip at the bottom of a wide cave.

Pale light glowed from afar in the background. He felt hot down here – unbearably hot. You couldn't stay on one spot because of the heat from below – barefoot as he now was. He headed for the light that turned out to be the reflection of liquid lava wavering in the crevice. He was here close to the liquid magma. That was the origin of the miracle of a fertile island amidst the Antarctic permafrost.

He could hardly breathe because of the heat wavering up from the surface of the glistening lake. Thus, he retired as far as he could get away from that malevolent offspring, and ended up at the bottom of the chute he had come down.

In vain, he tried to get a glimpse of daylight from above. Only a low flow of air indicated the surface way beyond.

Thoughtfully he grabbed for his Medicine Pouch to find out how Pooty handled the horror trip, whether he suffered from damage or shock. He might have pressed that pouch too hard in order to protect his own skin.

However, the pouch was gone! The shock caught him like a lethal stroke. He would be lost without the magical stone down here. How could he ever get back up? He would dry as if a fig in the desert in no time, and would faint, as if a flower in a flowerpot the owner forgot to water for a month or so.

8. Help in the last minute

While falling, Billy-Joe lost his sacred pouch with the precious contents. He did so while stumbling back and while he was trying to get hold of something, the pouch slipped over his head and hooked up on a sharp nose of rock immediately below the surface. The pouch then swayed precariously, however, the slope stayed in position. Pooty was knocked out for a while as his head hit the concrete. As soon as he regained consciousness, he spied out of the pouch's opening, but when he saw in which position he was, he slipped back in horror. He was unable to think or act. He tried to calm down and did by means of that breathing exercise his master had taught him while still alive.

He exhaled the fear with every gasp and this way he got rid of the threat. What had happened? Billy-Joe had fallen into an aperture and had lost his Medicine Pouch – purposely or by accident.

Pooty grasped for the items in the pouch he was so familiar with: a dingo claw and a bushel of herbs, a blank bone of odd shape, a bead of pearls – strange objects found or inherited – full of meaning for Billy-Joe, thus, he kept secret even to his friends.

Where was the magical stone? All other items were of no interest to Pooty. Some he'd have easily thrown out if he had to decide because of the intense odour, and while the space was limited.

However, Pooty was used to the lack of space in Walter's belly pouch, therefore he didn't really mind as long as they managed together with the magical stone, and that was the problem: He could not find that blooming stone!

Where was the magical stone? What could you do, while hanging on the tip of a rock over an abyss his friend just had disappeared inside? He imagined Billy-Joe lying with battered limbs at the bottom of that crevice, or being roasted in a flow of glowing liquid.

A fierce blow of the wind could kick that pouch off from where it hung, and had him follow his pitiable friend. Once more, he searched the pouch, as he wouldn't believe that the stone had gone – and there he was – right in the furthest corner under the heap of all that stuff Pooty had turned over and over already. How small the stone was! The shiny aura was gone, like an ordinary

pebble he appeared. He might realize now what he did to them. The least he could do now was to help them out of such precarious condition.

“What about a rope, then?” Pooty commanded – “and a protective overall would be of help, as well as some food and loads of flasks filled with best spring water, and a first aid set of course...” the upset little possum went on. The magical stone had trouble noticing everything.

“It would be best, if you climbed out and placed yourself on that rim up there. There is a small platform were you can deliver everything... and a safe stand I need as well”, Pooty went on - “And of course some absolutely safe hooks in the concrete...” the stone noticed how upset Pooty was. For explanations, there was no time, while he had loved to explain everything.

The magical stone did, as being asked, and Pooty began right away to lower down to where his friend had disappeared. If Billy-Joe was still alive, he had to hurry. Hot steam wavered up the crevice. No one could stand such atmosphere.

In his hurry, Pooty didn't think of the way back, which was even more difficult. Who should lift them up? The magical stone could do a lot, but could he also handle a winch? - was very doubtful.

Pooty was not yet acquainted enough with all the facets of the wonder-stone, as the latter preferred to quarrel with the magic bow most of the time, and gave him little chance to do so.

This time however, the stone went beyond limits and combined his power with that of the magic bow in no time. Thus, Arundle and Tibor jumped over the invisible barrier around the island. A protective device necessary against invasions by tourists – so the official statement. Fact was however, that they didn't know either of the whereabouts of that barrier. It served another purpose and that was not a good one, as they soon found out.

When Pooty had been looking for the magical stone, he could not find it, because it had gone the same moment when the medicine pouch went off Billy-Joe's neck. The stone made sure that the pouch was safe at that hook, while he went on to rescue Tibor and Arundle who were still fighting a hopeless battle with the fierce malevolent winds over the boiling sea, and – at the same time - get help for Billy-Joe.

Thanks to the magical stone in combination with the magic bow, Arundle and Tibor landed safe on the little stand at the crevice where their friend had disappeared. They checked the

situation and started to turn up the winch after a quick consideration.

Pooty in his protective suit had gone down in the meantime and found Billy-Joe more dead than alive. Thus, it was high time to tear him up. After some minutes of hard work, Arundle and Tibor could hear their little friend's faint voice. He was climbing on his own up the rope, while the precious cargo still was way back.

"Hurry – tear as fast as you can, our friend is suffocating..." and that was what they did.

Full of blisters and bruises but alive, Billy-Joe returned to the surface.

Pooty's joy went beyond limits, when he was able to embrace his friends, Arundle first. Just hearing her voice was like spherical music from paradise, he exclaimed while hugging her repeatedly.

He then reported what had happened down in the abyss, while Tibor and Arundle were still busy pampering their injured comrade.

Without protective suit he would not have made it, Pooty explained. "Knotting the rope around the chest was a hard piece of work, though. Lucky him you started tearing right in time. I wonder what I had done all alone..."

That had been a last minute rescue. Carefully they lowered their friend down into the green grass of the fertile vale, where you could see the favourable aspect of the heat from the interior of the Earth.

They lowered the injured on a stretcher by means of that winch. Then Pooty followed along the rope, while Tibor and Arundle hooked up for a green whirl of the Sublimations' kind once more, partly to express their joy, and of course, to get down.

Billy-Joe recovered soon. When his lungs filled with pure air, he opened his eyes right away. It took some five minutes until he shook off the dizziness like a dog getting out of the water after a swim.

Arundle searched for salves and liniments in her invisible quiver, she then gently stroked on his aching skin.

"It looks like we are stuck right here" Billy-Joe thoughtfully uttered while he endured such treatment without any other noticeable sign. A little while later - as soon as he got up on his feet again, he showed his friends what he had discovered. The stony custodian still stood where he stood – still focussing a distant target with his livid eyes, just as Billy-Joe had found him.

Then he told his friends what had come to his mind. Arundle however, interfered indulgently as something else came right to her mind. “Don’t you remember that petrification that happened to us in the Laptopian underworld?” she asked and Billy-Joe understood right away.

“You see” the girl exclaimed. “We were not coated by a stream of liquid lava. We were petrified by a special kind of water. The rain from the infested clouds was spreading that petrification virus. Without the potion Pooty got from the palace, we would still be standing there.”

“Does anybody have an idea, where we are?” Tibor asked who didn’t know about those Laptopian adventures. Pooty tried his best in explaining what he learnt from the magical stone, but couldn’t make himself clear, partly because the magical stone didn’t know better either.

Things interrelated and behind everything stood like a new and insurmountable wall of concrete the parent of all woe, Arundle earnestly suggested, and that was no one else but Malicious Marduk.

“After all things depended on the lost time in Laptopia, and the rain was just a meaningful coincidence...”

“While in the end we did learn however, that the factories weren’t responsible for that precarious loss of time” Billy-Joe objected.

“Funny enough that those things are coming on our minds right now” Arundle agreed.

“That is no wonder” Tibor added and pointed at the petrified giant.

“One by-product of the production of artifacts over there in Laptopia was the electronic smog, that was gathering in thick clouds on the Laptopia sky...”

“...and the clouds were so thick that you could sit upon, like a heavenly cushion...” Pooty went in.

“Yes, things might be similar right here, though” Tibor said. – “While that rain distributes those viruses – that makes sense...”

“Right you are” nodded Arundle.

“We can talk about that later. I think we have to bother about the present tense. There is trouble enough after all...”

Arundle had indeed discovered some strange looking grains on Billy-Joes skin. “Have you been in the rain?” she asked scared.

Billy-Joe confirmed. “While looking for shelter I fell into that crevice.”

“Did you get much of that rain then?” she asked, and while he nodded went on, “perhaps your immune system is still intact or the fact that you fell into that hot spot dried you before petrification...”

“If this is so, the giant might also be petrified and can be woken up with the proper potion... - the one I got from the Laptopian palace the other day”, Pooty went in – “when you stood about that subsoil pool like Roman statues...”

Walter came to Pooty’s mind while he remembered that scene and tears came into his eyes. “Oh Walter, dear Walter how much do I miss you...”

Thus, Arundle didn’t want to correct him, because things did happen a little different. Fact was that the serum had helped. You had to vaccinate the infected being. That was not so easy because you had to find a spot where you could get the needle in. One method was by rubbing a certain spot.

“With the horses we trained that. You look for a suitable spot, where the coating is thin. There you rub for a while until the stone gets weak a little and then you jam in the needle – that was the way we did it then...”

“Yes, and you rode with the whole flock over here to Australia on that virtual star bridge...”

“Flo and I, you are right. At that time we didn’t know that we could get that virus just like the animals. Well, soon we knew better...”

“They might still have left some of that serum” Arundle thoughtfully said and made up her mind at once. It was high time anyway to pay a visit to Laptopia. She looked at Billy-Joe and grinned invitingly. The boy nodded back. The burning limbs were forgotten. Once more like in the old days...

Tibor’s eyes flashed. You could see how eager he was, however the magic bow didn’t want to overdo. “Only two for this time, I’m sorry, won’t work for more” he said addressing the magical stone.

Pooty prompted him up right away to make sure he understood what was going on. The reason why not all of them fitted through that time loop at the same time had to do with that barrier, being put around the island.

You had to spot a gap between two intervals; a task, only true experts were able to master. “We came in at last. All I have to do is reverse the process. We handle back on the time-string exactly to the point where we jumped over the barrier. This time with

Billy-Joe instead of Tibor – that would be the only difference. Should be manageable though”, the bow said re-affirmative, as he wasn’t sure at all.

“From there it will become tricky, as we wouldn’t return to the Sublimations’ dance over the sea. I have to lift you up then, and while I do I have to consider the eternal law of time that’s got to be obeyed – that’s clear to me, therefore I will...”

“Before we leave, I have to report from that cave down there at the bottom of the slide” Billy-Joe interrupted. “That might become important, and we should understand that, before we try and get that de-petrifying potion.”

He was not the only one who was unable to follow the magic bow’s explanations, and was afraid of another quarrel with the magical stone, who blushed and blistered in all colours of the rainbow already - a sure sign of a near outbreak of wrath. The stone obviously had severe objections in mind.

And while Billy-Joe reported from that cave, fate took its lane, and had the two magicians argue about the nature of time reversals, of laws in general and the transcendent world in specific.

9. Stuck on the Secret Isle

Billy-Joe could hardly breathe down there while he had been down the crater. Besides the light had been dim that came from the liquid magma in the furthest end of that cave, and the noise had been considerable, still he remembered a remarkable discovery. “Shortly before I fainted, I thought to hear a voice – the voice of our Professor.”

“Could well be a hallucination of wishful thinking, as you were there to find her, and if you want something really strong, then your senses may fool you, all the more under the conditions you had been in”, Tibor objected.

Billy-Joe shrugged uneasy. He wasn’t sure anymore either. He could well have been mistaken.

“What I really wanted to say is, we have to get down there again. I need certainty. As long as I don’t know for sure, there is no use in that space mission.”

Right you are Billy boy” Arundle agreed – “however, this time fully equipped with a protective suit and oxygen mask and all that. Similar to the space equipment, protected against all eventualities”, Arundle agreed.

“What about that serum then?” Tibor wanted to know.

“Well that potion can wait, our Professor comes first. She is the reason why we are here...”

“She couldn’t possibly be alive after such a long time” Tibor objected.

“I know what I’ve heard, I have ascertained myself”, Billy-Joe answered.

“Well, then the magical stone was right after all... and I turned him down” Pooty whispered somewhat guilty.

“Well, not too fast. Up to now, we don’t know for sure” – Tibor was still sceptical. From his home, he knew the trickeries of the daemons and evil spirits, who fooled the humans. Still he was prepared to accompany Arundle right away.

“Billy-Joe you better stay behind with all your blisters and bruises. Heat won’t do you any good...”

Billy-Joe protested so Tibor went on “such a protective suit cannot do wonders either. Think of the long ride down on that slide.”

Thus, he agreed. Tibor was right. Together with Arundle and well equipped they should be able to manage down there.

“Take care of the cleft”, he shouted while Arundle and Tibor already got ready to go down with all their equipment. They would go the same way Billy-Joe had gone.

Tibor went first and half a minute later Arundle followed. They had tossed a coin on that and Tibor won. They didn’t need quarrel on such trivialities, while the magic bow and the magical stone still went on arguing until they parted because Arundle required the help of the magic bow in the abyss. Somehow, they were stricken into their magic world in turmoil and confusion.

Under their clever coating, the enormous friction couldn’t harm the two travellers, all the more as they got seated on soft cushions the bow placed under their bottoms. “It’s meant to protect the precious suits – might need them for the upcoming space mission soon”, he argued. The suits were not made for such a purpose, no matter how solid the fabric was.

Thus, it happened that the trip was pure fun that had caused Billy-Joe so much trouble. It ended all too soon, when they

reached the bottom where the open fire from the interior of the Earth could be seen in that crevice in the background of the cave.

First, they looked around. Then they walked clumsily about in their fully air-conditioned space suits. The cave allowed that, because there was space enough. However, it looked all the same everywhere, so they gave up soon. Nothing but grey stone they saw in the beams of their headlights. Only the background was different, where the fire kept on glowing. There they headed in order to have a closer look. One of them had to shut off the interior air flow in order to get smaller and movable, while the heat caught her right away, thus, she stepped back and had Tibor do his part. Both decided that they better not entered the crevice as such. Unfortunately, they found out that they couldn't communicate the proper way, but had to rely on a complicated intercom-system. This was not their main concern however, as they wanted to hear such voice Billy-Joe had reported – or to be more precise not only hear that voice but also find the Professor.

They decided to take off their helmets one by one in order to listen for that faint voice as carefully as they could. Then of course the heat got hold of them, and threatened to rob their senses, thus, they put the helmets back on after seconds, and then turned the cooling to maximum.

One reason why they changed was that the other could help if one fainted. After some time they were able to endure the heat for almost one minute. However, as much as they tried, they couldn't hear the voice of Penelope M'gamba.

Had Billy-Joe been mistaken? He had been in that heat for almost half an hour. It was a wonder that he had survived at all. If their teacher was down here, she had to be well protected.

The two investigators tried any site, near the cleft and in the middle, right under the slide and at the furthest end. They even put an ear to the ground – all in vain. The voice of her teacher they did not hear.

The Professor was a mighty person, and might be protected by a powerful charm. Still, her chances would tend to nil down here by now. The explorers had to tear them up again at last. The winch – still there over the hidden entrance to the underworld - helped a lot, as Billy-Joe wasn't yet fit for such heavy labour. In a joint venture the magical stone and the magic bow swiftly produced some kind of simple engine that took over when they realized how weak he still was, and set an end to their continuous quarrelling at last. They agreed upon the special character of the

parallel worlds in comparison with the limitations of time-roundedness, as they put it, probably not knowing themselves what that actually meant.

As per definition, eternity reveals its inner self to all creatures by the given sensuality each had to follow. A quite obvious fact, so to speak, the adventurers on rescue mission considered, when they learnt of the outcome of the lengthy argument. They had expected some kind of magical explanation on a closer subject, like a hint where to find the professor, for example, as they still had not the faintest idea.

Penelope M'gamba remained lost. Billy-Joe was still not convinced and insisted in having heard her voice. After all, he had his own experiences with magic and the other outer world, he insisted.

In his whole former life he didn't do anything but sway from one trance into the other, so peddling between here and there, and sometimes didn't know for sure, which side he was on. While he was exaggerating a little now, there was something in it. Billy-Joe could overcome reality by a wink of his beautiful eyes, and dive down to hidden spheres. He himself sometimes didn't notice such mysterious interference in time, all the more his environment and the people therein, who might get confused considerably.

When he now insisted in having heard a real voice, then it meant that this voice was somehow present one way or the other. Thereof doubts were inopportune. Still such perception could be a transformed one, something like an interception of another sphere – being no less real, because it didn't belong to the so-called real reality. Of course, that meant something with regard of the access, though. On foot or by means of common means of transport you wouldn't get far.

Thus, the magic bow and the magical stone received the order to focus their musings with immediate effect on the missing Professor and her voice, which Billy-Joe had heard with his own ears. While he didn't remember the exact words by now – had they been spoken in a strange tongue, most likely her mother tongue.

“In case of emergency people tend to return to basic patterns of behaviour” Arundle put in, rather crude her friends felt, but didn't object.

“Could you after all repeat the sounds somehow, which you heard?” Arundle insisted and thought of her old Lappy, which

held by now an honour status in the 'Museum of the History of Artifacts' way beyond in far Laptopia.

While they intended to go there for the de-petrification potion, she could as well have a look at it.

"In the meantime its translation module will be grown to most spoken languages of this world. When it was still mine it spoke some six idioms – well more or less fluent."

Arundle referred to her first adventure in Laptopia, while running away from school by means of her magic bow, she had not been wholly familiarized with at that time, as they ended up in a strange world. She had been arrested for maltreating her laptop, and without the interference of General Armyless, she had been likely to suffer harm when the advanced artifacts discovered an early form of their own existence in Lappy.

Billy-Joe shrugged. He didn't know whether he was able to repeat those words he had heard. "I will try" he said, as this might turn out to become another reason for the space trip to Laptopia. All four of them should try to get out of the ban of the mysterious barrier they concluded while the stone and the bow had come to an understanding at last. Such might become the proper challenge for a joint venture at last.

On a diversion via a parallel world, they might manage to get out of that prison. "Getting in was easy compared to that new task of an entirely different character. It's that semi-permeable membrane you know", the magical stone agreed, while the magic bow wisely and meaningfully winked.

Neither the magic bow, nor the magical stone lacked of experience in that matter. They both had done their lot. The stone had transported barrels filled with chatting students and their hysterical Mistress, being unable to overcome her fear of flying. In the end they only failed by keeping the whole affair secret, but that could not be charged on the magical stone's account, who argued that he had only looked so dilettantish because of the betrayal of Malicious Marduk.

"Wasn't all that bad", Arundle tried to smooth him down, while Pooty had tears in his eyes again, as this whole affair had been the beginning of Walter's tragic end. Therefore, he didn't agree to what Arundle had just said. Arundle on the other hand had the permanent dispute in mind, and feared her magic bow would step in and pour oil into the flames, and start that useless quarrel all over again.

As if the magical stone had read her thoughts he yelled upset – “My goodness, dear child – time, what is time? Time plays no role...”

Humans sometimes turned out to be so stupid, even those, you could expect better; did nobody yet understand that their prison was caused by a transmutation of time, or, more precise, that they were kept in bondage on the grounds of time? If they wanted to get off again, they had at least to understand better. That was the most general preposition to begin with. If they didn't, they could just as well forget everything else.

The humans and that ignorant bow, which called himself magic, but was in fact most ignorant, while the boys were full of good will at the least, and that girl showed indeed already glimpses of an adequate overall view, which he had expected of that bow the like.

As long as he didn't understand the set up he could screw and drive, hurry and strive as much as he wanted. There would be no other way out, if there were a way at all. They would bounce against that barrier like a fly on the windowpane. If they didn't find the proper gap everything would be in vain. They had fallen out of the time, so to speak and the great challenge was to get back in, so to speak.

They were stuck like the giant, and like the Professor, each in his or her segment apart by a glimpse of time, nobody could split.

10. A Terrible Discovery

“No arguments please! Not again, we had that already. Then let's part again, for heavens sake, although we just came together...”

Arundle looked upset when she said that. She grabbed her bow and Pooty the magical stone. “Let's have it a trial” he said and looked at Billy-Joe to have him join him.

Billy-Joe couldn't reject, although he would have liked to go with Arundle. He was used to that. On the other hand had Tibor only little space experience, while you couldn't rely on Pooty one hundred percent in case of emergency. He didn't have the nerve, no matter how hard he tried.

Billy-Joe remembered that awful experience, when the little possum got lost right in the middle of a time loop. Had he not picked him up by accident, the little thing would still travel on like a tiny satellite in all eternity.

The magical stone wanted actually to insist on a theoretical discourse until the last had understood what the matter was with the grounds of time. That was the reason why he did as if he accepted the majority's vote, although he was certain that the plan of the magic bow was bound to fail. Slipping through an interval of time would not work.

"We will see who is right. We have to sound the grounds of time, there is no other way", he grumbled and got ready for a time hop. Both groups agreed on meeting on the battlement of the Royal Castle of Laptopia. Where they wanted to see either the little Prince or General Armyless. From there, led only a short way to the secret laboratories, where the potion was produced and stored. At least Arundle hoped that this was still so. Of course you couldn't be sure of that either. There might still be scientists who were able to produce it, as long as petrification was a common disease.

At last, they could as well rely on the former laboratories of Professor Slyboots, where Grisella's study group then stored samples of the serum. There was no reason to consider that those samples had been thrown away in the meantime. While it could well be that Malicious Marduk goofed about those facilities, and had his wicked hands in the game. Nobody could be sure of that anyway.

While the years in Laptopia showed a tendency towards normalisation, and time did not elapse in a hurry like in the old days, the near past might not have yet passed entirely.

They were in desperate need of that serum. They had the idea of waking up that giant and bring him back to life, then find out about the secrets of the island and the peculiar whereabouts, the barrier and all that. So eager were they to learn what was going on, that they almost forgot about their professor, whom they suspected now to be caught in an interval of time, right here. With all such knowledge, they might succeed in finding her after all.

The giant might turn out to be a milestone on the way to success.

They started, and that was it, as they were back in no time. They looked rather stunned about while sitting in the green grass below that giant and rubbed their heads. Despite the helmets they wore, they bumped against that invisible barrier a couple of times while they tried here and there. Thus, they felt rather numb and didn't know what had happened to them.

"It's like I said", the magical stone murmured. He was somewhat numb either. "Won't work that way", he repeatedly reasoned.

Arundle and Pooty however were gone, and Billy-Joe was almost sure that they had made it the more time elapsed. He began to worry for a different reason when the night fell in and there still was no trace or sign of the travellers. Did they go lost? Pooty remembered his own accident, and imagined a similar fate for Arundle and Tibor.

From down here they could do nothing for them – just nothing - as long as the magical stone did not find a suitable gap. Provided, the magic bow indeed had managed to get through, but that seemed quite likely. Perhaps he had now trouble in getting back.

After they had recovered, they used the remaining daylight of looking for their Professor. Billy-Joe meant to remember now somewhat better and more precise where the voice had come from. He was almost sure that it came from the slot, somewhere half way down. There might be a junction or something.

The equipment was still there, and the suits as well. However the one he tried was too small for him, while the other was far too big for Pooty. "Thus, things equalize somehow" Pooty giggled, when they slowly let themselves down the slot.

It was dark outside meanwhile, but that didn't matter as it was dark inside anyway. Their headlights ascended enough light though. They looked in every crevice and took their time. They were not in a hurry. They could stand the heat although it was increasing the lower they went. Billy-Joe could feel it on his bare feet and arms the suit did not cover, while breathing didn't cause any trouble.

They found loads of niches and chambers and often thought to have found the junction, but the search ended without success – the Professor was not in there.

They might have come some fifty yards that way when Pooty started screaming. What was the matter? Was the rope broken? Had Pooty lost hold? Billy-Joe rushed down to the possum who

was a little further ahead, and found him in a niche hidden behind an overhanging rock, so he couldn't see his little friend at first despite the strong headlight. Only his voice he heard that guided him until he crawled around a sharp bent behind which another cave was hiding; and there he found Pooty waiting and waving with his little paws.

“This way please, its pretty tight though...”

As careful as he could, he crawled on. He still couldn't see Pooty properly, while he got hold with his knee where he could settle.

“Over there, look...” Pooty exclaimed excitedly: “Isn't that horrible?”

Billy-Joe tried to rise but was stopped by the low ceiling. He was lucky to wear a helmet. Pooty didn't mind the height as short as he was and jumped one quickly while waving the boy to follow. He pointed at a shallow recess in the solid stone that shone blank in the beam of the headlight, as if an eager servant had polished for years with cloth and beeswax.

Billy-Joe got closer and realized something so odd, he couldn't find words, when he looked right into the face of Penelope M'gamba.

It was the Professor, although quite different from the face he remembered as it was distorted by pain and horror – still it was her.

The body was all covered with that polished coating, and glued somehow with the back to the wall. Her mouth was opened in a soundless cry and the eyes were wide open, while the fingers stuck like claws up front. In short – that woman was an image of sheer horror.

At last, she was found, but at what price! Was she still alive, or did she exhale her soul with that last scream when her body became petrified?

Pooty banged like mad against the invincible coating, as he still meant her to be alive as well in her terrible prison, where she was surely destined to suffocate in the long run, if she hadn't done already. If there was no ventilation inside, she should be dead already because the coating looked impermeable like melted glass. It felt probably like the jade statues of Adrian Humpert's collection of Chinese artifacts, Billy-Joe had been only told, but had not yet seen with his own eyes.

Where did that funny idea come from, he wondered and didn't find an answer. While he thoughtfully stroked over the polished surface.

Pooty's idea might turn out to be realistic. If they managed to get through that coating, they might initiate the air circulation, if that would mean to revive the poor woman, was another question.

Had only Arundle be here – at best with that potion.

“Pooty, stop it, it's either too late or...” what he meant was clear. There might be another way of keeping that body alive, you couldn't see from outside. Under such a solid cover any living being would suffocate within minutes, if there was no other way of keeping alive. Penelope M'gamba was here enclosed for hours or even for days, and had to be dead anyway.

What voice did he hear then? Well, that was by now some hours ago, and since then nothing. There was little hope, if you looked at it that way. They could do nothing right now. A last glance, then Billy-Joe climbed up. There he might get further. There was no sense in knocking on solid rock.

Pooty followed reluctantly. He believed that the boy was strong enough to knock a hole into the coating. He didn't know that he overestimated the powers of the boy. They had to get hold of that serum that was the only chance they had.

When they got back to the surface, they could not see anything of Tibor, Arundle and the magic bow. “Pooty, why don't you try and find out about their whereabouts? Explain to him the affair and make sure he understands. It's a matter of death or life. We need that damned serum right away. Otherwise we couldn't help it, I'm afraid...”

Billy-Joe didn't know how right he was. Not only the Professor had been transformed into stone, the whole island was somehow taken out of the flow of time, as if a charm caused the time to freeze and thicken into an insurmountable cover, no might of this world be able to overcome.

Pooty's pride was challenged. He once broke into the secret chambers of that laboratory in the castle of Laptopia in order to steal the precious liquid. Once more, the life and health of a human friend were demanding his action. How much did he miss Walter now? The brave possum sighed and started looking for the magical stone in order to explain the matter. He explained their findings and what happened as best he could.

The magical stone listened patiently. A good sign though, Pooty reckoned, as he didn't offer any real news to the stone,

beside the fact that they had found the missing Professor at last, who might become rescued by means of the mysterious serum from Laptopia.

What Pooty didn't know, and what he didn't take into account of his considerations – and might not have done anyway, even if he had thought of, was found in the insurmountable problem that they were caught over here, and that they were not allowed to offend the first universal law of this world.

No one was allowed to alter the past – under no circumstances, even more, when means and forces from the future were employed. A circumstance, not always considered sufficiently by scientists and investigators on the verge of a borderline case, like the one in question right here.

On the other hand, the phenomenon Pooty referred to was in itself already offending this first law, no matter whether he was aware of such fact. Was it – (under such conditions after all) - not justified, to overcome the breach by another breach, and expunge and expurgate it that way?

With such heavy problems the magical stone had to bother, while Pooty kept on talking. An island in the sea of time, where the time stood still, and formed a barrier of steadfastness was prohibited - as to the opinion of the magical stone. “This is a clear offence of the first of all laws and cannot be tolerated” was his distinct and unquestionable opinion.

There was no such case known as long as the flow of time was in due course, and governed the physical world. Such an influence had to come from outside, from a sphere beyond the physical world. Such an intervention harmed the insurmountable law of the universe in an unacceptable manner. Compared to that the regulation of the damage caused by such breach – and be it by external means – would be a minor and neglectable offence; - an offence that would most likely be tolerated by the High Commissioner after all.

Even if the case were brought before an appropriate intergalactic tribunal, it would eventually be turned down. However, this was not very likely, for all the reasons that were just mentioned.

Worst case would be to take the risk, the stone summoned somewhat kinky in a victorious air. He'd risk his licence after all, and if he lost that he could forget about sorcery.

His licence by now stood on wobbly grounds already, he said, “as licences disappear in the flow of time like the water oozes

away in the desert, since humans deal less and lesser with magic, and don't care about the possibilities in the twilight between day and dream."

Magical stones were outdated and overdue models, so to speak. He risked disappearing from the surface of the Earth. Therefore, he couldn't take any risk, and had to think twice what he did and were he had his powers flow.

11. In the Maze of Time

Arundle and Tibor did not succeed. Things went wrong just as the magical stone had predicted. The magic bow went astray in the labyrinth of time. Instead of getting free from the prison that enclosed the island from all sides, he led himself and his companions still deeper into the strange dimension that opened beyond human imagination.

Hadn't he fastened a red thread – like Ariadne – and the area where they departed, he could guide himself back, they wouldn't have had a chance to come back to the surface of reality.

It was like looking into an endless row of mirrors, where they saw nothing but their own portrait. Thousands of images posing in all kinds of postures shone up vaguely like a wide lively bunch their past and future lives revealed.

They didn't recognize themselves – be it that they had forgotten their own past or that they didn't expect the future outlook. Some images were connected with an indescribable shyness. Thus, they had to turn their eyes away. They didn't dare to look back again but were attracted and forced at the same time to do so. Whether they closed their eyes or kept them open, those images remained and could not be banned. They were everywhere, like a second skin – they somehow belonged to them and did in fact, as they were part of them.

Lucky so, they didn't see the others images and didn't get what she or he learned. That would have been worse. Such, each was busy with herself or himself, while drowning in the whirls of timelessness, such icy labyrinth that was governing the outer sphere.

Over the island, a crystal harness of pure ice-like substance closed all in. Was it the same matter they had discovered before?

“It consists of congealed time” the magic bow let them know. He pushed for an outbreak. Those human children didn’t have an idea what happened to them, as they lacked of any sense of time, and didn’t notice what was going on outside of their prison.

The task was not a easy one they had to perform. Well. In fact, everything was up to him at last. The red thread had been fixed on the statue of that giant. Hand over hand he had now to crawl backwards, while he was not allowed to turn and see where to set the feet, so to speak, while his payload was still busy wondering about such faint images, they were leaving behind now. A strange yearning came then over them, and made them unwilling to follow the draught. Each image got hold of them, and didn’t want to let loose again. Most of all those with dubious contents were challenging, and were able to develop an almost insurmountable strong attraction, by teasing with glamorous promises of unspeakable joy.

Without the power of the magic bow, who tried as hard as he could, to get on and be it only inch-wise, nothing had happened, and that had been the worst of all. Neither Tibor nor Arundle noticed that they were in a similar situation as was the petrified giant, although their prison was shifted in time. Therefore they couldn’t see Billy-Joe and Pooty, and couldn’t be seen by them likewise, as they dwelt in a parallel world.

They were still fighting – well; in fact, the magic bow was fighting for them, because he was not attracted by odd images any more, most likely because he was immune against the attractions of time after a never ending life. He had experienced everything, and was not curious any more, because he knew what was coming, not in detail, but in general. He could figure out what lay ahead, perhaps not in detail, but in general. There weren’t too many choices, though. What ever was coming up he was prepared. The only real surprise resulted from the arguments he had with the magical stone. That was why he enjoyed such that much, and felt the charm of former days when still young.

He envied the children for their innocence and lack of experience – how they enjoyed the adventure of life – life for its own sake. Long, long ago while time passed by and rushed on, and couldn’t be delayed or even stopped – as happened right now for unknown reasons.

The return turned out to be complicated, while they couldn't escape either. Thus, the magic bow calculated how long they needed, if they went on like that, and wondered.

Tibor and Arundle were busy with their multiple images, and did not listen to any explanation from his side. He was not any more talking about seconds or minutes, but of hours and days.

"All in all some ninety hours, I'd reckon – some thirty seconds per take, roughly" the magic bow reasoned. "This is in no way a worst case prediction, because if we don't take to our heels right away, we will need four days as a minimum, is that clear to you? I thought you were in a hurry with that serum. Besides, what will Billy-Joe think of you?"

Thus, the magic bow spoke as persuasive as he could. He was sure that the magical stone didn't find a loophole either, and was likewise trapped inside of that damn barrier. He figured however, that Billy-Joe and Pooty had by then solid grounds under their feet again, and sure enough, the magical stone had not been seduced by that maze the barrier presented for those who found a suitable gap, as he had.

Therefore, he was very upset, but not yet desperate. He had succeeded in so much more than his competitor. He did consider what happened then, because he thought of the thread, or should he better say string? While a string was in fact, the likely connection between the worlds they had to pass.

After all he wanted to show his opponent the swift elegance and the easiness of his own approach, while the other lick his wounds in defeat. Of course, he did know how easy it was to run astray or to get lost in between the gaps all over. You might get lost in those chasms called eternity, and didn't in fact mean anything else but a vast jungle without beginning or end. Where you could easily goof about in all eternity and no rescue was likely.

When they returned to the surface after days, back on the island, they didn't find a trace of Billy-Joe and Pooty, and none of the magical stone either.

Tibor investigated the site carefully. As a learnt scout, he noticed soon that someone had worked on that vent, who didn't even try to erase the traces.

What had happened? Where were Billy-Joe and Pooty gone - together with the magical stone they employed? The traces he found, pointed to a swift, if not a hasty start.

12. A Miraculous Rescue

Billy-Joe and Pooty urged the magical stone to give the flight another trial; they had a much better reason now. The magical stone accepted, and decided therefore to mobilize his last resorts, and to run a high risk, even if it would cost his permit, as he was forced to act on his own.

“Is it not a fact, that we have to operate under the most difficult circumstances without support, while making decisions we cannot overlook?” he mused, while preparing another trial to overcome the barrier of the congealed time. While he did so, he wondered if he should not take into account another possibility - after all, the whole affair was quite questionable and more than strange.

What ever they did, they had to have an eye on that fundamental law they were - under no circumstances -allowed to offend.

In that potion, which they were supposed to steal, anti-matter was dissolved, by means of which the congealed time would be liquidized again – such the magical stone thought to have understood so far, while matter and anti-matter usually ate up each other.

They had now to deal with a very different – if not an opposite phenomenon, because the time itself congealed. Wherever this happened, the continuum of space and time was distorted and demanded immediate repair.

Who ever came about such an average, and understood what it meant, was obliged to implement immediate action, while a report of the damage had to be forwarded in duplicate to the Advisor’s Office at the High Council.

The trouble they were experiencing, pointed towards such damage, the magical stone concluded. This was however but only one likely option. If he was right, the measures he had in mind were appropriate and adequate, and were justified. His license would not be endangered, no matter where his action led.

The serum in question belonged without doubt into the future. To be precise – into the century after next, and had not to trouble the presence, however, it had to be employed, because the

disclosure in the continuum of time and space could not be stuffed otherwise. The fact, that the leak itself was the initial violation of the First Universal Law, was most important, though, because it asked for exceptional answers.

The magicians' code did not allow leaving things of such gravity alone. The code clearly defined, when a rescue action had to be taken, and when it had to be cut off.

Thus, he fell between two chairs at once. If he stuck to the regulations, the First Universal Law of the physical world would be offended, that said that you should not employ future gimmicks. On the other hand - if he did nothing, he would risk the ruin of the present world, and then there was no future.

Future as such wouldn't exist any more, if that leak was spreading unhindered, that was a fact either. It would overwhelm the entire time-space continuum. Time would escape like water, and then freeze like water in the cold as well, - then would cover the globe with an invincible coating, and then the whole solar system, and from there, on and on infinitively in a never-ending process until all life had come to an end.

Only after all life had been destroyed ultimately, peace would settle – but what a peace – it would be the unimaginable tranquillity of death, and had nothing to do with the condition of peace as was known in the world of the living.

The logical dilemma of the magical stone founded in the fact that he knew about the future. Therefore, he could come to the only logical conclusion that his intervention had occurred, as there would be no future, otherwise.

What, if he made a mistake – if he interpreted the parameters wrongly, and overestimated his own part – while others might work elsewhere? Perhaps even that bow!

The uncertainty drove him almost crazy. He had to come to a decision, nevertheless and right away!

He blamed himself of cowardice. What did his ridiculous license mean compared to the dimension of endangerment? Was it not his duty to do everything he could to keep the living alive and prevent them of dying?

His own being as a stone was after all not so bad. The life he would have to run without license would be somewhat boring after all.

Such were the evil musings of a distorted mind. In fact, nobody wanted to get hold of his license. As long as he acted as righteously as he could, he would stay on safe grounds.

If he acted otherwise, he might risk more. What, if he didn't interfere, if his negligence led to the likely consequences and the leak remained undiscovered, and was spreading unnoticed?

Could he not fail about the future? What made him so sure? He could be mistaken as well. Just as they had been mistaken, when they began to search for their Professor.

Thus he swaggered back and forth, he reconsidered every step and action they had taken, and all the likely consequences inherent.

At last, he had an idea, how he could get out of such a dilemma. They had to produce the serum by themselves, instead of stealing it in the future. That would solve all of their troubles – well, not all, but some!

In that potion anti-matter was dissolved by means of which you were able to liquidize the congealed time. The magical stone had to advertise such an invention for a serum against petrification.

He was of course allowed only the common assistance in giving hints as far as the direction was concerned such a research should follow, nevertheless, as well as the one or the other facility, which was common at present but was not used that way. Everything that belonged to the presence was allowed.

Were the friends who were stuck on the mysterious island at all able of such an invention? They could not look for help from outside. Nobody would come in, as long as that barrier was there, they somehow had mastered without knowing how or why.

First, his disciples had to have the idea as such and had to come together again, and that was not easy at all, but would turn out to be the greatest challenge.

Tibor and Arundle with their magic bow had missed the presence by a wink of the eye. They had remained too long in that "land of illusion" amidst the mirror cabinet that fascinated Arundle and Tibor likewise.

The fathom that had been fitted at the head of the giant had gone somehow, or had been torn by entering the tunnel. Thus, the magic bow climbed hand over hand out of the nothingness. The loose end of the thread still fluttered in the wind he noticed when they finally arrived on the surface. That was it and there was nothing more.

Because of the accident, Arundle and Tibor did not meet their friends when they returned. They were just arguing with the magical stone about the subject when they were shifted in

transmission, and that was why they did not meet Pooty and Billy-Joe, who were there, but not on the same level. Thus, they ran about as if shadows, quite similar to that ass with the carrot in front of its nose, which never succeeded in getting it.

Billy-Joe delivered a brilliant idea just at that same instant, when they arrived, and was enthusiastic about it as soon as he realized the impact. He didn't mind the information of the magical stone that the voyage to Laptopia was destined to fail most likely.

"We are going to invent that serum by ourselves. I already do have an idea how to proceed. I think I know now what that potion consists of. Let only Arundle be back, and then we can start right away", he exclaimed a bit too merry, Pooty reckoned. While he liked the fact that Billy-Joe didn't give in, but intended to fight, and didn't mind the negative outlook the magical bow presented.

For Arundle and Tibor however, Billy-Joe was waiting in vain. "They won't be standing about somewhere petrified", Pooty asked himself. However, the friends remained invisible to each other, while they began to somehow feel their 'ought-to-be-presence'.

Arundle and Tibor lay ahead a tenth of a second. This fact set them into an advantageous position, as they could turn their thoughts easier backwards, while the others had difficulties in doing so the other way round.

The magical stone contacted the magic bow on a higher level, and was able to familiarize him with his plans and intentions. He made sure the magic bow supported him. The latter was all too willing to do so. He liked inventions, just as Arundle did. That was one reason why they still were together, no matter how precarious the situation was.

The magical stone was able to convey the dilemma that limited their radius of action; and while he did, he came about with a scientific set-up that hit Billy-Joe like a flash of lightning, coming out of nothing. He soon found the access to their missing Professor likewise - the passage was now all too clear and didn't need special charms for discovery. No whisper from the future was necessary. Fact was however, that the access to the future was much harder to obtain than the passage to the past, no matter if you dealt with a very small access only, as was the case here.

In spite of the tricky details, Arundle and Tibor realized at once, what the clock had stricken, when they stood in front of the petrified Professor as well.

The equipment left from Billy-Joe's rescue was still ready and seemed to be waiting for them to descend. They had no chance of breaking out, they realized, while the helping serum was out of reach behind that devilish barrier, no matter how sweet the images were the wanderers came about in that maze-like labyrinth between the layers of time.

This was all ill-will, plain 'gaga' and illusion, bound to ruin character and guts, and intended to have them disappear in the gaps such dislocations formed.

Thus, the idea of creating their serum themselves got hold as well, and affected the unseen likewise. With joint efforts, those slyboots would come about that serum. The magical stone and the magic bow guided their disciples at best they could, each on a singular passage but with a joint purpose.

First, they all had to understand. That was the crucial hurdle on the racing course towards freedom and recovery. "Separate but equal" was the motto.

Great inventions didn't go along with that 'Trial and Error'-Method, as was common for centuries nevertheless. Great inventions required a vivid brain and tremendous courage, while loosing the ground under your feet, when stepping out into the nowhere-land of the not-yet-been.

Is it perhaps always like that? People have to get an idea of a matter before they start searching for approaches to get hold of the unknown. The petrified Professor was perhaps the last hint in that case, which you required to go on thinking and even get started with the research for the Anti-Matter-Serum.

While Billy-Joe was more or less on his own as far as the reflective side of his intentions was concerned, Arundle and Tibor formed a sworn in team, fitting perfectly together, and stimulating each other to the highest esteem. Therefore, they not only were ahead by one tenth of a second but also creative-wise.

Under the open sky a laboratory became alive out of naught and nothingness that had but one parallel. Everything you could get out of the (still filled) funds of the magic bow was employed, while Billy-Joe did likewise with the magical stone.

To be precise – two laboratories emerged separated by one tenth of a second. The magical stone and the magic bow did their best to equip their party as best they could, with everything that modern science had to offer. While the ideas had to come from the researchers, and lead to remarkable differences - even more, when the scholars began to transform their findings into reality.

The construction of the particle accelerator turned out to be most difficult - not only, because the anti-matter-particles were extremely rare. They had to be wandering beings, accidentally expatriated from the other sphere, and were supposed to fall apart soon, and therefore had to be caught exactly in that part of a second, when they fell apart and extinguished by amalgamating with a positive counter-particle.

Such behaviour turned out to be the greatest obstacle and seemed unsolvable.

What substance could such a device be made of? Any matter would by definition react with the anti-matter, it couldn't be different. Therefore, matter did not suit the purpose. What else was there? Were there other forms of material existence? Matter formed the basis of this world; there was no doubt about it. However, matter was also available in a different aggregate state, so to speak – that is in energetic form.

Up to now physics dealt with matter by categorizing it into elements that could be separated and put in order to form specific substances. However the further you went investigating split particles the further you got away from a defined substance. Thus, you ended up nowhere while the latest findings fled like mist in the morning sun.

The hypothesis that matter was just another form of energy soon conquered the institutions concerned. Everybody started speaking of the misty phenomenology of matter – that is energy, but not as energy as such, but as a specific form of matter.

You could compare such aggregate states with water and ice on the one hand or water and steam on the other, to get an idea of what energy was in relation to matter. The difference between such states was a question of temperature.

If you wanted to catch a particle – let's say an anti-matter-particle, then you had to force such particles to swim in a transformed solution of matter, that is in pure energy, as they were separated there from substantial matter and could not disappear by reacting.

(As soon as particles transform into the state of energy they disappear.)

The next step follows necessarily out of the previous one, i.e. to merge anti-matter in a kind of soup – a very hot liquid substance.

Looking for the adequate solution took great effort and needed as much attention as the segregation and splitting up of particles in question.

By day and by night the friends experimented and figured on two levels. What ever the outcome was, it became translated as best as the individuals could, into the other state of being on the other scale of time, next to the own one. The other team either felt its findings confirmed or received new impulses that way. In the end, only the joint success would count and hopefully triumph.

The outcome in the end was a kind of lightning conductor, that is to be more precise a lightning attractor, as the aim was to gather as much energy as possible that way. The apparatus should be able to attract and then direct the immense amount of energy, which is set free in thunderstorms.

Only for a very limited period of time it was possible to cook the "Anti-Matter-Soup" (AMS). If you were able to keep the set-free level of energy for a limited period of time, (a very long time for AMS-particles) then you could deduct enough of these particles and bind them in the soup. If you succeeded - all you needed was to guide the flow of such soup and hope that it contained enough Anti-Matter.

The serum, won such way, had to be applied to the patient by an injection, - a tricky and not at all harmless, but in fact a dangerous procedure. The petrified patient became connected with the "Lightning Attractor" in a very special manner, and then you had to wait for the appropriate thunderstorm, of course. For now, such was the procedure, while the inventors hoped to improve to a less difficult state.

You couldn't predict what would happen, when the thunderstorm came. A lightning stroke of some thousand mega-Volt could easily end deadly. Besides, nobody knew how the positive matter of the body would react with the negative input. In order to keep the risk as low as possible Billy-Joe built a strong filter to minimize the risk of uncontrolled flow of electricity for the Professor, while the giant would meet the full load at first. The way he reacted would guide the further process when their Professor was due. If they failed with the giant, they would be able to rehearse the procedure, before risking their Professor's life as well. Surely, a somewhat cruel way of thinking, but what could it be helped, such where the facts after all.

Arundle and Tibor had mused about the ethical questions involved. Finally, they had come to the previously mentioned solution, as there was no other.

They had to wait now – wait and see for the appropriate weather, that is, a hefty thunderstorm to be stuck over the island, with proper thunder and lightning, and all that.

The tension increased, while they kept waiting. They knew - the primordial powers of nature couldn't really be tamed. Their apparatuses were man-made - thus vulnerable and not perfect at all. However, that was all they had to offer. The little had to suffice its purpose.

Much easier had those injections been over there in Laptopia. A little rubbing, a sound sting – and everything was over. A lot of research work had to be done to get that far. Those drifting anti-matter-particles in the energy soup had to come under control and had to be kept somehow in a durable state. That might easily take a hundred years until the potion was as ready as had been in Laptopia when they needed it for the de-petrification of their mates.

The side effects of such progress were tremendous, Arundle knew by experience, because electronic smog darkened the sky of the Laptopian future, and the land suffered under decay, that could only be stopped by enormous efforts – if at all.

'Did they now promote such development? Were their efforts the beginning of the upcoming decline? It almost looked like that. Still – what she and her friends did, had to be done,' Arundle kept musing while waiting for their local little 'Big Bang'.

The crack and the leakage they experienced had its cause and offspring right here on that mysterious island, while it extended into space and time and ruffled the continuum. That was why they fitted well in with their invention, which had to be done right here and now, to strengthen the right side.

The serum served, while still inadequately made up, as a clear means of fighting the leakages and cracks that would soon harm all organic life on Earth, while favouring an elite of half-bred artifacts.

A hefty flash of lightning interrupted Arundle's musings. The thunderstorm was here. Tibor's hands hushed about the improvised keyboard. He pulled the trigger at the right time, so to speak. With a terrible crack, the flash hit the ground. The giant did a move. Was it by force of the energy? Was he back to life? On

the screen opposite the site their Professor was captured, you could hear a voice screaming.

While Arundle rushed forward, she noticed Billy-Joe appearing from a cloud of fog. He was sitting at a keyboard, almost on Tibor's lap. Time had synchronized – the friends were united again.

Together they helped their Professor out of the tunnel, who still was stiff, because of the lengthy stay in the state of petrification, while this was not necessarily the cause of her trouble climbing up to the surface on a thin rope.

In order to protect the organic fabric all tools like ladders and bars had been removed to prevent the uncontrolled flow of electricity, which might have induced a volcanic outbreak at last.

The young researchers had thought of everything, and their clever overall view was now at best rewarded. Their joy was indescribable when they saw their Professor climbing off the abyss.

They hugged and joined jubilant, and could hardly believe in such wonderful rescue. Even the competing magicians overcame their own nature and honestly enjoyed meeting again on that joint level, where they could go on arguing right away.

The magical stone had the upper hand, as he had been in the proper tense with Billy-Joe and Pooty, while Tibor and Arundle got stuck with the magic bow in the wrong interval, just one tiny tick but that had been enough.

The flash of lightning had cured that as well. However, what was the matter with the giant? Nobody had thought of him, while they were all so excited. There you could see him stepping by in the sudden shower that splattered down again. Tibor hurried to cut off the electrical wirings. They had served their purpose. They were now able in principal to catch anti-matter-particles and guide them on purposely.

The rain alone could not have been responsible for the petrification. That was quite obvious because of the hefty shower that went down without doing any harm to them. The giant danced clumsily. He yelled and laughed of fun like a little child about the newly won liberty.

Penelope M'gamba need not to be asked twice and followed his invitation. Her merry laughter infested the others as well to join her.

Out of mind, they kept on dancing in the rain, regardless of flash and thunder. The magic bow slang a pair of thin tentacles

around the magical stone and waved him off the ground elegantly. The over-hanging edge of the crater offered a certain degree of protection against the nature's fierce forces, the magical stone noticed. Therefore, he gave in and let it be.

Tibor had been able to safeguard the precious equipment together with Billy-Joe, who lent him a helping hand. They both knew how valuable the invention was.

While they were still dancing, the temperature declined rapidly. The island was changing - the adventurers noticed after a while. They didn't notice the signs at first because of their feelings.

Penelope and the giant were dancing cheek to cheek, hardly touching the ground any more. Light-footed, almost like Sublimations, they followed spherical tunes that were inaudible to the others. Sheer harmony guided their movements and figures, as if that was the most obvious matter of course; thus, expressing more than fun and joy of being freed. A higher happiness conquered their hearts, despite the never-ending rain still splashing down, while the thunder rolled away in the distance, and flashes still but only seldom enlightened the horizon.

When the first ice crystals got stuck on the green leaves of the meadow and then started conquering the green field the dancers began to awake, and the magical stone indicated to the magic bow that the way was free now. At best, they first returned to the School of Inbetween to restore and recover, therefore they arranged a date there instead of risking a cold over here.

They carefully put down the position of that island and altered their maps accordingly. Penelope M'gamba wanted to find it back later on. "I can't explain in one or two words, why" she said to Arundle when she noticed a questioning gaze from the girl. Arundle nodded full of understanding.

"Zinfandor – that was the giant's name – we will take with us of course", she added and looked caring up to the rosy cheeks amidst the wild bush of beard, wherein hardly more than the nose stood up.

13. The Leak

There were no objections against that plan. The little group arranged themselves anew, and took off right away. However, they experienced a bitter discouragement. Instead of landing on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, the magic transports went astray, and goofed about in circles. There was still no hole in the barrier around the island. Their enthusiastic expectations were badly disappointed. Quite the opposite was the case. The volcano started grumbling, most likely woken up by the strong flashes of lightning, and fits of steam and liquid glowing matter came out of hidden clefts.

If they didn't care to get out of the way, they might be captured by a stream of lava at last, and then there was nothing left to rescue them. Hurry was compulsory. Zinfandor remembered the wreck of a yacht on the cliffs of the outer coast. They should be able to get it back into the water and have it swim, he suggested. "At least we should give it a trial" he said when he saw the doubtful faces of his comrades, while he was leading the group. They rushed on as quickly as possible. They left the edge of the crater behind and climbed over the cliffs where only seabirds dwelled.

"Ah, voilà, it is still there" Zinfandor Leblanc (this was his full name) exclaimed.

The wreck was a wreck indeed. It looked horrible. The rump was torn open by a huge leak, and the sea had moved the boat high up the reef. How could they get it down from there, if they managed to close the leak?

"First we tie a sail over the leak", Zinfandor suggested. He seemed to know what he was talking. He was not only huge by appearance but also an able and strong sailor.

They were in a hurry. Hefty Earthquakes made the ground tremble. Everywhere new clefts appeared from which grey dust rose into the sky, or misty fountains were puffing with giant clouds of smoke out of imaginary pipes.

The tent in which they had spent the night on the cape before they departed into the unknown, now served a better and more vivid purpose. It was made for space travel and waterproof, and could not be destroyed by anything. They covered the leak with it, and in a joint effort, they managed to get the boat off the cliff and back into the deep water, while Zinfandor Leblanc did the main job. They stored their property in the cabin, where they even found a small stock of tins, they noticed while examining the lockers.

While back in deeper waters the flood threatened to through them back ashore, therefore Zinfandor hoisted the sail and steered the boat offshore as good as he could. Thus, they overcame the surf and got clear of that haunted island at last.

The steady wind from Southwest turned out to be their rescue, because for the wind the energetic barrier did not count. No magic forces could hinder the wind from blowing. The movements of the air was steered on a higher level of creation, if it is called magic what makes the world go round. A daily miracle was it that caused the turning of the globe.

Zinfandor Leblanc turned out to be an able sailor. Without many words, he laid his plans open. The return to the African mainland was almost impossible – not by means of the wind power. As to his calculations, they were some three hundred miles away from the continent. For a motor ship that could be done in a day's cruise, even in the heavy sea they experienced, but not for a yacht without fuel. The small tanks on both starboard and portside were all empty, so they had to rely on wind craft.

Zinfandor Leblanc pointed East into the vast and empty ocean ahead and nodded: "That is our way", he said firmly and no one objected. If they went on like that running ahead before the wind, they could easily make half the distance to the mainland daily, Zinfandor went on. His companions were not quite sure if they understood what this meant.

They could make it to Australia in two or three weeks, provided, the boat didn't take too much water, and the sail over the leak did its job – and most important – the weather remained like now – an almost more than unlikely circumstance during the time of the year in this part of the world.

Hard on the wind they could try for Madagascar. However, that was not advisable because of the leak sail. Besides, they didn't have the manpower to do such a difficult service in the long run. Thus, it was very likely that they missed Madagascar, and that meant they had to cruise back against the wind, an almost impossible task.

"We cannot do otherwise", Penelope M'gamba explained. She understood Zinfandor's Creole Pidgin English best. "Pas possible" the latter confirmed by hammering with his mighty fist on the map. "No way back, non, non" he grumbled and shook his mighty head.

Nobody objected. They would go on a lengthier turn, so what? As long as they got clear of that damn barrier, they would

accept almost everything. This barrier had withstood all their efforts of escape. However, this night was different. By calculations of their Captain, they had done some two hundred nautical miles up to now, without touching this mysterious boundary.

The cruise passed by without a hitch, if you didn't mind the continuous pumping, that exhausted them over the limits. As long as they were speeding that way, they had no choice. The swell pressed the water inside.

In the morning of the second day, the exhausted Skipper discovered an island on the horizon. The barrier seemed overcome; nobody had it in mind any more. They were not able to grab a clear thought anyway, as exhausted as they all were. Those who did not pump for their lives lay in one of the two berths in dead-like slumber.

Leblanc decided to go ashore. They might be able to fix the sail over the leak more properly. The sea had quietened down considerably and they were gently swaying along with the swell. The wind from astern still pressed the bow deep under the surface into the waves, and the water flooded inside at the edges of the sail over the leak. With less press they were still fast, that was good in a way, but basically didn't change the situation. They were still pumping like mad, one at a time, and only the strongest could go on for more than twenty minutes. Arundle and Pooty shared their part but that didn't help much either.

"Go on pumping if you want to stay alive" Pooty gasped, while jumping up and down, assisting his mate Arundle whose turn it was. He had just checked the level in the bilge, and was not at all happy with what the metre said. Arundle's back was aching and her palms were full of blisters.

Lucky though, the island proved to be accessible. The surf rolled gently up a splendid marina nobody cared however. By means of the tide, they should be able to set the boat on solid grounds in order to fix the carcass as good as they could with the means that were available.

As soon as the boat lay on the good side, they started pulling off any piece of wood and other material from the decks. Zinfandor Leblanc turned out to be a gifted craftsman and carpenter. He tinkered a solid frame for the sail over the leak that could be fixed tight with the surrounding wood.

The other crewmembers meanwhile started cooking tare and cloth to a veritable substance well able to stuff the hidden

openings. The sail over the leak had otherwise done a good job so far. In addition, Leblanc now replaced the vertical frame underneath, thus gave the body more stability.

He'd at best had some additional planks fitted as well, but the rising tide didn't allow that. The boat erected inch by inch, water spilled about the hardly hardened tare, that should endure hopefully, and the boat started swimming again.

After a few hours, they could go on. Pooty and Billy-Joe were a working team and had harvested a sack full of coconuts. The only food the shallow island had to offer. Pooty climbed up the slim trees and picked the nuts Billy-Joe had then only to collect.

They almost missed the way back when the flood returned. They had to swim in the ice-cold water back to the boat whose bow was heading into the wind. They crawled aboard just before the wind got hold of the sail, and made them cruise out of the vicinity of the island.

Pooty went downstairs and came back with good news. The sail over the leak set close and fast and no water came inside, although the water gurgled frighteningly outside.

The Skipper had the foresail hoisted for the first time to give it a trial. Once more, he checked with the space travellers about the fabric of the sail over the leak. However, they guaranteed its absolute endurance. "It is shock -, tear -, and waterproof" Arundle confirmed when asked by Penelope, just to be sure.

Meanwhile the peculiar couple understood each other quite well, and spoke a funny mixture of all kinds of idioms, dialects and languages, while the basis was a kind of French Creole, Zinfandor Leblanc's mother tongue most likely.

Tibor turned out to be a talented midshipman. He was interested in everything, enjoyed taking the rudder or bending over the maps for the course. He could handle the sextant just like that; therefore, the Skipper trusted him and had him take over the morning watch, in order to get some sleep as well, while he was on deck almost twenty hours a day. Because of his size, he claimed the most part of the cabin while resting; that was why the passengers joined the assistant Skipper on deck, as long as Zinfandor was sleeping. The weather was fine so they decided to have him sleep on.

Sleeping was by now the most favourite occupation on board after the merciless strain at the pump. However, the Somniors were not at all happy with what they experienced while heading

homewards. The Isle of Wisdom-tooth lay hidden under a misty layer they could not get through.

Penelope tried her Animator's way and failed as well. "The barrier is still holding on us, I'm afraid. We haven't made it yet", she thoughtfully said.

Tibor and Billy-Joe had more important things in mind. "Our course is East-North-East one quarter East. This is how the Skipper wants it. You can of course refer to degrees and minutes as well, but that is less romantic, I'd say." Billy-Joe nodded his eyes fixed to the compass needle that was trembling but kept the line.

The air was cold and a steady wind came from astern. The sun occasionally came through the clouds and made them feel a little more comfortable here on deck.

Thus, they rushed on day and night. Soon the Australian coast should show up somewhere on starboard, or straight ahead, if their calculations were right. The Skipper only shrugged when asked, and pointed vaguely ahead.

"West coast no use, mon Dieu, long march through desert, only sand and solitude. Moi et madam pas de passort - lot of explanation, parceque sans passport, n'est-ce pas? Riens des hommes ou transport. Boat now fine, we better go on, all right? "

Penelope M'gamba was the only one who knew the position of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth by heart. She was still not willing to publish it right here and now. They had to round the continent first anyway. "Somewhere East of Sydney it is, but that you all know."

Was it the position Zinfandor was after? Arundle still felt resentments; no matter how deep their Professor was in love.

Fact was that the griffins in flight could of course not carry any documents with them. Still, they all were now castaways after all, and would not be asked for proper documents when begging for first aid and further support.

"Seulement one more semaine", the Skipper pleaded. "What's a tiny week after all we have behind us, n'est ce pas?"

"To me it looks as if we have more to go than we have done so far" Arundle objected and Tibor nodded as well as Billy-Joe who didn't trust that man either. In a way, the Skipper was just too perfect, and in another way, not perfect at all, but quite the opposite.

"Travelling through the whole continent is no fun" Penelope M'gamba objected. "Depends on the means of transport" was Billy-Joe's reply. The Professor didn't know the answers to many

questions she would have to answer. Therefore, she favoured her mates' recommendation, well knowing the risk and hardship cruising on with only half a sack full of coconuts and some old tins, and very little water on board.

The least they had to do was mentioning their target, without being too precise. Half-hearted the others gave in after a while. The Skipper was happy, they heard him sing an old shanty while steering the boat a little further to the North to win the upper coastline.

The yacht had proven its qualities. They had been lucky with the weather so far. Unfortunately, they didn't have a radio to learn more about the outside world. On shore, they could have called at home and let the Headmistress know, who was by now in grief of course. Their magical means still didn't work.

Outside on the ocean they were all alone, and had to care for everything, first of all for the weather. Still, the youngsters went in on the adventure, and began to like the idea. They had overcome by now the strain of the start up and felt the thrill of reaching home on their own by scarcely other means than the power of the wind and their guts.

Three more days elapsed. They kept on sailing. Their bruised hands heeled and their backs finished aching. The main question was now drinking water and sufficient food.

"We will have to prolong things a little further, though" Pooty recommended.

"It might be raining soon. So close under land the air is warming up" the Skipper announced. The wind was calming down indeed and when the night came it stopped at all. That night when all lay sound asleep Zinfandor noticed the change of the weather. Fortunately, the wind woke up with the rising sun so they went on luffing in order to gain the rougher winds of the free ocean. The swell rolled heftier – a little more than usual, and occasionally you could see a little foamy crown topping the waves. Still the boat roamed on swift and elegant as long as the Skipper did his job. When he failed, a breaker gushed over the fore ship and the pumping had to start all over again.

Tibor took the rudder by noon, while everything seemed to be in order, so far, and the Skipper lay down for a nap. It was a sheer wonder how little sleep that man needed. Penelope was scared about his health meanwhile, and cared that he got a proper meal once a day, while the others gave up eating for days.

“Such a big man needs a little extra” she whispered uneasy. Arundle thought about that rescue package inside of the invisible quiver of her magic bow, they would have it before they died of starvation.

“We are getting along, don’t you worry”, she therefore said shrugging. Nobody minded the appetite of the Skipper. In fact, they were all thankful because they would definitely not have come that far without him, but would be lost in the icy desert somewhere deep down South.

At first Tibor didn’t want to accept the fact that he didn’t like the weather at all. There was still no cloud in the sky, however sudden gusts and an unexplainable unrest dominated the scene. Just as he decided to wake up the Skipper, he saw his head ascending from the poop. Zinfandor had noticed the change as well.

A short gaze up to the sky did suffice – another to the distant shore on starboard. Grumbling he bent over the map. You could see how fierce he was figuring. Questioning fearful gazes from the passengers didn’t make him calm down. Only Tibor stood his man and held the rudder firm as well as he could with those moody winds. The gusts increased from minute to minute while changing their directions. No steady blow from the South any more – Tibor had the sheets ropes manned and waited for the Skipper’s order to get the sail down. The main sail was almost useless and of danger to boat and crew. The foresail alone might serve a better purpose, though.

Should they try, and head for the land? There was something in it but also against, and that counted harder. If they didn’t manage before the gale hit them, they’d be done for sure. They might be better off staying free of the land, and have a drag anchor out riding through the turmoil as best they could, and might have a little chance to survive.

A black wall got closer from the North with tremendous speed. The clear wide horizon darkened from one instant to the next. They didn’t have any choice now. The utmost hurry was due. Zinfandor and Tibor searched the bow locker and had the anchor cordage ready. Instead of the anchor, they tied all kinds of floatable stuff together and fitted it to the chain-cable. Their lives depended on the quality of the job. Soon life would be in danger, so to speak. The drag anchor would soon be all they had to stabilize them in the gale’s turmoil.

As it was whenever warm subtropical air met arctic jet streams, nature's horrid forces of unimaginable dimensions stood up against Man, who dared to challenge such insuperable might.

Had it been a mistake – when trying to pass the continent on the Northern side? Had they better headed South? For such musings, it was too late now. The warmer zones had attracted the Skipper. He had wanted to save his passengers from the cold. Instead, now opposing weather fronts threatened to destroy them very soon.

Had they been here one or two days earlier, they'd done fine. However, an experienced sea lord had to reckon with such facts, after all in the fall.

The drag anchor was launched, and the passengers were sitting under deck. Rescue devices as far as available stood ready for use. They put on the safety belts or the substitutes Arundle managed to bring forward from the invisible quiver of her magic bow - still on stock, while real magic didn't work, though. In the flickering light of the flashes behind the horizon Arundle tried to read the safety instructions on the rescue raft that was still available, tied up on the poop in a white barrel.

If it came to the worst, would their magical devices be able to help them on a hop – say, from here to the coast - or were the opposing forces still almighty? The magical stone as well as the magic bow felt very able to give it a trial. “We should succeed in the common constellations and we would certainly try the Professor, but otherwise...” Pooty learnt and likewise did Arundle.

Zinfandor Leblanc, the giant Skipper, exceeded the frame in many ways, one of which was the physical mass, but that was not the gravest. Something, neither the bow nor the magical stone wanted to announce hindered the transport. They both agreed on that.

Thus, the four youngsters kept silence and didn't even let the Professor know. They thought they knew how she would react.

Arundle handed out some kind of ‘mana’ the magic bow kept in the quiver for emergency purposes. The stone-hard and tasteless cookies felt like paper in the mouth. They drank the last water as they were expecting heavy rain to fill their bins. Thus, they prepared for the upcoming challenge.

The preparations were all set. Everybody knew what had to be done in case of emergency. Tibor stood ready to take over the rudder from the Skipper. Penelope M'gamba would open the

rescue raft. Billy-Joe taught Arundle how to handle the sheet ropes, he himself just had learnt. Only Pooty had no nautical task to fulfil. He was defined the messenger and reporter of the water level inside.

Meanwhile he gazed shyly out of Billy-Joe's Medicine Pouch and started quivering whenever the thunder rolled, while the storm came closer. It was about time to get the foresail down. Billy-Joe was fighting with the stiff fabric the storm tore off his hands. He almost went over board, had Arundle not saved him, when she realized the trouble he had to stand.

Did they think of everything? Was the rainwater collector ready and set? Zinfandor had tinkered a very simple but effective device for that purpose.

A last checking gaze over the boat and the boiling sea round about: What could be done, was done. Now they could only wait and pray.

14. Shipwrecked

The storm was there – roaring and howling with rage. The mast bowed like a whip, but the mighty fists of the giant Skipper withstood the press on rudder and stern. “Let's go on as long as we stand this press from astern and then the swift turn right in a dale between two waves, then the drag anchor out and then pray and stay, what else can we do?” he murmured more to himself than to his assistant next to him. Such was the plan, but reality!?

Far too late came the turning, the drag anchor went therefore a little too early and hindered instead of helped. The boat turned crossways, and is rolled over, and pressed under water now.

Once more it is stumbling up within the screaming bottomless depth, the greedy waters floating off, the boat like a cork plopping up to the surface where the water is thin and misty, like a thick strangling veil over mouths and faces of desperate beings.

The bow turns round, is it heading into the wind? It looks like that. The cord of the drag anchor gets tight, and the anchor is fighting somewhere out there. Now it means bailing, and scooping, and drawing with ladle, tin can and bucket or with plain

hands. One thought is in everybody's mind. "Scoop for your life's sake!"

The cabin is filled with water. They bail with dish, and cup, and ladle.

"The water's got to get out for heavens sake otherwise may God have mercy upon us."

The Skipper takes the affair into his own hands. What shall the useless rudder do any good now? Either the drag anchor does its job or it is too late anyway. Like a dredger, the giant shovels some five gallons with plain hands. That's not enough; he grabs for a double folded spare sail and stretches it between both arms, broad legged he stands, his huge hull covers the descend and leaves no space for the others. However, the water flies over board with breathtaking speed.

Breast-high, hip-high, knee-deep at last. Exhausted the man stops. It is done, for the rest the passengers can care. They ran about the swell like wet hungry cats after a mouse. They are all wet to the bones. The cold they don't feel yet but it is creeping about, after the job is done and each of them sits panting in a corner, some with a prayer on the lips.

There comes the voice of the Skipper from above:

"All men off board" – Penelope rushes on deck. It's her task to unleash the life raft. Safety belts are put on and hastily brought in order as good as possible. The raft jumps off its hold, unfolds - kept only by a thin rope. Penelope forces one by one to slip through that tight hole inside. She herself is last in the row, hesitates, and looks over to Zinfandor, who looks up straight ahead. She follows his gaze and sees now what he sees: A wall is there, as high and close as the sky. Almost upright the wall is standing. For a second only the woman is hesitating, and then she cuts the rope to the raft. The raft gets free and into the counter-suction of the monster wave, while the boat remains - whose drag anchor is already in the wall - keeps it tight like a mouse is kept, hypnotised by the eyes of a snake. The boat stands still afoot the monster wave, mightier than ever seen by a human eye. An instant later, it is caught and pressed into bottomless abyss.

Penelope feels once more the supra-human strength of Zinfandors arms; feels safe again and wholly cared, before her senses fade.

From the North a hot storm rages ahead. From the South the Arctic swell opposes, driven by the steady West wind drift as

common for the time of the year. The meeting of hot air and cold swell is the crucial zone where the typhoons and hurricanes (those Western twins) are born. Fierce masses of unleashed and uncontrollable air hit the icy wall of the cold that is coming along with the drift. The consequence is always the same; it is just a question of time and of strength. All components have to fit. They did perfectly well, when that yacht sank and with it, the brave Skipper and his loving spouse.

While sucking ground seas to the surface, such a burning storm acts like a giant vacuum cleaner. Hot whirls and cold streams intermix, as not only the air is tempered. However, that is not all-important. It is the force of the collision that forms the crazy match of the wild sprites, while the collision only enables a wave to erect, and to rage on like a giant waterfall.

Men only notice when involved in such inferno. However, the wall swallows man and mouse, so to speak; swallows them down with what there is, and nobody ever returned to report what the ongoing was, but disappeared and became one with the hidden secrets of the depth.

Zinfandor knows about the death. For the last time he embraces the beloved. How fast their young love ended. Could he keep it, keep it together with that soft precious body he holds tight. “We are going to meet again – forever!”

The unsinkable raft didn’t stand the tons of water tearing it to pieces – slaughtering it in a way. It was gone only minutes later, when the raging waves caught it up. Inside the rubber closed up on the imprisoned whirling them about. After endless seconds, the turmoil calmed down, a bubble of air gathered and four heads stretch while the hands seek for hold. Then the sinking raft goes head over heels again, and then sinks down straight away. How long may the air suffice? Minutes, half an hour, one hour?

Arundle grabs for her magic bow. She cannot feel him – must have stayed aboard while they headed for the raft. She calls him now, but all wizardry has gone, got stuck in the barrier, when the time stood still.

Was this the end? “Billy-Joe, is Pooty with you?” Instead of an answer an inaudible gurgle. Did that mean yes, or no? “Ask him for the magical stone.”

Pooty’s nose showed up right before her eyes. “I have him”, he utters, while his voice sounds somewhat odd. Does the increasing pressure cause that?

“Do you think he can fetch us some nixes by chance?” Arundle wants to know. Her voice sounds also different now. Pooty disappears; he dives back into the pouch presumably. Why does Billy-Joe not help him? Then she understands. Billy-Joe cannot help any more neither he nor Tibor. Are they dead already?

No useless thought right now! It’s a matter of seconds, she feels, while the big easy comes over her, like a cloak of the bare naught covering up in the brain and everywhere, and to take over from the fading spirits of life. Why fighting, why holding what has to be left? Arundle reminds while fading. Did she not experience a similar situation some time ago? What had it been like, and how did she overcome the fatigue then? Too late, too late...

Death laid a heavy hand over her mouth and eyes. It was all over now...

15. Boetie’s Mission

Governing turned out to be a high art. Not only that: Governing meant work, hard toil and labour, and work again – every day, sometimes for twenty hours, especially in the beginning when everything was so new and nobody did know how. Besides, everything was different now. In former times orders had to be fulfilled. Now you had to care for opinions and for majorities. Decisions had to be respected and carried out, sometimes against the own will.

Many things turned out to be different than expected. In the beginning, she had been in the Parliament from daybreak until dawn. She had to study hundreds of files. This work had been comparatively easy, although also boring, but you had not to overcome your own nature, instead you had to stand up for your opinion or for that of the own party.

In her case, that was no contradiction. Quite opposite, because the Women’s Party and the Vegetarians, had a lot in common. By adding their forces, the new party was of considerable influence. Both sides met on common grounds as the

question of female equality went hand in hand with the mode of nutrition.

After lengthy and tough negotiations with the Labour and Planters Party, a coalition was founded at last. This party had numerous followers and could win almost thirty percent of the electorate, while the new Women's and Vegetarian Party gained a little over ten percent only.

Lucky though that the party leaders of the latter joined and put their forces together, because otherwise they had been powerless and without any seat in the parliament. The mothers and fathers of the constitution namely had implemented a five percent hurdle. Neither the Women's Party nor the Vegetarian Party would have made it. With roughly four or four and a half percent they would most likely have failed.

Of course, both wings intended to dominate the other and put their cause on the first place. That had been Boetie's hour. With cleverness and a good sense of humour and endurance, she managed to get the top of the united parties.

As leader of the joint Vegetarian and Women's Party (VWP) she negotiated a coalition with the Labour- and Planters' Party (LPP) - an even worse band of professional politicians.

Boetie's new role as Vice Prime Minister was meanwhile unquestioned. She had her own entourage of followers by now, which was very necessary. There were plenty of pushing problems the government had to tackled right away, while nobody knew which came first.

The Royalist Government had left behind a terrible mess. There was no field you could take over without revision. Reforms were needed everywhere and on all levels.

As it goes with governing, what ever you wanted to do, everything cost money, and money was of course not available. Where should it come from?

Australis had been exploited systematically by the motherland. The wealth however did not show but disappear in corruption, or was wasted by wrong decisions and unnecessary projects.

Boetie slept like a stone after her long and heavy day at work in her soft seaweed bed. A little she nibbled on tender seaweed heads, but then fatigue overwhelmed her and had her sink into an uneasy sleep, until her trained servant crab woke her up by

daybreak (a little luxury she could now afford) – by pinching her merciless until she got up.

Had Adrian left behind a pile of pending files? Boetie had this able man – no matter his limitations – complimented into the Ministry of Nutrition and Women Affairs.

Most likely, he was the reason for her unrest and inner disturbance, presenting a full load of the wildest dreams in which she was confronted with peculiar and hair-raising scenes. Had she been superstitious (that she was) she had spoken of magic signs. As she was now responsible for governing, she didn't allow herself superstition any more. Things were complex enough without that. Interferences from the eternal side of the world were seldom desirable after all.

However, she could not get rid of those dreams, yet during daytime. They even increased, the more she pushed them aside. The following night she tried with sleeping pills. She needed her healthy sleep. Australis expected an alert and proper Vice Prime Minister. She had to comply with the highest expectations.

She couldn't get rid of the nightmares, that woke her up as soon as she slumbered away, exhausted as she was. She saw herself on a devastated island robbed off her true nature. She had to walk on two legs and had to breathe air like the peddlers (thus they used to call the people from the surface.)

Such circumstances alone would have been enough to feel boxed in, but there was even more. She suffered as a peddler just the like, and suffered badly! She was short of everything, and a very general threat was put over her, she couldn't understand. Something horrible was approaching and creeping by, she had no name for - perhaps because it belonged to the sphere of the surface.

Should she get in touch with Adrian Humperdijk? Well, he had shortly left, and would be at home by now, unable of coming back right anyway.

Could well be, that she was ashamed. The new dignity made her insecure. Was she allowed to have own problems discussed with a member of her Ministry? After all Humperdijk was inferior.

If she only had known, how much she would have helped Adrian as well with her trouble! Adrian doubted likewise his own recognition. Something had happened during his last stay in Melisandria, and Boetie's dream fitted well into the picture.

The Minister didn't call Adrian Humperdijk, even when she received the emergency signal. An eternal voice whispered a column of numbers, which turned to come out as a geographical location. She managed to write those figures down and had them construed by her aides in the Ministry.

When she learned the result, she didn't hesitate any longer. Who ever was pleading for help, should get it. Even more so as she thought to know whom it was, from previous dream sessions she had.

Rescue teams with everything needed to convert lung breathers – like lung-converters and hail-sleep-buoys - were sent. The teams mounted their racing whales, that were bred for such purpose and were able to speed faster than the most modern submarine. They became well armed, because of bad experiences in the past, as the crucial location lay way beyond the regular vicinity.

Unfortunately, her new job forbade her participation, but she would pursue as soon as she received good news from the front teams, and then would follow with the band of reporters for publicity reasons.

If the public realized, who was responsible for such a deed, her reputation would grow enormously. As a politician, you had to care about publicity. A positive reputation was worth a thousand votes each, if you could prove courage and success, as well as empathy.

Thus, she stood ready for departure any time with the fastest racer at hand. All dates were cancelled for that day – still she couldn't find rest. Those scenes and pictures from the nightmare overcame her when closing her eyes, while she turned away from that column of the trickling time metre in her office. Such metres were the means of measuring the time down here.

A somewhat eccentric mode of making oneself familiar with the fact that there was no return of what went by. Since the contact with the people from the surface on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth got closer, and friendship tied individuals - plastic wristwatches were in use down here as well, where little handles moved or figures elapsed.

The official metres still remained in service and were found on public sites all over the place. One of which was found in front of Boetie's office. Thus, she could see how the time was running along and dripping away into eternity.

“The being fades so far, so far” – was the way of asking for the time then, down here, instead of the common question for the day and the hour.

Although, the new time that came along with the use of wristwatches and all that news from the outer world above, now was due for a big change. The biggest change ever, probably.

Perhaps not everything was good that came along with the revolution. The reforms were underway. It would be fatal to have them stopped or altered. Now was not the time to think about disadvantaging side effects. There was only one way, and no return was possible. That was the message of the column anyway.

The Minister didn't complain. Her personal life had changed radically and to the better, no doubt. She had achieved more than she had dreamed in her boldest dreams. From the daughter of a famed craftsman she had risen to the highest occupation.

The once so heartily claimed living conditions in justice and peace now showed their uncomfortable and inconvenient side as well, mostly when others tried to push opposing ideas.

Such lengthy procedures of finding a democratic solution sometimes drove her into desperation, while they showed the ugly face of their race. Stubbornness was one of the least vices amongst others, far worse, while the worst probably was the lacking respect for life and the living – that killing for killing's sake. Still common secretly, and everybody knew it.

A report via vista phone from the front interrupted the minister's murky musings. At the said site, a wreck had been found. The wreck of a common yacht but in bad shape - just lately sunk in a fierce storm, as it looked.

Had there been survivors? Were there still signs of life? The question mingled with the reply. The line was poor, too poor to get clarity. Then it broke off completely.

“They are going to do their best, I'm sure” the man at the communicator tried to calm her down. Under water in the depth of the ocean, communication over long distances was difficult. A disadvantage the mer-folk could not overcome yet. After all, they had to rely on the long waves that would allow only conveying simple signals.

“We are working on the line, I’m sure we’ll make in on a couple of minutes” the minister learnt. She had to wait and to keep calm meanwhile.

The geographical position, the Minister had received in her dream, was several hours old. The scouts knew that fact as well. The shipwrecked could well be drifted away. They could be taken somewhere else by the incalculable drift on the ground.

At least they had a rough idea where to start the search. Thus, they were all too happy to have found the wreck, were the traces of the whereabouts looked rather fresh, which was an important aspect.

Of course, the ground of the sea was full of shipwrecks, especially near the coasts, where the dangerous reefs reached up to the surface.

A minute later, an alarming news followed, still scabbled but anyway – two human bodies had been found buried under the wreck, tightly entangled – it said. That was indeed good news. Immediate action was required, the doctors had no time to spare. Lucky enough most human brains had a tendency to conserve in low temperature. The cells did not die immediately after the blood lacked the necessary oxygen or stopped circulating at all. Thus, the revival procedure implemented within a certain period of time, was realistic and in general showed good results.

While in this case other factors played a role, which could not be underestimated - but that the caring minister learnt much later.

Those extraordinary bodies were as such worth the effort, the doctors at the site agreed. For the time being, the successful revival made her feel much better. Her nightmare turned out to be a sound warning from another sphere, and obviously an appeal of clairvoyance.

Arundle and her friends in that sinking prison had used up the little oxygen in the bubble that had kept them alive for quite some time. The damaged raft hit the ground some ten miles away from the wreck.

The magical stone, aware of the earnestness of the situation did all he could to contact the magic bow who obviously had remained in the wreck. After some misunderstandings with the nixes who didn’t want to be bullied by a mere piece of wood – the

bow finally convinced the scouts to extend their search to the said area.

The Vice Prime Minister had meanwhile arrived at the site of the accident together with the pack of press people - all eager to get the sensational news first hand and the best pictures of course. She was then actually responsible for the extended search as well, because she knew a little of the bow and the way he functioned. - Arundle could not be far.

In great hurry, the scouts and the Minister rushed on to the given location. No seaweed wood could hinder them or flocks of fish disturb their pace. While the streamlined racer-whales kept rushing on in high speed, elegantly swaying around blossoming corals under the coast or dark grottos where mysterious creatures lured for prey.

Nobody knew what was waiting for them as soon as they would arrive. Would they come in time? Could the alteration still be done, or was it too late by now for such a measure? Provided, the body or the bodies were still complete and in order, of course. The Vice Prime Minister didn't have the slightest doubt about her assumption: her friend Arundle was near, she could feel, and the upper-world girl was not alone.

Rescuing turned out to be routine as far as the humans were concerned, while that little possum was not as easy to handle, however the doctors managed after a short while and all four recovered very soon, since their circulation had scarcely been interrupted, because of that air bubble they were exploiting for the last bits of oxygen molecules.

Pooty stood the conversion just like that, and was swimming about like a beaver; in fact, he almost looked like a beaver, and felt well in his new element.

Had Boetie hoped to meet her best friend Cori, she was disappointed. Cori was the only one who communicated in the mer-folk way and that was of course very convenient. She handled not only the audible side of that strange language but also the hand-signs, and the telepathetic dimension as well, which required a specific mode - uncommon even for well trained Somniors, like Arundle and Billy-Joe.

However, after some start-up misunderstandings they soon managed reasonably well. Arundle reported of the strange circumstances they endured, which brought them into such distress, while underway on a rescue mission for their dear Professor.

When Arundle learnt of the two humans found in the wreck, and how they were found and treated, she was full of hope that they would make it as well. They were not yet over the worst, Arundle learned from Boetie, but would most likely not suffer from severe damage to their brains or spinal apparatuses. The sub-water physicists guaranteed their survival anyway.

Unfortunately, Arundle didn't feel like reporting on the mysterious circumstances they experienced on that strange island, or she didn't have the time. Besides, she was not sure, whether the Vice Prime Minister would understand what that meant, while she herself didn't yet understand.

Perhaps the main reason was however, that she did not have the capacity - language wise to do so. Her trials explaining the barrier met bewildering, as there were all kinds of barrier reefs down here. Boetie was not able to imagine such a barrier consisting of pure energy. She had something else in mind, and could not withstand laughing at poor Arundle, when she tried in vain.

Communication was thus limited Arundle realized, while she was able to explain the petrification of the Professor and her mate, she and her friends had overcome by inventing an appropriate kind of serum.

The fact that the Professor and the Skipper had shortly been de-petrified might as well be responsible for side-effects and long term consequences – probably even in combination with the late reanimation on a gill-breathing basis.

The third and most strange interference Arundle did not even mention. How should she describe a griffin to someone who spent her life sub-water?

Such thoughts were too early anyway. For the time being, they all were happy about the fact, that they had survived and were definitely alive.

The rescue team was on the way back to Australis, where the patients would receive extensive treatment. The Anthropoid-specific Pneumological Subsection of the Hydrological Department of the Central Clinic of Australis held the ablest experts for such severe cases in their ranks. If there were any help at all, it would come from this side.

The rotors of the ambulance were purring, and the water went by scarcely foamy and almost invisible for the eyes of the passengers inside along the protective shields. The monotonous sound made Arundle sleepy. What had to be said was said. She

had made herself understood as well as she could. Boetie seemed to be content with it.

The reporters in her company accepted her report respectfully. Boetie had indeed become a respectable person, Arundle thought full of acceptance, while she did wonder somehow.

Well, Adrian had already mentioned something of that kind - while she still mused, she fell asleep. Now exhaustion took over.

Pooty snuggle up to her armpit as close as the water allowed - his rough fur tickling her skin. She meant to feel the warmth of his cute little body, while dreaming up to her friends in Egypt. Flo and Cori rested in the shade of a pyramid and had lemonade, while her mother was cooking. Billy-Joe and Mr. Hare stood nearby talking, bent over a meaningful piece of stone.

Walter was there again and rocking Pooty in his arms like a mother her child. In the top of a lonesome palm-tree, a nightingale was singing.

Arundle enjoyed the peace of the scene. Perhaps later there was an opportunity to talk about the affairs she just was involved. She didn't want to disturb the peace of the hour.

Thus, her friends spent their days. You could almost get envious. How did Walter get here? Arundle looked over to Billy-Joe and Mr. Hare.

Had she mixed things up? The boy next to Mr. Hare was in fact Tibor and not Billy-Joe. How could she muddle up the two of them?

"Over here, everything is possible", a voice said. "In the dreamtime other laws apply." Did her eyes fool her? She might as well report of that barrier in time. What did the two think about it? She didn't know much either, though. What could she report? Well, you did feel powerless while all magic failed - even in your dreams you could not get through.

Was she not dreaming right now? If she was, the barrier didn't work down here, because in her dream she was in Egypt - the pyramid was too obvious an indicating sign.

Her friends confirmed her presence wholeheartedly, when she asked them to do. She must have got through that barrier or might have found a hole down here. A hole, she knew as little about as about the barrier as such.

"In any case, we will be very busy the coming up term", Arundle meaningfully said. Cori and Flo nodded, still gay. It looked as if they didn't care much about those grave thoughts

about the fate of the big wide world around them in general and in specific. Most likely, because they had not yet heard of the barrier or didn't understand the way it worked. They were still in the mood of vacation.

At last, she got rid of her message, Arundle noticed with satisfaction. Perhaps Billy-Joe or Tibor did inform Mr. Hare likewise. They would need any possible assistance, for sure.

Had she only known by then how she was fooled? In her dream, she did not get through that barrier. Her dream had been one of the ordinary types. She didn't contact anyone. Her dream had taken her into the inner empire of wishful thinking – nowhere else. That was why she had met Walter and Tibor, who had been Billy-Joe, or vice versa.

The treatment of the traumatized coma-patients turned out to be far more complex. What did Arundle expect? “The doctors can restore your Professor so far”, Boetie declared in a grave air, after she had spoken with the medical staff. “However the man in her company is different. Parts of his brain were damaged. You cannot do anything about it, and the Professor will never again be able to fly. Instead, she will enjoy swimming. That might cheer her up, and help her compensating the airborne loss. Well, Adrian will take care of that, I'm sure...”

Billy-Joe was up again, and so was Tibor. The nap on the trip did wonders. They felt like newly born and insisted in an early return home. On the other hand, they didn't want to leave without their Professor, and she wouldn't go without Zinfandor.

“That man will never grow wings again. We don't even know if his lungs can become activated again. With us he could stay on for a good while comfortable and at ease, but that's not what he demands, am I right?”

Arundle, Billy-Joe and Tibor shook their heads, and so did beaver Pooty. They also couldn't imagine life sub-water forever. Thus, they concluded quite correctly in case of Zinfandor, who of course would like to stay on with his beloved darling.

The Professor would not give him up either in return, as this would mean a life under water for both of them; if Penelope didn't follow Adrian's double strategy for a life in two worlds.

A situation, she was familiar with as well, while her second element had been the air, and had to be exchanged for water now.

“I’m afraid, we have nothing else to offer”, Boetie concluded, and was somewhat annoyed about the girl’s reaction.

“Life down here is not all that bad”, she felt obliged to top her summary. When she in return imagined the clumsy paddling about on two legs, as was their mode of proceeding up there, she understood at once in return.

“Everybody may stick to their last, after all. We all belong to our inherited element. Well” – she hesitated - “most of us anyway.”

The Vice Prime Minister promised to do what could be done. “Do not expect a wonder. Time might be the crucial aspect, I learnt. That man is a physiological freak. He is not human, in a way. That is why nobody can tell how the cure will work. His bone-structure as well as the blood circulation system do not comply with the forthcoming of the mammals, that is - our specie. The pneumatologists consider it a miracle that they were able to stabilize his lungs after adjusting to the gill breathing - therefore, no hasty decisions; think twice beforehand what you do. Let your man here for the time being. We will care for him...”

Penelope M’gamba harshly denied. “I take him with me, or I stay here as well. You kids may of course do what you like, stay on or go home...”

Had Zinfandor been all right down here, (but he wasn’t), things would have taken a smooth rally, so to speak - but he definitely wasn’t well at all. He lay in his berth, rocking occasionally to and fro a little, while you couldn’t say whether this was done by the water current driven through the hospital - or purposely by him.

He didn’t show any interest in the world around him. He didn’t reply when asked a question, whether his eyes opened or closed. The only thing you could say of him was that he was alive.

Billy-Joe and Tibor made quite clear that they would appreciate their return very much. Therefore, Arundle also thought twice before she made up her mind. Only Pooty wanted to hang on with the thankful Professor. He said, he could imagine staying here forever.

His merry temper cheered up the scared woman. Staying day and night with the suffering mate was very hard. She couldn't be attracted by Pooty's suggestions for an excursion. Zinfandor's state of being deteriorated: After some improvements in the beginning kickback followed to kickback.

No improvement was in sight, and no discernments in the character of the malady were achieved, thus, the medical experts suggested to try even to reinstall the pneumatic system. There might be a little chance of improvement that way. This meant of course that Zinfandor had to leave the water and return to the surface. "The risk is given one way or the other", it said.

This was the reason why the converts showed up some days later. They knocked against the underwater sluice in the socle of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, which was opened just in time, their coming had been expected, though.

Her colleagues were all too happy to have their fellow teacher back, and so were Billy-Joe and the magical stone, and finally yet importantly Arundle, when meeting cute little Pooty again, who had his fur dried and tidied at his comfort by her.

16. A difficult Investigation

The exciting sea trip full of sufferings and perils kept those of the school community, who had stayed behind, busy for quite a while. Many mysteries had to be talked over, strange things asked for explanations. Why had Penelope M'gamba gone on that excursion? Had she had an idea of what was going to happen? Who was that man in her company?

Zinfandor recovered quickly as soon as he was back in the air. After some days, he could stand on his feet again and tried the first insecure steps. His appearance raised of course the curiosity of everyone. However, Penelope was yet not willing to talk about the whole matter, not even to the Headmistress.

They learned hardly more than the name of the giant. He refused to talk to anybody except of course his spouse. Nobody was able to understand him anyway, because of his peculiar language. Zinfandor Leblanc spoke some sort of very special French, only Penelope was familiar, or pretended to be familiar,

but that was another question. Language was not the main mode of communication between them it seemed.

You couldn't meet him alone, he followed his mistress like a dog and was quite unhappy when he was left alone. Then he sat quietly about doing nothing but waiting for her.

Penelope was in love with him, everybody could see that. Never had she been so happy and brightly smiling, while she always had been a positive and optimistic character.

Zinfandor recovered very fast. He seemed to grow and roamed about with swift elegant movements and made one pace when Penelope made two, while still tried to comfort her at best. Next to him she looked like a precious porcelain doll in her fancy African dresses, she used to wear now every day.

Everybody knew what was going on. The holidays came to an end, and the students trickled back in from all over the world. With every load full from the helicopter the rumours revived about the romance and the perilous circumstances of the beginning, while people improved and broidered the tale by gusto, depending on the mouth that told it.

Thus, the Headmistress asked for a General Meeting on the first day of the new term. The school community had a right to become informed of what had happened.

Next to the love affair, another main topic was the fact, that Somniors and Animations had lost their specific abilities. This meant that the newly developed joint learning programme could not be taken up right away. The reason was not yet clear, but had to do with a sinister attack out of nowhere.

Arundle then reported what measures Tibor and Billy-Joe had taken in order to rescue their Professor, whom they found petrified on a very strange island that exploded unfortunately as soon as they left. She then went on talking about the invention of the de-petrifying arrangements they made, when they realized which trap they sat in.

Penelope then published a brief summary of her excursion and how she stranded on that specific island where she lost her mate and re-converted.

Those who expected delicate first hand news were disappointed. The Professor spoke at length about everything that had happened to her and her mate, but not about her motives and intentions. The Headmistress stepped in and explained why 'the dear colleague of us' had gone down to the Cape.

“Important measures concerning the relativity of time; the proof of Einstein’s theory after all... Good reasons as you can see, and the results are more than remarkable, if I may say so. That will become a main topic of the upcoming term. The field is prepared, the work can begin...”

Penelope only shrugged and mentioned her friends down there in Cape Town she had wanted to see again, “while things later developed differently as our kind Headmistress just mentioned.”

The fact, that she was due to convert while down there, she didn’t mention.

“Well, I did meet another griffin after all. I followed a rumour, to be honest, and succeeded. - Love of the first sight, I didn’t have dreamed in my most daring dreams”, she now very frankly admitted - after having been so closed up before.

Those familiar with her more closely knew how she had been longing for a being of her own kind.

The excitement came to a sudden halt when re-conversion set in, and she found herself lost and alone on a deserted island, without shelter or food, until she found the fertile vale. However, a thunderstorm made her look for shelter soon, which she found in a crevice.

“The rain might have been the cause for my petrification”, she said – “Zinfandor had been caught earlier, that was why he couldn’t help me” she went on with a tender glance at him who sat to her feet.

She had learnt of his fate later when she met him in his converted state and – what a surprise – still loved him as much as before.

The rescue team then added what they did in order to find and rescue their Professor. All their fruitless trials until they stranded at the same place, where the couple was already stuck. A mysterious barrier surrounded the whole area, and didn’t let them go. There, the idea came to their minds of inventing their own de-petrifying potion, which they had actually tried to get from Laptopia, but failed.

“That was when they were apart already, because the magic bow missed the proper time slip” Pooty put in – he was back in Billy-Joe’s pouch again.

“Yes, we had to go separate lanes, so to speak.”

The Professors began to understand what immense threat their colleague had met on her excursion. They also realized that

this was no longer an adventure of some individuals. - Even the loss of the magic abilities was not the worst. They recognized a far more general and more threatening danger: The time as such had started to change!

Such an idea was too much for the normal mind, because the time was considered as an existential fact that could not be altered or influenced. A fact, you could blindfolded rely on.

Wherever the time is no solid base of existence any more, people risk their minds and lose their footing. The idea as such appears brains taking. Man is not made for such an assault.

“Only we space explorers know how relative the time relates to the reality of the cosmos” Professor Scholasticus Slyboots thoughtfully said, who had just come back with the other Slyboots from a visit back home.

“Although the organic life is determined by the time. Time is not only a limit, but an offspring of life – organic life as we humans know it, I mean”, his sister-in-law the famous Grisella of Griselgreif to Greifenklau thoughtfully added.

“Right, without time the eternal wheel of life would not be – the days and nights, the seasons and everything – any movement, the turning of the globe, the eclipses of the planets around the sun... whatever there is, does it in a given segment of time” Scholasticus continued.

The teachers agreed on study groups: “Let us take our joint target into focus”, the Headmistress suggested.

“For the time being just for the upcoming term”, her husband added, who was a little scared of the enthusiasm he felt from all sides. “Our other activities will have to be delayed” Penelope M’gamba backed up the Headmistress.

“We shall tackle the problem on all levels and with all means available”, Adrian said hastily. He feared to lose grounds presenting him hesitant.

His wife now threw her arms in the air and exclaimed dramatically: “Did we get the signs of the time right? Are we aware now, of what the striking of the hour tells us?”

Scholasticus knocked fiercely with his knuckles on the desk, signalling his agreement. As a space specialist, he knew of course a lot about the matter of time.

Grisella agreed wholeheartedly although her approach was entirely different. She looked at the matter from a philosophical point of view.

“Nihil est sine ratione”, she threw in, explaining right away, what this meant. “Indeed, nothing happens without cause. There is a reason behind everything. Let us see whether this is true when we look at the phenomenon we are facing. I’m sure there is a lot waiting for us to be discovered.”

“...While we are striving to get back our qualities and overcome that barrier” Arundle put in. Her remark met full agreement as could be seen by the humming noise of the multitude.

Many of those present didn’t even know of the limitations yet by own experience. However, that would change soon enough.

The assembly ended by forming study groups and arranging for the sub-subjects eventually. The alarming news made the students think twice. They felt confused and even scared, but challenged in a way, and soon became busier than ever, supported by their teachers, who guided with advice.

It was amazing how large the literature about the time in all its aspects was. Many great philosophers had been dealing with this prodigy, one way or the other, mostly showing its positive sides. However, others referred to the negative aspects as well.

Whether Philosopher, Physician, Physicist, Geographer or Watchmaker – the time cared all of them, and for many became the main topic of their lives.

First, the students had to collect material, then order and look at it. Soon they realized that their way of proceeding led astray. They threatened to suffocate under the amount of material. The searcher went astray in that famous forest, which you could not see any more, because of the multitude of trees.

Time was everywhere, and still slipped off, sometimes in a scary manner – ran away like liquid, could not be touched, and turned out to be nothing real...

No matter how the aspects of time – its effects, causes, whereabouts were praised and explained, were damned or hailed – the time withstood all explanations and understandings in a strange way.

Goodman Death swayed his scythe unremorseful and mowed down lives as the peasant cuts corn. Becoming and fading, Living and dying mingled into the indisguisable mystery of time.

Sometimes the time seemed to be self-evident, and then you didn’t know while time was mentioned at all, or disappeared

behind events, faded somehow and lost any meaning, while still remaining the secret cause of the unknown underneath.

Great spirits had not been wiser: They felt confronted with the phenomenon just like everybody, and asked the same old questions all over again, that had been asked ever since, while the answers never met the facts or convinced the inquirer.

Nevertheless, did Grisella's study group go on with the philosophical dimension of the theme, while Scholasticus invited his students "to approach the matter freely, leaving aside all assumptions and prepositions. - Do as Einstein did, who found out about the relativity by riding on a beam of light. Get yourself out into space as the great idol did. Your abilities are given to you, so use them. Only there, where you start seeing your world with different eyes, and where things show differently, you may see what must remain hidden as long as you stay on solid grounds."

Scholasticus was not sure if he understood, what he meant, but he knew his intention was right. His enthusiasm was somewhat infectious, though.

Arundle had to make up her mind which part she took. Should she join the philosophers or the physicists? Billy-Joe and Tibor would go on with that Anti-Matter-Catcher thing they developed so successfully, and felt well-taken care by Scholasticus.

However, Arundle would try Grisella's part. She knew her friends there already. That was one reason; the other was that Scholasticus didn't accept the distinction between Physics and Metaphysics.

"It's like facing two sides of one medal" he used to say when the question came up. Thus, he opened the gate for those who didn't feel comfortable in the physical world of equations and figures.

"Its all stubborn nonsense published by narrow-minded spirits. Talking of the opposition of the two is mere ideology. If you get to know a little better what lasts forever, you notice how ridiculous such a point of view is. It only makes you smile then. There are of course oppositions, better called forces anyway, tremendous forces, we only know very little. They are everywhere. Some call them coincidence or pure chance and mere accidents, and think them lawless, if they accept them at all; but they aren't lawless. You can find them, as you did when you invented your potion.

Be most welcome, go on believing in coincidence and magic discernments into hidden worlds. The question is not, whether they exist. We are interested in the effects they have on us, or on the physical world and how they interrelate. Such are the questions...”

Things didn't get much clearer though. Therefore, Arundle hung on with the philosophers.

There were other groups guided by Adrian Humberdijk and Penelope M'gamba, also searching for new ways. The one cared about the so-called biological clock of all living processes in nature - that was Adrian's topic, while Penelope went on the route she had taken, which took her further and nearer to the geologists in a way.

Her disciple was not educated scientifically, and was proud of that. Penelope didn't try to involve him in the project, although her friend Marsha was so curious to find out about him. Thus, his state remained undefined.

He had no official permission to stay on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, that the Professor knew well enough. However, nobody dared to mention such fact, because his dismissal would have meant to lose the gifted Professor as well. Thus, he was treated like the other relatives and spouses who had come here.

His status remained pending, and was accepted by the Teachers' Board with one exception – Moschus Mogoleya: He could not resist straying rumours and doubts. No one else minded the strange guest, as long as he kept calm. Everybody trusted in Penelope M'gamba. She would know what she did.

However, fact also was that the silent giant scared the younger students, when he followed his mistress like a dog wherever she went, so the rumours did no good and poured fuel in the flames.

The four Deans of the faculties worked on supporting research tasks and exam questionnaires. Such was intended to fit into the overall intention. That way a clever brain might be found who came about with a break-through invention.

Those who were not busy with the research at first hand took part in the weekly meetings; thus participating likewise. Mainly the newcomers were involved that way, who had been recruited by some eager staff during the Easter holidays. They had to

concentrate on their beginners' class: 'the other way of seeing', and had enough to do with that. The job was this time even more difficult. By the lack of magic power the auras tended to fade as well, thus the untrained students could see even less than usual.

"What is not there, you cannot see" was a teacher's frustrating comment after weeks of fruitless trials. Others were more indulgent than Moschus Mogoleya was - "It's not the pupils fault, surely not" Grisella tried to calm down the frustrated teachers in charge; Moschus only said what they involuntarily felt. They all knew what was wrong, but nobody wanted to admit. Therefore, they jumped on the new topic, where merits were likely.

The study groups reported of the progress their work made, and the Deans published what individuals achieved. Weekly General Meetings became routine, while the Headmistress cared for the regular lessons as they tended to become neglected, while in fact always had been only a minor part of the curriculum. Even more so as the scientists were able to show the importance of their research work they put down on papers, spreading amongst the sponsors, who had become nervous when strange rumours came to their ears, distributed secretly, and of course incognito. Some even drew back their share.

The development of the Anti-Matter-Catcher was of major interest. It was published in order to win back lost grounds. However, was back-firing now.

Were there inventive undertakings under way? Was a breakthrough near? Did the future of Man rise an eyelid?

Vague by intention the paper did its job and raised curiosity in an almost indecent manner, by promising inventions, which opened the view on immense profit in a wholly new and surprising reality.

After the unpleasant situation during the previous summer, (that is winter in the Northern hemisphere) such a change was most welcome to the Directing School-Board. Only with the broad agreement of the sponsors, the school could blossom like under a warm and friendly sun shining down on fertile grounds. Otherwise, the overall concept was doomed to fail.

Enemies and enviers there were enough. You had to have a clever hand to manage with the widespread and even opposing interests among sponsors and parents. The latter held their protective hand over the children's well and woe. Some letters, perhaps written of homesickness or hurt feelings, criticized the

school in a way and led to nasty questions and in seldom cases even to an investigation.

Repeatedly commissions turned up who asked for access, for one reason or the other. If the Headmistress had permitted them, there would have been no end. Even the parents' council accepted such refusals, however, each year the struggle revived again for such visitors' permits.

"Can you imagine a camera filming the conversion of a Converter – or 'The Dancing with the Winds' – such green Sublimators' whirl on TV screen worldwide!"

The consequences would have been indescribably incredible. Curiosity would pair with envy, and admiration would soon turn into hatred. One could easily imagine where such a development was heading.

Even if things remained as originally intended and admiration remained admiration, such enthusiasm would flood and drown the island by sheer mass.

The Parents' supporting Council could not ignore such arguments, and as long as there was a majority on their side, the Directing School Board was on the safe side, thus, the bitter cup passed by for another term.

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk made clear every time that a change in the regulations would lead to her immediate resignation – and not only hers but that of the majority of colleagues.

"The Teacher's Board supports me in that matter wholeheartedly. We would all resign and the school would be closed. There is no other option."

From the sponsors' side she didn't expect immediate danger, while the letter did its part in spilling off old rests of resentment. However, the pendulum could easily move over to the other side too far. Exaggerated expectations could also turn out negative for the school. Therefore, the Directing Board liked it best to running the school inconspicuously, without noticeable disturbance from outside.

While now the problem of time became an immense challenge for the school, even more when the publication of first results stirred up unforeseen and backfiring expectations soon spreading worldwide.

The study groups were facing more trouble than they could handle, when new questions arose. - What would happen if the time lost stability - if time left its iron bed in order to start

flooding the banks of history, so to speak? What would be secure then? Was there still a reliable reference system at hand or had all security gone then?

Had others to fear the consequences as the stranded had suffered on the distant island? Were similar processes threatening elsewhere? Was that the price that had to be paid for the stand still of time? What had the spherical disturbance to do with it? Was the strange rain interconnected with the obstructed time?

The functioning of the Anti-Matter-Catcher pointed that way, without showing how such interrelation was achieved. A wide field for research opened. Connections of huge dimensions came in sight. Who ever went through that narrow gate, risked getting lost, while the rules of the Newtonian Physics were set out of order and common sense came to its end.

Wide and fathomless dimensions opened up. Each step could have unforeseeable consequences. Scientific responsibility seemed to be obstructed, as well as the common morale. Still a divine light shone from afar like an upcoming and promising rainbow, and wavered somehow over here from infinity. The breeze of eternity conveyed death and life in one, was ambiguous by intention.

Those who relied on their common sense were lost right away, and could not be helped. Only in correlation with your kin and the complete knowledge of mankind that had been collected over the years, you could stand the decisive moment.

However, that was not enough, as you had to know, how to use it. Scientific research results always served commercial interests. In Laptopia, they speculated with lifetime, Arundle learnt while staying there.

They were stepping out now and went through a gate she knew what came at the end. Therefore, she and her companions had a hard time figuring about with the roots of such an ambiguous fruit, which did mankind no good in the future.

Still they couldn't help it. They felt like under the influence of a mighty fate that pushed them that way, or was there something they didn't see, or didn't know? Were they manipulated already? Were they serving instead of mastering their profession?

They were in the possession of the most precious abilities, and were allowed discernments of the most extraordinary kind - still they could be part of a secret plan of which they knew nothing.

Were they puppets on the string - manipulated puppets given enough space not to feel the hand of the hidden master?

Was Penelope caught in a tricky trap? Did the rescue team prolong and complete the plan by following?

What was Zinfandor's part? What was about the Board of Teachers, the new students or even the old ones? Whom could you trust?

17. What is – 'Time'?

Arundle, Flo and Cori sit together again once more, as they often do. It is late, the night is approaching and darkness is settling in the corners of the room. In the twilight the faces fade, only voices can be noticed and after a while you aren't able to distinct them any more.

The three of them are on the same level. It doesn't matter who says what, as long as the important things are said.

"One thing I don't understand" Cori puts up the thread. How could it be otherwise – 'Time' is their big theme and keep them busy day and night...

"How come the globe itself is probably the most accurate clock we know?"

"Can we say that?" - this is Arundle's voice. "The globe might be fast already, perhaps for centuries and we don't notice. Our days get shorter, because the Earth turns a little faster."

"Well, well" Flo objected, "were there not the next control clock and this one is definitely precise."

"What do you mean by control clock?" Cori asked.

"Quite simple. The globe turns around its axe in 24 hours on 365 days each year, while it follows on its eclipse its course around the sun, inclining its axe one way or the other – that we notice when the days get shorter, like now."

"Mustn't we then notice if we lost hours?"

"I don't see that. Presume the globe would turn around – say in twenty hours, instead of twenty-four, but still pace on its eclipse around the sun at same speed. Would we notice?"

Arundle agreed: "Would we not think our clocks were wrong? Imagine a process of gradual adjustment. The rotation

increases only a little with a tiny acceleration, say a tenth of a billion second per hour or so, but spread over the years that would mean a remarkable amount. We measure the time only for some centuries.”

“...Or – even cleverer – what - if things adjust automatically?”

“...would make no sense, how should it? Those electronic devices come from outside, in a vacuum and all that. They would rotate as well, but that does not mean they would have to accelerate as well.”

“Would such clocks be fast then?”

“Quite opposite, they would be slow – while time moves faster.”

“Right, my watch is a little slow every week...”

“Mine is fast...”

“This is, because the watchmaker considers this fact and meant it too well with your watch.”

“Let’s ask a watchmaker then...”

“I think, watchmakers don’t muse about such things.”

“And the people who take care of the world clock? They should be able to notice such acceleration, no matter how little it is.”

“Besides, the whole system could accelerate as well, and then nothing was left you could rely on. You had to go far outside – even further than the sun system.”

“Would the increased rotation influence the people? Would we lose time, because our days become shorter?”

“Your example at the beginning would show the loss of course. Four hours less a day would be 1460 hours a year – almost three weeks then...”

“The annual vacation had to be skipped.”

“We surely won’t notice rotation. Otherwise people at the equator would notice that they move much faster than the people near the poles...”

“Right, nobody ever heard of that...”

“...Or did you...?”

Thoughtful silence –

It’s Arundle’s voice that breaks the composure:

“Time’s a miserable nothing – nothing but global rotation – cannot be though, but what then?”

Flo eager: “In former times people were terribly afraid of speed, as if they foresaw what was coming up.”

Cori: “Do you mean we fake the effect artificially, when we accelerate?”

“Why not?”

Arundle: Physically wise speed adds up - at least sometimes. It can also be deducted, depends which way you turn. Take care of the East – only Westward long life is waiting...”

“You mean even if the globe does not accelerate we had the same effect, physically seen.”

“I see no objections.”

“I have no idea of physics.”

“Well, you should have.”

“Time is rotation and acceleration, that’s something...”

Flo: “Acceleration is a killer – that radical...”

Cori correcting: “Can a killer be in the worst case...”

Arundle: “Keep Westwards then you are on the save side.”

“If you go from Europe to Australia you should go via America and back via Asia.”

“Well then, we did it right. This time I mean, when we went to Egypt with our parents.”

“The other way round would have been nonsense.”

“Although there are routes which take longer and are still cheaper – tariff-wise, I mean. Seen from our point of view they may get more expensive, of course.”

“Right you are – what is more valuable than time?”

“Nothing.”

“Time is the most precious property we have.”

“I wonder who owes whom. Is it not the other way round, are we not the property of time?”

“We don’t notice, that’s all...”

“Or we don’t want to be reminded.”

“Even worse – we are the slaves of the time.”

“Can you really say that?”

“Time in general – that’s too general.”

“Lifetime fits better.”

“That’s another theme...”

They fell silent again.

Flo: “How fast does the globe rotate?”

Arundle: “You can figure that out.”

Cori thinks of flying: “Against the rotation you should hardly do in the air.”

Arundle answers: "Air belongs to the globe, no matter how soft it appears. Air is rotating likewise, so don't be afraid, and on the ground the adding of speeds is no question either."

"There is a crazy Millionaire who is flying continuously."

"Of course to the West."

Arundle thoughtful: Time is a form of acceleration."

Flo: "How did we come about acceleration?"

Cori paternally (she's always been the little sister): The Big Bang – everything is accelerating ever since and if this is so, then it means that the precise little globe we live on with the precise little planet balls around the good old sun are a fiction – an isle amidst rotation."

"Time equals Rotation. Biology – the eternal circle - well, yes, still, many questions..."

Flo: "Our circle's closing up, we get round!"

Cori: "Biological clock – is that obtrusive?"

"By no means, we're caught in the merry-go-round however. Time's our most precious property, the means of life as such."

"Yes, we had that. Still Time – each has her time, looked at it from the memory point of view. Nobody knows his next really. Personal time on the one hand – public and general time on the other."

"And of course lifetime – the time you have to live on."

"Important question when it comes to dying; before - it is only a matter of the Philosophers and Theologists."

"Personal lifetime is really a secret, often enough."

"Life expectancy, the whole plan of life, genetic, environmental, psychic – just as someone is made with his personal fate."

"Has that to do with time? Must we not draw the line? I think we drift into fathomless nothingness."

"We lost the ground under our feet."

"That can and mustn't be."

"Well then – back to space and time, there, there is the ground again."

"On the other hand – we accept that the rotation of the globe, and the eclipses of the planets, and the moving sun-system define our time."

"Or even make the time up for us..."

"If we do accept this kind of movements, we must accept the lifetime as a metre of time."

“Lifetime is the most precise clock.”

“That stops, as soon as it is left alone.”

“...Gets meaning only in relation to the planet-clock...”

“You can see that much clearer with the plants than with animals or Man.”

“Although they are pretty dependent sometimes.”

- *Intersection* -

“Time is a prison. We are prisoners of the time, each and every one. Our whole world – the world we are able to realize.”

“What we are able to realize of it...”

“We all wear the glasses of time-bondage, so to speak...”

“Our mode of perception is defined temporarily.”

“We can only get out by imagination...”

“Not really, the view from outside exceeds our abilities...”

“Still there are some who try...”

“Mystics get far and see even further, if I may say so...”

18. Visiting Australis

The moon got round. Nature couldn't wait. As important as the questions were, the Conversors were dealing with, – they couldn't leave the given path of their lives, and had no intention to do so either.

Despite her deep devotion to research and science – Penelope M'gamba was looking forward wholeheartedly to the full moon's upraising, and didn't mind the importance of the ongoing research. She had good reasons for that. Zinfandor Leblanc didn't keep as a human what he promised as a griffin. That was regrettable, but what could you do!

“Looks like a barrel on feet” the first graders whispered behind her back, when they walked by. “Besides, he is nuts” they completed their destructive judgement.

They were right to a certain extend, although their juvenile sight of things tended to overdo. Still, the Professor would have liked a more positive characteristic of her mate. (The naked truth

sometimes is more hurtful than a lie. In a way, we humans stand the truth much harder, while we enjoy sweet conveniences, no matter how false they are.)

Leblanc's character was also not favourable - Penelope had to admit, thus accepting that she didn't really know him. He was still a sealed book to her.

Had there not been the reminiscences of that gorgeous flight the previous month and the Skipper's bravery, she would have been unable to say what attracted her. Sometimes she doubted her memories, and when she did she recalled the trouble, the awe and the hardships on that lost island, and the joint experience above the raging waves.

She then said to herself that a sensible man could be broken by less. You could only hope for recovery, because time was often the best cure and healed all wounds.

What did she know of Zinfandor's history? Perhaps the greatest wonder was that he was still alive.

The moon got round. Conversors of all age and faculty rushed to the pier, where the boat left for Conversors' Island. The island next to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was but a little, steep rock, only a little smaller than its twin.

Accompanied by the guards and led by Adrian Humperdijk, the youngsters set off. Amongst them this time Penelope and Zinfandor, who didn't know what was waiting for them.

Normally, Penelope was waiting up to the last second before she took off into the air. However, that was most likely over and out, so to speak. She recalled the earnest warnings of the medical staff deep down under.

She still hoped, and believed to feel the well-known old tickling inside. The limbs became light, the eyes improved...

She waited and hoped, but in vain. Nothing of that kind happened - things remained as they were. She had to be thankful after all.

She looked at her mate, who sat next to her in that boat. He was much better off health-wise now, and recovered each day a little better, while still not able to overdo or take off into the air. He could stand on two feet on the ground and moved without crutch.

"You will see such a water cure will do wonders", Marsha had whispered into Penelope's ear, she meant to comfort her. Those in the know expected of course the forecasted to happen. She didn't honestly doubt herself - still she hoped. Deep inside there was that

itch, and the unreal hope of being able to pick the thread up where it broke last month.

She looked over to Zinfandor again, who still was squatting next to her. His face was like a stranger's – how tired he looked. The signs of a severe sickness were still in that face. The contours under the thick greyish beard could hardly be distinguished, and the gaze of his little black eyes was helplessly lost in the far distance.

What did he think? Did he think at all? Was he preparing for conversion? - She would be well advised if she cared about herself.

The banks of Conversior's Island grew up high into the sky, thus was the impression you got when approaching the little pier. It took quite some effort to manoeuvre through the passage in the reef without damaging the boat on the sharp corals growing there on both sides up to the surface.

The boat with the guards just past the crucial point and the Skipper of the following boat tried to remain exactly in line. It was high time to get ashore. A deep sigh was heard. Merry expectation mingled with fear of pain. Happiness and grief were closely interacting in a Conversior's way of life.

Zinfandor and Adrian started gasping for air at the same time. The reef threatened dark below the foam of the surf. Only where the water remained dark you could get through safely.

Adrian let himself fall over board backwards. He had waited long enough. Zinfandor still hesitated. What was with his companion? Inside of Penelope M'gamba, a terrible fight went on. Opposing impulses threatened to tear her apart. There was no time left. Any second passing was a second too much. Either now or never. Soon the passage was reached. Zinfandor had to get into the water, if he didn't want to suffocate. A last desperate glance then he let himself drop into the water at last.

Adrian had been waiting and welcomed him, and tore him down to the ground, where they could orientate and breeze the first fresh droughts of clear and reviving water, while the current showed them their way under the wide-stretched sole of the mainland, where Australis was hiding.

Penelope splashed by. They didn't have time to lose. The current from the deep sea would turn any minute. They had to try to get away from the reef before. Out in the open the current would suck them forward. Thus, there was no time to converse about whereabouts and emotions.

Penelope's part was the hardest. Besides, she was too upset to report what happened during those last seconds. She didn't know herself, what it was.

She now used her fins like wings – a funny way of moving. She reminded of a flounder, Adrian thought, while looking backwards to see if she could follow. She kept in line after all. 'She's still some kind of airborne ray' he wondered quite amused.

The shade of the island's socle kept threatening from afar or was that the upcoming night already? Down here, where the sunrays got with effort, you couldn't say. Adrian was far too busy to listen to his inner voice that urged him forward. No all-clear signal was yet in sight. His strong tail fins pushed the water steadily and forcefully, while the back fin stood upright and straight as a steering tool, influenced by the vegetative system rather than the free will.

Much different his companions: Their movements lacked of elegance. You could see the effort. Still they managed to keep up.

'Far too much exertion' Adrian thought, and looked for a suitable site to rest. However, nothing was in sight, which would have served the purpose. Quite the opposite: The current lost strength. Soon it would turn, and then they had to fight against the counter-stream, spilling all the dirt and the rubbish out of the city. If they then were still between the socles of the island and the mainland, they would be lucky if they wouldn't lose over grounds again what they just had made. Then there would be no way of getting forward, and they had to wait for the break of the tide.

As soon as they reached to shelf, they could hide in the crevices and caves waiting for the night to pass by, while after dawn the current would change again.

Adrian meant to know why this was so. Helpful and practical such phenomenon was, no doubt about that. Because the area under the shelf was filled with fresh water that way. The bad liquids were removed - containing all the rubbish and garbage a big community was producing. The night was the best time for that, as the day's work was done, and the oxygen, which was best in fresh water, got inside, and took care of the good sleep of the inhabitants - until the early morning hours. By dawn, which was hardly noticed down here, the tide was on its height and broke.

Adrian remembered: The breathing of the sea followed the phases of the moon like low tide and high tide. It was, as if the sea breathed like an organism, and all gill breathers followed the example and did likewise.

Right in time the tide turned, while the three swimmers were gliding seemingly easy under the protecting roof of the shelf.

Under water the shelf reached much further out into the open then up on the coast, which had been washed away in millions of years. Thus, it formed a roof for the world under the world: Home of the mer-folk - dwelling undisturbed by drylanders as a blossoming world of its own.

Penelope managed by straining all her strength while Zinfandor had left behind his weakness. He was all himself – strong and self-reliant, and aware of his strength. However, Penelope was far too exhausted to notice much of his change. Adrian on the other hand looked bewildered at their guest with different eyes now.

The three Convertors settled in a shallow tray under the roof of the socle, just a few yards behind the edge; while the water passed by on its way outside. They got caught sometimes in their hide with unpleasant left-over, though.

Most of the garbage passed by however. Anyway - sleeping was impossible. They were too close to the centre of the torrent. Some yards further and on a higher level, things might have been better.

The roof of the deep-sea world became steeper and formed a kind of shallow bell-shaped hood. On its furthest end it reached up to the surface and touched the main land. Thus, it was as if the mer-folk was living in the basement of the Australian continent.

There was even access to the centre rock of the continent – that holy site, where the Aborigines used to worship while by now tourists spoil the holiness and the peaceful atmosphere of the impressive outlet of an inner world. Thus, it happened that people disappeared, and you could well imagine where they ended up.

The whole continent rested on thousands of mighty pillars, and one mystical tale of the Aborigines told that one day some of those pillars would break and a big flood would come.

For the mer-folk, such an outlook was not at all utopian. Some clever set packs of dynamite could do, and so could any volcanic disturbance down here – causing the land to lower as a whole or in part.

Without the busy craftsmanship of the nixes, who mended the worst damage for their own benefit (they would be the first losing home and life in such an accident) the catastrophe could well have happened already. It wouldn't be the first, though.

Penelope sank in an uneasy slumber regardless of the whereabouts. Zinfandor took care of her and stopped the worst debris to get at her by his broad back, while Adrian guided the current.

By two o'clock in the morning the tide would break, you could figure out easily. At the latest by three o'clock they could go on, with fresh water in their back from the open sea. The current would bring them deeper into that secret world under water, where the city of Australis awaited them. Adrian would go on with his administrative duties he had taken over. He would join the Parliament and decide on laws and expertises, as required. Furthermore, interim elections were due in some outskirts, where he had to assist his party friends.

He left alone the guests, in his company, hoping they would do without him. They did at first, when they went on a sightseeing tour for the main part of the day.

There was a lot to see and even more to wonder, but Penelope didn't like the water, she missed the air. Swimming was the wrong way of movement and water much too heavy. You were hardly faster than on foot, besides you ran into trouble with the air when overdoing. Did she grow old?

The high pressure of the depth under tons of water caused the system to slow down. You used up most of your energy for just being. She felt she was not made for that, - not after a merry life on top of the world, where you touched the sky and knocked at heaven's door.

She was indeed extremely green about the gills - her mate noticed, and decided to bring her back to their dormitory where she could rest in peace. There they hung on most of the time, while Adrian wasn't seen for four days.

He had said so. Governing used up all his time, even more now with those aftermath elections.

When the moon cycle broke and they had to think of the return, he showed up. He remembered the desperate struggle last month and urged his companions on an early start.

"Something is wrong with the time down here. The clocks work different lately" he excused his pushing. Such advice rose Penelope's curiosity. She asked Adrian about his experience, as good as she could, while swimming on rather swift. He couldn't say much, no matter how she put her questions. He just didn't understand what she wanted to know and what she was looking for.

Time passed swifter or slower, “one thing or the other”, he said, “because I am always late, no matter how early I leave.”

Thus, she found a good reason why descending into the sea was worthwhile at last, no matter whether she liked it or not, and might have avoided in future – (while she trusted her ability of oppressing the notion for conversion all together by now.)

Zinfandor didn't need her. He had been well down there, like a fish in the water, so to speak. While she rested he had been busy, - had gone with the workers down the mines, and to the coral fields and seaweed plantations, and had checked the shipyards all over the place.

Penelope asked herself what it meant when the time factor got virulent down here as well. Adrian's naïve explanation was not satisfying at all. His only concern was to find out whether the clocks on the surface or the clocks down here went wrong.

“Because of my experience of last month, I would like to reckon at least half a day for the return” he considered. “Even more in a group – groups get along slower than individual.”

That was a polite circumscription of the fact that she was the lame duck, Penelope thought, but didn't comment. He was of course right.

If there was a next time, she would be prepared, she decided. Instead of hanging up lazily, she could have done research work of all kind. Had she only thought of the fact that the time was pressing down here as well... - The time factor was as valid in the depth as it was ashore. This was now as clear as daylight.

They had to keep up with the current again but the other way round. This time it meant – close your eyes and get through, because they went out together with the garbage - that was not convenient at all. They reached the open sea without major disturbance and picked up the jet stream as well as they could. Ahead of them, lay a huge distance, they had to make in some eight to ten hours.

“It can be done; normally I consider the exact tide only.” A tide was six hours, Penelope figured. Adrian was a remarkable swimmer, though, she wondered.

“Last month I got short of air already after five hours. Can you believe that?”

Adrian wanted to say that the conversion started far too early. Penelope understood. The biological watch inside could not be betrayed, no matter what the outside watches said.

Had Adrian made a mistake? Was that a singular error? Well, they would soon learn. They had brought their own metres into line with the central pillar of Australis – the official metre of time down there. Now they had two metres at hand, they could compare. No matter which one failed, the other would serve as corrective to a certain extent.

Thus, the return trip turned out to be more challenging and less frustrating. Repeatedly they compared their watches and calculated the time they still had.

They controlled likewise how their organs worked and listened inside. They controlled the pulse and the heartbeat without noticing anything strange. Compared with Adrian's common speed they lay back almost three quarters of an hour.

However, that didn't matter. They could use the dirty current to the utmost extent. Adrian avoided it as well as he could, and tried to join the current late or leave it and join in later again, when the worst had gone and was way ahead, but today there was no choice.

Noticeable marks under water guided the experienced swimmer the proper way and served as checkpoints for the time as well. The overhanging socle of the mainland reached far out into the sea, yet not as far as where the Isle of Wisdom-tooth lay, which had an own socle, growing up like a flower from the very bottom. The upper part became thin over the myriads of years of surf and tide. A junction, some hundred inches below the surface, ended up in the Conversors Island, while the main stem carried the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Conversors' Island came in sight. Such beauty and harmony it was to see the stem erect straight and fragile through the light blue water, the woman wondered – never had she ever seen a sight the like.

Reality caught up – they were not at all too early, quite opposite, they were too late again. Penelope suddenly felt a tight ring around the breast. She couldn't breathe anymore, the gills refused their function.

“Air, air, for heaven's sake” she gasped, and pushed upwards with desperate arm strokes where the light indicated the surface and the sun reflected in the crystal blue tableau like in a field of glittering diamonds.

Her mates pushed and helped at best they could, but were not yet affected, while Penelope's conversion indicated that the time had come for all of them.

19. The Brotherhood of Infernal

In London the fog governed the public as it hadn't for a long time since the burning of coal in hundred of thousands of open fires was prohibited by law. Thus, the smog was banned – the insurmountable notorious fog that gave hide to dread and horror in its days, and by now belonged to the past, while still weak reminders did occur, when favoured by the local and the overall weather conditions in the Thames vale.

Such was likely to happen in autumn or spring when the wind pressed in the fog banks over the wide winding river's mouth, which built up when cold air moved over the warmed up land after a nice day with bright sunshine.

Then the fog sank down grey and heavy over the city, and it was almost like in the old days the elder ones reminded.

The fog settled preferably in the narrow lanes of the quarter behind the docks or in old Soho. It then seemed as if the evil had been sleeping only, to wake then up again. Thus, this fog was called rightfully murderous.

Riffraff and scoundrels stood up and governed for hours or even days the devastated streets. Few cars prowled over empty streets. Only where the clefts of the underground opened the Earth spit out dark human clusters, which hastily went apart in all directions – likely to become easy prey for snipers and psychos.

Roland Waldschmitt landed on Heathrow airport while still the sun was shining bright. However, on the way downtown from Heathrow airport the fog began to lower over the city.

Herr Waldschmitt thought that a natural fact of the upcoming night, as he wasn't quite familiar with the time zones. Besides, the winter was just ending, thus you were used to early nightfall.

In reality, it was not even three o'clock in the afternoon local time, while Herr Waldschmitt was sitting in the bus that took him to the terminal of British Airways.

The passengers helplessly stranded in the grey. When they got off the bus, and couldn't see their own feet on the steps, they started feeling awkward. Fear like a luring beast jumped at them out of a sinister naught.

Herr Waldschmitt manly withstood the appeal; even more so as he was in company of a lady, he cared for and wanted to impress. Besides, someone was expecting him. Had he, like many other passengers, tried to find the nearest taxi stand or asked for his hotel nearby, he would have felt different as well. You couldn't see your own hand before your eyes.

The clever ones rushed into the terminal. The automatic doors let little fog puffs enter the inside whenever someone slipped in, while closing behind with a soft sigh. Inside there was just ordinary well-known neon-lit lightness, that calmed you down considerably and pushed down the panic attack.

Herr Waldschmitt didn't travel with his wife. His wife didn't even know that he was away. The woman in his company was an austere beauty, with all female attributes designed to attract a man like Waldschmitt. You couldn't guess her age, somewhere between thirty and fifty, while her body was shaped like a twen's.

Handing him over to that woman did cost Mr Waldschmitt quite some effort. He had followed a secret phone call, and had packed his suitcase, pretending to spend the weekend with fishermen friends. His fishing stuff and things he put into a locker at the train station. He changed in the washroom and put on a suit he had bought for that purpose. He then packed the smart business briefcase and went in time to the airport where he fetched his ticket being reserved for him at the counter of British Airways.

His hostess he then met only in the departure lounge shortly before boarding. She welcomed him with a little mocking smile around the mouth but with a cold glance in her remarkable eyes. She hooked up confidentially as if they were old acquaintance and chatted – explaining briefly her plan for the weekend. It would become a rather dull time, though, as it looked.

Should the sight of that elegant woman have led his thoughts astray, her words had him return to the ground at once.

“The trial phase is over. We are ready for action” – in short the woman explained what was meant by that. Herr Waldschmitt's English was not the best that was why he didn't understand everything, even more so as Madame de Stäel also had trouble with that language. More than once she slipped back to the common French, a language, Herr Waldschmitt understood even less.

The taxi they were sitting in now searched its way through the fog for the hotel near by. Although the driver was well experienced, the fog caused him considerable trouble, and made him proceed at walking speed.

Each crossing made him leave his vehicle and check for way marks or inquire unwilling passer-bys, who gave a start at that sudden voice out of the nothingness of that grey wall all about. They rushed on as if they had had an encounter with the evil as such, instead of giving advice – an advice that might have been wrong anyway. How should they know better than an experienced professional?

The passengers in the cab soon fell into uneasy silence. The uncertainty of the driver infested Herr Waldschmitt likewise. ‘Let’s hope that fool finds the damn hotel’ he was thinking. He had himself sink even deeper into his corner, as if he feared the touch of the woman. The situation forbade additional confusion. Madame, well familiar with the effect she had on men under normal circumstances, was confused and upset by the icy wall of uneasiness, and didn’t investigate for likelier reasons. Her female intuition didn’t understand the opposing dangers, but was only worried about the rejection she felt.

The days of the mouse-experiments lay way behind Roland Waldschmitt’s club of friends. How delighted they had been about that little success, those days. The tiniest differences had been praised. Meanwhile they had reached tremendous dimensions, and no end was in sight. The route they had taken promised unbelievable power, if the procedure was getting out of the state of probation. Already now, the results of the experiments were remarkable.

Satisfaction still didn’t show, what got at you when you realized the excessive dimension of manipulation. Even more so as there was a strange trend inherent.

Sometimes Herr Waldschmitt believed to see an avalanche thundering along its pace that nobody could ever stop. The question was no longer how to proceed but how to keep out. What, if everything and everybody was torn inside and become amalgamated by those deadly whirls?

Had they overdone? Was what they stepped loose too big?

Sure enough, the miserable creeping through that damn fog and the ridiculous search for the hotel did its part.

“For heaven’s sake, do install after all some electronic in your autos over here, as is done elsewhere for long. Navigation systems are after all no stately secrecies any more. In Germany you had lost your permit at once, just like that and right away after such a shame...”

Madame de Stäel shrieked off her musings or had she fallen asleep? The rough voice of that thickly man with the German accent touched her instincts. He pleased her annoyingly well she hardly dared to admit.

“You are right” she heard herself coo: “We turn the world upside down, and here things are going on as in the days of the stagecoach.”

“This is going to be no problem for us any more” the man turned in on that tune, he thought to notice. The great task might quite likely be related with a little adventure aside.

‘Take care, Roland, think of your wife’ he admonished himself, while trying in vain to get rid of the wedding ring on his thick finger. He’d try again later with soap in the bathroom.

The International Conference of the ‘Brotherhood of Infernalía’ met at a small hall aside, but was found at last by the two guests from Strasbourg and Frankfurt at last.

Madame de Stäel immediately raised the attention of the assembly. Not only because there were only few spouses present (some brothers had indeed brought their wives), but because of her overall appeal. ‘Silly bumps’ it went through Waldschmitt’s mind, while he spied over to his neighbour, who looked even more attractive in the warm light here inside, and opened like one of these mysterious orchids, whose irresistible beauty attracted any moth in the range to a deadly encounter.

Very few women were accepted as full members: they had to be real specialists, and absolute experts in their field, preferably where men could not compete. Male superiority governed of course the prejudicial minds of the majority. Thus, Madame de Stäel shone up as an outstanding exemption. She was not only clever and very able in her profession, but also unscrupulous like a real man - courageous, self-reliant, and cold-blooded. That was why Herr Waldschmitt couldn’t resist her charm.

Other women might owe such qualities as well, but very seldom were they able to combine such with the female attributes, Madame de Stäel so voluptuously obtained.

Those women who managed to enter the spheres of male dominance had to pay a high price by losing their femaleness - not so Madame de Stäel – Herr Waldschmitt mused, a malicious smile in the face.

With his point of view, he didn't stand alone within the 'Brotherhood of Infernalism'. Still - or was it because of that fact - Madame de Stäel had a high reputation. Herr Waldschmitt was not the only one succumbing to her charm.

In a way, the whole Brotherhood lay at her feet. Thus, it was just natural that she was elected Vice-Chairman that very night.

The election was most important, and the main cause for the meeting. "This is the 'election of verdict'" the rumour went – and 'a millennium decision'. The importance was well known and that was the reason why the 'Infernalism Brothers' had come in great number from all parts of the world to the Headquarter here in London. Some brought important research results with them – as one scientist put it – "by means of my experiment, I'm soon going to push the globe off its track."

"...However, only one's carrying the baton in his knapsack, so to speak, ha, ha, ha" – Herr Waldschmitt boasted, as if he had known what was coming soon by then already.

The first day was meant a get together with big dinner and opening speeches. Soft tunes invited the scarce pairs, while local beauties mingled in between, and took good care that no one felt lonely.

Herr Waldschmitt was able to conquer Madame de Stäel all in all three times, and managed to save the last dance with her. A remarkable accomplishment, he imputed to his rigorous will to holding his own against his competitors, which did not remain unnoticed by the thus adored.

The couple changed from the formal addressing to an intimidated mode, and Herr Waldschmitt was looking righteously forward to the end of the night, and so was Madame.

Endless speeches and reports bored the assembly to tears, while the main intention of the Brotherhood remained untouched and was saved for the secret closure the other morning.

There, the eagerly expected trailblazing on-goings would hopefully see the light of the day, which had been going on secretly, and were only known by vague tittle-tattle.

It was rumoured thus, that some kind of time lock was effectively working in due process right now on a mysterious island somewhere in the Southern hemisphere; while the highlight of the day would be the elections of the new Chairman and his Representatives. Who ever got the job, would be in charge for the new course, and had to lead the Brotherhood into the glorious future.

Who owned the necessary charisma among the assembled brothers? From all parts of the world they had come. Who would be able to bundle the different currents to a mighty stream?

Genius and researcher's urge were not enough. There were many with sufficient qualities. Who had the power and the guts to forming their excellent material into an efficient instrument, of which the brothers had but only a vague idea, which desperately needed concretising? Who had the strong will and hand to get things started?

Nothing less than unlimited world domination was tempting. However, without such an instrument and without a suitable combination of their immense forces, the Brotherhood would be grinded down to meaningless bits.

Opposing forces were everywhere, and were led by the democratic appeals in this world. Fortunately those good-men were not aware of reality, or knew what was going on in secrecy, while the democratic notions effected the masses to a disastrous extend. Public rights and welfare measures pampered the masses instead of slaving them.

The humanists banned even exploitation, without which – so the decided believe of the Brotherhood - those strong and exceptional could not blossom.

The meeting went on. The fog had long faded, and the dark conspiracy brooded upon in secret backrooms sneered at the mild autumn sun.

Roland Waldschmitt was - to the big surprise of the international assembly - elected First Chairman of the Brotherhood. The 'German factor' actually pushed him up, and he was well able to prove how much he deserved it. His inspired speech led to the appropriate result, while his German accent and funny diction pleased in addition.

Viola de Stäel was all in favour of her 'ami Roland' as she addressed him cooing. No other stood the high qualities, which you had to demand of the leadership of the chosen few.

He was the only one the delegates believed in owing the necessary recklessness and brutality for the task ahead, you needed to overcome the obstacles on the way into the glorious future.

Reports of the situation at the front, where research was transformed into reality these days, put the proper light on the tremendous changes that were on the march, connected with grave and far-reaching consequences to certain areas and their inhabitants.

Not only decisiveness, but also far sightedness and the consideration of all applicable circumstances and the quality of the own forces, as well as the accurate determination of the proper course, put a heavy weight on the exterminator. Thus, only a real hero could shoulder such burden.

Roland Waldschmitt was made of the proper tissue. In an inflaming speech, Viola de Stäel convinced the assembly to have him lifted up on the shield as their true and only leader and chieftain.

The speech heaved her en passant into second place, while a South African boer with limited mental means but of the same conviction, became Assistant Vice-Chairman.

Secretly Herr Waldschmitt and Madame de Stäel decided that such a ridiculous and shameful democratic act would remain the last of its kind. After all they didn't follow the suggestion of a secret vote in the hide of a closet, but all had freely and manly given their vote by hand sign.

Those who failed by choosing otherwise, would sooner or later notice the consequences.

Botho van Zyl - the third in the boat - was a handsome and representative figure. However, he couldn't harm the Chairman because of his limited capacities and had therefore a good outlook to endure.

It was advantageous to have somebody to be blamed for misfortune and failure; the South African boer was just right for that.

The dice had been thrown. Roland Waldschmitt was at the beginning of a new life. His break-off had been prepared for the long run in his private affairs as well. What did he leave behind? A marriage that was no marriage any more. Without research work he wouldn't have been able to endure the boredom of such life. Now

he harvested the fruits of his efforts. He would take over the company. Power and means he now had or soon would have.

Well, those colleagues would make silly faces. Most of them would see him for the last time – they would be fired.

He imagined the scene how he sacked his boss. “I’ll strip him down to the bones” he heard himself grumble.

Viola was lying next to him. She moved and turned in slumber. He had to take care of that woman. Every thing has its time, though. He was content. Things were in line, and couldn’t run better.

Really not? The divorce had to be initiated. His residency had to be cleared. His presence over here was not only desirable, but also necessary, he soon learnt.

Were there signs of weakness and hesitation? Deep inside he felt last doubts and fear luring; he tried in vain to quieten them down.

Heroism was easier raised than endured. He blamed him weak and fickle, and called him back to order. “Stay hard, Roland”, he heard him murmur. “You’ve got to get through, old boy.”

There was no way back. The bridges were broken. He owed big power and intended to use, and defend it with claws and teeth if necessary, so to speak.

Real danger came from ‘that girl’ (thus, he referred to his daughter since she was away from home in that strange school somewhere down there in the Southern end of the world.)

This was good and bad at the same time. He knew her weaknesses and strengths, her virtues and vices – perhaps better than anyone else did - you could grab her by her honour and tickle her pride.

She had been once caught already by the Southern section of the Brotherhood, she and her nasty acquaintance: some local semi-savages of the worst kind, as they were pampered by those silly humanists, who pretended to be appointed guardians of the world. They even paid the fees for such scum of the Earth. His daughter’s fees were paid by the company, while he intended to profit from the results. Good care was taken already by the Brotherhood. Their own people had an eye on that place. People, you could rely on. They were unscrupulous and well able to pass on information.

In his latest news, their spy reported of a rescue mission that almost ended deadly. The man did a good job, and his camouflage was almost perfect. He had his eyes everywhere. Unfortunately, he was no expert and not the cleverest either. Besides, there were

difficulties with the communication system because of a strong interfering transmitter.

It was planned to have the secret weapons destroyed, which were still available, while partly out of order already. Without those devices, the eager competitors were almost helpless, thus, the Brotherhood might be able to take over the fruits of their work, or even make the bearers change sides. If this could be achieved nothing would spoil the way into a glorious future.

Roland Waldschmitt tore himself back on the ground and left such rosy reveries behind. The trail was still a long way to go, and the aim was not yet in sight. Many foes had to be beaten, great efforts had to be undertaken. The absolute power was tempting and seemed so close. However, he couldn't risk any mistakes. One hasty draw might ruin the whole game. He had to be alert all the time; any sign of weakness might cause a fatal blow.

They had mighty allies indeed, but allies of the hard line who never gave in competing, while he could feel the unlimited power of evil. He felt the force in his heart, and a mighty stream of greed flooded his vessels and completely filled him.

Somewhere, deep inside last rests of doubt were hiding. Such mighty stream pretended to spill it away, but failed in a way, as Waldschmitt didn't feel like himself any more. He felt as if an occupant had taken over, utilizing him for strange purposes. However, he didn't feel scruples; quite the opposite, he was upset for those silly doubts, for such rests of cowardice he felt inside. Scruples and cowardice, which he would have liked to get rid of.

Yes, Waldschmitt had changed. Many things became clearer and appeared in a different light. Things, which had been vague and uncertain, which had only been a trace but nothing real - now became clear. Certain characteristics were enforced while others diminished.

The change didn't happen at once but over a period of time. His wife noticed such change first, and pulled away from him – if that was necessary at all or still noticeable after a long married life, which had driven them apart anyway.

Would she agree a divorce? He didn't mind. His life was changing anyway. He felt like contacting her, but gave in soon. He didn't want his present musings disturbed. Besides, he was tired. Tomorrow would be a long and strenuous day.

20. Drifting Time

The time had fooled him once more. Adrian Humperdijk wondered while he was approaching the shore. This time he had witnesses. The measures had been checked and proven. He hadn't been wrong last time. He hadn't left too late or had been too slow. Quite the opposite! Only because he had been so early last time he had survived. Otherwise he would have been done.

Penelope M'gamba found out by experience what it meant to become re-converted while still in the other medium. "You see above you that light mirror, a white spot getting bigger and bigger and while growing also lighter and lighter. You try at best you can, your muscles and sinews threaten to burst. You lack of air, and you know that you have no chance if you breathe right now. Your gills are paralysed, which served you so well before. Each cell is yelling for oxygen, and you must swim and fight – for your life, you cannot do otherwise. It's all what is left for now."

Adrian nodded. He knew what his colleague was telling. "We have to consider the time difference very carefully, that seems to be all-important" he said and looked at his watch. A big waterproof thing with an ugly plastic strap. It did its service and was precise up to one tenth of a second a day.

The other Convertors were back from their island for half an hour already. Arundle had picked up a very thoughtful Billy-Joe. They walked slowly around the island and spoke about the events of the past days.

The study group had been busy meanwhile, when the Convertors stayed away for almost one week. "It's a pretty long time, though" Arundle said thoughtfully. She would miss that week for sure every month; on the other hand - Billy-Joe learned a lot from the wise kangaroo. That was quite something as well; for he learned things, he wouldn't have access to otherwise.

"It's like diving into a barrel without bottom" Billy-Joe tried to describe his impression. "Somehow timeless, as if you were

taken out of the flow of time. Afterwards you feel like diving back, and you start memorizing. In the beginning, it is like the disrupted film. You simply don't know what is going on. You only know that you were there. What it is exactly you don't remember as pictures fade in the mist, and only shades remain. Now with Walter things get somewhat clearer, while the time flow passes by one way or the other. I feel like drifting apart or dissolving – a strong impression, though – strange and awkward I must admit.”

Arundle didn't quite get what he wanted to tell her. She couldn't empathise, so she shrugged helplessly: “You've got to experience yourself, I guess” she then said vaguely.

Billy-Joe nodded and stared absentminded at the far horizon, while Arundle went on: “One thing you got to keep in mind and so have I. Time does play an important role. You did mention that. We are back to our theme, that's quite something.”

They put up their trail along the rocky edge in the open, where the wind was blowing ice-cold from the South with increasing wrath. In fact, Arundle wanted to report of the progress the study group had made while Billy-Joe was away with the Convertors, however a turmoil down at the landing stage asked their attention: “Come on, we've got to see what's going on...”- and she got him by the sleeve, and took him with her.

Professor Penelope M'gamba came back from her involuntary wet prison with a completely new approach. While swimming back the idea came to her mind – “born out of danger of death, so to speak” she said dramatizing as she used to. She was back and was sitting in a meeting the same afternoon after a short rest, rolling her eyes fascinating as ever the two passer-bys agreed when their gaze met.

“Everything's getting clear now. The further you are to the centre of any taken body, the faster the time passes. In the depth of the ocean the clocks are slowest, we could realize with our own bodies, if I may say so...”

“That is the most plausible explanation for the phenomenon, I daresay” Adrian Humperdijk agreed. “Down there, the days are longer. In the meantime this fact summed up to a remarkable difference, as you can see.”

“Right, that is the reason why you are always late, when you return. – Still, I'm not completely convinced. The biological clock

remains an independent means of control, I should say. Where is such considered in our measures?"

"After all, we are the ones who convert. We do it by the scale of our inherited world, we are connected with."

"I would agree with your objections, if I didn't have my experience in the air. By the way, this was the main reason why I went to South Africa. – Well, you are right, not the only one..."

She looked at Zinfandor with a tender gaze, who was sitting beside her as usual, in a dull and meaningless air. Did he follow the discussion? His health was better again, that was quite something. He didn't suffer any more, as he did, when he came here first place, after his dramatic conversion.

"What was it like up there?" – Arundle wanted to know. "Yes, tell us" Scholasticus agreed, while she had intended to present such in her study group.

"My impression was..." she started then interrupted her. "My impression was totally subjective as I lost all my instruments during the shipwreck..."

"Well, what was your impression, anyway?" Scholasticus pushed again. Penelope nodded: "After all fitting, if I may say so. The further away from the centre the earlier..."

I was – I may say so, I was touching a border, I couldn't pass. There was not that much of a contradiction, do you know what I mean?"

Nobody understood. What should they understand? Their helpless gazes said more than words.

"Well, I couldn't possibly get further back than the time I started. I had to face that barrier, otherwise I would have crashed."

"Wow, that turns a light on" Scholasticus exclaimed enthusiastically: "Conversion makes it possible."

"...Or impossible..."

Did her judgment betray Arundle, or did she see a sudden light flashing on in Zinfandor's dull half closed eyes? Was he not so indifferent after all? She intended to have a sharp eye on him, and signalled Billy-Joe to do likewise.

She was just bending over to her neighbour, when Professor M'gamba began to reflect her theses in detail by means of a complex graph she started drawing on the board. As a result, she produced some kind of holograph vaguely reminding of the planet Saturn.

"I would recommend to have a metre put here, and here, and over there, and there as well, while a second one opposite to

minimize the quantum error. Needn't be anything spectacular. Independent, precise chronometers, self-reliant, vacuum-packed of course..."

Arundle brought forward an argument against the vacuum, and was immediately supported by Scholasticus Slyboots.

"In such a vacuum" the Professor explained, "such a watch is getting cut off the location. That would be contra-productive in our case, as we want to measure the exact local time." Arundle blushed and didn't know where to look.

Details like this couldn't bother the general line, and thus the experiment was set up.

Billy-Joe meanwhile was thinking of a mode of transport – a helium-filled balloon – able to rise up into the stratosphere.

Many questions were still open. He had his own experience with conversion. He tried to recall now his inner clock and the encounter with that damn barrier, he met likewise, however somewhere else. Were there different barriers?

On the other hand, he had met his barrier whenever he tried to get beyond reality, no matter where this was. The barrier was eventually a flexible grid against charm or charm-like efforts.

They had been employing the gifts of magic freely and unlimited to a certain extent. Thanks to the magic bow, and the magical stone, they had been able to travel places, no matter where and when. Such ability had gone now.

What was the cause of disorder? Had the world gone mad? Had such trouble existed for a long time, and only didn't show to them?

Billy-Joe hoped he wouldn't forget such thoughts, as he wanted to talk them over with Arundle. Especially with Arundle who could not stand the fact, that her magic bow had abandoned her. This was something she could not explain. Never had the magic bow left her for such a long time. He had always been back, no matter where they parted. Space and time did not bother him and time could not lay its heavy hand on him.

Arundle was not yet willing to accept such facts and still believed in his return. They all had lost their property in the shipwreck, even the potion and the notes of how to win the de-petrification serum, but they were able to reconstruct, as they had done partly already in their study group. Arundle's loss was much worse, even more, because Pooty had been able to save the magical stone.

“I’m sure, he is on the way to me”, she said to herself to calm her down, whenever she felt the panic rising.

She was thankful for all the workload in the study group and other school activities, and praised herself lucky in a way.

As soon as the lesson ended the members of the study group took off. Now real work was due; - not just talking and considering, but by doing – ‘only the action brings satisfaction’, as the saying goes.

Cori contacted her friend Boetie right away in order to find out about the time metres in Australis. Without the help of the merfolk, they would be almost lost, in any case they would lose time, and had to wait for nearly one month.

The naiads and nixes were very nice and reacted appropriately. They would read and synchronize the metres twice a day when the signal came.

That signal was not easy achieved, though. Complex calculations had to be done, while the packed water formed a solid cushion against wireless communication. Deterrence was enormous. Finally, the scientists managed to balance the indication error and all metres could be read exactly at the same time, as soon as the signal was received.

The results were remarkable, though. The deviation was even higher than predicted. The survey started with a difference of exactly forty three seconds and increased daily by almost a half and later by one second each day.

“That’s just logical, and has to be calculated by the interest formula. If we focus on the overall development and consider decades and millenniums, then we soon approach a similar situation as was found in Laptopia, I daresay...” – Scholastics was all enthusiastic about those discernments, while the horrible consequences that were coming up scared him to death. Mankind was facing a nightmarish future, that seemed to be coming one way or the other, and nothing could be done so far.

In a hurry, the balloons got ready, and heaved into position. However, the researchers soon found a severe obstacle. The size of the balloons would exceed sensible dimensions, if they got up as high as required, because of the strings connected. No matter how thin the rope was, the weight increased considerable the further the balloon went up. Even more, because the buoyancy declined the

higher the balloons went. Thus, they stopped rising halfway. As long as the strings kept them tied to the ground, the voyage had to come to an early end.

“We need something supra-light, and still tensile” Billy-Joe said. The other members of the study group immediately agreed, but they had no idea of how to get such material without the help of the magic bow. Thus, they had the metres read half way up, which was not very promising. In fact it didn’t say what the researchers expected, when they compared their results with the readings of the sub water metres.

Still the hypothesis proved valid. The supra-light watches high up in the air went faster by some hundredth of a second. The gap in time seemed neglectable. Still it was there and increased slowly during the upcoming weeks, while the metres went slower the further down you got. That meant the time was running faster, in other words, you lost time. The further you got off the ground the better it was, as this meant you was picking up with the flow of time. You wouldn’t lose time any more or even win some extra seconds, if you were lucky.

“That’s the proof. Time on Earth is nothing set, but refers to calculable data and reference points” the Headmistress Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk opened the meeting of the General Assembly.

“There is something going on that we don’t understand completely yet” Professor M’gamba assisted, while Professor Scholasticus Slyboots shook his head doubtfully. “I do not fully agree with my dear colleagues”, he said. “We might see now circumstances, which we ignored before. I wouldn’t get any further yet. The laws of nature are not negotiable. I hope, you do agree with that, dear colleagues.”

While he said that he gave the Headmistress and Penelope a fierce glance. The latter couldn’t resist from answering right away: “...On the other hand we do know that the so call Laws of Nature are only valid as long as somebody comes and proves how limited or relative their range of validity is. I think advanced science agrees to that...”

“That’s exactly what I have in mind...”, a voice was heard, while another opposed:

“The red thread, please, show us the red thread. What are you talking about? Or, more precise, what do you want us to understand? – Perhaps it would be wise if we assemble what we have got first of all, before we start with conclusions. That should

come later, when we evaluate the material and the data we have at hand.”

“Right, let’s gather facts. Here we put the facts, and there the conclusions, dear”, the Vice-Headmaster assisted his wife, and divided the blackboard with a chalk line into halves.

“The facts first – things we do know for certain...”

“Well, there is the measuring of time. We do have our charts and tables, without doubt...”

“...Which leads us to our first and most astounding conclusion, doesn’t it?”

“Surprising? How is that?”

“First, the conclusion as such. How does it read?”

“Can anyone provide a sound formula?”

“What about this one?”

Scholasticus produced such a shortened formula that even his assistant gave in. You could see the doubts in the questioning eyes all around, which asked, whether the speaker himself understood, what he was talking.

Most elegantly Adrian Humperdijk manoeuvred around such obstacle, Scholasticus didn’t want to accept as such, who turned away from the confused faces all about.

“Well, at least we do agree on the facts, after all” he murmured indignantly.

“Don’t we overlook something very important while searching for the formula?” Adrian Humperdijk asked after a while of stunned hesitation and bewilderment all over. He didn’t want the thread to get cut – he still seemed to be seeing.

“Right, it is astounding, no doubt about that. How does such a phenomenon get into focus or become alert after all?”

“Well, even if I risk to repeat me, first of all, we don’t know, if it is not us, who come about some eternal on-goings – if not eternal then very long-lasting, anyway.”

“...Seems to be not in one piece anymore – our good old globe, somehow cut into slices...” Penelope M’gamba didn’t enforce the thesis of the long range endurance. For her the phenomena seemed singular events, stepped loose by secret causes of falsifying manipulations by Man in Nature’s economy.

“The rings of Saturn – each follow its own dynamic. You didn’t look at that, that way – when it comes to time...”

“That’s wholly new. Nobody saw it that way...”

“...Doesn’t have to do with the ancient paradoxes?” Arundle objected.

“Are we caught in the trap of that aeroplane or truck, laden with some hundreds of kilos of birds, which all get into the air in the instant of weighing? Do we really know what happens with their weight? Do they weigh or not, that is the question. Is the means of transport lighter or does the weight hide in the volume, the birds cannot flee?”

“Is the answer known?” Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk wanted to know and turned to her husband, who shrugged. “I’m no math’s genius, like others right here,” he said with a grin.

“Thus, we all are the same, more or less with what we want to find out...” Arundle went on. “In our case the birds quite clearly don’t weigh. Our time is dissolving in layers and slices, and is forming its individual rotation speed. The rings of Saturn swivel independently and behave like alien elements at each other, if we look at it that way.”

“I’m not so sure about Saturn” Scholasticus objected – “But otherwise – sounds convincing, though...”

“None’s been there except me. I’ve got to know it better than any of you...” Arundle answered somewhat snooty and threw her long hair in a provoking air out of her face.

Adrian kept on scribbling on the board whatever he thought to be of importance.

The half of the board that was meant for conclusions became filled with unreadable scrabbles. Adrian put down everything he learnt. The assembly kept on producing samples and ideas.

“Above all is hanging in midair the desperate outlook of having lost all magic” Billy-Joe felt forced to remind them, when Arundle referred to their gifts and qualities. Her remark did lay open the whole misery, the disappearing of the magic bow meant to her.

“Let’s come to the point” she picked up his reminder: “Magic is on the verge.”

Scholasticus added: “Magic – that means ‘the not yet known’. Magic is nothing sophisticated, meant to confuse and mislead people, but refers to things we do not yet understand with the means we have at hand. This is the only reason why such things are banned into the sphere of mystery, witchcraft and sorcery.”

“Well, well” the Headmistress sighed: “The de-mystification of the world is on the march – and we are right in the middle...”

“I’d be very pleased if somebody would take notice of the ongoing hair-raising happenings out there”, Scholasticus pointed with a great gesture into the vague no-where all around: “Nobody

would speak of the de-mystification any more. We have out there a world full of the strangest and most unbelievable secrets... ah, what do I say – its not just one world but hundreds or thousands or hundred of thousands – while we hang on to the so-called de-mystification. Is it after all, all that bad when we do not believe any more in God's tracking the sun back to its starting point every night, when it is dark, and we cannot see such manoeuvre? This is done for the one and only reason to please us, while others believe him God.”

Scholasticus talked himself into rage and the Headmistress, who had raised the point, became subdued. Perhaps this man was right and the simple little world of busted illusions weighed light in the face of the real challenges of eternity and the everlasting endless secrecies waiting for discovery and realisation for those in the know, while it could also be wise to leave them untouched alone where they were.

God alone knew how many of such unsolved riddles and unsolvable mysteries there were. There surely were subjects a hasty enlightenment had unveiled or set aside as nonsense, which re-considering again might be wise.

21. The Time-Machine

Tomorrow was the big day. If he failed tomorrow, that would be it. He knew that. Convincing the Brotherhood had been hard enough, while they at least knew what it was all about – well most of them did, more or less. There were all the others - the fellow travellers and followers, but they scarcely counted.

“Try with simple words. Give them a clear-cut model at hand; something they can grab; that's always the best with those money people. They are simple minded and dislike complex theories. In fact, they aren't in favour of the academic world of ideas but have a good nose for opportunities.

For them facts are convincing, most those - nobody else knows. Show them a secret and tell them, that it is theirs now as well, and they will swallow it.”

Viola de Stäel talked herself in rage, while Waldschmitt was nodding affirmatively.

“I can give you an idea, of what I’m telling them, do you agree?”

“Good idea, you train your rhetoric abilities, and I hopefully get a better understanding of the matter.”

“The best will be I start at the beginning, when we experimented with our mice. Because everything began with mice.”

“That’s interesting – real mice? Such as they have in the laboratories?”

“Exactly – while our mice were special. I don’t want to step ahead too fast. We experimented with mice over long distances. You can imagine our experiment like a seesaw”, Roland Waldschmitt went on after a short while and started grinning self-complacent.

If the one side is up, the other side is down, that is obvious and cannot be altered. I think that’s clear, isn’t it?”

Viola de Stäel didn’t show how she felt. How silly does he think I am. Of course I know how a seesaw works, everybody does. Still she nodded eagerly to please him and have him go on.

“Just like that you have to imagine a Time-Machine - at least at that stage were we started. A mouse was sitting somewhere over the Atlantic, and our mouse was sitting over here. Our mouse became younger and the other mouse became older. Our mouse was sitting on top of the seesaw that is, it lost weight, so to speak. However, what our mouse lost the mouse on the other side gained. Thus became heavier, so to speak. That means the overseas mouse became that much older as our mouse became younger.”

“Very interesting, I see. How was that shifting of age initiated?”

“You ask for the seesaw, alright, that is the proper question.”

Viola de Stäel wasn’t aware of having asked for the seesaw. However, she didn’t want the flow of speech stopped.

“The seesaw is of course invisible, and not materialized either, but that I’ll explain later. Let’s assume for the moment that there is a thin pole – a string – to be precise crossing the Atlantic in a straight line...”

“Like a kind of tangent perhaps? – and where it meets the ground there exactly is the middle?”

“Right, you are very right. I see you have the right attitude. The rounding of the globe is of course part of our calculations. Our

string of approximately 4,000 miles at length, touches the Atlantic, say near the Azores... - Don't mind the exact position. The string however, is real you can bet it's real: on two opposing sites exactly the same happens, however upside down. There is one weakness in this model. I'm sure you did notice at once, didn't you?"

"You mean the state, when both sides keep in equilibrium, is that what you mean?"

"Exactly. Such a state doesn't happen but once. It is the state at the beginning. We then take care that our mouse remains up and the opposite mouse down. Which is easy to perform as our end of the string is on the highest of our mountains – the Zugspitze, while the American side of the string ends in the lowest depth of the Mississippi delta.

When we did the counter-check where we started from the Netherlands, we got the aging mouse on our side. Our American section was very enthusiastic about such revenge, so to speak. Who cares for the losers after all?

We were looking after the difference. We wanted to find out, how such aging worked under a specific set up of circumstances, while tricking out the time flow."

"Nice and dandy – in the example. Such a seesaw isn't real after all. Your string was kind of mental experiment, I presume."

"Not quite. We were in the lucky position to producing a string, by extracting one electron from our mouse..."

"One tiny little electron was all you needed?"

"You are right, one single electron – such a tiny invisible something, we had to add on the opposite mouse. – I forgot to tell you that these mice were cloned genetic twins – that is, they were absolutely identical. By means of the artificially caused difference we were not only able to build the string, but started the whole procedure."

"One single electron is enough? That's hard to believe!"

"Stunning, isn't it?"

"In deed! – How do I have to imagine such a transport of an electron over the Atlantic?"

"To be precise – it is sufficient to shoot one electron out of the clone. Very simple, just like that - most likely via string to the other side: That procedure is enough to get the aging started. The connection is set, as soon as the first shot is fired, so to speak.

A string is some kind of transformed matter – transformed into energy, to be precise. It is the energetic mode of matter, just as our given material world is a condensed form of energy. That's very

important to keep in mind all the time while fiddling around with such tricky stuff.”

“Sounds complicated, still somewhat plausible, while difficult to form a clear picture...” Viola de Stäel gave him an admiring look. Roland Waldschmitt nodded self-complacent and went on with his explanations.

“Later we improved our time-machine by means of a complex accelerator inside the string and began to experiment with all kinds of targets.

We searched by means of the law of probability for clusters on any given Galtonian curve.

Well, that was a little later, in fact much later, because we were fascinated by our discovery and extended it as well as we could with bigger and more complex objects.”

“Did you try with human beings as well?”

“Of course, we had Man on our minds; right from the start. That was our stimuli and generator and forced us to rush on. While we didn’t think of Man as such, but of the ‘Chosen Few’ – we were part of. Each of them wanted to be among the first to take the side of the rejuvenating mouse. However, who would take the part on the other side. For that position there were no volunteers - everybody long for everlasting youth.

‘Endless Life’ was the name of our project in the end. Of course we came about the question of the proper genetic material. Where was that? The answer was cloning. Clone-technology provided us with the necessary material. Thus, we started breeding our own clones. Of course, they had to grow up before we could implement them in the aging side of the renewing seesaw.”

“Cloning is the answer as it seems, but I understand such technology is still in statu nascendi, that is still in a probationary mode, and neglected because of moral considerations.” Viola de Stäel agreed.

“Research went on, although secretly, because of the public opinion. Nobody outed him dealing with such dubious matter, while research improved...”

”Might be different in France... over there clones are bred, just like that. Still things aren’t yet where they should be.”

“Officially, no one admits...”

“I thought they have started to breed clones as spare part reservoir for organ transfers, kind of store for living spare parts, for those who can afford, of course.”

“This is the most productive use, I agree, but we wanted to get further than that. We thought of a transfer of a much different kind, as you can see. With us, you generate youth directly. You stay young forever, as long as you have someone opposite, who shares his lifetime with you, that is give it to you, while you hand him back your aging.”

Viola de Stäel clapped her hands – “Congenial, just congenial. The gentlemen got to fly on that tomorrow.”

“I should say so. After all, we do have results. Those who extract organs from their clones did in fact fail. Things didn’t work the way they thought.”

“What kind of experiments are these?”

“Well, they experimented with brain. The basic idea was transplantation. They tried to incorporate young brains into old bodies, with mediocre success. Most patients died only hours after the operation. The others failed to keep up with the transformation process. The problem was that the old brains didn’t do good in the new bodies. Thus, people tried other ways and sought of transferring only the contents. Kind of programming though, that failed widely however when it came to emotions...

In short, our approach was the most challenging and advanced. You see - there is no future without us. We keep the key to the future in our hands.”

Roland Waldschmitt raised his voice in a prophetic air.

“You are the greatest” the woman exclaimed enthusiastically.

Roland Waldschmitt blustered like a cock in the poultry pen. This was the kind of admiration he deserved.

“That is – by no means - all we have in the back hand. Our greatest invention is still to come. There are plans for a gigantic project. We call it the ‘Moon-Tie’. If we succeed, then the world will change irreversibly on our will and will make of us the ‘Masters of Time and Space’. Only when we intervene on such global scale, we will be able to dictate our frame to the minor billions, as they have to give, what we are gaining.”

Roland Waldschmitt looked full of pride into the face of the woman. Madness shone out of his eyes, thus, Viola de Stäel quickly lowered her gaze, fearing such fierce flame could harm her.

A tremor of awe overcame her – cosy and horrible at the same time, when she looked into such abyss, her President opened before her eyes just like that.

What a devilish brain she thought; - ingenious and weird, and she felt more than ever drawn towards this man, as she was full of crankiness herself.

22. Searching for the Magic Bow

Arundle couldn't accept the loss of her magic bow. Thus, she succeeded in pushing her friend Cori to ask Minister Boetie for help at last, who indeed initiated extensive measures. At first, she had some scouts searching for that wreck. The bow might still be in there, was the idea.

While the rescue team had been busy with rescuing the shipwrecked, the position of the yacht had not been recorded. Only a very general description of the geological whereabouts of the area could be reconstructed, and formed now the base of the renewed investigation.

The rescue team had had then better things to do. The drowned had to be brought back to life. Now it looked as if many things had been dropped for sloppiness or ignorance, but that was not true. Things only looked different now.

Minister Boetie even offered to participate in the renewed search, so she might get an idea of what was going on out there. After all, they had to take care of a vast area that was more or less unexplored. Such undertaking was almost like searching for a needle in a heap of hay.

The depth and the geological composition of the ground did their part in addition. You could scarcely see the hand before your eyes in the mysterious darkness of the deep sea, while being caught in clefts and crevices when carefully investigating the ground.

"It's like wading through the thickest fog blindfold", Cori explained the situation down there. She had a good idea of the living conditions in the underwater world, because she had visited her friend Boetie frequently before the latter became Minister.

"Might be a good idea, though, if we did employ the submarine", Arundle suggested. "The boat is fast and has good search- and head-lights."

"That's a good idea. With the submarine, we could support the nixes outside. I'll pass that on", Cori offered. "...And I talk to

Scholasticus because of the submarine, perhaps he will even join us” Arundle said and Billy-Joe, who just stepped by added: “I’d be happy if he came with us.” He seemed to be certain that they shouldn’t let the girls go alone on such a precarious mission.

The submarine was meanwhile excessively overhauled, after having badly suffered from several damages during the recent war faring. The crew was goofing about idle on land, or was involved in guarding duties. Only the Skipper and the helmsman took care for the vessel round the clock these days, although their care was relaxing meanwhile, which had been up to the peak during the crisis and the upheaval of the Melisandrian colony.

Thus, the order didn’t come unsuitable. The crew was eager to test in practice the technical innovations and alterations made in the shipyard. The short cruise from the shipyard back home was meanwhile a good while ago. A trip down to the deep sea however promised to become a realistic challenge and a good test of the quality of craftsmanship involved in renewal and repair.

Minister Boetie did appreciate the operation of the submarine, however, asked for special care down there, as the deep-sea flora and fauna was extremely delicate. The operation could well be misunderstood by the deep-sea dwellers. “Take good care, nothing gets wrong this time” she pleaded her drylander-friends from the surface.

Scholasticus - head of the scientific expedition and scientific counsellor - passed her plead on to the crew. The Skipper was aware of his responsibility. Manoeuvring in such depth required excellent helmsmanship, even more because of the request for special care on environmental matters. Seaweed fields had to be left alone, plankton gardens or whale yards and breeding stations had to be passed undisturbed. All kinds of special rules and regulations had to be obeyed and followed, as were valid down there likewise. Artificial devices of any kind had to give way to all beings alive, for example. A multitude of instructions had to be learned and accepted. Such rules were hard to obey as some deep sea dwellers didn’t show their aliveness but looked like stone or just mud, or where mixed up with fixed plants.

Both sides agreed on the deal. The boat set sails, so to speak and headed for the crucial area where she soon arrived.

Everything was routine so far. The Skipper was happy with the renewal, and the scientific observers trained debarking in the depth or studied instructions Cori gave them. As soon as they

arrived, they met the scouts already there, now swarming about the boat outside. The joint search could start right away.

The head- and the searchlights of the submarine peaked like sunrays into the darkness. Such strong light got here perhaps for the first time, and might do harm to the inhabitants, but that was the risk, they had to take. Without light all searching down here would be in vain.

Some kind of Morse code had been arranged with the scouts outside, whenever they felt like communication. The crew answered from inside and picked up the advice, important as it was sometimes.

However, discipline was not the nixes' first virtue, thus, it happened that a multitude of messages sometimes hammered in on them scabbled and unreadable, though.

The further they got away from inhabited zones and agricultural areas, the faster they went on. The elegant swimmers outside kept up with the boat at ease. You could see them gliding by the panorama panes as if involved in some kind of merry dance. It was fun to look on - sometimes even breath taking - when they manoeuvred all too close.

The lookout up front in the bow still had to have a sharp eye on the vicinity, no matter how pleasing the performance was. The responsibility for boat and Man still lay in the hands of the crew.

Such a heavy giant took her time manoeuvring, thus, obstacles in sight had to be passed on to the captain's bridge well in advance.

Those scouts outside couldn't understand, as they changed direction instantaneously faster than in the wink of an eye. They kept gliding elegantly here and there, turned this side or up and down, just like that or even reversed seemingly effortless, while such a huge trunk as the submarine was, kept pace a good while before obeying the changing of the course. Getting her stopped meant to pace on for some yards, no matter how fierce the reverse shift was executed. While such strain could well ruin the structure of the whole. Shipyard wise such pull was prohibited anyway. The boat was not allowed to go backwards unless she had come to a complete halt before.

Nevertheless, the boat was easily steered and agile in a way, compared to others of her kind, while you had to take care for sufficient speed. The slower you went the lesser you steered – a contradiction you had to live with, but could hardly be conveyed to the outside scouts.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of the boat was, that you had maps of the area in question always at hand, while the scouts outside had trouble in sorting their devices, or lacked of light reading them. Currents and sudden ground waves weren't of help either, quite the opposite.

Thus, the Skipper kept the overall view and took care of the systematic search. In detail however, the scouts were of great help as they were able to look into each crevice or behind steep rocks. They dived into the darkest abyss, where no light could get, not even the searchlight of the submarine, while a shipwrecked yacht could well rest right there.

The scouts could follow any hint and suspicion, while the boat had to perform circumstantial manoeuvres doing likewise, if enabled at all. No matter whether a pair of curious eyes was staring out of each bull eye, while the ship was directed one way or the other for vague phantoms that turned out to be mistaken.

Adrian was on board of course. He couldn't resist coming, nor could Professor M'gamba - her factotum on the hook, by all means. Tibor couldn't resist either, and Flo accompanied her little sister, who couldn't leave Arundle behind. Both sisters tried to cheer the poor girl up who had started realizing the likeliness of the total loss by now, the longer the search went on.

"A hatch might be blocked" they argued, well knowing that the bow was very able to free himself, and had overcome other and graver circumstances with bravura.

Arundle smiled rather moved. She knew it better. The whole excursion was in vain, after all. Perhaps it was only to ascertain her. She had to do something she felt.

What had happened to the magic bow? Had he left her for good? Did she make an unforgivable mistake? Arundle couldn't think of such a grave failure on her side. What ever happened they mastered it together and much worse things than a shipwreck. Really a worse situation? The magic bow had lost his magical powers never before. Was there hope anyway, because of that fact? Was he after all helplessly imprisoned in the wreck, bare of all his magical devices?

Scholasticus and the Skipper agreed on going in circles through the area again, after having crisscrossed it once without success. This might turn out to be too small a range, but a more sorrow one. Thus, no inch of the area in question remained unchecked. At least they could say in the end, when they reached the centre that there was nothing. They were however still far away

from that end. The circling had just begun. The expedition was still on the outer range.

The nixes lacked of patience for such a delicate procedure. While they knew that the ship kept steadily circling on her cruise, they crisscrossed back and forth.

For one thing, they had fun, while they tended to give in all too soon – it was the second day already. Such double or even triple checking overdid perhaps, however the advantage lay clear at hand: no inch of the ground remained unchecked.

The large map could not be betrayed. The Skipper was able to locate their position at any time, and he was very proud of that.

“Solid seamanship” he called the procedure. “No helpless splashing about” he added with a meaningful look outside. “Looks somewhat nice and dandy, you’ve opt to admit, but that’s about it...”

In the boat only the clock indicated whether it was day or night. The day was on the verge the companions felt. They signalled their wish for a rest for the upcoming night. The Skipper had the engine stopped and had the boat set firmly on the ground, that is he kept her pending half a foot above. The scouts retired under the broad trunk safe from sudden attacks by the new energy shield.

Out here far away from any civilisation the ancient law of the sea still reigned. “Eat, or be eaten”. The eager scouts had a rich supper in the green field of seaweed near by, but swallowed a tiny mussel by accident as they pretended if asked by a comrade - or thoughtlessly hushed a silvery fish, now and then.

Since the Minister Boetie directed the course, most nixes gave up the consumption of live food. On the other hand taste was a very special matter and couldn’t be dictated, nor could the change of habits. If you were used to live on raw fish, while seaweed was but a vegetable aside, you couldn’t be changed over night.

Inside the boat, the explorers had also supper. Then the guards were fixed for the night. The Skipper called it for the day, while the lights were dimmed, and those free of obligations sorted their bones for a night’s rest.

The pictures of the day could not be cut off behind closed eyelids. They had seen too much. Had they overseen something of importance? Arundle had her impressions pass by, and tried to memorize such of a faint nature. How silly would it be, if they had passed the wreck without noticing? Then she told herself that she

would have noticed the bow's presence, as close as she was related.

She always felt him, although a kind of estrangement drifted them apart, which might have to do with her coming on age and the priorities she set. Things, she formerly did with the magic bow, she now did on her own. Thus, she'd heard him whisper more than once, "You don't need me any more."

No matter how fiercely she denied - a grain of truth there was and couldn't be set aside.

"Once it's got to be parted..." - She couldn't imagine such separation, and didn't want to imagine. "That's not only strange but awful. I would never accept this, never ever, as long as I live", she said under tears. Their partisanship was meant lifelong and even further then that, and would never come to a halt.

Now it did happen. Slowly she let the idea sink into her mind. The magic bow had abandoned her, because she didn't need him any more. Not in the sense of the unhappy child she had been. Was that the true reason why he left her, because she was happy now? Happier than ever?

Was that true? Was she happy? Somehow, she was, and was not at the same time, she thought with a bad conscience, as many things went wrong around her. Did such fact scratch her inner feelings? All that grief everywhere: Walter's death, the terrible war, suffering, cruelty, misery and persecution - all about had nothing to do with her consciousness deep inside. There she felt lifted up and settled on a pink cloud. She had reached her aim, and got at a state she didn't even dare to think of while young.

She felt her own strength, and agreed with what she felt. The feeling was such that she could have embraced the whole world. She was happier as can be, but now that shade fell upon her, deep and mysterious out of nowhere. She still could keep down the desperation, she felt as soon as she thought of the magic bow of hers. How long could she carry on? She had to find her precious - by all means!

A strange mode of love overcame her, a kind of indecent yearning, she felt ashamed. Would anybody know, she would die for shame.

At last, Arundle fell asleep. However the yearning didn't let her go in her dreams. Her magic bow transformed into a peculiar shape and misled her with blandishments to hair-rising encounters into strange worlds beyond the earthly boundaries.

She had liked to follow him but couldn't. Something kept her down. The barrier was there even in her dream. There was no escaping, no matter what she tried. She knew if she wanted her magic bow back, she had to overcome that awful barrier.

23. The London Conference

Roland Waldschmitt woke up by the fierce ringing of the alarm clock. Outside a grey day was dawning - or was it fog again? Bleary-eyed he gazed through the softly waving curtains and then checked the watch.

The fluorescent handles pointed at half past eight – it was high time to get up. The meeting with the finance executives was arranged for nine o'clock. The man shuddered as he thought of the cold shower he intended to take and covered in the blankets again.

The bedside next to him was already empty. The bath was blocked anyway, which gave him some minutes. The last day of the conference had come. Most of the far-reaching resolutions had been settled. High time had come to find appropriate ways of financing their outrageous plans.

Once again, he had to try his best, and convince his audience, while it were different today, not like the followers and members but hardcore business people, bankers, executives and shareholders of the largest scale. Such he had to convince today - people, who only had their revenue in mind, and that of their clientele. They had to become convinced of a higher aim that could be achieved - most awkward indeed. How could he present his subject in order to make them believe?

'Everlasting life' was the key to the new way of oppression – favouring the ruling class, and supporting the privileged by finding the trickiest and meanest way of exploitation you could think of. Reduce the time of life of the masses and enlarge the lifespan of the ruling class, that is, of selected members of the ruling class; - 'all, who deserve it' - was the idea still only vaguely laid down and circumscribed by the newly appointed spiritus rector (that is the guy who pulled the strings – and that was he himself, who else?).

Waldschmitt felt dizzy while imagining the outlook. A stony way lay ahead, he knew all too well. Getting money from those who had it was a contradiction in itself. He had to make clear that there was a value behind the money that was much worthier than money.

With wet hair and loose tie 'Roland sipped a cup of steaming hot coffee while glancing over to the rich buffet full of platters and trays with the most excellent breakfast food. He stuffed himself a filled ham roll in his mouth and the mayonnaise made a mess on his snow-white shirt. Angrily he tried to rub it off with a napkin.

There was no time for changing shirts however. You could hear the guests' next door small-talking.

Viola de Stäel, his representative, tried to safeguard what could be safeguarded, and went with a soft brush through his thin hair, then fastened his tie orderly, got the jacket straight and knocked off some dandruffs, then took care of the dot by buttoning the jacket the proper way.

"Off you go, good luck to you..." she ordered and rushed ahead with wide and fast steps through the twin-door *entrée*, where the fate and future of the world was on the verge.

A greasy dot shouldn't be responsible for the course of the world, Herr Waldschmitt fiercely reckoned, and pushed the chin forward feeling almost like an outrageous bull entering the arena – well he'd perhaps better choose the torero's part instead, though.

He followed the woman who spread a wave of self-assurance where she set her feet, and felt safely carried forward.

At once he also felt certain to be on the winners' side. He stepped at the microphone. 'Now or never' he said to himself. He carefully put down his scriptures on the desk. He quickly ran over the keywords and waited until the audience went silent.

He kept on waiting a little longer that increased suspense, before he opened with some cool remarks on the London weather, before he got to the point.

He briefly outlined the plans of the Brotherhood, but didn't bother the audience with fuzzy details, of minor interest and exceeding their capacity. He ascertained them that things were scientifically and technically safe and under control, and on the way as soon as the financing was finally settled. He outlined a clear period concerning the return of interest. He split up the frame of finance and precisely outlined when the first plants picked up production.

"...Provided the financing's set", he repeated.

The bankers and financiers were stunned. Such wide spun competence they had not expected. The amount in question was gigantic, no doubt, but so was the outlook.

Herr Waldschmitt frolicked inside as soon as he realized the change of the mood. While he himself couldn't believe what he was promising. His words sounded all too bold. He generated himself as a kind of God in due process of re-creating the general way of life; but they dug it, he had sacked them – not one stepped aside or gave it a second thought.

Madame de Stäel, the President's mundane Representative, was flooded with offers. She took notes, collected business cards and passed on her own, and cautiously dosed promises in correlation with the investment. Her behaviour was exactly complementing her master's performance.

The Chairman had expected ethical and humane considerations, because you found such humanists everywhere these days. They kept sneaking into the highest circles, but was disappointed with that. No one objected the immorality of the scenario. Like a pack of eager hound-dogs those money-makers picked up the trail of such a prey. While the idea of an everlasting life inflamed their imagination and had it strain into a somewhat odd direction. Democratic considerations didn't bother them. They didn't think of their clientele, as far as there was any, not even of their spouses or relatives – the thrill hit a much deeper layer of their character and satisfied a far wider notion, that stood – they doubted not - behind their profit-minded attitude, as its true and final base and substance, they didn't even admit to themselves.

On secret accounts, an insurmountable quantity of financial wealth and power gathered in one morning. Breathtaking figures wavered about, that became fixed after transfer, and re-transfer finally to the ultimate aim. You had to keep your mind clear and your records clean.

Without his assistant, he would have been lost, Herr Waldschmitt admitted unwillingly. She handled and juggled with those millions and billions like a true master juggler.

As soon as the conference was over, Herr Waldschmitt jumped back in on the workload stimulated by experiencing such a huge power of finance, he regarded as his own real world.

He didn't return to his wife, but stayed with Madame. A house was rented for that purpose in London. The Headquarters of the

Brotherhood was there anyway. He could easily transfer his part of research over there. Negotiations were in full swing.

The figures on secret number accounts built a quietening cushion without doubt. Still they bothered him little. Financing was put in the hands of his charming assistant.

He alone was able to imagine what things really were about. He hadn't conveyed such last secret to the assembly - not even to them. He still felt unable, be it that the time was not ripe for such wide-ranging ideas, be it that the true obligations and possibilities only opened to a free and independent spirit, be it that he was drunken by such outlook - unable to put in words what was in him...

For the time being only one scenario generated and became clearer and clearer, and that scenario mounted in one solitary peak. He could think but of one single individual in that position - himself. Should those money-sharks and locusts strive as best they could - suffocating from the fortune, they made - he was after more, much more ...

The formulas and calculations on his computer "the scenario of the future" as he vaguely put it, remained hidden in the dark. At last, he felt released, without the unnecessary ballast of his bourgeois existence. - Roland Waldschmitt was free at last.

Meanwhile the scientists of the Brotherhood didn't tinker any more in garages and backyards. Huge staffs of technicians, engineers and specialists were at their disposition. Gigantic experiments were in due course, and first successes were reported, while still regionally limited. However, this would change soon. Money was now no question any more.

While predicting such boundlessness, Roland Waldschmitt shuddered. "By all means - do not lose your nerve" he admonished himself and his able representative.

"It's do or die now." The next steps would bring about the decision. If they thought great enough this time, and dealt accordingly - they would succeed.

"Away with small-minded considerations. Grandeur is due. We need the appropriate dimensions. What we did up to now was much too small. We still haven't learnt to think in the adequate dimensions", he explained while Viola de Stael was listening attentively. She stood at his side every day and supported his measures with her full strength.

Then he once more explained what the Brotherhood had achieved so far on a world-wide scale, and what they were working on.

“Let’s have a look at this section. Here in the model you can see, what changes happened. Imagine such a ring fits all around the globe. It’s somewhat like in the computer tomography. We achieved the isolation of a section of the globe, and pushed it out of the flow of time - of course not wholly, but only in reference to the neighbouring sections. Time is no longer unchangeable, as is nowhere outside of any given reference system by the way, but relates to several forces. We were able to influence some of these forces and steer them as we wish. The first trial brought results after all, however not in the expected scale.

We managed to disturb the flow of time in certain areas remarkably, thus, temporal calamities occurred. We do not yet understand everything that is happening there. We do not know if some results were influenced by counter-strategies of defence that had been taken against our steps. Unfortunately, that area houses old opponents of ours, which is not advantageous for our purposes, as you can imagine...”

Herr Waldschmitt paused; while thinking of his daughter who was near, wrath overcame him. He knew she was responsible for the disturbances. She was the heart of the resistance. However, it was not wrath alone. As he also felt pride glooming up when he thought of her, while he angrily pushed such notion away, as it interfered with the reckless conqueror’s attitude of his.

Here he had a dangerous weakness, he knew all too well, which he would have liked to get rid of, the sooner the better. While there was something in him that still hoped to get her over to his side one day. She was so young, what did she know about life? What did she know about the realities of the world and the forces that kept things moving?

Although he sometimes wondered who of them was the cleverer – even the stronger - a strange idea, though that made him fear, and forced him into an inner conflict repeatedly. Then he felt the yawning gap, and a pain, unbearable and wholly inhuman and strange tore his interior apart. Only with the utmost strain, he managed back to equilibrium and gathered his self at the pole of his choice.

Helpless hatred he felt inside. He would do everything he could to get rid of the power the girl stood for, once and for all.

You had to make up your mind in the struggle of forces. There was but one ultimate choice. Those who had made it were branded by their fate, he well knew. Her daughter was still too young for that decision.

That was his opinion, which he relied on and gathered all hope. So much was going to happen. Life bore such a plenitude of hassle and foulness. Her notion towards the good would faint in her, he doubted not. In the end, selfishness and egotism would win, as always. Why should his daughter be the exemption to the rule?

Angrily he pushed such disturbing thought aside, which had come to his mind all of a sudden. However, he couldn't.

He wanted to turn back to the woman, who was sitting in front of him – an attentive look in her face. However, he had lost the thread, and Madame de Stäel suddenly became strange and awkward. He turned away and left the room without a word of explanation. The stimulant feeling of triumph had gone.

24. The Mark of the Magic Bow

The search at the bottom of the dark ocean by the submarine of the School of Inbetween was successful at last. The wreck was found and was searched thoroughly.

A wide leak gapped in the trunk underneath the side where the wreck had settled. First it had been obviously stuck on a reef but was then cut loose and tore open a second leakage, before it sank deeper, while losing most of the load – tins, anchor, ropes and hooks, even sheets and blankets, and chests filled with clothing. The sand covered all such things already. Thus the supporting hand of the sea covered the strange property up in a dark wet grave with protective force.

The sea had been upset and in turmoil to the deepest depth, while was now wavering peacefully around the site of horror, and had the one or other movable item swing and played with the rests of the sail. This tedious movement was actually the only reference the scouts ever noticed.

The wreck itself lay hidden in the shadow of the reef and would have been overlooked - no doubt. Without the nix-scouts

outside they wouldn't have made it, the investigators were fully aware.

The magic bow could be everywhere. Thanks to the buoyancy, he would have well been able to leave that ghastly site, provided he managed to free himself from the store in the narrow cabin. Arundle didn't recall where she had stored him. However, that wasn't the big question now. "Please, do your best. He's got to be somewhere", she pleaded, whenever a face turned up in front of the panorama pane, nodding or shrugging.

The cabin was re-checked all over again, without the slightest sign. That meant to continue outside. Each gap had to be examined, and the sand stirred up that so peacefully had covered the forlorn lost property at last - still in vain.

No matter how hard they tried, the bow remained covered. In case he wasn't down here, he must have gone. That was the last and only explanation.

'What, if he's gone forever, and won't come back again'? – Arundle thought and the idea alone made her feel sick. "That could not be, that must not be", she stammered.

If he had wanted, he would have found a way back to her! Or – was he still stuck in that strange barrier that had even hindered her dreams to float, and limited the souls of the Animations as well?

Had he only left a note! He could well think she would come to rescue him one day.

Anything – the slightest sign would do - something secret she alone would understand.

Had he? – She had to go out and check herself. The wilful helpers couldn't possibly suspect what only she would notice. They didn't know the bow. Only she knew his tricks and secret messages and was acquainted with his peculiarities.

Arundle asked for a diving suit, and because she was a little afraid of the darkness, she asked Billy-Joe if he would come with her. The boy caught fire at once, even more so as his relation to the bow was an intimate one. Thus, he read the bow's signs (which the latter had hopefully left behind) as well as could Arundle.

Before leaving however Billy-Joe had to quarrel with Pooty, who wanted to come with him and didn't leave the Medicine Pouch that was hanging on Billy-Joe's neck.

"Can't you see I've got to take the pouch off? It doesn't fit into the suit. I'm coming back, don't worry..."

Pooty desperately clung at him. Even the magical stone objected: “Where there is a will, there is also a way” he snarled disapprovingly, while Billy-Joe had made up his mind. He hung the Medicine Pouch on a hook in the wardrobe next to the sluice and followed Arundle into the pressure tank. They had to worry about the magic bow first. Pooty had to step back one way or the other.

“It’s not the bow’s way of disappearing just like that”, he thoughtfully said to his girlfriend to calm her down, and to leave Pooty’s nerving lament behind. They were meanwhile dressed up and did the final checks. How much easier things were for a Conversior, though, Billy-Joe wondered. On the other hand, conversion was in itself a mighty burden you had to carry as well.

Billy-Joe didn’t understand much of sub-water life, not in the sense of Adrian, who reported only the best. Since Billy-Joe took Walter’s part while converting, he saw the world with different eyes and understood Adrian much better. Keeping one’s brain was after all very helpful in such altered state, while you had to rely otherwise only on instincts and vital emotions. Thus, he didn’t run with tears for his time as a dingo, but praised himself lucky for the outlet which was opened for him.

There had been tensions between Arundle and her magic bow. At times they seemed like an old couple sticking too long together - kind of alienation though, and good grounds for an out-time before separation and divorce. Billy-Joe was almost certain that his friend knew just too well that their sands were running.

The bow felt rejected, even Billy-Joe could feel. Useless put aside, a leftover from better and glorious days. At present he had nothing to do. Arundle managed alone quite well. She just didn’t want to admit.

Others even noticed how easy and free she moved without the bow over her shoulder. She had lost her stiffness, became softer and womanish somehow. Others felt that way, not only Billy-Joe, even the sisters Flo and Cori – they felt better liked as well, and truly loved by now, while before, the bow and Arundle formed an inseparable unit. Meanwhile the bow seemed to stick on her almost like an occupant.

Wherever she was, she had to take care not to knock him. Eventually, he stuck in narrow doorframes, or mopped dishes off the table when she forgot to leave him behind before she entered the dining room.

There had been many warnings. The bow himself repeatedly said in a funny air "You need me no more." Arundle protested loudmouthed "I need you more I can say, - what am I going to do without you?"

Fact was that Arundle could reach her aims without the help of a magic bow. While dreaming - travelling was far less dangerous, and you could induce almost the same, and overcome the obstacle of time and space to a certain extend.

Billy-Joe felt pushed to tell the truth at last. Right now, while the tank was flooded.

Arundle should start and learn accepting facts, instead of hanging on with illusions, he uttered somehow scabbled.

Arundle didn't get Billy-Joe's remarks right. "You are but jealous, that's what you are, you want him for you, I knew it, from the first day I lent him to you..."

"You might even be right", the boy admitted. "However, alienated you became - you and your bow. My problem with him doesn't make it easier for you. Such a magic bow emits plenty of power. I cannot imagine a person who's been left alone by that."

"There you are! Jealous you are, I knew it."

Once more Billy-Joe realized that he couldn't talk to her in that matter. Besides, they had to put on their helmets right now. They were standing in the water up to the belly already, and the flooding went fast.

Hasty they closed the helmets one another and crawled towards the hatch of the sluice that was slowly opening, when the pressure inside matched with the outside.

The submarine had gone as close as possible towards the wreck. Still the way seemed endless from the hatch to the wreck. Both divers stepped heavily through the dark ground and had the mould waver under their leaden boots, worsening the sight once more, as far as possible at all.

Devoid of the strong beamers at their foreheads, they had been blind like moles, while they hardly saw the hand before their eyes, and definitely had been lost without the scout nixes, who guided them to the wreck right to the opening of the leak.

'When I need him most, he is not here' Arundle kept on arguing. She didn't accept Billy-Joe's objections. Had they not all lost their power - one more, others less? No dream-travelling any more, no soul excursions... Just a narrow corridor was left back to one's own memories - that was all: Memories you couldn't take away from a person, like hair or eyes or limbs, they were yours

after all. Still those memories were faint guests, diminishing more than once before you got hold of them.

Arundle stepped behind Billy-Joe's broad shoulders, she vaguely meant to see still and pulled one leg after the other. It was an awesome mode of moving down here on the ocean's deepest grounds. How much had she liked to through that burden off. She then had shot up like an arrow towards the surface. You needed the weight to stay down.

She knocked into Billy-Joe who suddenly stood in front of her. They had arrived. The wreck lay there dark and threatening – a huge leak in the trunk, where they could step in, to examine the interior.

It was the big leak; they had repaired as well as they could by means of the special space proofed fabric out of the bow's invisible quiver. That had been working still, despite the unpleasant facts otherwise.

Much hope was not on Billy-Joe's side. The scouts had searched the place, and it was very unlikely that they overlooked anything. However, the magic bow sometimes behaved strange, whatever the reasons were, and not everybody was able to interpret his signs properly if he or she noticed them at all. Had there been time for setting signs? Arundle tried to remember. – Right, they were pushed by the Professor into that strange rubber-boat, and just before the Professor intended to follow, she had cut the rope, and stayed with Zinfandor Leblanc, that is she preferred dying in his arms – how romantic... united in death forever!

There was no room for irony, Arundle felt ashamed for her silly thoughts.

Thus, it had been. She hadn't spared any thought on the bow, not even in such a situation – that was perhaps the solution. How could she forget about him? Did he matter so little? Did she only wish to save her bacon?

Once more Arundle went through the decisive moments. No, there had been no thought on him, not even later. The bow was the last to think of. First there had been the humans in the boat and outside. On the Professor and her romantic detachment she had been thinking, her great romantic love. Then there were those waves; they had been thrown about until she became seasick. Then there was a push while the rubber boat became soft when the air got off. Water came in from all sides and then they went down irresistibly into the immeasurable depth, while outside it became

quiet and the air got less inside, until her consciousness faded. That was the last she remembered.

Then the rescue – but there they had been in the city already: Australis-City hidden under a huge shelf reaching out far into the ocean, or the other way round: the continent was almost drifting on the water only stabilized by hundred of thousands pillars.

Was Billy-Joe right? Had the magic bow left, because she became alienated inside? Arundle was not sure of her emotions any more. She once more made herself clear what her feelings were like. It was time to give up.

She just wanted to indicate her decision to Billy-Joe who was stepping next to her, rounding the wreck outside, although they both had given up and had no hope any more for a sign or trace of the disappeared bow.

There, something glittered in the light of the strong beamer at hand. Arundle pushed her mate and they bent down clumsily. In the mud stuck a golden arrow.

No doubt, there it was: They had found the sign of the magic bow.

Their doubts disappeared. What Arundle had made clear to herself some instants ago, didn't matter any more. The sign was undoubtedly. The arrow stuck at the entrance of a narrow crevice.

Arundle pointed down then touched the boy and gesticulated fiercely. Billy-Joe understood at once, no matter whether the verbal communication inside the suits worked, which didn't. Thus, they managed with gestures.

He well got what Arundle intended and tried to shake his head which didn't work under the stiff helmet. He pointed at the oxygen metre and turned to indicate they'd better return right away and come back with more time after having exchanged the oxygen bottles.

Arundle checked her metre. She had still half an hour to go, thus she pushed forward and Billy-Joe aside, and stumbled and fell right into that cave, and disappeared. Billy-Joe had no choice. Before he had gone back to the sluice, exchanged the bottles and returned, Arundle would most likely be suffocated.

The scouts, when they noticed what had happened, were very upset, and tried to stop him following his mate, - of course in vain. Billy-Joe would under no circumstances leave her alone, even more so as the excitement of the nixes indicated great peril inside the cave - could well be a monster was hiding.

He asked for assistance but couldn't make himself clear so he dived down at once as time was precious after all. Half an hour passed by just like that.

What danger was there? Billy-Joe felt fear arising inside. He knew the courage and decisiveness of the men of the depth who weren't easily frightened. If they warned him not to enter the crevice something perilous must be waiting in there. Big enough the cave was. He could slip in without touching. The way back would not become easy though. Well, they could get rid of some extra weight and were lifted by the natural buoyancy. They weren't all that helpless.

Billy-Joe kept on sinking. He didn't see Arundle yet, nor hear of her or anything but his own blood hammering inside.

He kept on sinking even faster. He had forgotten to check his watch but figured a good while – almost timeless he felt drifting as if he was a dripping sandglass, he compared with the oxygen bottle that was going to run out soon - and what then?

25. The Breakout

Arundle felt the power return that emitted from the magic bow. She knew him very close here and now, she could feel, she knew it with her sixth sense. She couldn't see him – she couldn't see anything. The beam of her beamer faded thin in the black naught all about.

Somewhere some feet or even only inches apart there were the walls of the cave - she kept on sinking.

The deeper she got the happier she felt. She left the fear behind, although the lookout ahead lay in deep darkness and in the uncertainty of fate. She forbade her from thinking and realized that she wasn't even able to think.

The oxygen became indifferent, as if it didn't bother her, which kept on emitting and would soon reach the red mark, indicating immediate return. What would she do then? She pushed such musings aside. She would see. First, there were more important things to mind.

The magic bow mattered her most. Could she hold him in her hands again at last. Never would she let him go again. She almost

felt his pure energetic wood in her hands, she felt the curving and patina of centuries, even millenniums – all those hands holding him with the same love she now felt again.

Oh yes, she loved her magic bow, she only had forgotten about that. All those circumstances and excitements had alienated her from him, who couldn't find a suitable place in the school routine.

Fact was the school was hostile at him Arundle realized and not only since that assault against Tika and the trial thereafter. Such discernments met her with might down here and shocked her by all means. Her beloved school!

Yes, her unity cracked when she picked up with the school routine and focused on her forthcoming only. The regretting hit her physically, now while she looked at reality with her magic bow's eyes. How much did he suffer!

She felt him in her hands again. Well, that was an illusion of course. Where should the bow come from? Right now illusion and imagination – and suddenly reality! As if the bow had waited only for her imagination. He was there, no doubt – and how good he felt!

Smoothing his presence knocked in her palms. The telepathetic circuit closed in and pulsed through her body and soul. She let the wholeness flood her and the inexplicable depth of his archaic wisdom carry her on – she had all forgotten what it was like to be one with him.

“Danger, beware the danger right ahead” – the news got at her together with the first stroke of a mighty tentacle. She felt pushed against the rough wall of the cave, and almost lost consciousness. She felt the rubber of the suit scratching over solid surface. The helmet still clung after the stroke. Slimy tentacles rushed flash-like to and fro, and immeasurable force pulled her towards the beak-like fangs of the beast.

Just like that, the bow bent, and an arrow lay on the string and got off in the last instant. It hit the centre of the beast's being while that was triumphantly closing in on the prey.

Billy-Joe was there now. Through the waving clouds of the sepia that covered the scene of death, he got Arundle by the shoulders and pulled her back, away from the beast's greedy beak.

Then he pulled the tentacles off the body, checked while he did for damage – and luckily didn't find any so far. He tried to get a glimpse of her face, but only saw a white dot behind the glass of

the helmet. Did her eyes sparkle? Did he see at last what he had missed so long, and couldn't believe of seeing ever again?

Arundle held her bow in her hands, held him like a heroine halfway above the head, indicating a sign of victory or relief or enthusiasm. Billy-Joe didn't want to decide. He felt the broad stream of such feelings waver towards him and bowed obediently before the so long missed force.

He also got rid of the fear and of the small-checked hope for rescue, fixed like a hypnotised rabbit on suffocation instead.

Arundle had back her magic bow – both had back their magic bow – that is, the magic bow had them back, and he would guide them where they got closest to their aims.

The gorge they had been fallen through seemed to open after they had overcome the guardian of the depth. An incredible suction got at the divers and speeded up their fall. They felt like being sucked into a funnel. Steam covered them now where gurgling floods had been. Faster and faster they went. Steaming white streams took over and replaced the threat of the depth. They fell no more but were sucked.

Did they lower or climb, that was the question? They couldn't make up their minds. Did they loose consciousness?

Billy-Joe meant to remember. He had been in such a steaming lot – that couldn't be...

"We made it, the barrier is gone, we have our forces back" Arundle screamed unheard and gesticulated heftily while Billy-Joe didn't understand. "Wait for the voice of the magic bow" she then tried again, and the boy started feeling the telepathetic message, he realized.

The way through the gorge had been the exit through the barrier – the secret loophole. Dangerous because guarded by a murderous beast, - but not insurmountable.

It was about high time to concentrate on the essence. "We have a task to fulfil..."

The steaming blaze spit the divers out. The heat had increased considerably, and they now felt the leaden weight of their equipment that was useful of keeping them on the ground of the sea. Where they were, they didn't need such devices - quite the opposite. They had to get rid of the weight, while the heat was still increasing. They had to get out of that blaze. Through the window of their helmets, they could spot a light above that got nearer fast.

Once more Billy-Joe was reminded of his adventure on the island of the petrified giant.

“We got to get up there as fast as we can” he let Arundle know.

The bow, thanks to his old power, had them hold their hands and up they went, just like that through that tightening tunnel, no matter of the scratches and bruises.

The diving suits broke to pieces, while Billy-Joe kept Arundle now by the feet in order to slim the cargo for the narrowing slot. The bow kept on towing them towards the light, Arundle still held with both hands tight, as if she'd never let him go again.

At last, the heads remained intact under the heavy helmets, though.

“Can't you protect us with some kind of space cover?” she pleaded and indeed the harsh knocks and scratches faded while the load went on with maximum speed towards the tempting light. Once more, the bow speeded up, while he didn't have to take care of his passengers. Like a long cigar, the up-wrapped payload rushed forward, steam and glow pushing aside and ahead, almost like some kind of flash of lightening. The heat lessened, be it for the air stream or because the worst part was up-done. They had fled the boiling lava that was winding under the sea ground by digging tunnels and slots eventually turning upwards. One of which they just had passed, while the steaming seawater served as a cooling system. Still, without their protective gear they'd been vaporized.

Without doubt – they had been saved, and the old power had returned. They felt it pulsating like a healing stream of healthy blood.

The monster octopus had been luring for ages at that crucial turning point where the cave met with the deadly glow and pressed whatever got there with tremendous force upwards again.

Thanks to the magic bow and Arundle's courage and bravery the beast had been beaten, thus it let go the flying. Was the victory lasting? Had the arrow hit the vital nerve of the octopod?

26. A Volunteer for the Cat Whisker

Those who stayed behind in the submarine started worrying when the two divers didn't return in time. The two were overdue at length. As to the calculations, their oxygen was out some fifteen minutes ago. That meant they would fall into coma soon. If they weren't rescued within the next three quarters of an hour they would die of carbon-monoxide poisoning.

Scholasticus' hair stood on end. How could he let them go without guide? He felt the responsibility pressing heavy on his shoulders. Such a task was too much for him. The questioning gazes, he caught didn't help to improve his mood. This was the end, thus he felt. At best, he had thrown the whole matter to pieces. What had he taken over once more? He was scientist, philosopher or researcher and head of the expedition, but no nurse!

His coming up wrath mingled with panic and mounted in desperation. What was he supposed to do? Perhaps for the first time in his life, he knew not what to do – a terrible feeling! At best, he had followed the missing, however they had taken the only gear. There was an emergency set though, but the captain thought it not suitable for such depth, he doubted for the regular ones as well. Such gear shouldn't be worn below a depth of - say one thousand yards, he said, while they were operating at a much higher pressure down here.

"There is but one last chance" he let the desperate expedition leader know, with whom he didn't want to change, because he didn't give a penny for the lives of the two missing. Even more so as the scouts reported of a fight in a cave nearby, were the missing had disappeared.

Even the bravest amongst the nixes didn't dare to follow, as this was a trap of no return, they signalled.

There was a lot of banging and knocking. All kinds of suggestions from within and from outside. The Skipper offered explosives and the like - he had lots on stock.

The time passed – yet there was no time – now or never something's had to be done.

"You mentioned a last hope?" the desperate Professor asked once more, while all options failed.

"Well, yes our so called Cat Whisker, a one man mini submarine..."

"Why didn't you tell me at once. Get it started..."

"It's got to be steered and handled. There must be someone who's able..."

“No, I’m sorry the crew’s not trained yet... it’s kind of new, though...”

Scholasticus was in his element, such a challenge was just right for him. He had steered all kinds of vehicles no matter whether on Earth or in space. He pushed the crew to get it started, then he climbed inside – well he tried, however he failed. His belly didn’t fit for such a mission he couldn’t press in the hard he tried.

Another defeat - and what a ridiculous one; - had he not eaten so much lately. “Get me out, for heavens sake, I’m too fat, what a shame...” he sounded hollow up from below.

Red faced and ashamed he finally stood outside again. What now? A look at the Skipper wasn’t helpful. He raised his voice anyway “Volunteers please, a brave man should be amongst us...”, “...brave and tiny” that was Pooty’s voice - “...but not too tiny...” came the answer prompt, when Tibor’s hand rose. The crew was relieved. At last a volunteer!

“Young man, can you handle this?” the Skipper asked emphatic and relieved and bent over to Tibor who was indeed a small person that only reached him to the shoulder. By size, he would be ideal, though.

Scholasticus shook his head. Not this one as well! On the other hand – did he have a choice? Technically fit was the youngster indeed, and when it came to operating the Cat Whisker they were all laymen more or less. A lot was self-explanatory, though.

Tibor looked so eager. “I’ll make it”, he whispered while he looked so pleadingly into the red face of the humiliated.

‘Damn it, why must I be fed thus indecently...’ the Professor conjectured, punching his round belly.

Pooty was gazing out of Billy-Joe’s Medicine Pouch still hanging at the hook in the suppression chamber that was used now for the preparations while the slim fishlike boat was brought to water.

“Tibor” Pooty hissed “you cannot leave us behind, me and the magical stone. You may need us, the stone said. No-one need to know of those”, said he pointing vaguely around.

Tibor didn’t think twice. He grabbed the bag. Perhaps the little one was right. The power of the magical stone might be of help, and company was of help anyway out there in the dark solitude.

Scholasticus waved from the hatch of the sluice: “Hurry up, we need a wonder by now.” Nobody had noticed the grip at the pouch.

The boy was seating in the tight capsule, headset over the ears. The fingers were gliding over the buttons, while the navigation was explained. "As long as we have control, nothing can happen" the Skipper nodded, while the navigator helped with advice via headset. On the monitor Tibor could see and correct any move of the boat. Left, right, up, down, - the steering was simple, though, not unlike an aeroplane.

Now it became serious, while awaiting the rising of the water in the sluice, he had his eyes and hands searchingly move over the keyboard in front of him. He soon would find out what it was like.

The body got out of the sluice. The hatch slammed behind. Tibor was on his own. Elegant like a fish the slim body rushed on towards the cave his friends had disappeared almost one hour overdue by now.

The boat was easy to steer and followed the slightest helm's move.

"Marvellous", Tibor exclaimed. "Now let's get into that cave, right away..."

He really was acquainted quickly with the whereabouts and the functioning of helm and engine and all the instruments in the cockpit. He tried some manoeuvres – just for fun – before it went down and disappeared in the cave, where manoeuvring didn't make much sense.

The communication with the submarine was kind of complicated and worked via several channels. From the bow strong beamers flashed into the darkness of the groundless abyss, that had before taken the divers. The scouts had long left, as soon as the Cat Whisker headed down. Even the offer of arming them with explosives couldn't get them in the boat, so to speak.

It was not the real danger that frightened the brave warriors, but the fact that this was a haunted site, as they saw it.

Tibor reported regularly how he progressed "Everything alright" was his perpetual message, while he occasionally added: "I'm diving down a wide cave with flat walls, as far as I can see. I proceed at maximum speed. There seems to be a hefty current, therefore I scarcely need the engine."

Thus he went down at high speed. Tibor cared to keep in the middle of the flow and avoided contact with the walls all around, while he couldn't see them. Only the instruments indicated the distance precisely. He would receive a warning signal as soon as he got too close to the walls.

The autopilot had taken over and Tibor could concentrate on the beams of light pointing ahead. That wasn't too far, anyway. There was no trace from the divers. He took it as a positive sign. It meant he hadn't passed them. The metres had indicated organic tissue. The Cat Whisker was indeed well equipped. Whatever passed by outside was analysed and categorised right away.

It was time for another report to the base.

"Nautilus this is Cat Whisker on cave mission, over..."

An irksome noise was heard from the receiver. Tibor repeated his call again, without proper answer. Then he decided to place his message anyway. He read the figures from the metres – the distance that lay behind the craft, the pressure outside – things like that. He hoped that the reception was better on the other end.

Waves were not easy transmitted in narrow tubes like such a crevice he was in. By constant echoing on the walls the waves became neutralized or interfered thus couldn't serve as carriers for vocal modulation.

He was alone and on his own. Being cut off from the home base met him heftier than expected. He knew right from the start that this was very likely to happen.

The voices via loudspeaker had given him the illusion of closeness and shelter. Thus, was over now. He couldn't rely on advice from the Nautilus or from the Professors. Panic jumped at him like a black panther. He tried to keep it down by concentrating on his task.

Nothing had really changed. Only the communication line was cut. He had had to reckon with such fact while moving at high speed. The metre said he had covered some 70 miles. He could hardly believe it. Most likely the current faked the indicators.

Pooty looked out of the Medicine Pouch. Tibor had at all forgotten about that old thing, tumbling somewhere at his knees.

"The magical stone sees a monster right ahead", Pooty screamed.

The water outside changed colour. It darkened as far as this was still possible, and reduced the sight once more. Huge lumps of organic tissue bumped at the coating or sucked tight with strange noise.

Tibor was alert. The instruments signalled organic fabric, and analysed the lifeless remains of a huge octopus all around now. However, the boat went on at highest speed; thus, the debris stayed behind. The additional acceleration by the little engine when he

speeded up made the difference, although there was a change from the vertical to the horizontal direction.

He raced forward at highest speed. The speedometer wasn't able to show anymore, but you felt it without instruments as well, while you couldn't guess the true speed.

The water outside was changing. It didn't gurgle any longer but hissed steaming hot astern like white mist and such veil now replaced the former darkness.

Tibor felt the panic vanish somehow, now that there was almost no water outside but steam, while the instruments drove crazy, and the heat was almost unbearable, something else had taken over in him that made him unspeakably happy.

He felt a kind of well-known itching in his legs, and was ready for a green whirl. He felt in one word, how the force returned, that had left in the dark days behind.

From outside you could hear now smacking noises. Over the glass of the front window winding tentacles were gulping – this time well alive. The speed slowed down as if the boat was tearing a heavy load, a kind of huge drag anchor. On the radar, Tibor saw a huge mass stuck to the boat. By measuring powers with such a creature the boat would soon be defeated.

Thus, Tibor mobilized his own power. He tapped at the Medicine Pouch, and Pooty pushed out his head at once:

“I could well need some magic assistance”, the boy said. Pooty realized at once, he only had to check the radar screen. The magical stone started pulsating already in the brightest colours. The small cabin filled with green fog and hummed of energy. The howling propellers outside gave their best. The little boat slim and slick as it was slipped out of the deadly grip of the monster, one by one the tentacles popped off while steam indicated the danger they were in by now.

If the monster wasn't ready to be cooked alive it had better given way, and that was what it finally did. Somehow, it seemed to be immune against heat, though, as it gave way very reluctant only. Once more Tibor mobilized all magical force, and together with the magical stone the boat picked up speed, while had come almost to a total halt before. One after the other of the tentacles slipped off the trunk.

Tibor could only guess what was going on outside. For the last time he tried to contact the home base to report the happy outcome of the combat. He also mentioned the different quality of the water beyond the monster guard and the change in direction the tunnel

took that pulled now straight up, while the heat still increased steadily and almost reached the one hundred centigrade mark.

Things were getting tight. As fast, as he could Tibor speeded on, hoping for a cooling effect in vain. If the two divers ahead had come the same way, he should also have a good chance making it, he reckoned, hoping of course that they had made it before, and he hadn't missed them, while fighting the monster guardian. He couldn't be sure whether their corpses were drifting behind among those organic remains he had overcome at last.

Something told him however that they were ahead and alive, and that he should look for them beyond the steaming hell outside. A caring sight at the instruments showed him that they lost not only temperature a little – that was good; but also speed – and that was no good. The propellers didn't find resistance, as there was no water any more, thus it was wondrous that they still moved ahead at all – most likely due to the hefty current in the tightening slot where the steam was pressing, while gravity was against them now.

What could he do? Should he disembark and try on his own? The temperature outside made this option inadvisable, though. Almost a hundred and fifty degrees Centigrade were too much, even more so as he was not properly equipped with protective gear and respiratory devices.

Still Tibor didn't feel desperate. The old force had come back and filled his limbs and breast. In fact he felt stronger than ever, as if the withdrawn had come back enforced.

Thus, he gathered all his might and concentrated on the aim. Pooty helped as good he could. The cabin vanished in a green whirl. Without noticing the boy started rotating around his axis. Faster and faster he rotated in that tight cabin, always running danger of knocking at an obstacle, while the green energy formed a kind of protective cloak around his drilling body.

The slim trunk of the boat hummed and shivered full of energy, while the nose went up straight. Then the vehicle lifted and rushed towards the widening fleck of light far up ahead.

27. The Seekers of Advice

Exhausted as they were, the divers helped one another getting out of the damaged gear. Then they spread healing ointment on their wounds, which they found in the unfathomable quiver of the magic bow being at hand again.

As soon as they felt a little better – (the ointment did wonder) – they started exploring the whereabouts of the strange place they were.

Arundle – that is her Magic Bow – didn't feel like hanging on. Even more, when Billy-Joe thought to remember that they were on dangerous grounds. As long as the magical power endured, they should get rid of the place as soon as possible and try to get an overall view of the turbulences they'd just come across.

Right now, nobody knew where they were, and what had happened. They themselves hardly knew, and could only guess and raise hypotheses like they had done when they started for that expedition.

They had fulfilled part of the task by finding the Magic Bow at last, or had it been the other way round - did the Magic Bow return as soon as Arundle learnt how to properly care, and better understand her feelings?

Thus, the magic bow pushed them to travel on as soon as possible, and suggested a space mission. The distance might help to gain an overall view he reckoned giggling. Arundle agreed at once and so did Billy-Joe. While the programming for a space tour was in full swing, the magic bow gave his human mates a closer discernment. They should understand not only what he intended but also the obstacles that had to be tackled. Besides, it might help winning back acquaintance that probably had gone during the past weeks and months of alienation, and didn't do them any good.

Right in the middle of the planning a slim metal rocket popped off the ground nearby, and scared Arundle and Billy-Joe almost to death. Was the attack not over yet? Did the enemy finally get at them?

Billy-Joe had bad experiences with eruptions of all kind, either here or at a similar site instantaneously near-by.

What was that? At the upper end of the metal body that splashed into the soft ground of the meadow - a hatch opened, and Tibor's grinning face appeared, while a furry little something pressed forward right beside.

The slim lad and his companion jumped out of their metal prison, no less surprised then the latter to find them well and up and in companionship with the so long missed Magic Bow right

there. That was a hugging and giggling, and clapping of shoulders, and kissing of cheeks left, right and centre.

The Magic Bow and the Magical Stone amalgamated in one – all rainbow colour and humming, pulsating energy for the flash of an instant - none of the humans in their company actually realized, as such compilation was not meant for this world.

Soon however, such emotional outbreak ceased because nobody knew how long that window stayed open, they were glancing through right now. Perhaps it was of short endurance and then they were stuck again on the same or a similar damn island that had become an almost deadly trap just a short while ago.

They had to win distance and should use the favour of the hour before the window closed up on them, while it now seemed as if they all had escaped, just like that.

“That virtual centre-court of all universes and galaxies would be not the worst target, though” Arundle said. “Surely better than good old Laptopia, I daresay” Billy-Joe agreed. The Advisor might have advice for them, and might be able to through light into such darkness of mysterious circumstances and queer happenings all over the places.

For now, no irresistible barrier refrained them from access to space and time, and had them dwindle like mad insects at a pane. The Magic Bow (now representing himself in Capital Letters) unfolded all his ability. Stars passed by like silvery stripes. Like a tray filled with the most precious jewels the deep-folded network of the universe entangled in breath-taking beauty and stunned them once more and for another time.

Timelessness embraced them with all might and stretched the seconds, unyielding the instant immeasurably. Still the time stood not still!

Such happened while the trip carried them into a forbidden field of life, which the livings were not allowed to enter under regular circumstances by danger of life. The circumstances however were not regular, in fact most irregular - thus, there was the exemption from the rule.

“On highest judicial advice” they learnt from the friendly Advisor. He met them in the Grand Hall between all those empty chairs and chaise-lounges in order to get the situation straightened out for them - a task, not easy to perform.

His problem was not that he didn't understand, but how can you explain the unexplainable? Something, Man had no proper

sense for, in a way that straightened things out for them without asking too much of them.

How much could he tell them? What was prohibited by the First General Law of Nature? Did he interfere with the flow of time already?

The cheating of the dark side didn't let him a choice. Illegal as the means were the evil employed and riff-ruffed, such a tiny bending of law for the benefit of the bright side would be tolerable – at least he hoped, and would be accepted by His Almighty Majesty.

Such measures he would load on his shoulders for the benefit of the whole, no matter the long-range consequences. He didn't have the choice anyway.

So the Advisor began to unfold his plan, by means of which he would break the peak of the threat, or had it bent a little where breaking forbade itself. Because the broad flow of time was prefixed.

However, like in the wise old fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty even the worst plan leaves a loophole open, and some drops of the good may drip. The doom is never final, no matter how absolute it appears, and all circumstances work in favour.

“We are going to feed you with a quick lesson in Time-Management, though” the Advisor concluded his musings.

“You may have noticed what it is like out here”, the Advisor pointed with a vague gesture of his hand at the wide space all around.

“What you see is – you may know – but the surface, so to speak, the reflection of what is inside you. Because you see with your eyes, what is bound for you. The Time is your master. You belong to her, time governs your lives, and she tends well and woe. Time judges, straightens and distributes and still is but a humble servant of the primordial power beyond Space and Time, just part of a greater wholeness again.

An eye looks through the mighty whirls into your universe. At its edge energy and matter become glued or baked together. Call it God's eye, if you may. It shines up amidst the centre, at least would the centre be the appropriate location for God's eye, as there is eternity, while outside and around the billions reduce to seconds and one Aeon follows the other as if they were the roller bearings of a film.

There are many whirls - hundreds – alone inside the Milky Way. What do I say – millions. You cannot see them because they can't be seen of a mortal eye because of their blackness.

As to our experience the heaps of matter act crazy. They leave the order, do not obey the Grand Universal Law of Nature, that is Gravitation, Acceleration and absolute speed. They leave the Flow of Time. They do something completely unimaginable for human beings. Time finishes to be. Time is no more; still, something is happening there! However Man is unable to imagine what that is.

First you have to understand. Only those who understand are able to act. Conclusions must be drawn. Decisions must be made. Who holds the lead of the universes, who is the head of the world?

The visible hides the seeing, mischief hides evil, and truth hides the true. The mighty hides the strength, while the horror unveils cruelty. In this abyss look for the final ground of time.”

The Advisor's voice faded, as was his way of behaving. The time travellers felt left alone lacking advice. Where should they search? Should they leave? Who was going to teach them 'Time Management'?

Should such vague remarks be everything the Advisor had to offer in this respect?

Arundle meant to know the way such course was absolved. In her case she did wake up with information and knowledge, and all kinds of impressions, some of which suitable for the court case then, helping to find the truth.

Should they go to sleep? There were not even proper beds. Besides they weren't tired and still upset because of what lay behind them, and Tibor was no Somnior either. He wasn't familiar with the art of sleep learning yet.

Well, that could be done. Together with Billy-Joe Arundle felt quite able to teach him some lessons by means of that joint tongue twister method, they employed so successfully with their fellow-students as well as with the mer-folk warriors.

An inner voice asked her to refrain from sleeping for the time being, and advised her not to return right now to the School of Inbetween, either. She discussed her sentiment with Tibor and Billy-Joe and both agreed of hanging on right here, while the Magical Stone and the Magic Bow as well as Pooty didn't object. The Magic Bow still hated the place where he stayed imprisoned most of the time. Thus he declared that he would never return into such a humiliating state, while Arundle started musing about the cryptic words of the Advisor, and didn't even listen to such lament.

They had better things to worry but past failures, gone and over for good. Of course she would never again allow him being expelled from decent company. Today was the day for basics, so it seemed.

“What about looking around, while we are up here? Billy-Joe suggested, and started moving towards the nearest exit, supported by Pooty who had re-conquered his common site around Billy-Joe’s neck - with him in the Medicine Pouch the brilliant Magical Stone.

There might be other rooms outside of that huge hall, like business parlours or offices, where those countless delegates met for conferences or did some paperwork.

Did such heavenly beings need simple things like dining room or beds and writing paper or toilets, and lockers for clothing and the like?

Arundle and Tibor didn’t hesitate a second but followed him right away. They had no objections investigating the location, while the Advisor left them alone. His meagre hints didn’t offer much help. Still the travellers felt more self-assured knowing that they should better hang on up here, instead of returning right away to the School of Inbetween, while still awaiting proper advice.

For sure they only knew that they had surmounted the barrier, otherwise they wouldn’t be where they were. They had access to all their abilities, which to improve was reason for their stay at the School of Inbetween.

Arundle had the vague presentiment that there was more, something, she was not allowed to get clarified. It was very personal, and touched her most secret intimacy nobody was allowed access.

Billy-Joe’s smart advance now had her put aside such musings for now, and the small group headed forward, probably somewhat hectic, though.

The glassed floor resounded under their feet from their steps. At last, the floor was solid, different from last time when the uncountable assembly had gathered in the round and the hall lost contours at the far horizon.

However, they had to get to a door as well this time, which seemed to move away the straighter they approached.

Thus, they paced on, and the further they went the hastier and even scared they became. What was wrong?

At last one of the doors was reached. Billy-Joe, still leading them, tried to step it in as soon as he noticed that he couldn't open it, but in vain. The door resisted.

Magical Stone and Magic Bow got together whispering. Billy-Joe handed the Medicine Pouch on to Arundle for his useless trial.

Arundle as eavesdropping witness of their dispute passed on what she learnt, as far as she understood the warning of forceful proceedings. They obviously criticised Billy-Joe's behaviour.

"How come you stubborn boar push through the wall like that?" even Pooty was asking his friend who then gave up his fruitless trial.

"Have you a better idea?" he grumbled rather upset. What did he do then? Had they not agreed in looking around a bit? The vast empty hall had something frightening, though, which might have been the reason for his forceful proceeding.

The width was almost unbearable. You felt drawn from all sides.

"I hate that site, makes me uneasy, though" he uttered. Tibor agreed at once, even though he loved width as such, as he was used to the wide steppe of Mongolia forming him persistently. He was well acquainted with the spirits and the vastness. That was probably the reason for his bad feelings now. The same as Billy-Joe's feelings, by the way, who felt reminded of the Australian outback. They only had to look at each other to understand what was going on.

"We are proceeding on the Grounds of all Time right now" Arundle made herself known. She seemed to have learnt that from overhearing the secret talks.

"No wonder, we become uneasy", she went on still cryptic, though.

Pooty felt her strength and stuck close at her, while Billy-Joe had better safeguarded his affection. In their distress Billy-Joe and Tibor held hands and looked each other in the eyes. They read the truth in there; and no matter how much they feared, they were nevertheless eager to learn more of it.

"The Advisor wants us to refer to ourselves", Arundle declared. "The site was prepared for our senses – to a certain extend only as you can see." She looked at the scared friends. Billy-Joe kept on standing in front of this locked door, while Tibor tried to get him away from there.

"What we search we only find inside" Arundle went on. "We know more then we know."

Pooty nodded heftily. "I know where Walter is", he yelled. His trial to cheer the situation up however failed. He didn't win but a polite smile. Not even that from the children of the steppe who kept down the offspring of horror with effort.

Arundle knew not how to help, although a solution was due. In such a shape the two weren't worth a penny, mentally wise. They might look for a more convenient place to go, without whispering spirits and naughty nought.

'The Magic Bow surely will have an idea' she thought, and as soon as she confronted him with their desires he covered them up with a protective cloak, wherein it was tight but you could feel wholly yourself after all at last.

Billy-Joe and Tibor relaxed with deep sighs. "Not an instant longer" – "Thank you, Arundle" – "That was a last minute rescue" – "You know what it is like..." – "It's like being drifted away with the wind" – "as if you dissolved."

Such were their impressions and experiences they jointly put together. Even such circumstances had to be taken care of that might have nothing to do with it and seemed rather incidental.

Arundle knew for sure one thing: the answers lay in them. They had what they needed, and if they couldn't proceed then they were to blame, because they didn't come to the adequate conclusions.

How she obtained such certainty, she didn't know. Most likely, she had uncovered information from the Advisor. Nothing happened up here without purpose. The uneasiness they all had felt, each in his or her way, was without doubt part of the heavenly plan. Was that a first push towards a certain direction? It was likely, though.

Arundle shared her discernments with her comrades and earned agreement right away. Despite the fact that they still felt desperate.

"Do you mean we should face our fears anew?" Billy-Joe asked after some seconds of silence and shook his head in disgust.

"We know now what it's like" Tibor added and you could see how much he disliked the idea of getting out there into the emptiness again.

"I think it's more of the psychology" Arundle answered "lesser our ability to endure what causes the problem. What is it that makes us turn outside in? That is the question – or perhaps the advice we should follow."

“For that purpose we sit pretty close at each other” Billy-Joe objected, while the Possum up front his chest was jumping and didn’t give in for an instant.

Tibor recalled the joint meditation, they did at home, And to Billy-Joe’s mind came the fitting examples of his culture, while he still felt overcharged by that living pouch on his chest.

Well, he could take that off and put it in front of him in the middle of the circle that was necessarily becoming a triangle, when they got each other’s hands and leaned at the elastic skin of the cloak.

After a while the tension in their backs faded - be it that the magic bow made a change, be it that their backs got used to the pressure.

Pooty felt the concentration, as he was rather sensitive when it came to such supra natural things. After all, he had had a good teacher in Walter. He now meant to feel Walter’s spirit. Each of the present kept their little self behind and swayed in on the universal substance that was slumbering in each human being.

Time and space – while of mediocre impact out here – lowered their firm grip on all four of them. No less than their delimitation caused the trouble and fear before.

In general such assaults are well known as near-death experience that touch every one.

The flow of time opened up for them as a floating stream, they overlooked from the offspring to the mouth. They could have strived their eyes back and forth. They saw immeasurable (millions and billions) of flickering lights floating by. Three of them were they selves, they doubted not. However; which they were and who they were, they didn’t realize. The image was too general while the feeling was incomparable.

Unsubstantial knowledge conquered them – what an experience! Overthrown by storms of sentiments, they believed in dissolving, as the plenitude was unbearable otherwise, and details became faint – too much for the time being!

One by one, they returned. Each one felt as if been sent away by an irresistible force, they opposed in vain.

Arundle was last to get back to the surface from that sucking whirl. She gazed about with radiant eyes at the others whose blissful smile indicated that they had been in the unspeakable together. They didn’t search for words, it wasn’t worth while.

28. Misfortune Everywhere

Scholasticus Slyboots could kick himself. In vain the other members of the expedition tried to calm him down. They failed all the more as they were inconsolable themselves. First Arundle and Billy-Joe and then also Tibor, and most likely Pooty who had disappeared together with that old Medicine Pouch Billy-Joe used to carry around his neck.

Tibor's last scabbled message got in hours ago. No matter how well equipped the capsule was, by now he should run short of fuel and oxygen. What could be done? No one knew what to do. The crew looked aside, no matter how well they were acquainted with the situation down here, when they met a questioning gaze. They were certain about the fate of the lost, while their friends didn't want to accept the facts, which were all too obvious.

Signs and signals from the outside scouts were not meant to raise hope either. At last, the brutal truth began to trickle into the unwilling brains. The mission had failed inescapably. There was no sound hope left. The missing had to be given up. Their chances tended to zero - while only Tibor might have a theoretical chance to be still alive.

The Skipper became uneasy. "We are getting close to our limit. We have to go back..." he said in a caring air to the leader of the expedition.

Helpless and hopeless Scholasticus shrugged. What could he do? Things were long beyond control. He complied with the unavoidable and let thing go. Stunned and absent-minded the poor Professor looked for relief in vain – unreachable for his colleagues, whose trials to comforting him failed.

The other members of the expedition weren't much better off. Arundle's close friends Flori and Cori kept on sobbing softly, while tearing their hair occasionally when they raised their voices to a desperate scream or whimper as was Indian custom.

Thus, the sad party returned to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth having failed their mission, while helpless disgust was spreading all over the place as soon as the bad news set foot there. The disappeared were not only well known, but also well liked as everybody joined in the grief. There was no one who didn't care. The whole community felt with the missing. What a shame, what a

terrible misery – right now, while everything seemed to be turning to the better, when peace blossomed and progress fell in step.

Another curse threw its gloomy shade over the island and settled heavy on the inhabitants. All of them felt weak and despondent. No one cared about specific talents and extraordinary gifts, as there was nothing any more.

For the Convertors their upcoming excursion became a disaster, and the Sublimations tumbled – while having raised some feet off the ground – recklessly to the floor, breaking limbs though, thus, ‘Dancing with the Wind’ finally became prohibited.

Only Grisella kept up her spirits, and asked her colleagues for more discipline and courage, straining on their exemplary function.

Her brother-in-law Scholasticus suffered severely under the burden of guilt. As the chief-in-charge, he well knew what he had done. Three youths had come to death under his jurisdiction. There was no arguing about it – while Grisella was not willing to admit. “We do not have any proof – not the slightest” she objected.

“Oh, dear sister-in-law, had you been with us... It was horrible. First the two of them and then Tibor as well - had I been not so fat...” Scholasticus hit his belly in disgust. Grisella shook her head quietening. “Well – disappeared they are, no doubt about that, however, must they be dead as well? My feeling tells me there is more behind it...”

“How can you say that?” Scholasticus got almost angry, although her words also raised hope in him.

Grisella stayed calm: “I bet they are abroad in secret mission, as they did so often...”

“Do you really think so?” Scholasticus was all too willing to believe her, while the doubts still were there.

“You should have been with us – when the last communication line broke – just horrible. The poor boy, all alone down there with that monster; and those nixes, God knows how courageous they are, warned us to refrain from entering under all circumstances. They didn’t dare to enter not for one single yard. Nobody came back from there the saying goes among them. For them the tunnel leads right away into hell.”

“Trust me, the kids are alive, I have it in my feeling” was all Grisella answered.

The big change kept pending; not only Scholasticus was pusillanimous. The Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster weren’t any better off. They stood in the firing line up front, and

had a lot to explain. In case of Billy-Joe the Authorities handling the Aborigines Affairs would question the matter and ask for restless clearing up of the whereabouts of the disappearance of their disciple.

Not to talk about that horrible person who claimed to be Arundle's father - he lately appeared as Chairman of a unanimous and immensely rich organisation. This impossible man tried to interfere in the School's affairs in a highly unacceptable manner with the arrogance of the big money. While the directing Board of the School of Inbetween stood with the back to the wall, so to speak, and had to admit fatal mistakes – still not confessing, though, what seemed by now all too obvious. Marsha wondered how long she could keep the plain facts from that man. “Sooner or later, we have to tell him” the Headmistress said.

“Better later than sooner” her husband replied. For the students and pupils such development didn't remain uncovered. They felt personally weak and disabled, while their abilities instead of growing kept shrinking.

Those Convertors returned with bushels of fur or hoof-like nails back from their excursion. Adrian himself noticed a strange change. The back fin didn't disappear so he went around for almost the whole month with a humpback under the shirt. Besides the lungs partly failed their functions. The doctor spoke of a severe medical problem, and didn't have an appropriate therapy.

The so called ‘Tong Twister Twin-set double feature Training set up’ (the quadruple T) developed by Animations and Somnions didn't work any longer, as the latter felt fixed to the ground, incapable of doing what they used to do. Thus, the little flock of Sublimations refrained from regular lessons, being supported by their Dean. They wouldn't come back before they knew what happened to their beloved mate Tibor, they said -

“...And the responsible person in charge was punished as laid down in the rules and regulations”, Dean Mogoleya added.

The assault was clearly directed against Scholasticus, and did its part in his contrition. At best he had sentenced himself at once and punished with a draconic penalty. Grisella however, knew how to undergo such overreaction, too transparent she reckoned the motives of the vindictive Dean.

“No murder without corpse – that's as simple as that...” she said, referring to the old jurisdictional wisdom, any barrister of defence knew. She wanted the excited man to come down with his

feet on the ground, and try to find out what had happened, before charging himself.

She didn't want him to wallow in weakness but to remain aware of the merits the School and the staff had gathered. None the least the Anti-Matter-Catcher, commonly known as well as 'Depetrification Potion' - an invention far-reaching and congenial.

"We got further than we think" she exclaimed enthusiastically and tried by that to alter the fatalistic mood that was spreading everywhere in the school these days.

"We know after all how we can tackle those bubbles of timelessness, although we didn't find out yet how they came into being or how their existence could be influenced and steered."

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk could feel now the burden of her profession more than ever. Her husband and Vice-Headmaster stayed in bed suffering badly from some kind of asthmatic allergic reaction, and could hardly do a few steps. Therefore, she wasn't affected by Grisella's stimulating words. She insisted instead in having all Deans involved in administrative work, and answer the many inquiries - explaining what was going on without overdoing one way or the other.

"Until further notice" she demanded, but didn't meet much affection. Only Moschus Mogoleya showed himself willing, but he was definitely the wrong person for such a delicate occupation.

Therefore, Grisella recommended her sister, who was bored as well as worried because of her husband, and longed for a sensuous work. She wasn't bothered by the more or less secret machinations that were going on, and was therefore able to approach such matter unpretentious.

Dorothea was a trained secretary - and a good one as well - while she tended to hide her light under the bushel. She was a talented organiser, but had all her life lived in the shade of her famous sister. Besides, she was such a beauty that any other talent was overruled. Therefore, she meant to be of moderate means intellectually wise.

Perhaps she was able to fulfil now the squaring of the circle by smoothening and mediating the various requests and inquirers.

Grisella didn't understand herself by now any more because of Dorothea. Why didn't she think of getting her involved earlier?

The resolute Professor ruled with a rod of iron and pushed aside desperation and despondency where ever she met such. She organized new study groups, she initiated the publication of existing pamphlets and study results, some of which of remarkable

substance, as she pointed out, and took care that everybody was active.

“I don’t want you sitting around moaning and idle. Your missing friends didn’t expect that from you” she said upset as soon as she met somebody with secret tears in the eyes.

Not that she herself felt like sobbing once in a while, however that was not the point. They had better things to do, and idling in despair while shutting off the brain was against her nature.

“We go on, where they stopped” she said. “After all theirs were outstanding researches” – the resolute Professor didn’t know how right she was.

Was it because her husband Scholasticus lost his guts or was it because she had a definite task to fulfil at last – in any case Dorothea blossomed and developed congenial abilities. She handled the correspondence with wit and cleverness, and she managed to keep the worst harm away from the school, while she sometimes even won back lost grounds, where nobody expected.

There was however one correspondent who troubled her badly. “I cannot help it, Grisella, this person is gloomy. Where does he get all that information? He seems to know everything about us.”

For the first time she used a ‘We’ when referring to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth; that was a good sign, her sister thought. “Let me see” she said and Dorothea handed her a neatly packed file. “Everything is in there, all the correspondence back and forth.”

Grisella read and read on, then she shook her head: “That’s unbelievable, you are right. How does this man get all the information – and what does that mean at last – the ‘Brotherhood of Infernalía’ – as it says in the heading?”

Dorothea had spoken with other teachers as well. Nobody knew that organisation.

“Nobody knows anything, dear. That chairman is definitely an inconvenient person and his representative is even worse. You’ve got to weigh each word you utter. They twist your words, just like that”, she agreed to what her sister had said.

“Take that Anti-Matter-Catcher. How can somebody from outside know anything about it? While we are still in the probationary phase, and don’t know ourselves what forces we are unleashing.”

Dorothea had heard of that strange device. She knew about the mysteries involved, and what was done with it, but could still not imagine what it was like, because to her it looked like an ordinary

funnel as is used in the kitchen. The upper end pointing towards the sky, while the lower end carried out some kind of injection, as soon as the flash properly entered at the top.

“I wonder who made up something like that” she wondered shaking her head. “Some one has to come up with!” She felt a wave of love for Scholasticus, although, he had had little influence on the invention, while scholars of his did the job under very unfavourable circumstances.

When she thought of her dear husband, her mind darkened. How could she help him – how could he be helped?

No matter how often he was ensured that he was not responsible for the disappearance of the youth, he could not stop blaming himself. Their death had come to certainty in him, no matter what others thought or said.

Dorothea had always been in the shade of her husband, whom she dearly loved, no question about that. Now, for the first time she realized what it meant to take the initiative. The new role did her very well, and she discovered hidden qualities, which surprised her most, while she had always been in someone’s shade – first her sister’s and then her husband’s, thus she had leaped out of the frying-pan into the fire, so to speak.

Before her marriage, it had been her sister who made her feel clumsy and unimportant mentally, while she had always been the bright beauty. Each had learnt to insist in their special fields: hers was the beauty of the body while Grisella’s value could scarcely be spotted from outside, as hers were of the spiritual sphere.

For quite some time the sisters hadn’t come so close. For the first time they were working hand in hand. It seemed now as if Grisella blossomed physically. Never had Dorothea seen her sister so attractive. The joint task did sheer wonders.

Like a twin-rock in the surf of misery, the sister-pair stood up and arose in full bloom. As a bright example, they prospered, which the students could follow – and they did, first hesitatingly then even more enthusiastic.

Still mistrust kept on dwindling the affairs. The sisters had been foolish if they had ignored the signs. Someone on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth supplied that so called ‘Brotherhood of Infernal’ with brand new actual information. There was no other option. The impertinent accusations didn’t allow another consequence. Without doubt someone tried to get access to the decision-making level of the school. What else was the sense of the extorting letters and threatening offers?

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk had lost her nerves and had resigned, she didn't know what else to do but give in. Like Scholasticus, she felt the burden of responsibility.

She couldn't stand the idea that some of her disciples had lost their lives while she had been in charge. No wonder she was out of her mind and unable to grasp a clear thought.

Thus, Grisella and Dorothea decided to take over and act on her behalf. They didn't hand the offending mail further but kept and answered it as they felt adequate. They didn't bother with lengthier explanations, but lied as was appropriate - The more uneasy they became by the intimate questions and impertinent accusations.

Intense questioning of the students didn't uncover the leak, as the mail wasn't censored, neither the leaving nor the incoming letters.

The youths reported of course of the terrible accident when three of their mates most likely were killed, and passed other rumours on as they learnt - none however was able to build a connection with the scientific tasks the study groups were still busy with. None managed to draw the line between that accident under water and the research work that was going on.

However, that was the crucial point, as the inquiries by the Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalina dealt exactly with such an interrelation.

The Chairman frankly admitted his interest in the research work. He accused the School Board of having "willingly and carelessly risked the lives of three brilliant young talents for their own sake and benefit." He drew a connecting line that hadn't come to any other mind yet.

Dorothea got the bull by the horns and turned the tables on the accuser. The gossip talk of an accident were pure nonsense, she wrote, spread under the students to lead them astray and off the track, she went on, and continued by widening the web further while the emails travelled back and forth, and Dorothea got almost high by the fruits of her fantasy she brought forward the longer the bloomer.

Not only emails and faxes travelled all over the place but so soon did helicopters with loads of greedy reporters. As nobody knew the location, they hovered about the site where they guessed the Isle to be, but couldn't see anything else but the open sea, as the Isle was well hidden under some kind of giant magic hood or camouflage Mac - a device obviously of little value. How else was

it possible that the invaders got so close? They hovered above the devastated Conversiors' Island that was not visited during the late moon phase, as the confused Conversiors were fed up with what happened. Conversion was too big of a risk for the time being.

The question thus was, if there was a spy amongst them, right here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Mistrust wavered all about. One General Meeting followed the other. Decisions were made and executed at once. Letters were not allowed any more and secret talk in public prohibited.

The helicopter from Sydney didn't fly neither way, as long as the besiegers remained alert. The guards even saw sails where there had been no traffic for years as the Isle lay far from any regular route.

Such climate of mistrust didn't do the school community any good. Not in the situation as it was. The Board of teachers went silent at last – now when the leaf was due to turn. A few tried solid regular lessons. The crisis made plain now what had been hidden before; only the best were able to raise the pupils' interest without the help of additional devices.

As Scholasticus was temporarily dismissed, Peter Adams took over and proved his competence in Astronomy and Astrophysics. His classes covered a good part of the sciences, while Grisella kept on teaching Philosophy and History.

Only in part depression got hold of the Board, while the search for a spy went on, and met the individuals by their constitution.

The disappearing of the young explorers went into the third week, while the situation remained as it was. Dorothea did a good job and defended their matter with brilliance and charm, as well as with wit and disarming naivety.

“While reading what she produces you feel like seeing her. You can see her beauty and feel her charm right on the paper and get affected without noticing” her sister Grisella uttered full of warmth and affected her sad brother-in-law a little who had looked for hide with his brother Amadeus.

Slowly such support began to show. Grisella was still convinced, that the absentees weren't dead. “You could feel if they were dead, but I feel exactly opposite: They are buoyant and spirited like you and me, I bet...”

Those who took the pessimist part spotted spies all over the place. Each and every one was suspicious. They saw spies behind

each bush and under every stone, they passed. No one dared to utter anything questionable. Jokes were out. Mistrust fed fear and fear fed mistrust, the spiral of decline had such desperate souls and frightened hearts in tight grip.

The true secret agent, who was on the island, did a good job. His game was almost won. Only a wonder could turn over the leaf. As it is in times of delusion wonders keep hiding, no matter how voluptuous they come over us when least expected. They follow their own law and regulations.

29. On the Essence of Time

“Well, yes, a river, why not a river at last, but is that all?” Arundle exclaimed interrupting Tibor who tried to find adequate words for the experience he just had.

The illuminated shook their heads with a somewhat radiant smile on their faces. They didn’t feel like many words, however, they somehow longed for sharing and rehearsing what had happened.

Tibor mentioned a river but the echo had been divided thus he wondered why – “Speaking of a river does meet the matter” he now added – “not quite, anyway. I mean that looking over everything. I imagine my life being a river, I over view. Sometimes that river is fast and wild but narrow – the further down you get the wider it becomes – in the end, it is broad meandering along towards the mouth. Special was that I was seeing my life in such picture. I saw me without seeing my self. I was seeing what it is like to be in the time; only that I was outside and looked outside in and understood...”

“What did you understand?” Billy-Joe asked.

“I cannot tell, I think I understood what understanding is. You have it in the instant and know that you had it an instant ago but it is gone now, while you still feel certain that you still have it somehow, but still I don’t know how to describe it...”

All eyes gazed full of understanding and consent at him and Billy-Joe nodded fiercely. “It’s a pity you forget, isn’t it” Pooty

yelled. You couldn't reckon whether he knew what the talk was about. His question anyhow missed the level of sentiment.

"We are blacksmithing hot iron" Arundle put in. She meant to notice a glimpse of the enormous lightness, nothing could resist or remain valid, what they were used or would ever be used to.

"Absolutely and total" she stammered with a deep sigh.

The boys agreed again, and knew what she wanted to say, although she couldn't find the proper words.

"We do have our time" Arundle went on: "Everything's got its time – the time that is only made for you and me and each of us, no matter whether we are embedded in such paradoxes, no doubt, still it matters what it looks like as it is everlasting..."

"That is correct" Billy-Joe yelled: "Embedded into eternity. Thus was my impression. You take time as a metre, that is measuring eternity and cuts out a piece."

Tibor pointed around. Above him the almighty space was yawning. Space did prove endlessness now that they had accepted their borders, and deep inside in the far centre a black gap was yawning, forming the centre of a clear-cut whirl, which kept pulling them along.

"Look at that" Pooty yelled and jumped about in his pouch up front of Billy-Joe's broad chest. They all could see what he meant, without knowing of course if it was the same for each one. However, this didn't matter, as long as they kept on stunning and feeling worried by the same longing, Pooty expressed his way.

They understood – their utterances were subjective but approaches towards the unspeakable. What ever came over their lips they knew was incomplete and didn't meet what they wanted to express. They felt angry and devoted at once. They felt inferior that is they felt their limits where they were caught like never before in their lives.

"We are children of time" Arundle murmured and gazed up at the black eye above. She earned agreement, her words sounded unspeakably wise, although they were but simple words of a young woman. They felt the heavenly yawning, while the light in the middle of the black eye hit them like a solid beam, went through them, and made them look like transparent showing up in each vessel and made them feel like jelly fish. They looked at each other and over to the mate whether it was the same. Pooty dared to express the insurmountable:

"You look like giant glow-worms" he screamed "all three of you. How did you make it?"

“Mind your self a glow-worm” Tibor stabbed at him with a glowing forefinger of his left hand – Tibor was lefthander.

Pooty stretched his little paw towards Tibor’s forefinger, and when the tips of their fingers met, a considerable flash went through them – not really hurting but noticeable. Pooty yelled in surprise and Tibor suppressed a cry. Their witnesses meant to see the true inner light which made the bodies transparent.

“Are we all dead?” Arundle asked herself. She looked down at her. She was also bathed in bright light.

“Perhaps this is the way it is up here” Billy-Joe reckoned. “After all we are out of time. How else could we look at it from outside?”

“We will only get to see what’s good for our eyes, I suppose”, Arundle answered.

Billy-Joe agreed. Tibor and Pooty still were busy with each other and the flash to participate in their musings.

“Most likely we are only dreaming, and all that is not real” Arundle suggested, but Billy-Joe objected: “How real is reality and how unreal are dreams? What, if we didn’t do else but travel back and forth the worlds, or would at least have looks through the dream window?”

“Well, we had that already. You are right, this is a very righteous question: how real is reality?” Arundle added.

“...And more important – which reality is how real?” Billy-Joe picked up the thought somewhat misleading. However, Arundle did not mind.

“In such context belongs the question of what is real for us and what is real as such” Arundle agreed. Billy-Joe picked up that thread by pointing out the context such questions belonged. “Ancient philosophical quests – in deed.”

“...Filled with new sense over here with us, that is something else, after all. This way boundaries become extinct”, Arundle confirmed.

Tibor and Pooty were looking at each other still stunned. They forgot to pull their fingers back. The light went through them, scarcely noticeable, with merry warmth. The sidetracking conversation of their friends didn’t reach them. They had better things to do than musing about philosophy. They were busy with first-hand knowledge, and handed themselves thankful over. At best they had travelled away with such light that came about flooding in waves through them.

While this was going on, they realized that their sight became wider the more liquid they became. They felt like being at several sites at the same time. The overwhelming multitudes of impressions made them doubt their recognition.

Arundle and Billy-Joe noticed the change at once and tore them apart before they vanished at all, until Billy-Joe held a real Pooty in his arms and Arundle the true Tibor.

“What’s wrong with you?” they exclaimed somewhat scared. However, the merry smile in their friends’ faces turned them down. They knew of the pulsating current by experience, and the multitude of sights and of endless plenitude.

“What, if nobody turns us back?” Arundle wondered, while she fainted like a leaf in the autumn wind.

Such impression faded as fast as they had come over the time-travellers. Did they know now? Did they understand the character of time? What were they supposed to do? The trouble that lay behind them seemed unimportant and vain. They didn’t mean anything before the face of eternity. Still it had been their task to interfere. They were bound for the return. The racing whirl that blew them off the flow of time would suck them back in right at the same spot – well almost!

The Advisor made a little mistake, or was it the combined force of the magic bow and the magical stone that the time-travellers returned one month after they disappeared?

They had set course on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and didn’t experience trouble in this respect.

“Don’t mind your return”, the Advisor had said. What ever was waiting for them, the connection was set and would prevail forever. That was comfort – and more than they could expect of the troublesome situation in the School of Inbetween.

“Mind the guardian of the Isle. He is not who he pretends” the Advisor stressed mysteriously. “More to say I’m not permitted, the golden rule predicts, while I’d be delighted doing better. Now go with God my children” he mildly exclaimed while fading – leaving the little flock on their own and to their uncertain fate.

However, they were already approaching the cliffs of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, undergoing the camouflage that directed them towards the Convertors’ Island at first.

The excitement was indescribable their sudden appearance caused. “Didn’t I tell?” Grisella yelled dancing about with her grieving brother-in-law in a circle. She managed indeed to lift the enlightened (Scholasticus had indeed lost some surplus pounds) up

in a green whirl. Thus even the Sublimations stunned, had the magical gifts faded as such. Obviously, they had returned.

The Headmistress left right away for Sydney and held a press conference to rectify the lies and bad rumours that had been strayed about the Isle and the School – proudly presenting the illuminated.

Many things got in order after the happy return. The worst symptoms of the Convertors vanished. Adrian Humperdijk recovered soon.

First reports of Somnions' successful trips were only topped by Animations - they all succeeded in what had been so long rejected.

Tibor pushed his mates to join him for a Dance with the Wind, despite the prohibition, while their Dean followed them in rage. Wondering about himself, how this was possible. Some time later he realized what really had happened, thus he skipped the rule in the after math.

Merry feasts were feasted. General councils met, where the disappeared reported of their adventures, while skipping the most important part of their experiences, partly because they were unable to put them in words.

Grisella noticed the change, noticed with all senses and wondered considerably. She was able to realize the difference most, had she been so far the only illuminated.

The light kept flooding about the returnees somewhat natural, and while the forces bound to the colour scheme awoke all about and systematic, others noticed such coincidence as well. With the dreams, the Somnions returned to the other way of seeing and the Animations noticed likewise with soulful sights what had become rectified again.

“Just Pooty” – some wondered whose gloriolen began to fade slowly. While for Arundle things like that were in the range, however Tibor, or even Pooty?

“Well there was that strange connection suddenly” the returnees declared “and we began to shine – what do I say to shine – blossoming, glittering, - brighter than the eye could stand. You couldn't look at that. First we didn't mind much, we were all the like, you know. Nobody knew what the Advisor intended.”

“Might as well happen, because Tibor stretched out his forefinger and Pooty couldn't refrain from doing likewise. As soon as they closed the circuit there was the Big Bang – well, a little big bang, though...” Arundle explained.

“You know Pooty, he’s good for any nonsense, it’s always the same...” Billy-Joe added.

“The light emitted from that central opening amidst the glowing whirl, while the virtual centre isle whirled around like mad, I’d say. You could hardly feel such movement, though. It’s kind of natural...”

“Do you really think the beam came out of that black eye? Amazing though, as if God blinked an eye...”

Arundle nodded: “Got at all of us at once. I felt it strongly. We were seen and kind of x-rayed ... when they began with their touchy nonsense...”

‘Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, as theirs the heavenly empire’ doesn’t it say like that?” Billy-Joe added supporting Arundle.

“Are they now different from us?”

“Probably more intense...”

“I don’t think so, except for Pooty. That’s something nobody reckoned...”

“Tibor wasn’t all that unlikely. The light got him, a full load, you know...”

“Didn’t do him no harm, though, I mean Pooty...”

“Did it help than?”

Can’t tell, wait and see...”

Questions and answers went back and forth, while everybody felt special. As it is when the door to heaven opens for a small gap.

30. Sagittarius Alpha

“I would like to learn a little more about that whirl pool” Scholasticus Slyboots asked – still meagre and pale – but with a happy shine in his eyes.

The effect was one thing, the cause another – well likely a much more challenging phenomenon: “how lucky you were, if it is what I reckon it is, and I think nothing speaks against it. We should of course do some calculating first in order to clear up on the

location. If I'm not wholly mistaken, you had to do with in the centre of our galaxy. How lucky you were, you were really chosen.

Well, through you the glance could have hardly gone, because then you wouldn't be here any more – however, who knows... with you nothing is impossible – everything indeed – makes me kind of fuzzy...

Sagittarius Alpha would be a lucky strike, if I may say so. Under millions of these mysterious things, it is the only one you could get through indeed. I'm referring to well known specialists of the matter. Not those lunatics who don't know what they are talking about. You can believe me.

We do have basically spoken exactly three subdivisions of such peculiar monsters, which overrule everything, man ever explored and discovered..."

Scholasticus got lost in an endless monologue; none of his audience was able to follow, with one or two exceptions.

Peter Adams, his assistant, knew of course what Sagittarius Alpha meant; and some others at least knew the sign of zodiac the name stood for. While they didn't learn such in the context Scholasticus put it. That was perhaps the challenging aspect of the lecture.

The specifications the eager Professor scribbled in shapeless clouds of figures over the spacey blackboard of the Grand Hall, he had chosen for his study group, nobody was able to unscramble. Be it that the Professor had a bad handwriting; or be it that he made mistakes – he wasn't the best mathematician after all – in the end nobody knew which way the train was running, so to speak, not even he himself.

After all, it could well be, that the crucial phenomenon in question was not Sagittarius Alpha; you had to reckon with everything out here. Whatever the facts were, the Professor had severe problems in conveying his subject adequately. While this then was at least a lever to consensus:

"You ain't much better off than we are" Arundle triumphantly exclaimed. "There is a point when language doesn't suffice any more, and you cannot express what things are all about. We tried in vain without success although we didn't have a spacey blackboard out there, and no-one was eager to prove things in measurable dimensions."

Exhausted as he was, the Professor dropped the last bits of chalk he had left, he had been almost unable to write with anyway. He shook his head and turned. "What I tried, doesn't work this

way. At least I was able to demonstrate that things are more complicated, even if we base them in three categories, as my dear colleague suggests, however, even then...”

Again, the Professor went off in another approach, but his assistant interrupted in time, which suspected no good.

“We will prepare for the coming session, dear colleague” he suggested, and opened a backdoor for Scholasticus he could slip out without losing his face, which the latter did after some hesitation.

The shining angel-like beings, whose language didn’t suit their appearance, confused him a lot, he reckoned. Who, if not them could publish discernments into the functioning and consequences of that singular phenomenon?

After a short glance to the clock the Professor nodded over to his assistant, who was sitting at his side still rather alert, while the time was definitely ending. Perhaps there was a chance to find volunteers for some introductory papers for the coming meeting.

“Besides, it would be of great help if all of you make familiar with the so called Black Holes, we are dealing with. I’m sure you have noticed by now. Have a look on the study of a Russian scientist, Professor Igor Novikov, and his probably promising approach to Sagittarius Alpha, the most remarkable Black Hole of the Milky Way.”

He turned to Arundle – “Perhaps you might be able by analysing the joint records of the magic bow and the magical stone to find out about the location, where this incredible encounter was possible. That might be a challenging task for the enlightened part of the study group, if I may say so...”

Peter Adams meant to be joking, while Scholasticus hardly was able to hide his tension. He was closer to tears than to laughter.

Arundle nodded and Billy-Joe, who had taken Pooty now again back under his pinions, promised to do his part.

31. Dining with Amadeus

In front of the auditorium, Grisella got hold of the small group of the enlightened. She hadn't yet had a chance to talk about the philosophical implementations of their experience, as were her subject after all.

The hurly-burly about the returnees weren't coming to an end. The third day in sequence, they rushed from date to date and participated in all kinds of meetings - while taking part in welcome parties thereafter, until they were going to feel fed up.

"So I'm meeting you on your own at last" Grisella exclaimed facilitated, when the three run-aways came dawdling out of the lecture-hall. "May I join you?" she asked. They had no objections. Pooty stretched his little snout out of the Medicine Pouch, which was shining like the beam of a torch. All of them were still bathed in an orgy of light.

Was it the light that made them look as if they were gliding some inches above the ground? In any case, something special and solemn was about them, intimidating the Professor in a way that she almost forgot what she wanted to ask - while she in fact had prepared a little questionnaire for the purpose.

She overcame such attempt and hurried after them with quick paces. "In fact, I actually wanted to invite you for dinner. Amadeus has cooked, you know."

She said that as if such fact was something very special. While she realized she added somewhat weakening. "It's surely different from the public food for a chance. You ought to know Amadeus is well known for his delicious vegetable pies. Well, would you like to come?"

In the public dining hall there was no privacy, not for them in their state.

"In fact, we wanted to meet Flo and Cori on the oceanic side. We did arrange that" Arundle objected hastily while Tibor and Billy-Joe were going to nod politely.

Arundle knew that she didn't say the whole truth. Today was their oceanic day, but special arrangements had not been taken for that. They just were all used to meeting Tuesdays at the oceanic buffet.

Grisella looked somewhat disappointed, but she didn't give in. Her cause was important, she had to get a chance to talk with the returnees undisturbed - sure, of no overhearing by the mole, she suspected in the vicinity.

“Dorothea is coming and later Scholasticus as well.” She had delayed her brother-in-law purposely, as she knew that he was no good addressee for secrets.

Arundle knew already what kind of important role Dorothea had taken over by corresponding with the public one of which was the unanimous Brotherhood of Infernalina whose Chairman was her own father; and of course she also knew about the rumours of the spy hiding on the island. Thus, she took the bait at once.

“Half an hour we could afford, don’t you think so?” she asked her mates. Grisella was going to do more but asking curious questions. Therefore Arundle looked around fishing for agreement, which she got, although she had been the only one uttering objections.

Instead of heading towards the South seaside, the Illuminated left the main building and followed their Professor to her home, shortly a stone’s throw apart, where both Slyboots’s families lived under one roof, as they were used to in Germany. Little had changed in this respect.

Dorothea was approaching from the other side. She came out of the Headmistress’s office, where she was busy with the School’s correspondence all morning.

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk was so used to her new assistant that she couldn’t do without her anymore; no matter whether the crisis was overcome so far by now. For the office work seemed to do itself alone all of a sudden. No lengthy searching, no missed dates – punctual and accurate – all letters left the island, especially the official mail (as not has always been like that).

Parents’ inquiries were answered promptly and applications were handled at once. Even expertises went out in time, which had been delayed in former times for several reasons. Dorothea knew how to urge the experts without offending them.

Unimpressed by the gloriolate that shone at her, she hugged Arundle dearly. They hadn’t met privately after their return. She shook hands with Tibor, whom she didn’t know yet and gave him a gentle smile, while she aspirated two promising kisses on Billy-Joe’s - slightly reddening - cheeks.

“I’m curious about the meal Amadeus has prepared for us”, she chatted and hooked up with Arundle on one side and Tibor on the other on the last yards to the entrance. Now her charm surrounded the group like a fragrant mystic cloud.

Amadeus had prepared an excellent meal, as they soon realized, but for now their appetite had to wait.

“Scholasticus is coming soon, he just phoned”, Amadeus said while he pushed his head through that hole in the wall connecting kitchen and the adjacent parlour. “I recommend, we all have a drink and talk a little before eating”, he said and disappeared back to his oven wherein his famous pie was cooking, which emitted clouds of seducing vapour.

Dorothea took the chance and told Arundle what she knew about that mysterious Brotherhood and its chairman. It was not much she could tell, but the little she conveyed was hair-rising enough for the girl, - they were after all talking about her own father.

“That’s incredible”, Arundle whispered, when Dorothea read to her some passages of a file she had with her, containing the correspondence with that organisation.

“There the last word has not yet been spoken” the girl said angrily. Grisella frowned. “I’m afraid, it’s much too late. Perhaps I can blueprint the dimensions of the catastrophe”, she said in a serious air.

“Amongst us there is a spy of that so-called Brotherhood, that’s for sure” Dorothea put in – “...and we have not the faintest idea, who it could be”, Grisella confirmed.

“If you had been available the suspicion would have fallen on you again, because of your family-ties, but with that you are familiar already. Otherwise the newcomers are still in the focus, however with no proof, and of course old acquaintance like Moschus Mogoleya, who hasn’t yet escaped the ranks of the suspects, no matter how advantageous his progress might otherwise be, when it comes to colloquial behaviour and manners in general”, Grisella answered her sister.

“With outrageous speculations we won’t get any further. This time we need professional criminalistic clairvoyance” Billy-Joe put in.

“What use is it, if we find out who the informant is?” Arundle objected.

“Are we not led astray, instead of concentrating on our great task, that is of epochal importance as everybody knows...”

“I see it likewise. Searching for a spy is of minor value. What did the Advisor teach us? After all we do know now what Time is, while we still cannot say much of it, though” Tibor assisted, not only to get his Dean out of the fire line, while the permanent mistrust did hurt. Therefore, shifting the focus met his point of view.

The consequences could of course be disastrous, so much unnecessary damage was done - for sure. Although the spy was of no decisive function. The mistrust would be worse that was spreading all over the place, if you started making it a wide-ranged criminalistic investigation.

Scholasticus arrived, while they didn't get any further. The meal could begin. Amadeus served and earned enchanted agreement. He kept grinning and felt obviously in his element. The role of a host and cook suited him very well.

He noticed with great satisfaction that they like what they were eating. Grisella went on reporting of the ongoing matters of the School of Inbetween, while the absentees had been away.

She didn't forget her sister's successful defence against perfidy assaults by dubious people, while the Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster didn't look so good, for several reasons. – That however was hopefully over now.

Arundle reported of their adventures - the blasting of the barrier, and their visit with the Advisor. She implemented purposely many little secret hints in order to confuse the spy, had he been present. He would have liked to write that all down or - even better - had recorded it.

In fact, she gave very poor information. She skipped the enlightening passages when their understanding of the heavenly whereabouts had grown.

The enemy she imagined should get to know of the advances made over here. After all she had heard, she didn't doubt that someone tried to win control over the School of Inbetween. His aim was it to get access to the research work in progress in order to turn the outcome against the inventors.

She acted indeed as if the spy was right amongst them. Was that pure imagination or was there something in it?

Worst-case considerations might turn out to be of use under certain circumstances. In any case, it was better then musing under the illusion of being safe amidst of mates and friends.

“We do not know if the bastion can be defended. We didn't learn anything about that”, Arundle said with little reference to what just was said. She referred to her talk with the Advisor.

Bewildered looks forced her then to comment her remark a little further.

“I remind the latest advice of the Advisor, when we just got ready for departing”, Arundle explained – “when he told us to take care of the guardian of the island: ‘He is not, what he pretends to be’, “thus were his words”, Arundle said in a meaningful air.

“What might be meant by that?” Dorothea wondered. “Guardian of the island – could be one of the guards of the Convertors, though.”

Bewildered looks indicated that none of the present had an idea. “Perhaps a hint of the Advisor dealing with the trouble of the flow of time, as everything had reference to the time over there. Does that remind you of anything special?” Arundle turned towards her mates who had been with her.

Tibor shook his head and Billy-Joe shrugged, only Pooty tried a little nodding without real conviction: “When we arrived there was this monolith at the edge of the virtual peninsular – could that be meant by the Guardian?”

Arundle didn’t take care of what Pooty just said. If she had, she would have noticed something of great importance. To her mind came the rings of Saturn. Such the Advisor had given them as examples for the problems of time.

“Time is the beginning and the end of all our research work” Scholasticus agreed at once.

They all were happy for having found back to the red thread, which had been lost, although they didn’t get the last meaning of the Saturn-example. In any case they realized that even a weird intention could be turned into something positive.

“By us, the upcoming evil of the world becomes a momentum of hope” Arundle added.

Silence lowered over the assembly; while Amadeus served the second course, and needs that are more basic, asked for their rights.

Arundle felt like being the only one overlooking the full dimension of the upcoming evil and the decline of values in some clarity. Although she might overdo as she admitted to herself. She knew her pessimistic notion of colouring things unnecessarily sinister. The others might not focus on the historical dimensions right now.

However, the key word would be uttered sooner or later, and then everybody would know again, where the passage led. How deep had the human kind to lower? Had Mankind to dive down into such abyss that was opening up right here? Such were the relevant questions now!

They had the fate of mankind in hands and do as best they could to alter the general course that seemed to be given.

Such the brave girl thought to have learnt from the Advisor. The future had to fulfil by the tremendous strain they had to bury on their shoulders right here for the mankind as a whole, and for their own good and sake.

Neither good nor bad outcome was guaranteed. The red thread of Man's History could break at any time. While seen from an eternal point of view some thousand years of history were less than a drop of water in the ocean.

Would she be able to make such clear to people like her father? Could she show him how thin the ice was, they were all on right now?

In order to double or even triple the own lifespan – the girl knew in the meantime – such egoists didn't stay away from the worst means. What did such fools care about the future of the blue planet? What did they mind the misery of the masses? What did they care about the agony of nature?

The future had already begun. By now it became clear, where the journey headed.

Over was the time of careless studies; gone the wonderful days of musings and self-fulfilment, and free development of all talents. Two years had passed just like that. For them – right here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth – the screw of time had been tightened.

Without the Professor, without Penelope M'gamba's accident, they wouldn't have realized the signs of time. The manipulations of the Brotherhood had remained undiscovered. They had – unnoticed by the livid spirits in the School of Inbetween – taken over the power in order to use it to their sinister needs.

All those unexplainable and mysterious events on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth now could be seen under the one cloak of a sinister plan, which had a very real reference to the livid presence.

Malicious Marduk's stronghold turned out to be not only set and sound, but proved his immense power. His agent was sitting right among them, well hidden and fully integrated into the everyday life of the island.

Nobody had an idea who he was. Soundless wild accusations hovered about instead. Each little animosity served under such circumstances as a hint for weird suspicions. Arundle had become victim of such mistrust and had almost been dismissed from the school for that.

Instead of teaching them about the character of time -(an experience she didn't want to miss, anyway) - the Advisor had better provided them with more concrete stuff. As he once did, when he provided her with the counterfeit of the suspects, by which she managed to free herself.

What did it help her and her friends, when they became honoured, while the world all about was tumbling towards disaster? Was the School of Inbetween not doomed alike? Was their wish not a blind illusion of holding here a fortress of righteousness and truth?

Grisella was all too right. It was high time to talk things over and analyse freely the whereabouts and the outlook. Perhaps they would be able to find adequate counter-measures. They were not all that helpless any more. They had the magic posers - the bow and stone on their side, and their own talents as well. While they now realized, that any good always had the bad side inherent.

Things were not easy, though - surly not – and never - seen from that viewpoint. They could rely on nothing certain, there was no fundament of righteousness – and never had been. Wherever you looked, whatever you tried, you moved on wobbly grounds – things were uncertain and always on the move.

You better not ignored what was going on. Things were no more as they used to be, and would never again be. Did Scholasticus go wrong with his stressing on Sagittarius Alpha? Did that not mean to play God? There, at the end of all time, where matter transforms back into pure energy, and acceleration becomes so big that the time were stretched infinitively. While a fictitious observer could get the impression that the time were shrinking down to one singular instant – remaining thus for many, - for very many immeasurable units of time. Thus, exceeding the human capability by far, but were still like nothing in the face of eternity.

Arundle came back to the surface and looked around, while having stuffed her mouth for minutes with the excellent soufflé Amadeus had cooked on top of everything they had had already. He still saw it with delight, as he mixed up spiritual absence with healthy appetite.

32. Quaking Quantums

Arundle needed only one key word in order to come back with all her senses to the point, and all in the know understood what she meant. ‘Laptopia’ she exclaimed somewhat exaggerating.

Grisella heftily nodded: “Yes, dear friends. The future has begun already, if we like it or not.” She picked up the thread, which end Arundle had thrown at her just like that:

“From now on the count-down is running towards Laptopia, and we all know what that means. From now on, nothing will remain as it was in former times. We are facing new dimensions. Time doesn’t belong to us any more. Time is no longer given to us. Time is no present any longer. Those who want it, have to fight for it. As we know there will be many who are walking corpses thoughtlessly, while others throw away their most precious good. As had happened often in society, which is splitting up into exploited and exploiters. The ‘chosen few’ who are dwelling in surplus and immeasurable luxury, while the vast majority are ruining and stripping themselves off the only value they have left: their life-time. No one will ask whether the deprived waste their only property voluntarily or forced by circumstances not in their range. Soon they will learn to accept such living conditions as the appointed lot. The ruling classes will praise such state as the God-given order of life, while exploitation by means of labour is seemingly done, which had been the offspring of humane injustice and immeasurable grief in the past.”

Little could be added to Grisella’s words, and silence lowered over the party. Each mused or wondered whether anything else could be said and felt uneasy while they just had had an excellent meal – they were - without doubt – part of the privileged chosen few who were benefiting already and very likely would go on benefiting while they had powerful means at hand.

Finally, Scholasticus snatched up: “Until it is that far, a lot has to be done before. It will be up to us to keep up the dream of another better world, while the existing one might indeed be bound to doom.”

“In history it was always of vital importance that there were people, who kept in mind what was endangered to get lost” Grisella confirmed, and she went on: “And be the tunnel all that black, so we do know that there is a new light at the end.”

Was that so? Was there a way out – now? Had they to accept the unavoidable? Such an idea deeply offended Arundle’s imaginative faculty, and didn’t fit her nature at all.

What, if the free tribes of the future were underrated to a large extent? After all, the laws of Laptopia were not - or just partly - valid on their territories. Did they live as primitive as was conveyed to the visitors from the past?

The adventures of the future were likely to fade in the meantime. Besides, they had only experienced a very limited and small part of the future world. What, if Laptopia was a forlorn island at the outer edge of the time-flow - a segment, not more?

Taking things as granted was none of Arundle's business. She had become in touch with a future world, where the change of time manifested. Doubting such was inopportune, though. The evolution was in full swing. Did that mean however, that they could do hardly more than putting spokes in the ongoing processes - in order to get off cheaply with the world as such?

The hotheaded girl expressed her feelings: "Ain't doubts allowed any more at last?" she hollered somewhat unmotivated. Thus, Scholasticus meant to have her explained as cool as possible the astronomical side of the whole affair; she seemed to have lost out of mind.

"Without doubt the Earth is concerned by the phenomenon of time - very likely the whole solar system. Anything else is wishful thinking. We are all in the same boat."

"... And if we concentrate on the next steps that are coming up on us?" Tibor had not been in Laptopia and didn't understand what Arundle was focussing on.

Billy-Joe agreed: "The approach offered by Scholasticus seems to me not only righteous but pragmatic as well. What's coming is coming, we shouldn't doubt that. Both of you are right. We know what is coming and we don't know at the same time. We think to know the upcoming future, but do we know everything in detail? Beside the fact that time is rushing by faster, we know very little..."

Arundle shrugged in despair: "How can you be so cynical?" she shouted outraged. "All those poor people, exploited and cheated by their lives. It's enough to make you sick. You are right - I will stop it right from the start. All that should not come up and going to happen..."

"Do you think you can stop the technological progress?"

"The one has nothing to do with the other. The question is whether the unfortunate connection must come into existence at all..."

“What about the first cosmological law which says that the flow of time cannot be altered in the aftermath?”

“We aren’t yet dealing with the future. The future hasn’t yet happened except in our memory, that makes all the difference, thus there would be no alteration of the flow of time, if we altered what’s coming up, while we were the creators. What we saw in Laptopia might be a nightmare, we have to get out, perhaps we were only shown what would come if we didn’t act right now, if we let things go the way they did.”

“Our experiences were quite real, though.”

“Of course, they were. Our dreams show us a reality that is real in a different sense – still many people don’t believe in their dreams. We Somniors are the exception to the rule.”

Well, yes and no – not always, I’d say.”

“Call it better – visions. What we encountered in Laptopia, was a kind of vision, I’d say. Visions show what is going to happen under certain circumstances in the frame of probability of course, and by consideration of the Heisenberg-formula, which makes things, God knows, not easier.” – Professor Scholasticus Slyboots’ frowned in deep concern, while he said that. His gaze went afar. He didn’t see the faces that showed lack of comprehension. Had he seen those he most likely would have felt forced to produce an even broader and more general approach, while this had eventually not done any better.

“Who the hell is Heisenberg” Arundle wondered. She had heard that name: “Quantum physics” she heard herself murmur.

“Exactly right the Heisenberg formula says that events concerning quantum can never be predicted satisfactorily. A fact, which is great in its stunning effects and maddening consequences. At least for those who are thinking deeply enough about the matter”, he added after a short break, while looking into the astonished faces and met the confused gazes of the partisans with him.

“That means in the last consequence the absolute openness of all future” he backed up, hoping he made things now clear to all of them.

“If I see it right and you are right as well we would have faced some kind of collective nightmare. No matter how real things were. While you had almost been staked if we hadn’t saved you?”

Scholasticus didn’t know an answer to Arundle’ question either. Those Heisenberg quantum stuff and the experienced time

hops in reality showed an insurmountable gap, they weren't able to overcome.

"We have to admit that we can suffer from severe damage in such imaginary worlds. Is it not true that we can even suffer from mysterious damage in our dreams, unable to explain how we came to an aching shoulder or knee, while having laid peacefully in our beds, and didn't do anything else but dreaming a lively dream?" Billy-Joe objected.

"Right, you can even die. Many people didn't wake up after a dream, some odd statistics say there are much more of such casualties than registered" Arundle added, who could remember dreamt dangers of life.

"Let's sum up", Scholasticus said. "The future of the world in which we live has to be open. If you follow our joint musings the world is as open as are the incalculable quantum hops of Heisenberg. Nobody knows what is coming next, whether such quantum disappear in the next instant or reappear likewise.

I've got to correct and express myself more clearly: the future of the world could be open and wholly incalculable just as those quantum are that underlie everything. No one can predict what is going to happen in the next moment – whether one quantum appears or whether it is changing or diminishing. Here we are on the grounds of the mystery of all being; and here everything begins, that somehow is.

It could well be that people look into the wrong direction, when they search for God. They imagine God great and of unimaginable dimensions, as well as divine, and eternal, while God might as well be indescribably small and therefore invisible, inapproachable and indescribable – while omnipresent at the same time, and inherent in everything about us. – Here, with the smallest of all bits everything begins - which is about us, and forms us, and creates us – a truly fascinating idea."

They had coffee meanwhile. The luncheon had stretched in time, but nobody objected, the least Arundle. She saw things now with different eyes. Once more, she realized how valuable the exchange of thoughts was – indeed superior to solitary musings, though.

They didn't get any further as far as the present problems on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth were concerned. The spy lured – like a spider in the web – still unknown in the hide. While Arundle felt

confirmed in regard of the doubts and queries she was dealing with.

The future was hiding again behind a blue or a grey cloak. It became again what it always had been – the mysterious unknown, full of surprise and the unforeseen. No matter how intimate the knowledge - or how clever the access was, someone claimed his or her own.

Future is what lies hidden in obscurity. Not the likeliness or the logic was necessarily bound for forming what was coming. There were always other possibilities, no matter how unlikely they seemed.

The future was hiding in the incalculability of quantum physics – in the hops and gaps of the most intern self of all being. The course of the world is thus open for more or less likely up comings, and discharged from arbitrariness.

Once more Arundle thought she had come closer to the essential mystery of time. Would the Advisor agree? Would he be content? She felt a deep yearning for his presence.

‘Limited are we human beings’ she thought. Knowledge has to be prepared in neat bits for us; otherwise we are unable to digest what we learn. Faint ideas do we have a lot, but the most lead astray. Without certainty Man is not wholly himself.

Looked at the situation that way, she could be really proud of herself: One luncheon with the right people was enough to get a clear view of the likeliness of the future and led to considerations which had been unthinkable before.

Excursion into the future actually didn’t work, while visits in parallel worlds with different time scales were likely, and could lead to the conclusions they had drawn.

The Laptopians then thought the visitors from the past to be their own ancestors. Thus, it was only logical for both parties that they were dealing with the same Earth, the same globe and universe. While there were very likely hundreds of thousands or even millions of such worlds – one beside the other and packed inside like a Russian doll.

All these worlds were peopled with human beings and each set of human beings was of course singular and coherent.

Out of the plentitude of the visualized light – thus, Arundle recalled – such worlds had shown up: wonderful bubbles, transparent and covered like kernels or semen – Blue Planets everywhere, as far as the gaze went: Solar systems, circling around suns, bright and of unbearably intense lightness.

Such had been just a trace, too vague for the human eye – still noticed, thanks to the manipulations of the Advisor.

Tibor and Billy-Joe also remembered that light. They also spoke of the flashes of light and reported of the rays beyond borders.

“I could feel the light physically. It had been everywhere. No eyes were required. You could speak of an inner light as well”, Tibor added to Arundle’s musings – he had obviously participated via telepathies.

“It didn’t help to close the eyes, that’s right” Billy-Joe picked up the thread.

“The light was everywhere, we were light ourselves, and you can see that still...”

Tibor nodded almost as eager as Pooty whose head with the glowing nose tip and the shining ears looked out of Billy-Joe’s Medicine Pouch.

33. The Spy

The small group in the know gathered new courage because the discernments into the essence of time and future opened unexpected and challenging ways, they could choose. Nothing was lost yet, while the offers had to be consequently checked and considered.

No standstill of research was allowed. Especially the research on the AMC (Anti-Matter-Catcher) had to be driven on, by means of which the Brotherhood had once been fooled already. Furthermore, they had to take care of keeping their research work on a high level. By now nobody knew how the members of the School of Inbetween had won back their talents and magic abilities. All of a sudden, their colours became relevant again, and the eyes were able to see in the other mode. Somehow that mysterious barrier had been broken or put out of order, that is, it lost its power. However, as long as nobody knew the mechanism, the threat continued, and a new assault could happen at any time.

Perhaps such had to do with the spy, who noticed all that – more or less – what was going on, on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

A detailed analysis of the offending letters from the ‘Brotherhood of Infernalía’ was due. Perhaps such letters unveiled more than yet noticed. The arrogant mode of asking and insisting indicated a detailed discernment into the most intimate affairs of the School and their staff. Everything might have to do with a spy, who was suspected to be hiding right amongst them. Such might well become a task for a study group as well.

Many projects had to be undertaken simultaneously. There was much to do again.

Scholasticus still enthused over Sagittarius Alpha even more now after the enlightened had come back. He suspected the four runaways to have passed through the black hole in the centre of the Milky Way. The magical recovery they were experiencing all over the place now, might as well have to do with such encounter, and surely was worth a study group too.

Dorothea had other aims in mind. She didn’t intend to let even the inner circle into the secret. She didn’t mistrust them specifically, but the more people knew about her plans the greater was the chance of a leak. Thus, she decided at best to have none at all involved.

The only person she really trusted was her twin sister, who she knew almost as well as she knew herself. Since they were children they were able to communicate without words, no matter that they employed privacy as well - the older they went. Grisella was not interested in Dorothea’s superficialities (as she put it). She thought them shallow and useless, while Dorothea ignored her sister’s favourite subjects, as there were Philosophy and History.

The spy however, who troubled the public, met exactly the junction of joint concern between the two worlds of the twins. He stimulated their imagination and initiated a tricky plan how to discover and trap such a mole.

“We could go on like this” – Dorothea commenced and looked at her sister enthusiastically.

The twin sisters were sitting away from the public save of overhearing, in the park above the buildings on the surface. The weather was fine. The sun was shining from the blue sky and a mild air played about the evergreen leaves of bushes and trees.

Although it was winter, they experienced a very pleasant day with mild temperatures.

Grisella kept on stunning. Such intriguing plans, she wouldn't have expected from her 'little' sister, (who was just about ten minutes younger). She agreed wholeheartedly.

"Looks like it'll work, though" she decided. "You've got to set the lever on the right spot, then things look pretty easy."

Well, indeed, but we shan't sell the bear's skin before hunting the beast. The person – he or she - is surely not dumb..."

"Do you think it could be a woman?"

"Not really. All I want is to stay open – not to overlook anything. We will soon know more."

"Well, well, vanity became a trap for more than one. – I still cannot imagine how we are going to proceed. What am I going to do? You don't think I ..."

Dorothea nodded fiercely and her eyes glittered.

"No" Grisella shouted.

"Yes" Dorothea hollered back. "That's exactly the way it's gonna work. Nobody needs to tell me about vanity. This is a subject I'm familiar. Such bait no one would let go - who is fond of himself, and as soon as he swallows the bait, we have him."

"Won't that be too dangerous? What are you doing if things go wrong? You are all alone then. Besides, you have nobody but me to help you just in case! You know how scared I am in such things. So, don't rely on me. Perhaps we'd invite Amadeus, while Scholasticus has to be kept out that old chatterbox... - if he knows anything, the whole school knows it likewise."

Dorothea frowned. She didn't like her husband criticized in such a rude manner, no matter how profound such criticism was.

"We either tell both or none" she therefore exclaimed somewhat upset. Then, after a little while she added in a reflected air: "I think I manage. You shouldn't overestimate men and their abilities. First, I am very able to defend myself - I train almost daily. You know power and fitness go hand in hand and are part of my beauty programme. Besides, I'm certain that there won't be any physical encounters. He most likely wouldn't know what's going on anyway."

Grisella nodded, somewhat hesitant, she wasn't convinced at all even if it might be true that Dorothea outnumbered most men when it came to physical fitness and dexterity. Many men would wonder how fast he'd find himself on the ground. Dorothea knew a

lot about Chinese combatant sport and even more than that – some might almost think of sorcery. - Why not, with such relatives - Grisella mused somewhat self-content.

The trap had to work, as tricky as it was. She would be caught as well, she realized, she was just noticing, and that meant a lot.

If something went wrong, she would be near and could get help right away.

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The students' duty roster was altered because of the new challenge. The 'get to know yourself' basic lesson remained untouched, though, as the hurly burly with that blooming barrier had caused a lot of insecurity, which required repair now.

However, the voluntary offers became streamlined under the altered premise, while all talents and gifts were required in those study groups, and were trained by executing. Thus, the Teachers' Board was full of hope.

Arundle, Billy-Joe and Tibor got involved in exploring that wormhole, Scholasticus was so eager to studying. Unfortunately Arundle couldn't get her two friends to join them, because they had registered for the Anti-Matter-class already, where Billy-Joe and Tibor were missing, who had been initiators of the subject. The matter was tricky enough and clever brain and all hands were needed. Perhaps they came together in the end anyway, but for the time being they were parted.

A third study group was formed to search for secret transmitters and satellites, as the managing School Board suspected being overheard from afar, which wasn't unlikely at all, while the other option of a spy transmitting secretly somewhere in the vicinity was much likelier. The latter option seemed sound because of the correspondence Dorothea had had with that Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalia, and his interest in the research work, especially as far as there was any reference to time manipulations and time travelling. Thus, the source was rather defined, however the location was not at all clear. Therefore, the Sublimations daily searched as far as they were carried by their talents – and were looking for suspicious objects or anything unusual. Unfortunately, the nixes couldn't be involved and asked for assistance from sub-water.

Grisella had a metaphysical substitution group initiated in order to query with philosophical aspects of time and future and

such whereabouts, dealing with the given possibilities. This study group offered a chance for those (mostly girls) who shied away from the rough realities of astrophysics and still wanted to take part in the subject. -

Thus, it happened that Sagittarius Alpha was soon beleaguered by misty souls and Somnior shadows. Of course, in respectful distance, because even for such light beings the immeasurable suction of the whirling naught was too much, because it sucked in everything in its vicinity. Even the Time was unable to resist and thus disappeared.

This is why the impression stand still of Time came into being, while Time was in fact stretched endlessly, and you required godly dimensions to notice the dripping off of such eternal intervals. As Millions of light years become God's days and centuries trickle like seconds, while Man is but nothing.

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The Headmistress installed a study group of her own, dealing with the whereabouts of the Brotherhood of Infernalía, who had troubled her so much. Based on the letters they had received in the dark days when things went down to the dumps, her intention was to gather material in order to lay open the character of such organisation right from the beginning.

Where did these people come from? What were their aims? The study group should not limit their research on the letters only but should start a worldwide investigation – “on all likely levels” as Marsha put it.

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Amadeus also intended to share the busy scene by offering a magic seminar together with Pooty as the caretaker of the magical stone, who was the real intruder and had chosen Amadeus for reasons he alone knew. When Penelope M'gamba learned of such, she immediately was willing to participate, ‘in order to give the undertaking the proper status’, as she put it. While the Headmistress was all in favour of this study group, as it might be able to find out about that damn barrier and the loss of magic. They might even predict what was coming up and if such an assault was likely to be due in the near future again.

Arundle's magic bow had been invited likewise and even Billy-Joe and Arundle intended to participate whenever their time allowed. However, even the theoretical part of their research work about the wormhole ate up almost all of their energy. They meant to break down under the overload of stuff, as there were the estranging phenomena of space, the multitude of models and approaches. There was the big bang and quantum physics, quarks, space-time and the like – such had to be somehow put into relation and transformed into calculable figures. That was not so easy; well, in fact, impossible for an individual of the average type. Had they been average, they would have given in right at the start.

**

Adrian Humperdijk was looking for participants of his underwater programme. He couldn't refrain from the fact which almost cost his life and mounted in the question why time elapsed remarkably slower at the bottom of the sea.

Although he meant to know the answer, he still had no proof. Therefore investigations were necessary, but couldn't be started for the time being. While the transparent submarine was available again, after having been overhauled conscientiously in the docks of Sydney. While the shock still set deep, the accident had caused. Only the fact that things turned out to the better in the end soothed the fear of the depth a little.

Nobody wondered that the multitude of offers met a differentiating echo. Clever guidance and soft force led to a reasonably fitting outcome in the weeks to follow, thus, the teachers were content. One thing became clear at once: No one wanted to stay aside. That was the main thing. All students wanted to do something, instead of having things go their pace, and wished to use their brains.

Soon the spy, whose presence had started all this, almost diminished in the background, while new tasks took over with unforeseen challenge, thus everybody did his or her best.

When the first remarkable results of such joint efforts were presented, the spy almost was forgotten (except of course by the study group explicitly dealing with him.)

This was then Dorothea's great hour. She could arrange the trap of vanity. Would she manage to have the spy disguise himself? Would he be ensnared in the trap of vanity?

"Could we" she started one night with soft voice "could we – under certain circumstances of course..."

"Yes, my dear, what is it?"

"Could we, provided all of us participate of course, simulate that the time stands still? Perhaps by means of some sort of higgledy-piggledy – somewhat sound, though..."

"What do you mean, dear..."

"Well, the central clock stands still, people freeze in odd postures – something like that – spectacular it should be. Everybody must be affected. A kind of shock all experience, nothing set yet..."

"How should that work? Of course you can stop the clock, but that doesn't shock anyone. Something else should happen at the same time..."

"Perhaps the outbreak of a volcano or hot rain, a swarm of locusts, I don't know..."

"Apocalyptic signs that we interpret as the stand still of time, and..."

"Exactly – this is what I'm thinking of, and the surprise effect is most important. Everybody must be convinced, only then my trap would work."

"It's about that spy, am I right?" Scholasticus murmured already half asleep, still he could add two and two.

"Well, you are not allowed to know. Promise to keep your mouth shut only this time..."

"What do you mean by – this time?" he asked back fully awake - "as if I had ever..."

"Scholasticus, this is not our subject."

"You are right, still I would like to object that your idea - as far as practicable at all - might be a bit far reaching, so to speak. You'd better try to get the challenge somewhat more direct and closer to the suspect, in a manner that he cannot resist and betray himself irresistibly."

"Exactly, that's it. I don't mind, - everything is alright with me as long as it works."

Dorothea agreed with everything. She knew all too well that her suggestion was born out of helplessness. In vain she strained her brain since that enlightening idea had vanished and no new one came in sight.

The only confidant to her plans didn't get any further as well. In opposite – Grisella only could urge: “We've got to get him. Now, while so much is underway likely to do us harm. He surely is transmitting to his headquarter everything we do. I bet he does.”

Scholasticus was used to talk any practical problems over with his assistant, as Peter Adams was very able with such technical things.

Dorothea once more briefed her husband not to speak about her plans to anybody, especially not to one of the suspects. Grisella had prepared a list with the names of those who were likely to be the spy.

Peter Adams had been suspected once. Besides, he had had chances enough to get in contact with the Brotherhood, while others had likewise. There were all too many of them. That was why Peter Adams was on their list way behind, while the main suspect next to Moschus Mogoleya, who was on the list because of his rude manners and awful opinions fitted well to the letters they received from the Chairman of the Brotherhood.

Zinfandor Leblanc thus, was also found on that list. The sisters suspected him mainly because he made them feel uneasy, they found out after comparing their lists they had made up at first independently.

Zinfandor had shown up on both lists no matter how deeply Penelope was devoted to him – as well as Peter Adams and Moschus Mogoleya. While nobody could imagine what would happen to Penelope if their suspicion turned out to be factitious.

For the time being they couldn't care less – while they didn't overlook the consequences of the unveiling.

Scholasticus didn't think twice. He had his own ideas as far as the list of suspects was concerned, but that he kept in mind.

“I think we should involve Arundle”, he suggested. “She should ask the Advisor for advice. Such heavenly guideline had the advantage of being objective. All of us can go astray. What a mess would it be if we suspected the wrong one.”

While he said that he thought of course of his assistant and friend, and how harmful and embarrassing a false accusation would be in this case; no matter whether he himself noticed peculiarities and contradictions in the behaviour and whereabouts of Peter.

Why did he get along so well with Moschus Mogoleya? And that demonstration of superiority to manage with all kinds of assaults and threatening spirits, meant to destroy others, while he

kept calm and at ease. Could there be something else behind but a strong and straightforward character?

Besides, could there eventually be a complot? Who told them, that there was only one single spy? It could well be that there were more than one who slipped in one by one over a lengthier period.

34. The Trap

“After all, none is out. I think, we cannot exempt even ourselves. How was that with Walter? Do you remember? The poor guy didn’t himself know what had been wrong with him, - not to mention the poor pigs.”

“Don’t you mix up things, Scholasticus? Miseriors are, I think; a different problem. We cannot look at our case that way. After all there are responsible culprits for the evil in the world” Grisella replied.

It was a bright morning and Sunday as well. The three in the know were sitting at a joint breakfast. Scholasticus had become involved. Therefore the sisters had no reason to keep him out artificially, while Dorothea had broken the promise to her sister’s annoyance. While the breach turned out to become an unexpected chance to get further. Thus, she agreed on the opinion of her sister with regard to the evil: “After all, we had to distinguish those who know what they do from those who became witless tools. Walter, for example, didn’t know what he did in the state of conversion. We should keep that in mind all the time don’t you think so? – Still let’s run through that list anyway, perhaps we overlooked something of importance.”

All three nodded.

“We cannot delete Adams, I’m sorry, Scholasticus”, Dorothea thoughtfully said.

“Neither can we Arundle, which might sound stupid, because of her relationship with the Chairman of the Brotherhood. That is why she is on our list. Therefore it might be no good idea to have her involved, and ask for her help. – We wanted to be objective, while we cannot believe in our premises. We still have to accept

facts, and fact is that the unpleasant person who wrote all those nasty letters is Arundle's own father, There is no way out."

"Arundle you can exempt or delete finally from your list. She was the one who brought the heavenly light to us..."

"She was not alone, though."

"Still, I think that is reason enough to exempt her from any suspicion" Scholasticus insisted. "Someone who can perform so much shouldn't be bothered with such low mud, I'd bet my soul on her innocence." Scholasticus couldn't refrain from such open words even if he risked trouble with his wife, which bothered him much more than arguing with Grisella. Thus, he went on: "Quite opposite, you should involve Arundle in your team, as we don't get further without her. Can't you see that?" He knew by now how stuck the sisters had gone with their plans.

His hefty objection remained not without effect. Dorothea, who wanted to upset herself first, lowered her eyes, when her sister gave her a wink to calm down.

"What kind of trap did you have in mind right at the beginning?" Scholasticus asked after a pause of thoughtful silence.

"You see" Grisella exclaimed towards her sister. "Scholasticus puts his finger into the open wound, so to speak. That exactly is the weak point. Our trap does not yet work, we have had little more but a faint idea."

"Nothing you could transform into action" Dorothea agreed somewhat subdued. "To be honest, we did expect help from other sources..."

"...while we didn't want someone in whom we suspected, of course. That's clear. What were our plans good for otherwise?"

Scholasticus was shaking his head amused inside. What a nuisance! On the other hand he had to admit that he also didn't have anything useful in mind right now, while the idea of tempting the spy out of his hide, was a good one after all.

"You must have had something in mind" he hollered invitingly.

"Well, yes, of course. We thought of a kind of duel; something irresistible. Dorothea wanted to be some sort of bait, actually..."

"We didn't think of a bait, though, however, if you want to see it that way, you are right somehow..."

"Anyway it has to be a situation the spy cannot resist, if he takes his task serious..."

“...That’s what I think. Our spy has to be an expert. Such a challenge as we have in mind”, - “without knowing precisely what it’s like, he surely couldn’t resist...”

‘They should listen to what say talk’, Scholasticus wondered – and such people dared to condemn dear Peter. There, the last word has not yet been spoken, while in the meantime he would keep his mouth shut in that matter.

“I’m so well fitting, because everybody thinks me mentally limited” Dorothea went on. “I know the gossip behind my back, wherever I go.”

“Well, perhaps not now after you did that great job with those inquiries on behalf of, and in favour of the School of Inbetween” Grisella objected.

“Still, I didn’t step out of the big shadow of my famous sister...”

“I never thought you were dumb”, Scholasticus hastily proclaimed, but his inversion sounded somewhat queer.

“I know my strengths best myself – and my weaknesses as well. Self-deception is no part”, Dorothea countered with glittering eyes.

The experienced revaluation did her well. At last, she was accepted, as she was. She had empathy and a considerable amount of emotional intelligence, only few people shared. Still she thought herself in a cul-de-sac. While things sometimes were all clear to her. However, as soon as she intended to concretise things seemed to melt like snow in the sun and she found herself with empty hands right at the starting point. She couldn’t even talk to anybody then. Such were the moments when she envied her sister, who always had a suitable phrase in mind, while it did happen that her words sounded somewhat hollow, no matter how well they were set.

“Did I get you right, - there is no plan in the sense of a plan?” Scholasticus asked again. The sisters nodded.

“We did admit that already – doesn’t make sense to repeat it again and again” Grisella hollered upset. Scholasticus was not emphatic at all, while Dorothea did as if she didn’t notice his lack of empathy.

“As I said, I had several things in mind and whenever I thought that’s it, things melted away like ice in the sunshine.”

Scholasticus knew by experience that insisting now was the wrong approach and couldn’t help. Dorothea would close up and panic if he went further. She couldn’t remember those ideas she

had had in mind, otherwise she would have uttered them right away. Perhaps Dorothea's ideas had only been some kind of schemes but clear-cut thoughts, comparable to thin veils of clouds, such as had the sun weaken for an instant before fading into naught.

"...and if I just say, I were able to stop the time?" Dorothea all of a sudden cried, as if she followed a spontaneous vision, while she in fact had often played with such thought, but had put it aside, or forgot it just like that.

Now while having it discussed even with Scholasticus such idea became real and sound, and even Grisella recalled it again. They had in fact spoken about such a case.

"Well, of course I'm not really able to do so" Dorothea continued. "But perhaps Arundle can somehow – just in case that I ... now while we decided to have her involved..."

Grisella and Scholasticus looked at each other doubtfully. The idea was not new to them.

"Arundle has to teach me... or has to share what she brought with her, or I myself... - perhaps she takes me with her and I start glimmering same as those returnees did" she wondered. "Would be rather nice, me glittering and glowing... - if we take Arundle in the boat, that is", she hastily went on.

None dared to think of Tibor or Billy-Joe. In case of heavenly matters they better relied on Arundle.

Dorothea didn't mind asking her, she knew. Her friends enlightened as they were, were not the same. Without Arundle she wouldn't dare leaving solid grounds on such an adventure.

"Well then, we have Arundle involved. I'm sure she will help you" Grisella agreed and Scholasticus nodded, happy to get away with it. Dorothea now realized how absurd it had been to suspect Arundle.

"...and you make sure my old image gets restored. All world should believe me the dumb blonde, thus makes me a tempting prey..."

"Is that spy going to take the bait? What are we doing if he doesn't show interest?" Scholasticus wanted to know.

"In those letters you could read otherwise they were full of slippery quests" Dorothea replied, who had worked that correspondence over. "That's why I came to the idea with the trap" she shouted.

Scholasticus now had a bad feeling, as he realized how serious things went. What, if Dorothea suffered damage? He didn't dare to

imagine how he would feel then, while the probable loss of Arundle and her friends already almost turned him crazy.

Thus, he embraced his wife dearly – panic in his eyes. For him Dorothea had almost refrained from her intention, and a warm feeling pulsed through her body.

‘How nice, after all these years’ she wondered and clung to her husband’s wide chest.

Grisella noticed the change on Scholasticus’ side, before one of them could say anything.

“Would it help, if your brother stood beside her? We have to ask him before of course, but I’m certain he will agree. With Arundle we would then be five already. I can imagine why Amadeus would well fit into the pattern for several reasons. He could stay at her side or closely in the background in order to guide all her steps.”

Scholasticus felt relieve, and a meeting was set for the afternoon where Arundle and Amadeus were invited.

As Dorothea had hoped Arundle invited her for a space trip and so was Amadeus, right away.

The magic bow transferred them to the well-known virtual centre of all universes and galaxies, where they met the Advisor. When the latter learnt of the minor quarrels, he couldn’t resist a smile. Still he didn’t forbade Dorothea and Amadeus the bath in the covering light. Should they do with it as they pleased, - perhaps even more than some others whom enlightening had been granted.

If human beings started bothering about their future, he was all on their side. Why else were they gifted with brain, reason and will? Why not let them do their utmost, no matter how limited their efforts were, compared with the total whole.

The secrets of the universe were waiting for them, eager to be discovered and ready for the great awakening.

Arundle’s image began to fade already, and was renewed. Thus, the return turned out to be a march of triumph. Dorothea enforced her image of the blonde dummy and outed herself as the wilful prey, ready to unveil the most hidden secrecies just like that. This might be the safest way of pulling that spy out of his hidings. He could hardly ignore the fact that also simply minds were updated over here.

His reports on that subject were answered right away together with the official order to find out about those enlightened, while they had to do with back slashing effects on the side of the Brotherhood.

35. On the Track of Time

Had the island been busy already after the first return of the enlightened, it now went hectic even more, when Dorothea and her relatives followed. The spy had loads to do. Many details remained vague, though, as he was not the brightest either, easily mixing up cause and effect.

Sagittarius Alpha was somehow neglected – the spy either overlooked or misunderstood the whereabouts of such a Black Hole, while he nevertheless reported in detail what was said about such phenomenon. While the basic perception referred to the whirls in general, generated from such blueprint, so to speak. As to the study group, whirls formed the most general base of all movement, and generated a wholly new sight – that is, the universal character of whirls.

Instead of pulling in on such a hot track the Brotherhood stuck to the other trail, and bothered the poor spy with queries and inquiries about the progress in the islanders' time-research, and those mysteriously enlightened returnees from eternity. That was the trace he had to follow and made him risk his clever camouflage. Only his position inside of the School's hierarchy prevented an early de-camouflaging.

While the research of the whirls was challenging indeed, and went beyond borders: What does it mean when everything is moving in whirls? - And likewise does even the light from afar, on trails so huge that we don't notice the curvature, we are part of in a giant whirl!

Such queries were so hot - thus nobody could stay aside. You needed be a genius to become aware of immense inclusions. Sagittarius Alpha in the centre of the Milky Way was one of the mysterious Black Holes, as they are called, because they work as gigantic vacuum cleaners sucking in everything in the range. The suction is so immense that even the time cannot escape, not to

mention the light of course, which is disappearing just like that and never shows up again.

Here are working speeds of a scale exceeding Man's imagination. Since Black Holes are being watched, researchers know about speeds above the speed of light. Some say the speed of light is like the speed of a snail compared with a supersonic jet, which might overdo a bit.

The time as such is stretched in such whirls, which form the edge of the Black Hole. While outside centuries and millenniums are passing, inside not even a minute goes by. Time stands still, more or less; an idea, referring to Godly scales. On such a site, creation was planned and executed. Even the segregation into days made sense – not Earthly days, but Godly days elapsed, while the Almighty Creation occurred and is still going on. We human beings are right in the middle on our existential one-way street without return.

Arundle had joined the study group of Professor Slyboots at last. The spheres of interest were approximating undoubtedly, while she thought to have come closer to the character of time during her stay in the virtual centre of all galaxies and universes. She meant to have understood – however in an obtuse manner – which was somewhat contradictory.

Thus, Arundle soon took the word: “If we can start off the assumption of further acceleration towards infinity, on the one side, then the time must tend towards zero on the other side, as it is stretched arbitrarily. Time might never reach the absolute zero-mark, though, because then the acceleration on the other hand had to become in fact endless, which doesn't comply with logic and would – by the way - ruin human imagination finally.”

Scholasticus nodded enthusiastically: “That's it, you turned the philosopher's stone for another time by such epochal conclusion, which I – if I may – put in my own words, in order to bring it down to a clear-cut formula:

Acceleration tending towards infinity complies with the time tending towards zero. Would you agree?”

Arundle nodded, although she couldn't imagine anything of what was said. Time towards zero – what did that mean? Well, naught, nothing... “I see! Are we talking about something else, by changing the parameters?” she asked and looked around

bewildered, on the verge of another brilliant discernment, when she met the stunned gazes of the spectators of her monologue.

“Ah, yes – it’s as simple as that: Death! Time approaching zero, is like dying, when the big easy is coming, and everything is stopped. The lifetime of the body meets its final point zero. The being is ripped off the time and is thrown into endless eternity.”

That was what she was after. – “Does that work?” the others asked. “Are you allowed to change the frame of reference?”

“A minute ago unimaginable whirls with astronomical – in fact endless – speed, and then you are talking of Death – pretty fast, though, don’t you think so?”

“Yes, that cannot be done...”

“Cobbler, stick to your last...”

Even Scholasticus thoughtfully shook his head, who had been all enthusiastic only a moment ago, when he establish the equation as such. Nevertheless, things were obvious. Whenever the timeline reached the zero-mark, you left this life and crossed the borderline to the realm of the dead.

“It’s getting even further” Arundle exclaimed: “Time towards zero also means that other conditions prevail, that the known world will be left, wherein time and speed of light form the reference grid, while the speed of light is the absolute metre while everything derives from, and time would not be at all without. Reaching point zero means the change. It is, as if you fell into a jet stream. – At point zero we get thrown out of time into the current of eternity, where everything is infinitively large and infinitively small – infinitively fast and even infinitively infinite...”

Arundle always topped the top. No one had yet digested the equation and got familiar with the conclusions and consequences of the character of time, when death suddenly showed up and gave the matter a turning that had now to do with the infinitive journey in the racing whirl of infinitive speed.

“It would be as if...” Scholasticus picked up Arundle’s thought – “as if...”- he hesitated, what did he want to say? – was gone, just like that.

“Ah, yes, I’ve got it. What we need for life, our universe surrounding us, where the laws of time apply and everything is subdued by the metre of time. In such a habitat – thus, I’m going to put it for the time being – the whole affair was braked down for us, until a space was made up, wherein we could develop and where the laws of nature, as we know them, apply. While outside...”- Scholasticus waved in a grand gesture towards heaven – “The

stream of time rushes on, while we are drifting on the outer edge with our ridiculous speed of light. We – that is to say – our reference grid including the Milky Way and a couple of thousand neighbouring galaxies.”

Thus, the research was in due process, while the spy kept leaning out of the window, until he lost balance and fell out, literally spoken. In reality, there was no window, he could have been leaning out, because the Assembly Hall was located on the deepest level, where the plenary meetings took place, and where that spy was of course active, whenever he saw his chance, as was the case today.

The assembly dealt with the epoch-making research of Scholasticus Slyboots and his study group.

The Hall was located on the lowest of the underground levels - so deep that hardly any light came in through that centre slot from above. If you looked inside out, you saw black hard stone underneath some five feet down in the dim twilight.

The date of the meeting, where Arundle published her discernments into the nature of time, the function of light and the effects of speed, were not chosen accidentally. There had been no better date than this one, as it was exactly the day when she visualized in the night before the sensational equation in all its consequences. The equation had been suddenly there – complete and ready, as if it had been implanted in her brain, to surprise her foremost.

As was agreed, Dorothea was sitting somewhat bored and almost unnoticeable in the background. Next to her, she had Amadeus as a non-academic stronghold and support. He shared her resistance and disgust against ‘intellectual masturbation in public’, as he put it, which was executed up front on the stage – so they both agreed upon without words in silent accord.

Never – thus their mimes expressed – they would understand how you could get turned on like that by a speed tending towards infinite, while at the same time, the time took the opposite movement towards nil. “So what” you could read on Amadeus’s face.

Dorothea poked her elbow affably into her brother-in-law’s ribs, while her sister Grisella was keeping up her admiration for the

high class of the intellect on the uppermost level, as was accidentally developing just today – so it seemed.

Only Dorothea and Amadeus managed to stick to their chosen roles. Thus, it might be doubted if they really had trouble in doing so. Most important it was to play such roles convincingly while most likely being watched by the spy's sharp eyes. The person whom the eyes belonged did his best to follow the disputation as well as he could, while one to one spy copying didn't work down here for several reasons.

Dorothea had been boasting for days how easy it would be for her to conquer her sister's world, which she pretended to despise however. She hadn't thought of doing so up to now, because of her sister's poor self-confidence, she argued.

Being the beauty she was, she easily claimed the attention of the audience, although - mainly the advanced students - denied the unusual connotation when Dorothea began to threaten her sister, thus the latter gained not only pity but admiration as well, of managing with such a tricky sister for so long.

Dorothea had gained grounds nevertheless, as the School's correspondent. She was well able to present herself now as competent, witty and well educated as well, thus, Grisella didn't look as sovereign as she usually did.

A fateful discourse seemed to develop, involving not only the families of the opponents but the whole community of the School of Inbetween as well.

Marsha Wiggles, the Headmistress, and Adrian Humperdijk, her representative, felt surrounded by new gloomy clouds of trouble – having just recovered from the latest depression. Thus, they sank back into dreading desperation they had hoped to overcome. Marsha surely more than Adrian, who still had his monthly excursions and his important function as a high representative of the new democratic establishment under water in the new Republic of Australis.

Their query was convincingly put on stage. Both sisters had to get themselves to the ground occasionally, while they seemed to believe in what they stood for. Grisella was caught by bad feelings originating way back in childhood, and felt miserable but couldn't admit as she knew all this being fake, while Dorothea was sorry but couldn't help it for the sake of the purpose. Their husbands had a lot to do smoothening the waves on the sly, and make sure they still were aware of the task. In front of the public pretending was necessary. The spy was near and had to be convinced.

Since they were little girls subconscious envy got hold of them. Each had her method of getting away with it. However, they didn't succeed, instead they cultivated what they had – beauty was determined for Dorothea and intelligence for Grisella. They got along with it all right so far.

They still felt the shortcoming, and suffered in moments of clairvoyance all the more under the brilliance of the other – either mind or body.

The suitable moment had come. The meeting was in full swing. Once more, the discernments of the study groups were offered and compared with the results of others. Arundle presented the formula, complemented by Scholasticus who couldn't refrain from confronting the assembly with the new sight on the functioning of the universe.

Especially Arundle's presentation and stunning view of things set the ground for the trap, the spy had to be attracted, while Dorothea was the bait.

Hardly any man manages to resist female attraction of such extraordinary kind, no matter how steadfast he is, - (thus was the idea the two sisters had in mind.) - In fact, the firm ones got caught in the pitfalls of female finesse and became women's wilful prey.

Dorothea intended to overwhelm her opponent as had done Brunhilde in the Nibelungs' legend, who relied on her physical strength, rather than her female attraction, while taking both into consideration.

First, the spy had to stand the challenge, and that was not so easy. Even more so as Scholasticus was guiding the scene, and was watching each of his wife's steps, in order to be sure that nothing happened to her – right here in such a safe environment. Nevertheless, she felt the nuisance of his guarding gaze wherever she turned or what she did.

Dorothea could feel the spy near by. In fact, she was almost sure to have spotted him, and prepared for an attack, while he surely had heard enough. Could she get him to lower the shield for openly showing aggression? Why should he risk his camouflage? Only surprise would do.

Dorothea staked everything on one card, when she raised and pointed at her sister, who was just commenting Arundle's space discourse in terms of philosophy.

In dramatic pose and with a hi-pitched voice, Dorothea blamed her sister of continuous theft of spiritual property. “Your blind ambition forced you to use such stolen property on your own behalf...” she exclaimed.

Dorothea’s fierce talk didn’t miss the intended effect, while disbelief shone up in most eyes. Only a few among the present raised their hands for applause, thus the circle of the suspects was easily spotted.

However, before the courageous woman could do her next step, the leaf turned. The main suspect – who was identified by fierce clapping – jumped up as soon as he realized the mistake, and rushed towards the exit, and disappeared, before the assembly realized what was going on.

The perplexity was real, even more so as Scholasticus Slyboots blindly trusted that man. Blindfold as it looked now. - The runaway was nobody else but Professor Slyboots’ assistant – Peter Adams.

36. The Pursuit

Who had thought of that? Turmoil arose – every one ascended at once, and intended to catch the escapee: - A not so fruitless undertaking, because the man was still convalescent, and thus physically limited because of his lately broken legs. Nevertheless, he got away because too many rushed towards the same aim and hindered each other or didn’t know what the prey was like. In the end, no one was on the trail at all. Had someone notified the guards, they might have been better off.

When the stressed Headmistress finally thought of this, precious minutes had elapsed. Scholasticus cared about his wife, who was sobbing softly, now that the strain had fallen off her. Be it because of the disappointment about the failure or because of the suspense, that loosened its grip by now.

Peter Adams – was that possible? Just Peter! Scholasticus couldn’t and didn’t want to believe that. What did him make

rushing off? Was it a bad conscience or the fear of being discovered?

Could he not have other reasons for his behaviour? Peter was no intimate representative of the Isle. Perhaps he was ashamed, because he had believed in the false words of a beautiful woman – his boss' wife, after all!

As soon as Dorothea was back to normal she had to talk. Scholasticus admitted that he had not yet fully understood the functioning of that trap. No matter that it worked, as had just been proved. Peter Adams' flight had to be regarded as confession. Was there really no other explanation?

"Female logic will remain an eternal riddle for ever" Scholasticus admitted. 'Let's hope, Dorothea is going to revoke the public accusations against her sister' - he would have to remind her as soon as she was all right again.

Arundle and Billy-Joe were searching the island already and so did Tibor, Cori and Flo. They parted in three groups and agreed on a signal if they met the escapee or ran in trouble otherwise. You were not alone at last. Cori lacked of male company, however two mates joined her – both Sublimations, by the way.

The Headmistress called in on an emergency meeting that was joined by those who did not participate in the search. Nobody took care any more. The spy had discovered himself. His flight was confession enough.

In the meeting Grisella and Dorothea explained what they had intended with their plan:

"We thought my false accusations would amuse the culprit. Therefore I had all my charm glamour" Dorothea explained her proceeding, and Grisella confirmed: "Nothing of what was said was substantial..."

"It was a big show made up for the spy to get him out of his hide" Dorothea added. The sisters hugged to demonstrate their positive feelings for each other, and while they looked into their eyes, they couldn't find else but dear affection.

The janitor rushed in and reported of the ongoing search outside.

"We have to stop that fuzzy exploration, it's far too dangerous for our protégées..." the Headmistress objected, while the janitor agreed, however for other reasons. With his personnel the search could be organised professionally, the Board decided. The students should be sent to their quarters whenever they were met, which could be done anyway, because the evening had lowered over the

island and soon it would be dark anyway. A storm was approaching in addition - with hefty gusts and first showers, so the youngsters were glad to be stopped. For those out there things would become uncomfortable.

Scholasticus intended to utter doubts, didn't dare to however, because he had no proof, it was just a feeling, therefore he didn't insist, as everybody knew of his friendship with the suspect.

"Very unfortunate, indeed" Adrian tried to console. His intention annoyed Scholasticus more than it soothed.

"As if I were not able to differentiate my feelings from facts", he grumbled. "Exactly, that's what you never could" Dorothea countered while she became aware of that little side-wing dispute. Scholasticus gulped – was Dorothea right, after all?

"I think I'm done with my guts. I don't understand the world anymore. Right now high up and gay at the pulse of time so to speak, and now this abyss – and Peter became aware of our latest discernments. We cannot let him go with that, under no circumstances."

"I'm sure such news are in the air, by means of the tricky spy technology" Moschus Mogoleya meant to know. Who had been good friend with the escapee, and rated high on the list of suspects as well.

Suspicion arose in Scholasticus. How did that man know about the overhearing methods of the mole? Nobody knew the spy technology. On the other hand – how else could the news leave the island so fast?

The briefing ended and Scholasticus left the room together with his wife. He was obviously depressed and thoughtful. Just he, who could hardly keep his mouth shut and his words controlled.

"In dubio pro reo" he exclaimed emphatically: "a suspect is innocent as long as there is no proof of his guilt" he translated. He was not content with the proof they held in hand.

Dorothea was rather disappointed. She was responsible for the discovery of the mole, no matter whether things developed somewhat different from what she had intended. She had had to improvise and had sounded somewhat more reliable. Besides, the light helped a lot – she and Amadeus had picked up on their trip to that virtual centre of all universes and galaxies, which was weakening again by now already. Still she shone as bright as her sister did.

They all made such ado about the light and the colours here on the island. The trip had done her well, no doubt. She felt the

whereabouts of light and time and so did Amadeus. Still she didn't want to follow her sister. She was convinced that her own way towards the final aim was legitimate and profound as well. Nevertheless, she felt related without being able of putting her sensations into words. Thus, the big bluff was built on a solid base.

She didn't meant to offend her sister, still she wasn't sure whether her words had done more harm than she admitted. She had been so weird. Had they only captured the spy, then everything would prove worthwhile, and she could start repairing the damage her words had caused.

Grisella, she meant to feel, showed a façade to the public that did not at all comply with the inner reality. Like poisoned arrows her words still kept sticking in her sister's vulnerable soul, she had shot for the only purpose of spy defence.

Now there was Scholasticus with his quarrels and doubts, as if the question of guilt was not clear. While else did Adams flee? Without reason nobody runs away.

A man and a woman got ready for departure in a hurry. Both wanted to be away, before anyone noticed that they didn't take part in that spy chase.

'Let them do their chasing' Zinfandor kept thinking and couldn't conceal a malicious smile, he tried to hide to Penelope M'gamba – especially to her. She had swallowed the bait and trusted him, because love makes people blind, even more in maturity, when the affected do not reckon in the omnipotence of passion.

A yacht would pick them up in some minutes outside in front of the coastline. Zinfandor was rowing as fast as he could through the shallow lagoon. Soon the passage was reached, behind which a hefty swell awaited them.

Penelope's fingers cramped around the handles of the luggage while she saw what was coming: "Now, no panicking" she tried to calm her down, while she was going to risk her life soon enough, she wasn't aware of, though.

The little boat was hit by wind and waves as soon as it left the protective gateway. Zinfandor pulled the oars with might and efficiency. That man knew what he was doing. Still the breakers hit with greedy paws at them and filled the boat in no time.

However, the strong man didn't dare to put the oars aside, while his mighty strokes hindered the worst and kept the bow in the wind.

Penelope baled the water out with a little bucket, as fast and as well as she could - forgotten were bags and suitcases, next to her, all soaked with water now.

"After all, the weather, so close to the aim..." the man grumbled. Penelope felt panic that had lured in the background now rising. Something was wrong here. What was she doing? Why such suicidal excursion? - and what was that ship doing out here, picking them up, although nobody knew about the position of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth?

Through wind and waves the troubled woman heard the noise of a strong motor approaching. In a few seconds the silhouette of a yacht appeared in the gush of the lowering night. A few minutes later and the ship had missed them.

A line flew. Zinfandor let go the oars to catch it - in vain. The boat filled with water as soon as no steering was possible and threatened to sink, when a strong boat's hook drilled into the splintering wood.

"Luggage first" a voice commanded. "We have you, don't be afraid - now you Leblanc... - the woman too? Are you nuts?"

It went dark. The engine howled and the yacht took up speed and disappeared quickly. Penelope M'gamba sat up to the hips in the water.

Zinfandor was gone and with him all her luggage - everything, the calculations and documents - her complete research dossier.

While the water was gurgling nearer and the floor under her feet vanished, she still didn't want to believe what Zinfandor had done to her. - The discernment hit her like a club's blow.

All was over now at last, she thought - aware of death's horrid skull, which was grinning at her out of the breaking surf right ahead. Still she shrank back in the sight of the wet bereavement stretching its greedy fingers out for her. She was prepared to let herself sink into the bottomless uncertainty right away; life wasn't worth the struggle, while she felt caught by strong arms. A hefty whirl sucked her up out of the broiling sea. She felt lifted upwards, and before she got fully aware, of what was going on she stood back on solid grounds again and looked into the scared faces of Peter Adams and Moschus Mogoleya.

Soon the airfield filled with searchers coming from all sides. “We have him” voices yelled, “The spy sits in the trap.”

Peter Adams was caught. His protest faded unheard under the upset murmur of voices. Still more troops approached and the landing strip was all covered with students – even the youngsters somehow became alarmed and appeared likewise, while in the centre the poor woman was shivering still held by her saviours. – She was wet to the bones, and bitterly cold in the fierce night wind.

At last, the Headmistress accompanied by the Vice-Headmaster arrived rushing through the corridor when the students gave space to let them pass. When Marsha saw in what shape her colleague was, she felt scared as well. Something terrible must have happened to her.

“Take her into the warmth, my goodness – rush, rush” she ordered, and got Penelope by the arm pulling her towards the low arrival hall nearby.

“A strong coffee will do wonders, and then we will see. We need blankets and clothing”, she hollered at the personnel that were notified by an eager watchman.

The two men in Penelope’s company were brought in now. The Dean of the Sublimations was suspected the spy’s accomplice, though, while Peter Adams was clearly identified as the main suspect.

When Penelope showed up again in dry clothes and a steaming coffeepot in hands a provisional hearing was arranged right away. There was space enough for all the school’s community, which had completely shown up by now.

Chairs and stools were brought and a table. The Headmistress determined two associates, and Scholasticus should do the official questioning.

While lacking of the official hammer, the Headmistress used the heel of her shoe for knocking on the table, claiming thus attention for the provisional trial. The voices faded and the questioning could begin.

The first questions were directed towards the victim of the assumed kidnapping. However, such was not so easy as the poor woman repeatedly broke out into tears while stammering confuse inconsistent matter. She undoubtedly needed medical and psychological support, thus soon became clear. Going on interrogating her seemed irresponsible, though. Thus, she was released and handed over to the medical personnel available on stand-by right away. The focus then turned on Moschus Mogoleya

and Peter Adams, whose arms were still cuffed on his back and whose red face raged of wrath, he didn't look guilty at all.

First, Scholasticus had him released from his handcuffs. His first questions however were directed towards the Dean of the Sublimations in his company. Moschus Mogoleya reported what had happened during the crucial seconds when Peter Adams passed - heading for the exit, and asked for urgent help. "Not for himself, of course not, I might not have supported him, while I had my doubts since those photos appeared" Moschus Mogoleya explained.

"Peter asked for help for our dear colleague Professor M'gamba. Hurry was required, he said, someone was planning to kidnap her, or even worse.

While he trusted in the abilities of the Sublimations, though, thus, needn't ask twice. We lifted up into the air as soon as we were outside of the building. Peter proved himself an able disciple. - Then we circled around the island until we noticed a small boat that was heading towards the passage through the reef, and soon was fighting desperately with wind and waves. A yacht was approaching. In great hurry, some pieces of luggage were taken over under difficulties because of the heavy sea, - the man who was accompanying the unfortunate woman - then followed, while the pitiable creature was left behind in the sinking boat. The yacht got off in a hurry, as soon as the man was on board. Peter and I managed to rescue our Professor in the last minute shortly before the boat finally disappeared in the waves. We then lifted her up - and brought her back on firm grounds. The rest you do know."

Such sensible talk made a great impression on the assembly - by now almost all had come, while the news spread like a bush fire, and Scholasticus Slyboots felt confirmed. He knew right from the start that his assistant was innocent.

However, why did he leave the hall in such a hurry? Had he seen something no one else noticed?

Scholasticus took the chance to find out. Peter Adams soon realized what the sisters were up to, and when he became aware that he was their aim, he remembered a conversation between Zinfandor Leblanc and Penelope M'gamba he eavesdropped against his will this afternoon.

While he said, what he had heard, he noticed how deeply poor Penelope were incriminated, while nobody doubted about Zinfandor Leblanc any more. Without any uncertainty, he was identified as the mole and spy who had been heaved into the school

by exploiting the emotions of poor Penelope, who served him as a gateway, so to speak.

The inquiry had to find out when and how the idea was born, before or after that furious engagement of the mature kind. Those in favour hoped of course that the feelings had been genuine. However professional spies tend to mix things like that, and might not be able for devotional appeals at all. Who could tell?

The damage caused by the undercover service for a widely unknown master, could only be guessed for the time being. As long as Penelope was unable to report the actual whereabouts as well as the long-term discernments Zinfandor had taken, nothing could be said. Penelope had had access to most crucial areas, and was more or less acquainted with the ongoing research work, while Zinfandor accompanied her almost everywhere, thus, no one could tell how much he picked up.

Perhaps there were even witnesses who could tell of unusual behaviour or give even hints to where the radio station was located from where the messages were sent. Had Penelope been involved in other than her own projects and if so, to what extend?

As long as Penelope could not be questioned, things had to be kept pending.

For now, Peter Adams was rehabilitated. He accepted the official excuse in his usual generous air and Canadian nonchalance; instead of blaming the accusers he praised them for their attention and care for their school.

“Suspicious was everybody who came from outside, like I, as well as all newcomers and guests. Now we should look for eavesdropping devices in all classrooms and even in private resorts. Zinfandor had had access to almost any location. Thus, it had been easy for him to install his overhearing stuff. No-one checked him as long as he sailed under the flag of his pitiable mistress, if I may say so.”

The Headmistress asked the doctor again about an interrogation of his patient, but he denied. She was sleeping under the influence of strong sedatives. “Sleep is the best medicine right now” he said with a friendly smile. Everything else had to wait.

The caretaker and his assistants picked up Peter Adams’ suggestion and began to search for eavesdropping devices, while the spontaneous gathering dissembled and retired to the dormitories.

Arundle wondered what had been said so startling to make Adams rise in the first place, but had to wait as well. Thus, the

wondering and rumouring went on for a good while that night. How would things go on? Would their poor Professor recover? Was the spy case over for good?

37. ($v \rightarrow \infty = t \rightarrow 0$)

During the following days things calmed down a bit. ‘Back to routine’ was the guideline. The janitor and his assistants did a good job and finally located the secret transmitter, most likely having transmitted to one of the satellites circling around the globe. The device could be destroyed. Thus, they might have interrupted the main connection with the spy centre, while eliminating all bugs was like searching for the needle in the haystack.

“By means of such an installation not much can have been delivered through the air” the specialist proclaimed after a sorrow investigation of the transmitter. Disturbance and turbulence must have been enormous in that case”, he concluded. That might have been the reason for the order of stealing the documents, as had been done.

Grisella and Dorothea were ashamed. They had been so sure about their project. Perhaps they wanted to treat Penelope with indulgence, and therefore focussed willingly on Peter Adams. In the aftermath, things looked different.

Scholasticus and Amadeus tried to comfort their wives. Their action had been a great success after all, they said, while somewhat different than expected. Without the massive suspecting, Peter Adams would not have come to his conclusion that led him on the trail. – Still the discovery had been incidental.

Had Peter not overheard the conversation, the spy would have gone and poor Penelope lay on the ground of the sea. She was however still in bad shape. The hypothermia didn’t cause long term damage, though. Physically, she was more or less unharmed, and could recover, but mentally she was a ruin.

Her soul had badly suffered, and that was much worse. Nobody dared a prognosis. Would the so badly cheated ever find a way out of the labyrinth of desperation?

Penelope was not able for any kind of reasonable utterance. Either she blocked voluntarily or her memory left her alone. The

doctor spoke of a temporary amnesia. Thus, Scholasticus and Grisella soon refrained from severely interrogating. While other and more favourable obligations awaited them.

In fact the discernments into the nature of the relation between speed and time opened new horizons and altered everything. The new paradigm promised an epochal break-through, and pushed the spy and his activities into the background. Regardless of the obstacles, the enlarged and combined study group of the two professors aimed for new targets. Still no-one knew which way they went, while the set time had vanished in the mist of the unknown, and all prognoses, visits and speculations about the future turned out to be very limited, while imagination and fantasy blossomed anew.

The idea of a multitude of universes was somewhat strange. The reason why Arundle favoured such an approach was obvious, however. This way she saw a chance of avoiding the prospects of future Laptopia. Her idea was that she had had a glimpse into another scenario of a similar world – very likely a future world as well, but not necessarily, the world they were living in right now.

All those worlds might have something in common, some more, some less, and you could learn of them. They didn't determine the course of your world arbitrarily, that was the main clue she relied on, while hope was her principle. Whatever she had seen, whatever they had experienced - the strange world of Laptopia was only likeliness, was only threatening, but was not certain to come unavoidably – it was not set once and for all, it was not the fate of their own world. You could take such outlooks as warning signs and hints for counter strategies of the ancient seafarer humanity was. A seafarer, who learnt and improved more by doing than by reflecting and planning.

It was not at all unlikely that the development of mankind had a tendency towards Laptopia, but such tendencies were not arbitrary and had not to be taken for granted. Resistance was worthwhile. Earth was not yet forlorn. It might even be good to know what might happen if you went on as you did. Danger was everywhere and counterstrategies could be found and implemented.

That meant for them in their study group that they had to check twice before they went on or published the results of their time research, part of which had been stolen by the spy.

What did they find out so far:

Time comes into being where endlessly fast whirls of eternity become braked down to the speed of the universe, that is the constant speed of light, because the speed of light is the metre of everything that is related to time. Trials to manipulate such metre disturb the space-time-correlation. It is like opening windows, which show out of our universe.

Now the task was to become aware of the consequences of such intersection. The eager researchers developed scenarios in the one and in the other direction and came to remarkable solutions:

A time machine, that is a gigantic brake was hiding somewhere out there. So big, that you hardly could hide even in space.

Finally, Arundle meant to understand the Advisor in Toto. That was the reason for the trip through the light. What else did she notice, except of feeling like in heaven and hardly could stand the joy? As much as she strained her brain, it didn't want to show up. However, there had been something, she was almost certain. Why those voyage right now? The Advisor never did or predicted anything useless. You only had to find out.

He never guided you straight towards your aim. He always asked for highest esteem. Without the straining of conception, no things came into being; often enough Arundle felt terribly overcharged, as was the case right now.

Should she once more...? Well – was she allowed to do so? Or should she talk thing over before with the others? After all, she had had some fellow travellers who experienced the same.

What did they experience? Indeed, you lacked of words, but subscribing was possible. Everyone could say at least something, and perhaps they got any further, found a hidden hint, something, she had overlooked.

Did she not understand the functioning of the procedure? How did the whirls work? There must have been quite conventional theories, either in physics or in metrology.

Scholasticus knew the answer and explained to her and the whole study group willingly and in detail everything, which was about the whirls in this world:

“In fact the atmosphere is made up of whirls – some bigger, some smaller – they move their track with their appropriate speed” he started.

“Sometimes it happens that they speed up considerably and become typhoons, tornados, hurricanes, - or orcanes and wind

hoses, depending on the location. The geophysicists are mainly interested in the big whirl storms. They hope they become able one day of taking influence on them by better understanding.”

Arundle almost pitied the fact of having Scholasticus invited on that track, because he soon got lost in detail and exhaustive explanations. Soon she didn't know anymore what she had wanted to know, same as her fellow students of their study group. That was the way their professor was. You only had to touch him and he started sputtering like a vivid mountains fountain, and like the latter he could as hardly be stopped as such, after being tantalized into action. Well, you could try to guide such flow into a certain direction, though, but that worked out somewhat toilsome.

All too likely his undoubtedly eloquent flow of speech made itself independent, which was obviously inebriating him and procured him with a recognisable amount of satisfaction.

On the sly, Arundle touched Tibor sitting next to her in sweet slumber. As a Sublimator, he should have been able to explain the functioning of a whirl right from the inside, because Sublimators required a considerable whirl at a remarkable speed in order to escape the gravity of the Earth and lift up as they do.

Tibor obviously didn't follow the lecture of his Professor, perhaps the subject was too evident for him, while Arundle was somewhat annoyed about herself of not having asked Tibor right away.

The Professor was just explaining the differentiating momentum of decline within the middle and the edges, while the outer zone formed a frontier to the outside, where the air was affected considerably at first, but failed at length, while the interior showed another face.

Quietness prevailed in the centre, the so-called eye, measuring sometimes some hundred inches or even one or two miles in diameter, while the edges were affected controversially. The speed then increased up to a maximum of differentiating quantum and depth - overall, a somewhat rather interesting although insignificant discernment - leading to nowhere.

Arundle failed in getting Tibor started. The boy only shrugged intimidated, even more so as she rudely interrupted the Professor. Tibor felt like the millipede, which asked why not stumbling over his thousand feet – stumbles. Things you know by heart resist rational explanation.

Even more the girl made no bones about her annoyance. She didn't let him pick up the thread once interrupted by exclaiming fiercely: "We won't get any further this way" addressing to the whole group.

"There is something you ought to know. We must have noticed, but didn't get the meaning. The Advisor didn't send us through that eye in vain. Well, yes, Sagittarius Alpha is of course a whirl like any other. The explanations as meaningful as they might be, don't lead us anywhere. Nothing comes out, definitely not the lever to the true understanding of what is really going on."

Scholasticus looked somewhat offended. Arundle might be right. He had lost the reference to the subject out of sight. His explanations went astray and he didn't notice. Thus, he was. He apologized in thought. He was always easy to inflame and sometimes stood in strange flames involuntarily. He might still lack of experience. Should he also pass through that wormhole, becoming thus enabled to say - 'I know'?

Dorothea tried in vain to have him participate in her experience. As a man of science, the emotional side of the matter turned out to be very difficult. He reminded her words:

"After all, it is about nothing else. You are changing - your feeling is changing. That makes it so difficult talking about it. The certainty is hidden deep inside you, as if you could put into words, but you cannot. Describe for instance how you notice your breathing, or try to recall the pictures the sun is producing behind your closed eyelids. Then you might be close."

Should he better be silent?

While Tibor remained distant, thoughtful silence lowered over the assembly. All were musing and searching, while their thoughts turned in whirls. There had been something, something that lasted, while having been little more but a sudden flash, somewhere stuck in the corner of the eye, you only somehow thought it had happened.

That might be the point, when the time stood still, or the other way round, when you escaped the time and flew away. When the moment stretched like a very elastic rubber string – further and further while the contours faded about you and spots of light became lines.

Arundle picked up the thread: "I believe, I speak in the sense of all, when I proclaim that as the absolute, the indescribable, and incomparable. You can give IT no name. You cannot get nearer or

further away. For the first time you realize how close Man is HIM or HER, no matter how far you feel inside. In this dimension, there is no distance or closeness.”

“You talk like one of those mystics”, Grisella said meaning to stimulate Arundle to go on. She had been able to go on, and not only because she was educated. She had studied most of the mystics of many cultures and knew several trials of describing the indescribable that was going on in the so-called ‘unio mystica’ (the inexplicable unification).

“Everything is then good at once, you do read repeatedly, and everything is so much, more than you can say.”

Not only Arundle nodded when Grisella said that. They who were in the know agreed spontaneously:

“You realize what you have lost...”

“However, then it’s gone...”

“With everlasting effect...”

“It’s like a flash that hit you...”

“And then it is burning somehow...”

“Right, you feel the catastrophe...”

“Yes, it hurts terribly afterwards...”

“The emptiness fills you with desperation...”

“And nothing is again as was before...”

Grisella’s contribution opened a sluice. Everybody reminded something explicable, though, in order to bring life and colour to the mystic mist, while you couldn’t touch it or put in words – not even thoughts rather than feelings, while the descriptions mainly referred to what was lacking, that is the emptiness.

While you could imagine by the degree of naught, the plentitude, such you had become part of, and thereof everything was about, while no way was shown which led into the right direction, while all ways were right or wrong likewise.

“You may feel the time most, when it stands still, when you feel the momentum stretch like a huge chewing gum.”

“It’s the one moment for each of us, it’s not just a moment – I know that from Pooty. He says it is like a repeating dream. He recalls for example precisely what it was like with Walter, and since that happened to him, he recalls even more and better, as something stopped for him, what had to do with his memories. He feels like a picture is frozen inside”, Billy-Joe explained while Pooty couldn’t keep the tears back and felt unable of speaking.

“I can only confirm what Pooty feels” Billy-Joe went on - “as it fits with my experience, while I do have something else in mind.

However, that is only natural – we all experience our own momentum.”

“I would like to get something straightened” Scholasticus made himself heard again: “As far as a Black Hole like Sagittarius Alpha is concerned you have to reflect the following...”

Once more, he outlined scientifically precise how such a singularity worked, and what was happening to the matter in its range. Of an incomparable suction he told, even the light could not escape, as soon as it entered the racing whirl.

“Here at last our new formula comes into account”, Arundle interrupted, and addressing to the compatriots who had been with her in space: “You described such formula your own way, subjective so to speak. While the whole has got an objective side as well, I’m sure, you agree...”

Her mates nodded. “Until we don’t know better, I consider our formula worth while. It says that the time is not stopped, as you may think. The time is – on the contrary – stretched by the increasing speed. A fictitious observer may then notice the standstill, while in fact the acceleration tends towards the infinite.

That means (t) i.e. the Time urges towards Zero i.e. $[t \rightarrow 0]$. While likewise, on the other side the speed (v) increases i.e.: $[v \rightarrow \infty]$ – the acceleration (v) tends towards infinitive. Both values balance in their tendency that is $[v \rightarrow \infty = t \rightarrow 0]$ – is that clear!”

Hesitative nodding indicated that things were not so clear, by either understanding or disagreement. Still no one objected while Scholasticus was inflamed by sheer enthusiasm and kept on knocking his knuckle on the desk in front of him.

From the emotional impressions the others published a minute ago to such an abstract equation a long way was stretching. Grisella noticed even a wide gap. However, she believed that she was able to bridge it.

“Mankind has dealt with such sights on eternity right from the beginning until nowadays” she opposed.

“Devoted to one single instant
You may feel the eternal force”

- Grisella murmured thoughtfully. “Is that it, perhaps? Is that what the equation wants to tell us? In such a sentence I can see myself represented” she added and looked around expecting agreement, which she got.

While Scholasticus still was all in favour of the equation – ‘its clarity and elegance – so to speak.’ - Nevertheless, he accepted Grisella’s interpretation for the minor brains.

Both study groups had joined under the impact of necessity. Thus, it happened that the philosophical minds had to argue with the straight forwardness of the so-called scientists, who were so proud of their equations and clear facts, while the others mused about in misty regions of the spirit.

The joint study group was however limited in number – a selected group, the best of the best, with specific abilities and experience, paired with extraordinary intelligence.

Thus, you saw even Pooty’s little head (regardless of the declining light) shining whenever he lifted his head out of the Medicine Pouch before Billy-Joe’s wide chest. The latter was like Tibor and Dorothea, and all the others who had gone through the light well on board.

Astounding enough, though, Scholasticus wondered, still a little upset that he had not yet been illuminated.

“Well, well fortune favours fools” the Headmistress Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk used to say with a gentle smile when she met one of ‘the chosen few’ – feeling a tiny itch of not yet chosen herself.

While Moschus Mogoleya and Peter Adams participated for merits that were more definite – they were the saviours of poor Penelope M’gamba.

Florinna and Corinia Hare had proved themselves as very empathetic. Therefore, the Headmistress asked them to take care of Penelope M’gamba as long as she was in that critical condition. After all, she was victim of a mean attempt of murder.

Penelope had been with them right from the start, and had seen things others didn’t even dream of. Quite contrary to most of the fellow students Florinna and Corinia didn’t blame Zinfandor. Similar as Walter a daemon had taken possession of him, they argued, no matter how his behaviour was during the last crucial seconds when he jumped and let her behind.

That was an explanation Penelope could live with, and built the base of a restoration process the clever sisters initiated. Penelope doubted her feelings and denied the facts as far as possible. Thus, such an approach suited her well. She still didn't recall in detail what had happened, because of the amnesia, she was pretending to a certain degree, not definitely knowing herself how far.

Her friends hoped that the intellectual challenge could help to get her out of the depression.

Walter's crude fate in mind her colleagues didn't leave her unguided round the clock. Arundle even thought of sending her and the two guards through the light as well.

Some enlightening would do them well, but she was not sure whether the Advisor would agree. She reckoned that heavy traffic there was not desirable, however, she didn't know.

Dorothea had reported of extraordinary exceptions after her return and of conditions, living beings should not encounter. A revelation of the Advisor, Arundle did not remember. Either he had not mentioned in her presence, or she didn't listen carefully enough. Perhaps Dorothea's motivations had been insufficient in his eyes.

Someone like him, who was in charge of the whole universe couldn't care about every detail. Able people had to manage somehow with the given facts, and carry the load of personal fate, including 'the chagrins d'amour'.

The magic bow limited the number of participants – 'after feed-backing with higher authorities' and 'because of the special circumstances' to three, which led Arundle into panic, as she had done that never before, except for Billy-Joe, and he was the bow's close trustee.

What did the bow mean by 'special circumstances'? He didn't mind weight. In fact, Penelope weighed quite something, and had put on some extra pounds while grieving. However, the magic bow didn't uncover. "Either alone with them or not at all. I do have my reasons" he let her know.

The magic bow used the short breakfast break for a trip to Sagittarius Alpha. Time travelling had the advantage of not using up any time. If you were careless, it could happen that you even gained time. However, that was no good. Thus, it happened that

Penelope M'gamba and her two nurses mingled with the crowd instantly – shining like small suns, while nobody realized what had actually happened - when Scholasticus took the opportunity of explaining his sight further and in more detail.

He employed a rather original interpretation of relativity. A term, enlightening the world of astronomers since Albert Einstein: “After all, everything has to do with the curvature of space. Imagine you draw a line as long as your table is. Imagine further that your table becomes longer and longer, and still longer, and longer again, while you draw your line, and keep on drawing, for days and weeks, and months. One day you will end up on the other side of the table where you started, because you have rounded the globe. Your strait line is in fact a circle. Each part contains an unnoticeable curvature, you only become aware in the end. What we call a strait line is in fact not strait, but just relatively strait. We cannot avoid such curvature as long as we are on the surface of our globe, and not only here but as well in our universe while the circling and wheeling goes on infinitely for ever.

You may now object that if you cannot obtain a straight line on a curved surface you ought to go up straight into the air. Thus, you arrange on your fictitious table a strait vertical line. You check the angel of 90 degrees precisely. You take care that your base is wholly flat and undoubtedly horizontal. Let's further assume you manage the rectangle, and the vertical line is set, then it shows that you cannot stay within the limits of the laws of geometry, because all parallels of that straight line erected from your drawing table around the globe should show a precise rectangle to the base or be parallel, which cannot be. Those lines would erect round the globe like the spines of an alert hedgehog. They won't be parallel of course, which you may not notice right from the start but realize only in the long run.

If we replace our vertical straight lines by rays of light, we know already a little about: light forced the eye to follow its line. What we see are straits of rays, which connect our eye with the origin of the light. It looks as if those straits of light behave like the (relatively) straight lines we produce on our globe.

It could happen to us, that we look into our own backlights in a very far distance, while we look way ahead, because the ray of light which meets our eye was sent on a huge curvature many billions of light-years away, while in fact just behind us. Such we could notice if we were able to turn around, though. (Whatever we do imagine when we speak of our backlights.)

We are not able to turn around, and are most likely not allowed to do so. We may now notice what it means when we say a straight line can only be relatively straight. In a system full of circles, exact rectangular geometry doesn't fit. The postulates become untenable, while Geometry lacks the basic straight line in an all-round being.

We see the origin of our universe indeed in huge distances of millions of light-years. The so-called background reflection points towards the offspring of our existence - that is the birth of our universe.

We look in a far circle into our own backlights, as I said, and if we turned around or grabbed behind us, we could touch with our hands what there is. Up to now, we didn't find access to that antechamber that is undoubtedly existing in one dimension, while our eye had to adjust from the past to the future. Our gaze is pointing at the millions of light-years behind us. We are able to roam in our past, and the ways are consequently as much longer as we go further back in the past, where the light stems from.

It could well be that things behaved much different in the 'antechamber'. Logical would be there, that events which are furthest back were the closest. Provided we look in a circle.

We know of one event or assume it likely unquestioned: the Big Bang, when everything initiated, that is excoriating hence. Such was leading towards our solar system, the planets and the Earth at last, with life thereon and we - Man, and finally our history.

In our model, we notice that the shockwave of the basic explosion of the Big Bang blows us in the back while pushing us irresistibly and unreachable forward with little less than the speed of light.

We cannot escape such basic bang, as we live in our reference scale that is the globe. The speed of light we cannot reach because we can see the light that inflamed the existence long before we were born. If this light can reach us, then only because we are not moving as fast as the light. The light can only reach us, because it flies faster than we do.

Our own galaxy is unbelievably huge while still is a minor phenomenon somewhere at the edge of a much mightier whirling. We are just a slowed down area governed by the time. A zone of relative tranquillity compared to the prevailing endless speed by which any endlessness is moving.

We are in the middle of a smaller down-braked zone, while what we call Big Bang is supposed to be the shockwave as a consequence of getting off the stream of endless speed, or acceleration (while speed and acceleration is more or less the same in terms of endlessness).”

“Alright – could well be. Still - a straight line can be thought after all.” Arundle was upset about that logical trap Scholasticus had opened up.

“A straight line cannot only be thought. Of course, you can fix a tangent to the globe... At best be done by computer simulation, though. See, I put my ruler on the globe over there. Quite simple...” You could see the ruler whipping while a breeze pushed it off thus it fell clapping to the ground. Arundle picked it up and waved it grinning in triumph.

The others raised their heads at latest now having dozed away over Scholasticus’ monologue.

“Well, yes Man became geometrised. That’s a story of its own” Grisella assisted her brother-in-law. “Man is the only being that underwent a geometrical order. What ever you think of that”, Grisella added.

“Still it is no proof that the creator of the whole did likewise operate with ruler and protractor. We could well be cheated by the seemingly strait-lined light...”

“We should be able to figure that out” Arundle didn’t want to give in. She knew on the other hand, that the human eye was a difficult subject on its own. The shortest connection between to point was undoubtedly a straight line. However, did the gaze automatically take that shortest way?

Things you took for granted weren’t granted at all. What about the refraction of light? When you looked into the water, then your feet were suddenly somewhere else. You couldn’t rely on the eye, when it came to geometrical exactness.

With refractions, you had to reckon, even more when you had to do with astronomical distances. Other than manifold broken nobody could imagine a rounding of an aeon – after all, you weren’t able to look around a corner, though.

Peter Adams made himself known. He suggested to investigate with those interested in the matter of seeing: “While we have to stick to the traditional optic, I’m afraid”, he added calming down the offspring of early enthusiasm.

“While I could imagine that the historical review of the ‘Geometrising of Man’ might as well excavate all kinds of facts of interest. By now I couldn’t tell however, how and where exactly connections to the field can be localized, my dear colleague opened up for us so profoundly, but that could be risked, I’d say” Grisella added.

In a quick dialogue without words she and Scholasticus agreed on splitting the study group again, while the latter noticed when a considerable number of listeners to his brilliant lecture drifted away, lacking either of interest, or of capability. The matter was just too challenging and suspicious to risk didactic failures. Therefore they had to formulate enlightening topics, thus stimulating their clientele on a mature level.

They were looking for new ways of how to explain the universe on the one hand. More difficult was something else. They had to understand a contemporary development somewhere out there: An approach, which was destined to bring chaos and misery over the people. Left and right of that fatal strait to doom you soon would find heaps of murdered youth cheated for their life-time.

The Professors were aware of such likeliness. If they weren’t able to come about with alternatives, Laptopia would come in sight and couldn’t be avoided. Future then would expose such manipulations of the flow of time – interference then might be too late.

Wicked men who utilized their power unscrupulously and didn’t shy away from the worst crime also used the discernments into the relativity of time.

Penelope M’gamba was undoubtedly their latest victim. Travelling through space and time and jumping through the light - now in the aftermath managed to alter her distress into mild melancholy, while the unspeakable discernments couldn’t replace loss and disillusion.

By now, she had overcome her perplexity. That was probably the first important step. There was more and better outside her own state of being. Her assistance was needed and her knowledge as well. Her aides did their best to bring her back to life, by means of simple basic facts.

The power of light turned out to be of help, while the disappointment remained unaffected, nevertheless assisted to carry on.

The betrayed employed power, she never felt before, and didn’t assume herself the least. Strong had she been only from the

outside, while the inside was no-one's concern. Such image fitted well to her complexion and nature, and had helped a lot over the years. It was love that made her stumble and fall. Love tore down such walls of self-defence and strong hold.

Now she needn't grasp for such straw any longer, her two aides wilfully reached her. She could now admit her disappointment about Zinfandor, while love to that man blindfolded her and made her deaf against criticism.

There had been voices of critique, though. In fact she had had a foreboding of coming evil ever since. Something was wrong with Zinfandor. Such strange manoeuvres right at the beginning. Why did he push them sailing through half of the Pacific in a small and damaged sailing boat? Why had he been so monosyllabic? What was the reason for his taciturnity? She now could call what she had tenderly protected as timidity by the true name. Hostility it was, mistrust and denial of the world that was hers, and where she felt at home.

Grimly he had given in and had kept following her like an eager dog, a shadow had he been - ready to obey his mistress's voice.

Had there been nothing real? Was all his obedience but a big lie? Penelope still felt like finding some sort of genuineness and truthfulness. She grabbed for the last tiny bits. The doubt remained to her - the chance that his feelings might have been true for certain trustworthy instants.

The crevice had been too deep such anchor would cause if it was ripped off, did she admit that last betrayal as well. Much easier was it to live on with the doubt, because it came along hand in hand with hope.

Grisella's suggestion of making Zinfandor Leblanc subject of a study group didn't frighten the brave woman any more. She saw sense in it and intended to take part as well. Others might get ideas she didn't find, most likely because she was too close to the matter, and lacked the necessary distance.

When Moschus Mogoleya and Peter Adams also showed interest, she agreed with Grisella's suggestion. This would be a safe and prosperous procedure, any other forbade itself, because they knew how dangerous the enemy was who stuck at nothing. The correspondence with the Brotherhood had shown what type of people they were: an international trust, supplied with mighty means and immeasurable wealth, led by unscrupulous people.

Those who had an estimate of such people became weak and frightened. What could be done, while the hydra was warned?

Penelope M'gamba might be able to reconstruct her research results briefly, and then they knew at least what had fallen into the hands of the counterpart.

Such sub-study groups went to work at once – there was no time to lose. Grisella realized that her idea of investigating ‘the Geometrising of Man’ had to be postponed. For now, they had to step on new pathways, as Scholasticus had proved in cooperation with Arundle. The newly found equation had to become verified and the suggestions had to be crosschecked. The new sight of the universe was up to now but a vague image.

Scholasticus pointed at a third topic. As to him, it didn't suffice to direct the gaze only to the outside. You weren't allow to forget about the world of small bits, while there the last secrets were hiding. It would be wise to sum up their results up to now any way, as some musing had been done about elementary parts and waves already.

However, all their efforts threatened to finish in a dead-end street, if they didn't succeed in ending the mess of the so-called ‘Brotherhood of Infernalía’. As long as they kept muddling about there was no freedom of research any more. They had to overcome, no matter the price. If they wanted to avoid the false development, they had to cut down the Brotherhood's sinister plans.

“I suggest a dual procedure”, Professor Slyboots therefore suggested.

“We must find out, what the Brotherhood has accomplished so far. For that purpose, we at best employ our magic abilities. While we keep in mind our own view of things and discernments into the universe and the whereabouts of time and future. Therefore, I would like to ask you to bring along everything available to the next lesson, which may help to get us any further. We collect everything we know, and then we look if it suffices to face the threatening danger.”

38. On Secret Mission

In the London telephone book, you were looking in vain for the 'Brotherhood of Infernalía', as was obvious with a secret society. Tibor and Billy-Joe were standing right in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, once called the hub of the world, which was turning again, however in a different intention, though, right here in the middle of the capital city.

A soft drizzle tousled down from the grey sky. Although in the middle of summer, the temperatures went hardly above the fifty-degree mark, and although they both just came out of the Southern winter they felt the wet cold quite inconvenient. By power of the magic stone they had come here, but now they didn't know how to proceed.

"The office's got to be quite near, otherwise we wouldn't have come here" Billy-Joe tried to cheer up his friend. Pooty pushed his head out of the Medicine Pouch around Billy-Joe's neck confirming the words of his master: "We must go over to that tall building on the other side, and then to the twenty third floor. There we should take the third door on the right into the second corridor, then turn right and left again for about thirty steps, and then we should be there."

"We cannot march in the office just like that. Most likely it is a letterbox address anyway", Tibor objected.

"I think as well that we should camouflage. At best, we buy some inconspicuous clothes. Lucky though, London is an international site, thus, we do not attract attention."

Their job was as simple as unclear: "Find out what these people know, and what they intend to do. Try to catch the spy and most of all get back that stolen bag with all the secret documents and research results."

The task better had read: "Find the Brotherhood!" The boys didn't doubt that they would find a friendly secretary at the marked site, representing a company with a sounding title. The secretary would patiently listen to their story (they still had to invent) and then would compliment them friendly away. They couldn't of course tell her, why they were really here, and in return she couldn't tell them what she was really here for. – That they were chasing a spy, who was on the way with a suitcase full of secrets

most likely just about to show up any minute, if this was the proper address, which was more than unlikely.

Spies with stolen secret information usually didn't go to the public cover address in order to get rid of their hot stuff.

The Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster negotiated for quite some time with the Teachers' Board. Should they involve official channels? If they did, had they then to lay open too much? Governmental authorities didn't content themselves with vague accusations. Sure enough, danger threatened from that side as well. The outlook on an epochal scientific revolution didn't only seduce criminal bad-men. Governments would tune in likewise as soon as they became aware of what was going on.

Therefore the assembly decided to send an inconspicuous search party behind the escapee, and what served such purpose better than the dream-fast trip with the magical stone?

The latter was fishy, though, and didn't take just anybody. Besides, he was short of suitable information. The yacht Zinfandor Leblanc had escaped with couldn't be localized any more. Most likely, he had changed the means of transport meanwhile anyhow.

For all that, the magical stone meant to know the site of the Brotherhood's head office; - that was not so difficult because Dorothea had a mailing address from London England, to where she had corresponded.

The magical stone refused transporting grown-ups. "Not for such a local hop" he had Pooty - who shared the Medicine Pouch with him - to tell Billy-Joe.

You could forget about a sound reasoning. The matter was not negotiable. Thus, the frustrated teachers had to let the two boys leave into the uncertainty of menacing whereabouts.

Better them with experience than others without practice. Besides, the magical stone made quite clear what was required. He was so sure this time. "The trip is a matter of seconds. If things work all right we are back in one or two hours", the boys said after checking with Pooty who did the magical communication for them. A role Pooty enjoyed as he stepped into the footprints of his friend Walter by that.

"Do not get involved into unnecessary risks. Keep the stone ready so you can take off at any time, if it's burning", Professor Slyboots insisted, who didn't like the idea of such task at all, the

Headmistress and her Vice-Headmaster had outlined and were so fond of.

“How shall the kids manage all alone on their own?” he argued. Of course, it would be wonderful if the two succeeded in bringing back the stolen bag.

Dorothea warned likewise: “Those people over there are seasoned racketeers. They stick at nothing if they feel necessary.”

The plane from Sydney arrived on time in London Heathrow. The man with the bag under his arm looked about like a chased beast, even the customs officers noticed who did their job somewhat effortless. The man owed a South African passport and hadn't filled in the landing card properly.

“Sir, where are you going to take residence? You have to fill that in. Didn't they tell you on board?”

The queue got longer while the officer argued with the reluctant passenger. When a grumbling was heard he was obliged to step aside. His suitcase, he handled with great care, was searched thoroughly, however, it didn't contain other than some files and records with mathematical calculations.

The form had been filled in meanwhile. “Don't you have any clothes and personal belongings on you?” the customs officer asked friendly. The man quivered like a caught shoplifter. “Is that forbidden?” he asked lacking completely of humour, thus, the officer waved him through and turned to the next client in the row.

The plane had been almost empty. Leblanc, no one else he was, had had a complete row of his own. Still he hadn't shut an eye, while in his head thoughts went topsy-turvy like bees in a beehive.

He hardly managed to keep down the panic, which was getting at him frequently. What had he done? The horrible scene appeared over and over again before his inner eye.

He shouldn't have given in so easily. Things had gone so fast. The accusing gaze out of those beloved eyes, the unwilling disbelief and a last desperate outcry - all around the broiling sea – a boat filled with water up to the board, bound to sink...

Zinfandor Leblanc felt like an animal in the trap. He only seemed to be free. The bars of his prison were invisible, no less effective, though. He knew, he couldn't turn anywhere. He was in the hands of his secret leaders – systematically he had been caught

in the tricky net. Now there was no way back. It was too late, while he finally noticed what reality was like.

He rushed towards the exit, following the instructions the agent in Sydney had given to him when he saw him off at the airport.

“In London pass customs and passport control unobtrusive” the man had insisted. – Thus, he had badly mishandled already.

“ - Then take the shuttle to the City Terminal, next take the Underground Circle Line to the city centre – get off at Piccadilly – take the exit towards West till you end up in the basement of the Invest-Tower – there you take Lift number twelve to the twenty-third floor...”

Zinfandor Leblanc searched his pockets. Where was that slip of paper? He now remembered he should have destroyed it. On the slip was written the name of the company he was supposed to show up with his bag.

Billy-Joe and Tibor meanwhile went shopping in the nearest department store. They bought pullovers and raincoats and caps as well as backpacks of the fashionable kind, where Billy-Joe could hide the strange Medicine Pouch, a necessary measure, which Pooty disliked very much, though.

“Do you want me to suffocate” he made himself heard muffled. “What an awful stench that is.”

New things did smell after all. “It’s only for a short while, until we are out of that place again up there” Billy-Joe whispered and bewildered gazes met him. They were in the lift already, which took them up to the 23rd floor. Up there, they followed the instructions and stood soon in front of a milky door with an inscription that said ‘Tempora Media Ltd’.

“Now we aren’t slyer than before” Billy-Joe objected. He did feel very uncomfortable. Tibor wasn’t any better off. This was not their site. No matter of the camouflage they did misfit badly. For their showdown up here they’d better seen the Gentlemen’s outfitter at Harrods.

They looked about uneasily. The corridor was empty - no one near or far. Pooty wondered about the sudden silence and put his head out of the backpack.

“There is a bell” he cried and pointed at the brass shield with a shining knob.

“You’ve got to press, go ahead.” While the boys hesitated, he slipped out of the bag and rushed down Billy-Joe’s back that sparks sprang up and electrified his fur. Billy-Joe’s coat was made of plastic.

The chair of the mighty Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalnia was somewhat shaky, so to speak, while he was sitting in reality behind an impressive desk puffing a fat Havana and phoning with Sydney.

“At last some good news” he exclaimed and banged the lever back on the gilded fork of the antiquity he employed as a telephone.

Things didn’t developed as planned. The ambitious project was stuck. Critique came up in their own ranks. He was blamed for his rude mode of running the affairs. He couldn’t risk being unsuccessful, though, and should show no weakness either.

Time had come for a radical change. Closer contacts with the once disregarded bionicists were very challenging. Their successes looked however somewhat meagre compared to the grand overall view, however turned out to be far more realistic. While he personally felt uneasy facing the idea of having his organs replaced by bio-mecha-tronic devices, or even have his brain and his whole personality altered or replaced into another body. A somewhat less elegant still effective way, while backstrokes had here also to be taken into account, though. Thus, his favoured approach had once been most welcome in the ranks of the Brotherhood.

That was over now. The secrets in the bag he was expecting so indulgently might be his last chance, anyway.

Billions had been spent and wasted, and were lying about as debris on the back of the moon. When he thought of the coming up balance auditing, he felt sick. He was under pressure, no doubt. If he couldn’t show success, things would be over, he would be out of the game. He then would be lucky to save his mere life. Some of his investors were showing their claws already. Instead of washing money, as they had expected, he had buried it for good at the moon’s backside, so to speak.

A grim growl vibrated in his throat. As he knew how he would behave if he were in the position of his financiers, he had no illusions about his fate.

Things seemed to be all right only weeks ago, the moon had been pushed out of her regular track and started not only a series of horrible catastrophes on Earth but the desired effect as well.

The globe did a remarkable jump, the rotation increased and the days shortened remarkably. Confusion and worldwide panic in the affected regions – mainly in the Southern hemisphere – was the consequence. In addition something else stirred up scientists all over the world as strange black whirls were noticed, deriving from wind-hoses and other whirl-storms the like, which split in certain regions leading to very strange effects.

Now the satellite had crashed behind the moon, and the distance between the Moon and the Earth returned to normal, thus, the time ticked as ever again.

The third Chairman of the Brotherhood, a South African named Botho van Zyl sent an emergency call at the height of the catastrophe pleading for an end of the experiments. A typhoon had wiped out his farm and part of his family.

What a coward he was, who hadn't yet understood the least of what the Brotherhood was after. The fax would serve Waldschmitt well on day, as he could blame his representative, why the experiments had to be stopped. Thus, a scapegoat was found who could easily be made responsible for the enormous loss.

At best Botho van Zyl had quitted for good together with this family. What hadn't happened yet could well happen soon, the sinister man mused.

Before Billy-Joe could stop him, Pooty pressed the shiny button causing a melodious ringing and shortly after a humming tone, inviting them in.

Somewhat hesitant and rather timid the boys stepped forward a few paces. Pooty, afraid of what he had done, disappeared in the backpack immediately where he whispered with the magical stone, to have things prepared for an emergency lift off.

A mature beauty of indefinite age was sitting behind an elegant desk and was looking straight into the boys' faces, when they stumbled through the opening of a doorway soundlessly gliding aside.

There they stood and looked to the ground. The woman cleared her throat, smiling somewhat forced and asked: "Is there anything I can do for you, Messieurs?"

Billy-Joe felt reminded of his days as a hotel-boy. He knew what the whites expected from you. Thus, they thought his spontaneous idea for a good one.

"We would like to ask if you need reliable cleaners" he said and answered a second even more formal quest: "Is there anything I could possibly do for you?" of the lady.

The latter stunned for an instant, smiled again her artificial smile then shook her remarkable head.

"I'm sorry, no. We do not need any personnel for the time being or for the future."

Once more, she checked the boys from tip to toe then shook her head and said, just to be sure. "Is there anything else?"

She seemed to have expected someone else, and wasn't sure whether they were definitely the wrong ones.

"Are you bringing the suitcase by chance?" she then asked, nevertheless.

The suitcase? The boys thought. The suitcase! – and shook their heads far too hasty, then turned around and diminished through the door, which was closing right behind them with a soft sigh.

Roland Waldschmitt pushed the uncomfortable ideas aside. The doorbell was ringing. "That'll be him", he thought somewhat alleviated. Then he heard some voices. This was obviously not Leblanc, however he was supposed to come any minute now, Waldschmitt thought, if he reckoned the time correctly.

- Leblanc had been asked to proceed straight to the given address without diversion – reliable he was, though. Leblanc had received a new identity, thus, one phone-call to a certain number was enough to send him for the rest of his life in jail.

When Tibor and Billy-Joe rushed back to the elevator they almost ran into a man coming from the other side, seemingly in great hurry. Both realized at once who the man was, and reacted immediately.

Billy-Joe jumped forward, while Tibor snatched the suitcase in the man's hand, thus, he stumbled and grabbed for a handhold, while Pooty had the magical stone start. Before the stunned man realized what happened the spook was over, and the suitcase gone. That was the end, Leblanc reckoned. He could just as well jump out of the window, and would have done so, if there had been a window, which could be opened.

In panic he rushed down the staircase, in order to get away from here. Where did he find a loophole? The visitors' platform came to his mind – in such a tall city tower there surely was a visitors' platform, - everything was not yet lost.

“Call it an incident or fate” Arundle said, when she learnt of the tale a little later as soon as she had returned. Filled anew with the light and power of the Advisor, Arundle felt strong and refreshed, and she was aware of course that there were not such incidents but secret pre-arrangements behind Man's back.

All the better she enjoyed welcoming home the two adventurers with their prey. The suitcase was carried in a march of triumph around the island until the scared Headmistress asked for secrecy. Care still seemed advisable, though.

The short look into Zinfandor Leblanc's haggard features made Billy-Joe think twice. He had seen more in that face than the exhaustion of a two-days' flight.

“I'm sure, Penelope is interested in getting to know your findings” Arundle said when he told such, and insisted on a visit in hospital where the Professor still recovered. Tibor joined them, although he didn't see the face while concentrating on the suitcase. “The coup was over in merely a second” he explained.

“The bag is untouched “ Penelope M'gamba confirmed after a careful examination. Then she put it aside and wanted to find out as much as she could about Zinfandor Leblanc, while the whole encounter had lasted only seconds. Billy-Joe almost repented of having spoken about his impression.

He didn't know the strategy Flo and Cori had developed in order to get the poor victim out of her crisis. Such a hint did fit very well. Thus, Billy-Joe only gradually realized where the questioning was leading, and the more he thought thing over, the

clearer the circumstances seemed, while many a man had been slain by horrid Malicious Marduk against his will.

Zinfandor Leblanc a compliant object in the hands of overwhelmingly strong and evil forces; - and as frightening such a remonstrance was, it still was comforting the worried soul: Penelope found back to her strength. She managed to tear apart the black veil of melancholy she had been buried. She now mused with all her ability about rescuing her man.

39. Outer Space is all about

This time the cause was more than important, Arundle happened to know, while the magic bow was immediately ready to get her to the Advisor at once.

“Carpe Diem, i.e. utilize the day“ the magic bow snarled, while the boys were heading for London and he had to keep Arundle off by force to join them. Since they had renewed their relation, the girl listened to his advice more than ever.

“Let them just go, ours is the Outer Space” he let her know, and started fiddling around with those coordinates. Somehow, the magic bow was fond of such voyages to the Advisor. After all, both had planned the visit, she realized when the Advisor welcomed her heartily. She had had other encounters.

“At best you just tell a little what’s going on” the Advisor started. “Don’t be afraid, I won’t vanish. I will listen patiently, take as much time as you need.”

The Advisor had the bad habit of disappearing spontaneously right in the middle of a conversation. He just faded. His voice faded, and his appearance became transparent until he was gone at all.

Arundle reported what was going on, on Earth. However, the Advisor showed little interest in the story of the runaway spy. He was quite amused, though she noticed as he kept grinning all the time.

“I know, I know, I know all that my dear child”, he said. “You do have your own ideas in mind, I daresay, love” he said with a

convincing smile, when Arundle went silent, while she noticed his reaction.

The magic bow over her shoulder shivered. Arundle felt his power get hold of her. Sure enough she had her ideas in mind about the whereabouts of time and being, and what they did in their study group, the research work and all that.

She had almost forgotten what she had been doing before. What did they do? – Well, they might have mused about the subject more or less all the time, since they were influenced by the Laptopian drama. While she had lost the subject out of sight only for a short time when trying to find out about ‘the other mode of seeing’, and so had done her mates and friends in the School of Inbetween. All too soon, they had been pushed by a series of accidents, back in line, so to speak.

“Well then, let’s hear, what its all about” the Advisor said. “Don’t be shy, we are amongst us”, the magic bow added, when Arundle still hesitated. Where should she begin? There was so much.

“The Outer Space isn’t empty, not as empty as we think” she started and realized how shallow and meaningless this sentence resounded in her head.

“Be it then”, she wondered and straightened her thoughts - then went on:

“While at night part of the plentitude becomes visible, when rays come to us of many stars. During the day we don’t see the trees because of too much wood, so to speak. I’m saying that the rays of our sun are bathing us in an orgy of light, all the more when the sun is shining.”

She stopped again. However, the Advisor went on nodding reassuringly, indicating that he had well understood what she was trying to put in words. “Go on” he said.

“Light is spreading – like many other forms of energy – in waves. Meanwhile we know that the invisible radiation is much more voluminous than the visible. We can therefore assume that the Outer Space is filled with a plentitude of rays of all kinds rushing along in various directions.

The Outer Space is not at all empty, even not for us, who are so limited by our senses, and can hardly notice anything else but a small range of light. Such ocean is governed by the constant speed of light the waves are spreading everywhere. Be it that they meet an obstacle and become swallowed and transformed. They then change their state of being, quite like water freezing to ice. The

waves lose their liquid state and become solid resting matter. The energy however, remains, and only needs liquefaction to set it free.”

“Very interesting” the Advisor interrupted the girl’s flow of constant talk. – “Yes, Einstein, our greatest physicist has put it in a famous formula”, she rehearsed. “He found out that energy was a kind of matter, that is in fact vice versa - matter is a form of energy. Energy equals to the square out of the product of matter and speed of light. Since then, we know why the sun is emitting his enlivening light. He does it by liquidising his matter - that is, he is burning himself up.

The double character of light as described in the quantum physics comes into effect because light has a substantial and a volatile state of being. When the substantial form is favoured then matter emerges.

Such materialisation of energy is somewhat imaginable after all, while the process itself takes place in secrecy as we all notice day by day on Earth. In the photosynthesis, for example, light becomes vegetable growth, and light is transformed this way into matter.

Let’s come back to the Outer Space such light-flooded ocean of energy. Is it everlasting or limited – created or permanent? This is the question, which matters. While it is the time we are after.”

The Advisor nodded in a serious air. Much of what he learnt needed rectification or comment and couldn’t remain like that. Still a holistic approach at last – someone’s trying to get an overall view, instead of giving in while facing the overwhelming dimensions of all that.

“If the space wherein such ocean of energy is waving and living is governed by the laws of time, then space has to be limited. The fact, that constant speed is defining the ocean basically, shows us the way.

The ocean of energy was created. It came into being by braking down the endless speed to the level of light. By this act, Time was born likewise.

Time did emerge together with the speed of light – to be precise – Time emerges out of light. Time is a consequence of the upcoming of light, while eternity is in any respect eternal, except in regard of Time, because Time is by its nature ‘Determination’ as such. Where Time prevails there is always a beginning and consequently always an end.

We are interested in eternity because of the speed that is causing the stretching of the instant. – The instant is the smallest possible Now, I would like to connote and refer to Aurelius Augustinus, who was winning deep discernments into the being of Time already in the 7th century.

The instant – that is the smallest possible ‘Now’ freezes by becoming tuned in on the suction of eternity and the endless speed prevailing there.

The last instant is therefore the eternal instant. (We human beings should care for a pleasant last instant as it’s prevailing for ever.)”

The Advisor stunningly tore up his eyes: “Death becomes a wholly different appeal – very interesting, somewhat original. Just go on”, he lauded.

“In the last instant the being is torn into eternal not-being” Arundle picked up the thread. “...or should it say Pleroma instead of Not-Being?”

“You are on the right track, dear child!”

Arundle felt blushing because of the praise. The equation between dying and stretching had led to severe arguments in their study group. Could you really compare events on the edge of such black holes with the instant of dying? Were such comparable situations?

The agreement of the Advisor now confirmed Arundle’s musings. In their study group, she had failed.

“Let’s come back to the Light once more” she continued:

“As my ideas of the being of finiteness demand explanation. – Light is spreading linear and synchronous, isn’t it?”

Once more the Advisor had little choice but to say a flat yes, while he did have objections. However, he was eager to hear what was next.

“Viewer and source of light are connected by a line” Arundle went on. “Straight lines have to follow the law of Geometry, while their coming into being contradicts the whole universe, which lacks the geometrical base as soon as we leave our drawing table. All kinds of forces then come into effect.

Rotation of the globe is perhaps the most obvious influence. What kind of straight line is that, when neither the viewer on the globe nor the source of light in the Outer Space stand still, instead is rotating away together with the Earth? Still we pretend both factors stand still. It has to be so because we drew the straight line between the eye of the viewer and the source of light.

Such a straight line has to be only relatively straight, while the viewer's sight follows the given line to the source of light. He does it no longer with plain eyes but with all kinds of devices, though, which allow to cover distances of millions of light-years.

The scheme however, remains the same. The viewer looks along a line that is thought as straight, as all straight lines have to be straight. In fact his gaze follows such relatively straight line – no matter how little the curvature is – while the light rushes on in millions of years, thus we end up in a circle with necessity. How else than in a circle such a relatively straight line is able to finish?

Any straight line (being by necessity never absolutely straight) has to finish one day in a circle (or somewhere in the vicinity of the beginning.)

Thus, we conclude: The view into the origin of the universe is likewise the view of its end. The further the gaze reaches, the shorter becomes the rest of the circle, in other words: the further away the beginning is, the closer gets the end, while a circle has to be closed one time.

The fact that the beginning of Time and Light is way back is in no way soothing, because the further the beginning is away the closer becomes the distance to the end in our back. Would we be able to turn around and look over our shoulder we might be able to see the flickering light already with plain eyes – likely to be away only a couple of light years...”

Again, the Advisor seemed content. “Your sight is more or less adequate. However, there is a tiny bit still troubling me. You say the viewer pretends to stand still, while in fact his standpoint is altering permanently with the rotation of the globe. You will have to check whether the angle of the straight line between the viewer's eye and the source of light is changing likewise. Think of a sundial. You should look for a better reasoning at this point for your exceptionally unusual sight.”

Arundle nodded. Scholasticus had as well referred to the curvature of light not long ago. Then she had been the one objecting, and still everything refrained in her when she confronted her with the fact that Man was looking in circles instead of straight lines.

Alas! The eye followed the flow of light, it always did. The connection between the eye and the source of light had to fulfil certain conditions. What, if the conditions were fulfilled and a circle-line were still the outcome?

Again, the Advisor looked at her piercingly, and the magic bow behaved like mad. The girl felt as if the Advisor could read her thoughts before she put them into words.

It was high time after all to have a look at the forces responsible for the curvature in the Outer Space. High up on the list stood the question for the force being responsible for the braking down of the endless speed to the speed of light and time. The bible found a simple answer, there it sufficed to have God say: “It may become light.”

“The might of words is immense”, the Advisor agreed.

“Look, it is that way”, Arundle began: “When you think of energy much more is meant than what is spreading in waves about us. In the history of philosophy, there is an argument right from the start to what the forces of the spirit are able to do. It is high time to consider those metaphysical forms of energy as well.

Would the frontier between spiritual energy (which you cannot measure) and physical energy (which you can measure most of the time) – would that frontier be set aside, as it is in fact fictitious, we would see in front of us a blossoming field, we hardly have an idea of. Thus, I employ the metaphor of the field.

I’m still convinced that I’m on the right track. If matter derives from light, then a word can become light as well...”

“O, my goodness – while time goes by!” the Advisor exclaimed, wringing his hands. Arundle thought his reaction somewhat exaggerating, or did he offer another hint?

Time had come out of focus indeed. In fact the time went crazy while people became aware of the beginning of everything – the Big Bang as it was called. First, an unbelievably big amount of happenings were pressed into a very short momentum – you could well speak of a ‘naught-time’, and then you felt thrown into a huge million light-year-scale. Suddenly time was available just like that, while the development took almost endless amounts of time, following right behind that singular millisecond of the start.”

Again, Arundle felt like the Advisor was reading her thoughts, as he nodded in silence and refrained from any remark, trying not to influence her.

“Such certainly had to do with one of his directives: ‘pushing yes, but no prompting’ she reckoned – and she wanted to find out by herself!

While she had so far avoided the most decisive question: something happened to the time these days, and that was no good.

Again she felt confirmed by the Advisor, who was able to make him known without words.

“For now we only know what helps” she said therefore and thought of the Anti-Matter-Catcher by means of which they had produced the de-petrification potion.

“We assume that there is a device out there able to manipulate the time for some regions or some people and make it pass faster, probably activated by different causes.”

“Both can be understood by now with the discernments you have achieved, am I right?” - the Advisor said.

Arundle agreed. The influences were on different levels, while ruptures meant that the time passed quicker.

To the Advisor’s delight the study group had found out a fundamental law of the universe, which says: ‘Time passes as much quicker as the Light slows down in speed.’

“Now you’ve only got to find out how to get the Light to unleash its constant speed again...” the Advisor said with a grin.

“Anything else” – Arundle shouted upset.

“Indeed, no easy task” the Advisor agreed.

“After all, this task has been partly solved” she said - “in theory, though. In a Black Hole Time gets stretched down to a stand-still almost...” She stopped and was puzzled.

“You mean...” she exclaimed stunned. The Advisor nodded. “Thus, it could work, couldn’t it?”

“Tiny Black Holes, that’s it, but how do you get them down here?”

“One step after the other, young lady...”

“Little Black Holes... fascinating...” Arundle murmured once more. She had an idea, though. The Advisor smiled again and seemed to be content, as always when things went the way they should.

“My head is spinning, I feel like in a merry-go-round” Arundle shouted in pretended desperation. “How do I come to think of yoghurt? Right spinning – left spinning! Which one is the healthier, though?”

Well, that didn’t matter now, or did it? Again she looked at the Advisor. At least in the yoghurt questioning he could help her - that was no dearly kept secret any more. She just couldn’t remember right now.

They did exist - such twisters - spinning right or left. The one were good for you the others bad, she thought to remember. Was

she allowed to generalize such facts? Was yoghurt a kind of specimen for the functioning of the Outer Space?

“Outer Space is all about” she joked laughing on. The Advisor reacted quite different. His meaningful gaze puzzled her. Had she come about an important discovery by accident? Which way did Black Holes spin? Typhoons spun opposite in the Northern hemisphere than in the South – was that so?

Was the spin important? Everything was important! Thus, something obvious as the spin couldn’t be unimportant.

Her father’s spleen – his dream of everlasting youth, and an endless life: With yoghurt it had started. He had given up smoking, and had change nutrition. From then on, he went to that Club. First, it seemed as if his bettered health also bettered his character, however this was not true. His egotism only changed subjects. How did mum stand all that?

The Advisor’s voice mingled into her daydream, and it was more than a voice this time. Old sentiments from far away shone up of her childhood. She felt love and desperate yearning for her father. When was the connection cut off? Was it cut - or did the ties of blood last forever?

She almost felt the fatherly outcry in the genes – deep inside, anyway – where you couldn’t defend yourself, where you were open and vulnerable – nothing but a human being – a being formed of images.

Here also – right spin, left spin? Did even the blood whirl as per the individual twister? Did the streams of nerves obey the almighty order? Did you think right spin or left spin? Did the biological clock tick by this order?

What were those men of that Brotherhood about? First of all her father, he became that greedy monster again, ready to swallow everything whom she rejected for her own sake.

Route and aim were likewise evil – really? – Eternal life!

She felt the thrill. She knew still – something was fundamentally wrong, but still...

Things weren’t over yet, not in her. The dream of an eternal life, that is a very long and very healthy fruitful life – was that dream as such wrong?

“Advisor, Advisor do help me please. I need your advice. You know what is right and what is wrong.” She whispered, and felt empty inside and terribly alone. Those memories didn’t do her good.

“It’s up to Man to look for his or her destiny. Outer Space is all about, very right!” the Advisor said untouched and rather disconnected.

Whether she strained his nerve already? Thus, things came to an end usually. When uncertainty had a climax he withdrew, while this time he had promised to stay. She might have to remind him.

Arundle felt the bow while he pushed her back, as if he wanted to say something that was obvious to him but not to her. “If a bow is the shortest connection between an observer’s eye and the source of light, then the sting is there as well, isn’t it” – the bow asked challenging.

“Besides you have to keep in mind how fast the Outer Space is exploding”, she agreed, while she meant to be aware what his input was after.

“Right, Space is exploding at high speed, little slower than the speed of light, though, still giving notice of the Big Bang. Quite a lot of movement for a simple straight line – all that began with and is going on a couple of million years from now on – until...”, “yes, until the circle is rounded, then mankind has reached the end or the aim.

...or, the new beginning!

Such aim fitted well with eternal life, however, a very different eternal life than is meant for the dead.

Was her father a part of the force that always wanted the evil while nonetheless achieving the good? Did they hinder the wheel of time when they tried to stop the efforts of the Brotherhood?

Were they full of idle fear? Did they bother too much about their little sorrows? Did they want to keep control, and couldn’t stand progress when made elsewhere and by other sources?

Their biggest mistake could well be that they separated the School of Inbetween from the rest of the world.

The Advisor smiled mildly. He nodded at her, while being with her and her somewhat confuse musing.

“If everything serves the one purpose, be it good or evil by intention, then...” Arundle exclaimed upset. The Advisor interrupted – “then it’s still essential to stay on the right side – saving what can be saved. Fulfilment doesn’t deliver the promise, does it?”

“You mean?”

“Right. Many a cycle has failed, though - you human beings wouldn’t be the first.”

40. Remain

Scholasticus was willing to speak of a victory. He couldn't make up his mind how these daredevils managed. "Right from the centre of hell, you hardly will find someone like you."

All over again the heroes had to report. "How cold blooded - I'd pissed my pants, though..."

Billy-Joe and Tibor waved off such compliments. Things had been easy in fact. "Kind of reflex, though. There he stood with that suitcase, while we were ready to leave anyway. Had Pooty not been, we would stand there still... It was him who did the actual job, fiddling around with that magical stone and all that."

"I won't imagine what had happened if he'd caught us."

Billy-Joe couldn't get Zinfandor's sad face out of his mind. He had read something terrible in there. Such a horrid terror – even the memory made him shiver.

"Right in the middle of the floor – imagine. Normally the magical stone checks here and there – one step aside, three paces back. No, not over here, let's try over there. However this time..."

A real emergency start-up that was – a piece of great art in fact, could have easily gone wrong, we could have gone elsewhere, lost in space and time, you know..." Pooty recalled his accident as if it was yesterday.

"While he didn't manage the time-slip, though. A couple of minutes we had been back earlier than we took off, funny enough, might cause the stone trouble, though..."

What happened, didn't actually happen, and if the suitcase wouldn't be gone, they wouldn't know at all."

That's the difference. They knew the bag was gone, and they knew who was responsible. In addition such horrid appeal – it didn't look good for Zinfandor Leblanc.

Arundle nodded understandingly. "Would be nice if we could capture Zinfandor out of the claws of his tormentors" she wondered. Billy-Joe agreed wholeheartedly. "I think Pooty and Penelope are working on a secret plan already – nobody is supposed to know. The magical stone is of course involved again. The saying goes that the poor man is suffering in the deepest

dungeon. It's all our fault, let's hope and pray the magical stone will manage."

"I think so too, don't worry too much, what had been done had to be done."

While Arundle and Billy-Joe settle in the meadow overlooking the island, a big miraculous bubble just plopped in over there, on the airfield, and Penelope followed by Zinfandor Leblanc step out.

Billy-Joe lay on his back; he was thoughtfully chewing on a blade of grass, while looking into the width of the blue sky. Accidentally had it happened that the two were together alone.

The wind was mildly blowing from the North sending the first spring forebodes. Up in the sky flocks of wandering birds headed for their summer quarters.

The girl stretched. A strange shyness made her feel timid. However, the boy didn't notice. He was still stricken into his tale, he didn't become tired of telling, while he now fully became aware of the importance of the suitcase.

Arundle had not returned with empty hands from her meeting with the Advisor.

"I know now, that nothing happens without cause. Even for the time there is a good cause, I learnt."

"Which cause could that be, tell me, Arundle."

"First you must guess."

"You don't mean the light, do you?" he asked and looked gently back at her.

She had spoken about many things with the Advisor. Now it looked as if the world had got cheaply – well, for the time being, nevertheless, while things were on the razor's edge most of the time – just when you felt sound and safe.

"The light, not bad, the light is a good answer. However, I think that the light and the time were born together. It is not so important where things derive from, or were brought into being. Well, you never guess... or perhaps you do? Look at it philosophically..."

Billy-Joe tried to remember, what it had been like - and looked rather silly Arundle felt and laughed no less daft.

“Well, I’ll tell you” she went on rather highbrow. “It’s Development. Development is the ground of time. There is a fine example. Look at the acorn and imagine an old mighty oak-tree that derived from such little acorn. Then you get an idea of what Development is.

Development is more than passing time, and it is everywhere, especially where Mankind is putting in their part. In history the spirit realizes himself in the double meaning of the term, by becoming real and by becoming aware of such realness.”

Billy-Joe had him fall back. That was a little fast, though. An acorn, he guessed, was the seed of a plant from a strange world.

“Stop that, it tickles me” Arundle whispered. Billy-Joe’s blade of grass vibrated close to her ear. Did he laugh? She peeped over at him. Billy-Joe spit the blade away and leaned on his elbow. His face was as open as only Billy-Joe’s face could be. He always surprised her with that. How could a man be so open and wholly without awe?

“O, Billy-Joe, how much I love you for that” she whispered inaudible and felt blushing.

How peaceful the world was, all different to the world inside. “Could it be always like that” she mused and knew what she meant, she needn’t argue about that.

“We cannot keep the time, not as long as we live. Human beings have got power over something else and by that they can get Heaven down to Earth, and that is not the least, though.”

“We will always remember, won’t we?” she asked.

Billy-Joe nodded and smiled, then stretched for the blue of the sky and the green land about in a wide gesture.

“That as well” she agreed. They looked into each other’s eyes: “Say now!”

“NOW!”

Turn up your spirit – look outside
 Into the everlasting starry space so wide.
 Deeper that is - more than the deepest eyes provide,
 And wider much than to the widest heart's delight,
 While being brighter than the brightest brain is bright,
 And longing more than any soul's yearnings ignite.
 **

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1. Hostile Conquest

“We have kept our independence after all” Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the well-known Headmistress of the School of Inbetween, announced, and gazed about triumphantly while she said that (had she only known by then the whole truth!) A General Meeting was due. Many subjects had to be discussed, and while the directing Board wasn't sure whether they had everything in mind, a kind of brainstorming seemed best to getting all relevant themes on the agenda.

Dorothea was of great value for the School of Inbetween. Being the wife of the famous astrophysician Scholasticus Slyboots and the sister of the likewise famous linguist Grisella of Griselgreif to Greifenklau – she was not at all timid, and graciously accepted the ovations of the assembly, while the Headmistress stressed on her most favourable services during the late weeks. Dorothea enchanted the auditorium by her all too gracious smile, as her sister noticed once more, feeling an itch of jealousy.

No matter how generously she was gifted with an outstanding aura, she still was devoted to such considerations – “don't want to be” she pushed herself, while she raised a loving hand for a gentle touch of the back of her gorgeous sister, she truly admired. “With Dorothea everything lies in the plain, there is nothing hidden, she is all clear, true and transparent.”

Dorothea would have sent such positive thoughts right back to the sender, had she known of them – or did she notice by telepathy what Grisella felt? Since the eternal light had flooded her, things became clearer now – not only for her but also for her brother-in-law, Amadeus, who'd joined her on that trip, and who was now also stepping out of the shade of his famous brother. Being chosen by the light, they enjoyed the special attention of the Teachers Board as well as the affection of the students. Therefore, Marsha had appointed them - somewhat high-handed - members of the Board.

“We try to avoid wrong hierarchies” she pushed aside doubts as had been uttered by Moschus Mogoleya. The latter had better favoured her decision, he was still a precarious case, though, and not at all settled. The other day Adrian had caught him when he tried to steal the Magic Bow with the quiver out of the strong room.

“It did look the like” Adrian later reduced his charge, while he was not so sure anymore now. Moschus Mogoleya denied of course, and said that everything was a silly misunderstanding that soon would be clarified right here by either Arundle or Billy-Joe, who both would surely explain the whereabouts.

The relation between the Magic Bow and the School of Inbetween was not the best, - such fact was widely known. This was true in a way, but the trickster forgot to state his initial role, when he had been the pushing part, forcing the bow to disappear out of sight.

Thus, this matter had to be cleared right away and the Magic Bow was asked to comment on the accusations. He was all too willing to do. He was very interested in having his status cleared finally after his recent return.

“If not now when then?” he asked when he got the word and his red eye was sparkling full of holy rage. “Can these crusted conditions not be overcome once and for all?” Arundle hoped likewise, but didn't comment yet in full agreement with her Magic Bow.

“We need a Lex^{xxxi} Magic Bow”, he said and neither Arundle nor Billy-Joe had any objections, and didn't want to argue. Many reforms were underway. However the trail was long and the aim far and threatened to become far and further - ending in a deserted nowhere land like a rivulet in dry lands, and people like Moschus Mogoleya were just the right ones putting strokes in the School's wheel with their legalistic stubbornness stressing on rules and regulations in permanent complaint. Without him, the drastic measures would not have been taken in the first place.

Thus, the mood was not in favour of him, while the decisiveness was not the best either. The Board of Teachers had been stripped of

power since the upheavals and riots, where their helplessness had been proved. Therefore, it was of vital interest to have things straightened and clarified, and the case of the Magic Bow might serve the purpose well.

So far, nobody had thought of the new situation or had drawn the necessary consequences. Instead, they realized how they fell back into old structures. The janitor, who was against change anyway, arranged the seating as he always did.

Of course, there had to be a Chairman or Chairwoman who was in charge. Nobody was against such a necessary instrument. Nobody wanted chaos, but why did they become seated in the same way again and again – only because they always had been sitting that way? Such thoughtless behaviour made Arundle blush in wrath, and her Magic Bow not only supported, but also enforced such feelings, as he had come cross with the School of Inbetween because of the bad treatment he had suffered. The time for a change had come.

Arundle knew Billy-Joe on her side, and he was not the only one. In fact, there would have been hardly anyone who'd publicly oppose her. Thus, the brave girl almost took for granted. Her aim was liberation not oppression; the latter was the least she wanted to cause.

“Let's get started, at last” the Headmistress yelled and looked rather upset. She didn't enjoy such critique, no matter whether righteous or unnecessary, while most was unspoken yet. “Telepathy can be somewhat strenuous, though” she couldn't resist musing. Criticism and self-denial was not what they needed.

“After all, we do have to show some extraordinary successes, that we do not want to be robbed of, my dears” she then tried in a persuasive manner, but didn't meet much interest, though.

Things might be easier if they elected a Chairman, thus she could participate just like the others. She didn't mind being set back, as long as they steered the adequate course and didn't fall back into disastrous structures. If the others saw the necessity, why not...

“The last will be the first”, sounded a voice seemingly out of Billy-Joe's chest, who was carrying a Medicine Pouch around his neck as usual. While Pooty, likewise as usual - was sitting right in the middle of those strange smelling items and odd objects Billy-Joe kept since he was a youngster, and might not know the

whereabouts any more. However, that didn't matter as he had become one of his kin that way:

"Your roots are sacred. Never cut your roots off, when you wish to grow and find your destiny. Everybody knows that while nobody cares..." thus, he did explain himself a while ago, Arundle recalled.

Pooty's voice now sounded as if Billy-Joe had spoken with a funny voice, thus, everybody paid immediate attention, even more, when Pooty stretched his little head out of the Pouch and the surrounding audience noticed the actual whereabouts. General agreement sounded by acclamation and Pooty found himself in the role of a Chairman all of a sudden.

Marsha left somewhat demonstrative her seat overdoing in devotion and headed towards the vicinity, while her husband, who was sitting next to her, followed her in the line on to one of the last rows.

Things like that were no big deal any more. The democratic self understanding had grown meanwhile. Had Pooty not hollered his gay jubilant outcry nobody had minded, while now a great laughter arose, freeing the assembly of mistrust and envy, the most severe enemies of decision-making. It freed the individuals from uncertainties and opened a heaven of consent and affection.

Yes, that was the School of Inbetween. "There you know what you have, and why you are here" it came to the Headmistress's mind. She felt soothed and relieved, while Pooty was growing with his task. At first he asked Arundle and Billy-Joe as his assistants then he went on making funny faces and jokes in order to cheer up the atmosphere, as he explained and then gave the word back to the Headmistress, who was already waiting in the starting box like a spirited racer.

"We've got to define where we stand", she yelled far too loud into the public microphone, which was brought to her.

"Sure enough we do have us back. The School of Inbetween is save for the time being. The sponsors calmed down and so did most parents. You know again who you are – yes, I can see that clearly", she interrupted herself, and gazed about noticing the crossing auras in colour of her disciples.

How she had missed such beautiful sight in the dark times behind. How had they been able to endure, while the mud of the Miseriors covered up all clarity. Now the colours shone up as bright as ever, in funny patterns all about. Large fields of silvery pigeon-grey more on the left, while pure soul-blue was spreading right-hand side, mingling on the edges.

In between you saw green or red spots – no one was isolated, not even the teachers.

‘We might be astutely advised if we made the colour scheme the base of our seating arrangements’, it came to Marsha’s mind - while she wondered, whether this could be realized. Right now, she noticed wide agreement from all sides. She didn’t have considered the endurance of telepathetic thought, though.

Why not begin right away with that. Her speech could wait. Thus, she gathered her manuscripts; she had placed on the small rail of the balcony. She gave them an involuntary (intended) push - thus; they sailed down like butterflies over the heads of the bewildered students sitting down there. Helping hands collected them and took care that the big whole of the important concept was not lost for good.

While Marsha was sorting anew her speech, the colours were on the move, either to mingle or to differentiate, which was not so clear. Nobody yet understood what was going on. It was fun first, and an interesting way of meeting and greeting, while the garbling mass made remarks when passing left and right and centre, thus it was a turmoil of the friendly kind without hostility and bad mood.

Pooty and his assistants found themselves all of a sudden in the centre, and to make them visible the wooden cubes were pushed to where they stood, while of no use at the end where they had been placed for the former Chairwoman and her aides. A measure, surely bound to upset the caretaker, who was not yet convinced of such dawning of new times.

“We’ll tell him that they can remain” Marsha agreed with her acquaintance that was gathering in her vicinity while everybody was underway. Their gazes crossed agreeing, even those who had been separated by their colours – for the time being.

When Marsha had put her papers in order, the hall had gone silent; the tramping feet had come to a halt, no scraping of chairs – expectant silence prevailed.

Somewhat uncertain without her matrimonial support Marsha picked up the thread of her speech where she had paused.

“Where did I stop? A, yes, our colours, our glorioles, our non-interchangeable specifications we have them back - the world is colourful again and is waiting for us – seducible and mysterious. Thanks to Dorothea’s efforts the distorted public could be soothed. What had we done without you?” Marsha turned towards the so addressed, who was – strange enough – near-by, who was shining now as light as Grisella or even a little shinier, though. Be it because of her

eternal beauty, be it because of the freshness of her experience, she had come about such unexpected glamour.

“Our little world here inside is save and sound again. Thanks to you, and not only you. Without the brave deed of two students, we wouldn’t be here any more. What they performed was almost a miracle. Yes, the two of you, would you please stand up that we all can see you?”

In case of Billy-Joe, one of the Chairman’s assistants, that was no problem. He was sitting on that cube, while Tibor, the other hero was way back near Tika, somewhat entangled to that strange girl.

Tibor – easily upset if overlooked or discharged - was at his ease – just the opposite. He accepted the merits gratefully with polite gestures waving friendly at Billy-Joe over the many heads, grinning his timid grin, while listening to the laudatio^{xxxii} (feeling in one with Billy-Joe) and didn’t care the least when the attention went by, while the Headmistress continued her speech turning to another subject.

He’d surely could have claimed a seat next to Billy-Joe. Pooty had only overlooked him, but that didn’t bother him, and still didn’t while the cards were shuffled anew.

“We’ve met our stage – a battle is won, however, not the war. Even worse, we still don’t know if we deserve the victory at all. Sure enough, we did a lot. We have done everything in our range. Without our courage and enthusiasm, we wouldn’t be where we are. That is quite clear – still we don’t know what happened to us. Where were we without heroic Walter (never will he be forgotten, he will always have a place in our hearts, as long as they beat. Sure enough...)

What I’m going to say is this” Marsha went on with her betrothed speech: “we know the chronology of events, but we are missing the last piece of evidence. We should study our deeds carefully, we should keep in mind what happened, while this might lead us to the missing link, without which the puzzle of our immediate past doesn’t show a proper whole, and the heroic deeds remain individual actions we do not understand in context.”

Marsha didn’t mention Zinfandor Leblanc not to offend poor Penelope who hadn’t yet overcome late near-miss showdown, and didn’t scrabble about his dubious role, - supposed to be very clear on the one hand, while on the other rather muddy, and would thus remain. He himself hadn’t found out how he came to his role, and why it had been so difficult to get away again without the help from outside. Even more so as he was grateful to his saviours, who saved him for the risk of their lives.

“What did happen in London?” the Headmistress went on with her speech. What happened really? We only know the part referring to us. We know from a reliable source what kind of people those brothers are. However, that’s about it. We only know little of their strange and threatening projects. We don’t know how this brotherhood managed to get the Southern hemisphere out of balance. – If they did!

Has there been something initiated that cannot be stopped or reversed?

Something is under way, and nobody has an idea of the side effects, while the idea as such is monstrous. We know far too little, and this is very bad, because we cannot react. How shall it go on? Are we handed over to unpredictable circumstances, we do not understand?

We know that Malicious Marduk is going to be finally defeated in the 23rd Century and sent back to his horrid empire. However, what is now? What’s threatening from this side? What masks is the rascal presenting? Is he again right in the middle amongst us? We don’t know yet. We have no answers to these questions.”

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk stopped meaningfully and looked around into thoughtful faces.

“How nice it is to be among you again” she went on. “The happier I am on the one hand that we came together again, the more such uncertain circumstances threaten me to death on the other hand. Neither about the Brotherhood nor about Malicious Marduk do we know enough.

Walter killed that Legionnaire Sergeant, that’s for sure, we have witnesses for that. While those witnesses witnessed likewise the triumphant retreat of the rascal. He didn’t die really. Malicious Marduk only got rid of a corporal cover, so far so good (that is, so bad), but what does that mean?

As far as we understand that means Malicious Marduk is looking for a new host with whom he can mingle in order to do his old evil things in a new shape. The advice Arundle brought from the Advisor is not so helpful than we thought; still we thank her of course and appreciate very much what she did for us - because such advice refers to the future. In the future, so it was predicted and defined that the rascal will not be allowed to alter the past in a way that the future becomes affected.

Unfortunately, the Advisor didn’t tell what deed this is. What is Malicious Marduk not allowed to do in the presence? That is the question of concern. We know nothing about that. We have no picture at all with regard of the future, and what is altering the course of the

world now. We don't even know whether the news from the future, we received - thanks to Arundle – are dealing with the right future, or if we get pulled by the leg, so to speak by discernments into parallel worlds that have little to do with our history and the course things are taking here with us.”

Arundle applauded full of admiration. Marsha had done her homework, or had taken extra lessons with Scholasticus. Up to now the Headmistress had refused “fuddling about with such fancy space stuff” as she used to put it.

“May I have the word?” Scholasticus Slyboots thus made himself known, and lifted his massive trunk. He was widely seen, though, even without the cubicle, now serving the Chairman of the day by acclamation. Scholasticus could be sure of the undivided attention Marsha felt, and let him interfere, although it still was her turn.

Soon, however, the Professor got lost in the labyrinth of his subject musing about the essence of Time in general and the future in specific, but didn't enlighten the virulent questions. – or if they did - none of the present could find out. Thus, Arundle was almost forced to throw at least a touch of light into such darkness. Pooty did not object and let her go.

The Headmistress collected her leaves somewhat fussy and still concerned, whether she had made herself clear enough, and turned to her husband, who gave her a quietening slap on the back.

She didn't mind the colour scheme for now when seating where she was, she minimally offended (if at all). Her finish stirred up somewhere else, not where she had expected.

“I'm not the only one who has made such an experience” Arundle began willingly and pointed at Dorothea and Amadeus, as well as on Pooty and Billy-Joe, next to Tibor, all seated more or less close, except Tibor, for good reasons.

“You all do know perhaps better than I, at least no less”, she thoughtfully went on.

“The Advisor is wholly untouchable. You cannot describe him. Are you of the same mind?”

Her mates of the light agreed. Thus, she went on: “The Advisor is not from this world. Nothing has been from our world what we experienced. Still we had a look on our world. An alienating look, if I may say so. Therefore I am convinced that the Advisor showed us our world, no matter whether we realized or not, because that is up to us, and of course up to the perspective he tends to take.

Let's think of that very pompous entourage and the fancy figures – even the Emperor or the Princess. I think there is much commotion involved. Perhaps you had the same impression, and you experienced a similar mixture of feelings as I did - a combination of identification and disgust, being confronted with such ridiculous and puffed up characters, and the ado they made about themselves.

You, who had been with me, might have felt likewise. It was like in a dream, just as desultory and flighty, and overloaded with sentiment. The causes seem to be exaggerated; still the highest emotions show up. You are overwhelmed by the strongest feelings, you cannot protect yourself, while still unjustified.”

Had Arundle hoped to find agreement, she was badly disappointed.

“All right then, we might have all our own pictures – that is, very basic situations meant only for you, and mine are as I told”, she added.

“I discovered the personality of my father in the emperor, and you can imagine what that meant for me – well, all who know me surely can – and that was not enough, I had to stand that princess and her affectionate behaviour. Yes, I felt pulled by the leg, believe me – ‘such are images of your own megalomania’ – I said to myself. Believe me, I’m telling this to myself day and night.

However, if this is no megalomania, seducing my self with wishful thinking, but a secret message, which has to do with what we are researching right now here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth and others elsewhere.

That Brotherhood of Infernalina – what research are they forcing? We do hate of course their wrong targets. How can you dare to prolong and enjoy life on behalf of others, and long for immortality with stolen lifetime? Yet, do we know if this weird connection is arbitrary, or was it born only of sick brains? Could it be that immortality is possible without such unacceptable price?

Perhaps it is a wrong conclusion that lifetime prolongs only by reduction somewhere else. This might be a limited mechanistic view on the functioning of life. Perhaps life doesn't follow the basic law of energy.”

Could the audience still follow? Did they understand what was bubbling off her lips like a fountain? Arundle had her gaze wander and at the same time those miraculous sensors of telepathy, whether understanding or ignorance wavered about.

She dared not decide one side or the other. Perhaps it would be best to stop right here. Others had also much to say and waited for

their chance. Because good advice was dear, so to speak, but this, by now even the slowest thinker recognized.

“I would give the Magic Bow a seat of honour in the Standing Council of the School Board. We would be well advised if we offered him a job as Honourable Professor, we should have done this with Walter by the way.”

“...And I apply the same for the Magic Stone from Uluru” Pooty threw in who put himself first on the imaginary list of speakers Arundle had taken over. However, she was still musing behind her thoughts, and didn't notice such offence.

It was Scholasticus's turn anyway and after him, the Headmistress was due once more, next to Amadeus and Dorothea, and there were still more to come, thus the meeting would become a lengthier one.

“I'm sorry to interrupt” Pooty excused a little hasty. “As Chairman I apply for limiting the speaker's time to – say - one or two minutes, otherwise we will be sitting here until tomorrow morning. Is there any comment on my proposal, if not, we can close that sad chapter and have our magic heroes honoured the way they deserve it. May God bless them.”

Like an able politician, Pooty turned his mischief into an official application, asking for the voters' decision.

Nobody objected, but an addition came just from Amadeus, who was whispering with his sister-in-law. “We apply to involve Pooty as guardian of the Magic Stone. He and the joint home should become idolized.” (What ever this intended)!

Neither Amadeus nor Dorothea had been able to tell what such status meant, however, they wanted justice for the oppressed little ones. That was why the Magic Bow was entitled to a considerable indemnification for his time in detention.

The Magic Bow and the Magic Stone were promoted Honourable Professors. “With own resources and adequate means” the Headmistress added meaningfully, and Pooty officially became the ‘Guardian of the Stone’, while Billy-Joe's Medicine Pouch was declared sacrosanct. Such was laid down in the protocol, voted and incorporated.

A Professor - dangling on the neck of an Aborigine – on this side of the globe an absolute innovation! Hefty applause and calls for the two caused Pooty to raise the Magic Stone with both hands over his head. He climbed out of his home – now raised into a sacrosanct state

– and became seated on Billy-Joe’s head, thus, enabling everybody to see him and the Magic Stone who began to shine in the brightest rainbow colours.

Billy-Joe raised the Magic Bow in the air to have him participate in the standing ovations. Seemingly moved he turned towards Arundle, who tenderly comforted him, causing waves of heart-stirring concussion.

All these dark threatening clouds were gone. Away with enduring in the strong room, - freedom, width and action – the life of a bow eventually.

Yes, you could learn a lot from a bow, such the humans had rightly recognized. Alas, but humans had that not been, no, it was Pooty, yes, Pooty alone, who understood and fulfilled his dearest dreams and most secret wishes by this unexpected promotion.

‘Professor Magic Bow’ – almost everything had he been already, as time was not his problem. So many masters had he served. He could hardly name them – if at all: ‘First Servant of Pasha Sultan’, ‘Moon Delayer’, ‘Day master’, ‘First Knight of Cavalry Chief’, - titles as many and strange as the life itself, that he was leading. Some change had been very hard, while death was the true reason in general for parting.

Never had he been Professor - a marvellous and peaceful occupation, he couldn’t imagine a more decent one. Their talks now became the proper status, which he had with his friend and competitor.

‘Magnificent Stone’ as was the title the Magic Stone selected, gazed down from his Olympus knowingly and affirmative. He was looking forward as well.

Thus, the meeting went on. Administration didn’t settle by itself. Dorothea officially became manager in charge of all administrative obligations as well as all public relations with an office of her own and a secretary.

“I’d prefer a male secretary” she put in and had her brother-in-law in mind, who should bring along Intelleetus his witty and bright son, especially for the afternoons.

“Smells like nepotism” Moschus Mogoleya commented, however nobody paid attention. Still they had to be careful with that man, Arundle reckoned. “Courageous he is, after all” she thought while the Magic Bow – that is - Professor Magic Bow agreed, however relieved

the man in a generous gesture. As it was now clear that he would never return into that musty dungeon.

“What ever this man intended by trying to fetch me out there, everything is better than being locked up...”

Being administered by Dorothea, Countess of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots, the School of Inbetween would hopefully never run into such a clumsy trap again as was laid by the Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalía. For that Dorothea was much too clever, and familiar with business obligations. She could almost smell dirty tricks and fancy manoeuvres.

The main subject however, didn't get any further and could not be laid open publicly. The time-research programme was far too complex to have it discussed in such a broad scale.

Nobody was able to emphasise Arundle's experience at the imperial court. Hers seemed to be singular, and had to be accepted or rejected. Nobody was able to find sense in her tale.

What was the purpose? Arundle didn't find out herself - and nobody else could bring her clarity, with one exception: Professor Magic Bow. He was the only one who understood, and took for granted what she felt. She could hear him snarling tenderly in her back.

Did she underrate someone? Was there really no one else? Well, yes, she was feeling that way sometimes. Sometimes you are very alone, terribly lonesome and without help in this world. This feeling will soon become lighter but will never end.

2. Time isn't Money yet

“What a nuisance” the Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalía thought on his journey around the world, wondering how little effort it took to acquire funds. More than once he had to refuse, as the expectations were fundamentally opposing. While his campaign had become decent. He never promised anything remarkable, and never boasted with interest shares. Clear and plain, he said what he had to, wherever the journey went. However, his logic was convincing and his cause very simple: “Invest your money into the future” was one of his slogans. “Invest your surplus in Life-time” another.

Before he accepted larger sums, he rechecked meanwhile where the money was from. Pure speculation capital was rejected right away.

Such unusual behaviour rose curiosity and the longer the acquisition tour went the more curious the market became. Even the mishaps and failures in research changed little for some time, although such research was any other than open. As easy and light handed as Roland Waldschmitt juggled with investments freely, the more he closed up when it came to research results. This was his weak spot, and he knew it.

Too wide lay the competing approaches afar. On the one side, they dealt with gigantic quantities of energy-consuming accelerators on the world scale, on the other side with bionic transplantation medicine, and genetics based on Nanotechnology.

He knew little about both fields of action, because he changed into the new field earlier, when they still fiddled around with the imaginary mouse seesaw, when they first managed a remarkable break-through, by proving the aging of the one side in favour of the other by shooting one electron out of the genetic material of a clone. Well, Roland Waldschmitt was not so sure any more about that either.

“You don’t need to know, mon cher ami” cooed Viola de Stael facing such attacks of self-criticism, as they happened once in a while. “We care for the money and the researchers blue it. What does that matter, as long as you stick to the truth?”

“Yes, but do you believe in our research? Are you not bothered by doubts as well? You know where we stand...”

Nonsense - Backstrokes – success that is, a long row of successes. One success follows the other. That’s the way you ought to look at it. That’s reality. Is it your fault when Botho van Zyl, your representative, starts panicking when the wind is blowing a little harder? Had you not given in and turned back those days, we would look better now. You mustn’t blame yourself for that. Quite opposite – use it. Strengthen your influence. The Time-Value-System is going to come. The time is ripe, ...why are you swamped with surplus capital? Everybody feels there is something coming, they all feel the uneasiness of the markets. The future belongs to the Time-Value-System. This is the horse they all will bet on sooner or later.”

Roland Waldschmitt needed such moral injections to improve. The horror news from the London headquarters he still felt them deeply in his bones – and his own daughter was right in the middle...

It didn’t take long to get about it. The humdrum-attacks of the fool against that bumbling institute deep down under at the end of the

civilized world had used up not only energy but also a hell of a lot of money.

As little, as the spy found out, that much became somewhat clear: Those people down there also were on the way, and had found out about the true relativity of Time. They even seemed to follow an astounding timescale, nobody understood, while still impressive, though, - being very much to the point, no matter how they managed.

Looked at it that way - the interference of the South African colleague had had something good. Thus, the place survived that had very likely been swept away, as could have happened if you believed the reports of the weakling and coward from South Africa, which was in no way unreasonable.

Thus was the state of matters, seen out of Roland Waldschmitt's perspective. However, this was all old stuff from yesterday, so to speak, because the Brotherhood had been blown sky-high meanwhile. Somewhere a huge leakage had opened, and now the Intelligence Services of all major states chased the Infernalians for whatever reason this might be, none the least was the research stuff the agencies were after.

The acquisition tour of the former Chairman and his representative altered into a flight around the world, from one business centre to the other, while the couple learnt of arrests in the media. Thus, it was almost accidental that they weren't yet caught.

The clever ones of the Brotherhood dived away and retired to the countryside pretending to be horse breeders or landlords, or rented solitary bungalows somewhere in the Seychelles or on Caribbean islands, or even lodged in one of the monster-hotels on Majorca, under false identity, of course - not the worst mode of hiding, though.

Reasons for prosecution were enough. The Chairman had not been prim acquiring dirty money - especially not in the beginning. Now those cheated investors saw their chance for revenge. Officially, their money didn't exist, they could do very little, the more so they jumped on the train now, blowing for attack.

The most irritable accusations turned up in the press. They weren't even wrong, however, where did the writers get the information? Where was the leakage? Was it the South African? Had they tricked him too ghastly? Or did they come cross the international mafia organisations by burning their money on large scale?

You could only guess. Fact was the Infernalians were the prey and the hunt was on.

Viola de Stäel and Roland Waldschmitt were hiding in a small Corsican place, where they enjoyed safety. The pair had erased all traitorous traces. Nobody knew of their site. They lived there of course, incognito.

Viola de Stäel took care of the outside contacts. She pretended to be a Parisian Art Collector and Auctioneer. The little cottage was in fact her own, and had been equipped with the most modern high-tech communication systems as far as this was possible in the Corsican mountains.

On a mountain peak, near-by a powerful transmitter was installed with a very clever protective device, showing an interchangeable location some hundred miles away.

The system functioned by an enigmatic system the clever woman got from a queer inventor, who was looking for investors, and operated on a specimen basis for the time being.

Boredom became the true enemy. The safety pretended a freedom, which was in fact very limited and ended on the boundaries of the premise. Roland Waldschmitt was of no command of the French language, and thus tumbled from one depression into the other, shut off from all communication, thus the passion suffered as well.

In the solitude, without diversities, and without a task, and - more important still - without success, the childish characteristics pressed forward hidden in both of them, however more clearly and harder to stand in Roland Waldschmitt. The two of them soon were a pain in each other's neck, and couldn't stand the once beloved characteristics.

After many weeks and months – Roland forgot to count them – the press humdrum faded. The Brotherhood of Infernalism vanished out of the public sight; in one or two months time they would be forgotten.

The accounts were frozen in, as far as governmental authorities hadn't claimed their charge, contenting as many creditors that way, in order to get them out of sight and hinder them from interfering into research affairs, which were going on undisrupted as it seemed, for the first time noticed by the public – to a certain extent, though.

Universities became involved. Famous Professors acquired research funds for the projects, and what had been secretly done by a dubious organisation, now became a matter of public affairs. The Idea of the Time-Value-System (TVS) was born.

Roland Waldschmitt couldn't stand the solitude any longer. This was no life for him. Chased like a criminal, (he didn't feel alike) – in the hands of a power-mad domina, he longed for trustworthiness and normality. He seriously mourned about his marriage back in good old Germany, while he missed the German mode of being.

However, there was no way back, thus, soon became clear, while contacts with the former brothers were also prohibited. If anything could be tried, than ... however, he didn't even dare to think about that. Still, the idea got hold in his head the longer he mused about it, and became more shiny and more challenging. Thus, he construed fancy frail entities, refused them soon and replaced them by others even odder ones.

Money was still available he knew that. Some number accounts in Switzerland and Andorra as well as on the Seychelles or even in worthy Sydney allowed him to purchase enough funds, he'd carry on for the time being. Later he would have to see.

First, he needed a new identity. This step had to be carefully planned. He cared much about a legal and clean identity.

Any criminal could acquire a new passport, if he had money enough. However, this was not the way he liked it. Roland Waldschmitt wanted a genuine second identity.

Of course, there should not be any reference to the past. Not only the Secret Services were on his trail, not only Interpol and investor-trustees – those folks dumping their dirty money with him to have it washed, and they were the cleverest of all. Their money he had accepted in the beginning in large quantities. A serious mistake, he now realized.

“That damn woman” he growled. Because he was convinced that Viola de Stäel had been the one who persuaded him in accepting all that dirty money, which was given for one only purpose - to have it washed and returned, topped by a crazy interest rate.

Most likely, the avalanche started right here, which could soon not be stopped or kept secret any more. While they faced serious liquidity problems, when he failed to shuffle the funds about, because the moon project had eaten up all means, that is, the money was burnt in fact, while the project failed.

When it was too late he realized that you were allowed only fiddling about with the absolute surplus and not with the substance.

“It was she, no doubt about that. She was to be blamed. She pushed him further and further down on this slide to hell...” he heard him rumble in rage.

Only serious investors were on his line. Those, who were interested only in money hadn't understood the true value of immortality. Such value money couldn't buy, while it ate up tremendous amounts on research expenditures. Thus, only serious investors, who understood and read the signs of time right, were the proper clientele the Brotherhood needed.

Had they only remained in the circle of the ones in the know, and had formed a secret sphere embracing the real elites of this world, they'd now be better off.

This damn woman, how she had ruined everything with her naughty fussy greed – while she as well would now become a serious hunter, whom he had to get rid of, at best here and now.

That would be the solution. An accident in the mountains out there in plain nature - no one would ask for a stranger, not here in Corsica, where witty tourists disappear without trace. The Corsicans were a peculiar little folk with Corsair blood in their vessels and a touch of Bonaparte's megalomaniac unscrupulous grandeur.

Now he had to care not to disguise him. They had looked each other too deep into their black souls. They both knew the abyss wherein they had mused full of sweet horror. They were in hatred no less close than in passionate devotion.

They spied up on each other like luring beasts, and didn't expose on the other, and were both convinced of the bad intentions of the other. Who was doing the first move? Had the first move once done, there was no way back.

Disappear secretly or have secretly disappeared – that was the question he had to answer. If he disappeared, she would stick to his trail with the instinct of a hound-dog, because Viola de Stael smelled money like the hound-dog smelled blood.

Had he been happy with an ordinary bourgeois lifestyle he would have been able to shake her off. However, it was such a timid life that drove him crazy, and was just ruining their stormy love affair built on power and ruthless progress.

There were moments of scruples. That woman was too much for him. With her quick brain and her female instincts, she always was ahead by the length of a nose. That was why he felt so exposed and without standpoint.

Thus, he hoped more than he believed that he would overcome her in sheer lust of murder, when it came tip to toe, when he pushed her into an abyss.

There were glens enough in the inside of Corsica, but how could he manage to have her fall into one of them? The time for fancy excursions was definitely over. Whatever he suggested, he was opposed with denial and mistrust. He could be sure about that.

No, he had to handle that cleverer. Instead of tempting, he should manoeuvre her into a hopeless situation and have the reckless deed done - while such an idea made him shudder. Was he the coward in the end, the fierce woman accused him daily to be? She would see who the coward was in the end!

Sometimes, when he was alone the outbreak came and the wildest curses broke way and came him over the lips – he raged in an orgy of cruellest imaginations.

When he came back to his mind he blamed himself childish. Then he mused in cold-blooded calculation, and he wondered how such outbreaks could ruin him: The positive effect stood in no relation to the risk he was running.

Was he looking for an outlet for his fantasies or for an effective strategy to become free? Before this question was not answered satisfactorily, there would be no success.

He needed a definite strategy answering this question. What was his aim? Where was he heading?

He needed a new identity. The old Chairman had to disappear – this – and nothing else was the solution to his quest. There was no other option but striving for a new life.

He carefully prepared a variety of traces, planned them as good and as complete as he could, with his limited resources, and made sure that not even he knew which one he would follow. The decision had to come in the last moment as a last minute reservation, so to speak.

Double gangers he didn't have unfortunately, thus, he had to do with virtual tracks. A lot could be done via Internet meanwhile. Local presence could be faked easily.

Roland Waldschmitt purchased a number of air tickets, granting him to leaving at any day from the airports of Ajaccio or Bastia, where the first tracks were leading, and they could be clear and sound, as this was unavoidable. For boarding purposes, he already cared for false identities.

While preparing such precarious tasks, he met a very able man, who offered him his help, when Waldschmitt hardly uttered his needs. This man was an expert who was able in the shortest time to come along with authentic travel documents.

It was a kind of miracle – the services could hardly be described otherwise. Even Waldschmitt's appearance could be altered by some simple gadgets and a little make-up, thus, he became Professor Baranasias or the Sales Representative Samuel Fuller, or the aircraft mechanic Adrian vom Berg on business trip.

His lingual capabilities were however not the best, which limited the national question to very few countries, which was by no way a disadvantage. For a Canadian or Australian immigrant his English was sufficient, though, and German was no problem anyway.

The clever Agent of a non-specified organisation settled somewhere in the intergovernmental stage (as he put it) thought of everything. Nothing remained unnoticed or mere chance.

He seemed to memorize the flight plans of the airports, and Waldschmitt had only to mention one of his several ideas and – crack – the mysterious young man came about with a worthwhile proposal.

Did Waldschmitt seriously insist, then it didn't take half a day and the route was settled with everything that has to go with it.

Thus, it happened that Roland Waldschmitt found himself in Sydney, Australia, where he passed customs and passport control as Professor Henry A. Baranasias.

Two weeks stay in hospital – somewhere en route in Singapore - were sufficient to have his appearance suit the title and identity. Even the fingertips were cared for, however, when it came to the DNA even this clinic had to give in. Otherwise Waldschmitt was renewed and overhauled, thus became a new man.

Professor Baranasias was on the way to the Private Bank House Schimmelpfeng, when the eager Agent of the preparatory days joined him, who had arrived the day before. He introduced himself as Rudolfus Catalanius, and also had a new face fitting his new identity.

“To be precise – Dr. Rudolfus Catalanius” he supplemented somewhat highbrow - ...and National Monetary Economist like His Honourable. - We are on the way to an International Symposium” the overcharged person went on. “We're coming right away from Etobicoke – the beautiful pearl of Ontario – we're lecturing at the famous McGill University of Toronto.”

Nothing of the false Professor reminded of Roland Waldschmitt, while he was sitting in front of the Bank Director - (his chin rested on the precious silver knob of an ebony walking stick), and made arrangements for several transactions just being initiated via several number-accounts all over the world. Such was handled in seconds,

while some years ago, days or weeks, or even months were necessary for processing money around the world.

“Well, well, time is money, and surely will be”, the Professor’s assistant was musing, who hadn’t left Waldschmitt alone all the way from Corsica.

“Until we are that far, we better stick to the money side”, he laughingly added. Who had known better than he had?

“Haven’t we met before?” Catalanius had asked in an air of irony. Cooler it couldn’t be put... In the plane when departing from Singapore they met again with their new identities and their new faces, while the freshly baked Professor had just settled in his chair, and was carefully checking his new documents.

Right then Catalanius took the seat next – offering the perplexed Professor (with a pirating grin) a hand, while the latter finally realized what was going on - thus took the hand and shook it reluctantly, though.

3. The New Professors

“Professors are good for teaching” Tibor declared. “That’s right, however, since the old days lecturing and research were united. You shouldn’t forget that”, Arundle corrected him.

“We shouldn’t worry on the Headmistress’s behalf, I’d say”, Billy-Joe put in. “They’ll make it, as always. Well, I’m happy, what about you?”

The new timetable wasn’t yet distributed while the course was fully booked already, and a waiting list grew longer each hour. They would have to split and install a parallel course. Thus would limit the time of the new Professors considerably, they intended to claim.

Not all their work was destined for the public, not even for the illustrious public of the School of Inbetween. That was why the friends worried about lecturing and researching which had come up, while time was limited, but for both sides should be cared.

“What sense does it make to forcing them into such a dreadful mill right from the start? “ Adrian Humperdijk objected. “They won’t accept that anyway.”

“You better leave that up to them, dear Adrian” the Headmistress replied.

“I see that likewise” Penelope M’gamba made herself known.

In a small circle the intimidated ones in the know from sinister times were sitting together, freshly elected to the School’s Board. The students had voted for their representatives right at the first trial with overwhelming majority, while the Headmistress and her representative, Vice-Headmaster Adrian Humperdijk, required a second helping, which didn’t do them much good, and that only because the new Professors weren’t yet eligible.

“Lack of experience” it was said.

“They have to grow into their new role first...”

Dorothea of Griselgreif to Greifenklau or Amadeus Slyboots had been rejected because they were non-academics.

“We’ve got to change that”, Arundle hollered rather upset. “Besides, why should all others be represented in this Council? That doesn’t work. Are they nobody?” Intellectus added to Arundle’s insertion.

He was the youngster and was elected for representing the children of the island.

“Seems to be some kind of caste representation like in the France of the Revolution” his aunt put in.

“Someone’s picked up with might”, Arundle wondered. Then she shook her head angry with herself. What an arrogant thought that was.

The first relevant constitutional reform was showing up, that seemed more than clear. For the time being however, busy everyday life took over. The new term was underway and next to the obligatory basic courses a considerable amount of surplus subjects were given to the choice of the students, suitable for all levels and needs.

The new Professors were not tied in the plight torso, and were chosen all the more as they promised not only a very general but also mysterious theme under the somewhat ridiculous title “The Art of Sorcery in Flowerpot soil” – most students imagined some kind of ikebana flower power. However, no matter what the two Honourables had offered - the curiosity could not be refrained by the oddest title.

Only those who were acquainted with the two had an idea of what to expect: Somewhat fussy, pedantic arguments about matters of little concern such as calculations of coordinates or favourable routes.

However, such could hardly be subject of the seminar. Therefore the ones in the know, that is, Arundle, Billy-Joe and Pooty, were as alert as all others what was to be coming up.

Their Honourables refrained from floating over the heads of the packed audience through the air, (which they could have easily done), but insisted to be carried. [“That’s somewhat more gracious”, they argued.] Therefore, it was up to Billy-Joe to be slipping through the tight ranks like a supple animal - with the bow in the quiver over his shoulder, and the Medicine Pouch around his plain neck, wherein the other Honourable resided.

Pooty didn’t miss the show, of course. He took his task even more serious. The newly acquired honour of his protégé improved his occupation as Guardian of the Stone immeasurably. His still glowing head looked out of Billy-Joe’s Pouch and stirred up the assembly to general amusement.

As soon as Billy-Joe arrived at the aim (that cubicle amidst the round of the Hall) he sighted for help at Arundle, who had tried to follow in his pace but got stuck half ways signalling now that he should place all the utensils on the desk and then take a seat himself.

Pooty climbed out of the Pouch and placed the shiny stone close to the glowing red eye of the Magic Bow, and immediately the two newly appointed Honourables began whispering.

Those near by, who became aware, hissed for silence. Thus, the murmurs died soon, and were replaced by an almost audible strain of ears.

The whispering of Their Honourables could be heard by now, but was far from understanding. “Have that damn microphone installed, what the hell is the thing good for otherwise?” voices yelled. However, nobody knew how this could be done. “The janitor’s got to come” other voices sounded.

Their Honourables didn’t mind such hanky-panky, and kept on conversing as if they met again after years of partition, while they lacked the alertness for the flow of time of the earthbound beings, but couldn’t help it, no matter if they knew.

Therefore, they were very astounded when they heard themselves via loudspeakers and stopped intimidated, being faced with such fancy unknown sorcery.

Arundle was asked now to show up on stage, and tried to calm them down. However, His Honourable Stone was frightened almost to death she learnt from her Magic Bow and was further told, “that any sensible spiritual occupation under such working conditions was impossible – either that thing is shut off or we leave!”

What could be done?

“I recommend something else. Listen to your insides, remain with the instant, stop thinking, have the flowerpot soil take over.” Arundle didn’t exactly know why she said that, especially the last, it had come to her mind out of no-where.

The hearing device was closed down and the Honourables went on with their murmuring – very audible now but still meaningless, though, or filled with inaudible sense.

The listeners settled down and relaxed with the instant, while the few who were unable to taming their unrest pushed for the exits, didn’t manage however, and resigned, because the Hall was packed now and still more pressed in at the doors.

Thus, the most peculiar lesson of all times was on the way and took its pace. The big clock above the desk was heard ticking, while the silence cracked even louder in the cocked ears, and the multi-voiced breathing united in an ocean of indisguisable waves. What an experience!

The whispering Professors kept whispering but didn’t make any noise. Something like sense lowered gradually over the assembly. There was nothing inaudible, they did understand. They understood all too well, and what she or he understood could not be passed on. Thus, many realized ‘the Unspeakable’ for the first time.

Whenever they would hear the word ‘flowerpot-soil’ in future, something would be released inside as well as the circumstances here in that hall, whether they had had to stand or had been seated amidst a packed crowd of fellow students, and that much more being released, but was unspeakable.

“They won’t carry on like that for the whole term” Tika – Billy-Joe’s little sister – wondered. She felt left alone by her big brother, and had she not have found Tibor, she would most probably have ransacked for good.

“I care for your little sister. I enjoy being with her, and I sometimes feel accepted as well” Tibor frankly admitted, while Tika let her Sublimator friends Tuzla and Patagonia know that she cared for Tibor in return - “He makes me laugh, and that’s a lot more than you can imagine.”

Strange enough - people found each other from the furthest ends of the world, and nobody knew why. The reason could not be found in the colours, as they were far apart. What else could it be?

It was the way it was, and Tika was far too bound by her passion to question their affection.

“We don’t get lost to the future at home” Patagonia and Tuzla confirmed Tikas musings about the proper handling of emotional affairs. “We do live the moment – here and now...”

Tibor was leaning next to Tika not fully aware of her presence any more, and in a kind of trance almost. Still he enjoyed being with her and definitely didn’t feel like lifting a burden off Billy-Joe’s broad shoulders. Well, not in the state he was right now, whereas Tika was obviously not affected yet. However, you never know.

Where was she? Little could be seen through the mist.

“Let’s have a dance” Tuzla and Patagonia suggested. Sandor joined them now and both brothers from the Mongolian steppe needn’t be asked twice. They took Tika in the middle and before long, a green whirl lifted them off the ground high up far over the borders of the little island.

Scared she held Tibor tight, who kept murmuring soothingly: “Let go, let go, have yourself drop, we keep you, the wind carries you, you can believe in you” – and indeed Tika felt the freedom and the wind, and felt lifted and carried, and filled with happiness. “Thus, it works with the others!” she wondered.

“Flowerpot-soil” she sang “Flowerpot-soil – Flow erpots oil, flow erpots oil, how much I love Flow-erpots- oil...” she heard the others singing “...the flow of oil, erpots and soil, what the hack’s such Erpots Oil?”

“Flow Erpots Oil

Flow Erpots Oil

Flow Erpots Oil

A flow all filled with Erpots Oil”

Did her eyes betray her? She saw little rivulets filled with creamy oil flowing down to earth, trickling and dribbling in the bright sunshine above the clouds as if in a sea of diamonds, far above the clouds, where boundless freedom rests.

She felt Tibor’s strong arms when it went down again. His firm grip when settled down on solid ground.

The echo on such a remarkable lesson was somewhat divided. Many, in fact most, didn’t dare to trust their experience, as soon as it lay behind, and only remembered the silly title and the lengthy silent whisper, or had it been a whispered silence?

Only the four Sublimations and Tika knew what they had experienced. Especially Tika, for her, it had been the first time.

“Does it make sense, if I talk with them as well?” Billy-Joe asked on behalf of Arundle, who had been taken aside by the Headmistress. While the latter had become a wink from Dorothea the new Public Relations Manager.

It looked as if children had complaint with their parents about the new Professors and their fancy style. However, this was just pretence. Neither the children, nor their parents were definite – and thus, things should remain.

Dorothea was alert. “There is someone secretly infiltrating our major sponsors, and there are other motivations involved than mere esoteric concern. We could easily rate that fancy proceeding of the new Honourables somewhere between yoga and transcendental meditation – God knows there is worse under way. If you think of things, like – say - Urschrei... for example” she couldn’t find a better term, and wasn’t familiar either, but had heard most terrible rumours. Anyway, those who were in the secret knew what she meant.

“You just don’t understand what’s going on out there. We’re being sold out, so to speak. Someone’s buying our shares on a large scale basis. Didn’t even know such shares were around, never heard of them anyway, but they are there, don’t ask me from where they come...

Discrediting rumours help lowering the course of course. The more foolish the School’s appearing the cheaper become the shares... it’s as simple as that...

Someone’s taken over already, nothing is ours any more, neither the helicopter nor the Nautilus, in fact, nothing belongs to us any more. All we have is some eighteen percent of the School as such, am I right?” She looked over to the Headmistress questioningly.

When she saw her contrite face, a terrible suspicion arose - things were even worse “You don’t want to say... - no, not really, you can’t be serious, dear Marsha!”

“What could I do? You know what it was like last term. Everything went upside down. I had been a little careless, though.” And after a pause she added in an air of hope: “Now you are here, and everything will turn to the better. I’m sure you have an idea how we get out of this...” Dorothea looked helpless. “...well there’s always a way” she went on somewhat intimidated.

“...Now, if this is starting all over again, we will give up once and for all” Adrian, her husband and Vice-Headmaster put in.

“Don’t say that, Adrian, you cannot seriously mean it.”

“Well, there is an offer. Doomsday hasn’t come. The latest trial of scandalizing our affairs might well have been a kind of door opener, as is well known how closed up we present in public...”

“Someone’s drawing a bow at a venture, if I may say so” Scholasticus supported his wife.

“I think, I leave for Sydney first of all, and see what could be done. Is there anyone here joining me? – Not all, please...” she shouted while all jumped to their feet. “May I choose my companions?”

“Yes, of course, what else can we do? With you we are in the best hands” the Headmistress said in an air of resignation.

“I’m not taking you, Scholasticus, you are too dominating. What I like at home doesn’t fit everywhere. Don’t be upset, dear!”

“Who’s going to be our opponent? Whom are you meeting?”

“A certain Professor Baranasias from Toronto, a learnt economist, I understand.”

“You are right” Scholasticus made himself known, “I don’t have an idea about the matter, but with Peter Adams you might not be all that lost, he’s in good command of economics either. Shall I ask him?”

“Don’t you worry, dear, I’ll handle that. Besides, I would like to ask Arundle, and if Peter cannot come, I would like to have you, Marsha, on board, - if it wouldn’t be best anyway to have you with us.

- More than three would be too big a party. I’m sure that we...”

Dorothea stopped in the middle of the sentence. She didn’t want to say too much. Instead, she picked the lever and called Peter Adams, who agreed spontaneously.

“Sold out we had been already anyway, even before the scandal and that minority share, which seems to be lost for good. What’s coming up next, has been drifting above our heads for quite some time, and that is not the fault of our two freshly promoted Professors. Still, they may accompany us – they are most welcome, if I may say so!”

“Pooty wouldn’t go without Billy-Joe, and without Pooty the Honourable Stone won’t come either” Arundle put in.

“Well then, we are five then, or six, or eight to be precise. What a shame, how anthropocentric^{xxxiii} we still are” Dorothea wondered, after having corrected her three times.

“Do let me talk, then we’ll manage”, she said in a self-assured air. “I need you in the background. We might even have to employ some sorcery, and Marsha knows the school best. She is aware of all secrets.

It's a pity though, that we lost our damn obstructive minority... well, it can't be helped right now."

"We do have more than such a minority could grant. We have our research. Our successes are sensational, they mean a scientific revolution, more important than microchip or Internet, and what's most important – they are inside here" Scholasticus knocked at his head while saying.

"Scholasticus, won't you come with us, then? Once in your wife's shade won't harm you, but keep in mind, I warn you – I'm the boss for now!"

"I will stay back, if the number causes trouble..." Marsha put in. "I've lost control anyway, and doubt my own memories..."

"Let's sleep a night before decision, tomorrow the helicopter is coming, and then we will see. May I invite all of you for a drink? Let's go..." Dorothea headed for her home and the others followed.

4. Background Affairs

Instead of executing sinister plans of revenge, Roland Waldschmitt preferred escaping. The false tracks he laid by advice of his assistant were heading to different parts of the world. The man had joined him from no-where, and construed especially designed curricula, Waldschmitt knew by heart now, while he could never be sure when and where to leave. Decisions always came last minute.

All such nuisance because of that woman, he'd love to strangle still, while his assistant meant life would be much easier without bloodshed. He was of course right. No matter whether there was blood enough on his hands. From your desk at home, you could wipe out whole villages for the profit's sake. Still it was something else whether you made your choice in cold blood or strangled your former Mistress.

He pretended not to care what had become of her, when he changed identity and was now Professor Baranasias from McGill-University in Toronto. Together with his assistant, a certain Dr. Rudolfus Catalanius he travelled about the world from one strong-room locker to the other, so to speak, while care was arbitrary,

because such hot spots were under guidance, either by governmental authorities or eventually by her.

One method had been sending a messenger, but when one locker contents disappeared, they thought things over twice before trusting a stranger. A beautiful woman like Viola de Stäel would have been of great help, though. Thus, the false Professor had to take the risk alone or send his assistant.

Who ever were travelling through the world with suitcases full of money ran a big risk. Now, the false Professor understood his former clients better. Where to bring the money? How to make it clean and exchange for something of similar value?

You could only do by secret approach to the nearest private bank and to another strong-room locker where nobody had access but the proper owner, or you relied on a safe right at home in your premises. For that purpose, Baranasias and Catalanius acquired a sleepy hamlet near Sydney where they began their stock marketing.

With great care and in custody they started buying what ever shares they found in the market of the School of Inbetween or related contractors. Causing thus a steep inclination, that could hardly be avoided, though. The market reacted, of course, while those negative headlines in the papers did hardly more but a slight rebuffing for some weeks.

Had they stopped buying, they might have reversed the trend, but there was no time. Baranasias wanted to get hold of the secrets and the chosen way led him straight into the heart of the unbearable competitor.

Catalanius was even worse. “We buy in any case, don’t mind the price...” While the pile of valuta^{xxxiv} melted like snow in the spring sun, Baranasias had collected with so much effort and great risk.

“Had been a nice time, after all” recalled the beautiful woman with the well built while somewhat severe face. “Especially in the beginning. However, as it was, it couldn’t go on.”

Right from the start, Viola de Stäel felt resentments, and her feeling had been right. The truth came about in small portions.

That disguised spy on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth had in fact been her creation. She had him trained and tamed until he became her factotum. Therefore, he reported to her.

However, she also depended on a Master and wouldn't have managed without him. Her obligation had been the training only, while the idea had come from another source. She had done her best.

Whenever the Chairman had been on business tour negotiating with potential clients, she hurried into her studio in Soho, which she had never given up, because it was the base of her power and her independence. For her, money lay on the streets, and her equivalent couldn't be reckoned in figures either.

The Master had been able to fix an appointment of the extraordinary kind, somewhere beyond the endangered zone that showed up in the Southern hemisphere, thanks to those greedy rascals of the Brotherhood, who couldn't keep on waiting until the time was ripe.

Black magic had played an important part. However, Viola de Stäel was still unfamiliar with the whereabouts. She did her part and didn't mind the circumstances, she neither cared nor would have understood.

Only that much became clear to her: Her 'cute huddle cuddle grumble Pooty-bear' ended up in the centre of a most challenging research mission on a secret island somewhere beyond Australia. While those stupid brothers almost torpedoed the neat plan, by performing a nonetheless remarkable experiment, setting the whole region in flames, so to speak, by a chain of catastrophes and immeasurable and insurmountable destruction, which then finally led to the end of the Brotherhood.

Viola de Stäel secretly arranged for the arresting of the Brothers in range, who weren't hiding fast enough, while the clever ones disappeared, and were never ever seen, whereas making it a deal in her own case.

As chief witness she was freed from any charge and lived on just like that, while those around her were in great trouble, none the least Roland Waldschmitt who turned into a coward and jellyfish, while she remained seemingly untouched by the prosecution, and poured disdain over him, resulting in his psychic breakdown. Had he not been such a selfish person, he could have been pitied. However, thus he experienced the woe he used to spill out so merciless over others.

5. Queen of Heart trumps

The helicopter was late as usual. It arrived at eleven o'clock instead of half past nine. The weather was bad; it had been a bumpy flight and the passengers climbed pale faced and shaky out of the cabin.

The busy airhostesses still tried to tidy the seats of the worst, while the new load of travellers rumbled up the gangway. There was no choice, it had to work, the young women might think, and produced their professional smile when welcoming the guests.

Marsha had finally stepped back, heavy hearted as her husband proclaimed, while Dorothea realized (with her sure instinct) that this was a mistake. Part of her task would be taken over by Billy-Joe and Arundle (together with the two new Professors.)

It was too late now, anyway. Sending Scholasticus away now would have endangered her marriage and that was not on Dorothea's mind.

In Sydney, they took the bus to the City Terminal. With their handbags, they walked through the streets to their hotel. There they had a date with the Professor from Toronto with that funny name.

At the desk they received a note, thus, they dumped their luggage and then marched on to the little conference room where they were bound to have an undisturbed meeting.

Professor Baranasias wasn't alone either. His assistant Dr. Rudolfus Catalanius was at his side when the guests arrived. The latter took over the introduction and seemed to somewhat dominate his Professor.

Professor Baranasias seemed to be not well. Certain unrest filled him unknowingly, which the assistant realized even more. After a while the Professor recovered however, now making eyes at Dorothea, and was soon devoted to her circumstantially, while she was leading the negotiations, thus enabled him to have his eyes rest on her unblemished.

Scholasticus felt wrath rising, and hardly managed to stay cool. Only after Arundle gave him a quietening touch and the red eye of the Magic Bow kept twinkling, he noticed what went wrong with him and turned down.

Professor Baranasias was hardly estimated for his age as well as for his overall appearance. He was definitely average in any way. Scholasticus didn't refrain from a fierce gazing of such likely opponent.

When Dorothea had mastered her part, Peter Adams took over, and tried to draw out their host. – 'We all came out of a likely

premise, being absolver of the good old McGill University' he uttered in a jovial air. '...had been lecturing there as well, until receiving a call from deep down under, that is far Australia, just recently...'

While trying to refresh joint memories however, he realized certain uneasiness. That man was neither familiar with old colleagues, he should have definitely known, nor with other Professors, Adams noticed. The knowledge was very poor, not even the clever assistant was better off. While the dubious Professor could hardly hide his immigrant status by the language, he spoke. That man had not been bred at McGill's – no, Sir, definitely not, Peter decided.

With the Professor's assistant, Peter Adams shared a deep antipathy, wherever it came from. - He disliked that man. Had they been together lately, he would very likely recall. The person was a swindler and impostor. Deep inside Peter therefore felt ill will, which tried to break out and could only be tamed with great effort, and the support of Pooty, who cautiously pulled him by the sleeve.

Peter Adams kept on wondering. Where had he come across that man? Had they met at the university, as Catalanius said?

While his thoughts went astray, Dorothea had taken over again and stressed on the remarkable research work that was done on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

"While this value cannot be found in stone and wood, or real estate and means of transport" - Scholasticus put in tipping his forehead meaningfully with the forefinger. His remark fitted well this time.

"You had to behead us and replace yours with ours. Ha, Ha, Ha" - he hollered.

"Everything's got its price even the brightest brain" the assistant replied sharply, lacking any sense of humour.

"In your world this might be so, but we follow better rules."

"What ever it is, we are interested. You are far too precarious. Don't you understand? We only want to help", Professor Baranasias put in.

"With our help you soon will be able to stand on your own feet again. You need not worry about money. For money is cared. Do your research as you feel. All we want is be part in it. We also run out of time. How can we get hold of the time? Nobody is further than you I tell you frankly - we have nothing to hide, believe me. Let's play with open cards, that's all we want."

Arundle cocked up. Such tunes were somehow familiar. She noticed a hidden yearning behind those sentences. A desperate longing for the untouchable, for something, money cannot buy.

There it was, here they had to step in. Dorothea seemed to feel likewise. She took the word and played her card with highest esteem, knowing well that she wasn't meant personally or somehow still was anyway. That man's mind was out of order, though. Was he a border liner, worth the effort of trying? Were they prepared for such a task, while a lost soul offered all the world's property, or a great part as it seemed. Someone cared for eternal happiness hoping to knock on the right door.

The Professor's assistant noticed the change in the companion's attitude. Something went out of control. The false Professor gave way to the charm of the Circe^{xxxv}. This man was a weakling after all – had he only believed his agent, who had warned him right at the beginning. Baranasias wasn't worth the effort.

“There must be someone coming, and shake her hips – thus the dog's parrying. She's got to have some style and appearance, nevertheless”, the woman had said in an air of disdain, while he didn't believe her and had alleged that she was just jealous.

“Viola, how right you were” he mused by now as it was too late. Viola de Stäel wouldn't hear it any more, even if she had wanted.

Someone was in due train to abandon his disciple. He couldn't allow this. Besides, what was that after all - a whole phalanx had marched up on him. Instead of his acquainted Miseriors, he had that weakling at his side. He should better have avoided the situation as such, right from the start, but he had been so sure about himself. Catalanius, the man with a thousand faces, now realized.

The air was full of magic, but it was not his. Thus, he sounded for retreat. The position of strength he had had in the beginning melted like ice in the sun.

The first impression, that woman conveyed should have warned him. They hadn't neared their aim, the take over of that damn island was still out of reach. He decided to tighten the screws as soon as possible.

“If they don't want to listen, they will have to feel” he mused enraged as he was. After all, that island was only the nominal property of the former owners. They couldn't go on, on their own as they did in the past. They had the law against them, and they knew it, what else had their interest been for that meeting?

He put them in sacks - other than in former times, when his Miseriors took over here and there - rebel rousing wherever likely. All their efforts were in vain, if the fool at his side wouldn't parry.

Nothing was left – he found himself right at the beginning. What had been was over now and was part of another life, still there was hidden the club, which one day could turn out to be the means for pushing the weakling ahead.

The cover was hard to bear, and grew harder every day. He could feel some kind of invasion in his bowels, infiltrating likewise the windings of the brain, while ensnaring the vibrations of the mind – full of sweet whispering yearning. In vain, he tried to shake such off.

He looked at the false Professor standing next, and felt the big change coming. However, other than felt. The Professor's face was shining; in his eyes was seen an absurd glance of kindness. He was indeed on the verge of falling and changing the sides. Not an instant longer he could allow this to happen.

Catalanius grabbed the false Professor by the sleeve and off they went in great hurry. At the door, they got stuck and Catalanius lost his factotum, who tried to return - still with shiny eyes fixed on Dorothea, so it seemed - but than was drawn away and passed the hotel personnel in front of the room on stand-by.

Had the scout mission of the School of Inbetween met its aim? Had Arundle touched the stony heart? While she felt the yearning of the man combined with a strange feeling of confidence, reminding her of a scene of former childhood days turning up involuntarily her father's face, whom she had all forgotten.

“Now we've truly earned our food” Dorothea said, while Arundle kept in mind what just had come to her. She waved for the waiter and generously ordered a second breakfast. “We'll have a bottle of Champagne with it. Put it on the bill of our host, if I may beg...”

After all, they were guests. They had some hours to go before they could take the helicopter. Thus, they dined at length, and then they took off, and walked back to the terminal, where they experienced an inconvenient surprise. The helicopter including crew didn't belong to them any longer.

Catalanius had done a good job. As major shareholder, he had the right on his side. There was no legal point in it. Thus, Catalanius had fulfilled his prediction. Baranasias' uprising had been but a quick straw fire. He was fallen back as soon as he was out of Dorothea's range, and influence of the memories awakened by his daughter.

“He won’t escape us, you will see” Arundle murmured and grinned. “Then we must travel the magic way, alright.”

The Magic Bow had his string snarl; Pooty grabbed for the Magic Stone, and by joint magic the missionaries found themselves right away back on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Dorothea had stayed best back in Sydney because what she intended didn’t allow any delay. Thus, she disappeared right away in her office and vanished in the Internet, so to speak, for all kinds of applications, orders, authorities, and had the slow mills started – down here probably even slower than elsewhere.

She renewed old connections, which could be traced up to the tops of UNO and UNESCO – some even still worked she found out to her big surprise.

“Thus, aristocracy is good for something after all” she growled somewhat contented. Things developed successfully, as soon as they were tackled. Of course, there was irritation about the secrecy, and still some enlightening work had to be done, but in the end common sense and reason succeeded.

Dorothea was very persuasive. Her web-cam was all in favour of her staging, however in the end the Isle itself was most convincing, when a UNESCO team invaded the island. The poor inhabitants didn’t know where to hide, while Dorothea was busy showing the team around and stressing on the highlights.

Neither students nor colleagues proved helpful - even those she had expected a more general overall view.

“Can’t work that way...”

“Can’t go on like that...”

“Can’t stand that for one more day...”

Such were the complaints she heard during the week of film making, wherever the film team showed up, and that was more or less everywhere. Last taboos however remained untouched. Thus, the panorama window was kept shut, while the coverage looked like plain rock structure. No hint was referring to the existence of the mer-folk, while rumours were about already.

The idea was to show the Isle as it was: natural and positive like some kind of soap opera at best, following the somewhat extrovert taste of the producer, meant for the public, however still unreachable and unreal in a way. As if the film was made on an other planet or in another time. Thus, the secret remained as well as the hidden dwellers and their location. A kind of squaring the circle, as was Dorothea’s ambition, and it seemed as if she succeeded.

By means of a court sentence, she obtained a pending decree saying that ‘no alterations were allowed until further notice. Nothing could be taken away or could be added of the real estate or mobile property.’ The decree explicitly granted ‘the undisturbed functioning of the School and safeguarding the dwellers in full range...’

The decree summoned the helicopter likewise and the crew, thus the shuttle service was picked up again and guaranteed the free flow of man and cargo, as before.

Furthermore, the busy Public Relations Manager started a fund-raising initiative around the globe, stressing on the pending law case and the disastrous consequence. The flow of funds wasn’t a broad stream of money right from the start, but a kind of rivulet spilling in noticeable relief for the time being.

Fees of pupils had been kept back, as soon as the situation became known, but now were paid again. That’s the way people were outside, even those you didn’t expect to be like that.

The Isle of Wisdom-tooth was on a good track. However, that was not all, Dorothea had up her sleeve. How had she been able to initiate all that humdrum?

“If your product is good, and if you understand your business, such is simple as that”, she explained to her husband, who didn’t only love her by heart but adored her for what she performed, and realized how deeply he had failed in his judgement.

Dorothea’s idea was simply brilliant. How could she create a win-win situation at once? By means of her connections as Countess of Griselgreif of Greifenklau she managed to apply for the status of “World Culture Heritage”, and her application was on the best way to succeed, thanks to her friends with UNESCO and the congenial film that had been made, presenting the Isle and the school project in the brightest colours.

The pending state – the application had not yet been approved – enabled her to raise more funds by clever reference to upcoming glories, thus the flow improved considerably. She as well noticed: money was available. People cared for reasonable and sensible investments, and values worth the effort, and this was what the mysterious School of Inbetween promised. The demand for interest funds increased exorbitant. Mad sums started circulating – that is – rumours wavered about a secret investor who disappeared all of a sudden.

Together with the out sale of those important eighteen percent, which had disappeared somehow - the Headmistress couldn’t tell how and when this happened – he now kept 49 percent, while the

remaining 51 percent were split into tiny fragments, hidden with parents and former school-leavers or had just disappeared unnoticed. The owners might not even know of their existence in lockers and strongholds or safes, not touched for years, slumbering, while blowing up every hour, so to speak.

They increased in value and went straight upwards and no end was in sight. If Dorothea managed to get hold of these shares, she would be able to outnumber the other side. Thus, it was about the School of Inbetween. The pending status as World Culture Heritage together with the mysterious research programme based on an outstanding brain trust of able scientists kept stimulating the finance markets.

“The holder of the majority is running the show, that’s the way things work in this world. Whether we like it or not” the intimidated Headmistress admitted repeatedly.

Had she only opened the many lockers and drawers in her office and on the floors, or looked at even plain piles of dusty papers. However, she had not the faintest idea of what treasure kept slumbering in the hide unnoticed.

Those piles didn’t belong to anybody while the case was pending. As soon as the situation was cleared the way Dorothea intended, things would automatically turn over into the hands of the UNESCO fund. Nothing, no piece of paper, no picture or photograph, nor any trophy and cup would be exempted, but would become part of the ‘World-Culture-Heritage’ – as such it would soon become conserved for the future. It was only a question of time. – So - why fiddle about now? There were more important tasks to be fulfilled, the stressed Headmistress said to herself. While actually Dorothea took the workload from her shoulders, a fact, she seemed to ignore.

Whatever the reasons were, those piles remained untouched or even unnoticed. Dorothea would handle all that and end the administrative chaos, Marsha surely was ashamed of, and found good reasons of not touching the matter. ‘We have it done the easy way’ she quietened herself down, thus, the mysterious treasure remained untouched.

6. Arundle's Presentiment

Since Arundle had returned from Sydney she was introvert and thoughtful. She and her friends were on the way to the dining room. Flory and her sister Cory felt torn towards the South Pacific site under the palm tree roof, and Arundle was accompanying.

"See, this is Billy-Joe's with his little sister."

Arundle had scarcely seen Billy-Joe for days, and if, then from afar like now. When they had filled their trays the three followed the Australian pair and found them sitting apart.

"Clear enough, take a seat, nice to see you" Billy-Joe greeted them with his common gentle smile, when he fetched Arundle's questioning gaze.

Sometimes the sisters had their secret talks, the three friends knew. Was Tika as enthusiastic as was her brother? She looked anyway less disturbed and hostile. The reason for Tika's hostility lay several years back in the past, however it was not forgotten, even more when Billy-Joe began to change to Tika's disadvantage.

Billy-Joe moved into the corner and gave way to the three, who seated them comfortably. "So, you as well" Cory said in a moody air when she noticed the famous Flying dogs on the plates - a wholly vegetarian speciality with the confusing name.

They had their meal first, while the conversation was floating somewhat tenacious. This changed as soon they were filled up. Arundle wanted to know at last whether Billy-Joe had wondered as much as she did about that peculiar Professor over there in the Sydney hotel. While neither Tika nor the two sisters had been with them, therefore they picked up other subjects, and that were, as you can expect with girls of that age - boys. However, not boys just like that, but specific boys. Thus, they let their mates talk over their subject, and didn't care or listen.

"Strange guy, though, I'm sure he was no real Professor - Peter Adams also said", Billy-Joe confirmed now.

"Neither did he come from Canada, Peter said" Arundle went on.

"Definitely not" Billy-Joe nodded.

"Besides, his English -haaf yyou herrd ..?" she snarled like Emperor Wilhelm II on pre-war goodwill state tour to the Commonwealth.

"That too - but I meant something else" Billy-Joe went on without caring much about Arundle's funny interlude. "Has been more an impression, though. He reminded me of Zinfandor Leblanc. They weren't really alike, still there was something, some kind of likeness

I cannot describe much better. You know, Tibor and I were on that special tour to London, where we snatched that suitcase off our old acquaintance, and then picked him up later and got him out of jail, the poor bloke.”

Arundle thought to understand. Perhaps it had been just that, what had touched her – the panic and inner pain, she meant to have noticed in the Professor’s gaze, whenever he felt unwatched, and didn’t fix Dorothea with his eyes, whom he seemed to adore.

“Like a puppet on the string. Whenever he referred to the subject, he rattled down his message like a well-trained actor. Nothing was real with that guy...”

“Did you see that thin red streak just at the hair-line?” Billy-Joe wanted to know.

“...As freshly operated that looked” Arundle nodded.

“Yes, that was it. He smelled like just got out of hospital, as if he had just come back on his own feet” Billy-Joe added.

“Perhaps his gaze was more exhausted than panicky”, Arundle wondered.

“Anyway, he kind of shrieked when you stood in front of him...”

“soundless, though...”

“Yes, it was just a moment, than he had him under control again, but he couldn’t make the instant undone” Billy-Joe was almost sure about that.

“ Right you are, as if he knew me – but how could that be?” Arundle confirmed.

“It was definitely you that made him shudder - you, and your Magic Bow - as if he knew you, and he knew you because he was somebody else, than he pretended to be. Or had you seen that man before?”

Arundle fiercely shook her head, while then her shaking went over into a thoughtful waving. “Not really seen, but I felt him – there was something emotional. Just a glimpse soon cut off. We might even talk about that assistant as well, what was his name...”

“Don’t you mind names. If you ask me an old acquaintance is hiding behind that assistant, but I don’t want to rush on too fast. Anyway, what was your impression?” Billy-Joe wanted to know, not expecting an answer, though, while he went on right away. “I can only say what I have heard from Peter Adams, who is certain about it. You know how he was cheated when he broke his legs.”

“You don’t mean...” Arundle exclaimed.

“Right, exactly this is what I mean” Billy-Joe affirmed.

“Of course, we will get rid of **him** only in the future. However, the Advisor assured me, he’d be cutting **his** wings considerably. **He** won’t change the past, **his** power’s got to remain in the given boundaries. This is why we needn’t care about Misieriors in the near future. Because this had been **his** mistake, and had been forbidden for that reason, when **he** dared to sent his Misieriors back to us” Arundle explained, well knowing whom she meant – “well, and that a couple of times. Yes, I’m also afraid that Malicious Marduk is back again.”

“If we only knew just as well, where we had been in the future. Future is easily said. Was this my future, when I faced the Prince Regent in combat? Guided and protected by the magic of the ancient Shaman, you and all others wanted to convince me that he is I, until I began to believe myself. Well, in fact only almost. Only almost, as life doesn’t work that way. Nobody knows his destiny. This is what nobody can, and you can prove it. Ask Scholasticus for Schroedinger’s cat^{xxxvi}...”

“I know, I know, Einstein was all against such unpredictability, and you want to claim it for you right now, as this is, what you do. You want to say that your predicted end as Shaman of the Churingas is a quantum-mechanical impossibility, do I get you right?” Arundle asked.

“Exactly, and this is not only because these things now are past for some years...”

“Some six or seven years, if I’m not mistaken. I was with you, don’t you remember? I was holding your head, and all thought you were dead. Without magic, I don’t know...”

“The way it looked, I did die then, however not the I that is sitting in front of you here and now, and is recalling the future, but an I of whom we know nothing. An I that was leading a life over one hundred years, a life ahead of me and ahead of us and our time.”

“Thus, it works with the future” Arundle agreed.

“...Or it doesn’t work that way” Billy-Joe objected. “That’s what I want to know without being stubborn or polemic. I just don’t know. I don’t know what I it is, that I do remember.”

“That’s it” Arundle put in all in favour. “The most extreme variation would be a parallel world. Because then all paradoxes would be solved – well some at least...” she added after a slight hesitation.

“That would mean”, Billy-Joe went on – “What I experienced, I have experienced, however in another world - in a world next to our own. Similar to what happened when we investigated on that island of the petrified giant, without noticing each other, because we were separated...”

“At least we had an idea of each other”, Arundle agreed. “Worked out fine then with that potion and everything, when we came together again.”

“How this was done, we still don’t know” Billy-Joe objected.

“Well, that’s kind of magic, though, somehow taboo, because we leave the sphere of reason, which is, we are going to slowly understand, infinitesimal bits from the endless plentitude of all what is knowledgeable... - This I don’t mean fatalistic” she added.

“The plentitude of thought is like the ocean of eternity...”

“And we are swimming as tiny fragments of matter on minuscule bubbles of thought, that cover us up like an atmospheric gas some planets procure.”

“A nice picture...”

“Isn’t it?” Arundle looked so agreeably. Billy-Joe felt irritation similar to the scene when he awoke in Arundle’s arms on the battlefield on the verge between death and life.

Then in the far future he had decided for his life, for a life, that he overlooked and was centred on Arundle, whatever life would make of it, as long as it allowed communion.

Never would he allow them to getting lost in Arundle’s Polyverse (if there was something in it), not she and not he. He would always strive for concord.

Such an intention made the fate of the Shaman of the Churingas somewhat impossible. What, if there were hiding several lives in one? What could happen in over one hundred years? Not twenty years did it take to lead children out into life. Up to five families could he found, if that was what was on his mind, hidden somewhere out of scope.

However, could it not well be that different worlds were guided by good or evil spirits? Full of good or bad will and able to a certain extend to influence the fate of a being, who was playing an unconscious role, and hadn’t won the necessary existential depth?

The idea of parallel worlds embraced a close relationship - it was identical parallel life and parallel drafts of world – thus it was seen by some scholars of this scientific approach.

“Of course it’s worth while researching about the phenomena of parallelism. Cannot be done otherwise if we care for deepening our understanding of Time” Arundle went into his musings as if she had been part of it.

The glittering eye of the Magic Bow indicated highest concentration now, and Pooty climbed out of his home pouch to have a look what was going on. A wave of energy had ripped him off his

slumber he had been befallen, while the peaceful conversation was going on.

“The false Professor, a visitor from a parallel world – is that, what you mean.”

“Could well be! However, there had been a different, more important idea, - wait, I’ll have it soon. Yes, right, - what, if that Shaman of the Churingas had been my guardian angel? If he were, would I then get rid of the whole lot of oppressing burden right away? Had I then not my own overall terrestrial life back? A life, with an open end, without predetermination, and without the knowledge about the fate awaiting me once?”

“Such are the questions, you’d better discuss with the Advisor, if he doesn’t dissolve again, as he does, when things are tightening up on him, I’m afraid”, Arundle answered who started musing likewise. Since she had that experience with the entourage and the veiled princess, and since she met everywhere images of her father, she felt the pressure of the future and the burden of the upcoming. This might be the reason why she fled into the theory of the parallel worlds, because they made things easier for her.

The other day in Sydney she had had another encounter of that kind. The false Professor had unleashed a similar confusion of feelings as she recalled from her father, and wherever she found such feelings triggered Malicious Marduk had been near. Was this fact now or was she tricked out by her psyche?

On the other hand, she was well familiar with the ‘good fathers’, and the guardian angels, as she called them. ‘Good fathers’ like Professor Slyboots or General Armyless in a future other world.

‘Godfathers’ in fact, so to speak, protecting and supporting her, and taught her many things, and offered shield and shelter when needed. None the least was the Advisor the truest Godfather of them all. A Godfather of the best kind, if she thought it right.

All the more she was confused by the role he played at court, as he was obviously a member of the entourage, while the Emperor – the bumptious ‘Rolandus Imperator Caput Mundi’^{xxxvii} arose no less aversion than the original Roland Waldschmitt, her father. The late journey to Australia with her parents had been just too much.

Billy-Joe had missed Roland Waldschmitt in London anyway, while both had definitely met when Billy-Joe served as a hotel boy. However, does a hotel guest remember the porter – a guest like Roland Waldschmitt? Most likely he didn’t. While the false Professor seemed to know Billy-Joe, or had it been Arundle right away he’d noticed, who sailed in her mate’s wide shade?

Billy-Joe had put off the humiliating experience together with his porter uniform. Well, he wished he'd have done so, while those bad white masters still settled in his brain or soul.

Thus, the two adolescents had met while fighting such negative images which threatened to block the process of growing up, and had become an important mode of mutual appeal - a first trace of attraction, though, - weak, while of negative connotation.

Had someone asked, why they felt attracted, they'd become confused. While they felt bound by the unspeakable, so that their outspoken attractions would have shown almost false and definitely limited.

Yes, it was true, they felt attracted, but what it was, what really mattered, they couldn't tell. They felt limited at once, as soon as they tried. Thinking and talking stopped anyway, as soon as they realized the unspeakable, they knew of each other. - Yes, they knew how much they knew. Still such enumeration meant something - their talents and abilities conjured more than once. The singularities counted less, compared to the likenesses, if they won attention. On the second sight, many things entangled. Be it because of the expressiveness or the characteristics and reactions, or what might turn out to become their mutual weakness - their calculability - at least in their enemies' eyes.

They were without malice; they were unable of malicious attempts. Billy-Joe even more than Arundle, because she was culturally further alienated.

They were easily peered through in any encounter. Such impression they gave, and still lay here their best arrow and was hidden their greatest advantage. A missile, they handled with great virtue by hands of spirit and forces of the soul.

Tibor passed by to pick Tika up, while the other girls listened somewhat fascinated to what was going on between Arundle and Billy-Joe.

The glorious pair employed support from eternal forces, although they didn't understand what happened with them. Thus miracles could occur inside and around them quite naturally, as if it had to be so, while nobody noticed. If there had been anyone able to procure such a comparison, while the wonderful is most wonderful when it seems natural, and nobody notices.

Dorothea called her project ‘Reform of Administration’ but it was more or less and first a cleansing and tidying process. The Administration lacked of competent experts, while the Headmistress and the Vice-Headmaster weren’t capable and didn’t want to be. They never tried to get things in order, and as long as the School was running smoothly, nobody even noticed. There was no filing system whatsoever. Instead, piles of files rested on endless dusty shelves for ages and nobody ever had a look, or had an idea what they contained.

“First of all we need archives and a record office” Dorothea explained and asked for volunteers when the Great Council met for the monthly meeting.

“I do recommend to have this important project be installed overlapping the major subjects, thus, those of us who feel called, get a chance to participate” Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Headmistress, picked up the suggestion – a bit hasty though, as she never shared the call.

“Such archives are the heart and soul of any administration. Shame on me that I didn’t succeed so far. Well, well, too much work, other interests and priorities... In the past this side of the whole project was almost non existent, while teaching and research had highest priority. Yes, I do feel guilty, though. When I took over, things were in a better shape, I must admit. My predecessor on that - chair – ehm (she just recalled that the chair and the chair holder had been abolished, while the chair she was now sitting was an ordinary chair like any other) – that is the person in charge by declamation. It is a juridical necessity by the way to have a person named, I would like to stress. Do not get me wrong. Aspirations of that kind I do reject vehemently.”

Yes, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk employed a new openness complying with the democratic reformation of all school structures, and was far from feeling ridiculous.

“Something else would help further” Dorothea added untouched by the servile sermon of the Headmistress – “if all subject sections could participate and form a team gathering all private collections left behind by former students and generations of scholars that have passed this school many years ago.”

The Vice-Headmaster, Adrian Humperdijk, also made a suggestion: “We teachers recommend jointly to spare a whole week in order to have this project started. I don’t think we have to vote on that.”

Pooty who held the chair again, enjoyed voting. Therefore, he had the assembly vote - “just in case” he gaily announced.

As always, the counting of the many arms and hands was quite an act.

- “Adverse votes” – a few hands rose.

- “Abstentions” Pooty asked, and a few less were shown of those who couldn’t make up their minds. There wasn’t much sense in it anyway.

“The motion has been accepted by thirty adverse votes and fifteen abstentions. I do advise you again that the latter will be automatically added to the pro-votes in this case” Pooty commented the election procedure, which he seemed to dislike, no matter of the tremendous amount of pros he gathered.

“Dorothea, would you be so kind and take over the organisation of the practical part?” asked Marsha still intimidated, who didn’t feel like doing it.

“Yes, of course, dear, I’d love it – at best we begin right away. We need, if I see it right, five project teams. One of each colour as well as an overall section dealing with the treasures of the private sphere - that is mainly the material I discovered in the office. With private treasures, I mean all what was left behind or was handed over to the school by former thankful students – that was my impression anyway of what I’ve read so far.”

For the archives, a new floor was arranged. That alone took several weeks. However, the teams didn’t remain idle while the renovation went on, as their main task was the checking through the material anyway.

The first week was used up for the separation of the colour sections, however, more in a psychological than a physical mode. A task, which turned out not so easy at all.

Perhaps they would have been well advised to be starting with the sorting after the archives were wholly installed. However, the project had been started, and thus, many willing helpers stumbled about the craftsmen, who were in a hurry anyway and had now to switch the tricky phases of the construction work into the early morning and late evening hours when the students were away. The schooling as such had come to a general halt anyway.

Thus, the project blossomed no matter of the setbacks, and gained amiable contours.

Dorothea took care of the dominant section of the former students, and what she and her willing helpers discovered made her heart soon beat high and higher.

Many of those lost interest shares were hidden in the piles and had been left behind by the ex-students either of negligence or

purposely to do the school some good. Others had left reference to bank strongholds and lockers somewhere in the world. Shares, waiting to be picked up by the proprietor or a person with the proper code or key.

The calculation virus caught on Dorothea. More and more piles landed on her desk, containing interest shares or reference of access to their location.

No wonder that the stock market looked so meagre. They would have to spend not a penny, or cent, or centime, or what so ever on a minority share. Reality looked quite different.

The managing School Board spoke of a wonder. Dorothea reckoned and calculated. Scholasticus calculated as well, and to be on the safe side, the main school server was fed with data as well by the project teams.

Each day the local public was nourished with very varying information, still not so far apart in the end. Problems caused the percentage calculations, as the initial dates had to be considered.

The share values differed enormously over the years and decades. A factual analysis of the overall value was therefore impossible. Only as soon as all papers were set in order and compared date wise, a somewhat valid assumption would be possible. This was not likely or probable, as the competing counterpart would certainly not present their shares for comparison. Thus, they had to rely on estimations of the treasure at hand.

“Surely a save cushion for the future, that is, we do have at hand now, while it is too early yet to decide whether we also hold the majority. It’s some kind of neck to neck race, though” Dorothea summed up her report.

How well she had improved! Once more the old wisdom proved valid: ‘Man is growing with his tasks’ that is, in this case of course ‘Woman’s growing with her tasks’ her husband thought full of admiration.

7. The Archives of the Ex-Students

The moon was on the verge these days and Adrian followed the call of his blood as well as Cory, they took off with the swell of the underground torrent on their return home under the shelf.

They left behind the planning for a great feast celebrating the inauguration of the archives. Adrian Humperdijk and Cory Hare even arranged a Pump the Pummel Tournament as soon as they arrived, and met open ears, while the young Democracy beyond the continental shelf also cared for some entertainment.

Those sea-sprites were of eruptive temper, overlade with passion and emotion, and were close to their other relatives of the depth, despite of their intelligence. Thus, those in charge needed a fine feeling dealing with their subjects, and sometimes felt overstrained. After all, they were also only water-bound humans!

Such a Pump the Pummel Match was harmless enough while binding a lot of surplus energy – a balance, everyday life couldn't always offer, as it was as dull and strenuous down there as every day life is everywhere.

A lot of work had to be done, no matter of interest and ambition, or thrill and threatening dangers, as huge octopods lured at the edges of seaweed plantations in the lightless depth of their hiding. Wild sharks allied with runaways and formed murderous killer-shark militias. They knew best how humans functioned, and thus ransacked outposts and solemn hamlets –leaving behind a track of destruction and decay, and could hardly be stopped or controlled.

Things even worsened when the army – the former pride of Melisandria – more or less openly began criticising the new regime. The terror of the shark-militias was even secretly favoured while the army was needed as peacekeeper.

“In former times things like that never happened” people growled in pubs and partisan gatherings in the endangered outskirts, where the raids occurred almost every night somewhere in the hiding of the sepia-blue darkness of the deep-sea.

Boetie's Vegetarian- and Women's Party was in progress, not only as a political movement, but also as a social force of change. More and more people changed sides and started a fleshless existence, and soon began feeling better – much better than before - some converts confirmed. Still they had surplus energy inside, which once had been used for hunting, and had often been a question of death or life.

From Cory Boetie got important tips, because old ancient instincts also attacked the drylanders.

“Beasts they are everywhere. Mankind is made of two halves, and won’t get rid of the dark half for good, however they needn’t let the darkness dominate their whole being. Neither here on dry lands nor down in the sea” Cory summed up her musings on that important theme she also was confronted with.

Adrian’s job was it to care for the reforms down there, while Cory was busy with ad hoc problems her minister friend was confronted with, while the most challenging were the raids by those shark-militias. How could they be stopped?

This was the only question on the agenda the young parliament and the two special guests were musing about during that session.

“The wild surplus energy putting into the service for the community is a high art, such taught us our state philosophers” Adrian just put in. “The idea is to employ evil motions into the service for the good. The lust of danger, the ambition of proving others of the own abilities and dominating them – all the surplus potentials that young men feel inside, have mounted into the service for a good matter, that’s where the theory is striving, and theory have such ideas remained. Still, there is something in it. In the end, such practices fail, because the so-called good matter isn’t all that good. Soon you realize that young men are merciless slaughtered in senseless warfare serving a surplus upper class pretending their own sake as the common sake.”

“This is not the case down here. The danger from the depth is all too real and the raids of the killer-shark militias...” the Minister put in.

“Before we concentrate on the Fourierite model^{xxxviii}, I would like to add another aspect” Cory Hare took the word: “Especially the early settlers and liberators of the young United States employed such model, and managed quite well, at least in the long run. They formed own militias for their settlements. Each man able to defend him - and not seldom women as well - trained the defence, and had their weapons ready at hand. Thus, defence was organised immediately in case of necessity.”

Cory’s remark found broad agreement. Without effort, the mer-folk found themselves represented, and a model that had once been successful might be successful again.

The old guns of the pioneers however didn’t fit the needs down here. For dry powder, you hope down here in vain. However, these were detailed questions, which surely were soon answered. The first step now was to win the mer-folk for the idea of a militia system on a democratic basis.

“I could imagine that such a system fits very well with us and our nature” the Minister ended the debate and referred detailed questions to the subdivisions, and Adrian was surprised with his beloved Pump the Pummel Tournament, the Prime Minister intended to perform as an introductory starter of the measure.

When the two Convertors were back on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, they reported with the monthly conference what was going on at the bottom of the sea, while the question after the state of the calculations came up as soon as they stopped. There was still no final break-through in sight, no matter of the mathematical geniuses amongst them.

As to the one part of the experts, they were approaching the highly longed neck-to-neck race, while voices, that were more sceptical, spoke of a percentage of about thirty, or at best forty percent. Still a remarkable result, and only because someone dared to tackle the homemade chaos.

“Well, in former times there had been no necessity. Who had been interested in such odd themes like money those days?” the Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk defended herself and her mode of running the show. Facts like that were forgotten all too soon.

“Let’s look forward” Adrian took the word – “Yes, shame on me, I commit, and my talents are on other fields. If this is now the new time, then my time is over as Vice-Headmaster. I’m all in favour of a general reform of our hierarchy. The directing School Board should be elected as per the new order, which should be negotiated soon. What is the use of exporting our ideals only? We ourselves have to pick them up, and there is no better time then right now.” Adrian referred to the experiences he and Cory had just had, advising the mer-folk of the proper understanding of democracy.

Marsha looked stunned, or even disturbed. This was not what she had in mind - not so fast anyway and not from this side. Her own husband proposed a vote of confidence – right now, where they just had won some territory back. Besides, he didn’t bespeak of that with her. She felt hit deep inside in the inner marrow, so to speak. Was she not right? Had things been not all different in former times? Everybody should get a chance to adjust to a changing situation.

The events didn’t overrun her alone. The whole School of Inbetween had been caught in that tricky trap. Instead of being praised for the positive change, she was now blamed for her former sloppiness, her so-called irresponsibility, and for overall

mismanagement, and her husband made himself the voice of the accusers and critics.

“Well then, you propose a vote of confidence, I see. You can have it, but before, I would like you to listen to what I have to say” she yelled while her mighty organ vibrated with anger. Then she published her musings, she just had had on her mind, and they showed effect.

When Dorothea – just Dorothea who would surely follow her on the Chairwoman’s chair – spoke in favour of her, the populist revolution was perfect. By acclamation, Marsha was confirmed Commissary Headmistress (what ever this meant). While Dorothea became her Vice and Adrian was set free, ‘and would have time to concentrate in future on his undersea tasks.’ That was surely enough for him; while up here he still had a sound amount of teaching in the School of Inbetween.

This development met in fact his demands, however he felt an itch deep inside. Was he the cheated one? Was he the yokel in an unclean game?

Nobody stood up on his behalf. Nobody asked for his candidature as Vice. Thus, he didn’t get a chance to retire in honesty.

The decision as such was right, no doubt about that. He had imagined an even more radical change of roles, when Marsha had become Vice, and Dorothea the Chair. However, the way it was now was also all right. Marsha stood for tradition and Dorothea for innovation.

When the big day was there, such irritation was forgotten while the new archives were officially introduced and handed over to their purpose. The feast was at its height inside, while the Pump the Pummel test runs for the tournament were going on outside in front of that huge panorama pane down there on the last floor, where the audience now proceeded.

Adrian, familiar with the rules and habits, prepared for commenting as he always did when he got the chance. There was indeed a lot of surplus energy used up, either by the players or by the spectators as well - surrounding the turmoil in the cube in tight clusters.

At last, those boring speeches ended. The final match began and Adrian took over, as reporter and commentator. - Forgotten were the worries and queries. A heavy burden had been taken off his shoulders.

He had carried it far too long, without asking many questions, such hadn't been good for him. Excessive workload and heavy sorrows were bad advisers. He was full of the best wishes for the newly appointed Vice-Headmistress and wished her many good ideas, and a good solid stand, a lucky hand, and the shield and support of a gracious heaven.

Adrian's role as the grey eminence of the mer-folk was extendable, and his being as a Converter he was just revisiting, whether he'd better remained for good in the wet element.

Their latest joint project had been the Time difference, when there had been a huge chronometer installed amidst the sub-sea settlement. As a result the scientists found out about the relativity of Time and the manipulations by the Miseriors. Such research had come to a complete halt. Nobody controlled the metres regularly, some had even be demolished, because nobody asked for the respective data any more. However, the problem was not at all solved. Things like that do not solve them, just like that.

When the war had been going on – the so-called war, because a real war had it never been – the contacts were of course broken off, and might have been even his fault, as he had been the moderator and was up to now the democratic adviser of the young parliament.

Adrian brought himself back to the presence, while the Pump the Pummel Match was on and his obligation was it to report and explain to the laymen audience on this side of the panorama pane, what was going on. The bravest slipped outside either protected by diving suits or naked, equipped only with an oxygen bottle, like Cory, who was in her second element, so to speak.

Doing so was risky in the depth of more then forty feet, and was therefore not allowed officially, but things were in turmoil somehow. Adrian just wanted to ring the alarm bell when Arundle indicated by telepathic means that Cory and Intelleetus were both sound asleep, as they were the divers out there.

“What we see are dream images – might be an interesting idea in general, reckoning what we are seeing anyway. Our panorama pane might opens a virtual sight we are able to infiltrate on our way – well that's just a kind of musing, nothing more...” Arundle added hastily when she met the doubtful gaze of the somewhat impressed reporter, who turned back to the match – a likewise virtual imagination, where elegant bodies were fighting for a piece of matter in foam and steam, however likewise unreal. A dream- and foam-born world for those in the secret, and only those could participate, who were engaged.

Selected representatives of parents and governmental agencies (even UNESCO had sent a representative) had been invited, and therefore the speeches went on some storeys higher. The guests from outside might not have been able to see what was going on outside anyway.

Still, the room was well filled, while you heard nothing of interest from the speakers, but the general phrases for such occasions, fishing for applause. Repeatedly the School's Representatives were assured that the acceptance as World Culture Inheritance was more than likely.

"Don't count your chickens before they are hatched" Scholasticus murmured close to Dorothea's ear, when she shouted for joy. "Don't ridicule yourself old miser, just trust in me!" she replied.

Scholasticus was the leading head of the mathematicians' branch and well familiar with the matter. While only some selected data of their treasure was stunning enough. However, nobody yet had a foreboding of coming evil that was just gathering somewhere over their heads - and the least expected.

The opposing stock-market party had also sent a representative to the big celebration, which had been easy enough. His task was to check the chances for intervention and the location as such. An attack wasn't planned for the same day, of course.

The false Professor had altered his freshly renewed appearance again and slipped into the role of a former student. The identity he adopted was real, while the person had died some years ago, well off and lonesome. His shares had been offered to the School and should be found amongst the piles, which had been sorted and put in order. Even an answering reply from the school the false double held in hand. So nobody became suspicious, not even Dorothea, who checked those candidates applying for a visitor's permit. Thus, the renewed masquerade wasn't meant to affirm likeness but to disguise the Professor, who was well known by Dorothea and her team.

Even the Professor's voice had been altered, while the original was forgotten anyway. An artificial voice adapter had been implanted, and granted an alienating modulation. Such an alteration was of advantage because it could be removed at any time, other than the face, which had been transplanted in an extensive operation, thus Waldschmitt belonged to the past. His character however was the same. This new face was his now and had to be altered by mechanical means only.

Professor Baranasias became Holger Hansen, a praised guest of honour, who was thanked by the managing Representative at best and

in person, while his interest share was about five percent alone, quite a sum in one hand, he never became tired to point out.

Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Commissary Headmistress held a laudatio^{xxxix} on the generous sponsor and thanked him in warm words for his munificence.

In his short reply, the false Holger Hansen asked for permission to have a look at one of the shares with his name on it. "One is enough. I hope to not cause you any inconvenience..." he bade with his old shaky voice, as false as his beard and bald head.

Marsha looked at Dorothea, who shook her head unnoticeable. The request could not be fulfilled right away. "You have to understand that our treasures lie well protected in a safe place. However, we will be pleased to make copies as soon as possible, and send them to you. Be so kind and leave your home address or even better your e-mail address."

Such advice the old gentleman seemed to dislike very much. He mumbled something about modern bullshit and threadbare excuses, however handed his business card to Marsha who accepted it with a winning smile.

"For the mail your will have to wait some two to three weeks, I'm afraid" she said when she saw the address – "Airmail of course", she hastily added when the old man objected harshly, then added "We cannot do otherwise, I'm so sorry!"

She shouldn't have mentioned such details, because the false Holger Hansen concluded that the security holdings still were on the island, and that had been the only reason for his request. He now knew what he wanted to know.

Professor Magic Stone and Professor Magic Bow didn't feel any guilt when being asked what went wrong during their first lesson. While some complaints had stirred up the scene consequently.

The Headmistress wanted to find out whether the joint seminar was a meditation encounter, which they denied right away. "Had been some kind of exchange of thought in the presence of the students, as is customary. The acoustic side had been the problem, and asked for special attention, however acoustic is not to only level of communication, just a welcome accessory, and a telepathic connotation so to speak. After all, we heard - had been a great success. Even more for the first time, nobody was trained yet, you could notice. – Well, except for some old acquaintance, however they don't count",

Professor Bow added after a little pause. Professor Stone could only agree. "From our side there is no need for a change" he went on.

Who ever she asked, she always got a different reply. So she gave in and let things go, while the date was near and the next session was due.

"Those who dislike our seminar are kindly requested to stay away", the Honourables said and Dorothea wholeheartedly agreed. "Let it go, as long as it works, this is best, I assure you" and extracted deeper sense from a shallow pond once more.

Who ever had complaint – there hadn't been many, though, because the Hall was filled again to the last seat.

The time in between had past just like that and almost four weeks were over. First the archives had asked for all their joint attention, and then the big party had to be arranged and celebrated, while other subjects were arbitrary like the basic course 'Get to Know Yourself'.

Therefore, the new Honourables had agreed to a monthly cycle. "What others do in eight hours, we can do in four", they boasted, while their allotment had become stocked up from two to four hours in sequence on that day.

"Go ahead, we agree, such a block is of great and profound help" Professor Stone kicked back the ball.

The organisational chaos of the first hour now showed effect. What ever there was on technical devices functioned well and unspectacularly, thus, no complaints were uttered. No, 'we cannot work here' or the fierce yell for increased volume was heard from the students' side. Perhaps the proper inner state had pushed such unimportant extrovert motions aside.

The Honourables began like ever, talking already while on the way to their desk in the centre. The Magic Bow stuck in the invisible quiver on Billy-Joe's shoulder and the Magic Stone in the Medicine Pouch in front of the boy's chest.

The hall was still humming like an upset beehive. Professor Bow and Professor Stone were happy with their company and conversed freely as they were used, content with the own self and the outer world.

They spoke about all kinds of assumptions wavering about the Isle of Wisdom-tooth these days, as everybody did anyway, whereas the difference might be the perspective. Theirs was the bird's-eye view or something the like, while definitely different from all other views, they ascertained their listeners.

It could well have been the strange way of expressing which made the dialogue so different to others, or was it the not-said, which made the difference and what things were really about.

It was like a talk about the weather, that is - the overall weather conditions of a certain area, while in fact referring to the history of settling of the mentioned area over the last - say - thirty thousand years.

The careless timelessness was stunning and the talk in abbreviations. Time condensed in a tiny instant or blew up and contained the whole world. They cared not about size at all, neither with reference to time nor to volume. Things like that seemed to be of minor importance and didn't claim their attention. It was more the other way round: they focused on the tininess of the Nanoverse^{x1} and the life of the tiny beings inside.

While their pseudo-mathematics was beyond any sound critique, and defied description. No wonder they came across each time they argued about a course or destination, as Arundle and Billy-Joe knew by experience but didn't dare to think of such right here and now, well knowing that the two Honourables were capable of reading thoughts.

Was there anything like a theme showing up? Sometimes it seemed as if something was swaying in on the interest funds. They had been busy with over the last weeks. You could feel as if wild calculations on huge boards with many wings were under way, undertaken by agents invisible to the human eye because of the size.

Dust of chalk whirled about some kind of Einstein-dwarves ruffling their feathers and yelling odd curses, while wiping here and adding there, and didn't come to an end.

The whole set-up was like in a dream, Billy-Joe recalled, while Arundle dived into one of the dusty tinies.

"Don't you forget quibbling", a voice sounded close to her ear and swayed in on the song of the broken Germans, they all could sing, as soon as the public Assman's house came in sight - what ever this meant.

A pale coloured singer club tuned in with crackly voices on the song of the broken Germans: "Ich weiß nicht was soll es bedeuten" ('I don't know what it means') - and couldn't find an end, how could they? Not every question finds an answer. More likely is the other way round. Thus, the Germans made it a canon.

Arundle recognized her father's wide soundtrack she had spotted among thousands. Well known from childhood on and likewise horrible.

“We easily can be envied for all we were saved of.”

Arundle couldn't imagine an infant's life in a wolves' pack, and Billy-Joe had no idea of the shortcomings in an unloving petty-family, under specific circumstances.

8. Dream Windows

Who once got lost in the underground labyrinth of the Isles of Wisdom-tooth would take in future a big ball of red tensile string, while the best sense of orientation failed down here.

Although, such floors and passages were made by nature, when the sea had eaten through the softer layers of the sediments, not caring about vertical or horizontal lines, but followed the inner force, still howling through the devastated, mostly invisible empty halls, and left behind gangways, where even bats couldn't dwell, while the air was breathable after all, although saturated by salty foam and mist.

She just had been a calculating math's genius and was now hurrying, accompanied by Billy-Joe, through the socle searching for invaders. – Such was the official mission, initiated by the invader's alarm. Intention and identity of the invading subjects were known, and that meant the stolen property had to be either confiscated or destroyed.

“Zinfandor is a backslider”, Billy-Joe told her in a meaningful air, she hardly noticed in the twilight. Still she saw what she knew, and Billy-Joe felt likewise.

Arundle's turn was to unroll the thread. The bow's magic eye spent just enough light to have her notice how little she could see. The horrid breath of the sea sounded fierce from afar, and overruled human breathing quite near and also close to the secret treasure chamber, Dorothea's best guarded secret, the hope and the pride of the School of Inbetween. Such knew the false Professor and his mysterious company, who used Zinfandor only to exercise the might she still had over him. He wasn't of much use, though.

“My wonderful sweet might
Set free by a finger's snap
Slowly comes at night
Or in a day's nap.”

The woman twittered of chapped lips. She had to be very careful in her fragile triumph, while love was soaked with hatred, thus endangering life.

Being life forms of the dark - they needed no light to their advantage. They reached the sarcophagus untroubled. Zinfandor got his last chance. Two big packs were hanging down his shoulders, stuffed with piles of coloured papers of immense value.

“The utmost difficulty with such dream images is our ability to differentiate. Don’t you think so?” The lesson of the Honourables had come to a grandiose finish. Out of the plentitude of events, a self-explanatory singular unhidden threat arose, or should they not take for granted what had been exposed?

How could they separate the Time tracks from the levels of reality? Was real, what they just had experienced? Had the robbery happened? Was the secret chamber plundered?

They hadn’t left the seminar in reality, that was certain. However, what did that mean?

In many a case, they had been travelling and fulfilled glorious deeds that way. However, as clear as the dream the past didn’t show, Arundle felt, and Billy-Joe agreed.

“Had been like in the dreamland, I’d say”, he nodded. No matter of their feeling, they had to inform Dorothea right away. She was the only one who knew of the secret site where this sarcophagus was hidden.

They hurried to the office with their suspicion and met there Intellectus who spent his free afternoon with his aunt, waiting for his mother to pick him up, but was late as usual.

“Controlling overrides studying” the witty boy hollered when he learnt of the suspicion.

“She should be here for a while” Aunt Dorothea agreed, thus she was hiding the first threat such news gave her, she couldn’t think of what that meant if this would become true.

However, everything was as it should be. The seven keys shrieked in seven locks. The heavy lid was lifted and swayed open, while coloured paper piles blinked in the beam of the torch.

“There is everything as it was” the Commissary Head Mistress confirmed whose assistance Dorothea bade. - Grisella and Intellectus had joined for solidarity.

Confronting the Magic Bow with such nuisance didn't make sense. Neither Professor Stone nor Professor Bow could see any sense in the situation.

"Should have been empty eventually..."

For once again the lax handling of Time asked for revenge, while the humans were happy with it: if this was future, they might be able to turn it away. Dorothea was decided enough for that – "such future mustn't be in the name of God" she predicted and raised her chin decidedly.

"We bury our treasure elsewhere – simple as that – back to the strong room behind the office" -

"...And have a guide in front, day and night..." Billy-Joe affirmed, supported by the Magic Stone that gave him a friendly knock from inside the Pouch.

"Dreams, my dears" - the Magic Bow chirped - "are magic windows, facing the outer world."

"What is one's dream is the other's reality, my old Shaman already knew", Billy-Joe agreed.

"We must ask Zinfandor, who that woman is" Arundle thoughtfully said.

"Doesn't make sense most likely, we are not able to show him a picture of her. Besides, Zinfandor will probably block off. He doesn't want to be confronted with his gloomy past, I'd say", Billy-Joe replied.

"Well, I did see that woman as clear as I see you now in front of me, although it was dark", Arundle insisted and went on thoughtfully – "however, I didn't see anything, at best I heard the breathing of the sea and the like..."

"Right - in the dream things were not real. We knew already that we saw things, we couldn't really see. After all, it was dark night and we could hardly see our hand before the eyes, but the sarcophagus we saw and we saw Zinfandor with his bags full of piles of coloured papers..." Billy-Joe confirmed.

"It's somewhat strange the seminar our Honourables do offer. Thus, you see the ground of things. We weren't able to stun anymore. Things are taken for granted. That is, if I may say so..." she paused - "honestly, if we told someone outside – he'd call us crazy, while we think this is normal..." Arundle struggled in vain for the right words.

"The procedure is made clear to us. We see, perhaps for the first time, behind the dream scenery, while I think the most thrilling idea is that you look out into another world, while someone's looking over

here at the same time or even more precise - his dream is my reality and my reality is his dream.”

“Yes, and this you have to do imagine multi-dimensional” Billy-Joe picked up the thread. “At the same time an undefined multitude of dreamers from all sorts of worlds dream of as many undefined multitudes of realities at the same time - while another undefined multitude of dreamers gets involved likewise. The functioning of a guardian angel thus probably is established, in which many of us do believe. There, an alter ego^{xli} is dreaming for his I, and embraces it in his very world.”

“...and may visit it once in a while in a dream, just to complete the confusion...” Arundle agreed. “Such has to be clarified once, and therefore the seminar of our two Honourables is helpful – well, it did help me. Others might see it different, could well be...”

“With that much run after...” Billy-Joe put in “I’m sure you are not alone with that, nor am I. We are all the same – whether only here on that island or everywhere is still kind of a question, besides...”

Those coloured paper bundles were put into another bed out of the sarcophagus and into the safe, and a watchmen’s service was arranged around the clock. The strong room was equipped with the most modern alarm installation, and was the latest model just as the safe, which had been delivered only some weeks ago. A fact - those in the secret should have become alarmed right away.

There were guards available for the Convertors’ Island who were idle during the intermission of Conversion. Thus the janitor, who was responsible for them anyway, decided to have them take over the duties in the offices as well. Everything was done this way to protect the precious property.

Another lesson of those fancy dream dancers was on the verge, while some were longing for them already. What would happen this time? Would they dig even deeper into the matter? Was that possible at all?

Arundle was hoping for a confirmation and deepening of her theory of the parallel worlds from the previous session. She somehow figured the interrelation between dream worlds and realities to be the key to the secret of time.

Otherwise, there were no sound results, except that potion, by means of which beings of flesh and blood could be brought back into their time.

Everything else was pure magic, they employed of course, without much thinking.

The Anti Petrification Potion was an invention of the researchers from the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. The apparatus was still available and could be operated at any time.

All their activities were bound backwards intending the normalisation of the flow of time. Still the time began to run away. Whether in far Laptopia or here at home in the depth of the ocean. All their different approaches they had put aside for good reasons. Be it the bionic supplementing technology, able to stop or even reverse the aging process, however transforming a living being into a monstrous passionless ogre.

The worst practice of all that was threatening were those ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converters’, stealing the lifetime of the masses in favour of a small ruling class. A procedure likely to come as the researchers learnt when they got lost in space by accident.

Was such practice to come or was it just threatening as a possibility among others? Had they been to a parallel world, without sound connection to this one?

Thus, it was their magic that made them so attractive for their opponents over here, Arundle concluded her musings. She forgot about of many a special gift being practised in the School of Inbetween, and might be even a better or truer reason for them to be here.

Perhaps things were interrelated and connected unknowingly a wholly different way – not only with her and her friends, but also with all her fellow students.

That way, Arundle hoped to get further and therefore she was looking forward to the upcoming lesson.

It was her Magic Bow, after all, who opened up for them, and began to talk about his discernments, who had been always closed up, no matter how positive their relation otherwise was.

Once again, Arundle felt like at the beginning of something great. No matter how deep her gaze went, no matter how much she experienced and recognized, - she knew that she knew nothing, and that she was not alone with this knowledge. This was most likely her most important discernment.

The suggestive small talk of the Honourables started – uncaring of the chatting and laughing audience, still looking for a somewhat comfortable seat.

Tables and chairs had been replaced by mattresses. Only the desk remained set and couldn't be removed, thus, Billy-Joe was sitting cross-legged on top while Arundle had her legs swing, holding Pooty on her lap, who couldn't stand the tight Pouch.

As guardian of the Magic Stone Pooty was in his element and held the latter tight in his little front paws, while the light emitting from the stone made him transparent as if a gloriole had grown around him. Had he seen himself he'd been very proud.

The Magic Bow was resting in comfort across Billy-Joe's lap. His red eye was sparkling. Energy was pulsating noticeably and also visibly, when a flow of golden arrows shot off unbelievably fast one after one (how else could Billy-Joe have done it?) - and was thereafter blossoming down from the high dome of the great Hall like a mild golden shower.

All who managed to catch an arrow were shining up as well and became shiny incarnated multiplicands of energy of the purest kind. Tender as if snow flakes the golden messengers came down. The bent heads straightened and enthusiasm replaced fear.

The professorial moaning and whispering turned into small talk, while the arrows reached their aims. They spread with it and formed epicentres building circles, which included everybody and expelled none.

The scenery might have reminded an outside visitor of an anthill or even better of a humming beehive – while this was only the beginning. Arundle meant to see another demonstration of her multi-world theory, however out of a different perspective and with another focus, which didn't deal with the interaction of dream- and reality-particles. That much she had understood, while that ridiculous sentence interfered with hypnotic powers. She became affected at once, feeling drawn into an entirely opposite direction, where she was asked to form a negation.

“Why could such not be said with simple words, people are able to understand? What is the meaning of negation?” Billy-Joe asked upset.

However, Arundle didn't mind. “There is a big difference if someone says ‘I know that I know nothing’ or if someone says ‘You know that I know nothing’ or even ‘I know that you know nothing’ – those are three big differences. It won't be done with some golden arrows. Such little energy can easily be sold as a conditioning drug.”

Billy-Joe wasn't sure, who was talking, he only knew that it was not him, and that he wanted to let know Arundle for some pushing reason he couldn't explain. He feared for her dear imperturbability

and didn't want to risk. Such mode seemed him a very necessary protection he vitally required.

He still didn't want to risk her imperturbability, no matter whether due to his fault, because the true conditions were uncovered in a way, even Arundle could accept.

However, he didn't manage to bow over to her, who was not a hand's breadth away and had the legs swing carelessly, thus his heart opened as if one of the golden arrows had hit him right in the middle. All the more he tried to communicate.

At last she realized, whether it was because of his endeavours or because of her inner drive, he couldn't say. Still her attention made him happy, although the words he heard didn't fit to his mood.

"If you tell me, that you know that you know nothing, than I also know, that you know nothing. Therefore I can truly tell you, that I also know, that I know nothing, thus you can say to me that you also know that I know nothing. Yes, we both then know that from each other, and do know about the coquetry, while nobody ever said that sentence, because he was convinced of its truth. Quite the opposite, if someone says - 'I know that I know nothing' - he says in fact that he knows very much, and that he knows in any case more than others, who not even know that they know nothing."

As if he ever had denied such, Billy-Joe wondered. Playing with thoughts it was - nothing else. Arundle took the pose of a school-master and jumped about in a grey waving coat in a cloud of chalk dust in front of a huge board, scribbling hardly readable signs and letters here and there, until she was somewhat satisfied, and put away the tiny piece of chalk that was left - turning to the audience:

"Two bodies are congruent when they match. They are parallel however, when they are alike in their immanent relations. The relation of size plays an immanent role, and if it differs then it has to differ in any way."

Stunned Billy-Joe looked up, stunned and irritated were also others sitting near. For those further away he couldn't say anything, because their mimes were swallowed by the cloud of chalk, still not completely sunken to the ground yet. - ready to blow up again at any time as soon as the teaching being was challenged to deliver new evidence.

"With simple bodies the problem might be irrelevant. More difficult it becomes with more complex bodies with an own interior life. This we will handle later, much later. Today we want to understand the difference between congruence and parallelism, while the theory of parallel world implies a most likely false assumption,

while everybody starts thinking of some kind of doubling and ask himself rightly where this was going to happen. First, we think of a temporal shifting and a special overlapping and don't pay attention how such behave with past and future. Some kind of river is the basic model for this kind of thinking. A river wherein each drop is identical with any other drop floating jointly side by side. Parallelism can refrain from such equal size completely. While here not dimensions but relations count. All measure, angles, figures must relate only in proportion identical, no matter the scale they are based on. Thus two pictures of the same TV programme on differently sized screens relate identical whether the screen is as small as a thumb nail or high up to the ceiling."

"Now I do understand why they favour TV over there in Laptopia" absurdly came to Billy-Joe's mind.

"A whole world is being built up in the solar system" Arundle went on – "with amazing parallels to the oxygen atom. Let's assume a complete parallelism then we would get an entirely different idea of what to understand of parallel worlds."

Signs of disbelief, sounded up: "just absurd..."

"The size alone is the proof..."

"You see now where the limits of mathematics are..."

"Well it's all here on the board" – Arundle pointed to the board, where she had calculated the relations of both sides and came to the same result.

"The relations in the solar system and those in the oxygen atom coincide, as far as mass and measures are concerned, while any other is beyond our limits."

"Even the Earth we can spot in the atom" she added triumphantly.

"The Earth is the electron in the third orbital or is it the fourth already? Well, doesn't matter. Dwellings and inhabitants we couldn't yet discover with our means, neither geographical structure, nor can we escape the time, that's clear, but otherwise! It's amazing, though, isn't it?"

"Such you do learn with the Advisor or is it the close acquaintance with the Magic Bow?" Billy-Joe was thinking, and earned a questioning gaze, which made him to wipe out the negative connotation that slipped in somehow. He didn't want to devaluate the brilliant spiritual performance, no matter where it came from.

9. The Trojan Horse

It was high time to have Penelope involved. After all, the move of the treasure was Zinfandor's fault. Arundle's and Billy-Joe's joint dream during the meditative late session of the two Honourables was taken serious. They didn't skip even the slightest detail and compared what they had experienced step by step. Both didn't know more about that mysterious woman than they had dreamed of her. It took some time and rehearsals with Tibor until Billy-Joe recalled something that might help them further.

"We took that warning very serious, as you can see. Arundle now confirms as well how real that vision was" Dorothea put in. "We went to the secret chamber after you had been visualising the pilferage but couldn't find anything wrong. "Still, we thought it a good idea to have our precious property move" Dorothea went on.

"Yes, therefore, all that trouble, and guarding-system. Our certificates have been stored in the new most modern vault and are guarded around the clock by now. Only when our watchmen are needed on Conversiors' Island, some students take over the guarding", Marsha, the Commissary Headmistress, added to what her Vice-Headmistress just said.

Penelope was somewhat irritated. "Perhaps poor Zinfandor has no knowledge of the trouble he is in – at least I hope so... You cannot doubt such clear visions, and I know that my Zinfandor was involved in sinister circumstances. After all, I picked him up out of the dumps, so to speak. There is still a hell of a lot of work to do. Things are by no means settled yet."

"I'm glad you look at it that way and don't blame us for what ever, dear Penelope. Let's hope our precautions prove unnecessary, and the whole affair turns out to be a hollow bubble. We might have interfered substantially into the gloomy planning already, while special attention seems to be arbitrary..."

"That means special care. All our guests will have to be checked thoroughly, more cautiously than ever. Since that big feast we lost control, I'm afraid" Marsha supplemented Dorothea's remarks.

"I'm going to have a word with Zinfandor, anyway" Penelope said. "Although he closes up as soon as the talk is about his past. He is, but so confused the poor bloke. – I cannot see any danger emitting from his side, thought..." she stopped for an instant – "dangerous he never was..."

“Without him we would have died in the storm or would still be sitting on that rotten island” Arundle confirmed.

Billy-Joe was thoughtfully chewing a tough piece of meat. They were all guests for dinner at the Humperdijks after a strange, somewhat thrilling afternoon with the two Honourables, and were eating with hearty appetite, although Marsha wasn't well known for her abilities as a cook. Adrian liked it raw, anyway. Still all helped themselves considerably – meditation obviously stimulated the appetite.

“I think what I said was not quite correct” Billy-Joe mumbled, still busy chewing the piece of meat – “I have met that mysterious woman of our vision before – at least once. Tibor or Pooty might be able to confirm, what I suspect. When we were searching that London Office-tower for the address on Dorothea's note – we of course didn't believe that the address was genuine and we would meet that Brotherhood of Infernalina right there...”

“Right, if you hadn't been standing in front of that door and dared not ringing, while I did for you...”

“...and there we were standing right in front of that woman...”

“exactly, and this woman could well be the woman I saw down in the labyrinth in my vision... - well, you couldn't actually see, but you could feel somehow...”

Dorothea was nodding reassuringly.

“...And this was the same woman I was corresponding with. I had her even on the phone and on the screen. She introduced herself as Assistant Chairwoman, her name was Säel or Stäel, yes, right – Viola de Stäel was her name.”

“Would you happen to recognize her, you and Tibor and Pooty, and you of course, Arundle?” Dorothea wanted to know.

“Would be worth a trial” Billy-Joe thoughtfully waved his head.

“Something else – Professor Baranasias announced his coming” Dorothea went on. “You know that person who is keeping the majority of School Certificates, that is - he pretends to do so, while things are not so clear any more. He wants to negotiate, and puts us under pressure, I reckon, and he is coming not alone but is accompanied by a woman, while he seems to have separated from his late assistant.

Since we were chosen for that World Cultural Heritage and found loads of School shares, he obviously sees his position weakening. The so-called majority doesn't mean that much any more, and that he seems to realize.”

“Do we let him in?” Arundle asked somewhat rhetorical, as she knew the answer.

With a new face and some internal achievements – thus, a widely mechanical heart was beating in his breast and his sinews and joints in arms and legs consisted of best Titan – the man had become someone else, while he still wasn’t used to his funny new name.

The woman in his company did the cosmetic rejuvenation well. Face and body could compete with a well built slender thirty-years-old, while she still spread that diabolical charm, many men weren’t able to resist.

Thus, she had remained more herself, while Waldschmitt became someone else. Even his voice and the eyes and fingerprints had been altered with great care and artistic ability, while those trials failed which intended to isolate and eliminate his aging gene. Still the result was somewhat satisfactory. No one of his former life would recognize him. His new vita as Canadian Professor with emigrational background stood sound and solid, so he believed.

Quite different things went with Viola de Stäel. That little scene in the London office turned now out as an obstacle. She was no ace in the sleeve any more but a threat to the mission. However, the visitors had no idea of this, when they set foot on the grounds of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Malicious Marduk decided to change masks, because the false Professor ran out of control. Therefore, Marduk had Viola de Stäel renovated and overhauled, and made her his wilful factotum, as such he had her attract the former Waldschmitt alias Baranasias anew. ‘Where hatred is lodging, devotion is not far’ was his sinister allegation.

Waldschmitt couldn’t stand the dismay of the woman beforehand. This had been the main reason for his murderous fantasies and desires, and was the true reason, why he finally fled.

‘Fire must be fought with fire’, Malicious Marduk decided, who disliked Waldschmitt’s (alias Baranasias’) obvious favouring of that island woman, which didn’t fit into his plans he noticed, when things almost went out of control again.

To be on the safe side Malicius Marduk had himself proceed into Viola de Stäel's sinister soul – a site rather strange even for him, who could stand a lot. The new location however, made even him shudder, - although he felt welcome and respected at once.

Malicius Marduk parked the assistant, Rudolfus Catalanius, meanwhile in hospital, where the latter got a complete set of new organs. This time, not his appearance was the reason but his lungs needed replacement for heavy smoking, and so did his liver for heavy drinking, while heart and kidneys were in bad shape as well - surely a strenuous cure and not without risk. Either the body could stand the renewal or not – that would be it, then. The probationer would know soon enough.

The transplantations were a branch of research the Brotherhood of Infernalía had been successfully practicing, and was thus taken over by the orthodox medicine right away and one to one, while such operations had been impossible some years ago. However, thanks to the bionic combination of organic and mechanic devices and spare parts, the surgical operation techniques made a mighty leap ahead. The new ways were spreading immediately around the globe, and everybody who could afford it had his or her interior corrected as to the new standards based on the research results of the Brotherhood of Infernalía.

Viola de Stäel didn't suffer under the guest she was obliged to host inside, nor did she mind the tasks he asked her to perform – quite opposite, she loved it, because such demands were up to her nature.

Thus, the grief in the man's heart melted like snow in the spring sun. Tender cooing and adulating gazes before long caused effect. Soon all sorrows were forgotten and the old passion renewed.

This side of Malicius Marduk's plans worked fine, while a second task had to be fulfilled. Would Baranasias withstand the tempting of the island woman? Soon he would know.

Being PR-manager, Dorothea welcomed the odd guests right at the gangway and helped them through entry formalities and procedures that were specially designed for the purpose - as if the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was some kind of sovereign state.

At length and with care the visitors were informed about their rights and plights while staying on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Almost everything was forbidden, if not explicitly authorized. Without guide they weren't allowed a single step, or leaving or entering buildings.

Walks were prohibited as well as contacts with the students or personnel, and of course no photographing or videoing and the like were permitted.

“I will be always at your service” Dorothea exclaimed with her sweetest voice. “We will take care for you on your short stay as pleasant as possible. Ay...

I now show you to your suite” she went on and rushed ahead towards the black flat building with the shining roof in the sunlight of the bright day.

Two huge leather trolleys rumbled behind, far too big for an overnight stay.

“Here you find everything for your welcome, and if anything is missing, do not refrain from contacting me. Myself or an assistant will be with you right away.

In about an hour I will pick you up for dinner, and bring you in touch with your counterparts. I think, three hours will be enough to answer all your questions and queries. After that you surely will be exhausted and wish to rest. Tomorrow morning I will fetch you at quarter to nine and take you to your aircraft” – thus, she spoke and diminished.

Could Roland, alias Henry, withstand that woman? The staccato of her talk had been all too intense – not even the hidden Marduk had noticed anything remarkable in Baranasias’ behaviour, and the coming hours were able to disperse all objections. When Dorothea ringed an hour later, she looked into after-glowing relaxed faces.

The dinner was taken in a small circle. Few selected Professors of the School of Inbetween were invited, formally dressed and very careful with what they said. For tactical reasons Penelope M’gamba was accompanied by Zinfandor Leblanc.

The sight of his former mistress caused great pain to the man. He couldn’t stand her presence for five minutes, when he was overwhelmed by nausea. He rushed away and with him Penelope, who came back after a while, shaking her head when meeting questioning gazes: “My poor sweetheart won’t be coming back – it’s the summer-cholera spreading all about the island these days. I took him to the infirmary, just to be on the safe side, you never know these days with the infection and all that...”

The assembled exchanged polite formalities, without really saying anything, while the guests of course were eager to get to the point.

Viola de Stäel couldn’t refrain from nasty remarks against her competitor, while the latter paid back in same currency, thus their

combat was running the show, and made Baranasias look clumsy. Only when the desert was served he managed to close in on Scholasticus Slyboots, and managed to worm secrets out of him. However the false Professor didn't come about real news. Nothing, that wasn't known already.

"In matters of the World Cultural Heritage you better see my wife."

"Certainly, I know that. You see, I'm running out of time. We all won't become younger. Therefore I want to frankly admit something of great importance to me. I beg you let me participate in your research. For every year of added lifetime, you will grant to me, you will get back one of your shares. What do you say – is that no fair deal?"

Scholasticus pretended to think deeply. In fact he was wholly stunned and tried to hide. A person who was able to ask such a question, must get his information from somewhere.

No one had yet shown interest in this aspect of their research work. The focus had been on the opposite, they had been searching for measures of getting hold of the fast running time.

How could they comply with such a desire? Scholasticus meant to know the proper way towards that aim, but it was plastered with stones and was leading right into a peculiar wasteland.

"A whole year is by far unreal, you mean perhaps a share a day, that would be somewhat realistic. Who do you think we are? We cannot do wonders..."

"Well, certainly that's why we have to talk..."

"Your surreal ideas prove your complete ignorance, you do have not the faintest idea of what our research can perform", Scholasticus said in an air of supremacy.

"Days and weeks we managed years ago" the false Professor went on – "what do you mean by – no idea – we knew very well what we were doing, but had rudely been outnumbered and cruelly stopped by envious competitors who destroyed us eventually. I think of our sensational mice-experiment. We would be much further and the set up would be suitable by now leading to a firm procedure."

Again, Scholasticus pretended surprise, however, that wasn't necessary, because this was indeed new to him. He hadn't heard of such experiments.

"You and your harmless mice."- he boasted back. "From there the road is sheer endless to the sacred lands. – A beginning it was, but not more. You don't want to compare yourself with a mouse, do you?" Scholasticus asked in a provocative air.

Baranasias alias Waldschmitt cocked up bewildered. Was his counterpart bluffing? Did he let out too much, while talking himself in rage? He had to be careful. They were here for a much different purpose, and that he knew all too well. Thus, he tried to give the conversation another turn – away from such fragile subject.

He mentioned the UNESCO-project, knowing well that his counterpart wasn't interested. Instead he handed him over to his companion, who impressed Scholasticus more than he would admit. Perhaps she was able to get more out of him.

Baranasias turned to the woman at last, who was the PR-manager. Dorothea was steaming with anger because of Viola de Stäel for the provocative behaviour. Arundle hardly managed to keep her under control, and didn't pay attention to that man, who once had been her father, and still was, in a way.

He felt awkward in his daughter's presence and couldn't concentrate on Dorothea, although he would have liked. Fatherly pride arose in him, he pushed however aside for tactical reasons. He and his company had in fact to bridge the time, and use it to become informed of the latest developments, as far as that UNESCO business was concerned. – This brilliant coup of that charming person, he had to admit, while he wondered what his witty daughter had to do among the illustrious circle of Professors.

“May I introduce you to Arundle” a voice was heard from the side. “She is like a daughter to us..., yes, like a natural daughter. We do not have any children of our own unfortunately. All the more we are happy to have Arundle. If her mother agreed we would have adopted her.- Well, it's a bit late now, as she is coming of age soon.

“Yes, a real petite lady is our cute little tomboy meanwhile...” a tender gaze met Arundle, thus, she blushed and smiled back.

Such tunes were new to her. As far as she could remember adoption had never been a subject amongst them. Thus, she thought her part and played her role in that comedy.

“A real bit of a tomboy...” How funny that was, but might serve the purpose and cause old Roland losing countenance. Taking a piece of property away from him, was like snatching the feeding dish away from a hungry Pit-bull, no matter if he cared for her.

Instead of being informed about the UNESCO project, Baranasias alias Waldschmitt learnt what was going on in his former family. Arundle's mother had married again and was dreaming her old dream of a sound family anew, while adoption didn't fit at all into the picture, no matter if Arundle ever came back home.

“Here, there will be always your true home” the former Mrs Waldschmitt wrote and phoned with tears in her eyes.

Arundle liked Dorothea and Scholasticus very much, but not as father and mother. If she had had the choice she would have joined the Hare-family. They were a real family, she’d loved to be adopted by, as sister and daughter likewise.

Furtive gazes at the watch were indicating that the night was on the march. “Tomorrow will be a long day” Adrian Humperdijk said, who had been quiet all evening and so had been his wife, the Commissary Headmistress, who had to rein her temper many times. They had agreed on such arrangement with Dorothea.

The guests were all too willing to follow the signs of departure and retired with Dorothea, who guided them to their suite, not without a formal good-night procedure.

For the last time the careful PR Manager checked on the watchmen in front of the strong room with the activated alarm system, before she retired as well. She was last anyway.

However Dorothea only pretended to go to bed. Behind the vault in the teachers’ lounge there was hidden the secret centre of communication and control. There she went and found Arundle, Scholasticus, and Billy-Joe with Pooty sitting in front of blinking monitors and screens, of many infra-red cameras, which had been installed on each neuralgic point, all about the sarcophagus and the possible paths leading there, well hidden and protected. And to make the disguise perfect, the sarcophagus had been filled with fake copies of those certificates, while the genuine ones were safely located in the new safe.

The time passed by – toilsome the handles of the clock moved upwards. The twelfth hour was near. Those, who were fashionable among the black magicians saw his or her hour now had come.

Dorothea gave Scholasticus a furtive push because he was on the verge of falling asleep. “I think, something is going on” she said pointing with her chin at the monitor in the middle.

The others rushed by. Pooty place himself right in front of the screen. “Get away, we cannot see.” Billy-Joe’s big brown hand grabbed for the witty possum and placed the protesting carefully on his head right into his curly brown hair.

“Is it better that way?” he asked . “...and what’s it like up there?”

Had there been anything on the screen they had all seen it. However there was nothing. Dorothea must have been mistaken. “We

have to keep an eye on each monitor. It might even be better if you returned to your monitor and keep an eye on it, as we concluded.”

Only Pooty remained where he was. Billy-Joe balanced him back to the other end where his monitor was located. “Four eyes see more than two” the little lad yelled – and indeed the next report came from their corner. This time it was no false alarm. Clearly - dark shadows appeared, who were carefully sneaking through the radius of the infra-red camera.

“It’s just like it was in my dream” Arundle whispered, while she stepped to Billy-Joe. “There are the three of them – and now you also recognize them. How did they manage to pick up Zinfandor?”

Then the three had left the screen. The cameras weren’t movable. Deep blackness swallowed the invaders. If they kept pace they soon would appear on the next monitor to the right.. – And there they were! “Holy smoke, they know exactly how to proceed in such darkness” Scholasticus whispered.

“Well, yes”, Dorothea agreed – “They are beings of the darkness after all...”

“Can you take that for granted?” Scholasticus asked.

“Seems so” she answered: “If they go on like this, it won’t take much longer.”

“What shall we do? Shall we initiate invaders’ alarm?” Scholasticus wanted to know.

“My idea is to let them go” Dorothea denied: “We let them go with the falsified papers. They cannot do much harm with them. All certificates are marked on the back as copies.”

“Are you certain, that all certificates have been replaced? Is there no error possible?” Scholasticus had not been involved in the move or the construction work, and he didn’t mean to confuse his wife. He could answer the questions himself. He only caused Dorothea to feel uncertain and uneasy now, and had her rush out of the control centre. She went over to the safe to prove with her own eyes again that she kept the correct papers. That would soon turn out to be a terrible mistake.

For the time being, Dorothea was lucky. “Before tomorrow morning at eight o’clock nothing can happen. The time-lock can’t be opened before. So you have to be patient, but then you can dive in – you know, like Dagobert Duck – ha, ha...” the guard declared and made signs of swimming and diving and couldn’t stop laughing.

Thus, Dorothea missed the raiding of the sarcophagus. She returned when the thieves were on the way back and disappeared from

the last monitor. From there, she knew, they could take the elevator straight up to the guest house and their suite.

That night neither Dorothea nor Scholasticus closed an eye. Could she dare to let the thieves go with their prey? Could they do harm with it while here? Was the idea of making copies perhaps wrong?

Dorothea repented of not having involved a reliable expert, because there was no such person on the island. She was no expert either, although she knew a lot by now.

How many papers had they copied? Vaguely Dorothea remembered that question about the dates of first delivery, that had been an argument with that former student who wanted to see his shares.

When she negated, the man had become quite upset. She had considered his attempt as a trial of getting access to the vault.

What, if something else was behind? Something worth the risk of a robbery? Even then she had been careful and suspicious. What was the matter with such delivery dates the former student was interested in? Perhaps even the knowledge was some kind of value alone.

While copying nobody cared of such details. The students doing the job didn't mind what they copied.

Were these dates in the end precious as such?

"No, Scholasticus, we won't let them go with their prey tomorrow. This snake is not hissing me into the face sarcastically once more, - not me..." she brought her musings to the point.

At best she had rushed right into the suite. However, it was deep night. She had to wait until the daybreak in a couple of hours. - "Alas, nothing though... In the end they are gone for good by tomorrow morning, when I'm standing in front of their door. We must catch them in flagrant, - and you., Scholasticus, are coming with me."

"What do you mean, who's coming?" he murmured half asleep.

"You, of course - who else. Rely just for once on my feeling."

In front of the strong room the changing of the guards took place, thus there was enough personnel. Dorothea advised the watchmen briefly what she intended to do, and the headman ordered his troop towards the guesthouse to take care of the doors and windows. Then a special team invaded the premise, and found the thieves sound asleep, while the sacks with the prey were stuffed under the beds.

The couple remained safeguarded until the morning, while the sacks were taken away. Penelope would have to have a serious word with Zinfandor, the Slyboots decided.

As soon as the helicopter landed the thieves were deported, not really handcuffed but carefully guided by the guards. For protection of the aircrew a watchman accompanied the flight. No information was yet laid against the couple, as this had caused a lot of paperwork and other trouble. No damage was caused anyway, thanks to the future-directed way of dreaming during the recent seminar of the two Honourables.

That same day Dorothea began to investigate what it was all about such delivery dates. However, she couldn't find anything appropriate in the Internet.

Then she examined the certificates carefully and prudently, as soon as the time-lock allowed it. She was sitting like Dagobert Duck amidst the piles of coloured papers in that small strong-room behind a tiny table right in the middle with the necessary equipment like magnifier and pocket-lens. There she sat checking the bills and compared the originals with the faked, she had taken with her, to find out. Had there not been the print-on on the reverse, she'd hardly noticed any difference.

Was that the answer to the quest? If you managed to multiply the reverse of the original and glue them together with the faked fronts, you'd come to an acceptable duplicate, nobody would spot right away. You would need an expert to find out about the doubled thickness. This was very unlikely because those papers experienced considerable changes over the years of printing.

Only those who knew exactly at what time a specific paper was used could notice the falsification, but who was able nowadays? Even the deletion of the print-on would do, as nobody cared of the reverse as long as the front showed everything you expected. Even experts wouldn't be able to tell, which print-on had been due in a certain period.

In the aftermath Dorothea thanked her instinct, for the precautions taken. Otherwise the market would be spoilt with such falsifications, and soon the originators would be spotted.

At lunch she told Scholasticus her conclusions and was highly praised. "Looks like the handwriting of Malicius Marduk, the guy with the thousand masks. He is well known for his macabre confusions. I'm afraid, we aren't yet rid of him. Thanks to you we might have spotted him once more. Perhaps we even manage to get hold of him. – Well, in fact, I am not optimistic, however, we will do everything we can to push him back to where he belongs. Let us hope and pray that the price we have to pay is not insurmountably high." Scholasticus referred to Walter's tragic fate.

Malicious Marduk could feel those gates, there were at least four – weaker the ones, stronger the others – not really inviting, but without strong protection. He decided to take his time. The flight attendant was part of the plan. The closer the connection, the easier the transaction. Unnoticed transitions were the safest.

Sudden raids often led to bad results, caused sickness or death, and nobody took advantage. The most convenient transition was when he was welcomed, when he felt invited as a guest. When he was regarded as a present and gift by stressing on available characteristics. The louder the voice of the conscience cried, the more the lost soul screamed, the more difficult the stay became.

Malicious Marduk looked back on a long trail of seductions, and thus, the watchman Will Wiesle became his latest victim, who had been commanded on board of the helicopter in order to guide the deported couple back to the mainland. Had he slept like his comrades, a bad fate had been avoided. However, nobody knew, and that was bad luck. His bad characteristics would perhaps never show up. Like in most people good and evil balanced more or less.

Viola de Stäel felt uneasy. Something precious was taken from her. However, such motion passed – nothing real had changed. Everything was as before – perhaps a little weaker, though, but that could well have to do with the misfortune, they had to overcome.

They well had escaped right away, however passion overwhelmed them after the successful coup, and afterwards they fell asleep.

Watchman Will Wiesle used the opportunity while being in Sydney for visit to his former wife, who was married again. He did so pretending to see his children, which was his right. He was allowed one afternoon per month spending with them.

The children were at school and the new husband at work, thus, he met his former wife alone. He was not allowed to do so, because his former wife was afraid of him and had divorced for being spanked regularly.

Repentance overcame him only afterwards, when it was too late - each time. One word gave the other and before long he was clubbing the poor woman again. Lucky though, a neighbour overheard the attack and called the police. The fierce man was arrested.

That was the reason why watchman Will Wiesle spent his four days off in prison instead of taking leave as had intended.

Lucky him, the assault didn't expand, thus, he managed to be back in time for service, and was right away ordered to Conversiors' Island, because the moon eclipse was on the verge again.

This way, Malicius Marduk managed to enter the life on the islands somewhat organic. Will Wiesle was well known for his excessive behaviour and was employed on a rectification basis only. His violent nature was substituted by a somewhat harmless, well-natured mood, and made him suitable for social behaviour. It could well be that his former wife had been the wrong character, and he would have become happy with another woman.

Unfortunately the service on the faraway island reduced the possibilities to a great extent. Among the personnel there were very few unmarried women in the proper age, and students were taboo anyway. The watchmen weren't even allowed to look at them.

Will Wiesle's hot-headed temper didn't suit Malicius Marduk, but endangered the operation he intended. The mean monster had to work on that and used the upcoming quiet days on Conversiors' Island to do so.

In a time-lapse process he had to show Watchman Will Wiesle the ways of lunacy and the fun of sly malice, to make him gain more satisfaction in what he was destroying.

Otherwise, he was very satisfied with the manoeuvre as such. Despite considerable rejections and slash backs he finally made his way into the stronghold of the enemy. As long as he could operate undisguised, he would achieve a lot – either by collecting information or by confusing the prevailing harmony. He might even be able to pull the whole project over to the dark side of existence.

However, he was missing his army of Miseriors badly. Being all alone on the scene, limited his chances considerably, he had to admit.

There was some likeliness between the good and the evil side of the world. The evil side dreamt as well and wished and hoped and longed. However, it is the opposite of what the good side's intending, while the intensity was the same.

And thus it does happen that beings wake up on the wrong side. And because the power of the good side is finally stronger, it happens to the evil more often. As much as the evil spirits try to improve the evil, they have to consider more than once that they achieved the opposite of what they intended.

While Malicius Marduk concentrated on his task, he didn't realize how his host became penetrated. Amidst the fountain of love no space was left for hatred. Thus, Malicius Marduk himself felt threatened in his existence. His march of triumph inside the Trojan Horse could easily become a trap.

The flames of passion under Marduk's influence diminished with the defeat. The thieves both lost their face in combat with those islanders, - the representatives of the School of Inbetween. They had been too greedy and had felt too sure, while a strange tooth gnawed at them almost like a vampire's, and made them feeble and vulnerable.

In vain Baranasias tried to beat that ugly weakness, coming over him in the oddest circumstances, while Viola de Stäel mourned about that feeling of awareness and strength, she had felt on the way to the island, and missed so badly on the way back.

10. The Advisor descends

"It's gonna start all over again" Adrian complaint. The boat with the Conversiors disappeared in the mist of the dawn. No waving and hollering could alter such fact. The crew or the passengers either didn't want to notice them or they couldn't for whatever reason. To Cory such behaviour appeared somewhat strange. Things like that hadn't happened for a good while.

Adrian and Cory had left Australis in time, and proceeded without delay back to Conversiors' Island. They knew the gap of time by now. Adrian claimed to be able to spot the difference up to the second. For that reason he had acquired a waterproof chronometer he was wearing around his neck like a protective amulet.

Their re-conversion should never hit him in surprise, and hadn't done, so far. This time it had been the other way round, they had been too early. Therefore they did a round around the island, and had a look into those caves, where the refugees had fled from those shark-squadrons. By now you couldn't imagine things like that to happen, but had been real just about one or two years ago.

What could be done? On foot the two reconverted Conversiors made their way towards the nearest outpost, hoping to find a means of communication there to contact the main base.

The guards had left with the Conversiors, Adrian knew for sure, while they left behind their equipment.

They found indeed a fully equipped rescue station, with everything you could think of, for people in distress. Even a safety raft they found, inflatable and all around protected against the cruel waves of the storm stricken seas.

The sea however, wasn't storm stricken at all, but wavered in gentle waves towards the sandy beach, where they rolled the white ton in order to gain the deeper water. Inflated the raft was soon, but then they noticed that there was no mode of motive power. They could drift with the waves but couldn't direct towards an aim.

"Thus, we could as well remain, where we are" Cory agreed, when Adrian explained the situation. They had spent the whole day, they realized, when the sun settled in the far west. Down here in the South the night came fast on velvet paws so to speak, as soon as the sun sank into the ocean.

"Tomorrow morning we think about something else, if we aren't missed by then" Adrian said.

"We should be missed already by now" Cory Hare answered pitifully. Adrian tried to comfort her and cheer her up. "The best would be if we didn't think about it. It's like it is, after all."

Before they settled in the beds of the guards, Adrian shot some rockets up in the air, when it was completely dark outside.

A few of the many who were having their evening walk over there, might see the signals and act appropriate. As everybody knew that there was no one allowed on Conversiors Island as soon as the period was over.

The two stranded had the emergency packs, they found, for supper then tried to sleep. They were still feeling strain of the last days. It was quite a trip each time still, despite of their deep devotion towards sea and submarine life.

Adrian lit an open fire in front of the gate, to show the rescue team the proper way, just in case. No wild animals were there anymore. Only some seabirds bred in the rocks near the seaside.

Past midnight they woke up by voices. There they were – their rescuers. Flory had alarmed Arundle when her sister didn't come home, and Arundle negotiated with her Magic Bow, who consulted the Magic Stone. For a magic rescue – (yes, the Magic Bow knew at once what all was about!) – the distance was far too short.

Adrian and Cory were well, therefore the rescue team could take its time, and Billy-Joe and Tibor decided to take the boat.

No hour later the absentees reported what they experienced. Nobody could explain how this could have happened.

“Those guards know the amount of Conversors and check before departure” the Headmistress explained. However, she had expected her husband by accident a day later, she admitted subdued.

“Basically such a mistake is always possible. Well, we are going to inquire the personnel and have them instructed again. Who doesn’t stagger exhausted out of the bush, doesn’t seem to exist. While there are by now sometimes even three getting off the deep sea.”

“We are just too modest” Adrian confirmed what Arundle said on behalf of the sea dwellers.

“Things turned out fine at last” Cory put in. “Nothing really happened, after all. It was just the sudden shock, when we were all alone like on Robinson’s Island...”

“Bedtime’s due” Professor Stone made himself heard. He had the four-hours block seminar on the next day in mind. When he was going to lecture with his dear colleague Professor Bow. He eventually would interfere into the affairs of human beings, which was not his general intention. However, this time he had a special reason. His advice was meant for the Somniors and to a certain extend also for the Animations still sitting in the round, as they would soon experience a glimpse of what was going to happen, but therefore they had to sleep.

Only a few had had an encounter with the Advisor. That is, they might have experienced him but didn’t take notice, because the Advisor was of meek appearance, little more but a vague shadow most of the time.

Not all had Arundle’s empathy for the substantial. Thus, such a shadow could well pass by unnoticed.

“The Advisor is near” was the message Arundle understood. As far as she remembered, had she never met him on earth, not on the present earth anyway. Therefore, his visit was something very special, all the more because of the preliminary announcement by the Magic Stone.

Once upon a time, Cory and Flory met Arundle in a dream and thus became acquainted not only with each other, but with the secrets of dreaming as such. However, now the sleep was fleeing them, most likely because of the dramatic whereabouts and happenings. Arundle only faded away in the morning hours and fell into a dreamless deep sleep. However, in the deepest phase an odd little dream cocked up.

She was dreaming that she dreamed. She dreamed in the dream of a voice – a voice she recognized as the Advisor's. The words she heard, however, didn't make sense – still they were accompanied by extraordinary meaning.

Her friends, the sisters Hare experienced a similar dream attack, she learned at a late breakfast in the dining room the next morning. They had also been confronted with such a strange voice.

“If this was a preliminary announcement, then we can expect quite something today” Arundle said and the sisters agreed eagerly.

They had skipped the lessons that morning so far and decided to do the same with the rest of the morning, which wasn't the way they usually acted, and get prepared for the afternoon. Thus, they sneaked to their favourite beach and swam out to their pontoon, and had the sun shine on them.

When they returned for lunch, Tibor caught up on them: “You have been searched all over the place, especially you, Cory. I think it's about yesterday. They need your testimony.”

Conscious of her guilt Cory rushed towards the Headmistress's Office, where the whole gang of watchmen was assembled to have their testimonies recorded. “We need your statement as well, perhaps next door with the secretary, then you needed wait” Dorothea suggested and pointed at the door.

Cory's statement was of minor importance. She confirmed in her own words what had been said by Adrian already. Nobody expected anything else of her. If there had been designs upon the incident, they would surely not find out by such an inquiry. However, thus were the regulations.

Cory noticed that it was high time for the block seminar. She rushed towards the lecture hall and arrived just in time, when the two Honourables settled on the centre desk. There was no chance to get there as well. The students were sitting tightly packed, and she had felt bad, if she had tried to make her way up front.

From afar she noticed her sister's face next to Tibor, Patagonia and Tika, as well as little Sandor and Tuzla, the new inseparable couple.

The Honourable Professor Bow was resting comfortably on Arundle's lap, while Pooty looked out of the Medicine Pouch the other Honourable presenting in his little paws, who was shining widely.

“Before we can start” Billy-Joe announced: “Where is Corinia Hare? We ask Cory Hare – if she is present already – to show up and report to the desk immediately.”

“She might be still in the Headmistress’s Office for her testimony” her sister Flory stated, while Arundle nodded affirmatively.

Cory waved fiercely and was handed over the heads of the crowd, with hallo and ado – thus it was easiest.

“Now we can start.” The Sublimations circled the pedestal and started circling light-footed. A few instants later they lifted up to the ceiling, and moved shrieking and yelling – as a green cloud over the heads - through the lecture hall.

Their joy inflamed the left-behinds and had them participate empathically, joining in with their voices, while many felt the itch in the legs but couldn’t do. They had the fever in the blood unnoticed, waiting for the break out, which might come one day or never would. Not each gift became alive, but was oppressed instead, for whatever reason.

When the green whirl lowered to the ground, the Advisor stepped – somewhat dramatic –out of the circle, came to a halt right above the pedestal, and bowed. Arundle recognized him at once. He introduced himself in a low, but still far-reaching voice.

“It’s a great honour to be here” he said “I appreciate the hearty welcome and am willing to handle your problems, however, questions I cannot answer, at best can ask them. Such are the regulations. I have not made them.

My experience taught me that this arrangement is not only useful but also appropriate. Do not imagine the Almighty questionable. Better do not form yourself a picture of him or her.

If everything is possible, then everything is also impossible – that is clear, isn’t it? Well, take it as a challenge and prepare your first philosophical discourse. Let’s call it ‘The Prize Question of the Honourable Academy of Sciences of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth’ – sure enough with reference to the most famous one a couple of hundred years ago^{xliii},” he said, and disappeared laughing in the dark ceiling above.

“That’s him, that is the old Advisor” Arundle exclaimed somewhat disappointed again. She knew of such behaviour. Whenever you felt like questioning the hard way, he disappeared.

“Keep that title in mind, take it as a kind of revelation, though” Arundle said in an air of importance, she knew why.

“Can someone write that title on the board eventually?”

“The Advisor said – no questions...”

“I only asked because I ...”

“Those who feel overcharged by the matter, I suggest some meditation. It’s never any harm, though. Have it incorporated into your every-day-life. It’s good for the blood circulation, strengthens heart and kidneys, and the brain anyway...”

Professor Stone presented himself conciliated and open minded as never before in the seminar, intimidated by the illustrious guest. The title might be better recalled that way, while philosophy was lost without proper questioning.

“Well then, get to work, don’t hesitate and don’t delay. A surprise had been promised, a surprise you have got.”

“Surprise you call it, we call it disappointment” some growled. Not all of them were gifted with a nimble quill.

Paper was distributed and time was granted. The two Honourables kept almost quiet for the rest of the session, and before long most students started scribbling. The meditative atmosphere helped a lot, reduced frustration and stimulated an air of eternity somehow stretching with gentle fingertips at those in peace and joyous rest.

One option was to imagine which way the Advisor took. Somewhere, way beyond the furthest depth of the universe – that is – the poly-verse to be more precise, he came to them. He didn’t miss that tiny grain of sand the earth was – so tiny that you couldn’t meet eventually. He had hit even once more on it, when he approached the Southern hemisphere.

He met the grain of sand in the grain of sand – that is – the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, guided by the green whirl risen to welcome him, in order to sway in and have his gentle suggestions delivered, he was good for.

Help for self-help he called his mostly frustrating programme. While he enjoyed sudden departures, like this time again. He wasn’t really after results, however that ‘Eureka’ and stunned ‘Alas’, generally following the overcoming, pleased his wide heart and raised his fathomless soul. That was him outcome enough.

“Well, well those dimensions – the overstressed grain of sand. Everybody is using such metaphor. What does it really mean?”

The keywords have been said already:

“Turn up your spirit – and look outside
Into the everlasting starry space so wide.

Deeper that is - more than the deepest eyes provide,
 And wider much than to the widest heart's delight,
 While being brighter than the brightest brain is bright,
 And longing more than any soul's yearning ignite."

If our solar system were no solar system, but an oxygen atom or a fluorine atom – (you can argue about the number of planets and moons, though^{xliii}). On the other hand, nobody knows the true orbits of the electrons, so much depends on: - our lives and everything physical.'

'Don't you forget the discourse and the question to be somehow reflected:

If everything is possible, then everything is also impossible.

Good-by for now, Adios, Adieu, God bless you...'

The investigation of the incident on Conversiors' Island ended up no-where. Watchdog Will Wiesle enjoyed his prank even more so as nobody suspected him. He was still testing his chances. He could trust the inner voice, he now knew.

The latter asked him to engage and be willing wherever demanded. No time was too awkward, no duty too much. There was no time for holidays anymore. Since his fiasco in Sydney he was fed up with the city, including his former family and wife. Spare time only seduced him and led him astray. He knew his strange desires.

Thus, he enjoyed serving his inner master, who guided him so successfully, and warned him in time. His inner master also directed his thoughts and tamed his rough temperament – steering it into no less evil tracks, however, they were much wittier and more intelligent than everything he ever could think of on his own.

The prank on Conversiors' Island was just a beginning. This was the lane he got closer to the aims he could feel inside. Soon he was in charge of the guards in front of the strong-room. However, not even he knew the code to the system and wasn't entitled to enter either.

Dorothea had safe-guarded those stolen sacks. Nobody cared for returning them to the sarcophagus, which was regarded as unsafe since that thievish couple had pilfered it. All the more, because Zinfandor had most likely been involved, although he claimed, he couldn't remember.

Penelope M'gamba confirmed his testimony. "That night in question Zinfandor didn't leave his bed. I just cannot understand how

my dear sweetheart managed to become an object of investigation again. When ever they feel like it, they jump on him. You all did noticed, how sick he was, before he finally fell asleep. I can testify.”

Of course she also knew that he could have got up again, when she had left for the banquet again sneaking away in high speed in order to get to that far tunnel, he most likely had no knowledge of. – All that was in fact very unlikely.

Anyway, the sacks with those faked papers were resting in the office, until Dorothea locked them up at last. Thus Will Wiesle could use his new talents not only to search the sacks but to reduce the contents by a third, replacing it with other void papers, he managed to stuff to the bottom.

It was very unlikely that someone would check those sacks down to the ground. And even if this happened, nobody would suspect him. First, those students, who had made the copies, would be charged, for not having done a proper job.

Without doubt, meditation had an important advantage. Many participants became somewhat synchronized, and started off from the same level when dealing with a certain problem.

Much different that was with the discourse question, which was in fact not even a real question – while most had already forgotten – or were unable to get the words in proper sequence. Did that read likewise: “If nothing is impossible, than everything is possible?” or “Everything is possible and nothing is impossible?”

“You are not allowed to alter the title” Arundle meant to recall the shrill voice of the Advisor: “...and the title reads after all: ‘**If everything is possible, then everything is also impossible.**’ – You are strongly advised to have such a causality settle in your mind, before you start arguing with nothingness” the Advisor nodded and was due to disappear once more. This time into a separated oxygen atom of a drop of water.

“I only show you this, to have my disappearing not becoming a cause for arguments” he laughed and Arundle had the strong feeling that he was laughing at her.

“Nothing is, where nobody is well versed. My good advice: Forget about nothing.”

While he said that, he definitely disappeared in his oxygen atom, and nothing was left visibly but a drop of water falling, which sang with a lovely voice:

“All in one, and one in all
is the Advisor’s invincible fall...”

when it bumped through the silk skin of a wobbly surface with a noticeable splash, and got lost in an ocean of other drops – where it would have been lost if the Advisor hadn’t been visiting the third electron called Earth, were he was embraced by the green circle of yelling Sublimations dancing in the air above the desk in the lecture hall of the School of Inbetween on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, somewhere in the Southern hemisphere.

Thus, the non-interchangeable electron in its non-interchangeable reference-grid, which was made noticeable by the visit of the Advisor, and was somewhat evaluated by such fact, while such system would be granted also without the special attention. It was just a visit, not more.

“In the inside watches work different, that’s hard to stand”, a voice said unheard by those in the far, wide space outside. And those inside, who heard the voice, didn’t understand, because they knew little. It might be so, that they were just about to get a vague idea, though.

11. ‘A Certain Something’

Watchdog Will Wiesle noticed that it was more difficult to get the certificates off the island than to steal them. Already the storage caused considerable difficulties. He couldn’t just push the piles of paper under his bed, as he had thought, because the cleaner came every morning for cleaning and did a good job.

Thus, Will Wiesle packed his prey into water-proof plastic bags and buried them near the hangar on neutral grounds. Who should find them there? As long as nobody missed the papers, nobody would search for them.

He arranged for a little garden there and got permission right away. Thus he could dig as he pleased.

On the other hand you could never be sure that one of the witty little-ones (mostly the girls) passed by in their dreams or sent a no less curious soul. And it was quite likely that somebody had seen him

digging, without becoming suspicious, though. While such suspicion could well come up in the aftermath. The tiniest mistake could suffice.

Watchdog Will Wiesle had to get his theft off the island, that was as clear as daylight. Firstly those certificates were needed to raise confusion, and secondly he ran the risk of losing his camouflage, and thirdly the papers were of no use on the island, while they earned money on the stock market over there on the mainland.

There was but one solution – he had to find a good reason for regular flights to the mainland and for writing letters in between, as he had done in former times when he had been living together with his family.

And if he fell in love again? He then would have good reasons for writing letters and take leave for the mainland as well.

As there was a diabolical guest sitting in his interior, he had no choice anyway. Will Wiesle was turned over to the fangs of Viola de Stäel. This seemed the best solution – practicable and convenient in one, because Viola de Stäel was in command of the attributes of a perfect seductress.

The limited watchdog was in any way inferior. Such a poor figure she would have ignored under other circumstances. However, Malicious Marduk held the strings and guided the steps of the two puppets in his hands. They met and fell in passion at once. - Here it was again – that ‘certain something’ the woman could not explain but scented at once when a man had it.

Viola de Stäel had returned to her old practice and had installed a little sex-studio here in Sydney, where she could obey to her motions undisturbed. It was well designed for the upcoming liaison with the watchdog.

Soon the stock market was flooded by falsified certificates. In the beginning the man in love wrote almost daily and enclosed each time a coloured slip of paper. It was his personal mark, so to speak. Sporadic checks were still made in the beginning, but were given up soon.

There were more effective ways of passing on information via Internet platforms and secret servers.

Even the passport and customs control relaxed the more often Will Wiesle travelled. He did the trip at least once a month whenever he had spared a couple of days, which was easy, when serving on Conversors’ Island, because the workdays had sixteen hours over there.

Digging for the certificates behind the hangar was difficult only before he asked for his gardening project right there.

After some months thus, the whole lot of faked certificates were transferred. They were carefully prepared and freed from the print-on on the reverse side. After that they were ready for Professor Baranasias, who fouled the stock market with them.

Dorothea was checking the trade daily and noticed the movements of course. But it was too late already. She purchased all offered papers, regardless of their quality, thus, they increased in value considerably, and found their way back to the island. However, instead of being buried behind the hangar, they were stored in the strong-room, where they innocently mixed with genuine certificates.

The thicker the pile was growing, Dorothea meant to rightly store, the happier she became. Not even in a dream she thought of becoming the victim of a tricky dirty deal. While she could well have doubted where those new stocks came from, seemingly rising from no-where all of a sudden.

She didn't stop purchasing when she ran out of money. The money was spent for a good purpose. She would soon be able to acquire new funds on a worldwide acquisition tour – at least she hoped.

Who was lacking the “Certain Something” or lost it while in close encounter with Viola de Stäel, got a kick in the ass. Henry Baranasias alias Roland Waldschmitt had had to notice that twice. Whatever the ‘Certain Something’ was, you could feel it, and you could also feel, as soon as it was missing.

Poor Watchdog Will Wiesle didn't know what happened to him. It was as if someone had turned off the light and left him alone in an empty dark room.

His duty was fulfilled. He had no chance of getting hold of more certificates. Thus, Malicius Marduk left him during one of his visits in Mme de Stäel's studio, when the former assistant showed up, who had just recovered from a number of operations.

Freshly renovated and full of energy he presented himself as a suitable candidate. Thus, Malicius Marduk took hide in the assistant's sinister soul and made the latter show at once that ‘Certain Something’, while Will Wiesle lost it.

The abandoned watchdog became depressive and fell back into the stupid behaviour of former days. He was arrested soon by the

police. The Vice Headmistress of the School of Inbetween took great effort to get him free, and managed finally by promising of keeping him away from the city and his former family.

Watchdog Will Wiesle had indeed caused great harm and damage, more than he could pay with one year's income. Thus, he thankfully accepted the help. He was even so thankful to admit the theft and smuggling of the faked certificates.

Dorothea found it very difficult to separate the chaff from the wheat, because both looked alike, in her case, and could only be differentiated by the different storing, which made things not easy. Finally Dorothea came about an indicator and that was the date of first delivery. The false papers were all printed with the same date. Thus, she had a second criterion.

The stock exchange market got nervous – that Professor Baranasias stirred up the scene, with sinister accusations and secret hints to the press. The School of Inbetween was again in danger of losing its reputation, when it became obvious that the faked certificates originated right there. The thief and smuggler was upgraded in the aftermath and was presented as the School's official messenger.

It was great luck for the school that the repentant sinner made a clean breast to the case. Only devotional love had seduced him, he confessed, but was still not willing to charge the seductress.

The financial effect was enormous, but otherwise no further harm arose from the transactions, and Dorothea started for a new acquisition tour to Europe and the USA. This time she made even more and trickier reference to the outstanding research work that was going on. She thus involuntarily entered a rather similar sphere than had done the former Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalialia, who stranded as a consequence.

The course of the School's papers consolidated regardless of the dangers. There was money enough again, but the expectations also increased considerably. Scholasticus was upset of having let his wife go, instead of going with her. After all, he had old connections which seemed more serious and more integer than the new ones his wife brought back from her tour.

The world was now looking full of more or less reliable and serious expectations on the little island down in the Southern hemisphere, where marvels occurred and the search for the lost time led to discernments of the extraordinary kind.

Malicious Marduk was frolicking clandestinely and had a good time in the sinister soul of his roundabout renewed former assistant. As long as the system of exploitation prevailed and was taken over by the new world currency, he was on the right course.

Things didn't look too bad, though. It all was a question of time. The paradigm change would come sooner or later. The new principal could be seen on the horizon of world history, while only the least had yet understood.

Would the new system come as an instrument of liberation or oppression? That was the most challenging question for Malicious Marduk, he wanted to have answered in his sense.

The new greed had to be stirred up even further that was spreading already. Only if the greed for life increased insurmountably, there would be enough people willing to install a renewed system of cheat and theft, and murder.

His considerations were simple after all. Time was a limited resource and who ever managed to invent or discover a storage system for the time would make it.

Before the time could be stored however, it had to be collected and discharged from the mass of people, who were bound for a shortened life. While those who could afford it, were guaranteed unending life. The conflict of the classes was thus pre-programmed and would come along with chaos, destruction, war and misery as ever. And that was in the sense of Malicious Marduk.

The research work on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth fitted into this picture and didn't fit at the same time, because here a different perspective of the problem showed up. The approach focussed on several indices and based on the plentitude of time. Not shortage of time but surplus was its credo ever since.

Only a misbegotten life made people step out of the flow of time beforehand, and have them crash on the shores of death. While this is no necessary evil, but can be overcome.

Still, Malicious Marduk saw his chance even in such an opposing approach. If he managed to push such research hard enough, and have the masses become separated at the same time, he would get closer to the aim of a general injustice and the renewed triumph of the evil.

When the repentant Watchdog Will Wiesle had confessed, he was a little better. However, deep inside he still felt the pain in his love-forsaken heart, while the routine of the duty and the comrades as well

as the friendly atmosphere on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth gave him support and soothed his grief.

He was not allowed to approach the students. Only when they addressed to him he could answer, and that they did - well knowing about the matters of his heart and how awful he had been cheated. So it happened that he even made friends with some.

Pooty was free in this respect to do what he liked and told the poor fellow of Walter's fate. He arranged a more general meeting with Billy-Joe and Tibor, who were all in favour of the deprived and the cheated of the world, and Will Wiesle was one of them, they could feel.

Billy-Joe might as well find the trace to Walter's sinister fate and secret being stuck in his interior. He suspected Malicious Marduk responsible for Will Wiesle's crash, as to the hints the latter gave.

Will Wiesle had survived, but Walter had not (not in the sense of reality, though.) How could that be?

Arundle had found a somewhat strange answer Billy-Joe learnt when talking the matter over with her. Up to her it was the prohibition she had achieved from the Advisor. Malicious Marduk was not allowed to alter the past in his favour.

In regard of the new theory of the parallel worlds this had become a weak argumentation, Pooty and Billy-Joe both found out. However, Arundle re-considered, Walter's death would be not wholly in vain if also looked at it from this point of view.

Since Billy-Joe converted each month, he could identify with most of Malicious Marduk's victims. You felt somewhat strange with two souls in your breast, all the more when they were in permanent struggle. Such inner partition had turned out fatal for Walter.

Watchdog Will Wiesle knew well what it meant not to be the boss in one's own home. In his case a trained teacher had taken over, he told Billy-Joe. And for the first time in his life he felt the sweet poison of power. A great feeling, though. And the more wicked pranks he was successful in doing, the more he inflamed for that power.

Where Walter had been torn to pieces, Will developed a monstrous image of himself, more brutal and wicked than he had dreamt in his boldest dreams.

The question was now why Walter had resisted the seduction and couldn't do but break apart and die. Was Will more honest inside or had Walter been different?

"Are you short of something, while you are alone again?" Billy-Joe wanted to know of Will, but only made him wonder. Self-reflection was not Will's part. He was not like Billy-Joe, who foresaw

by now more than he knew, what it had been like with Walter. Will Wiesle was far from such self-reflection. While Billy-Joe knew Walter by now even better than his own self.

“No-one’s ever wholly free from fits of megalomania. I think we needn’t argue about that”, Arundle said just like that, and took a solid base off from Billy-Joe, who claimed indeed such on Walter’s behalf.

“Your view surely doesn’t focus on kangaroos, does it?” he argued: “If you think back, it had always been animals who were killed by Malicious Marduk and his Miseriors. Human beings did survive, as far as I know.”

“Do you mean we humans all suffer from fits of megalomania, while animals are free?” Arundle asked back.

“Yes, I think Walter therefore died. He was unable to turn his inside out. And because he couldn’t get rid of the occupant, that was wholly strange to him and couldn’t be stranger indeed, he preferred to be dead than stand the pain longer”, Billy-Joe replied and went on: “Will Wiesle admitted that he enjoyed the state he had been in to a certain extent, while he was scared at the same time, but the more he succeeded the better he like it. He wasn’t wholly neglecting such overwhelming power, as it helped with the adored woman, he was devoted to. We should never forget that...”

“... and that - even he found out in the end” Pooty interfered.

“Thus, it could well have been” Arundle agreed.

“I think we guess who that person is” she added after a short while before she went on. “It could well be that you Conversiors are far more endangered than others. - Although, Walter had had no idea of what was in him – I mean all that changing and discovering someone else inside and letting him out...”

“Definitely not such a monster...” Pooty agreed, and recalled that ugly farmer who posed on that pile of kangaroo corpses. Sure enough – Walter was torn to pieces.

To Billy-Joe’s mind now came that big yellow dingo and his ambivalent affiliation with it. Before he recognized him as the killer of his human mother, he had been rather helplessly devoted to him.

The situation had been similar to Walter’s. Still he survived, while Walter died, that was the big difference. The honest Walter broke to pieces, while he put away with such murderous inheritance. That yellow dingo was still part of him and would always be. He didn’t know of a strategy of how to overcome. None that promised success, while Walter might have just offered him the adequate medicine.

For most of the students the Advisor had just disappeared. They meant to have seen him disappearing in a green whirl – same way as he had come.

But the Sublimations didn't show him off at all. Tibor meant to have seen him fading until he was wholly transparent, until he was gone at last.

"This way, it had been the first time. However, the second time he disappeared different."

"What do you mean by – 'the second time?' There was no second time..." Tibor asked stunned.

Except Arundle nobody saw him a second time, not even Billy-Joe or Pooty, who had been next to her all the time.

"Perhaps, it's not important" she vaguely said. "I wanted to focus on something else, and I wanted to know if you noticed it as well. - Forget what I said."

She went silent. You could see how she was moved. Did nobody notice the Advisor disappearing in an oxygen atom? Such an idea was of course nonsense, she quite well knew. Nobody ever disappeared in an oxygen atom – not visible anyway. Still she knew about such disappearance. It was not just an imagination of hers.

The Advisor had entered the oxygen atom, knowing well what he was doing. He obviously had been expected inside.

Had she had one of these gaps again? As lately happened frequently?

She then felt some sort of wheeling, and then she saw something like the disappearance of the Advisor (it could as well be something acoustic – or even just a feeling) – an instant later things were as before.

Nothing real had happened. For her, it had been a long moment, for the others a very short one (one of those moments you don't realize, because they pass by so quick.)

Now she recalled that special silence, she felt accompanied by a peculiar clairvoyance in due process with the pause, as it had been again this time.

An intense discourse with the Magic Bow might be advisable, she thought, while she notice agreement in the back and then she learnt of a very tricky window in the flow of time, especially opened for her, to grant an outstanding sight.

"Some kind of fainting fit perhaps, in any case something you do not influence, while seeing things not bound for you, because they are

not made of the dimension you are in, normally. However, you are not normal. We know that already.”

Arundle weakly protested. The Magic Bow was right, she was different. On the other hand she felt a strong longing for normality, and didn't want to sway from one extreme to the next, that was no life.

“In your strong-room you weren't happy either” she therefore moaned.

She knew it, she wasn't locked up in a strong-room. She didn't die of boredom. Perhaps the vain business killed her nerves. All were busy and nothing happened. All research stood still, while everybody was busy in checking for leaks and spies and thefts. They all scented betrayal and bamboozle everywhere, and had to take care of making mistakes. Trust was a foreign word and liberty of research was an empty phrase.

She knew, she was unjust. Many of the problems they experienced, had to do with her and her father, who was suspected to manipulate the school for his sinister plans.

Had he not attacked again, things would run their smooth way, and the enterprise would flourish unhindered. Perhaps he found access to their research because she wasn't able to clarify her relation with him.

While she thought that, she noticed how right she was. On the other hand she knew that there was nothing to be cleared. Deep inside another conviction was burning.

She was asked to do something, she didn't feel able. – Only that much she had understood. She should solve the task for her father's best.

Henry Baranasias alias Roland Waldschmitt had reached his irresistible end. Finding himself standing in front of blown up dreams and hopes, he felt misused, betrayed and cheated. His familiar world made him feel sick. He realized how impossible it was, and that life wasn't worth living therein, because little gaiety was possible and real happiness was impossible at all.

And such a world he intended to accomplish. In such a world he wanted to spend a very long or even never ending life?

Sitting deep down in the dumps, licking his various wounds he realized that such a life wasn't worth a penny.

The power you gained was a short living drug, he had mixed up with happiness, but was in fact short-lived always leaving behind a

stale remainders. This was no happiness, he knew for sure – right now, being so far away from it as never before.

He had looked over the fence, had seen a world of happy beings, and was affected for short moments. This had been no side-effect of his spying matters, and nobody's intention – still the spark jumped over and ignited a meagre flame – always threatening to fade, and the more often it did, the sweeter the yearning became.

Henry Baranasias, alias Roland Waldschmitt felt in his semi-human heart, that was left with him, a great unfulfilled yearning. Now the feeling was even stronger in contrast to the mechanical part of his heart, he had shortly obtained.

And the longer the yearning prevailed the more concrete it became. Henry Baranasias, alias Roland Waldschmitt, was longing for something really great and extraordinary, something outstanding he could hardly imagine, and something he had never before done in his life.

He couldn't yet put the indescribable into words, he had only a vague idea and couldn't find the proper words for it.

One day then - a long forgotten dream of his childhood inflated like a soap bubble.

And then he noticed all of a sudden the mistaken ways he had chosen. Ways leading him astray, further and further away from his dream. All his strains and efforts had led him further away from his aim. Something inside now pushed him to set things in order, and compensate ill-will and mishaps.

He wrote a letter to his former wife, although he knew she had started a new life. He wrote about his grief and his earnest will of change, and dearly hoped she would understand and would forgive.

Then there was his daughter, Arundle. He had maltreated and cheated her, as far as he could think back and became even worse, since she was on her own – his own flesh and blood! Because she never accepted his paternal dominance and had her own will. And in the end she had been responsible for his change, convincing him that she was right, while he was wrong. What a girl...

He openly adored her now. He loved her and those people with her, all these friendly faces with her dealing so clever with all his dirty tricks. They had the power and he didn't know what it was. Only deep inside an idea had survived, oppressed and neglected – a trace of happiness.

There was a trace hidden somewhere in his soul and never diminished. Arundle's power now stimulated what had been long

forgotten. Still full of doubts, he hardly believed his feelings – deep overwhelming love it was.

He started planning as before, but now the plans were different. He planned from a different point of view, and wanted to save his soul and find his better self.

He could have altered his outside appearance, without changing inside. Now he noticed that this change was not enough – quite the opposite – he had been trapped and couldn't escape.

The time for the inner change had come. This was a wholly new track for him. He was underway on a journey into no-where-land towards his most secret dreams. He had no precise idea of the aim yet, or how far he had to go. He didn't know about the stops and hardships. He only knew that the first steps were done, and that was essential.

12. Anonymous on the Moon

Those in the devil's claws have a hard time when trying to escape. Henry Baraniasias, alias Roland Waldschmitt, had not reckoned with his former guest. Once more he realized the ties and puppet-strings which held him ever since.

What ever he did – and he did a lot as Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernaliam - wasn't wholly done by himself. A mighty force had taken possession of him and steered his deeds.

As long as he moved ahead on the straight of success, he enjoyed his part of the game, and didn't mind the interior guest who guided him. But kick-backs and back strokes he couldn't handle, and soon came across with that whistler. His self-esteem collapsed like a house of cards. Where he had been big and strong, he now felt weak and miserable, and that woman on his side knew how to put her finger on the sore spot, or even turned the knife in the wound, while the whispering voice inside couldn't be heard.

Thus, the whole construction of his life collapsed. The further down he went, and the more of such back-strokes he had to stand, the more he doubted. In the end, he was convinced that he had backed the wrong horse.

How could he escape that woman, who somehow knew how to seduce him all over again, whenever she felt like it?

His great awakening had many sources. Fact was that the process had begun, and as it looked, it couldn't be stopped or reversed. Roland Waldschmitt started his self-reflection, and no threat or reminder was able to alter the new course of life.

The last who tried to regain him back on the dark side was the renovated assistant after his come-back as his master's darling (which made him irresistibly attractive in Viola de Stäel's eyes.)

So he had a back-firing effect, and raised the old stubbornness in his former - so-called – Professor.

Stubbornness had accompanied Waldschmitt's career ever since and now arose as the power of resistance against any seductive occupant what so ever. Could well be, that he recalled long ago aspects of his true and most inner self that even the most wicked of all seducers hadn't been able to affect, while it survived and slumbered behind the pompous blown-up image of a mediocre self.

The renewed assistant was surely superior to Baranasias with respect to physical strength and unscrupulousness, all the more so as he was furnished in addition with the 'Certain Something'. Consequently Mme de Stäel felt irresistibly devoted to that man, thus, the miserable presence of the former lover became a severe obstacle. While the trade with those certificates now turned out to be some kind of boomerang causing more damage than good. The confusion broke together and the clean certificates also became questionable. An effect that was of course not favourable, when it came to claiming rights and options.

Baranasias had become useless or – even worse – disturbing and had to be made extinct. Viola de Stäel was ordered to think of something efficient and discrete to get rid of him.

Such was the situation when Roland Waldschmitt, alias Henry Baranasias, decided to change sides, and ask for asylum on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Time was pushing while the hellhounds were on his trail. Baranasias was in danger of life.

The magic involved on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth referred him to the moon for refuge. "Just for the time being" it said "until things calmed down – this way or the other..."

Grisella, Countess of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots, Professor of Literature and Philosophy of the School of Inbetween, became involved. In close correspondence with her (she was unable to visit him where he was hiding, because she was afraid of flying) Roland Waldschmitt, alias Henry Baranasias wrote an astounding

oeuvre in only a few months. A somewhat intergalactic confession, which turned out as a “remarkable literary piece of art”, a fact, Grisella couldn’t stop mentioning.

Grisella was even able to find a renowned publisher for the masterpiece, who announced it as “the blunt uncovering of a gigantic scandal of world-historic dimensions”.

Roland Waldschmitt wrote down mercilessly all the misery, and all the sins and crimes he had committed or taken into account. He discovered abysses of the soul, the reader hesitated or denied to look inside – too much was the horror while reading on.

Nobody knew where ‘Anonymous (this was his publishing pseudonym) was hiding, or found out where the insider knowledge came from. Certain interested circles wanted to move the oeuvre into the category of utopian fairytales and fables, however the matter was far too explosive and much too factual for that.

Not necessarily individual elements but the whole composition gave it the immense power and enlightening credo.

“You could hardly find a better founded warning of the dangers of the paradigmatic change underway towards a new worldwide standard of value”, one of the biggest international stock-market magazine wrote, and the Yellow Press even topped: “Is this the dawning of a new race of hyper-men?” or even more provoking “Underdogs - do you want to live on forever?”

A more sophisticated paper wrote: “Sensational discovering in the world of ‘high finance’ or should it better read ‘time-dominance’?”

Another thought “the end of the monetary system has come” or even worse: “Dummies will pay the bill with their lives.”

When asking for asylum on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth Roland Waldschmitt, alias Henry Baranasias, found himself right away dislocated on a secret place in a flat building.

Busy robot-artifacts stood by to serve him with everything he needed for a modest life. Unfortunately he was not allowed to leave the building without the adequate gear, because of the lack of atmosphere out there.

While he had mentioned his wish to write, his secretary was fully equipped, even with a printer – many humans still withstood electronic media.

He had escaped from Sydney without trouble. The little hangar he still had in mind, where the copters landed. And he found one ready for takeoff, when he walked smoothly by the site.

The crew was very helpful and understood his claim all too well. They welcomed him aboard wholeheartedly as if he had been expected, which was not the case. It was just their way of being he soon learnt when meeting a flock of students returning from an excursion on the way back home to their school.

On arrival he looked into known faces as soon as he set foot on the island. His daughter was among the committee, and with her that friendly savage, with a bow in a quiver on his back. This could well be that bow, so much trouble had been caused, he wondered.

“There is no time to waste”, a friendly woman explained. The refugee was not safe on the island either and his life was still in danger, that was why he would be taken ‘away from this world’, as she put it.

“No, no, of course not the radical way your opponents intend, who had been your former friends. Clocks work little different here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.”

“Soon you will see...” another beauty added, he recalled as the leader of the committee he met some time ago.

Arundle and the savage took one of his arms each, while his daughter was murmuring with the bow and a hairy something stretched its head out of an ugly, smelly bag around the savage’s neck, followed by a shiny stone, and up they went that the stars went by like spurs of comets or shiny streams of oily liquid soap.

“We drop into a disguised time loop out of time, and steer towards the moon. There you will find everything you need – we checked that out for you, don’t worry” Arundle explained warmly.

“Away now with masks and hidings. I know who you are. Got to get used to your appeal, - somewhat strange, though... Well, we will have time enough for that, I presume, - Daddy. - Yes, the bush drums conveyed the news of your big change. Now you are one of us, aren’t you?”

Father and daughter hugged with tears in their eyes. Then ‘the savage’ shook his hand wildly.

“This is Billy-Joe, do you remember?” Waldschmitt vaguely nodded.

“Roland, this is Billy-Joe, Billy-Joe this is Roland – or do you prefer your latest alias?” She introduced the two uneven men and was happy about their smile, more of that of her father, though, who was overcoming his own nature again..

“Now get acquainted. Let me show you around. This will be your home for the next couple of – weeks”, months she wanted to say, but hesitated as the place was somewhat dull and in fact very lonely.

Waldschmitt would be all alone up here, alone with those artifacts of the latest kind that could speak of course and differentiate human voices. Typing was outdated. Thus, the recording of his memories and musings was done verbally, and what was said could immediately be read either on screen or print-out. The artifact secretary even suggested alternatives if asked or the given one was regarded as poor.

So the man got to work. He started at the beginning and told his tale right from the dreams of his childhood and of the many ways that led astray, until he meant to have found the right way.

From the first beginnings of the research work in backyards to the foundation of the worldwide Brotherhood of Infernalía. He mentioned of course the struggles and arguments, the intrigues and rancour, and didn't neglect his own role – quite the opposite. He almost enjoyed showing his badness.

The more he told, the more he recalled. He worked to exhaustion, then sank into bed after a quick bite and half a bottle of a rather reasonable red wine. Hefty dreams had him sleep uneasy, while different ways of the flight were presented. None with the lucky outcome reality had taken.

His former mistress mixed poisoning herbs into his supper, causing his death with terrible pain.

In an other dream a band of killers chased him through the furthest bush in the Australian Outbacks. In vain he tried to hide but was captured and ears and nose was cut off and even the tongue. A flock of savages picked him up more dead than alive and made him alter his mode of being.

A Scud-rocket was fired at the helicopter and had it diminish in a fireball, and where the Isle of Wisdom-tooth had been the horrid hood of a nuclear bombing arose.

When he woke up he looked into the caring faces of her daughter and her friend.

Once more he had dreamed very lively, as often before. The dentist had prescribed him a protective inlay for that reason, he was supposed to put into his mouth, but had forgotten, as often.

He'd ruined his teeth otherwise.

Tongue, nose and ears were still where they belonged, he could feel, while Billy-Joe seemed to have stepped out of the nightmare.

The loneliness wasn't good for him, his daughter decided and together they look for a better solution. The problem was that the track should be kept small which led to the hiding, because Misericors and their master Malicious Marduk were quite capable of tracing him down, no matter how tricky the trail was.

The dark side had of course noticed his disappearance, and the conflict now extended into other dimensions, and was by no means less dangerous or deadly.

Arundle thought it a good idea to have her father hiding on the moon of Laptopia, because she knew what it was like and hoped for a convenient stay. Without atmosphere the moon as such was not a pleasant site, you'd better skip.

A fragile character could run into severe problems, under such circumstances. The empty width of the surrounding space and the weak gravitation, and the total lack of human beings and human civilisation could cause trouble for anyone.

Whenever Roland Waldschmitt dived off his phases of productivity – that was - working on his book – and sat down for a meal or lay down for a nap, the phantoms of former times overcame him, and taught him the horror in the aftermath he didn't feel at the time. Thus, loneliness was no good.

Those who knew on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth wondered how they could overcome such awkward circumstance, and came to the solution of granting him permanent company of a man of flesh and blood. Artifacts he had enough already. They weren't really suitable for overcoming the problem. Artifacts were not the same, while still better than nothing, of course.

Who was going to stay with the lonesome refugee in the hide for good? Travelling back and forth forbade itself because of the widening track laid that way. While the trip as such was no big deal. If there hadn't been the risk of widening the track, they'd been able to do it daily.

“Imagine such a track like a thought, you keep in your mind. The vaguer it remains, the faster it fades out of your active memory. You simply forget it, and cannot recall voluntarily. Still it remains with you and it might happen that it shows up accidentally some time, when least expected. Quite similar it works with those traces on the time-track leading along side at the edge of time and fade as soon as the aim is reached” the Magic Bow explained rather complicated. Arundle wasn't sure whether she got him right. Her idea of changing visitors would have been an elegant solution otherwise.

“The more often a thought is repeated, the safer it is available for the mind. A vague trace becomes a solid passage, everyone can follow, and that’s the trouble...” the bow insisted.

Well, yes, I got it at last, I’m not silly” Arundle moaned impatiently. “We shouldn’t sent someone to the moon daily, because of the passage that is going to build up. Right?”

The bow didn’t answer.

Were there other option? “What about asking others, who had been obsessed similarly, like Watchdog Will Wiesle or Zinfandor Leblanc?” Billy-Joe suggested.

“Penelope M’gamba wouldn’t accept, I daresay” Dorothea turned in, referring to Zinfandor only.

“Let’s have it a trial. It’s not forever. Only as long as Anonymous is writing his book or the case isn’t so hot anymore” Arundle put in.

“Will they ever forget?” Pooty wanted to know and made a funny face, thus, all laughed while the subject was too serious and still a matter of death or life.

“Where Malicious Marduk sets his iron heel there no grass will ever be growing again, I’m afraid” Pooty added. “So, let’s ask.”

“On the other hand, do not wake up sleeping dogs” Marsha put in, still the Commissary Headmistress, who still felt responsible for the whole.

Thus, the little sworn in flock mused sitting around the table in the Slyboots’ premise. Grisella joined them with a big pile of paper. - “The latest news from your Dad” she said triumphantly. “Talent he has, no doubt about that – we can expect quite something...”

“Why not ask Penelope, she knows him best and where he stands...”

“She’s the one to decide, anyway...”

“...and don’t forget to ask him first, because he’s a person with a free will, isn’t he?” Billy-Joe put in, somewhat upset.

“Right you are, what you do is female chauvinism” Adrian backed the boy up, and shook his head in disgust.

“Besides, Zinfandor isn’t kosher. Since that night, you know when...” Marsha intended to lower the tension, she had just caused, but her intention was somewhat backfiring.

“Now, does this start all over again” Dorothea hollered “I try and do what I can and you stick to your fears as if they were part of your skin. Zinfandor is as out as Arundle’s father or that poor Watchdog. They are all clean by now.”

“...still, the evil gets hold of them once in a while, as we experienced, when Zinfandor was recruited again...” Marsha insisted, but nobody wanted to support her. They all felt like she was mixing up things.

“We have to find out if they want” Adrian said after a short while of silence.

“We wonder without cause. The problem however is, that we involve them into the secret, if we send them at last, provided they want to go, of course. Otherwise nothing would happen.”

“Except that my father becomes depressive, and gets hurt or even worse. If we cannot find anyone I will go”, Arundle said “It’s gonna be not forever, though, how long does it still take...”

“he won’t go on for more then a quarter of a year, as fast as he is, I’d say” Grisella answered.

“I do have the publisher’s commitment. For the corrections it might take another month, maybe. However, this could be done by others. But were should he diminish after that? Where are you going to hide our guest in the long run? That is a severe question of concern. We cannot grant him another new identity, knowing well, how little this alters in fact, we had that already” Billy-Joe put in and Dorothea agreed. “We have to think of a long term solution.”

Arundle had something in mind, but that was too far away, therefore she didn’t mention it. She knew of a site where no harm was threatening. However, this site was so strange and unimaginable that she didn’t dare to mention it. A tiny trace somewhere in her mind, she had used more then once but seldom enough.

Watchdog Will Wiesle as well as Zinfandor Leblanc spontaneously agreed with the proposal. They knew the inner hell by experience and were all too willing to help their comrade. As a side effect they hoped to get things straightened out a bit on their own behalf. The clever big shot might do them good as well.

Besides, there were connections of another kind between the former Chairman of the Brotherhood and Zinfandor Leblanc as well as with Watchdog Will Wiesle. But this they found out only later, when they became more acquainted.

The idea of taking part in the production of a book also pleased them and made them feel needed, while the oppressed egos even noticed a glimpse of importance shining up on the horizon behind all their mishaps they had to overcome; if it was gone over that way, their suffering might not been all in vain.

The book got fresh impulses, Mme de Stäel was illustrated in an even blacker light, that can only be seen by those familiar with the deepest abyss of wickedness. The divided grief made the burden lighter they were still carrying, when the third in the round added his lot to theirs.

While all three of them couldn't quite understand, what had happened to them, and how this woman managed to swallow them with root and branch, so to speak. They now discovered certain characteristics they shared, which once had opened them for the diabolic sensuality of that woman.

The trace of memory on the edge of time faded, when days and weeks passed, while the little community on the edge of the world, somewhere in the future, were left all alone by itself.

The three characters – so different they seemed on the first sight – became acquainted and accepted each other – at least to a certain extent. The joint grief out of the same source made them feel like brothers, who shared the same experience. Perhaps the brotherly comparison wasn't as far fetched as it seemed on the first sight. Perhaps they became devoted to Viola de Stäel on a long lasting track, leading back to their childhood, without knowing, and were therefore so hopelessly devoted, because they didn't have a chance to find the roots and work them over. While the joint work on the report of Anonymous changed that.

The three men soon realized the book project as their joint one. One more, one less, and felt indeed responsible for the indicated development, while often certainly indirect, as far as the research work was concerned.

Because the research work formed only the former Chairman's centre.

Zinfandor became - without doubt - the victim of the infamous Brotherhood. However his tormentors had as well only fulfilled their Infernalian plight, so to speak, while they prepared him for his future task foreseen for him, and that woman was the key to his heart.

She was the opener, and this way, they all became wheels in the machinery of evil. They were promised the most excessive satisfaction and the ruthless outliving of the strangest motivations and musings from now on until eternity. Late enough they realized, that they only had been used, and that they were merely of value, as long as they functioned like little wheels in the mill of horror.

"In such a system you look in vain for self assurance and confirmation" Waldschmitt explained his comrades – "true evil only

knows lie and cheat, and is based on oppression. – All promises of happiness and freedom and joy east of the borderline are but lie. Such a project cannot persist, because it is founded on destruction. When I became aware of that, there was but one choice: the flight. Flight by all means.

Prolong the lines of such a life – we had to lead – into eternity and ask yourself, if you really and earnestly want to go on like this forever.

In the light of reason there is no other choice than to realize that you are straight on the highway to hell. Because it cannot be worth down there. Do believe that we took a look into hell, and I hope and pray that this sight was the last. Perhaps I got away with it – one way or the other...”

This was their state of being, and how they felt, more or less, and Waldschmitt only had found the proper words, because he was a talented man of letters, with a sharp and clear brain.

“The Brotherhood of Infernalina was longing for eternal life. However the eternal life was seen as a privilege of the few. What was taken from the mass was given to the few privileged – that was the basic idea, and was justified by the universal law of energy which says that you only can shift around internally, but the sum of energy has to remain stable and set. However this mechanistic way of seeing the world is a limited interpretation of reality, and doesn’t explain what’s really going on in our universe that is – our Polyverse – to be more precise.

The physical world covered by the limited view of the whole is only a small part of the reality around us.

The greater part of reality is withheld from us. It is the great naught covering the distances between materialized entities. Thus, the naught isn’t just nothing, but the great unknown, containing unimaginable mysteries, far beyond the limits of Newtonian understanding.

The law of energy was a convenient excuse for reviving the old privileges which were tormenting our world for millenniums.”

Zinfandor Leblanc was breathing deep and regular. “He hasn’t fallen asleep, after all?” Watchdog Will Wiesle wondered. While wasn’t wondering too much. The flow of words of that enthusiastic man passed by just like that, and sounded all too educated, however understanding was something else. Perhaps you had to be a physician or a philosopher – at best – both.

Leblanc and he were definitely the wrong addressees. It seemed to him that this was the point where they had to say good-bye to that

giant project of Anonymous. The subject became too scientific and was something for specialists and insiders of another kind - nothing any more for simple ordinary people.

Perhaps it was time for the changing of the guard. Down there, on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth most people talked like Anonymous. People like him were the minority, thus, watchdog Will Wiesle said to himself, and informed the ground-station accordingly.

“Is this an emergency?” Zinfandor asked when Watchdog Will Wiesle pulled the emergency trigger and opened the secret code channel.

Well, yes without notification nobody cares down there. How long are we alone up here? For more than three weeks.”

It took a while until a channel was opened. Via monitor you could see dizzy pictures and faint noise, however no clear announcement. Either there was no-one in the control room or the connection was poor.

You couldn't rely on the time, because the clocks worked different up here. Time was running off, so to speak. Perhaps this was the answer already, while they still felt the time.

Had there been no shortcuts, the guests would have gone on beyond their limits. It was high time for the next pile of manuscripts, they had completed meanwhile and waited to be picked up.

Well, those two ever same faces every day, became some sort of burden, you couldn't stand. No matter whether the shared grief was half grief, as the saying goes. A little joy would have done them good for a change.

“Home base Wisdom-tooth, this is moon-base zero, zero six, over...”

Watchdog Will Wiesle was in his element. He enjoyed further education programmes and had taken part in a space telecommunication course. Should he even send an SOS emergency call?

Better not, this was meant for real emergencies only, and boredom or loneliness were no emergencies. No-one was injured, no danger was threatening. Dull routine was the only nuisance and didn't really count.

“Home base Wisdom-tooth, this is moon-base zero, zero six, Anonymous speaking - over...”

“Anonymous, this is Home base Wisdom-tooth – read you loud and clear, over.”

Finally, that was about time.

“It's your turn, Leblanc. We have the connection. Fetch Waldschmitt, hurry up.”

“Home base Wisdom-tooth this is Anonymous, what's the matter down there? Replacement is overdue, over...”

“Press the button while speaking and then let go. It's as simple as that...”

Roland Waldschmitt pressed his finger on the knob: “This is Waldschmitt, Waldschmitt here...” he hollered before he could be stopped. “Need urgent support...”

Watchdog Will Wiesle tore the microphone out of Waldschmitt's hand, who held it tight – still the knob pressed.

“Anonymous, this is home base Wisdom-tooth, roger, over and out.”

The reduced way of talking was meant to irritate possible spies, and was part of the whole scheme. Had they been cracks, they'd even encoded their texts. Watchdog Will Wiesle had only forgotten about that. They might not have managed anyway because of the time difference. Codes changed at midnight daily, but it was not easy to decide when a day elapsed.

Out of nowhere shortly later three figures stepped. Arundle, Billy-Joe, and Professor Scholasticus Slyboots, the expert and well-know specialist all over the world.

“We had lost your track. Our only hope was your call” Arundle said and looked at her father relieved. Everything seemed to be in order, so far.

“We better switch of that apparatus right away, we want to stay amongst us, ain't we?” the Professor asked, and Watchdog Will Wiesle cut the line right away.

The travellers weren't hungry or exhausted by the journey, because it hadn't been a journey in the sense of the word.

“What we experienced was some kind of shifting” the Professor explained. This way he wanted to explain the jump along the timeline, and he revered, because he was not sure whether he was understood properly:

“We do not have to deal with a movement in the physical sense, while the fact that we are on the moon has to be considered as well, however in a neglectable circumference, as most experts would agree, although other opinions may be found for such an interesting phenomenon.”

“That’s gonna become funny” ‘Will Wiesle sighed and Zinfandor even sobbed. He immediately became homesick for Penelope M’gamba – how much had he missed that blurry science talk!”

“Home, homeward bound, I wish I was” he sighed, imitating unforgettable ET, Pooty had hardly done any better.

“No problem. Anyone else care to go?” Billy-Joe asked, and Pooty looked out of the Medicine Pouch dangling around the boy’s neck. “Master Stone is with you.”

Nobody was waiting for Watchdog Will Wiesle. - Nobody in love with him anyway. Utmost those comrades of his watch-team. Without Zinfandor he would have felt even more lost up here, thus he preferred to travel with the party.

Magic Messrs Stone & Bow had agreed on splitting their power. They wanted to erase any trace by that. While each had his own signature, that changed when doubled, and vice versa as well.

“Waldschmitt shouldn’t have mentioned his name. Thus it would travel on for ages through space and time. – Well, can’t be changed anymore now...” Watchdog Will Wiesle was stunned when he heard Arundle’s explanation. He hadn’t expected such a long-lasting effect caused by such a minor faux pas^{xliv}

However her way of looking at things was only logical. What ever was thrown into the empty space, be it material debris or finest spurs of ions, that was travelling along with the general extension until it hit somewhere. However this was very unlikely in case of a modulated acoustic wave.

In the range of the nano-verse things extended excessively. The emptiness also prevailed by means of gigantic gaps, letting pass almost everything that was crossing their way.

“We could try with voice disturbers” Billy-Joe suggested

Scholasticus Slyboots shook his head. “Wouldn’t work anymore the acoustic traces are too far away by now.”

“The likeliness that our signal is spotted and understood by someone evil is so little, that the radius of the earth wouldn’t suffice to write down the figure” he calmed the Watchdog who felt responsible for the breach.

Up they went – Billy-Joe disappeared as fast as he had shown up, and with him Zinfandor Leblanc, and Will Wiesle, the watchdog.

Earth had them back. Both space travellers felt their limbs heavy as lead after weeks in the weak gravity of the moon. They staggered

and even fell at first but after some hours of adjustment and a good meal they felt better.

13. Anonymous and the Wealth of Laptopia

The book was almost ready, and would be published and introduced to the public in autumn on the Frankfurt book fair. And the publisher tinkered about with those in the know on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth for an adequate presentation by the mysterious Anonymous, Waldschmitt, alias Baranasias - should still remain.

They thought of a new face-lifting, or an alteration of sex, by breeding a clone. However that was impossible because of lack of time – not to mention the cost and the ethic dimension of such a rigorous step.

Meanwhile those three, left behind on the moon of Laptopia made up their own minds, how to proceed.

“I think it would be wise if we showed Anonymous how things go in Laptopia” Arundle suggested.

The needs and shortcomings of Laptopia so far shocked and moved anyone who got aware.

“I think, we show him the same Laptopia we found some years ago” Scholasticus agreed.

“We might as well start with a visit of the secret strong-holds of the palace. The horror you experience there, will never fade. I think, this is the adequate propaedeuticum^{xlv}” Arundle agreed.

“Master Bow can you lead us right to the spot and time where we were shown around in the castle by the young prince shortly before he was made Prince regent?”

“No problem, it’s as simple as that. Let’s dive into a segment of time of major importance:

‘Future come back, come back right here
Others wish as well to hear.’”

Heavy bodies started driving apart in one - each fitting the other - like when doors opened, and wings kept adding their cores seemingly – melting first than elapsed, while a voice was heard, which Arundle

recalled as if it was yesterday – a déjà-vu par excellence^{xlvi}. But this time she was here with Scholasticus and Anonymous instead, and the Prince showed them around in the castle. He was leading them downstairs to the basement:

... “Down here, you will find the wealth of Laptopia” the Prince said, and asked them to follow him through endless corridors, with safe deposit boxes on both sides. “Behind those hatches immeasurable wealth is deposited, perhaps not behind every hatch anymore, because things began to change, but still...” the Prince went on.

“Here is all the money, after all” Anonymous asked.

“Who’s talking about money? Money has lost importance long time ago. Money is of interest only for historians and coin-collectors. No, down here you find the preserved time, mostly converted into energetic quantum. Because it is not easy to preserve time. In former times, the loss was immeasurably. By ninety percent of the boxed in time got lost by preservation. You have to imagine... Arundle you may recall your space disaster, when you got lost in time. You were led into the area when the business with the time prospered. Then nobody had the faintest idea of what was coming all too soon. Such losses were then taken for granted. Then, when people lost youth in no time and grew older almost visually, things turned into the open but it was too late already. You couldn’t stop or reverse the trend just like that. The monetary system had been replaced by the temporal system irreversibly. Some order was necessary to keep the society going, if people didn’t want to return to the very basic exchange of goods. And soon it became clearer and clearer that the wealth of nations assembled in the hands of fewer and fewer individuals, to an immeasurable extend beyond all historic comparison.”

While the Prince talked, they stepped ahead, still along the corridor and between those rows and rows of lockers, behind which the preserved lives of a countless multitude rested, fading unused.

“Whom do those lockers belong?” Anonymous asked. The Prince gave him a long thoughtful glance then said: “I don’t want to lie at you. All you see in this area belongs to my family. My father was crazy about such wealth. The worst was, he bought on the black market whenever his contingent was exceeded. But we will come to that soon...”

Arundle noticed by his look at the Prince, what her dad was thinking. He wasn’t very wrong, though. If the Prince had wanted to throw dust in their eyes, he could have lied or kept them away from that horrid family bank of his.

“In those lockers there are hoarded up values of whole lifetimes, what a waste...”

“And if you give the time back to its proper owners?” Arundle asked.

“If that was so simple... believe me, I had done it. Whatever we do with that” and he waved helplessly around “we won’t solve anything but only stimulate the black market. You can’t through values in, and hope of no effect. What do you think the heirs do with their relatives’ lives? They gamble with them, try to increase their value and of course extend their own lifespan, but that would be the least of all problems...”

Since the great currency-reform, when the exchange rate was voluntarily put up from two to one and the free time-trade was limited, you can’t distribute time, just like that. In former times, there was even a state-lottery, and the winner of the week cashed a check over eternal life, as it was called in those days. Of course, nobody lives on forever, but a couple of hundred years can well do, all the more since the currency-reform I mentioned.”

“What does that reform mean?” Arundle asked.

“When the free commerce with preserved, time became more and more intransparent, and parents sacrificed their own children for their sake, and riots arose not all that different from those we experienced, the Emperor decided to interfere. The Time-Exchange-Converters all over the country were drawn back. The time-exchange-stocks were closed down everywhere. Existing accounts were frozen in, and instead of the time-currency, they tried to install a credit-system, similar to the old money-related system. But things weren’t handled wholeheartedly enough, I’m afraid...”

They had come to the end of the corridor by now, and were standing in front of another huge strong room, the doors of which blocked the corridor completely. This time the Prince used a secret code number to unlock it, and the mighty hatches swung open.

“We are entering now the so-called ‘Workshop of Renewal’” the Prince explained.

“Be careful, what you see is shocking...” The Prince’s warning came just in time. The room was filled with body parts like in a slaughterhouse. Legs, arms, and torsos were hooked up the same way, but here the parts belonged to former human beings - that was the difference.

“What the hell is this?” Arundle yelled. She couldn’t stand the sight, her stomach rebelled. It took some time until she dared a second look. The first impression had been misleading. This was no dead

meat, bound to be eaten. Such extremities seemed to be alive and ready for action. All kinds of artificial spare-parts were connected with bones and sinews. Everything looked clean and well maintained.

“From here most hospitals procure the spare parts for transplantations. You find almost everything here, suitable for any blood group and as fresh as on the day of extraction. Those who get equipped here and don’t miss the inspection-intervals, are provided with an almost perfect body, that lasts for ages, so to speak, while the spirit and the soul need some extra service.

My father was a good example. Had he not lost his head, he would have gone on forever. But the price he had to pay, was high, extremely high in his case, from a moral point of view.”

“The corpses look so fresh, they must come from somewhere” Anonymous exclaimed. The Prince nodded. “Those are the victims of the system. They have sold themselves or have been sold by others. The creditors cash those who plunder their account before the time has come. Their executives - the so-called Miseriors - grant no mercy. Meanwhile the situation became better for two reasons. Since spare parts of that kind” he pointed at the disgusting scenery – “became superfluous and have been replaced by more elegant and less cruel methods. The keyword here is cloning.”

“And we wonder, where the aggression comes from over there in Laptopia” Arundle said, shaking her head.

“How come, we didn’t find out? Grisella’s interviewers inquired in any possible way, and asked the people over and over again.”

“I think, it was fear, that made them keep their mouths shut,” the Prince suggested. “If you don’t know it otherwise, you take such things for granted, and you don’t talk about them anymore. You wouldn’t question the daily sunrise, would you?”

“Are they going to be slaughtered while still alive?” asked Scholasticus Slyboots in disgust.

“That’s not necessary. The life-light extinguishes, as soon as a Miserior presents the Proclamation of Exitus (PoE). They then get hold of their victims, who exhale their living soul, which is put into a special plastic bag. This way such life has definitely terminated” the Prince concluded.

“Would they die anyway?” Arundle asked.

“Most likely” answered the Prince – “but it never happened. The creditors have been so keen about corporal spare parts.”

Arundle shivered.

“You spoke of reforms, that followed. What did change then, after all?” Scholasticus Slyboots asked.

“Well, first of all the extend of such practice was concerned. Nobody was allowed to deal with ‘time-related articles’ – (as such corporal human entities were called) - uncontrolled any more. Each transaction had to be registered, and most importantly - was charged. In some cases by an enormous tax-fee, depending on the wealth of the proprietors.

All ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converters’ were withdrawn, which had been positioned in each supermarket or other public facility of any kind.

Can you imagine, the youngsters spent some ten to fifteen years of lifespan for a trendy glider, just like that? All they had to do, was put their finger into that TEAC – (that is the ‘Time-Exchange-Account-Converter’), and the thing was theirs. That was indeed pretty seductive and you had to have a strong character to resist. However - what does the youth care about age. The bill was then presented all too soon. Those who had chosen this seductive main road to immediate happiness, didn’t do - as a rule - for more then five years or so.”

“I see” Anonymous said “and by that way all the youthful corpses came here to become cannibalised. How awful...”

“Disgusting” Arundle, added.

“But that was it - the creditor’s executives cashed with ‘mind and body’, that is, the whole being by terminating their lives. I have to confess, that the corpses were much better off, than the souls. Although there are only rumours spread about, nobody has ever confirmed. The Advisor spoke to me of unbelievable excesses, though. He’d be the one to explain all this much better than I can. All the more Malicious Marduk comes in right here, he is meant to be the Big Boss of the Miseriors.”

The mysterious Advisor appeared right at that same moment from behind a pedestal. He bowed politely and greeted the Prince’s guests deservingly, but didn’t show, whether he recalled them.

“I’ve found out about that one” the Prince declared and pointed at the Advisor, as if he was an object. Arundle thought him to be almost rude. ‘Was the Advisor after all no man of flesh and blood?’

“I think, he is something like a virtual image”, the Prince went on. “Try to touch him, then you understand, what I mean.” The Prince stepped forward and grabbed into emptiness right through the Advisor. “See – nothing but pure air. He’s an icon, nothing real.”

The Advisor smiled softly and bowed again: “But I fulfil my duty” he said.

“His Majesty gives his regards to the young lady and her disapproving companion.” He smiled again and bowed heartily

towards Arundle and a little stiffer to Anonymous, who sighted at him somehow confused.

In the meantime, they had entered another room. Here the atmosphere was even denser and more uncomfortable than before. Anonymous didn't find out at first, what the cause was.

The Advisor accompanied them just like that, and even took the lead. "As far as here, even the Prince hasn't gone" he explained, and pointed at the strange bubbles fitted to the lowered ceiling. The bubbles looked like blown up plastic bags after a second closer look. Each was neatly closed and labelled, and was filled with some kind of milky something.

The Advisor grabbed for a bag, opened the string and softly knocked on the top. From inside a thin screaming was heard. Arundle saw two little hands trying to get hold on the slippery skin, but were slowly gliding towards the opening. Before the grey shadow could fall, the Advisor held his hand under the opening and pushed the being right back. The frightened eyes in the little face, which you noticed between the thin stretched arms, closed. A thumb got to the mouth. The being rolled in like an infant in its mother's womb, while the Advisor carefully closed the string and fixed the bag back to the ceiling.

"Those are the lost souls," he explained. "That's all the better, then up there" and he pointed up. The ceiling, the bags were fitted to, was a kind of trellis. "Behind - something terrible is lurking" he said and pointed at big dark shadows, who made faces at him as soon as they realized, that he was referring to them.

"They know exactly that I can't get at them," the Advisor said. The monsters were shaken by fits of horrid laughter.

While the Advisor had opened the bag, they had stretched greedy fingers at the trellis but couldn't get through. "There is nothing the poor souls are more afraid of than those Miseriors" the Advisor explained – "those emissaries of that Marduk – and there is a good reason for that. In their bags, they aren't free, but they have peace after all and may find a useful place somewhere. But woe betide them, when they fall into the hands of the Miseriors."

"What do they serve for, and where do they come from?" Scholasticus Slyboots wanted to know. He cut Arundle off that way because she had intended to ask for the horrible fate as victims of the Miseriors.

"The lost souls originate from the debtors and form the most valuable part," the Advisor explained. While cashing the debtors, they

are extracted first from the terminated corpse and are caught in those plastic bags, as we just have seen, before they can escape into nothingness.

They are condemned to become victims of the Miseriors anyway, therefore they accept any other solution. They serve as a kind of lubricator. A dead leg for example becomes only alive again by means of a living soul. The soul is the most important factor of the transplantation.”

The Advisor waved around in a circle. “All those souls wait for an opportunity to be used.”

“But is that not dehumilating? Souls are bound for higher purpose. To become a leg’s soul can’t be it” Anonymous put in upset again.

“That could well be, but such complicated philosophical questions we may discuss somewhere else. You have seen how frightened the soul was, while I tried to get it out of its bag. It has noticed the Miseriors earlier than you did. That was the reason why it didn’t want to be knocked out of its shelter.”

“Is there no way of getting rid of the Miseriors?” Arundle asked and looked uneasy up at the ceiling. One of the monsters just made a face at her.

“I’m afraid, no” the young Prince interfered. “Our hands are bound. We can control the state-official sector and we can try to get hold of the black market as well, but against evil spirits from other spheres, we are powerless. As long as Malicious Marduk keeps control over the twilight zone of the Miseriors, we won’t overcome the black marketeers. There are other means required. Means we expect you to obtain.”

The Advisor nodded: “Nevertheless, what lies in our hands must be done, to get control over the black market and the black marketeers. Otherwise, all our efforts are in vain and devaluations turn out to be inefficient. You see, we came to the factor four by now. Nevertheless, the last word hasn’t been spoken. Our combined efforts may let us focus on factor three again. You never know what’s written in the stars.”

Arundle and Scholasticus Slyboots looked at each other uncomprehendingly. The Advisor - while noticing such glance - nodded reassuringly and declared: “It’s like that, - well no, I better try historically.” - The matter was harder to explain than he thought.

– “One of the actions that was taken to calming down the riots, (I referred to in the beginning) was to bring everybody back to the same level. In other words to spread the time regularly – as far as possible.

The Emperor decided for the first time a general devaluation of time. Beginning with a fixed date, the time was devaluated by ten percent, that meant, the time was shortened by one tenth. Seconds, minutes, and hours – all measures of time were shortened by one tenth. At the same time, the free trade of time was abolished, and was limited to the state-controlled sector.

However, we didn't consider the black market. Just as our actions began to work, the black market began to boom: - time, TEACs, corporal spare parts, souls – everything you could think of was traded on the black market. The demand regulated the supply, and soon the worst possible forms of slave trade revived. While we were still busy, handling that devaluation.

After some ten years or so, we were down to fifty percent. Can you imagine – the night has only six hours – at night people couldn't be cheated, the body required its rest, while during daytime at work we could have easily quartered the quantum” the Advisor smiled.

“No matter how often we devaluated. New secret strong rooms were installed uncontrolled. (The one we are in right now was of course authorised.) Greedy bumps were purchasing and dealing under cover. The consequence was that people died again earlier and earlier. The average age was sinking dramatically again, while our plan figured the average age of seventy earth-years.

The black marketeers caused confusion in many ways. They initiated slave trade and headhunting on the one hand, and satisfied the most primitive and cruel notions on the other, - they found clients enough for their dirty trade.

Again the underdog youngsters had to die far too early. It was like a pandemic plague. This development led to considerable obstructions. Riots and upheavals were the consequence. First of all the youngsters, - who couldn't lose anything but their chains -, rioted and terrorized the quarters of Laptopia-City, and even got them under control, while the Miseriors didn't miss such opportunities to stimulate chaos and cruelties of the worst kind.”

“And always one name appeared: Malicius Marduk...” the Prince added. Again, the Advisor nodded:

“Malicius Marduk became the big opponent of the Emperor. The Miseriors, you must know, are mentally very limited beings, although full of malice. Without guidance by Malicius Marduk, they are easy to be seen through, and we managed to keep them under control.”

“What terrible things are they actually doing?” Anonymous wanted to know.

“That’s a good question. All I can do, is to refer to the lost souls” the Advisor answered.

“Amongst the living no-one knows for sure” the Prince interfered – “and from the souls you wouldn’t get an answer. Nevertheless, the pain must be unbearable, otherwise the souls wouldn’t clamp to their plastic bags. Although, it is natural for souls to roam. If they prefer to stick to their bags, while Miseriors are waiting outside, there must be some good reason, though” the Prince explained. Again the Advisor agreed, but not all sincerely, perhaps the Prince was simplifying a much more complex matter.

14. Anonymous in Frankfurt

The former Roland Waldschmitt twinkled. Had he dreamed? His daughter and Scholasticus Slyboots were busy in the little kitchen, they were cooking a meal.

What had happened? Well, he had never experienced anything like that. Had it been a day-dream? Had he really been sleeping? He couldn’t remember anything else but the dream, or had it been a very lively vision?

Had he needed another push, there it was. If that was the future of mankind, then good-night, and fare well brave new world...

Like in a distorting mirror he visualized what would come if people like him ran the show. He and his kind – all those so-called brothers, who praised egotism and selfishness as the true virtues of progress, stood at the beginning of such a nightmare. Everything had to be done to make this not happen. Another chapter had to be written. He decided to start right away while the impression was still fresh.

He wasn’t hungry anyway, and was fed up with all those tins. He wondered if he also could get something fresh, once in a while.

Right now he felt strong enough to stand the challenges. The more as so he was not alone. However, he had to become active, that nobody could do for him. In his daughter and the Professor he had the best partners for his ideas, he was sure about that. Perhaps they had to wait a little longer, perhaps they needed more careful planning. However, the fight had to be taken up, there was no way out of it.

They had to stop Malicious Marduk, at best right now and here, if that was possible, lest that such nightmare never become real. He still

resisted to believe that what he had seen was a vision of the future world – the earth they lived on... – not right now, however some-when and somewhere (while he had been moved temporal, he was almost certain) – the good old earth down there, he hoped to see soon enough, as well as he hoped that it would be the earth he left some weeks ago, in order to write this prophetic book of warning up here.

He couldn't be sure about that either, had he himself become his alter ego and was not the same anymore, but a new man.

The old I had died. He had left it behind. And he strongly wished to have this become reality. Because it is said so easily that an I has been replaced by a better one, while the body was still alive and more or less the same, and so was the memory. So what was this death like, then?

He felt the itch to test that out, and go into the lion's cage, so to speak. And what would be more challenging for that than the stage of the world, a public performance at the Frankfurt book fair?

The book should be promoted anyway, and without author this was a tuff business, no matter how worth while the subject was.

First he talked things over with Scholasticus and Arundle, after having found out, that they remembered his nightmare likewise. "Kind of mirror, though, opened up for you" Arundle confirmed. "We were there in fact some years ago, that is, I was, but for Scholasticus it was as uncommon as it was for you, I presume... Both of you took part in my memory in a way..."

He'd better talk things like that over with Grisella, Scholasticus objected, because neither he, nor Arundle knew enough of that business. Thus, the three decided to move back to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Grisella was all too happy about that decision, because the responsibility for the book project was almost too much for her. They could weigh and consider the pros and cons of such a public affair, and speak as well of the risks.

In the end they came up with a surprising suggestion. The publisher agreed right away, thus the idea was built into the marketing and advertising strategies.

"Who is hiding behind the mask of Anonymous?" you soon could read in the appropriate magazines, expecting a sensation on the upcoming 'World's biggest Book Show'.

In the Deep South the winter just said good-bye – in October, spring broke out with might. The Isle of Wisdom-tooth was glowing in a double fever of awakening.

While everywhere flowers and grass raised their subtle heads, a plan built up to have Anonymous burst into the Frankfurt fair by sorcery. "...as precise and media specific as possible" Grisella put it – "...and also somewhat oblique and not quite legal" Dorothea added.

That would heat the media humdrum even further. However the probationer required an extra lot of discipline. "I think, we do it that way..." Arundle fixed the strategy. And then she presented to her stunned father such a tricky double strategy, that he bowed in admiration literally.

"...and now get to work, what you are missing, is definitely the routine. A talent like you has to be trained. However there has been little done from your side, so far. Besides, you are not the youngest. – well, don't you worry, we'll make it. Flory and Cory are with us, after all..."

However, the training went on and successes remained meagre for indulgent Arundle, who started panicking: "Things got to be visualised" she kept yelling at her assistants: "Visualising is our declared aim. Everything else is secondary..."

The sisters looked at each other and shook their heads softly, what on earth was meant by 'everything else is secondary'? However, they refrained from bothering their exited friend with such check backs. Her father was stress enough.

"And don't forget about plan B, if plan A fails!" Again the friends didn't quite know what was meant by that. Well, plan B did mean something. They had to talk with Billy-Joe and Pooty about that.

"...and be aware of that grass harp for heavens sake. I cannot imagine what's going to happen if we stand up front without a grass harp..." she yelled and stumbled over her own feet.

"Arundle, you need a break. Have a break and let us continue. We will go on the way you want it, just trust in us..."

Former Waldschmitt, the object of his daughter's endeavours, was also stressed. While stress was the least they needed. So they made him break as well, and then continued with some relaxation exercises, which miraculously led to success right away. While the visualising still was some kind or a problem. The probationer more then once started flickering or even disappeared as a whole.

"Wouldn't look all that bad, after all" they nodded at each other affirmatively. "Let's see what the others say" Cory wondered – "I think they'll like it, just the same" Flory agreed.

For the exotic part Pooty and Magic Master Stone as well as Billy-Joe were responsible on a wholly different stage, so to speak. Still, Arundle insisted to participate and found her father's agreement, who still was a little afraid of the 'savage' he still addressed Billy-Joe secretly – and that outlandish fury thing with him likewise. Such a hint could show how far he had managed in overcoming the old Adam – not really very far, though.

The date came nearer, while the excursion into the Australian outback consumed a lot of the precious time of theirs. The probationer lacked twofold of mobility and flexibility.

Being stuck for years in a rigid ideology turned out to be as miserable as the chronic lack of physical exercise; in spite of the radical vocabulary he procured, thus now turned out to be nothing but empty straw.

A beginner's training right from the start seemed necessary, while those spare-parts, which had been implanted, turned out to be disturbing or even became severe obstacles. Only the organs could prevail and did a good job. That was something, after all.

The sensitive side of his personality had also severely suffered, and it seemed very unlikely to bring here some green to blossom, but Billy-Joe didn't give up so easily, and indeed after some days they achieved somewhat acceptable results.

"We may not need that part at all" Arundle commented, who wasn't convinced yet, when she realised how deep her friend involved.

"You never know" he just said. He wanted this part done as best as possible. Despite the fact that this part of the performance was of minor importance in the oeuvre that was going to be presented. On the other hand, it would raise attention, and that was what the show was about, anyway. The basic idea was to stir up as many people as possible.

For the publisher any event would be of help and the press would jump on this one, for sure.

"What ever we do, by all of our measures your father gets an exemplary lightness, thus it really doesn't matter whether his bones show a little stiffness – might even be a nice effect, though" Grisella put in. She claimed for an end of the preparations by now. Everything else had to be performed live on stage anyway.

The telephone kept ringing for a little while – so unusual over here, until Dorothea finally answered the call. “It’s for you, Grisella” she shouted through the office – “it’s the publisher...”

A minute later Grisella came back with a bright smile on her face: “The decision is out” she yelled into the round where all in the know were assembled.

“As we learn from well informed sources the price of the German Book Trade this year goes to – well guess to whom – to no less than to ANONYMOUS...”

“Now our efforts were not in vain! - congratulations and thanks to all of you. We wouldn’t have done without you...”

“Slow down, dear sister-in-law, don’t you tear off the rabbit’s skin before you caught it. There is still a performance ahead...”

“You and your awful comparisons” Grisella answered quite upset while being vegetarian and animal rights protector – however Scholasticus only shrugged.

“Let’s stay cool” he murmured somewhat intimidated, but still didn’t see the point in his offence. To him it was just a kind of proverb.

They all knew it, the first performance was the most important. Conditions favoured the sleeper down here in the South. Right in the middle of the night he had to dream himself to the Frankfurt book fair, while the accompanying crew travelled by means of Masters Bow and Stone and were supposed to meet at the publisher’s stall in Hall II G3 precisely at ten thirty local time.

“By all means, be punctual” Grisella pleaded, who couldn’t overcome her aero-phobia and was represented by her sister.

Anonymous had a beer for the night in order to gain the necessary mood and to overcome a certain nervousness. He punctually slept by half past ten and dreamed himself straight towards the book fair, the same way they had trained it during the preparations. He knew the site of course, but had trouble finding Hall II at first.

When he did it at last he was greeted by his team, who checked him over again of his transparency, but were satisfied, so far. The passer-bys shouldn’t notice before hand what was going on.

By car they then went to the Paul’s-church for the price. Speeches were held, the price was handed over, and now it was Anonymous part to say thank-you. At first he did so with brave words, but then he pulled a grass harp out of a Medicine pouch around his neck under the

busted shirt, threw away shoes and jacket and started one of the monotonous Australian singings.

While doing so he began to lift off the ground – first up and down than had himself wave through the rows so that the last noticed the condition he was in.

A sigh went through the hall. Those who were seated apart pressed in. Rough press-guys pushed for the best shooting position. It didn't take more than five minutes and the photos went around the world, and Anonymous somewhat thin singing had half a million clicks in the internet and promised to become a world hit. The publishers didn't know what happened and weren't prepared for such ballyhoo.

The book as such seemed of minor importance, while his author was some sort of Aborigine. That was the sensation.

“Anthropology has to be rewritten” titled a yellow press paper and disguised as Euro centric.

While the rumour of the gifted Aborigine kept roaming: “Einstein from the outback”, it said in the evening news. No dements could do – those photos were just too cute. “The resurrected amongst us?” questioned another yellow magazine showing Anonymous with his grass harp some three feet above the ground swaying through in Paul's Church.

The paper was accused right away for blasphemy by the Holy Chair, who sent his highest representative next to the Holy Father himself to Frankfurt to find out what was going on.

The idea had been another one. The esoteric performance was intended to protect the endangered author, and that fear was all too realistic.

Like hellhounds a mean couple was on his trail: Viola de Stäel and Rudolfus Catalanius were present, however realized soon that nothing could be done, because the author wasn't present in reality.

Such a phantom could neither be chased nor executed. The original could be anywhere. And even if they had known were to find him in person, it was too late by now. Anonymous and his book were already well known. The author had achieved what he wanted: worldwide publicity was his lot. He could sit in any corner of this world and enjoy his oeuvre, while they were the blamed.

Both agreed how dubious Waldschmitt had appeared ever since, when they read his book – they didn't doubt for a moment who was hidden behind the pseudonym.

It was the bleak and somewhat merciless accusation of a traitor and renegade hiding behind morals, and presenting his - 'supposed to be' - mellow heart with in-surmounting stupidity and the naughty arrogance of delayed puberty.

The most secret plans and most hidden intentions, and darkest secrets this man discovered. Such a book was dangerous, because it assembled the stupid band of good-doers and world-improvers, and put the finger on the weak side of the new time-economy.

With gnashing teeth they had to witness how this renegade was hailed by the plentitude for his hollow talks of love and justice.

Malicious Marduk knew the sources very well, Anonymous referred to. But how could he achieve such detailed discernments? The appropriate chapters proved him witness. Thus, a grave complaint was due with the highest authorities. Such an unacceptable interference into the past by future means could not remain unanswered.

However, complaints like this didn't suit the spontaneous spirit of evil, for him they seemed to be the most boring endeavour you could think of, and were meant for his heavenly opponent, the so called Advisor, an arrogant self-assured bastard, who aimed to be something special by resisting the temptations of power, while rejecting torture in disgust.

Malicious Marduk was bound by a similar codex and was thus separated from his hellish company. A circumstance he was more troubled with, than he had thought he would be. As a result the humans he became under control remained weak characters in general. The best example he was just experiencing.

Malicious Marduk could as well count two and two together, so to speak. Behind Anonymous nobody else was hiding but the former Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalina, who had changed sides, just like that!

Those human beings remained for ever an insolvable secret for Malicious Marduk. At the bottom of their hearts you could find all those demands and temptations of his taste. However, they were full of weakness and scruples, and broke in on the funniest occasions, only to throw away everything they had achieved or had adored as their elixir of life before.

Can a book change the course of the world? That was the most decisive question. Anonymous asked the question over and over again, and a sweet tickle got at him. He'd be better off if he hadn't swayed in on the hubbub about his book. He could feel how the fangs of power played with him again, which were creeping in through the back-door while being dismissed at the front door.

It was high time to wake up. His dream had been a nice dream, no doubt, but a dream, and dreams you had because you were able to wake up again. And because all things that were happening in reality, hadn't yet happened in the dream, or would perhaps never happen – and what was perhaps most important: In dreams things could happen, which would hopefully never happen in reality, thus, functioning as a kind of warning.

That's so nice while dreaming. Dreams aren't real, as long as they last, what ever comes out in the aftermath. Think of that ancient dream of flying, almost everyone knows. Without it, people had perhaps never had the idea of leaving the ground. Being free like a bird meant to be outlaw and had been one of the worst punishments you could think of. However, the inner drive, the dreamt experience of flying overcame the fear and the dangers of free flight.

Anonymous started musing again, while he intended to wake up only. Waking up was hard to achieve, though. Would all be just a dream he had experienced in Frankfurt, as soon as he woke up? Then he didn't want to wake up.

All the perpetrators of the world couldn't harm his dreamt appearance. He enjoyed for being honoured for the sake of the bettering of the world. That meant a lot for him, more than all the terror meant he had been spreading in former times. If you could compare that at all!

Now, the sweet lust of power tickled as well, but it was a different kind of power, and came from passion and respect, where he formally was spreading fear and horror and have his self being raised and also somehow respected in a negative way, though.

He couldn't help it, he had to wake up, thus was the quest of life. Those, who never woke up again were handed over to death, and that was something else.

The crew was just arriving, when Anonymous stretched his stiff limbs and yawned, after a long rest and sweet dreams. While he was in due train to tell the others they just waved him off “we know, we

know” they said smiling. “We were there ... great experience, though, congratulations ... well done...”

What should they do now? Sooner or later the persecutors would pick up. They also were in command of forces of the other kind. Wrath and sudden rage paired with malice and cruelty governed their misdoings. The cloud of revenge wavered by like a threatening thunderstorm. Those sensible characters on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth could almost smell them. And while they were able to arm themselves, they couldn't guarantee for their guest, who was the target of the combined wrath of all forces of darkness.

Especially since the formal protest had been accepted, Malicious Marduk had raised. Thus, the doors of hell stood wide open while the band of Miseriors were gathering and was approaching now like a dark huge cloud, mighty and deadly towards the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

“This time it'll be serious” Arundle meant while she looked at her father really scared. Billy-Joe agreed – “There is but one choice - resurrection!”

Pooty got Master Stone off the Medicine Pouch and Arundle employed her Magic Bow likewise, and had his red eye twinkle.

“I think, we go the straight way – no diversions, no temporal or local target this time...” Arundle and Master Bow agreed. “At best we steer right towards the virtual hyper-station amidst the crossing of all galaxies and poly-verses.”

Master Stone agreed right away. There was no time to lose. Arundle, Billy-Joe with Pooty, and the real Anonymous this time vanished from the surface of the earth, while stars and comets passed by like neat little coloured lampions in time.

For Anonymous this would become a long trip, a very long trip indeed, whether a voyage without return, was written in the stars. For now he was in their middle, like a lost sheep that was coming home after a long void journey back to the herd.

Arundle's fare-well faded in the empty space. A last wink and Anonymous was on his own.

The magic carriage turned in on an elegant slope about the time-scale, and than returned the passengers to the original position, where their friends hadn't been void in the meantime, and were prepared in order to stand the upcoming evil.

Like Moshe once erected the iron snake in defence of the deadly attack of the fire-snakes from heaven, stood now Scholasticus like a

rock, firm and sound on the ground, and tuck his iron staff into the ground as Moshe had once done.

And the staff endured! Endured for a good while, when Scholasticus staggered and threatened to fall under the impact of the attack. Billy-Joe saw it and rushed towards him. Mighty energies rushed through the iron snake and disappeared in the ground, where hell opened its mouth. The Miseriors disappeared one by one to where they belonged.

When Malicious Marduk realized his mistake, it was too late. His army was lost. His mighty force faded in the senseless attack. In boundless wrath he rushed behind. So mighty was the push that went through the staff, the iron snake busted, and burned the hands of the holders down to the bones.

“Are you sure, this was hell’s gate, they went through?” Pooty asked and looked into stunned faces in the round, while the two heroes, holding the staff, slowly noticed what had happened to their palms.

Arundle rushed towards them and got her first aid stuff out of Master Bow’s invisible quiver.

Master Bow then examined the wounds and knew right away, what to do: “It’s gonna take a while, though. Lucky them mostly the palms are burnt and not the fingers. That’s good. Put your hands into ice-cold water for the next twelve hours, and then we’ll see” was his advice, the two heroes followed without comment.

Thickly muffled up in warm clothing they sat in the kitchen in front of a bowl of water wherein ice-cubes were swimming.

Many of the ones in the know had gathered for company, but that was not the only reason. Cory and Adrian were in severe sorrow for the mer-folk. “What, if the Miseriors are going to attack them again?” Cory asked and Adrian added:

“Was that really hell’s gate, you saw them disappear? How do you know what hell’s gate look like?”

Scholasticus and Billy-Joe looked at each other. “Such you feel” said Billy-Joe after a short while, and Scholasticus nodded “You know that in the instant” he said “afterwards you ask yourself how did you know...”

Now, they weren’t all that certain anymore. What Adrian and Cory feared was not all that unlikely. By experience all inhabitants of the area knew that simplifying the whereabouts was no good advice. Who had been attacked by those Miseriors, knew how the personality could change under the impact of the evil force. The first notion was just to lie and ignore what happened: “That’s kind of logical, though.

Who wants to admit that he or she isn't his or her boss anymore?" Pooty said with tears in his eyes, while he thought of Walter.

15. The Nanoverse

"Has been just false alarm - thank God, my feelings were mistaken" Adrian reported after his visit at the bottom of the sea, and Cory could only confirm his impression, who had gone with him.

Both had been on very different sites, but didn't notice any remarkable difference. The mer-folk was as usual. The trip to hell had thus been real – Those Miseriors had obviously disappeared.

"Sometimes they are in their own way" Cory sighed somewhat desperate after her return from her monthly visit. Her sister picked her up from the landing-stage where the boat landed after a stormy trip over the passage from Conversiors' Island. One of the few summer storms moved over the islands since that morning.

"Is that not the same everywhere?" Flory answered.

"Could well be – still..." Cory objected.

"What are you after?" Flory didn't quite get her.

"Well, nothing special, it's just kind of feeling" Cory said, while alarm-bells starting ringing on Flory's side.

"...and Adrian speaks of false alarm!"

"Do you mean...?" asked Cory.

"Don't you think so?" Flory replied.

"While you say so" Cory thoughtfully put in.

"Just remember, nobody sticks a label on his or her forehead saying 'here lives a Miserior'," Flory insisted.

"I see what you mean" Cory nodded. "Yes, I think the feeling is enough. I mean that awful feeling – nothing works by itself, everything is delayed, things don't fit as common. It's like wading through a swamp and you don't get ahead. While normally you meet happy faces everywhere, they all look so sad and hopeless" Cory explained, and went on after a short while: "Perhaps it's the lack of lightness. They are all so tough..."

"You and Adrian should mention that as soon as possible or even call for an extra meeting" Flory recommended.

Her sister nodded somewhat bleary-eyed. She was tired after the swim and longed for her bed. "Such a week under water is quite something, you know..."

Flory couldn't imagine her little sister's life any more and felt sad about that. They weren't the same any more, a shadow stood between them and had torn them apart. But perhaps life was that way, and perhaps the change didn't pass by her as well, while she didn't notice it.

When her little sister had left, she went on to the 'great afternoon' as the seminar of the two Honourables was called meanwhile. In fact the semester had already ended, but the hard core of students didn't accept and didn't want to miss the energetic push they always perceived.

Messrs Stone & Bow were only too delighted, though, and needn't be asked twice.

They then started their monotonous singing and squabbling as usual to the students' delight, who didn't want to miss it. Such collective daydreaming was of an entirely different quality than any other lecture or what Flory was able to achieve on her own or with her sister. (Cory was as good at that as she was.) They were well-trained Somnions after all, and were at the end of an endless chain of ancestors on their mother's side.

The hall was packed as ever. Flory slipped through hardly noticeable openings, and put her small feet into the tiniest gaps. She wanted to get to her friend Arundle, who was sitting at the desk with Master Magic Bow on her lap, while Billy-Joe was sitting cross-legged on the pedestal, and Pooty was fumbling the other magician out of Billy-Joe's Medicine Pouch.

Master Magic Stone soon gloomed in the brightest colours. Master Bow answered by the nicest red of his magic eye. Billy-Joe took over the introductory singing this time, and sang a song of his ancestors. It was the great song of rain-making, while outside the storm roared, you could hear through the centre shaft.

"Rain-making's kind of easy, though, while the storm is raging outside..." some might mock and got an ice-cold shower in the neck for that, which made the mocker squeeze like his mouth did when sucking a lemon. Those forgot about the telepathetic base that prevailed in here.

Such little sanctions were done smart and precise and nobody with a clean mind experienced one single icy drop.

It was not easy to clear the brain and get rid of the wild mixture they had in mind. Flory tried very hard this time. She had been pushing towards the centre, because she thought the energy strongest at hand. Besides, her friend was sitting there, she wanted to be near, because the alienation from her sister was aching, and she hoped for relief. While being here she couldn't feel the wall, she meant to notice between her and Cory, when they were alone. She panicked whenever she became aware.

Something was going on, she couldn't grope, and might have to do with Cory's excursions into the ocean. Although she had made excursions before ever since, and nothing happened.

Billy-Joe's singing increased and mixed with the hollow howling of the wind in the inner shaft. Since Anonymous' great success with his Australian out-back interlude at the Frankfurt book fair – Billy-Joe thought such performances very suitable by now – right here and in the lecture hall! Far too unquestionably his folk ignored their own folk's soul and spirit or even denied it.

What did those whiteys think they were? Judging and measuring the value of the original Australian culture for the good of mankind. Would they at last know for once what they missed, lacking of the capacity to take part, first of all. They didn't even have a sense of noticing their shortcoming!

Yes, this was said just like that, very right! If it was said just like that, than it wasn't worth while and would forever be closed for those who lacked of courage and patience, while this was needed if you wanted to dive into the true secrets of the world.

With axes and halogen beamers you better not tried. And perhaps did a symphony orchestra not fit either, while a grass harp would do, by means of which it had been tried for thousands of years to imitate the chirping of the cricket.

“What's that worth while?” was the stupid question of the whiteys, who knew the answer beforehand.

The whiteys know, that the substance of the cricket is not worth while, that the chirping of the cricket isn't worth while, just like the little leaf of grass of the monochrome grass harp.

And now they even know that their own wealth isn't worth while, because they have invented a new worth, they believe in with the old fervour – they call it the time.

But now the cricket comes back into the game and the chirping of the grass-harp, because the secret of time is enclosed in the chirping of the grass-harp, and what it needs to find out.

“The value of the grass-harp chirping is the de-acceleration of time.”

“Hear, hear” a voice sounded. “Just like the life of a cricket prolongs a short summer into an aeon in the Nanoverse, the play of the grass-harp takes us out of time and into the Nanoverse” the Advisor made himself known.

“Chirp, chirp, chirp” the grass-harp said. Foreboding, woeful sighing – The audience split into those who understood and those who didn’t. Billy-Joe was asked to continue until all changed sides and understood.

Billy-Joe hoped for the power of the grass-harp and blew with might. The weak sound combined with the howling of the storm in the shaft, indisguisable. “Take your time, take your time, take your time...”

He couldn’t do more in the presence of eternity.

The Honourables packed their stuff, that is, they let pack, and waved off in dignity through the centre gateway that opened respectfully.

Flory popped in on the suction of the departing and remained on Arundle’s heels, who held the Magic Bow high over the head, when an almost soundless orchestra was heard playing some kind of gay defiling march.

“Let’s have a bite, I’m starving” Arundle suggested. “What about the South-Pacific buffet? What do you think? We didn’t do for quite a while.”

“Not together, anyway” Billy-Joe agreed – “Flying dogs and the like, ain’t it?” he grinned and pushed at Arundle, because he knew what she liked in any respect. Those so-call bats were her favourite.

“...and if the storm lets us, we could have a swim afterwards” Billy-Joe suggested.

At half past seven the sun was setting and the night came. Now it was about six o’clock. There wasn’t much time left.

“Let’s see” Arundle replied smiling. She didn’t want to refuse his wish just like that. He might have something in mind after today’s experience, she didn’t know what to think about.

So they indeed went for a swim after a short supper. The water was still upset and rather fresh. They headed at once out to their platform. The low sun was hardly able to warm them up, while the last gusts of the storm made them shiver.

They didn't feel like hanging on and soon decided to return. Trained swimmers as they were, they usually did the distance in a few minutes, but today the course stretched uncomfortably.

They hadn't figured the suction of the low tide – which was heavier after the spring floods of the storm than usual, and – when driven back - had almost missed their pontoon in the twilight that was lowering.

They just managed to get hold of the rail and climbed up again, as they were, that is – Arundle, Flory, Billy-Joe, Tika, Tibor and Tuzla.

Arundle called for her Magic Bow and Billy-Joe for Pooty, but in vain.

In dim light of the lowering evening the beach was greeting a last fare-well. Would they have to stay out here all night long? They would chill, no doubt.

A left behind towel of former guests was their only cover. So they crouched and held tight shivering. While fear mingled with the cold.

Billy-Joe felt ashamed and guilty. Arundle was ashamed too, because she blamed him, Flory was ashamed because of her ill feelings towards her sister - Tuzla and Tibor were ashamed, because it should have been easy for them as Sublimations to wave over to the beach, they could even have taken a passenger with them. But instead of talking things over, they just sat there shivering and quaking in silence.

Billy-Joe started one of his songs after a short while, which all sounded alike to outsiders. This one was the warming-up song for cold days, and was meant to warm you up, as the title said.

Soon Billy-Joe felt indeed warmer, Arundle noticed, who was squatting next to him. And she also felt revived, as soon as she tuned in on the singing.

A simple solution for a big problem, it seemed to her, and she felt very content, and so did the others.

Again the time stood still like once before the same day, and the Nanoverse opened, where time doesn't mean the same and seconds eventually become years, and minutes decenniums, and hours millenniums, and weeks – millions, and months billions - well roughly in some kind of reality - yet unknown, so to speak.

Who professed the proper eye, might look inside like into a goggle box and have a convenient look at world history in a kind of parallelogram, or something...

“Thus, we'd end up with “Spoeken-peeping^{xlvi}” Flory wondered. Her father was a Hamburger (not the one you can eat, but born in Hamburg) – he loved the saying and employed it in order to

circumscribe the gifts of his wife and daughters, without knowing in fact how far such “Spoeken-peeping-reality” was away from dreaming. That didn’t mean much on the one hand, any good dreamer should know. Perhaps she doesn’t know exactly what she eventually sees, still she experiences things nearby.

“No matter where you log in, you can find your time anywhere in the Nanoverse. It cannot be otherwise, while this is eternity” a voice was heard “I say this without claiming permission, though” the voice went on.

In reality no ten minutes elapsed. He had had an argument with his colleague Arundle’s Magic Bow let her know for excuse. “Did last a wink longer than expected. It’s not going to happen again...”

“We didn’t see anything, at least I didn’t. But we know now how it works properly, after having found access once. There are most likely safer procedures for that” Tibor wanted to know. And Arundle was rather stunned how cool he did see the matter – it seemed to be for him like one of those new computer games.

“Well, yes, after supper taking a swim out to the pontoon, then swimming back, and try in vain to fight the current; then getting hold of the rail before drifting away, freezing and gathering while singing a warming-up song and feeling good for that, and then you can take a look into the Nanoverse – is that so?” Arundle mocked. “Is that the procedure?”

“We could have left at any time, if we wanted to, am I right, Tuzla?” Tibor objected.

“Well, yes and no, the wind wasn’t favourable, and it was almost dark. If a gust had caught us we would have been in trouble” the so addressed replied, and Tibor shut up. He knew, she was right. In reality they had preferred to stay with the others, this was how he recalled it now anyway.

As soon as the rescue operation was closed, the Magic Bow had a word with Arundle and the Magic Stone likewise with Pooty and Billy-Joe.

They talked about responsibility and that sorcery shouldn’t be wasted, because it was too precious. After all, they were no taxi-cap you phoned or whistled to pick you up.

Arundle excused herself with the Nanoverse. However, the experts didn’t accept.

“If you still have questions, you better come to us. However, those dreamers are so clever, they pretend to know everything.”

Arundle protested – swimming hadn't been her idea. Blaming Billy-Joe however, didn't suit her either. Where had that idea come from?

In the dark waters of the bay strange shadows had appeared. A new kind of jelly-fish or left-over of a tanker leakage, the storm had pressed in? Who ever approached those shadows felt awkward right away without noticing why.

After that failure on the pontoon, water as such became distracting for the youth during the upcoming days. Instead of swimming or sailing they stayed ashore chilling in the sunshine.

A lot had been mused about the sea and its many facets during men's history, Arundle wondered while she relaxed on the beach. All people of the coastal areas around the world were devoted to the sea somewhat ambivalently. Love and hatred for the wet element were closely related, as it was taking their sons while delivering life likewise. Either soft and seducing, or brisk and demanding when driven by storm and gale.

To them the sea was peopled by all kinds of fable beings, and couldn't be otherwise. In the deepest depths all kinds of titans, guardians and hell-monsters kept on dwelling. The sea could become hell as well, when the shipwrecked died with thirst amidst the blinking water.

However, by all that general musings Arundle's rejection could not be explained. There was something else, more definite while still undetectable. Normally musings of the former kind didn't hinder her from splashing through the waves. Even accidents, as had been many, didn't refrain her from the wet element. There was something else, a more concrete threat, you somehow noticed when entering the water now.

With Cory she had become aware of first, Flory said, when she spoke with Arundle about that new phenomenon they all experienced. Such, none of them remembered of former times. They all agreed while dwelling on the beach and wondered why they preferred to walk some 300 yards to the shower instead of cooling off right at the waterfront before their noses.

Thus the golden October came, and the summer arose with might deep down under. Adrian felt the monthly uneasiness approaching, still no joy came along with it this time, and Cory wondered whether she should go at all. Intellectus had given in for good already the month before. He said he had to make up his mind very basically.

“Those steaming waves are showing an all too rough face, and the mer-folks don’t like us dry-landers – not the way humans like humans” he meant to know, while he was limited to his family and acquaintance, more or less. He was still young and disappointments of such kind would surely follow soon enough, ashore as well.

Cory went to bed with migraine, and had the doctor to look after her. However, he didn’t find any significant failure. He spoke of hormonally caused psychic ups and downs and suggested homeopathic hot and cold fomentations and light gym exercises and massage. While avoiding introspective experiments of all kind, as well as extreme strain and conversational role-changes.

Cory’s aches didn’t lessen, thus Flory asked Billy-Joe for advice, who employed the Magic Stone soon enough. While the latter contacted Master Bow, who was present anyway, because Arundle didn’t leave her friend alone, of course not!

“A classic case of exorcism, I should say” the Magic Stone explained and started right away an argument with the Magic Bow on that - about the pros and cons of certain methods.

Then Tibor was employed for his opinion. He would bring the decision, if the experts couldn’t agree. With the negative experience he and his Shaman had with the pigs and first of all with that huge boar, Tibor stayed away from asking his Shaman again and have him show up here. “Had been kind of negative experience for him likewise. That’s why he just doesn’t want to give it another trial over here.”

So the girls asked Billy-Joe, but he refused right away, and said he wasn’t prepared yet. His teachings had been cut off by death anyway, when his mentor disappeared. However, if there really was no other Shaman at hand, then he wouldn’t steal away from responsibility and give it a trial, even more because it was for Cory’s sake.

“This would be my first case” he said in a meaningful air. Cory, who unfortunately heard the whole negotiations felt even more awful than before, and wished she hadn’t asked beforehand. While she had to listen to that whispering mean voice inside, growing more definite and louder any minute, and couldn’t be pushed aside.

Admitting that something was wrong inside had been a great advantage already. Many others never came that far, but pretended not to hear. Her friends admired her outstanding courage.

“Had only Walter once been so frank and free...” Pooty sighed and gave her an admiring look with tears in his eyes. Cory stretched her hand out for him to comfort him, but an uncontrollable impulse

had her push a fist right into his face. The poor fellow didn't know what did happen, while the nose was bleeding.

Had there been need for a prove, here it was. A cry of disgust filled the room, and Cory's light voice was the loudest and most disgusted. Pale in the face she pleaded for bondage.

"Unfortunately, we have to do without narcosis. I can only give you a little of that hallucinate powder if you like. You might feel a little easier with it. It's not gonna be a nice walk, though. You should know. Are you ready?"

Cory nodded bravely, her hands cramped in Arundle's hand on the left and in Flory's on the right.

Billy-Joe waved with all kinds of bushels and smoke-tins over her body murmuring as he should be indisguisable, and hoped to impress not only the spectators but also the evil spirit.

Wholly unexpected - things worked out perfect. The evil spirit emitted out of Cory's wide open mouth and made faces before he fainted and disappeared like a black veil into naught.

"For this round, that one is really dead and is not allowed back on the battlefield" Arundle commented. "By the way, this was one of the main mistakes Malicious Marduk made last time. Out of the pigs and into the sea-sprites, as it went, do you remember? If we didn't have the great idea of re-education, things would be still the same" Arundle explained when Flory interrupted. "and if it's been that way all the time? You see, what happened to Cory, that is, what was with her, she was infested down there, I'm sure..."

"So do I" Arundle agreed: "I do recommend we all have it an investigation. The water lately hadn't been kosher, we all did notice, didn't we..."

"Oh, yes, collective ghost busting, hush, hush" Pooty yelled, who had been the only one without contact with that water. While Billy-Joe put him off together with the Medicine Pouch and the Magic Stone inside.

Cory soon recovered and assisted, and had Billy-Joe explain the procedure, because he also wanted to be examined. "You never know..."

"If you were haunted, you wouldn't have managed the exorcism with Cory" Pooty said, while Billy-Joe shook his head and said somewhat unfitting "One for all, and all for one" and didn't know rightly what it meant. Perhaps he referred to another proverb - 'caught together, hanged together', while this didn't fit either.

The joint exorcism done by Cory and Pooty was more successful than expected. At least three of those mugs became extorted and disappeared in an invisible hole in the ground. Thus, they had been in the water. The marvellous lightning conductor Scholasticus Slyboots had erected and held with all effort – now lost a good part of its miraculous nimbus.

“No highway to hell had that been, - instead - they’d done the mer-folk a backfiring disservice, though” Cory realized.

“We didn’t do purposely, we didn’t know better” Flory wanted to pull her down, However Cory didn’t accept. “Such a learnt Professor should know better than that” she complaint. “The whole Force might be assembled down there again. If so, we ain’t better off than some years ago, can’t you see that?” she looked with a sheepish grin into embarrassed faces.

“We still have our strategy – It was successful once and will be successful again... however, we don’t have to decide on that alone. First we have to inform the management and ask Adrian for his opinion” Arundle objected, who hadn’t been infected, same as Billy-Joe.

“Black ticks don’t jump on white dogs either” Pooty explained the outstanding phenomenon, which was a big compliment for the two, and probably was right, anyway.

“Mind your words, little friend” Arundle answered. “The situation is far to earnest, for mocking on anyone.”

The double strategy had required a great effort and took several weeks. Besides, things had been clear, and defined while now you didn’t know who was friend and who was foe.

The Miseriors behaved more like parked sleepers this time than like hostile warriors, awaiting their hour to come. Little was achieved by stirring the individuals up, who weren’t open and resisted the efforts by listlessness and indifference. The former double strategy might therefore be of little value.

Only a few swimmers had been tested positive, and so far none of the mer-folk, while listlessness was a strong hint.

Adrian wanted of course to find out for himself, but was tested negative. The procedure was simple meanwhile, and fast, still you couldn’t test the whole sub-water population. They might not agree anyway, proud as they were. The only possible way was to raise their own ambitions. And without a simple method of testing and curing, the chances were limited.

During the upcoming general meeting many things were on the agenda. The most curious application referred to Anonymous. And demanded his surrender as he was claimed to be responsible for the situation in general and for the problems of the mer-folk in specific.

Without authorisation the School's Management had granted asylum and publishing of a whistleblower of the worst kind, thus caused the uprising of the dark forces again, thus the reasoning went.

"We should negotiate about the retreat of the Miseriors, and offer the handing over of Anonymous" it further said in the application.

"I would like to have the applicant tested" Billy-Joe whispered into Arundle's ear. They were steaming with rage.

Who else but Moschus Mogoleya raised his voice in favour of this application.

(He would of course never agree to voluntary testing.) Arundle and Billy-Joe were sure that he was the grey eminence in the background, who arranged for that application. However, they couldn't prove it. The matter had been brought forward too clever: Nobody but Tika, Billy-Joe's little twin sister had put that application on the agenda.

"Moschus Mogoleya would by no means agree to a test voluntarily" Arundle whispered.

"Let's have it a trial. The test as such is of minor interest, it's the result we are after." Billy-Joe somewhat mysteriously answered.

"Yes, as a result of the test the exorcism should be included" Arundle agreed – "Thus, we do them a favour. Nobody enjoys hosting a Miserior. Surely not!"

"Be it, that he belongs to that sinister breeding..." Billy-Joe objected.

"Even then, I doubt it... - People can change, think of my father, he is the best example."

"Courage you can't learn, I'm afraid."

"...And that's missing here, no doubt..."

"Surrender – what a nuisance. First of all, they must find him..." Billy-Joe shook his head in dismay.

"That's what all is about. That's the trick. They want to find out which way my father took. That's the new strategy of Malicious Marduk..."

"Not as long as I live..."

"I'll be with you, sure enough, if it comes to the worst", the brave girl added.

The decision was delayed. Such a basic controversy was without parallel. An investigation would be necessary to find out about the motivation that was hiding behind the application. For that purpose an open study group was founded, inviting each and everyone to take part, while Arundle and Billy-Joe registered first, sure enough.

The leading question was whether the motive for such an application was fear or something else. – Was more behind, was it intended as a tricky trap to get hold of Anonymous?

Tika's shy and naïve air of bringing forward the quest favoured the first assumption. If it was her own, and that was the big question. Without help she would scarcely have managed, even Tibor admitted, who had been hanging up with her regularly, since she made friends with the Sublimators. Tika enjoyed Tibor's company and had changed to the better. The green whirlwind had set her heart in flames, so to speak.

Did she hand in this application in order to do him a favour – that is - his Dean?

For Tibor it would have been easy to convince her. Had the Dean set him under pressure? The fact, that Tibor was his friend and Tika his sister, didn't make things easier for Billy-Joe.

Arundle should have a word with Tibor, because Tika wouldn't talk to her openly. She still was somewhat upset and resisted any approach so far.

Tibor wasn't sure either. Fact was, that his Dean had talked thing over with all of them – including Tika. Since that time fear was the girls' lot, while he and his brother manly fought such feelings.

After some days the girls turned up with a paper that turned out to be the application and was blaming Anonymous to be responsible for the hullabaloo, and resulting in the dubious demand.

"I think this is a new strategy of Malicious Marduk", Arundle thoughtfully commented on Billy-Joe's report. "He seems to have learnt from his defeats. Moschus Mogoleya is the key, I'm convinced. Tika and the girls are only the scapegoats. The man in the background is, I'm sure, the Dean himself, and I doubt whether he is still wholly on his mind", she went on.

"Who shall we test then?"

"Well, of course Moschus Mogoleya, that's quite clear, or do you think there are others still behind him?"

You don't think of poor Penelope or Zinfandor again?"

"Not him again, he had just been with my father in closure for several weeks, so I can't see him fit into the frame..."

“And if we are totally lost the way we are investigating and Marduk isn’t the initiator this time? As a matter of fact we do have quite a different problem we should tackle, instead of wasting our precious time with bagatelles.” Arundle concluded.

“How did we get about Penelope and Zinfandor in this context?”

“Well, there’s still the suspicion in general and has to do with Mogoleya’s character. He is craving for recognition makes him open for all kinds of influences by admired authorities.”

“Is he admiring Penelope?”

“Well, let’s start all over again. We want to know who is behind that application, because we suspect the applicant to find out the whereabouts of Anonymous. Right?”

The others agreed with Arundle.

Purposely she didn’t speak of her father in this context.

“But don’t we all wish to know where he is? I for my part would very much like to know how he is and what’s it like where he is...”

“Malicious Marduk wants to know his location for another reason. He wants to punish him for his desertion and disloyalty – as he sees it...”

“That’s the way we see it. Perhaps he just wants him back...”

“Bullshit, my father said it, while being Chairman, he only was a nuisances and as a spy he failed...”

“Besides, that woman comes into the match, the one for whom he left my mother” Arundle went on. “That was so mean after so many years...”

“Each third marriage is being divorced nowadays...”

“But not my parents...”

“Sometimes it’s even better that way, also for the children...”

“Still, when I marry one day, which will most likely never happen, I will never divorce – no way...”

Thus, the debate went astray.

The question, whether the application was based on a fundamental right or was an eerie conspiracy didn’t get any clearer. While things would definitely be settled during the following meeting. Where the application might even be accepted, a hair-raising idea for the opponents.

“When Anonymous already went through the light, than Malicious Marduk won’t have any access, no matter where he is. You see with us, or didn’t you realized that we were the only ones unaffected by the threat in the water?” Billy-Joe said, looking around into stunned faces.

“You might mix cause and effect, though” Arundle admitted rather sphinx-like.

“What do you mean?” Billy-Joe asked back.

“Could well be that only those are allowed going through the light, who are prepared – and that does mean something, after all, I would say”, did she make herself clear.

The others didn’t look at it that way yet. “Then this is indeed a kind of privilege” Pooty proudly announced.

“You can say that” Arundle nodded- “However, it’s just an assumption of mine...”

“And you think Malicious Marduk knows all that and wants to find out, whether Anonymous went through the light?”

“Sounds logic, if he were logic and wouldn’t be screwed up the way he is. I think stirring up people is just fun for him.”

“And how do we find out, whether your father is safe indeed?”

“Let’s go and see, Master Bow knows how...”

“This might be more effective than hanging on with this discussion. Somehow we are moving in a circle, I’d say, and ain’t getting any further...”

They all agreed and Arundle and Billy-Joe together with Pooty and Messrs Stone and Bow headed towards the intergalactic virtual centre of all Poly-verses where they hoped to meet the Advisor, while some of the passengers might be sent through the light, though.

Again the fascinating light show extended before the eyes, while they were in no time at their aim – the virtual space centre.

Arundle remembered faintly the teachings of the Advisor when it came to defining the location of the centre.

“The centre of the universe is at the same time on any possible location, depending only on the time” she heard him say, as if anything became clearer thereby.

“Do you mean all-about and no-where?” she heard her asking back and was highly appreciated for that.

From afar she noticed that Anonymous had gone through the light as well. He was shining like an angel and the aura dignified his appearance, thus she felt pride rising inside. While pride wasn’t quite what she felt. Perhaps she felt something like satisfaction for never having given up the old squabbler for good, but kept in mind something of the old storyteller of her childhood, and his fervid dream.

The satisfaction referred to the fact that he had now come so close to his dream.

Would she be able to take him back home? While she was thinking, the Advisor shook his head, who just tuned in. “Anonymous is needed here” he said.

“While his testimony he is leaving behind guarantees immortality. And immortality can only the mortals achieve. Looked at him that way then your father has passed away, and his dream is fulfilled.”

“Perhaps I should start reading his book. Although I think I know what’s written inside” Arundle thought while fighting the tears, when she realized, what really had happened: her father’s life had terminated.

She would see him no more, she thought when she saw him swaying in and coming to a halt next to the Advisor.

“Now we are alone at last, just you and I” she heard him say with the voice she faintly recalled from the early days of her childhood, Arundle had missed ever since.

Pooty pushed for departure. Some opening was soon closing they had to pass through.

“Over here in the Nanoverse nobody knows what’s going on” the Magic Bow snarled unwillingly, hurried then however to take position.

“I thought we were somewhere in the universe” Master Stone inquired.

“You’ve got to imagine the following...” the Advisor commenced, but then interrupted himself.

“See you another time – take care of your opening – hush, hush...”

In the background you could see again those luminescent stripes. The wild whirls of time arouse all about them and pushed them right towards the proper gap in the space-time-continuum, and back to where they belonged.

The news of the early death of the author who just had come to fame and fortune stirred up the public. The sales figures rose into the immeasurable. The publisher wasn’t able to answer the demand and couldn’t have printed as many copies as required. Commercially seen the success couldn’t have been greater.

Still, the death was a pity despite the fact of the increasing sale. A living author could have produced on and on, and the time wasn’t yet ripe for letters from eternity, which were neither unlikely nor impossible.

Grisella held on stock still many more manuscripts all written by the busy man while prevailing hidden on the moon. Arundle assured her that Anonymous wasn't all that dead. He might come for a visit sooner or later, however in a virtual version like he did at the book-fair.

Arundle's and her mates' excursion to the inner space-centre did bring some clarification at last, while there were now even more secrets than before.

The opponents of that application, which was asking for Anonymous' surrender, could sit back now and relax. No matter what the vote would turn out, a workable trace to the disappeared could not be laid, he was not in the range of any human pursuer, but under the protecting roof of heaven.

Esoteric circles soon began hailing Anonymous as a saint. Somehow they got notice of the mysterious circumstances of his disappearing. He was put in one row with old Moses and the prophet Elias. Even the Catholic Church hurried now with their internal procedure.

The infestation by the Miseriors however could not be handled as easily, while there was now at least one clean institution, and that were those who had gone through the light. By means of empirical data Billy-Joe and Scholasticus collected, there was a 99% likeliness that those who had gone through the light were immune against Miseriors.

Thus, the commission was found that could be nominated for carrying out the tests and doing the exorcism.

Members were all those who had lately gone through the light, and that was quite a number. Scholasticus and Billy-Joe, as well as Arundle, Tibor, and Pooty were the activists, while all others participated on a kind of free lance basis, though.

The debate, whether testing on a large scale or not, didn't come to a definite result, while the search for the appropriate serum – intended to shortcut the exorcism procedure – was nevertheless going on.

The mer-folk however, so it seemed, would be left alone with their uncertain fate. Adrian was deeply ashamed and Cory was in tears when they couldn't find a majority for their proposal, and were faced with such cruel shortcut. Unfortunately the two sub-water activists had no idea of how to proceed otherwise, the more as so most tests down there came to a negative result.

16. Holidays

Time went by. The summer holidays were coming up, and other aspects of life pressed forward and pushed such notions aside. Flory and Cory would be picked up in Sydney by their parents in two weeks already. This time they wouldn't go to Egypt but to the desert of Gobi in the middle of Mongolia – home of Tibor and Sandor Khan. Both didn't know yet of the big surprise Professor Hare had foreseen for them. He asked them to become guides, while the Professor intended to follow the tracks of the greatest Khan of all times.

Arundle had intended to follow Billy-Joe to the outback, but wasn't sure whether her mother would do the long trip again. The sensational turning her former husband's fate took, moved her more than she could stand, and her present mate turned out as some kind of loser in her eyes now, comparing the former with the present.

Mrs Waldschmitt was a free lance accountant now, and well off, but the work ate her up.

“Come over here and have your soul relax. Deep down under the clocks run slower. The people have more time, especially in the outback. We can read Daddy's book together or go on a photo-safari, or we can lie on the beach somewhere...” she suggested to her mother and had convinced her more or less already.

Money was no problem. And relaxing would do her well – now at the end of November when the sad time came and all the grave musings of separation and death.

She had gone to see him, of course when performing on stage at the book fair, and had seen him on TV as well. He looked much different, though.

However, it hadn't been the time alone that made him change, she knew from Arundle, and was earnestly thinking of heading for such a beauty surgeon as well. Her friends had done – some even twice or more.

Had been good looking, her Roland! However, Goodman Death can't be cheated. So, he was dead now, just when he got caught by the wave of fortune. There wasn't even a grave yard.

“He just disappeared” Arundle reported, who cared not to say too much. Her mother wasn’t yet far enough. The resurrection-tale would have been definitely too much for her.

“Well, and how do you know he is really dead?” Mrs. Waldschmitt asked.

Arundle said she didn’t know better than the media, and was somewhat ashamed for cheating her poor mother. However, the truth would have been too much for her.

ANONYMOUS: THE FUTURE HAS BEGUN

Thus was the publisher’s title of his book. Mrs Waldschmitt bought it for the journey. At home there was no time for reading.

The paperback edition that was out by now, did it, she decided and cost half the price of hardcover. Besides, it was handier and lighter. Still it was a rather thick volume. “Who’s gonna read all that?” she asked herself and began leafing mindlessly through the pages.

There were no photos... might be a dry dull abstract – something for men, she wondered.

“...and if you come with us, instead of I’m coming with you?” – Arundle asked the twisting poor boy. The idea of meeting Mrs Waldschmitt again made him shudder. However, Arundle wasn’t much better off by now, when things became real and her mother was approaching. “I need you” she pleaded, and indeed did.

Sooner than later she’d run into trouble, Arundle knew now. They never had managed without mediator for more than five minutes, but her Daddy was gone and the two women would be alone for almost six weeks. She’d have liked to join Billy-Joe on his trip. However mother was underway and couldn’t be sent back, and this had been her own idea.

“We read Daddy’s book, and you can explain it to us. That’s fun for you too. And in the evening Mom will depart for her hotel and we do what we like. I can sleep outdoors like you, why not – and your clan we can visit as well – why not? We rent a mobile home and call our tour a photo-safari. I’m sure Mom will like the idea.”

Malicious Marduk wasn't present when his sinister troops were trapped, but resided still in the soul of the former assistant Rudolfus Catalanius from the McGill University in Toronto, Canada. By that way he participated in the dark passion of Viola de Stäel. Thus he was distracted from his real intentions, no doubt about that. Therefore he was steaming with rage when he realized the dimensions of the fiasco.

Instead of conquering the island finally and take in the bastion where the refugee had hidden all the while, he had now to accept the triumph of these people. While his headless troops were erring through the depths of the ocean or had even run stuck already in the mount of hell, wherefrom he had just bought them free. In his rage he punished the couple, who didn't know what happened.

Catalanius was castigated with deprivation, with the consequence that Viola de Stäel lost her passion at once. The relation broke apart. However, Catalanius was not the man to stand dispossession. He lured for the woman in a dark night near their former joint flat and stabbed her to death when she showed up with a new lover.

"If I cannot have you, nobody else shall get you" he hatefully hissed when she was dying in his arms. The man's throat he cut. Then he disappeared and didn't leave behind anything but a golden trace of certificates, still under way and noticed in the financial world – while the demand was mostly initiated secretly by the clever Public Relations Manager of the School of Inbetween.

Certificates were thrown on the market at a stunning low price. Dorothea had them all bought for a sum of half a million US \$, she was able to give away just like that. Money was no longer a problem since the great success of Anonymous' book.

This was the way Catalanius took bloody revenge on Malicious Marduk, who was impressed by the outstanding wickedness of his former companion. While that damn School of Inbetween triumphed, and the secrets of the time lay open and could be read by anyone, no matter which way he tended or engaged. There was no more competition. Who ever cared and wanted could bring the evolution forward. But when the time had come, he - Malicious Marduk - would take care that enough rascals were about then, steering the course of mankind the weird ways, and have exploitation revived and prolonged indefinite.

“When you got used to the complexion this man turns out to be a rather amiable and clever person, well educated and also gifted with a sense for the real things” - Mrs Waldschmitt was highly attracted.

She spent pleasant days in her daughter’s company. Right now they were underway in a mobile home way out into the red Australian steppe. Adventurous was their outfit – suitable for the purpose: Arundle and Mrs Waldschmitt were dressed in safari khaki from tip to toe, while Billy-Joe wore a brand-new loincloth and nothing else.

Gaily whistling he steered the mobile home through the glowing heat of the noon. The little air stream wavering inside like from a hot stove through the open windows, didn’t make any difference. Sand was everywhere, even between the teeth, and you couldn’t drink as fast as you felt thirsty.

Nevertheless, they were all in good mood. They didn’t have a declared target – if you didn’t take the cooling off in the evening as a target, you could be looking forward.

Mrs Waldschmitt did well. The nature-bound lifestyle in down-under and in the outback made her blossom. The scarce landscape charged her attention and kept her thoughts and feelings busy.

The fussy quarrels with her husband had ruined her life. She now could feel how ridiculous they had been, on the background of her new experience in the scarce landscape. In a grandiose scarceness like this, mulish quarrels of their kind became absolutely ridiculous in the after math. She asked herself how a reasonable person could have participated in such a farce.

“Yes, right you were. ‘The being defines the consciousness’^{xlviii} you recited your favourite philosopher, and now I begin to understand what you wanted me to realize, Roland. Where might you be now?”- she said to herself.

Arundle gave her the one or other hint, which radically altered the view on that man. And while she understood his book only to a very limited extend, she was surprised about the enormous knowledge that was laid down in there.

“Who had thought that such still waters were running so deep?”- she wondered all over again. She couldn’t praise it high enough when Arundle told her about the joint days on the moon, where Roland had to hide and found rest for his writings.

She also liked the respectful way Billy-Joe addressed to her former husband. ‘Anonymous’ in his mouth was like a title of honour. His sophisticated way of commenting what they jointly read, also did

her well, when they sat in the dim light before the tent, reading before nightfall.

The first chapters they had done by now. They had been full of hidden discernments as well as of the alienation that got hold of their marriage unnoticed by both of them – in their married life and on the job likewise. An avalanche of untouched subjects was rolling growingly and unnoticed for a long time, and buried their marriage at last, while the longing for freedom became overwhelmingly strong.

She wondered in the after math how little she had noticed of such inner fights, while sharing life with a stranger, her husband remained all life long.

Still, she was somewhat proud, because the book also dealt of her, and was read now by thousands of people, some even spoke of Millions or yet Billions. And if it was indeed true, than this book would change the course of this world – either to the better or to the worse – that was the question which had to be answered. Good and evil - both were laid down in the tracks leading ahead to the future, the book kept warning.

One of the most realistic chapters dealt with an discernment into a horror scenario that would hopefully never become real, and still was realistic as one of many thousand possibilities the future of mankind could choose.

Billy-Joe had discovered another chapter closely connected with that nightmare, dealing with the problems of predictions.

“...while the greatest secret remains the future...” he read. “The last and decisive grain of sand falls to the ground at a certain time and starts an avalanche a vacationing minister gets killed by. He thus cannot realize an application deciding on the paradigmatic change of energy-politics.

Had that grain of sand fallen a second later, the avalanche would have been delayed by the decisive second, the minister would have been rescued. The law would have become real. The change of the energy politics would have been executed. The Nuclear power plant XYZ would have been shut off just in time, and the mega super nuclear fall-out would have been avoided, and a region of the size of a state would not have been poisoned, and 3.5 Million people would not have been contaminated. A genius without genetic failure would have been procreated, who would discover an inhabited planet three generations later...

Thus, you could go on and on without end. And this would only be one string, at any given instant while other strings commenced at

any time and anywhere anew, anywhere on each time-bound location in space.

An idea that makes you dizzy, if you let it settle. May many parameters seem to be fixed, the bed of history present itself solid and stable, though. Fact is on the other hand, that there will be (in each spring and on any morning, no matter how they look alike) - fresh leaves replacing predecessors, however, all a little unlike, and never ever identical. That's amazing, isn't it..."

Mrs Waldschmitt's thoughts dissolved. She began to dream. The monotonous murmur of Billy-Joe's voice became somewhat suggestive, and said more and others than the words – while she had passed the border and lay in Somnia's^{xlix} arms who was delighted to welcome her on a trip into the dreamland of the Aborigines, where she remained.

Adrian Humperdijk felt left alone with the problems of the mer-folk. The research work for the infestation test and cure was stuck half ways. The test was far too difficult, besides, it hurt the feelings of the probationers. Such could probably be down with drylanders, but didn't work with the proud sea-sprites.

"If they deny our suggestions they have to find out on their own" Grisella said, who stayed behind because of her fear of flying. All other teachers had gone, and so had the students. Beside Watchdog Will Wiesle and some of his colleagues the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was deserted like never before.

Was that providence or coincidence? – it was so, after all. Only Marsha was coming back from Europe soon, and in three weeks things would look different anyway. There were only a few lonely days ahead.

Grisella's logic didn't convince Adrian – "Why should they? We ran them into trouble and we have to help them out again, and can't make them responsible for any shortcomings in our eyes. We can't say – you have the face the music now, while we are to be blamed."

"What would you suggest then?" Grisella asked back, when Watchdog Will Wiesle asked for the word, who had his own experience in this respect.

"You feel different, believe me, and I think, I can speak for all..."

"Very right" Adrian agreed – "so, it depends how many are reporting. And as many as there are, we have our medicine ready."

“And if that little prick is too much, then they get the serum the oral way by means of a sort of tablet with whale-flavour, by all means. Shouldn’t be too difficult, after all”, Grisella agreed, when she found out, that things were much further developed than they thought. Even the serum was available in sufficient quantum for a start anyway.

Since the first extortion of a Miserior, Corinia had been infested with, the procedure had become much simpler. By accident the researchers came about the anti-petrification potion, that was developed for the freeing of Penelope M’gamba and Zinfandor Leblanc. This potion was totally unacceptable for Miseriors, and only seconds after the vaccination with that serum, they departed right away.

“We might think of a general vaccination for all – under water and on dry lands – for those living here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth” Watchdog Will Wiesle suggested.

“We have to find out with our friends under water. They have to agree”, Adrian nodded. He was highly pleased by the unexpected turning the matter took.

“We can’t indoctrinate from outside, that’s clear, the more as so the young democracy was established only lately. On the other hand, I think the proposal is acceptable, and I will present it as soon as I have the chance to do so.”

Watchdog Will Wiesle blushed of joy and timidity. Since that discriminating rule, that was prohibiting service people to address to students was given up, some of the service people proved themselves as clever contemporaries. Such, they had been before as well, but weren’t allowed to show.

In those long solitary hours on watch the thoughts kept wandering, and thus, it was unavoidable that the one or the other man started thinking about the flock they were safe-keeping. They then came about the closeness of men and animal, which was even more obvious with the mer-folk.

Other watchmen saw their job differently, for them it was mere money-making for a comfortable living. The monthly agony of the creature on Conversiors’ Island, when such beings pushed their inside out, didn’t bother them.

They might as well need a dose of the serum, his engaged colleague now recommended. Because he knew by experience what it meant to be taken into possession of an evil spirit, and assumed such ignorance as a proof of contamination.

Cory sent a postcard from the desert, addressed to Adrian. She missed the water very much, she wrote, and was looking forward to come home and see their beloved in the depth.

Right now, while conversion sent first forebodes he wouldn't have liked to change with her. For once she might manage in the dry, because she had a strong will, after all, and conversion didn't mean too much for her. Theirs was a mild form of conversion, anyway. As a naiad or nix you were more or less the same, except for fins and the flipper.

Those big beasts or the tiny ones were different, though, and ran into great trouble. They suffered a lot both ways, and should know if it was worth while. They could be freed from their lot to a certain extent. (Some treated conversion like a disease.) You could reduce the effects of such attempt as far as the length of time was concerned. Instead of four days you could do in a couple of hours with some strange physical alterations. You had to stay for a couple of hours in a darkened room, threatened by a terrible headache, but that was it then. Life went on as usual after the attack.

Watchdog Will Wiesle was not only an experienced guard but also familiar with attacks by Miserior, the worst of all had taken possession of him not long ago. Because of his experience he suspected the conversion as a mild form of such an attack, because the symptoms were very much alike. And indeed helped the treatment with the new serum a lot, if you consider the chopping off of your second nature a success.

Because of that treatment Cory was able to come along with her critical days rather unharmed with her family in the desert. Her animalist nature was pushed back and reduced. Shortly before she left for Mongolia, she had had a vaccination even after the successful exorcism, to be sure she wouldn't run in trouble while abroad.

Her second nature might not be pushed back each month, mostly because of the lung – gill alterations which seemed to be a necessity in the meantime. As long as the initiating stimuli were blocked off, she could do well.

For good reasons she didn't want to become cured. Such an idea was wholly out of her range. For her it was a sacrifice first of all,

rather than a pleasure that enabled her to stay with her family, while the idea of never again meeting Boetie made her sick.

What so ever - some liberty got closer for those who suffered more than enjoyed their lot. Watchdog Will Wiesle trusted in his observations. Sometimes he felt like seeing further than the people concerned. While most of them accepted their fate in dignity and patience, however that didn't necessarily mean that they were content or even happy with it.

The photo-safari in the Australian outback came to an end. The mobile home rushed through the steppe. Billy-Joe was steering well, noticing holes and obstacles just in time, and stayed away from wandering dunes. Thus, they took their time. They weren't in a hurry. They had four more days to go before Mrs Waldschmitt's departure in Sydney.

She still wasn't through with that book of her former husband, but she had now access and good advisers she could always ask when in need. She was all in favour of the good cause and meant to notice time-thieves everywhere, whenever she ran out of time.

Brave and true Billy-Joe was reading each night with his soft melodious voice and commented or interpreted tricky passages. Arundle helped as well as she could, but avoided confrontations between daughter and mother. That was new to Mrs Waldschmitt who remembered otherwise, the more as so when Arundle's father had been involved.

The book couldn't be stopped on its victorious rally around the world. Daily there was news of translations. Some hundred languages were involved already and still more were to come.

The message of the change of values and the decline of the money-system spilled huge amounts of such unworthy means into the pockets of those, keeping the copyrights, and that were without doubt the family-members of the author.

17. Heal with Patience

“What about a Nautilus trip then?” Adrian asked the group of returnees who had joined in order to discuss the troubles of the mer-folk still pending. “After all, we are responsible to a large extent by sending those foes down there...” he argued.

Nobody objected. The Nautilus crew was available so far, only the engineer and the navigator were missing. The ordinary crewmembers were watchdogs while idle.

Before they set sails those pads had to be prepared, they had agreed on, while vaccination was regarded as a too cruel form of healing, and was definitely disliked by the probationers. Besides, filling jelly pads turned out to be much easier, and could be applied very easily either, because they had to be simply swallowed.

The filled jelly-pads were packed into waterproof chests, fifty in each box and had to be used up under water in one day after opening.

Being first rate sailor aboard the Nautilus Watchdog Will Wiese had come up with the idea of involving the submarine.

There had been no objections. Such an excursion would strengthen the solidarity as well of the students but also with the sub-water acquaintance. And those in the know could find out about the state of the threat, while the Nautilus as such always rose the curiosity of the mer-folk, the more as so it had been the life-saver for the freedom fighters.

None of the returnees wanted to miss the adventure, the more as so the school had not yet begun. So there were lots of volunteers. Each of the crew members was allowed to choose three volunteers. So they ended up with twenty four, that is to be exact with twenty seven souls on board, because neither Pooty nor Messrs Stone and Bow lacked a soul, while they had to be aboard in any case.

Not all were chosen for their abilities, but for more personal reasons. Adrian, who was in charge of the medical programme, was optimistic and trusted in his volunteers. All they had to do was handing out those jelly-pads and marking those who got it, in order not to mix up things later.

There was a lot of serum on board, and thanks to an alteration of the sluices you could now hand out the pads without problems they found out in a test run they had had.

Medical knowledge was not required at the sluices. Only the marking was essential.

Cory, (who was just back) and Adrian had figured out something nice – at least they hoped the naiads and nixes would like it. Each

female probationer was marked with a beauty-plaster a la Pompadour on the cheek, while the male were spotted with a red blotch on the forehead. (similar to the dot Cory and her sister had) – or vice versa, as per gusto. And for those both marks seemed too womanish it could be a stamped skull instead.

The boat set sails and was diving close to the base of the islands almost to the ground. All outlooks were manned, because there were steep riffs and clefts out there.

All those surplus passengers tried to find a spot from where to look outside. The view was grandiose down here, and all kinds of sea-dwellers could be seen you could think of – glittering swarms of fish rushed by, myriads of the most beautiful jellyfish wavered about, while sharks lured in the seaweed drifting in the low current, not to forget the little sea-horses or sea stars, the sea cucumbers, sea hedgehogs and octopods here and there between adventurously growing corals.

Soon, the first hidden hamlets showed up, almost invisible, fitted into the sub-water landscape. Regularity only allowed conclusions of artificial interference by intelligible constructors.

They had arrived in the agricultural zone of the city. In former times a most dangerous area at the edge of the sub-water civilisation (as far as you could speak of civilisation.) – nowadays still dangerous but was attracted now by several incentives. Thus, each settler was guaranteed a completely equipped home base, while a swimming school cared for the little ones, when the parents were working on the fields.

Patrolling guards prevented attacks of all kind, be it by outlaws or the murderous shark bands still somewhere out there in close alliance with former soldiers of the king, and wilful victims of attacks by Miseriors. They allied once in a while and there were rumours of conquered settlements without survivors further away.

Most farmers had changed sides now and were part of the vegetarian coalition. They looked at the outlaws as cannibals eating their own kin.

The closer you approached the inner city, the more vegetarian the scene became, and sometimes turned into unacceptable rigorousness. If you were caught when thoughtlessly swallowing a crab or grabbing for a passing swarm of fish, you risked being battered by enraged vegetarians. - The formerly needful aggression once required for chasing and hunting - altered into wholly unacceptable ugly forms of violence.

Such was the state of public affairs, and the visitors from the surface hoped to be of help by means of the vaccination, because it resulted in a noticeable reduction of aggressive desires, no matter whether such impulses originated within the individuals or were obtrude from outside by raiding marauders infiltrating the souls of the unprotected.

The fact as such was against a decent democratic development. No community could handle eruptions of that kind. Therefore those in charge grabbed for every straw and almost hoped the obtrusive cause to be found in the infiltration by Miseriors, because that could be cured, whereas genetic failures of the race were out of range.

Getting access to the followers of the new democratic offspring was easy in the centres. The Nautilus hadn't yet stopped and soon the volunteers came by from all sides in order to become vaccinated and get the appropriate mark. The aids at the sluices had only to take care that the cushions were indeed swallowed in front of their eyes. Otherwise the job was easy and both sides had a lot of fun with those markings.

Two sluices were in the bow and two astern, one each on starboard and port. The naiads and nixes put their heads inside and a jelly-cushion was placed in their mouths, and while they swallowed they were marked either on the forehead or on the cheek. The whole procedure took only seconds. Then the probationer dropped out and had another one take his or her site.

The people inside worked as if on a conveyor belt, and managed almost three hundred vaccinations an hour, that meant about two thousand every day. If they went on like this they would be ready in one week.

"We have only nine thousand pads available" Arundle objected. "As soon as they are used up we have to leave anyway..." Pooty added unnecessarily because everybody was able to figure that out.

"How many of those nixes are there down here in Australis?" Flory asked her little sister, who should know.

"Nobody knows the exact number, and nobody tried to really find out, there has never been a census, and there won't be one soon, I'd say. However, we might take our vaccination programme as a kind of census too." She answered.

Before long the current ceased. Fewer and fewer probationers strove for access, while the boat was on its second tour around the

inner city, for those who had missed at the first place for whatever reason.

They still had almost half of the jelly-pads on stock. “We do another last wide turning and then give up” the Skipper decided. “With so many people on board we use up more oxygen than we produce. The air becomes sticky already.”

Adrian and Cory put on diving equipment – their time hasn’t yet come so they had to manage the traditional way – and were now stepping clumsily towards the seat of the government, where they hoped to meet the Prime Minister, who rushed by as soon as she realized how they were armoured. The Prime Minister highly appreciated the amount of vaccinations, and couldn’t tell how many more there were likely to come.

The two ambassadors thus returned and reported to the Skipper as well as to the medical chief in charge. They decided to cut off the mission right away and return home to the protective docks of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

It was somewhat likely that they had vaccinated the wrong ones, and all those who should have been caught had slipped through their net, as it often was. However, nobody blamed them, and that was probably the most encouraging outcome of the undertaking.

The conflict between the fraction of the Vegetarians and the Meat-eaters had other sources and nobody down there saw a connection to the Miseriors.

The conflict had existed ever since, while there was now a clear majority on the vegetarian side, there were still thousands who followed the old way of life and also the old days’ values. The opposition was therefore strong, not only by number but by impetus.

“Hunter or prey, what’s inside us? Surely those fail who make up their mind for one of the sides, and those are right, who figure that we stand on each side with one leg, that is with one flipper-tip each...” Adrian summed up the tricky situation down there.

Cory picked up the thread right away and stressed on another aspect that had to do with their mission: “The conflict caused by Miseriors is much more effective on the Vegetarian side and might even cause casualties. So we might have done a good job after all, by getting access to the endangered clientele.”

Her discernment wasn’t new at all, because Walter’s death led to similar assumptions and conclusions. His death was another proof for their proceeding, while the truly endangered became protected by the vaccination and that was of course very good.

Things were somewhat different when you changed perspective and looked at the world from the meat-eaters' point of view. They felt limited and reduced or even existentially threatened. Therefore, the meanness of the Miseriors – if they had entered the carnivore souls – would only enforce the given aggression and unscrupulousness, which was already present there.

Looking that way on the matter, the islanders had become guilty somewhat different, by causing mean developments for parts of the mer-folk population, which had been noticeable already even before the attack of the Miseriors.

The conflict was part of their nature. Those who were unable to tame the murderous element inside were soon overwhelmed by killer instincts. There were no Miseriors required for assistance, though.

Those, who switched between their natures, and had to stand the attacks of a murderous nature, while normally decent people, were deeply ashamed, and threatened by a bad consciousness. For them the infestation by a Miserior was helpful in a negative sense, because it helped them getting rid of their scruples. At the same time they lost their humaneness, because they were pushed back into the mean bestial state, they had left behind to a certain extend. They became a kind of sharks again, and sank back on the primeval stage of a beast and gave up their humaneness completely. Being treated with the serum, might have helped, had they'd managed to get access to the sluices.

The most important group were the intermittent, who couldn't make up their minds which nature to favour. They found help with or without Miserior attack, by turning to the peaceful side in any case. Access to those therefore was the prime aim of the mission.

Adrian dreamt already of a general vaccination for the newborns, and have the bestial instincts controlled right from the start. Because such instincts had to be trained like everything that was human. The instinct alone didn't mean that much, he argued. But Grisella saw a grave problem. You should alter neither a population nor an individual by applying chemicals. If you did, you played God. And the vaccination was indeed an appeasing drug that changed the nature, not so unlike and in a way even comparable to chemical castration.

The original cause of the argument went out of sight while a hot discourse developed with many other aspects being put in. Arundle, who took Grisella's side, questioned the whole civilisation with the final aim of pacifying the human society by manipulation. "True

progress can only be achieved by democratisation of all – really all – aspects of life. - Democratise all modes of being and you alter Man as such”, she concluded.

“...And because this is so, therefore the human beings try to help out, however on the false end. They wish to manipulate and breed the ideal type, by interfering into the genetic programme and even begin to alter the DNA. - Cloning and the like – you name it. – This is Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*”, Billy-Joe assisted his friend.

The Aboriginal young man was very interested in the subject for good reasons, while having the tribal culture in mind where his offspring was.

“In the end nobody knows and good advice is dear, so to speak, when things extend nightmarish. And then you step back and look for connections of a successful life, and may end up with the so-called primitive cultures...”

“Very right” Scholasticus interfered. “Think of Laptopia. Those in charge promise improvements by adopting the tribal lifestyle in a way – well, could be seen that way somehow, anyway...”

It was a nice summer day and the study group met outside in the park near the little airport.

A helicopter just landed and a bunch of merry chatting youths got off, and were welcomed likewise, thus, the discussion came to a natural end. However they had a full term ahead to continue.

The responsibility for the mer-folk became a fixed position on each agenda of the School Board Meetings and the appropriate sub-committees.

The beach was tempting. Arundle, Billy-Joe, Flory and Cory as well as Tibor, his brother Sandor and Tika, escorted by the Korean twins Li Mei and Li Chang with two newcomers in their company, whom they had just picked up from the helicopter – formed a gay and merry flock that was heading for the seaside after lunch.

The decision, whether to sail or swim was taken out of their hands, because all boats were gone. Others had had the same idea on such a beautiful summer day.

“Then we go swimming – let’s see who’s first out there on the pontoon...” Arundle yelled and got started right away. The others followed and soon the water was foaming by the wild strokes of the swimmers, all heading in straight lines towards the target that was

gently swaying in the soft swell of the inner lagoon. The scary days when they'd feared the water, were gone for good

18. South-Michel of Capricorn

'How nice is life' Arundle wondered while handing herself over to the instant. She noticed the low motion of the planks underneath, listened to the mysterious gurgling of the water from below. The rough wood was pressing a little too immediate against the back. However, such was just bearable, and was compensated to a certain extent by the gentle breeze that was undermining the whizzing heat of noon. However, beside the breeze something else offered unexpected relief and took away such overload, which had meant too much in the company of the hard pressing wood, and might have caused even uneasiness, had there not been the warm vibrating body right next to her, well able to recompense such negative attempts just like that.

'O Billy-Joe, o, Billy-Joe, how nice it is to be with you.'

For the whole lot of the wild bunch the pontoon was too small. Tibor just turned on the back and his wet thin plaids clashed against her belly, and made her scream.

The ban of the instant was broken. She now felt in the aftermath an almost eternal sweet joy stretching in time as if time stood still just for them.

The Korean twins chatted with their Korean friends they had picked up from the helicopter. Melodious strange sounds wavered over to her. She let it be. The moment of panic was long gone. Arundle was looking forward back to the instant again, you couldn't hold tight and was still somehow endless.

Was it because of boredom or wantonness – they didn't know, had someone asked them – the Mongolian brothers started pushing the pontoon in rhythmic swinging motion. The waves under the planks were gurgling more than they smashed while turning into splashing, that was accompanied by fierce yelling and laughing – however soon intermingled with panic, when in vain the shaken tried to get hold on the steeper and steeper swaying planks.

A definite sign for departure, no doubt. Last in the row the two troublemakers jumped in - following the bulk. The sun was setting and was almost gone behind the horizon. Soon the wind would turn, thus it

was high time to return. Besides, supertime was near and the girls wanted to have their hair washed before. It was indeed high time, though.

The swimmers struggled hard but finally made it, just like that, and thanked the two marplots in the aftermath.

They arranged for a joint meal on the South Pacific side of the buffet, where they met again under the palm tree leaves, where you found mostly vegetarian delicacies.

For quite a while it hadn't been clear at all whether the two Honourables would go on with their lecture. They didn't have anything in the backhand, they said – anything suitable for such an audience, anyway, they argued.

The two Honourables had been invited to the planning-conference where the curriculum was discussed, altered and fixed for the upcoming term, and each teacher had to publish his or her priorities.

- Could well be, that they just disliked the idea of planning. Many things you cannot plan, they argued, in fact most things you can't, and if you were most precise there was indeed nothing that could really be planned. Planning was one of the hypocrisies of the human race. By planning, people hoped to get power over the future, and the outcome could be seen.

Thus, the two prevailed in mysterious insinuations instead of laying their cards open. Perhaps they wanted to become pampered and pleased.

Grisella argued that you didn't fix the future in such a curriculum but only the quantity and quality of the achievements. Of course there could always happen other things, still you could have intentions, no matter whether you fulfilled them.

Everybody noticed that they didn't meet on the same level. While the Honourables fought against the disenchantment of the world. They didn't want to participate in such attempts, they said. Whatever the people understood, lost its value at once. Many former mysteries lost that way and were devaluated down to nothingness.

They were asked for examples and were told to present facts instead of faint assumptions, nobody knew or had in mind.

So it happened that the two became the centre of the session, while they noticed that the matter began to interest them because it won profile as they put it. Perhaps that was it already. Only after they had taken over and dominated the situation, they were happy.

Without further argument they accepted the terminus and set date – it was the old one anyway – and also kept the four-weeks-sequence,

thus the time was available for other subjects the other three weeks. The whole trouble had been in vain.

The human colleagues decided to have such arrangements done differently, and have them develop from inside out, while for many the Honourables had been spokes in the wheel.

The criticism of the two Honourables had a grain of truth in it. The curriculum wasn't ideal – sure not – all of them admitted more or less, if they were honest with themselves. Such planning was always frustrating and never met the satisfaction of the colleagues. Why should the students feel better?

The idea of questioning such planning wasn't new either. “We had that for ages”, Grisella started. - “Such debates are not new, for sure not. But when it comes to realisation, then nothing is left. Each and every one is throwing his or her bread on the water – like in former days, and is hoping that enough eager fish snap for it, as it used to be before the great avalanche of reforms. - I'm sure, we all remember...”

“We indeed do” picked Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk up the thread: “How nice it had been in the days of the good old academic freedom. I don't want to miss it and remember it with pleasure. The prevailing so-called principle of discretion and pleasure we all remember well, the more so as we began to work on a new order. And thus we began creating it by disciplining ourselves first of all, I'm afraid, - always having the so-called best of the students in mind, while our best had rested in the freedom we experienced when we were due. That's the real scandal and I thank our two Honourables for reminding me.”

“Of course we noticed the weaknesses of our anarchic system and therefore tried to fix a clear course. But who decides what is important or even absolutely necessary? How broad must the curriculum be? What is essential and what surplus? Do we need a curriculum at all? Can we stick to the discrimination of those who know and those who don't?”

“Dear Marsha, you are right in a way” Grisella agreed. “What you excavated from your profound memory is well known. This was the Northern Tropic of the reform – I would like to put it – with all the difficulties, we now know and fear. We have escaped from that system, when we retreated to this island here. We live here on the Southern Tropic and I would appreciate very much, if we did better than that. Therefore, I welcome it very much that the two Honourables managed to remind us on our overall aim. Are we aware of our own approach? We are not. Therefore I thank the two of you, and hope we

won't forget and keep in mind, - and learnt our lesson", Grisella exclaimed somewhat emphatic.

She felt a glowing passion inside, and wondered whether they might have the capacity of writing a similarly noteworthy book than the one Anonymous had contributed. Perhaps with a different approach but similar emphasis. Right now she felt capable and courageous:

"We must stage self-reliant, dear Marsha, we do have a lot on stock, while we also carry with us debris from our past and shortcomings in character – each of us without exception. -"

"Research is nice and dandy" she went on after a pause – "however, our own approach was left behind, we lost the most precious out of sight."

Scholasticus agreed with what his sister-in-law said but he didn't quite get what she was after right now. In the last year there had been turbulences enough. There were times when things went almost higgledy-piggledy. There had been neither time nor space for elementary musings and basic ideas. While the threat from outside formed not only and glued the people together but also stressed them more then bearable in some cases or instances. You became dull and indurate and resigned while doing your thing, as well as you could. Where should pedagogical impulses rise under such conditions? Basically they agreed of course, however, even that - Scholasticus dared to doubt meanwhile, while they differed surely in detail.

Too far the needs and requirements of the different departments were apart. The colour scheme alone was differentiating enough, where else could such be found? Right there they had to start, right here you could find the South Tropic approach to reform pedagogy.

Right here, deep down South the clocks worked different, and other priorities and subjects were found back-slashing on the contents, which was essential.

'If you speak of miracles" he mused, 'then of wonders of form more then of contents. While discovering other realities you came about the differences. Nowhere else the abstract observer was looking in from outside, and was analysing without participation, doing his cruel investigation, not even knowing whether it was cruel.

While the world pressed inside so real and lively like with them on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and introspection all of a sudden became overall view of the world again.

The thoughtless and unconscious musings contained no less mistakes and mishaps of mankind Scholasticus concluded. The more

fixed people are, the less thoughts they make about the aim. Looked at it that way, thoughtlessness isn't worse than wickedness.

How much grief, how much fear on the one hand, however, how many efforts on the other hand - arose Mankind from thoughtlessness of others, who didn't mind doing things to us (or we to them), they wouldn't be doing purposely most likely – is there no end in sight?

The majority of the peoples may have understood by now – at least in the tempered zones of the Northern hemisphere where despotism is claimed to be overcome. However, is thoughtlessness therefore also overcome? Does it not come along hand in hand with insurmountable systematic requirements?

So called 'factual issues' – however in fact – side-wing turnings of despotism were no less cruel by effect, or less arbitrary, or destructive – in fact even more of it all. Yes, it looks, as if the so called factual issues are twins of despotism, despite the fact that they may look differently or wear other clothes.

The sun was turning punctually calendared on the twenty first of December shortly before the beginning of the New Year. This was the day when the sun stood vertical above the Isle of Wisdom-tooth at noon, and who ever dared to step outside into the sun, noticed that practically no shadow could be seen of them.

A few marks southerly of the Tropic of Capricorn they were situated, after all, however that did hardly matter. Covering the head was arbitrary, since the ozone hole was gapping above the Southern hemisphere. While the whites better cared for shelter, and exposed better not at all to the sun unprotected.

The warming good old sun soon became a monstrous messenger of death - threatening Man with poisonous rays and horrible disease.

However the sun was not in question. The attitude was the problem, that was connected with it. The mistake was basic, and could be found in the fundamentals of the dominating culture of the whites, was – so to speak – the base of basics.

The more Billy-Joe studied and the more he learnt from them – he always tossed at that strange barrier, and there was no way of how to overcome. The mistake had been built in a long time ago, and the further this culture developed the trickier the basic mistake was hiding.

The mistake appeared in different shapes, it altered its gender and colour – its smell and being, but remained still somehow the same.

Because it was the initial mistake, and remained the initial mistake, although nobody was able to touch any more, and which couldn't be bettered later any more.

Had it to do with left or right-spinning yoghurt? Yoghurt was like yoghurt and was it not at the same time. Everything with these two yoghurts seemed the same, nobody was able to notice the difference, except when you followed up the consequences of the probationers who either blossomed or faded in a long range study.

Ran the clock of life on both hemispheres the same way? And did the clock of life turn the same direction? This question had been raised once with Arundle and Billy-Joe, and what had this question to do with the question for the basic and cardinal mistake?

"We don't want to learn how to manipulate the time, we want to heal the world, and while we do, we have to learn and understand the world, that's arbitrary..." Arundle put it and Billy-Joe saw it likewise, however the other way round.

The hour of the Honourables had come. Messrs Stone and Bow enjoyed the fancy ritual. Billy-Joe stepped ahead. Pooty looked out of the Medicine Pouch, dangling before Billy-Joe's wide chest and Pooty was balancing the Magic Stone in his far too little paws.

The Magic Stone shined in all colours of the rainbow, and seemed to risk falling, while in fact held by invisible forces, so it was Pooty who got hold with him.

Billy-Joe was followed by Arundle with the invisible quiver, wherein the Magic Bow rested, as well as a never-ending supply of golden arrows, as had showered over the assembly during the previous meeting.

Attentive silence lowered while the enterers arranged at the desk. Billy-Joe got seated cross-legged on top and Arundle on a chair beside – they did so unconsciously meanwhile. Would Arundle have the arrows once more shower down over them?

For the human eye invisible the arrows purred one by one off the bow-string and swirled in formation over the heads. However this time they didn't lower but returned to their quiver after a short cruise.

Perhaps the flying arrows were meant as a distraction, because a little man was sitting next to Billy-Joe when the assembly came to rest. The little man's head was covered by a red hood, while his upper trunk stuck in a green waistcoat, and the lower in a tartan kilt. His legs clad long yellow boots.

The shorty introduced himself as South-Michel of Capricorn. For his introduction he raised, than crossed the legs, waved his right hand with the hood wide and bowed low to all sides at the same time, which was of course somewhat impossible, still he did.

Thus, the students concluded that he was a magic dwarf. Very likely a colleague of Messrs Stone and Bow, from somewhere deep down under and subsoil. Rumours went of immeasurable deep clefts and slots around Uluru where humans disappeared (Preferably whole forms of young girls on Valentine's Day when picnicking, as was done more or less regularly since that movie.)

Those, thus disappeared showed up in the Bermuda triangle, years later, but that's a different story!

South-Michel of Capricorn had Northern roots despite his name, that said otherwise. He was a singular appearance, because he had overslept the Cardinal Mistake (in short CM) of his inherited culture. While sleeping deep inside the deepest depth of the earth, protected against heat by a magic armour, and supplied with fresh air by a pipe to the surface.

In the beginning, there had been only the pipe back to the Scottish Highlands, from where he immigrated in the first place to the New World; however, later also the other way towards Uluru and the dusty red air of Central Australia was tunnelled. (A masterpiece of dwarven craftsmanship, no doubt.)

In the hall and above the heads South-Michel of Capricorn had his film roll. No silent movie in fact but rarely bespoken, too rare to become synchronised. The New Year's song of Auld Lang Sine weren't worth the effort.

As a proof the students fell in with the song and some even ran tears out of their eyes as was common. All hugged and made in friendship, although they scarcely knew, while the semester was still young and many newcomers were present. Here they settled after all, instead of sweating in their basic seminar, 'Get to know yourself', to find out about the other way of seeing. However, they might do anyway, but not now.

South-Michel tinkered as main character in the background. He was not alone. Hundreds of stunts and aides were swarming about all in dwarfy outfit. The film showed what was going on in the underground and that it was the truly mirrored equivalent of surface life. Everything, however the other way round, a most sophisticated piece of art with great technical effort, almost like in real life.

Arundle was always amazed again how the two Honourables managed to fascinate the audience, and stick so closely to the pulse of time.

“We have understood” resounded a wordless unsolvable contradiction all about them. Like through a monocular a huge eye stared into the tiny film-world as if it was a goggle box. A cut through the earth all in halves: corridors and caverns in halves, mice-nests and foxes’ caves all in halves cut in the middle.

Indeed a tricky technique had been used with quick and short cuts, enabling to visualize things, that wouldn’t fit into any continuum. Still a wanted effect was achieved, Arundle was sure, while the agreement all about confirmed her impressions.

“A film gets great when a director manages to involve the spectator and take them into the inner world of his, to even indoctrinate himself, leaving them without tool of protest or denial.

That is something else then stimulate them making up their own minds or getting emotionally involved”, Arundle thought and realized broad agreement again from all sides.

Whether this was right or questionable was written on a different page. Perhaps such was only necessary. Perhaps he had to proceed like this, because a new perspective had to be taken and old habits questioned.

The eye disappeared into grandeur. The eye rushed off in time-lapse pictures and lost contours the further it grew. While the spectator didn’t know, whether the eye was growing or he was shrinking. He was forced to ask exactly this question, while questioning his conviction as to the convention of the linear direction of time, as if there only was one way. As if the suckling only grew or the seedling began small and grew big.

“From the old peoples’ homes we hear it differently”, the fine thin voice of South-Michel of Capricorn was heard. Arundle agreed: “The arc of a circle of earthen life – is good old Greek cultural inheritance, no doubt. The riddle of the Sphinx of Thebes, if I’m not wrong - Oedipus only solves it, because he knows the answer”, she heard herself think meaningfully.

She started general confusion by that. Nobody wanted to make up his of her mind. While South-Michel’s short pass play wasn’t under control yet, but ended east of the centre line. There the ball couldn’t be reached by the all too moderate inside striker on the one hand, and on the other it didn’t seem worth while for the outside defender, who started building the offside trap instead.

“When it comes to old peoples’ homes keep the ball low”, South-Michel’s thin voice was heard once more in the movie-dream. Arundle didn’t want to differentiate between dream and movie. At last she decided that falling asleep wasn’t impossible in the cinema, while dreams were stimulated intensely, though.

“About the missing fourth leg in the evening nobody wondered?” South-Michel pushed, the thinking became all too creamy and stiff, and in fact Arundle could feel his impatience almost physically.

“Once again, for those who want to copy. Who goes in the morning on four, at noon on two and in the evening on three legs?”

“What a nonsense” Pooty interfered at last. “In the evening senior citizens sit either in a wheelchair right away or move about with their rollator.”

“Thus, we are getting nowhere. Your relation to the classic is poor. You exhale a clear-cut ignorance, while you are principally on our level under several aspects. Rollator – I’m laughing, have you nothing more attractive in mind? I only say running-wheel - what now? Now you are stunned, aren’t you?” South-Michel breathed disdainfully.

“And if we put the whole riddle on wheels right away?” Arundle suggested willing to mediate. “Who goes in the morning on four wheels, at noon on four wheels and in the evening on four wheels?”

“Sounds kind of monotonous, but it is not easier to solve than the original. The more as so a Laptopian robocoptesse is the Sphinx at the court of the Prince Regent of Laptopia” – Pooty was all agreement. Finally a common playground, and up to date.

Appeased he wanted to speculate down from the top, when he remembered something that annoyed him only a minute ago. “Did that dwarf refer to height?” Pooty wondered. While he could have hugged South-Michel because of that.

“Was that necessary – a small spirit in a small body?” he asked and could take the best liked out of a flood of answers. Only South-Michel who was the one he cared, didn’t answer.

“Perhaps Arundle has her Advisor and I have someone of my own, whether I like it nor not. Arundle argues often enough with her Advisor. Why should I be better off with my South-Michel?”

Pooty was not able to hang on moaning and grieving for long. Himself the dwarf wouldn’t think stupid, he wondered. In fact he hadn’t been called stupid but uneducated. That hurt, that hit – deep inside. Perhaps, because it was true. Walter had also had his trouble with him in this respect.

South-Michel had fallen through the hole, connecting the Northern Hemisphere with Uluru. A colony of dwarves was living under the ocean in an air-bubble, still below the Sargasso Sea close to the Bermuda triangle. The colony kept on dwelling there for ages. The offspring was unknown. - only rumours were underway. One said that the predecessors of the dwarves had been buried with the downfall of Atlantis, while working in the mines.

Today nobody could tell why the dwarves survived. Perhaps the early dwarves only meant to be the only survivors. They had survived, for sure. By means of an air-bell on the ground of the sea and by means of tricky drillings and a specific secret technique, they had managed to reach the surface, where they supplied their air which was cooled down to normal temperature by a special cooling system.

The procedure hindered the centre-heat to contaminate the tunnels by absorbing the energy and transforming it into vital functions. The dwarves were very proud on that.

In former times when they were cut off (Cut Off - they called the epoch of the downfall of Atlantis when the continent sank and took with it a whole culture, later becoming the mystic base of ancient Europe.) After the Cut off, the former ancestors swore to never repeat the Cardinal Mistake of the Atlantians. Never to plunge in on the whirls of rational egomania, but do their own thing, and start right there - where things had still gone right. That is, before the big Cardinal Mistake was first done. Because they knew, who ever had internalised the Cardinal Mistake wouldn't get rid of it.

The colony was located below the mainland shelf of the Australian continent, close to where Australis had started off. Thus, the Bermudian dwarves were living in the Australian area close to Australis. As a matter of fact they did so in an air-bubble still below the mer-folk. Therefore, they knew the mer-folk very well, and were acquainted with their rites and habits, while spying on them through the roof of their cover.

South-Michel therefore was well acquainted with the coming of age and the first democratic aspirations of the young democracy. His duty was it to safeguard and observe what was going on and to be of help when necessary – shorten the processes and overcoming shortcomings like the outbreak of aggression or the change in nutrition habits.

South-Michel was not able to interfere in person directly. This was one reason why he appeared to the humans on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. This was a privilege only given to a few gifted

persons. But the urgency and the needs of his disciples forced him to do what had to be done.

Still he didn't appear live in front of all those witnesses, who hadn't been tested yet, but virtual. Therefore Pooty had been right who compared South-Michel spontaneously with the Advisor, who also was a virtual projection.

“The root of us is all the same” South-Michel explained. “With Atlantis the blossoming part of the early western culture failed. The Atlantians fell, however the Cardinal Mistake, which enforced or even caused their destruction, remained in the world. They didn't take it with them. And perhaps it was a wink of a mercy fate that the miners of Atlantis found a way of overcoming the downfall. Because they were no part of the culture, but only servants and slaves deep down in the mines.

There they developed what was required for survival, right there, sub-soil, where no sunlight ever gets and the air is bad.

Thus, it was essential for the dwarves to develop an airing system. While they were good at mining and tunnelling, and thus they kept on digging and didn't bother much what was going on above their heads.

While there, dramatic chances were going on. “In order to understand how such development was possible, I have to explain. The Atlantians were in their majority arrogant high-brow feudals, who had slaves do the work. However they were also intelligent. They enjoyed the sciences and philosophy. They were the first high culture of mankind.

They were living on their island far away from the rest of the world, where people just began to replace stone tools by metal. While the Atlantians already founded democracy and even a theory of relativity of time, by means of which they discovered the secrets of the atoms, and how to split uranium cores. They might even have ignited the first atom bomb which caused their destruction, most likely.

The thirst of knowledge didn't stop before the people. The Atlantians – so closely related to the sea - also experimented with all kinds of sea-dwellers and also with nixes and naiads, whom they felt related to.

In short, the ancestors of the mer-folk - whose offspring is now living under the shelf -, go back to half-breed Atlantians.

Therefore the fact that the colonists settled right where they did is worth while mentioning, while the dwarves built their air-bubble. In

my capacity as emissary I brought my disciples the values you need for a humane living. It took a good while until moral standards became accepted.

This is why we dwarves are observing – (and before-most I, as the official emissary) - with great sorrow what was going on lately. We are happy about the progress. However, we do see the price that has to be paid, and we ask of course, if we can witness that without intervention. As it is our task to safeguard the well and prevent the woe of our disciples. We, as keepers of the heritage of Atlantis - carry great responsibility – that is, I do, because I am the one and only emissary.” Thus, spoke the Emissary South-Michel of Capricorn and disappeared.

Hesitative the students returned from their trance, or what it had been. Some felt like waking up from deep slumber. And all had the feeling of having witnessed something meaningful. They felt disappointed in a way, because they had consequential questions on the tip of their tongues, so to speak, and didn't accept delay. Too much had there been surmounting them, and had to be digested, and put in the right order as far as possible at all, which seemed not very likely, though.

Only a few had a faint idea of Atlantis and the whereabouts and doom, and could stand the noteworthy lecture. While the proportions had been laid open, and the scientific approach was appreciated. Sure enough, all worlds knew that already the old Greeks had wondered about atoms. However, that had been on a different level than what had been reported by the Emissary South-Michel of Capricorn.

The Cardinal Mistake upset the moods most, which had been referred to several times, but not defined. Nobody knew what it was like or only just to name it. Each could think his or her part, however, that was not enough.

Did nuclear fission cause the destruction of Atlantis? Had this high culture blown themselves up? Was that the Cardinal Mistake, the whole Western culture and civilisation threatened to fail? South-Michel's explanations arose more questions than he gave answers.

“And just like the Advisor he disappears, when it's most challenging” Arundle quarrelled: “How should that work anyway? Drilling a hole through the core of the globe, what kind of technique is this supposed to be? He himself wouldn't believe...”

“He doesn’t need, he was not real. Therefore he doesn’t need a real hole, you know what I mean?” Billy-Joe objected, who was strongly influenced by Pooty in such matters, who was all in favour of the dwarf. After he had decided to like South-Michel. Now he adored him and his lecture.

Pooty was glowing with agreement and so was Master Stone, thus, both pushed themselves up against each other. Billy-Joe took care not to intervene or become involved in a tricky argument, while he felt great sympathy for the little lad either.

“His world was not all that virtual, after all” Billy-Joe said. “They were striving for real air and real craftsmanship was needed, I’d say” – Arundle also agreed.

“And if there is really a material, a kind of protective umbrella, standing the heat? Theoretically it could be some kind of energetic grid, or something...” Billy-Joe vaguely put in. He surely knew that his argument was no trump in the sleeve.

The hall still buzzed and vibrated, hummed and drummed – nobody cared for leaving. Self-forgotten, bereft of time and space, so to speak, the students got hold at each other, and surprised themselves with more or less ripe constructs and ideas most of which already acoustically failed. But that was not the point. Except when the character took over and outed the inner state of being. However, that was another matter. Fact was that the scene lacked of analysts, therefore such attempts passed unnoticed.

They all could feel it. There was something in space about. They all had their ear on the pulse of time, which opened up for them, and granted discernments of such an immeasurable dimension that nobody quite got what was heard.

19. The Homeland of the Magic Bow

Scholasticus Slyboots and his sister-in-law, Grisella, Countess of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots were quite upset when they learnt second rate, what had been going on lately. Scholasticus would have been deeply devoted to his colleagues, if they had given him a wink,

whom they invited. Because they did invite South-Michel of Capricorn, no doubt about that. He wouldn't have come otherwise. The question was however, if he had come, - had he known who was awaiting him, but that was a merely hypothetical question by now.

Adrian Humperdijk was even more upset of not having been noticed in advance. After all, South-Michel was a being of the higher kind for the mer-folk. Why had nobody given notice of such fact?

Adrian knew the mer-folk for ages but nobody had spoken of South-Michel. Did they take him as an atheist, things like that couldn't be bespoken with? Perhaps people were too shy or thought it impolite to bother him with such quests? Now he didn't wonder why his efforts on a rational base had been limited, or even failed. He couldn't reach the hearts by that, only the heads and that was not enough.

He, who won the hearts won the heads as well, and only if both were won, victory was in the range.

He would talk things over with Cory as soon as possible, who surely had been present and experienced this ominous emissary. She might know how to proceed now under such new premises. Lucky him, that he was not as all alone as he felt, after having noticed such personal Cardinal Mistake of his, he now could realize. He couldn't think of a way of correcting himself. His brain was swept empty. At best he had hidden, but his time hadn't come yet. Instead he settled at Marsha's kitchen table and open her his heart.

Marsha also felt cheated a little, like the other teachers. Were they so useless? Hadn't it been better to talk first with them? But then she recalled that meeting about the new curriculum and the planning for the upcoming term when they confronted the new Honourables with their pragmatic approach and couldn't convince them.

Perhaps the two had intended to let them know but couldn't, because there was no opportunity to do so. Now it was too late to correct this mistake. Everything had its time, and they had missed their time in this case. Would there be another chance?

Her consolation for Adrian therefore was poor. The inner unrest couldn't be banned for both of them, just as it was for their other human colleagues.

They all kept on cackling like a flock of upset poultry when the fox was near, and asked for an emergency meeting, which was called in right away. This time they would listen carefully to what their two new colleagues had to tell them, each of them decided for him- or herself, and wouldn't bother them with outdated didactical schemes.

They would highly appreciate, they said, if they also were allowed to experience the Emissary South-Michel of Capricorn. “Is such a meeting at all possible?” Marsha – the official representative of the School of Inbetween – asked. Her request turned into a lengthier dispute Pooty stepped in lively, but didn’t lead to a result for a good while. Right among those silent band of teachers their inaudible whispering was of course heard. In the end the two Honourables agreed at last.

Like doctors are known as the worst patients, so it was with the Professors: They were horrible pupils. They couldn’t or didn’t want to get really involved. All over again one dropped out of the frame and disturbed the upcoming concentration, and ruined the effort of the instant, as if they just didn’t want to or couldn’t understand what they were expected to do.

Thus, Billy-Joe tried with a trick and invited the stiff gents and madams to an Australian feast-dance, that differed for those in the know in no way to the well-known rain-dance, Billy-Joe danced at any given opportunity, as if it was made for him. However, this would show only the far future.

The dancing helped because South-Michel swayed in while they were all in the move. The sight of his made the audience shiver.

“Thus, they should treat the Advisor” Arundle wondered almost annoyed, while was glad to have the invincible subjects trapped. As a matter of fact, South-Michel could talk. And that was what he did. The Professors listened attentively however South-Michel hardly moved his lips, while his thoughts entered the brain unfiltered, without diversion via other senses. Still his sight was a feast for the eyes. For this time he was clad in a yellow waistcoat and his legs stuck in green long boot-shafts under the tartan kilt, those who met him a second time, noticed what differed.

How fast you felt confidence, Arundle wondered, and how dear the little man was to her already – perhaps, because he was so small and came out of the depth, while the Advisor stemmed from the endless width of outer space.

Atlantis however, was not South-Michel’s theme for this time, Arundle meant to understand. Because he was interfering into your thinking, thus, all noticed what was meant only for him or her or for each of them concerning the ethics of the mer-folk, and where it was stuck.

However, the curse of Atlantis was mentioned nevertheless. For the time being it was the curse, and not the Cardinal Mistake only. While South-Michel in fact meant the same, Arundle noticed already

without enforcement by the glowing red eye of her Magic Bow that was fixing her with hypnotic glance.

Billy-Joe experienced the same. Pooty was already kneeling on the ground praying – that is, he was kneeling in the ribbons of the Medicine Pouch. His little paws he had folded, his eyes were torn so you could see the white only. Somewhat odd, though.

The Magic Stone was swaying likewise – glittering in all colours of the rainbow above Pooty's folded paws, and it looked as if Pooty's prayer was meant for him, but in fact wasn't, because behind the Magic Stone you could see South-Michel waving – the true object of Pooty's ardour.

What ever happened between Pooty and South-Michel in those moments, nobody will ever learn. Pooty was probably covered by the unspeakable secrets of mystics and perhaps received a revelation – 'Of the necessities and disadvantages of History for Life'¹ – who could know?

Whether even the Professors missed what really was going on, Arundle and Billy-Joe could only guess, because they were busy with themselves, and didn't mind the whole show as such.

The Cardinal Mistake meant to believing in the second with a beautiful woman, what ever this message meant – still they noticed the keyword.

Arundle gazed over to Billy-Joe and he smiled his unbelievable smile, as if the Cardinal Mistake wasn't meant for him.

Arundle also noticed that important things were going on with her. Still she couldn't tell. She would have liked that it had to do with Billy-Joe and with his marvellous smile that was her so dear and near, like small tickling waves of indescribable tenderness dissolving inside her.

What a pity – she felt when she realized a much older trace, that was running ahead of her. She couldn't do other than follow, the more as so the track was built of golden arrows being shot in the ground for her.

For ages she was attracted by this track, the Magic Bow had laid for her. She had followed up to now, and as it looked, she would go on following, just like that, despite Billy-Joe's beautiful smile. That might follow her, as long as she didn't lose this track.

What ever was set this way was set for good, that much she could say in the aftermath. No matter whether the track got out of sight soon, the track was much further than the eye could see. Because what eyes do see, and what eyes can see, was not quite the same. Sure enough, another proof of the Cardinal Mistake.

The track of the arrows carried her off to a no-man's-land, where even Billy-Joe was prohibited access. Arundle noticed him tapping heavy-footed and ever heavier footed behind her, as if his feet glued tighter to the ground.

Thus, it was. Billy-Joe couldn't follow her. He let her go sadly by heart. She waved with her Magic Bow, whose eye shone inside out on his own, despite the fact that the evening sun reflected before he disappeared behind the horizon, and the night came.

Westward the trail turned by now, and the golden arrows were glowing, ruffling dainty feathers in the soothing evening wind.

"Home, I want to go home" the Magic Bow sighed. In that very moment the golden bulwarks of Atlantis shone up in the distance. Silver dragons with golden horns were blowing, while drifting above the site with a pathetic halleluiah-welcome.

The Magic Bow's eye dissolved in tears and wetted Arundle's little brown fist clenching tight around the tough wood in a decisive air, as if she wanted to grant him absolute loyalty. As if she wanted to tell him - and to her at the same time: "I am yours, and you are mine." A very likely admission, though, as the girl meant to know in that very moment, while following her basic instincts.

Low-purring horseless carriages were waving by, and stopped, while golden Atlantians got off, as soon as the vehicle halted. Arundle pushed forward her hand with the bow, while the Atlantians bowed their heads, and Arundle followed their example.

"I wish, you were here, mi o my country-boy" she heard herself singing. However, he was still back at the spot where she had lost him, no matter how hard he tried to go ahead.

In her fist she felt a vibrant, and hoped she understood rightly, and indeed she heard Billy-Joe's heavy breathe next to her. She didn't dare to turn her eyes off the Atlantians, as if she banned them with her gaze.

"We are searching for the Cardinal Mistake. Here we are supposed to find it" she kept on thinking. She knew not whether out of her or raised by the bow in her fist.

The Atlantians didn't show, whether they had understood. Instead they invited Arundle and now Billy-Joe likewise to enter the horseless carriage. As it looked they regarded the horseless-ness of the carriage worth a lengthy explanation, by pointing at the hood where a tiny engine was hidden.

"An automobile, isn't it?" Arundle replied politely. "We are from the future, carriages like this one are common all over the place.

Arundle made several signs of driving, flying or diving. The Atlantians nodded and smiled, and looked as if they didn't believe a word of what she was saying.

The bow in her fist made her feel, not to show her impressions and keep her mistrust down, still boiling up, and not to enter this vehicle - under no circumstances.

No spoken word had been uttered so far, she realized. Nobody moved a lip, or if, than to smile or bite on the lip ironically, while presenting two rows of perfect teeth.

Without doubt the Magic Bow was from Atlantis, you could easily notice because there were lots of quivers hidden behind the backs, and many brothers could be seen sticking in such quivers. They all had their red eye shine indicating that they had noticed him.

All too short he enjoyed this brotherly We-feeling. While the knowledge of his world-experience and philosophy of life made him feel superior. Such youngsters were only there to serve. They were useless otherwise, but being in good shape and alert when it came to shooting arrows.

Now, that he was finally at home, his yearning melted like butter in the sun.

"It's a long way to Tipperary, it's a long way to go" he tuned in rather amused. His little home-sick-crisis was over.

Arundle repeatedly said to herself that this was all not true, and that she needn't worry in reality, while the hostility of the Atlantians was sipping through the mask, they presented.

The beauty scarcely covered the ugly face of cruelty. Once in a while the ugly face appeared, the more as so Billy-Joe's mighty figure built up, that had been before in the background, little mattered that he had no bow.

The less as since Pooty and the Magic Stone were ignored. "No place for animals" Arundle became aware. Billy-Joe who was first to notice, had his boomerang swirl, smashing hundreds of golden arrows showering down on them, while Arundle let go a similar reverse by means of her advanced bow.

The mean heroes took shelter and Arundle and Billy-Joe rushed away in their dream, then that they dreamed they doubted not, although Arundle found the tip of an arrow sticking in her arm., while Billy-Joe pulled even three out of his legs.

Obviously a very lively way of dreaming had that been. They got plasters out of the invisible quiver and covered the wounds, but didn't bother the concentration of the Professors, that was still prevailing.

On the search for the Cardinal Mistake they got a good step forward, that much the two of them believed to know. Thus, they all made very lively experiences while sitting there. Arundle wondered, where they could have hurt while sleeping. Perhaps some arrows had slipped out of the quiver, and she had pushed one into her arm and even three into Billy-Joe's leg, which appeared to be very unlikely.

Such an unreal explanation was much unlikelier than the miraculous tale of the dream. Thus, Arundle preferred to trust again once more in the unreal. While the so-called reality appeared wholly unreal.

"Strange, isn't it - such reversing of fact and fiction" she wondered, and Billy-Joe wondered back, confirming her change in recognition, by pointing to the fact that his people were blamed for such change by the whites and treated as if they were out of mind.

Seen from the point of view they just took, this was nothing extraordinary, as they just could experience.

"Don't ask me, how those arrows managed to get into us. The most obvious explanation that they were shot into our bodies by those mean characters over there in Atlantis, you may accept least, am I right?"

Billy-Joe understood her right. Everything rejected such fictitious explanation, while it was most likely the only reasonable one. Instead she preferred a very unlikely construct, she herself couldn't believe in.

It seemed to him as if Arundle wanted to explain the world in the way of the old. They imagined in one of their legends – the surface of the earth as the back of a turtle. The turtle was standing on the back of another turtle and this turtle on the back of another and so forth, because they couldn't accept the idea of a globe swaying and drifting in an empty space, but rejected such an idea as wholly absurd.

Arundle gave in. Her Magic Bow was proof enough. After all she knew now where he came from and what a troublesome youth he had in Atlantis with such cruel beings. The bow confirmed her empathy when she rechecked: those Atlantians were just the way they had experienced them.

"They were so racially prejudiced – you can't be more chauvinistic" he stressed. "Each individual shorter than two hands below standard were put into the mines, and animals only were meant for food, and if regarded as uneatable they were diminished as parasite and mercilessly destructed.

Billy-Joe had them been a double thorn in their side. For once he had the complexion of a slave, and for the other he had an animal in a bag around his neck. Had Billy-Joe not whirled the boomerang before

his chest, they would surely have killed Pooty – that is really, not just dream-dead – as real as the arrows had been in their bodies. So it better read – when they returned from another reality to this reality.

How could they get into the far past? Because, when the arrows were real, than everything else might have been real, and so was the time. South-Michel had them somehow transmuted – disguised as a dream – all along the string of time backwards. Was he himself also part of... Arundle had an idea.

She felt strongly reminded of her first visit to Laptopia. The only difference was that the attackers had been artifacts there, while in Atlantis they were humans, and the reason had also been a different one. In Laptopia she had been accused for maltreating her laptop, while in Atlantis they were attacked for yet unknown reasons.

Could it be that the Atlantians accused Billy-Joe for mishandling Pooty? Was Pooty a holy animal for them, that had to be protected?. Perhaps she had misunderstood their motives. However, had her Magic Bow not warned her?

Did he warn her in Laptopia? – Arundle tried to remember. General Armyless had come to rescue her from the inconvenient conditions she had been in. She tried to recall what exactly had happened then, and noticed that she could hardly remember.

The facts had been not so important, but the feelings were, because she now thought to remember similar feelings. No matter whether the situation had been entirely different. Well, perhaps the differences had not been so important but the likeness was. And if it was the way she had suspected, and Pooty was the key to the secret of the Atlantians? But how could they have such a shower of arrows go down on him? They must have known that they endangered Pooty's life. Those Atlantians couldn't know about Billy-Joe's abilities as a defender – or did they know?

Fact was that she was hit by an arrow in the arm and Billy-Joe by three in the leg. To the crucial part, where Pooty was located, no arrow seemed to have approached.

And if they were indeed miraculous arrows, they were especially gifted, as she knew from experience. Finding the target was one of the characteristics. The main task of the shooter was to be aware of his target. If he or she was, the arrow made its way if not hindered by a whirling boomerang, as was done by Billy-Joe's – a weapon also full of magic, Arundle doubted not.

That was why Billy-Joe related on the ability of the boomerang and his virtue of handling; and why Billy-Joe handled his boomerang with great care. He sharpened its inner blade and erased little scars (as

were unavoidable in defence) before he had it disappear again, that is, he stuffed it into the belt around his hips, or had it disappear by sending it on a long voyage into the dreamland; well - this was what Billy-Joe told, anyway.

Arundle wasn't really prepared to believe him. Fact was anyway that the boomerang was absent indeed, just like a stray dog, while the inner lead with its master never cut, no matter how far it's astray.

She wouldn't find answers here. She would have to go there once more. And because she didn't know access, she needed the help of South-Michel. At best she spoke with Billy-Joe and had him participate in her musings and feelings now and way back in Laptopia, where Billy-Joe had done such a great job, but that came later.

Lappy, who had caused so much trouble was honoured triumphantly there, and she had never again taken such a device with her to avoid provocations.

This is what she told and how she referred to Pooty. On the other hand, how should they find out what really was the matter if they put away any hint in advance, without knowing why or why not?

However, were they allowed to endanger Pooty? How important was the search for the Cardinal Mistake after all?

She noticed the Professors waking up. Out of deep trance they stumbled back into reality, where everything had its proper weight. They felt like returning back from space without gravity – this was how they behaved.

Grisella even fainted. However, all were happy, and – as one put it – “richer by a sound experience.” There was a lot of talking of the unspeakable and the unimaginable and the unio mystica.^{li}

Grisella claimed to have experienced such a mystical unification, and that explained her fading when coming back. She couldn't say whom she had been uniting, that was the unspeakable, the whole band was wondering, so nobody except her husband Amadeus was upset when she remained silent.

Amadeus feared greater misdoings over there in heavy trance. Therefore jealousy was overwhelming him. His brother Scholasticus tried to calm him down and explained - somewhat unclear - how this kind of union was going on. He pointed out that there was no other human involved, definitely no other man, and that was Amadeus' major concern. While the dissolved appearance of his wife spoke another language, and couldn't be erased by tricky phraseology either.

Grisella showed more than there was, because in a physical sense she had not been touched, and she would have liked to have Amadeus with her. Perhaps one day this would become real. The more as so Marsha gave the impression of having had just that experience with Adrian.

Thus, they were all talking about the unspeakable. While the unspeakable remained unspeakable. After all, they now knew about the powers of South-Michel, and this was, what they had been after.

20. Atlantis

Arundle and Billy-Joe were sitting alone at the beach. It was one of those summer days, you were yearning for the slightest cooling wave of air. Her friend was wondering about her doubts and his task was to objecting them and stress of contradictions, instead of just being and enjoying the rays of the sun and the sounds of the sea.

Her experiences in Laptopia taught her that things were not always as they seemed to be.

“...I can’t get rid of the feeling of being on the wrong track” Arundle thoughtfully said. “Things are not as they seem. Despite South-Michel and the discernments he gave, reasoning about the destruction of Atlantis, while such fact could hardly be doubted. – I do not doubt the facts, of course not. However it could be that the reason for that had been different, other than the one given by South—Michael.

His explanation must not necessarily been motivated by mean intentions, though. I do believe in what he said about the treatment of the dwarves. However, that does not mean that South-Michel is right in everything he says. Perhaps, he understood things somewhat perfunctory, as we did in Laptopia. Let’s take the first approach – the horseless carriages they were coming up on us and the respectable welcome...”

“Yes, you could be right. They were indeed taking trouble to please us and open up – right at the beginning. However, then something happened, and the situation changed...”

“Exactly, that’s what I mean, and that had to do – well, it must have had to do with Pooty or with you, or both of you, when you

stepped forward. Did you do anything with Pooty or did Pooty do anything worth while mentioning?"

"Might have goofed about with the Magic Stone as he is used to, in order to show his importance, I figure, I didn't pay attention. I was gasping hard, longing for breathe, and was still exhausted by stepping through that sticky ground. Don't understand why you weren't affected either..."

They couldn't find an answer. Pooty seemed to be sleeping, otherwise he would have made himself known, when Billy-Joe talked about him, the more as so unfavourable, which he didn't like at all, but who did?

"Shall I wake him up?" Billy-Joe asked. "Perhaps he remembers better, what it could have been. Pooty has a fine sense for the supra-natural" he said winking at Arundle, while he noticed Pooty's head stretching out of the pouch, who had understood every word.

"I do not goof about with the stone, in order to make me feel important" the possum moaned. "And what is meant by my – 'sensitive feeling for the supra-natural' -, I must tell you, that it didn't work this time. What was your own sensitive feeling like – Billy-Joe, or what about yours, Arundle?"

Neither Billy-Joe nor Arundle tuned in on Pooty's provocation, while both looked somewhat ashamed to the ground, being trapped for ignorance.

"I think the mood switched as soon as you began explaining to them what you knew about vehicles moving without horses. They didn't believe you. Since then they behaved differently. – Well, it's just an idea. We hadn't been close yet..."

Arundle agreed with everything, as long as it supported her uncertainties. She didn't want to blame those Atlantians before there were not all facts considered, which were supporting South-Michel's negative judgement. Because this way they took the easy trail on the search for the Cardinal Mistake, they were actually looking for, and might go wrong.

"How do you get hold of that South-Michel? I do want to get there again, and give them a chance" Arundle exclaimed very decidedly while pushing the Magic Bow. Pooty rushed for the Magic Stone who was hiding again, for what ever reason.

"Without South-Michel we do not find the way. I myself was most surprised, being suddenly confronted with my beginnings, you can believe that. Meeting all those little brothers, was kind of queer, believe me" the bow snarled.

Meanwhile the Magic Stone was found and the two began one of those endless palavers, nobody could follow, no matter how hard he or she tried. So, Arundle and Billy-Joe went for a swim. Pooty decided to remain ashore with the two Honourables, and promised to give notice as soon as South-Michel appeared, which was not all that unlikely.

Arundle and Billy-Joe swam out to their pontoon and stretched on the hot planks. However, as soon as they had settled the well-known song was heard: "It's a long way to Tipperary..."

Arundle meant to distinguish the voice of the Magic Bow while other voices fell in melodiously.

They hurried back. South-Michel strongly recommended to put on clothing, he didn't name more closely, thus, they put on shirts and trousers and Arundle shouldered the invisible quiver with the Magic Bow. Billy-Joe put his Medicine Pouch around his neck with the Magic Stone and Pooty in, and over the shoulders he put a tunic-like mattress, while South-Michel guided them along the time-scale, clad as usual: with a red hood, yellow waistcoat, tartan kilt, and green leggings, leading them back to the past.

The four singers were scattering their song in two voices thus it was great fun, and inspired them greatly. The marching was easy that way, much easier than last time when Billy-Joe almost failed.

Pooty was tapping the rhythm with his foot on Billy-Joe's chest, while singing as loud as he could out of the opening of the pouch, thus Billy-Joe started hesitatingly, first only humming but then with his full voice, and Arundle did likewise.

The song was more than the two front lines the singers were repeating all over again, but they didn't know more text, which didn't reduce their enthusiasm.

"It's a long way to Tipperary,
It's a long way to go."

Thus, they marched on towards Atlantis right through the Golden Gate into the centre. The Atlantians formed a lane and clapped their hands, as if this was a kind of triumphant march, while in fact there was nothing to triumph about. Those Atlantians seemed to like gestures of grandeur.

The rally was heading towards a wide square with a sumptuous building, and while many Atlantians were stepping in, following the four, the procession was quite something.

Billy-Joe ensured that they were able of dreaming away as fast as last time, in case this turned out to become advisable. He looked over to Arundle noticing an enthusiastic expression on her face, which made him wonder. She looked as if she was high – probably been

carried away by the jubilant masses, which had increased considerably in number, when the tip of the rally halted in front of a magnificent palace amidst the grand square.

The Atlantians tuned now in on the song, stammering meaningless sounds supposed to sound like the original words of the song, and soon instruments resonated: trumpets and drums taking up and transforming then rhyme and melody.

All of a sudden, the noise stopped for no reason. But sure enough had there been a signal all of those Atlantians received. Again the horseless carriages came by and the same procedure as last time repeated.

This time however Arundle rejected any thought of superiority. Instead the guests entered the vehicles and moved almost soundlessly towards the palace.

The carriages stopped in front of the entrance. The guests disembarked and were guided through the magnificent lobby into a huge Hall on both sides of which pillars were lined up, each topped by a statue.

The guests paraded with distinguished steps first along the left hand side of the row of remarkable personalities of the present and the past of Atlantis.

Again Arundle felt reminded of similar set-ups in the future, while the hall was much alike the one in the imperial palace, called the 'Hall of Fame and Honour'. She had to bring herself down and push such memories aside, because she knew now that the Atlantians didn't like any comparison questioning their singularity.

Besides, the intergalactic universal law prohibited any interference of the future into past proceedings, as they always were some kind of alteration of the present. Had their song been already such an alteration?

This didn't seem to be the case, otherwise they would have noticed. Perhaps the problems found their cause right here, rather than with those Atlantians.

She had to make up her mind all over again and recall what they were here for. They were looking for the Cardinal Mistake that came into the history of Mankind, but nobody knew what this mistake looked like, or when it first appeared.

The Cardinal Mistake was now set and fixed, and deeply rooted in everything, culture brought forward. Thus, there might be several ideas of how to tackle the Cardinal Mistake, but all such musings lacked a sound fundament, that is, the knowledge of a historic phase before.

Those statues caught Arundle's attention while stepping on. Their hosts guided them solemnly along the rows. They were gifted with the ability of telepathy, and didn't need many words. Thus, communication turned out to be easier, insofar as Arundle, as well as Billy-Joe had some telepathetic experience and so had Messrs Bow and Stone, who didn't even have mouths to speak or ears to hear, which weren't required.

At each second or third statue the hosts stopped and explained the circumstances briefly. Never they just said, 'this is the famous Y or the godly X. As if persons were less important than the circumstances of their lives. If this was the root of the Cardinal Mistake, then they were lucky, because such notions had been distinguished meanwhile.

Thus the walk around of the small procession approached the most sacred top of the Hall. And now not only Arundle understood the hefty reactions during their first visit, and so did her companions.

On the column there was a peculiar hybrid, showing from the girdle downwards noticeable semblance with a kangaroo, while the upper part was connected to the trunk of an Aborigine. On the head, that was much alike Billy-Joe's, a copy of Pooty was resting.

They were right in front of the incarnation of the most sacred Godly wisdom as the guests learned – "this is the image of the haunted blind semi-being Walt Yio on top of which the farsighted dwarf-being Puh Tzi sees what is coming."

Pooty couldn't refrain from sticking his nose out of the pouch. This Puh Tzi he wanted to have a look at. When the Atlantians noticed him, they showed all kinds of devotional gestures, which they should have done earlier already, because Billy-Joe also looked much alike this Walt Yio on the pillar in his upper part.

Then Pooty had the idea of climbing on top of Billy-Joe's head grabbing for hold in the latter's thick hair. As soon as he had done, the Atlantians came down. Their world was in order again as soon as things were on their proper site.

This had it been then. The Atlantians couldn't stand the idea of having the Godly beast resting in an old pouch. For them Puh Tzi had to sit on top of Walt-Yio's head, as simple as that. If this had to be so, then it should so be, decided Pooty and remained on top of the world – Billy-Joe carried his lot with patience.

On the way back South-Michel went almost invisible on the telepathetic site. Whether there had been something wrong or whether he had realized his error, or whether doubts gnawed in his soul – each

of the co-travellers could look for something suitable, while the right might not be amongst anyway.

Perhaps his staying below surface endured for too long. Perhaps he had lost the touch with the upper world. The picture of the cruel racists, he could not keep up, neither for himself nor for his co-travellers. That became clear. Racism was most likely not the base of the Cardinal Mistake. The Cardinal Mistake must have come earlier into the history of Mankind, or at a different site.

Was the fall of Atlantis the wrong track, then? Did Atlantis fall because it denied such Cardinal Mistake? This idea came to Arundle's mind flash-like, and the more this idea settled, the less absurd it seemed. The more as so after the second visit.

Was it not absolutely absurd to charge the Pompeian for the destruction of Pompey? And would it not be likewise absurd to charge the Atlantians for the destruction of Atlantis? Doing so, would mean to interchange cause and effect, as was quite obvious in case of the Dinosaurs.

You can't in fact view geo-physical events as punishment or vice versa perhaps as reward. All you could do is say that victims were at the wrong site at the wrong time. The question why things like that did happen quite often in history, might be worth while investigating. Signs of warning must have been ignored – or the ability to notice them got lost.

On search for the Cardinal Mistake Arundle and her companions might have gone wrong in Atlantis. Nobody forced them to accept the false tale of punishment for misbehaviour and hypocrisy, the more as so there was no evidence.

The interrelation between human hypocrisy and tectonic occurrences in the earth's crust, nobody who was sensible and reasonable could claim. Who ever tried to draw a connecting line here had surely to prove it with convincing evidence.

Perhaps the opposite idea that Atlantis fell because it didn't follow the Cardinal Mistake, might be worth while considering. Arundle didn't have but a vague feeling, though. On the search for the Cardinal Mistake the late salvation of Atlantis would mean a small diversion, if at all.

21. Puh Tzi and Walt Yio

How did the half Walter, the half Billy-Joe and the whole Pooty get to Atlantis? What great deeds had they together down there? Why were they hailed as heroes? Quite obvious Puh Tzi - as he was called over here – took a leading role. The blind giant Walt Yio was carrying the wide-sighted dwarf-being Puh Tzi on his head. Together they formed the sum of all wisdom, such the rumour went.

Pooty only shook his head about so much rubbish, and Billy-Joe couldn't see any sense either. He didn't like the idea of being blind and just some kind of undercarriage for Pooty, whose messianic glamour Puh Tzi kept emitting, while fully aware of everything.

Repeatedly, Arundle had to assure him that Walt Yio was an image of a long passed and forgotten culture, while his curiosity had arisen just for that reason. So, the little sting at his ego was therefore just like nothing.

He feared that he was converting in the future, in order to become transformed back to the past that way. A hair-rising idea, that made him sick.

Fact was, that neither he nor Pooty recalled a similar likely situation. And were absolutely sure of that.

So Arundle reminded them of what it had been like on Conversiors' Island often enough.

“Could those caricatures have been built after snapshots, while in the critical pHase of transformation?” she asked and made them think twice.

“But who should have witnessed us? And not only that – the monument was surely built afterwards. Before we must have been in Atlantis and done great deeds. Why else should the Atlantians build such a monument – that is to say - did so at their time)?”

“Yes, and that we do definitely not recall” Pooty confirmed. “Photo shooting on Conversiors' Island – yes, but miraculous deeds in Atlantis definitely – no. I do see it likewise” Billy-Joe agreed. A pHase like that in one's life would of course be unforgettable.

“Well, could it be that such events still lie in our future? Perhaps such trip as saviours lies still ahead of you” Arundle wondered, while noticing how tricky such jiggling along the time-string back and forth was.

“The two of you return tomorrow back to the day before yesterday and we all return today back to yesterday – if we all do so, then things work out fine with the monument and the devotion. While you have to imagine the todays and tomorrows and so forth, kind of

stretched, though” Arundle put in and enjoyed the surprise in the faces of her witnesses.

“Main thing is, you understand yourself” the bow snarled, who wasn’t fond of logic.

“Humans always want to know. And if they forget anything they feel shame. While in fact they always forget things, and for you this turns out to be a catastrophe” the Magic Stone went in his speechless impertinent way of communicating.

“Could we then wait until tomorrow, and then travel to the day before yesterday?” the sly Pooty picked up the thread, and did, what Arundle intended to do.

“Yes, but must we wait until tomorrow? Billy-Joe went in now. “Can’t we go today back to the day before yesterday, then we know what Puh Tzi and Walt Yio have been doing, and perhaps we do understand those Atlantians better, and perhaps find out if they made the Cardinal Mistake or not.”

“If this is technically possible” Arundle looked around questioningly at the Magic Bow, who had his eye shine and stimulated the Magic Stone to lift and glow in the brightest colours. It looked as if the two felt quite capable of doing so.

“We’ll stretch that time-string a little further, what do you think, old bloke?”

“Yes, sounds alright with me – let’s get going.”

For this time they choose another song “only for this time” it said. But that you never knew – not only they did.

“Fine marching is the miller’s lust –
 Fine marching is the miller’s lust –
 Fine ma-ha-chin
 He couldn’t be a miller’s bloke
 Who never ever marched ad hoc
 Fine ma-ha-chin...”

Without South-Michel the time-string led them on dusty overland lanes and devastated fields. No golden city came in sight, instead they were approached by a small band of vagabonds, who followed Walt Yio with Puh Tzi on his head. They looked like a monument that had become alive.

The people in their company were well-built Atlantians of differing age and gender, somewhat about twenty in number.

In order not to cause trouble, when Pooty and Billy-Joe met their ‘alter ego’ the Magic Bow and Magic Stone had an idea. They

covered the visitors by an invisibility-charm, thus they couldn't be seen by the Atlantians.

For that the Magic Bow enlarged a covering cloth, thus they all could hide, while it had been Pooty's, but had been forgotten and rested unnoticed on the bottom of the invisible quiver, Arundle had always with her together with the Magic Bow, mostly on the back, as she did right now.

Still out of sight the cloth was taken out on command of the Magic Bow and was unfolded. Arundle, Flory, Cory and Billy-Joe took a corner each and stretched it neatly on all four corners until the cloth became not only very thin but also large enough to house them all.

Being so thin had the advantage that you could look through without much obstruction. Pooty did like his 'alter ego' and held tight on Billy-Joe's head with his little paws. Thus, he became seated on top of the invisible pyramid, and had the best total overall view.

As soon as the Atlantians passed by - the hidden visitors followed and eavesdropped them in the telepathetic mode, finding out about their inner communication.

There was quite a confusion. The twenty were caught by the spirit and flew over by the greatest emotions and ideas. However, Puh Tzi seemed to be asleep, because he wasn't online Pooty found out, who was of course most interested in him.

'Let's hope, he'll soon wake up' he wished. However that he had better not done, while Puh Tzi suddenly woke up and yelled, stretching his forefinger towards the invisible pyramid, that was obviously not invisible to him.

This might be caused by a special supra-natural clairvoyance and might be the reason for the devotion he encountered.

A wild turmoil broke loose. All twenty disciples male or female shrieked and shot some twenty arrows at any direction. The disciples didn't share the clairvoyance of their master obviously. Besides, those arrows kept gliding down the invisible cloak of camouflage that was as it seemed more or less in vain. The arrows broke under the feet of the fleeing flock of invaders.

Thus, the merry march came to a sudden end, while the marchers hurried to get away and out of sight as soon as possible. Followed by the yelling of Puh Tzi who directed the arrows. But the protective cloak was still in use and the arrows kept on gliding down the shimmering cloth like silvery dewdrops on sea-rose-leaves in a pond on a wind-still summer-morning.

Hindered by the cloth the escapees weren't faster than their prosecutors and Puh Tzi soon changed the tactic. He had the pyramid surrounded and encircled, but he didn't consider the wittiness of his original. Pooty kept turning the Magic Stone until the latter took off straight up like an arrow tip, taking the load under the cloth with him – (of course they had to get hold of it.)

The cloth was strained and stretched almost over the limit but thanks to the power of the Magic Bow, who didn't want to show weakness, the cloth endured. It was, after all, a very special device from his very personal secret magic box.

Now they were away, but further they weren't either. They stood where they started, when they lowered red-faced and sweating, from where they had emerged some minutes ago, with a merry song on their lips.

"If I didn't know you, I'd say Puh Tzi is a psychopath" Billy-Joe grumbled upset and rubbed his aching head-skin. Pooty had grabbed a little too tight while troubled.

"I wholly agree – I think, I'm mad" he giggled and couldn't stop laughing. He infested the others, and all started laughing for a whole minute or more, and weren't really sure, why exactly.

"I think, I'm mad" Pooty repeated as soon as the laughing faded, thus it started all over again.

"I think I'm mad..."

However, was Puh Tzi really mad? Or had he good reasons for his behaviour? When he could look through the magic cloak he had seen Pooty sitting on Billy-Joe's head, no doubt, as if he looked into a mirror. Only the time-travellers had had an idea of what they were going to face, while Puh Tzi had been surprised by the situation. Thus, his reaction might be understandable.

Should they therefore try another approach – this time without the magic cloak? Perhaps they should grant the pair some time to digest what had just happened. Such a shock claimed for incorporation, that much was clear.

Besides, it was high time to have the public here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth informed. First of all Grisella or Scholasticus who had a right to be involved, because they were in it just as Marsha and Adrian, as well as their student friends.

It might be best anyway to ask for a school conference where they could present their adventure at length.

So it was done. The escapade in Atlantis was stunning enough, and met great interest. And the conclusions were welcomed as well. Nobody discovered a mistake.

They were praised by Scholasticus for sticking to the universal transgalactic law, while the appearance of Puh Tzi seemed somewhat problematic. Thus, a clarifying expedition was arbitrary.

“Of course with the necessary precautions...” Scholasticus said,

“That means, he wants to come with us” Arundle whispered into Billy-Joe’s ear.

For this time, there was no lengthier ado. As nobody wanted to employ the help of the magic cloak, there was no objection concerning the number of participants. Both, Magic Stone and Magic Bow didn’t publish what they had learnt yet.

For sure Scholasticus wanted to be on board as well as the specialist for prehistoric history Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots.

When Arundle and Flory described the mode of getting there, she overcame her panic of flying. Penelope M’gamba also claimed to be expert for mystery-cults and paganism and therefore her participation was a clear necessity.

Flory and her sister were on board because of their farther and own interest in archaeology, while Tibor was of need because of his transcendental air.

Thus the group kept growing and if they hadn’t departed right away, they might have grown even more.

South-Michel’s help was no longer needed, that the Magic Bow and the Magic Stone had proven. The once trampled path alongside the time-line was obviously broad enough even for those newcomers the magicians were still certain, despite the fact that the Magic Bow was Atlantian himself.

Perhaps for this fact his ability was founded of indeed finding the proper way.

Thus, the two Honourables stepped on singing one of those boy-scout songs, and marched to the sounds of the Internationale. While Arundle let them know that this was not just a boy-scouts’ song at all, but the song of the working class all over the world. However, it was too late for a change, and an alteration was most likely not intended anyway.

They all tuned in and thus the air resounded by those martial reverberations all over the idyll of a peaceful evening on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Arise, the workers of all nations!
Arise, oppressed of the earth!

For justice thunders condemnation:
A better world's in birth!

Once more the marchers all stuck closely to the time-line bewigged by their own singing and the harmony of their steps. The dusty roads of Atlantis already shone up towards the close horizon, when they sighted the band of disciples of Puh Tzi and Walt Yio, who were marching no less decisive towards them and soon stepped in on the same rhythm as well as the martial singing, while breaking down the text to unreadable sounds. Even trombones resounded like the trumps of doom accompanied by heavy drum beats.

Both bands of marchers met and combined. And further they went through the land, passing by hamlets wherefrom poverty-stricken Atlantians streamed by and followed the procession.

And thus the 'March of the Millions', it became famous then, was started. Nobody tried to find out the exact number, neither now nor later. It was a problem of noughts more than believe, such the rumour went amongst those in the know.

Until the golden city was reached, they surely were a couple of thousands that was singing the Iiihaaanahaahaalee to the drumbeat and trumps following the almost even pair of Puh Tzi and Pooty both sitting on top of the world, so to speak, while Billy-Joe had trouble jiggling the upset possum steadily over stick and stone on his head.

The time-travellers were enthusiastic likewise, and mixed with the folk before the palace on the centre square, soon packed tightly by the masses that streamed by from all sides, thus no carriages could pass, which were made serviceable for the high guests of honour. Because in the Grand Hall of the palace the official annual feast acts of the first inauguration of Puh Tzi and Walt Yio was to be celebrated. For the Atlantians thus the double became a true miracle and Godly revelation.

As you can imagine the arrival of the time-travellers enriched the position of the Saints (as they were regarded) considerably. That was why their appearance was pushed up to the 'March of the Millions' and became recorded in the annals of Atlantian history, no matter how short the distance to the final fall was already.

Whether intended or not, the appearance of the strangers turned out to be a milestone towards the Atlantian doomsday, Scholasticus concluded later, somewhat pathetic. Nobody wanted to accept his point of view however, before he produced a pile of evidence that couldn't be pushed aside. But this was some time later, when the time-travellers had returned to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Unfortunately, Pooty had no chance of contacting Puh Tzi, while he was so eager to find out how Puh Tzi had become his ‘alter ego’ and mark Atlantis with his stamp.

Whether he had any idea of cloning Puh Tzi asked just like that while they stood side by side before their monument,

“You me clone” stammered for the first time also Walt Yio addressing to Billy-Joe next to him, and twinkled silly out of blind eyes, so that Billy-Joe felt bewildered.

“Let’s hope, it’s the other way round” Billy-Joe wondered, however than he felt ashamed, how could he treat himself like that?

For now both didn’t know how important this little scene was, and how far reaching, not only for Atlantis but for the future of all Mankind.

There were no further contacts any more. The official ceremony tidied up the saints while Billy-Joe arranged for a gathering of the time-travellers, because the Magic Stone indicated that the time had come for an orderly retreat.

Little later Billy-Joe understood what the Magic Stone had let him know. Everywhere people consumed drugs now, and the Atlantians became somewhat irrational, thus the xenophobic tendencies came up again, and hidden cruelties inflamed, as they recalled from their first visit.

In a hurry the strangers were collected. The Magic Bow had the magic cloak unfolded and Arundle pushed it over the little band, that was miraculously all covered thus the whole mishpoke was beamed off the endangered zone.

And before Grisella (who was so threatened by the fear of flying) – realized, she was back home sitting in her professorial chair, and felt as if she had just had some kind of a colourful dream.

There was a lot to be analysed. Nobody had remained idle while over there, but collected loads of material. Thousands of photos had the youth taken with their cellular phone cameras. Even probes of saliva some of Penelope’s aides had taken – stones, cloth – even shit they assembled, while idling about in the mass.

The stammering ('you me clone') of Walt Yio had been recorded, as well as the singing of the Internationale by the multitude. Of course the wavering thought couldn't be recorded. Instead there were some videos taken, showing the official act below the monument.

22. The Clone Thief

The evaluation of all that material went on for weeks. Step by step a more precise picture of the Atlantians crystallized. They differed in specific areas of culture only little from other antique peoples.

The Athenians were in many ways very close as far as the appearance was concerned, as well as certain patterns of behaviour, Grisella deduced, and not always the positive ones.

Outbursts of xenophobia, scarcely suppressed cruelties were found likewise. Whereas the search for the Cardinal Mistake didn't get any further. For that aspect the field-research had failed.

Interesting were those results in any case. A livelier and more natural discernment into a strange culture that had passed - never existed. Of the many photos the best were taken for an exhibition and were supplemented by the videos. Thus, you got a lively idea of how the Atlantians used to live and feasted.

Unfortunately it was impossible to get hold of the telepathetic dimension of this society. Neither the video takes nor the collection of photos or the many items supplementing both, gave but a vague idea of the remarkable abilities. Only much later such circumstance would receive the necessary attention.

Rather stunning was the DNA comparison, thanks to the probes secretly taken by Penelope M'gamba and her aides.

DNA wise the Atlantians differed a lot to contemporary humans or other antique peoples, as was checked by the bones, which were found and analysed. Such findings contradicted strongly the thesis of the splitting off. Most likely the Atlantians were no early Greek colony as experts suggested.

While the comparison with living beings also proved considerable differences. Thus, the researchers on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth concluded that the Atlantians were a singular and strange race. They might even be of alien origin, that is, some kind of fallen angels.

Thus, the search for the Cardinal Mistake would lead astray anyway. What ever was found that way, it wasn't necessarily part of the human evolution, the scientists concluded. Be it, however, that inter-mingling occurred, an idea explaining to a certain extend the fits of xenophobia. But that was mere speculation.

Thus, telepathy was put on the angels' side – which might turn out to be a grave and meaningful error. Far too soon was that theory of the extra-terrestrial offspring at hand.

The most important group of scientists dealt with the cloning and the idea that Pooty and Billy-Joe were either clones or had been cloned. Both were of course most interested in proving them originality. With them were Arundle and Scholasticus, as well as Grisella who was hoisting her flag on many staffs.

First they compared the secretly taken hair probes of Puh Tzi and Walt Yio with Pooty's and Bill-Joe's. The result didn't surprise any one. The probes were identical. Nobody had expected anything else.

This proved that Puh Tzi and Walt Yio were clones of Pooty and Billy-Joe.

Theoretically there was the chance of turning things around. However, this seemed so unlikely that the scientists didn't follow this track, the more as so the two 'guinea-pigs' (as they addressed themselves ironically) were part of the team.

The idea of being clones of those mad psychopaths from Atlantis was absolutely strange and most unlikely for several reasons.

While the fact that the earlier apparition was the more original one, still had something in it. And this fact couldn't be doubted in case of Puh Tzi and Walt Yio. This was when Grisella stepped in as a linguist.

“The name Puh Tzi is a perverted form of the German adjective ‘putzig’-“ the Professor somewhat high-brow deduced – “it means something like nice, or fine, or neatly cleaned. The German language however commenced even in its grey beginnings much later, after Atlantis had long doomed. This name and the applicable figure therefore was an import from the future. Another explanation is very unlikely and doesn't make sense.

The name Pooty on the other hand – seems to be the Australian Anglicism of the same German adjective” she completed her assumptions.

“In the second case things are even clearer and more obvious. The mixed being Walt Yio is in the upper part alike Billy-Joe and in the lower it is like a giant kangaroo. In Walt we have the short form of Walter and in Yio we recognize Joe. Thus, the riddle is solved. Walt

Yio cannot for his name's sake be the origin, Billy-Joe must be the original source of the blind semi-human being.

Still, the semi-human figure may lead us on the right track. The extraction of genetic manipulative material can only take place during the pHase of conversion. In this kind of androgyny state enough blastulae^{lii} become set free, as are needed for cloning. Cloning means but the artificial parting of a blastula. Much like when twin embryos emerge... well, I think that's enough for a start, and that much need to be said for Walt Yio's coming into being..."

"There is still another question" Scholasticus interrupted. "Namely the question, who overheard Billy-Joe's conversion and pinched him of a blastula, while being in the critical androgyny pHase, which Walter also claimed, as we do know now. Because Walter was one of the few male giant kangaroos with a belly-bag, which is the big exemption from a biological point of view. We needn't argue about his other qualities, though", Scholasticus objected.

"Can we be sure that the same way of cloning was taken in this case? Exempting cells of a living being need much time after parting, in order to breed two identical embryos and not just an identical copy of the original owner of the blastula" Arundle put in.

"I don't agree, dear Arundle" Scholasticus contradicted. - "The most important question, however, is not how the clone emerged, but how it was transported to Atlantis. The fact, that it emerged is out of question, we should presume, and be it only for a preliminary hypothesis to work with."

"Yes, and where this embryo was raised" Arundle insisted. "Perhaps only the embryonic cells were pinched and taken to Atlantis where they somehow grew up. Perhaps those blastulae were implanted into a mammal's womb or even a woman's – you do have the choice. This would require the least effort. I'd say" Grisella put in.

"Still a lot of effort" Pooty remarked.

"...And a lot of planning on top" Billy-Joe added.

Yes, and there must be sense in it either. What the hell is all that good for? Why so much effort? I can't help it, but that looks like a prank of our old opponent, I strongly guess" Arundle said and looked around, ready to tackle the challenge.

"You mean **him** to be behind all that cloning and things?" Billy-Joe asked back just to be sure he got her right.

"Help, no, not **him** again" Pooty yelled.

“Time is not his concern, that’s for sure – thus – logical it would be, no doubt, and his aims, that is chaos, hatred, destruction and doom he has achieved, no doubt about that”, Arundle answered.

“Then Puh Tzi and Walt Yio would be responsible for the fate of Atlantis”, Grisella put in.

“Perhaps not in the technical sense, because the island collapsed most likely by a tectonic catastrophe. That doesn’t mean however that the civilisation hadn’t reached an end beforehand. Things were in bad shape as soon as you left the shining centre. The land was a desert. Didn’t you realize?” Scholasticus asked.

“They might even have been able to blow themselves up – the knowledge of such disastrous explosives they had most likely had.”

“Also one of his presents, - well, the handwriting of Malicious Marduk’s everywhere, as soon as you start tracing him down.” Arundle thoughtfully said.

“You could find a lot of past grandeur, that is, you’ve got to stress that it’s past and gone now” she went on.

“And Puh Tzi supplied the fitting religion of decline. I have here a very interesting brochure taken with me, that was handed out. I wonder why I was the only one who noticed – well, anyway its heavy stuff” Grisella said and continued right away:

“The end of the world is described in eye-catching pictures, however not threatening but heftily welcome, as far as I understood. You cannot just read that writing. But the little I was able to interpret, guided clearly that way. We are confronted here with the so-called Manichean bacillus^{liii} I would assume. This bacillus is chasing mankind like an insane goblin through history. Mostly disguised by varying forms of salvation. While you see in the background the cruel will of destruction, powered by a sick world-weariness.

Disguised as a light and soul cult such rejection of all that lives and loves, and presses forward in ecstatic plentitude - becomes vital. Spirit and soul need salvation from the bonds of earth, is then said. Matter is the cause of all evil. Like blinking gold in the mud, the captured souls long for freedom. The world can only be saved by the destruction of all matter which is regarded as the stronghold of the evil forces. The final big bang may grant freedom for the captured souls. The final goal is the destruction of the world - by people like Mani, the founder of this religion.

His cult was wide-spread in the Mediterranean World, competing Christianity in its beginnings.

Such negation of the world can be found also in the teachings of Puh Tzi, as far as we understood, yet. If there had been any doubts, we

can now clearly notice who the teacher is, and the force in the background. We all do know who he is. It is nobody else but Malicious Marduk, this is as clear as daylight to me...”

“Sure enough, dear Grisella” Scholasticus wholeheartedly agreed with what his sister-in-law said.

“Had there been any doubt, the brochure I just mentioned will bring clarity, as soon as we have it translated” Grisella confirmed.

“Malicious Marduk’s slyness and his unlimited resources have stamped an iron heel on poor Atlantis. What ever he needs, whatever he longs for, he acquires just like that by rushing back and forth on the time-string. Puh Tzi is but a wilful terminator. His teachings and his enthusiasm are genuine and therefore convincing...”

“It’s high time to notify the Advisor” Arundle added.

“We still only assume – more or less” Billy-Joe objected, but received a punishing gaze in return by Arundle, who ignored such doubts because she was by now sure about that matter. Like once before she was able to enter with empathy the sinister ways of thinking of her opponent. A dangerous undertaking – she knew all too well. No matter of all the errors she underwent, in the end it was she who -like no-one else - judged her opponent rightly.

“I know it”, she said “Malicious Marduk is absolutely mad about the fact that someone stole his favourite toys. Since the creation was taken once and for all out of his hands, he only muses for revenge, and tries to destruct everything that has been built by the creator with so much passion and effort. He does what ever he can and often enough it looks as if he succeeds. Those Atlantians had obviously been led astray.”

“Perhaps it’s him a cruel satisfaction and a devilish fun to have Walter all over again humiliated further than in the world of the living, by misusing him as the blind undercarriage of a mad being. Most likely was he far from any human civilisation been brought up as a clone and was poisoned and blinded while this was done” Billy-Joe added to what his friend said, confirming her assumptions, as it seemed.

“And Puh Tzi manages with his new religion of destruction to destabilize the Atlantians and have the longing for dissolution established as their final aim in life”, Grisella put up the thread and went on:

“Thus, things worked, and thus he managed to get the Atlantians out of equilibrium, while things went wrong anyway – be it socially or ecologically, when the soil lost fertility and the upper class failed their obligations of ruling...”

She had that from the booklet, she still couldn't read yet. She stressed on - yet. Soon she would be able to do so and was on a good way.

Scholasticus agreed "...one's longing for the death then, the more as so it is painted in the sweetest colours, I would guess."

"...when the soul finally returns to its empire of happiness" Pooty supported the Professor, then began to sing a pretty outlandish song, wherever he got that from:

"Who cares when we are marching
And everything falls apart?
Today we owe Atlantis –
Tomorrow the rest of the world."

"I understand" Scholasticus thoughtfully said, while he recalled the dubious context he had heard those words before, and so did Arundle.

"That was why the Atlantians enjoyed marching so much. Here is the connection, and everything looks quite obvious, no matter how awful it is" she nodded and felt shame of having marched so enthusiastically together with all her friends.

The cloning of Walt Yio they meant to have understood so far. There had been many opportunities in the previous month on Conversors' Island, when all the attacks occurred and even casualties had to be lamented.

Malicius Marduk had had more or less unhindered access. They only noticed in the aftermath. It had been the time when Billy-Joe's totem animal changed, and he entered the secrets of his early childhood. While such metamorphosis suited him well – (you couldn't in fact talk of Walter's death – seen that way – was he but still alive, although hidden under a human coating, that was set aside for four days every month.)

Walter managed to get along with the world, and Pooty won back his stepfather, although for just about a week each months only. Thus, they all were served well and Billy-Joe got the chance to enjoy Walter's wisdom, which he did excessively just as Pooty did.

It must have been in one of such conversions when Walter took over from Billy-Joe, that is, when Walter turned inside out - giving Billy-Joe his shape, when Malicius Marduk slipped in, extracting the vital germs for cloning.

And neither Pooty, who was always with his friend, nor Billy-Joe realized what happened. – Conversions of that kind, didn't pass without bruises and bleeding, thus it was easy to capture the required material for cloning.

On the other hand it was fact, that Pooty didn't alter his appearance but remained who he was, and was wondering now whether there had been a situation differing, where he had been injured when getting to the island.

Of course, when the converted sea-sprites attacked Conversors' Island he had been with Billy-Joe and had been paying blood toll in form of a cut in the back.

There must have been someone able to get what was required for cloning. Perhaps Malicius Marduk himself led such attack, when Conversors' Island had had the highest priority.

Could well be that this devil had been looking ahead and was planning what later became reality, while his intentions had failed then. He might have learnt to hate Walter right there, who confused his plans and intentions repeatedly.

23. The Cardinal Mistake

The days passed. The evaluation of the field research material was in full swing. Grisella didn't rest before she had unscrambled the writing of the Atlantians and filled it with sense. While becoming familiar with this complex language was impossible. There were too many intrusions of the mental kind, noticeable only by blank signs which were of course only understandable by individuals who were wholly familiar with the cultural context.

Therefore, Grisella was eager to try another trip. Now, while she knew how it worked, she wasn't afraid anymore. However, her co-travellers dissuaded her from doing so. They might become involved into the doomsday, her sister argued, who had been instructed by her husband, what was going on over there.

“Let them keep their last secrets and take with them into their eternal grave” Dorothea somewhat paternalistic argued. “We cannot do anything for them.”

“However, they might be able to do something for us” Grisella answered defiantly. “Perhaps we can find out more about the Cardinal Mistake.”

Grisella meant to be on the right track. While it was far too early to talk about. However, Dorothea didn't let her go with this in her practical way of seeing things and pushed such unreal notions aside.

“Let's assume you find out about their Cardinal Mistake. Who is helped with that? Do you really believe that you can alter the course of Mankind's history? What has happened, has happened. The switches are shifted for long...”

“Exactly, that's why we need to know the Cardinal Mistake” Grisella went in excitedly. “We've got to know it in order to make it extinct once and for all, thus it can never be made again as long as there are human beings on this planet.”

Hang on dreaming, dear sister. Mankind will not only stick to that Cardinal Mistake but to all other mistakes they were involved. That's the way people are. And perhaps this is their Cardinal Mistake already. The biggest mistake of Mankind is that people are making the same mistakes all over again – mostly, because they are inexperienced, or thoughtless, or stupid, but there are also low notions and egoistic motivations involved. Yes, such favour more than once all those cruelties to the best advantage of individuals.”

Grisella was impressed, how clear and sound Dorothea looked at things. Still the argument didn't convince her. The Cardinal Mistake was far more general and therefore far too close already. Grisella meant to grab it with her hands. She could see it swaying like the sword of Damocles above their heads.

It could well be that this Cardinal Mistake was like a chameleon – changing colours and appearance for the living. - She had to trace thing down, no matter the costs.

Thus, she pleaded her brother-in-law to raise his influence in order to motivate Billy-Joe and Pooty for another excursion to Atlantis. Arundle, she would surely get over to her side in an intimate talk between women on eye-level, she knew by experience.

She was able to convey the importance of her attempt: “This time we know what it is really about” she stressed and reported of her success with the decoding business of the script. “We need some more sound material, little conversations, single words... Material I can feed the computer with and incorporate into the system. I just have too little material. If I only had a few facts about the grammar. However, I hardly recognise the nouns.”

“Do you mind if I object?” Arundle replied somewhat cool. “We do have a brochure – a rather voluminous manifesto with clear references. Compared with the few plates of the Sumerians or the Assyrians our scientists have at hand, this is a lot more.”

“Yes, but they didn’t work with telepathetic blanks, which can only be filled by a reader, who is intimately familiar with the cultural context.”

Grisella didn’t give in, and Arundle wasn’t against a new trip along the time-string, as a matter of fact. In case of emergency they could beam back, as they once did. If Grisella was prepared to overcome her fear of flying, why not? It would be right with her. She wasn’t really convinced about the reasons for such new visit, because the unscrambling of the brochure couldn’t be everything. However - if Grisella insisted – the Magic Bow was prepared. He was searching for new songs already, and hoped to find something stimulating, because they knew now how the Atlantians mentally functioned in this respect.

Besides, they wanted to get them to talk as much as possible, as Grisella had made clear.

Should they show up again with Pooty and Billy-Joe, while their clones inflamed riots in Atlantis? – Better not!

“I would prefer to get in touch with ordinary people somewhere in the countryside” Grisella explained.

Thus, Arundle had a word with the Magic Bow, who consulted the Magic Stone in return, if it was possible or likely to do the trip without his caretakers, in order not to stir up further upheavals and riots, that might be inflamed by the common care-taking pair.

“I could hang that Medicine Pouch around my neck” Arundle suggested. “There we put you in and everything is like always, what do you think?” Arundle asked the Magic Stone. Who began to gloom and wink for help over to the Magic Bow.

“May I find me my own carrier?” the Magic Stone asked after a short while of hefty unspoken communication with the Magic Bow.

“No question - of course – choose who you like...”

“Well then, I want Professor Slyboots to carry the Medicine Pouch, and for replacing Pooty I want a little toy-koala in the Pouch. Can that be arranged?”

“Certainly, that’s no question – too much honour for me. I do thank you very much indeed...” Scholasticus agreed.

“And I provide the toy-koala” Grisella exclaimed.

That decision took at once two loads of Grisella's mind. For once she hadn't believed in their trip when it became clear that Pooty and Billy-Joe wouldn't be with them – no matter how obvious the reasons were. And secondly she highly appreciated that her dear brother-in-law was with them. He was some kind of steady rock in the swell, she could rely on one hundred percent.

Arrangements were made for the trip. Arundle, Flory and Cory lined up with Scholasticus, Grisella, and Dorothea, who insisted in taking part this time, and have an eye on her husband, as well as supporting her sister with collecting such voice recordings. Thus they all lined up along the virtual time-string.

Up front came Arundle with her Magic Bow, followed by Scholasticus who was the keeper of the Magic Stone for this time, then the others followed.

The Magic Stone tuned in on a voiceless marchers' song, and the other set in right away, as soon as they realized what song it was:

“Who has the nicest sheep, all here?
That is the golden moon!
Who lives behind the treetops, dear,
And will be rising soon.”

All over again the song sounded through the falling evening, while over the scarce land of Atlantis the silvery moon arose. From far lights kept blinking of a small hamlet the wanderers headed for.

Their singings arouse curiosity. When they finally got there, they were welcomed by some ten Atlantians, children, elders and one couple – a family as it turned out soon.

They all tuned in on the song as well as they could – and Dorothea took over the recording.

With the kids talking was nicest. They enjoyed communication and didn't mind whether they were understood, because children normally don't understand everything anyway. This is the way children learn language, wherever children are.

Thus it went on for almost an hour, until it was time to go to bed. And like everywhere the children asked for a good-night tale. So the mother got an old book from the shelf, while the little ones snuggled up into their rags and stuck the dirty thumbs into their little mouths.

On the table you could still see the rests of a frugal meal consisting of a thin oatmeal soup and stale beer, for which the guests were invited without any hesitation, no matter how they strove.

The old people soon dismissed and rummaged behind the curtain. This the guests took as a sign for departure. And while the children slept, and nobody talked, they withdrew, nodding friendly at the parents, before wandering back on their virtual time-string. – For this time without singing at first - which made it a hard fight against the forces of persistence, until they softly tuned in again in their song, as soon as they were out of sight. –

They kept on singing until they saw the silhouette of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth coming up in the dark. They were at home again.

In fact, their excursion had been little more but an evening walk after supper. To be honest, quite a walk, though. In any case you couldn't compare with what Grisella feared – those trips into space and time, because such were so bottomless. That was why she always refused and claimed her phobia. Not even regular flights she accepted. –“There are busses and trains, and even ships” she argued.. Those were her preferred means of transport.

Everything was alright, as long as you stayed on solid grounds. While water – not all that unfamiliar with air – was exempted for reasons only known to her.

Had it been the song? Or the peaceful evening? They had met very polite and convenient people, no matter how poor they had been. Still there was a hearty joy of life, as far as such a short visit could show. There was definitely not such cannibalistic wrath prevailing which had to be assumed for a society in decline, dissolution, and destruction – heading towards doomsday.

The audio language patterns achieved were combined in the computer with signs and sounds available from the booklet. A first systematic overall view soon showed up. By means of the written words in the brochure and the spoken words mainly deriving from the good-night tale a useful overall language pattern was achieved.

The computer then tried to find sense as well, and experimented with all possible conjunctions of both sources, until a suitable order showed up that might claim validity at last.

The brochure turned out to be what Grisella had guessed. It was a pamphlet of hatred against the unworthy world over here, and at the same time a praise for the upcoming world and the joys of the next life.

Each Atlantian was explicitly demanded to participate actively in the destruction of this world. Therefore there were detailed instructions and procedures laid down. People were called to the arms to the final war against state and society. Dying in this war was the highest aim.

Such a rigorous form of world denial had never before existed in the history of Man. That much Grisella was able to say. After all she was on common grounds, and was an expert in this field.

Thus, she meant to have made it. The Cardinal Mistake of Mankind was found, she was certain. – And it was found right in the state of birth.

This was a scientific sensation of the singular kind. Grisella reddened all over her face because of so much excitement, and didn't know where to put her enthusiasm. Had she been a child, she would have jumped about yelling, as if the golden goal had been achieved in the world cup of the home team.

She was no child any more, therefore she had to stay on the ground. She kissed her husband passionately instead, before she got hold of Intellectus who was kissed likewise. He hardly recognized his mother who generally was more the decent type.

Grisella called in a General Meeting to introduce 'the scientific sensation of incomparable ranking' to a more or less interested audience. However, such ignorance didn't hinder her engagement.

Scientific revolutions like that needed their time, and step by step the sensation would find access to the minds of the appropriate society.

The Cardinal Mistake – once spotted - had now to be found and eliminated in all possible spheres of life and institutions. This would cause considerable changes, and it was Grisella's job to make herself and first of all the present audience clear what this meant.

When she pointed out how severe such alterations were, she noticed that such an undertaking was practically impossible. The Cardinal Mistake – spotted or not – could not be eliminated, or if tried, the whole society would be blown up.

"Dear Grisella" her sister therefore raised her voice for an answer, after Grisella had touched the surface of the consequences a little, and noticed how tricky the matter was.

“Dear Grisella, I would like to remind you on my words before that all important visit. I told you ‘hang on dreaming, sweetie, just hang on. Human beings will not only continue to make the so called Cardinal Mistake, but they will continue to make any possible mistake. That’s the way people are.’ And therefore I tell you once again: The true Cardinal Mistake of Mankind is far more basic. People will make the same mistakes all over again, be it for negligence, or inexperience, or stupidity, or thoughtlessness, as well as for low aspirations, and egoistic motives. And thereof you won’t change anything, even if you succeed in banning the Manichean goblin and free the world from such ban of unworthiness.”

Grisella blushed in anger, while she had to listen to her sister. Getting set back in public like that in her own field, and by her own sister, was too much.

Instead of being thankful to what she had done for her, now this – that was more than the poor Professor could stand. And this on such a day. Instead of the expected glorious triumph - now this...

“Come, Amadeus, we are leaving” she hissed and marched off the hall stiff necked. Amadeus followed her on the heel.

Marsha, the Commissary Headmistress in charge, dissolved the assembly hurriedly, and tried to make it look as if Grisella’s departure had been part of the general final.

24. Sisterly Quarrel

Long healed wounds broke suddenly open. Deep inside her soul Grisella felt the pain again, she had pushed aside and forgotten. Never had she overcome the first set-back, she felt now quite clearly. In the shade of brilliant Dorothea she had starved. What ever she than tried – nothing and nobody could help it.

How much had she secretly admired her sister, how much had she loved her, and yet – hidden in the love and admiration - hatred never vanished - and envy, and jealousy.

How often had she trained in front of the mirror to be like Dorothea. She never came closer but to a ridiculous caricature.

Then she had turned to something own to get out of this devil’s roundabout, she was trapped in. She felt it, she had known it all the

time, deep inside, when she listened carefully enough - that there was something else, that was more and this More was waiting to be freed.

For a long time she had not been able to define this 'More', not even vaguely. Perhaps it hadn't been real yet at that time. Perhaps it had been only a dream of something, that wanted to become a 'More' – nothing else.

She realized that she owed something, Dorothea didn't owe, no matter whether she was able to clearly name it. It was as vague as the 'More', and she knew the hidden secret had to do with this 'More'.

While she had been unscrambling that brochure from Atlantis, this forlorn dream had come to her mind again. While in that pamphlet the talk was of something valuable hidden in the mud of matter. And this was exactly how she had felt being in her sister's shade. And also to her - the world around, which was so brilliant and beautiful and colourful to others, had been a dull sad misery, she tried to escape with all her effort.

Dorothea was bothered by similar scruples, only the other way round.

Sweet little Doro, sugar-puppet, all liked to neck and smooch, like a doll, was stamped a dummy, while Grisella was the intelligent, the reasonable, the one you could really talk to.

"Take example by Grisella" people said when she tried hard with her homework and failed. Her lack of cleverness she could feel in comparison as long as her sister was near.

She didn't have a chance but being the sun-shine, otherwise she would have pegged out in her sister's shade.

And thus she blossomed as a beauty, while nature had been helping a great deal. While Grisella on the other hand, became a typical blue-stockings, - the full explosive impact of both than showed up in puberty.

Dorothea could have any boy she wanted, while nobody wanted Grisella. That was as cruel as the world could be.

From Dorothea's point of view the sisters didn't stand back. Both had suffered under each other and had been bereft by the other considerably.

This was how Dorothea saw it, and Grisella should have been as just as she was, while she had meanwhile been blessed with the wittiest son you could think of, and with a very handsome husband, who was dearly in love with her.

Parentage had been denied to Dorothea up to now and probably forever. This was one reason why she had broken into the domain of her bright sister in order to conquest a piece of the empire of the spirit.

A stupid little brochure from the far past, written on strange material, no papyrus or goatskin, irresistible and thin as paper! A brochure that could be rolled up or folded but never torn to pieces, now tore apart sisterly passion by mistrust and ignorance.

While Dorothea had only tried to remain on solid grounds and keep her sister from running astray into irrational fantasies and dangers.

The two of them supposed to know it better. Things that happened to them from infancy on couldn't be avoided or corrected just like that. Of course there had been many mistakes done with them. But how could they have been avoided?

This was how Dorothea looked at things, and she couldn't find a mistake on her side. This however had a good reason. As to Grisella she lacked of a dimension. A dimension, which Grisella claimed to have achieved. And this was the reason why she was so self assured and convinced of what she had found out about the Cardinal Mistake and the Atlantians.

All those in the know had an idea of the wrong state of human affairs, and only those who hid their heads in the sand like an ostrich did in danger - could ignore what was obvious.

In the history of Mankind an early mistake had been mingled in, which nobody noticed in the beginning. While people tried to correct this mistake, nobody became fully aware of the dimension, and thus all trials got stuck already in the beginning.

In Grisella's intellectual process of manufacture the definition of the Cardinal Mistake held a central position. For a long time she believed – together with others - to have recognised the Cardinal Mistake by the term 'Alienation'. Then, however, unexpected irritations occurred, and in the end the abrogation of the alienation turned out to be nothing else but the return of the soul to heaven, back from the imprisonment in the material chaos of the world.

And this was exactly what Puh Tzi had planned for Atlantis in a large scale, and transformed into reality as was known by the historical facts.

- 'Could well be that the Atlantian souls were laughing by now and were glad to have made it. However, we don't know. Was it due to the Cardinal Mistake, or had it been non existent than, as Dorothea

claimed? Was the Cardinal Mistake the sum of all the little mistakes made by the people, because they were human beings?’

“There must be a way out of alienation – right now and here – in the real world about us.” Grisella wanted it that way, and everyone who hindered her searching for that way, was opposed.

First you had to push aside the psychological apparatus. There was a lot of confusion inside her, that had nothing to do with the historical dimension.

The sisters had in fact made their peace long ago and the early past was buried and cleansed, the wounds had healed and weren’t just scars, ready to open any minute, but gone for good.

Grisella felt well in her skin and loved herself with all senses - definitely when mirrored in the loving eyes of her handsome husband. While Dorothea meanwhile knew about her intellectual abilities, and didn’t sail in the shade of her sister any more, which had still been the cause of the sudden outbreak of turmoil right now.

Perhaps, the translation of the brochure from Atlantis had confused her already, and when Dorothea topped her state of being by her fundamental criticism, she lost her nerve.

Dorothea’s position meant in last consequence that Mankind had no chance to get out of the self-induced misery other than following Puh Tzi’s proposition.

A position, Grisella was not willing to accept. Because she had learnt by now what life held available on the sensual side, she felt all the more pushed towards her search for ways out of the alienation.

Who once realized the value of the interrelation of body, mind and soul rejected those who ignored such basics, and by doing so - the hope and outlook on the salvation of Mankind. Without such outlook you were hopelessly lost and confused, sliding towards doomsday. This way led astray, and was in fact the peak of alienation, while claiming the opposite.

Arundle and Billy-Joe meant to have discovered an entirely different problem. Decent people who attacked each other that way without obvious reason, usually suffered from infestation by Miseriors, and should be vaccinated immediately. On the other hand was there the fact that Dorothea had gone through the light, and her sister Grisella was by nature enlightened visually, after all she was the only full scale Divinator over here. Therefore, they both were supposed to be immune against infestation.

Still, there might have been a slight chance, when marching towards Atlantis along the string of time by the tunes of self-induced songs. An incalculable damage might have occurred in the light-coating, for reasons beyond their range and knowledge.

“In case it doesn’t help, it doesn’t harm”, Billy-Joe said with a grin and referred to the French philosopher Blaise Pascal. Billy-Joe wanted to say, that such a vaccination was useful if it helped, and didn’t necessarily cause damage, if it didn’t help.

Grisella was prim in the first place, and wanted to be precisely informed about the side effects, whether she risked any threat to her health, while she herself had participated in the produce of such serum. Being reminded of this fact, she finally gave in.

Had it been the Placebo effect or were they indeed freed from evil spirits, - the sisters were heart and soul ‘for each other as soon as they were vaccinated. They both felt unable to understand what had happened to them, attacking each other the way they had done. Both asked themselves where such hefty aggression had come from.

However, no-one saw grey shadows hushing off, but that might have been referred to the bright sunlight that day, flooding the surgery where the vaccination was practised.

Later, they learnt that the effect of the serum differed from patient to patient and in some cases it took three days before the exorcism was completed. Besides, the likeliness of getting rid of the tormentor at night was some fifty percent. Thus, nobody would notice a grey defiling shadow anyhow in the dark.

Perhaps the Advisor would be prepared to send Grisella through the light after all, if it was correct that she had overcome her fear of flying while marching along the string of time back and forth – while once being rescued when attacked by furious Atlantians.

Arundle considered to question her in this respect. She had to ask urgent questions anyway that were not immediately connected with the quarrel about the Cardinal Mistake parting the sisters in the first place.

25. South-Michel of Capricorn on Report

Nobody enjoyed being commanded on report. South-Michel of Capricorn was no exception. All the less he enjoyed such incitement by the Advisor, because he had a very general disciplinary objection with the ranking. Nominally the Advisor claimed the higher ranking. Fact was however that they had both their spheres of influence. It might thus be mainly a matter of perspective (as South-Michel put it.)

Each of them meant to have the proper general view, - the Advisor because he had 'the Ultimate Overall View' (UOV) from above, and South-Michel because he had 'the Ultimate Perspective Discernment' (UPI) from below. (Discernment sounded more adequate to him.)

In fact, each of them saw what could be seen from his perspective. The Advisor saw the surface and South-Michel the interior.

South-Michel mainly looked on the world through the prism of his sub-water globe under the ocean, where the dwarves kept on dwelling in the underground, while the mer-folk did likewise one storey above. Whereas the Advisor looked from the top - down, comfortably located in the virtual centre on all universes, galaxies, stars and planets, and so forth.

Because he saw so much, the Advisor believed in his omnipotence, but this did South-Michel no less: he looked into the depth and the interior, and that was no less challenging than the Advisor's grandest grandeur, - however, somewhat different.

Only once South-Michel had been able to invite the Advisor into the inner universe (that is the nanoverse), and the Advisor had been very impressed. Since then - thus had been South-Michel's hope - the understanding had grown on the Advisor's side. This was what South-Michel expected and assumed - until that letter came - commanding him to justify his way of dealing with the affairs of his disciples.

For a good while South-Michel wondered whether he should forget about the date, pretending of not having received the letter. Because he had been underway a lot when things went out of control in a way. But then he decided to go nevertheless.

He asked for a proper agenda in return, in order to prepare and get legal advice, he hoped to find with those humans on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, who had impressed him quite a bit in their majority.

Thus, he contacted Arundle by interfering into her dreams, and laid open his quest. The little agenda with the crucial points to be discussed, he had received meanwhile, and he transferred it this way to her likewise.

Unfortunately this form of communication wasn't fit for the transmission of genuine documents – at least not in a way of remembering them in the state of mental awareness.

Anyway, Arundle was notified, and confirmed date and time. She didn't remember any limitations, when it came to travelling. Therefore she invited Billy-Joe with Pooty and the Magic Stone to be with her, thus enforcing the magic which turned out positively on the travelling arrangements.

The Advisor had ordered South-Michel indeed towards the virtual centre, that is, the imperial virtual island in the no-where right between everything and nothing.

South-Michel of Capricorn was waiting already, when his legal support arrived a little late (due to the time loss in the outer space, the Magic Stone pronounced, who had been responsible for the navigation this time.)

A little deranged and out of breath had they been, however well cared and safe, when they finally arrived.

Just in time to witness the empirical entourage marching in – the bombastic somewhat ridiculous spectacle that accompanied the emergence of Their Majesties.

South-Michel of Capricorn was standing next to Arundle and whispered into her ear, somewhat intimidated – he'd only reckoned with the Advisor alone.

Arundle whispered back that this was not common right here on the virtual centre of all real and unreal fictitious and non-fictional worlds and entities.

The ceremony went ahead. The high personas were uplifted on their shaky thrones and heaved towards the virtual sky. The spectacle could commence.

South-Michel was seated on a stool in the red challenger's corner, while the Advisor was sent in the blue corner opposite.

"No bad proposition" Arundle whispered. She mimed the coach and ring-aide in the red corner, and served her challenger eagerly and obediently with the necessary utensils like drinking bottles and waving towels, while South-Michel got gloved and seated on his red stool.

Billy-Joe was coaching the blue corner likewise. He had not being asked properly, but swayed in on the pleading gaze of a very lonesome champion, no-one paid attention.

As referee Pooty jumped about in the centre of the ring.

“The duel of the strong words may begin” the hardly audible loudspeaker squeaked from above.

South-Michel felt encouraged by the fair set up of the performance, and did a first attack.

Upset as he was by the impertinent way he had been addressed in the invitational letter, he double-hit the Advisor’s ears – thus, they began to ring in a most annoying way – later diagnosed as Tinnitus.

However, the immediate counter attack of the Advisor was no less far-reaching. South-Michel’s nose was punched severely by an extremely heavy blow. Blood was sprouting and couldn’t be brought to a standstill, thus, the bleeding caused the fight to be cut off, before it had just about started.

South-Michel’s nose was still swelling. Thick plugs in the nostrils were supposed to stop the bleeding. The referee disqualified the blue corner, and South-Michel of Capricorn was declared winner by technical knock out in the first round.

Frenetic jubilant ecstasy from the terraces indicated how much the fight had pleased, despite of the short distance. Nobody seemed to have expected anything else.

The imperial throne-chairs couldn’t stop shaking of enthusiasm:

“Ever more,
storm in roar,
forth and back,

bamboo cane - never crack” – a thin voice kept chanting.

Arundle was completely stunned and meant to vomit with empathy, however she then noticed that the chairs were luckily empty. Their Majesties must have jumped off unnoticed. They might not favour such public sport-events.

Arundle had to have a word with the Advisor before he disappeared again. She asked herself how it had been possible, that the two fighters caused so much damage at each other – while the Advisor was known as absolutely peace-loving and ethereal.

South-Michel’s double punch to the Advisor’s ears must have been of disastrous effect. From the referee she learnt that the man was practically deaf. Therefore, it might be wiser to send him a telegram or even better – an e-mail for her immediate request.

While she was still wondering what to do, the importance of her request didn’t seem given any more. She wanted to ask permission for Grisella to go through the light, but couldn’t see the urgency right now.

At least she remembered Grisella’s necessity, behind which the quest for the Cardinal Mistake lured, she now recalled. There were

two altering positions opposing in the outer empty space, so to speak, in order to keep with the given situation they were in.

When speaking of the empty outer space, she noticed South-Michel's resistance. 'Where – for heaven's sake – was the empty open outer space?' she felt him inquiring.

"That's my trouble and misery with that Advisor and his megalomania. Grandeur he only sees in the size. He can't do differently, that's his nature" South-Michel lamented and complaint his grief out into the empty space, that wasn't empty at all, and couldn't be empty either.(empty was no option, because emptiness was in a way non-existent; - everything was a matter of dimension, aggregate state, size, and perspective and a lot more other conditional considerations.)

As coaches and aides Arundle and Billy-Joe did a rehearsal of the fight. They wanted to chat a little, while the fight was over so soon, but would have lasted on, normally.

Billy-Joe was packing his utensils back into the coach's pouch, having the blood-stilling tissue further at hand. Then he covered Arundle's protégée with his coat, saying 'South-Michel of Capricorn' on the back, and guided him - who was still shaky - over to the bar, where thick clouds of smoke kept rising.

The boxing public was in this respect very conventional, and didn't mind fishy regulations. – South-Michel was coughing all the time. Since he had stopped smoking, he couldn't stand the smoke at all.

"A quick drink, won't harm" Billy-Joe said just like that, and tried to hide his worries. While Arundle was also not so certain any more that her decision had been the right one, or even a brilliant idea, to have their drink and chatting about the fight right here. They could have gone elsewhere.

Thus, not much came out. "If you approach the matter that way, you needn't wonder if you fail", whispered the Tinnitus-damaged Advisor who strolled by, nudging South-Michel's bloody plugs sticking out of his nostrils just like that. South-Michel yelled of pain and sighed, but it was the sigh of a victor, as they all realized.

"If you consider the arm length" he said self-content and stuck his short arms out. While standing on the stool he hardly topped the Advisor by a head.

'True grandeur lies in smallness' -

Everybody along the lengthy bar noticed by now who was standing there, and friendly agreement mingled with nasty boos,

depending on the side taken, or the character, or the state of drunkenness.

“The winner gets them all” Arundle wondered somewhat misfitting, she herself realized. What was fact about the negligence of his tasks? While it had been she, who explained the facts to the Advisor in detail. She had told him about Malicious Marduk and all that. It wasn't South-Michel's fault. If there was someone to blame then she was to blame.

The whole idea had been just a farce. Order someone to report, who had been left alone for centuries or even more than a thousand years!

At that time when the subsoil enclosure occurred (thus the dwarves called the epoch of the destruction of Atlantis.) - At that time, their ancestors had sworn never to commit the Cardinal Mistake of the Atlantians, but do their own thing. Remaining always opposite - on the other side, of where the Cardinal Mistake had been committed. Because all those who once perpetrated, would never get rid of it again.

South-Michel's point of view was somewhat logical, seen from his side. He had given his best, as to his understanding. Therefore he couldn't agree with the Advisor's dissatisfaction.

“Someone spending his days in the underground gets rid of the general overall view” the Advisor opened the continuation of the match by other means.

“Anything is better than doing without the proper perspective discernment – good man” South-Michel responded.

His nose had started bleeding again, while being touched purposely at that vital point.

“Don't ask a mole for an eagle's gaze” the Advisor went on generously conceding somewhat pathetic, and probably unfitting. However he meant what he said, and thus his ears started jingling again badly. That was an unmistakable sign.

“No-one ever should pretend to carry the baton in his knapsack” South-Michel trumped, while he enjoyed seeing the Advisor perplexed, and kept him pending for a while. Then he laid open by means of a bunch of rhetorical questions, he put together rather voluntarily, the true relations – as he put it – as they prevailed on earth, after all.”

Just lately he read a disguising book of a famous South-American author^{liv} - South-Michel went on. ‘It's the story of an urban brought up Jew, who gets lost in his own ethnological studies, and continues as

the Storyteller of a dying Indio tribe, while there his true life commenced, shortly before ultimo. This man also tried to get back in time before the Cardinal Mistake was committed. His life can be seen as a mighty disaster or a grandiose fulfilment – seen under the perspective of the Cardinal Mistake.’

Arundle and Billy-Joe cocked up and felt like colonialists to the mer-folk – the more as so Billy-Joe still was feeling the sufferings of his own folk much more evident – almost like a hammering sound in his vessels, as there was his own blood singing such tribal anthem.

The Advisor’s ears stopped ringing, as he noticed first stunned and then freed. He smiled his merry disarming smile, as could only top Billy-Joe’s smile, Arundle realized, and was amazed anew like every time, how a living being could smile that way.

“Help is a boomerang” Billy-Joe confirmed South-Michel’s advice, which hadn’t been more than a reprimand after all: “It misses its aim and returns” -

Sounded somewhat wise, though. In the long run Arundle could imagine him as an old Shaman. Whether he might once suffer a similar fate than that Jewish Storyteller in the Peruvian rainforest?

‘What do we know about the happiness of Mankind?’

‘What do we know about the fulfilment of life?’ - Arundle wondered, and she felt the Advisor and South-Michel being with her, gently exchanging neat little kisses of peace and understanding - lest ear- or nose-bound punches.

Still she felt an envious sting because of that Shamanism in general, and Billy-Joe’s Shamanism in particular, which hadn’t yet arisen, of which she was nevertheless afraid, almost as much as most women were afraid of breast cancer.

Before he’d become Shaman, she would have liked to have a joint life, she imagined bleary eyed, while she snuggled up at him, and didn’t know where to let her hands. Putting them around his neck here in public she would have regarded as unfitting, and not appropriate to the situation. This was the way she was, after all. Seen from this point of view, growing up was a very slow and tough matter, which seemed to take no end.

The Advisor promised to send Grisella through the light, when she overcame her fear of coming up to him. “This is the basic supposition” he stressed and lifted meaningfully the V for victory with the fore- and the middle finger of his right hand while fading gently.

South-Michel looked for a filled ashtray and put his blood stained nose-plugs on top. This might prevent the devil-may-care from smoking, he hoped.

Because of his deeds none was done without purpose. No matter whether he explicitly declared or just did without explanation. Be it that there were no witnesses about, whom he could oppose with his teachings, or were they the wrong ones like in this case. Still he always intended to set a sign, that could of course be misunderstood, and would have been misinterpreted by most of those drunkards at the bar.

They felt repulsion, nothing else. They didn't understand or didn't want to understand what he was after, but took him as an inconsiderate goblin, who wanted to ruin their mood with such mess.

They didn't look for deeper sense for a second, while he – feeling the heavy blow from up front – hurried to lay open his intentions.

Questions of that kind were not favoured at the bar. Here, people cared for fun and good mood and the tender touch of king alcohol. He kept swinging his sceptre, which occasionally turned into a knout for those who became addicted, and that was what happened to all of them in the long run.

“Will you come with us?” Pooty gently asked South-Michel of Capricorn. The Magic Stone was in a hurry. For some reason he feared obstructions.

Arundle's Magic Bow slipped out of the quiver behind her back and got ready. The bar with the drunkards vanished in fume and mist, as well as the adjacent box-ring. Busy waitresses hurried about with buckets and swabs, collecting bottles and glasses with one hand, while the other had them glide into a foamy indefinite liquid.

Some resistant drunkards claimed the very last drinks. Others were still puffing hefty and extenuative, the cigarette in the corner of their mouths, eyes pressed tight, while helping each other into heavy coats more incapable than able, as soon as women were in part.

Their hysteric yelling overrode the bellowing coughs of the men, who were secretly handing coins or even bills to the cloakroom attendants, with a dirty grin on their red swollen faces.

“Might be worth while talking over with the big boss” Arundle agreed, while she caught the questioning look of the victorious goblin, who joined them on their trip home, at last.

26. The Day of the Upside-down Emissary

The Magic Stone arranged with those blooming coordinates once more controversially. While the Magic Bow unpacked the space cloaks, made for ‘interstellar travelling’ – thus was the official labelling – and off they went. Billy-Joe heading with Pooty and the Magic Stone.

South-Michel took the chance to have a look on the other side. He would have managed perfectly well on his own. Besides, he enjoyed company, all the more after his triumph, when he made his point so crystal clear.

The load dragged right into one of these staff meetings, which had been arranged because of Grisella’s complaint. Thus she was highly pleased to learn of the good news from Arundle, that her application of going through the light had been accepted.

It seemed advisable to take the chance right away, Arundle pointed out. So, South-Michel was unloaded and Grisella checked in instead, and off they went back to the virtual centre, they had just left.

And while they were back, Arundle and Billy-Joe took the chance to quickly slip through that sluice of brightness as well. They felt great while doing, and so did Grisella. She felt her inner balance return and the wholehearted openness flooding back, she had missed so much. It was a good feeling.

Should there have remained hidden rests of any Miserior’s aspirations, they became spilled away. Her search for the Cardinal Mistake was thus enriched by a new dimension, and improved her understanding.

Meanwhile, South-Michel of Capricorn was guided on an impressive sightseeing tour of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. While the meeting was postponed until the return of the space travellers. When they tuned in, he was just on his way down twenty storeys in the transparent lift showing the proper craftsmanship along the shaft, he was of course interested most. He wondered how the builders had managed to mirror the light so deep down, that plants could still grow.

Scholasticus was all too happy to explain and mimed the expert with lengthy explanations, more or less appropriate.

At the bottom, some fifty yards under the surface he had the curtains withdrawn from the panorama panes opening the view of the fathomless depth of the ocean.

“This is where dear Adrian, our Vice-Headmaster, is commenting those famous Pump the Pummel encounters celebrated annually on the Day of Democracy. Even the old King Melisander shows up then”, he explained.

“However, this you are going to hear of a vocational voice” he said and pointed at Adrian Humperdijk, who had managed to assemble some friends of his outside by telepathatic call – or had they been attracted by the strong beamers that lit the scene? Fact was, he was there likewise.

The remainders of prejudices vanished. Colonialism or imperialism was not their cup of tea, thus South-Michel meant to have understood by now.

When the nixes recognized their beloved Emissary behind the pane, they didn’t believe their eyes at first. But then they bowed and hailed their Salvador.

South-Michel acted most adequately, as surely was expected from him by bowing and scraping elegantly, waving his red hood at the gathering audience on the other side of the pane.

Ever more streamed by outside to witness the miracle.

Adrian learnt at his next visit the day was named “Day of the Upside-down Emissary”

This referred to the fact that the Emissary, as they called South-Michel, showed up from the other side. Because he normally did so from below, if he showed up at all – seldom enough, and never as clear as he did on that remarkable day.

The matter had an unwanted side-effect. The visitors from the Isle of Wisdom-tooth also were raised in status and became saints – while the Emissary had been in their company, on an eye to eye level. And what had been recommendations before, now became advice.

Finally the vaccination could be conducted, covering all the people, no matter whether this measure touched the identity of the mer-folk fundamentally, which it did.

With the foe the dare-devil was likewise extricated. That was fine in a way, however, reality was altered considerably by chemical means that way, and this was of course not intended.

When South-Michel learnt of such facts, it was too late already. The baby had been emptied out with the bath. The few resistant who had opposed the vaccination anyway, became the new outlaws for whom there was no space inside the society.

Thus happened what no-one intended: Under the influence from outside, life changed radically, no less as they themselves changed.

Cannibalistic carnivores^{lv} became over night peace-loving vegetarians, who might accidentally grab for a witty tiny passer-by as a kind of reflex, but let otherwise their fish-headed neighbours in peace.

As outlaws the few beasts of prey were banned from the civilized world, and damned to match with veterans and killer sharks of the former royal troops, who had gone that way already as a consequence of the democratic revolution.

Once masterful men had become outlaws, and elite soldiers became brand marked pirates in both hemispheres. The Melisandrian army got rid of those likewise. They didn't fit over here any better, while peace and reforms were in progress as well, after the old elite had resigned together with their king.

Those desperados attacked and raided hamlets and smaller towns. They didn't even shy away from slaughtering domestic infant whales or sea-cow babies in their boundless greed for fresh and tender meat.

Wherever they showed up, they spread fear and horror, and left behind only death and misery. A track of devastation ran through the territory, be it down under or in the motherland, the more as so they then even were robbing sea-maids and have them reconverted.

Those poor prisoners were stuffed into lonesome camps, where the outlaws not only satisfied their animalistic lust but also forced the desperate maids to switch back and eat meat again, until they also swayed back into that semi-civilized state as had been common in the so-called good old days.

Thus, all their efforts had been in vain they had undertaken in order to get out of that primitive state of being, that was undoubtedly connected with that kind of nutrition.

Their tormentors meant to be the last of a dying race. In their cruel rituals they sacrificed to their idol men and beasts.

The Emissary's gestures of dismay they took as signs of insufficiency, which caused their efforts to double. Thus, the sites of sacrifice were polluted with clouds of blood. Only the deepest red, deep purple or violet - such the myth said - might lead to the Emissary's satisfaction.

While the blood settled to the ground from where South-Michel of Capricorn was to be seen, if at all. -

They addressed the Emissary - the Emissary from the depth, while the other Emissary, as was now appearing from above, was denounced as the false Emissary, that is, the Emissary from above.

Because he was the Emissary of the peace-loving vegetarians, who had allied with those drylanders from the adjacent islands. This false Emissary, regardless of the fact that he very much looked like the true Emissary - was invented by those to destroy the proper way of life.

The fact, that the Emissary from above had been seen in the company with some islanders then of course led to contradicting conclusions. While the vegetarians hailed the newly appointed saints in the Emissary's company, the outlaws regarded them as frauds and terminators showing up on the eve of destruction.

Adrian's and Corinia's monthly reports from Australis laid open the dilemma that was going on in Australis. And while the humans from above clearly realized whose handwriting was noticeable once again, they couldn't deny that there was something else on the verge. They couldn't ignore the desperate quest for an identity which differed extremely, from what is meant to be a way of human life.

But who were they to decide that this way of life had to become extinct?

No matter how precarious the situation had been in old Melisandria, they had been authentic, what you couldn't say of the latest development over here in Australis.

Strange influences of a wholly different kind were at work. Adrian and Cory didn't argue about that, the more as so they mostly met open-minded and enlightened individuals, who enjoyed learning and picking up everything which was offered.

The box-match east of time and space in the virtual centre of all galaxies and poly-verses didn't come to a decision. Arundle now wondered - which side was right, that is, which side had an own point of view. However, that remained written into the stars, so to speak - where it might belong to, and fitted well, but didn't help with tackling the difficult question of the Cardinal Mistake.

What did it mean to wipe out this mistake? And didn't it belong inseparably to the freedom of Man - making decisions on each critical turning-point of life?

Decision-making that had been done million times before and would be million times after? Still, no way led by such points in life of each individual - Arundle wondered:

All human beings - all of us - have either to avoid - making this Cardinal Mistake or hand themselves over to it. The crucial question

was if we could notice the Cardinal Mistake as a mistake as such, or if we were hindered to do so, by a world-outlook grown and settled over the centuries, that made us unable to spot the mistake at all, because we couldn't imagine, and were like those people who were certain to live on a disk, while the disk was in fact a globe. Sure enough - when mankind meant to live on a flat disk they couldn't imagine that this disk actually was a globe.

Thus, Arundle mused, and decided to have such substantial questions discussed with the Advisor, the more so as she had once more lacked of asking him for her father's well and being, who was supposed to be somewhere out there.

Was he on the moon, where he longed for in his dreams, or was he stuck in some disciplinary altering measures, where he became disaccustomed with his past – a lot might have to be worked over?

She rejected to go on speculating and worrying unnecessarily. The time was now favourable as ever or unfavourable, because she couldn't leave just like that. Always there had to be something considered, or had to be done. There was always a pot on the stove, that had to be tended, so to speak.

Since the anti-petrification-serum that was now doing so great a service with that vaccination programme, they were in due process with, - little else had been successfully elaborated. Their understanding of the substance of time stagnated more or less, and was as far out of reach as ever while challenging as ever.

If the new system of values would be coming, replacing money by time, and if that development couldn't be stopped any more, then she wanted to know at least, how they could steer things a better course, avoiding exploitation and deprivation of the masses.

There was enough wealth in the world to grant all humans a humane life already, and thus, the new system had to guarantee them a long life, worth living, instead of granting everlasting life for some privileged on the one hand, and drastic reduction of life-time of the plenty, as was already showing up.

Would it be too much a demand, if she asked the Advisor for a meeting with her father? Or was that too much? She could feel the barrier. She could feel that the time wasn't yet ripe. There had to happen a lot more and being cleared as well – things, she understood too little of. Therefore, she was almost sure that she wouldn't get a chance. However, a negative advice was the least she could expect.

South-Michel's ridiculous box-match with the Advisor had been the greatest hullabaloo of all times, as Pooty put it. What was the

sense of it? Everybody had expected some clarity, or at least a proper demonstration of the opposing view-points.

What was the point in South-Michel's stressing on the 'Ultimate Perspective Discernment' as he put it, and why did he oppose the Advisor's 'Ultimate Overall View'?

What was the advantage of South-Michel's point of view? Why did he regard the Advisor's overall view as limited, while he claimed to see through the matter and down to the substance of things.

While Arundle was thinking all that, she felt carried away towards the dreamland, where the Advisor met her with a smile on his face, offering a cup of tea to her, then asked her to get seated on a neat little chair covered with red velvet. While she slurped her tea with pleasure, she tried to wind her legs around the slender golden legs of the chair in vain, while the Advisor answered at length all these questions, which had gathered on her mind.

Although he began with an excuse, of not being able to answer all of her questions, and trace them down to the ground. However not, because he didn't want to, but because there had no answers been yet found. In fact, he was hoping to get the answers from her.

There it was again – the high expectation, she was resisting in vain - tossing from all sides towards her. That was so unfair and she couldn't do anything about it.

While deep inside she was a little proud on her, when she was quite honest. How did the say go?: 'Among the blinds the one-eyed is king' –

Not necessarily, surly not, if he was carrying a Puh Tzi on his shoulders, or even on his head, like Walt Yio did – ruining the scene over there in Atlantis on the eve of destruction.

While this in fact was the true and only Cardinal Mistake, as to her personal opinion. Right there in Atlantis this Cardinal Mistake had proven its irresistible power of destruction.

Those who first denied and damned creation and felt bound for a higher and truer life above, leaving the world behind, denouncing it as unworthy, awful and mean, and denying a worthy life in the world – were committed and deeply devoted to the Cardinal Mistake, and laid the foundation-stone by hiding it for all future in the undercarriage of human civilisation and culture.

While Arundle presented her view to the Advisor, she earned mild but careful agreement, mingled with occasional little confused coughs, which rather annoyed her. Because she didn't know how to handle. Was he regarding her arguments as limited and shallow, not proving real intelligence, but simple naivety?

A grave and basic quest like this couldn't be approached in such a naïve manner, was probably the quintessence of his tickling gibes.

'Won't work with daddy either' she learnt straight and harsh. "He isn't that far yet, has to be worked over. One of our many construction sites, where we get stuck once in a while, but we remain alert. Delays are the rule more than the exception" – and thus it went, no matter what subject she raised.

'Mentioning South-Michel caused a Tinitus-attack, and that was it, and with him – the "not at all easy view-point-business" - as he put it, was pushed aside "once and for all." He indeed meant to wipe aside with this South-Michel's fundamental criticism.'

"UPV or UOV – that is the question, whether 'tis Nobler in mind to suffer the Slings and Arrows of outrageous fortune..."^{lvi}

27. Music in the Air

"Meetings of that kind, you can forget" Arundle reported back and awoke amongst her friends in the round. There were Flory and Cory, Tibor and Tika sitting and having their meal already, while Billy-Joe just turned in with his tray balancing above his head, and the unavoidable Medicine Pouch dangling before his chest – just behind Arundle, who dropped her plate with a loud bang on the table in order to give way to the nuisance she still felt because of that Advisor.

"Whenever it got tricky, he was attacked by Tinitus. That's the way any-one can do... It was so unfair..." She had of course not believed him. "...And then this coughing – whenever I said something he didn't quite accept, he started coughing. I just don't want to think of it any more. – What are we going to do this afternoon, anyway?" she gave the conversation a turning towards a more grounded theme. While she had done all the talking, so far.

It was like always: the six of them met under the South-Pacific Palm-tree roof of the dining hall, where almost no meat was served, but loads of excellent vegetarian food instead.

They were a sub-committee of the general time-study group, that had been formed as an answer to the new queries, which had turned up with South-Michel and the quest for the Cardinal Mistake.

There wasn't much research work done yet. They didn't find the right clue where to start, and didn't see clearly which way things went.

That measuring of the time on the sea-ground had been stopped a while ago, when the results turned out to be stable. Whether this had to do with the democratisation or the general vaccination against Miserior-attacks – such the official term – neither those responsible on the side of the mer-folk, nor the young researchers from the Isle of Wisdom-tooth would have felt able to confirm or deny.

Arundle was reminded of the Advisor's unacceptable and annoying attitude of dealing with questions of grave concern, as she just had experienced.

Most interesting of their projects was the actual state of the worldwide nano-transplantation medicine. In this field you experienced almost hourly advances, and had there been no modern servers they'd have given up, sorting things out.

Here, the problem was sheer quantity, no individual institution could overlook. Therefore, it was impossible to evaluate the actual state of the theory and to keep up with the actual practice. Nowadays, everything seemed possible or likely.

A fresh breeze was blowing. Should they try to conquer a boat? However, they were too late. Only some surfboards were still available. Anything else with sails had gone and was cruising out on the lagoon.

Untrained as they were, they had a lot of fun on the shaky planks. However, after two hours they were fed up with that permanent in and out. They brought back the surf-boards and swam out to their pontoon, that was for unexplainable reasons not yet conquered by others.

“This time please without shaking” Tika pleaded, and Tibor promised.

In the fresh wind it was pleasantly cool, while the sun was still shining brightly, and thus they kept on longer than it was good for them. Arundle, suffered from a sunburn. She was the whitest of all. This was no pure advantage, she noticed once more.

The Magic Bow could help. As soon as they were back ashore he had Billy-Joe to embalm her back with a special lotion from the invisible quiver. That helped immediately.

The evening approached with long shades, thrown by the rocks behind the boathouse. The wind turned, and sucked off the lasting heat above the rocks.

One of those voluptuous tropical nights began and invited for a beach party that arranged itself by its own. Open fires flamed up. All kinds of equipment were brought. Bottles, cooling boxes – some even got their guitars and drums, and began to play softly first then with more effect, encouraged by clapping hands.

Strange fume out of exotic pipes emitted. While the absolute prohibition of alcoholic beverages was obeyed. Thus, the mood raised and kinetic forces came over the exulted, who wilfully obeyed.

The night - soft as velvet - bowed deeper and deeper its blue head, and stars showed up in the darkening sky. The broad band of the Milky Way parted the moonless dome, enlightening itself and spending scarce light for the secret beasts of prey or plant. There was a whispering and crushing, a gurgling and chuckling – sometimes from afar outside, then frightening close.

Schemes were dancing - embroidered by glow-worms – you wouldn't know whether beast or Man, or child, or goblin – very low above the water, or over there on steep rocks, where brushes seemed to be wandering over brisk edges, indicating danger already by day.

Unending wide the dome of heaven extended, while the Zephyr closely touched the limbs - gently and covering, almost like a silken, velveteen loose suit or cloak perhaps, sloppily thrown over humid steaming-warm skin.

Tuzla intoned a wistful song of her home. The strange rhythm was picked up by Billy-Joe on the guitar. Light-footed the others moved over the soft sand – bending and bowing to all kinds of fantastic figures.

The pipe in his mouth emitted a strange smell. Arundle took it, when he began to sing, while first he'd only hummed. He liked to see her snuggling likewise.

She melted inside and was carried away by her mood, pushing aside all grave thoughts. She managed something she never succeeded: she stopped thinking, and became one with the singing and the tune of the guitar, and the movements that overcame her without realizing. Life itself happened to her, she meant to hold so tight in her hands. Now she grabbed it, while letting it go.

All that musing and searching, all those questions about sense and reason, or use, or ruin – wavered away with the clouds of fume and drew her with them into the seventh heaven of pure delight.

When the singing ended, she stepped behind Billy-Joe and bent over him. She felt his skin on hers, and noticed the incomparable acquaintance and sweet yearning closeness. From South-Michel – she knew not how – she remembered an old Scottish reel, she now started humming and clubbing on the boy's shoulders, who transformed the rhythm to the strings of his guitar. There was no text what so ever, and all began humming and drumming, thus it became a real reel, somehow.

Still a bit hesitant at first but then an ever enlarging circle was formed stomping rhythmically through the loose sand.

Those inside the circle grabbed each others hands, or hooked up or put their arms over each others shoulders – one at the time, while the rhythm held and carried them and steered them away. No one fell or only tumbled. In fact, they set their feet and steps neatly and accurately, without being much aware of it.

Had they realized what they were doing, they might have experienced the centipede's trouble, which stumbled as soon as asked how it managed to get away with its many feet, without stumbling.

Tibor forced the beat ahead by rhythmic strokes, until he couldn't stand the tension any more, as he was in his element. He not only effected his Sublimator-friends, to do like him, but they were supposed to do likewise with their common neighbours. By that the circle started whirling and even lifting here and there in waves. It even occurred that they all lost contact with the ground for the part of a second, which caused them to stumble like the humiliated centipede or even fall if the neighbours hadn't hold them.

The circling was accompanied by yelling and screaming of joy and sheer delight, that it was just pure fun to witness.

South-Michel was amongst the dancers wherever he had so suddenly come from. He jumped lightly like a feather, and put his steps gently. He bowed and bent continuously without losing the rhythm. Esoteric as he was, he crossed through the rows and divided the circle to form a snake he then led in sophisticated turnings around the lowering fire-places, while all hunger was stilled and nobody lacked of warmth – quite the opposite!

From the water-side a splashing was heard and in the dim light of the stars a foamy circle showed up.

South-Michel gave way on the top and got lost most likely that way, while the headless snake felt forced to bite into its tail.

Once more the staccato of the guitar beats increased. Billy-Joe couldn't feel his fingers anymore. However, the rhythm didn't let him go, got hold of his arms and shoulders and of his whole body. He had

become one with his instrument. The more as so South-Michel with a harmonica before the chest – suddenly appeared in the middle of the circle again, giving the reel now a more melodious and presumably a more Scottish touch as well.

Outside the sea was foaming. Thousands of naiads and nixes whirled and reeled in the meantime in circles of hundreds. As far as the ear could reach they were heard.

Under water the sound waves went for miles, once having reached the sub-water level. To make this possible, South-Michel had installed the big water-proof hi-fi set from the boat house and plugged his harmonica with it, thus the ‘heavenly sounds’ of the harmonica played by ‘The Emissary himself’ - were heard everywhere in the closer or further vicinity - as his were of course the most important tunes for the mer-folk anyway.

A memorable night inclined while the morning was dawning in the east, and the sun was rising red and glowing out of the sea behind the horizon – thus it looked. Those who saw something else, knew it, but you couldn’t see anything else.

“Thus it works with our sensual abilities” Arundle wondered and felt well. However, feeling was not enough, there had to be more. Still – a memorable night, no doubt. Billy-Joe had come closer, even though she didn’t know whether this was possible at all. And how nice he played. Had he been playing before and didn’t do over here?

From somewhere this unspoken order had come to get started by means of music.

“The voice isn’t only good for speaking alone” the saying went. While the music room had been available all the time. However, scarcely anyone went inside.

Suddenly that peculiar urge had been there. Arundle had felt it and her friends Flory and Cory likewise. Might have to do with that singing and marching business along the time-string. All her friends started remembering forgotten talents and had a violin forwarded from home, or a trombone, a trumpet, or flute, and the like.

Was their affection promoted by their joint experience? Perhaps there was no need for explanations.

A lot they had done together, a lot, but no music. This had come to their minds in that special night. So, they let time be time, and made music. And at once they noticed that they played at least an instruments each, or had done so, before they came to the School of Inbetween.

“I left my violin at home, I just wasn’t good enough...”

“And I shied away from taking my flute with me...”

“My harmonica was too big and too heavy carrying...”

“When I became older, I didn’t like my piano teacher any more. Therefore I gave up playing...”

Thus it went on, each and everyone had a similar foul excuse, why she or he didn’t do anything music-wise – although conditions were indeed favourable.

Sound-proof exercise rooms, a thankful public, able teachers (not just available right now, but could easily be made available the Headmistress declared.) In case there was no-one available for a certain instrument, this could be managed – money was no problem since that book of Anonymous.

Thanks to Dorothea the administration worked fine and money flooded in like rain in spring.

Since that beach party the students felt relieved and relaxed, no inner pushing and the same burning questions about the more or less real dangers and troubles for them or their acquaintance. With a little more ease things didn’t work out worse, but much better as far as they could be regulated at all.

Not everything could be settled – not with other cultures and when it came to the fortune and the future of individuals.

“I’m no percussionist by origin” Billy-Joe declared a little highbrow.

The musicians and band members-to-be sat in a circle. Each and everyone were introducing the whereabouts and experience with his or her instrument. When Arundle pointed at the guitar and looked challenging at Billy-Joe.

“The guitar I play just like that – Nope, I never took lessons. Drumming we have in our blood, so to speak, and this string-tinkling you just copy, and have shown it to you here and then. What really matters you have to find out yourself anyway...”

Arundle decided not to comment that, the more as so Tibor was eager to proudly present his horse-headed violin, he had had sent from home just recently. He was able to produce wonderful, strange sounds, and surely was a great talent, no matter which way the train was due of their joint venture.

Li Mei and Li Chang, the Korean twins, were trained opera singers and played the violin. They had been using the music parlour regularly right from the beginning.

Sandor Khan was a trained Mongolian low voice larynx singer, besides, he understood beating the huge drums.

Cory and Flory had wonderful voices and were trained traditional Indian dancers and singers. They had been training secretly with all kinds of jingling bells on fingers and ankles. Their way of performing was as worthy as any other. Even Arundle scarcely knew of their hidden talent, who was so familiar with them for so many years.

Arundle was also hiding how far she had come with plying the piano, and meanwhile she surely had forgotten a lot. But she had definitely left the stage of the flea waltz and Schumann's Elise behind. And still owned musical fantasy. Melodies kept flying at her just like that, as soon as she took the time to record them, lyrics were no problem either. Thus, she hoped to get some of her songs on stage with the new formation, they were just going to found.

However, things went in a wholly different direction. A school band would be founded, but all of them, who were gathered then, shouldn't be part.

28. More Perspective Discernment

Arundle's ideas didn't suit the Advisor at all. "Far too many efforts" he argued, besides, there was a school band already. The mixed band called 'Loblolly-girls 'n boys' had been playing already on their first feast on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. They only had forgotten.

"Its something for the first graders" the Advisor said and they all somehow agreed. The idea had just come with that remarkable night, and might fade again. In their first term they had just missed their chance, and now it was definitely too late. Besides, their talents lay on other grounds, and that was the most important aspect, when it came to concentration – the Advisor let them know and turned to Billy-Joe, who, like Arundle, had been following his urgent invitation.

The Advisor was clear and precise, perhaps, because not Arundle raised her questions, but he held the sceptre in his hands, and clearly designed the general course, he saw in danger since that late "Summer Nights' Dream" as he put it. Things like that weren't part on the agenda he had made up for them.

“Didn’t know, he had plans with us” Billy-Joe murmured unwillingly, the old mistrust awoke anew. Had they hoped to get further with their catalogue of questions, they became disappointed again. All the Advisor intended was to get them away from the sweet leisure life on the beach, they found out.

“If he hasn’t to offer anything in return, I just don’t listen any more” Arundle scolded. Billy-Joe was on her side anyway. He neither wanted nor could put aside his mistrust against that faint appearance.

Perhaps there was jealousy involved. The Advisor had a very possessive attitude, and offended Arundle’s sense of liberty. No-one was allowed to deal like that with her. What he forbade to others, couldn’t be allowed, Billy-Joe decided.

Somewhat strange it had been, though – where had that dope come from in the first place, they had been smoking, and the pipes and all that...?

He had never been smoking, still he did that night and he had forced Arundle to do likewise.

Had someone poisoned their tea, or had something been in the cookies for dessert?

The guitar he had fetched by himself, that he could clearly remember. Some weeks ago he had it taken to the island, following a vague inspiration. – None of the famous brands, but handmade of wild cherry and cedar wood. Soon had she conquered his heart, though.

The Advisor noticed such resistance. Therefore he offered them an excursion to the central switchboard in the virtual head office of all might and power, where they, so he hoped, not only experience a surprise, but would hopefully see the proper track again.

The centre gave a wholly unreal impression. Nothing reminded of the switchboard type of centre. No desks were there, or telephone. No radar screens or squeaking loudspeakers. Not even an entrance control.

It was like in heaven – just as people imagine heaven. Winged angels all in white passed by and turned their eyes upwards – hands hidden in wide sleeves and from their mouths it constantly chanted Hosanna and Hallelujah.

Sitting on a pink cloud only some feet above their heads a Bavarian in trendy leather shorts and plaid shirt with a green velvet hat on his head - kept fiercely working on a little harp, while singing with cracking voice his heartbreaking Hosanna, that tears came into Arundle’s eyes. And Billy-Joe deeply sighed thus they pitied the poor man.

“Well, well eternity can stretch, no doubt about that” the Advisor sighed, when he realized where his guests were looking. “Don’t worry, he will come down again, as it says in the Script.^{lviii}”

“What script does he mean after all?” Arundle wondered, and knew the answer at once. She always forgot, how closely she was related to the Advisor in her mind.

She wanted to start a brief explanation, to inform Billy-Joe, whose part was it not to be familiar with the Bavarian habits and hospitalities, when she saw her father sitting on just the same kind of pink cloud, as the Bavarian.

Would this cloud be grey instead of pink, she would have sworn that they were in Laptopia, and not in the true heaven.

Her father also held a harp in his hands, and was frolicking as well as he could, while boredom was written into his face.

How long was he doing this, Arundle wanted to know. She didn’t get a clear answer. Most likely all the time he’s here, she figured and reckoned back – must have been some five months or so.

“More then five months” Waldschmitt confirmed, he was allowed to be himself here again, despite of his false face, that hadn’t been altered back yet, and wouldn’t be, as far as he knew.

He was growing wings already, he remarked proudly and pointed at his back where you could see indeed two little vaults under the white gown. Other than the Bavarian he had put on the heavenly gear already. “Not to raise bewilderment” he declared.

“The Bavarian is going back on his own request – that’s why his garment.”

A shining golden ring around his upper head was meant to indicate a gloriole-to-be, but was only brass, Arundle recognized.

“That’s the way you live” she concluded, and you could see that she disliked the idea. “It’s not heavenly to me, after all”, she said without addressing anybody, and made the Advisor turn to her, who had been busy with Billy-Joe.

“Looks worse than it is” Waldschmitt tried to calm her down. “I do learn a lot” he added and after another pause he exclaimed suddenly: “I know now the whereabouts of the curse.”

“You mean how blessing turns into curse?”

Arundle meant to be very sly, by thus overdoing.

“Something like that” he monosyllabic replied and had him sink back on his pink cloud while the conversation had discouraged and exhausted him.

“I shall give you best regards from Mom. She was here. We had a nice time together. She has an own office and is on her own now.”

“Ah, yes, I’m glad to here that. What did you tell her of me?”

“Nothing special though – that you are still hiding because of that gangster organisation. – We did read your book together, and Billy-Joe explained it to us. – In the aftermath she adores you and is very proud on you. On the book-fair you signed her a copy of your book, without noticing her...”

In partitions the sentences erupted, as if she had greatest difficulties with such exchanging of information she neither could nor wanted to be involved.

“Oh, I’m sorry about that. Give her my regards in return and tell her that I’m all in all fine... - If you are allowed to blab this out. As soon as I can and may, I will look after her.”

The Advisor made his placid poker-face, which meant that this was very unlikely - definitely not in the near future, Arundle concluded.

“We could send you Zinfandor Leblanc or Watchdog Will Wiesle, then you have someone normal to talk to – up here between all those angels.”

The two had accompanied Roland Waldschmitt on the deserted moon, where he finished his book, while he had to be protected against his prosecutors.

The Advisor’s face was shutting up now completely. That was obviously a not so welcome idea of hers.

“How is the book doing?” Waldschmitt then asked, in order to bridge the confused pause that came up when the Advisor rejected each of Arundle’s proposals.

“Very well, Grisella said. Dorothea is buying school certificates with your income. However, money seems to be the least of your worries, as it looks...”

Roland Waldschmitt nodded in silence, then said: “For you money could be helpful, then you are safe. You never know...”

Arundle just shrugged, she didn’t care about money either. If you agree, we spare some of it for Billy-Joe’s family-clan, they need support.”

Billy-Joe shook his head. Such money he didn’t like. Arundle just ignored him.

The Advisor showed impatience, Arundle realized and said farewell. She hugged her daddy heartily, noticing how weak he had become. She felt tears on her cheeks, and inside opposing notions. On the one hand she welcomed what happened to her daddy, on the other she could hardly stand the unavoidable alteration he underwent.

The Advisor, who was reading her thoughts again, nodded earnestly. “Such changes are unavoidable, and they do not concern your dear father only, dear child” he said and gently touched her still wet cheek. “His triumph he had had. His life on earth has been fulfilled at best. What else can a Man wish?”

Billy-Joe shook Waldschmitt’s hand, or tried to do so but couldn’t feel any response. You could hardly feel that hand anymore.

Thus, the corporal revelation had still not been solved satisfactorily.

“Rather virtual – your old man” he said, meaning to cheer her up. “Is that so?” she asked back, with a gentle smile. She knew how right he was. She just couldn’t stand the idea of his death. For a real corporal life someone like him was not suitable, she slowly began to realize step by step.

Of course, we always lose something of each other, she told herself. In each farewell and in each separation we lose something, and we can never get it back, we will never be the same again. While now she experienced another level of alienation – this was now a new quality. Because in between there was a farewell for good. She had never looked at it that way.

Thus, his disappearing was not just a trick to get away, and was not just set in scene to get rid of his persecutors. Roland Waldschmitt had left this world corporal and irreversible. With own eyes he could be only seen by those in love with him, who had his beloved image in their heart, while it one day would also begin to fade.

“And what about me?” Arundle asked miserably and reared the answer, she meant to know already. But the Advisor shook his head with a smile.

“With you it’s different – with you and your sceptical companion, by the way. Your fate won’t fulfil in South-Michel’s reel, that much frankness must be...” he said and turned back to this slightly arrogant and mocking air of his, Arundle couldn’t stand at all. And just to top her impression he topped while fading:

“Do your best, wherever it is
And keep up your good name...’lviii”

What was that? Did he want to upset her?

“It’s from Black Beauty, everybody knows” she uttered somewhat highbrow, but Billy-Joe only shook his head.

“I don’t” he said intimidated. Thus, Arundle felt ashamed, when she woke up.

“What a dream” she wondered. She had certainly to talk about it with Billy-Joe. First of all with Billy-Joe, but with the others as well. They had a right to learn why she was altering her intentions so often, as if she wasn’t master in her own house, and that – in fact – she wasn’t.

Perhaps it wasn’t all that bad to be torn back. Not everything that came to her mind had to become a mighty project, or even a worldwide hype.

The Advisor wasn’t wrong when warning. Thus she opened up only another construction site, so to speak, while there were many urgently needed actions, like the time for instance – little was done lately.

Billy-Joe – how could it be otherwise – had shared her dream, he had been with her.

“We did start awake, do you remember? We were destined for that virtual centre of unlimited power and as far as I can see, your Magic Bow took you there while I was proceeded by the Magic Stone. The Advisor then came and took things out of our hands. Somewhat then we slipped into a dream. That’s the way it had been, while I didn’t notice, but that doesn’t mean much.”

“Did you find the Advisor more trustworthy, then? I think it’s very important to me, if I’m honest. I do care a lot what he says. No matter if it’s much – well, perhaps I do, because he tells us so little.”

“South-Michel’s reel he dismissed, I’d say. - You can say that...” Billy-Joe agreed.

“While we were dancing so nicely. The sea was all excited” Arundle said – remembering scenes and approaches, and gestures. Were they asked to give this all up in future? That could not be.

“I think it was because of those drugs. I should never have lit this pipe and hand it to you.”

“We all were high already then, wherever it came from” Arundle opposed. “You played the guitar like a young God.”

Billy-Joe grinned and turned away. Arundle was certainly overdoing. Besides, much more important aspects had shown up meanwhile.

“The relation between South-Michel and the Advisor is very tricky, I’d say”, Billy-Joe changed the subject to a higher level, both realized after that box match. There was much tension: “The contradiction between the Advisor’s megalomania and South-Michel’s minilomenia” Billy-Joe added – “each is nuts his way” –

“Still – the Advisor seems well capable of tuning in on South-Michel’s dimension” the girl answered – “I know for sure that he’s able to enter the nanoverse. That much flexibility seems granted on his side. What we not yet found out is, how South-Michel get along in the larger scales...”

“Fact is, that South-Michel showed up before our eyes, while only lately, and is the Advisor alike.”

“The one’s getting down from his greatness, the other up from his smallness...”

29. The Return Bout

The disappointment was incredible when Arundle and Billy-Joe announced that they wouldn’t participate, because the Advisor asked them not to do. They didn’t really know why. However didn’t want to ignore his objections. There would be no time for such a project. A school-band you founded during the first or second term and not shortly before the final exams, he argued.

This is what they hadn’t considered. While they didn’t think much at all, but followed the intuition instantaneously.

For most of the study group members schooling ended at the beginning of the term after next, that was in about three quarters of a year. And there were no reasons, why this date couldn’t be met. They would surely keep it. Next to Billy-Joe and Arundle, Florinna and Corinia, as well as Tibor and his brother Sandor Khan would terminate, the others had a little more time left.

In any case, the back-bone of the undertaking would be gone then. Besides, nobody had yet thought of the existing band, that had a hard time anyway. Confronting them with a competitor wouldn’t have done them any good. It might have been wise to have contacted the band-members, instead of coming forward with a new formation, only because South-Michel had put ideas in their heads with his Highlander’s reel in the tropical night, which had been the main cause of the subsequent idea.

What made Billy-Joe buy such an expensive guitar – right now? He couldn’t say. Was it only because he had finally enough money?

His scholarship had been increased considerably when he became eighteen, and an extra payment was credited to his account.

While dreaming he had seen himself playing the guitar, right at the beach as became later real. While he couldn't remember South-Michel, who had not been in his dream at all, or he had overlooked him – which was very unlikely – how can you overlook a dwarf clad in Scottish gear and a red hood?

For his part in their joint invention of a vaccination-serum he also would be gratified, as soon as the application was settled, and the shares had been evaluated by the Swiss Patent Office in Basle. His share would be some twenty percent, and negotiations with a Pharmacy-Multi were pending.

“...Will end up with huge amount and a monthly lifelong pension” Dorothea figured. In any case a safe cushion for an unemployed young graduate with a native background, which was no real door-opener even in liberal Australia.

The invention served an entirely different purpose, that was originally acquired for de-petrification, caused by a determining shock – what ever this meant.

That was why clever Dorothea put emphasis on the second effect. The serum was supposed to be – “a most effective means against depression, which could likewise be applied against severe psychoses, with great positive results...”

Thus, the drug promised to be sold worldwide, with great success, and soon was.

What made him change, Billy-Joe asked himself, when he found him sitting for hours playing the guitar, and humming of singing all kinds of melodies that came to his mind just like that. Why hadn't he done so before?

Had there been no time? Had he been sailing and swimming so much?

He was sitting at his former favourite site where he also used to sleep – somewhere near the teachers' dormitories, where he conquered a site in the open, and didn't give way ever since.

There he was sitting now, experimenting as well as reminding almost forgotten chants and songs of his people and ancestors (or who he meant to be such) - coming to him in his dreams.

The melodies were in his reach, closely purring about in tender soft flows of air or what it was, and enjoyed being caught in his hidden corner.

Arundle asked herself the same question and didn't get any further. The music had come with South-Michel's performance, - all others confirmed as well. They had had the same experience. They felt, as if the contact with South-Michel had initiated something slumbering in the hide.

There, South-Michel was again – what did he possess, what did he initiate, and why did he do it the contradicting way?

For the mer-folk he was the Emissary – a Godly emanation, a Salvador and Messiah of a new time. The democrats amongst them saw in him the initiator of their change. While the meat-eaters claimed him as guarantor of the old now threatened tradition. Each side maintained and adjusted him as to their needs.

And what did they (that is, the 'true humans' on two legs) - see in him - as he appeared under a red hood with that checked waistcoat, tartan kilt, and yellow gaiters? Did he make them smile pitifully or just benevolently? Did they think him wholly naïve? As he promised the overcoming of the Cardinal Mistake – or what he meant to be the Cardinal Mistake. As you can see, his was no definite interpretation, but was asking for contradiction, and was of course contradicted fiercely by the Advisor, and his rough argument with a punching fist.

Only some weeks ago he introduced himself as South-Michel of Capricorn (might be even two months or three by now.)

South-Michel had turned them backwards. Not in the future, but in the past you could find the dawning of the Promised Land. And that fitted very well with the intentions of the School of Inbetween, - to pick up things that were lost in the course of progress. All what threatened to disappear in the scars of the streaming history for ever and all times, and for all future – remaining undiscovered and unused – if not recovered and saved in rehearsal.

This was why South-Michel was very interested in the witnesses of the long forgotten or sunken past.

South-Michel drove their attention to what lay under their feet, or right in front of their noses, or came about them secretly in the mist of the night with sweet pictures as well as not so sweet ones.

He pointed at the obvious – all the world took for granted and wouldn't doubt. He put emphasis on fairies and fables, and the naïve belief of the children, that was mercilessly sacrificed on the altar of up-growing.

Most likely, here was the greatest secret, nobody yet traced. - Because the perspective discernment, and the child-related stunning, and the child-related ability to see and experience wonders - were not utilized - for reasons that were obvious.

Thus, South-Michel spotted the missing Ultimate Perspective Discernment (UPI) as the Cardinal Mistake of Mankind.

This was why the Advisor vehemently contradicted. His whole virtual appearance manifested in holy wrath and formed the blood-rising punch whose intergalactic consequences couldn't be overlooked yet. A punch of a fist – thus South-Michel put it – that changed the world for ever, because it would never be as it had been before (he might overdo a bit.)

And thus, such an Advisor could talk a lot, such a negative creational aspect (such a punch in fact was) would never ever be eliminated, and was an absolute novelty, as new and singular as true creations only can be.

He'd be glad to learn that the idea of creation as such was accepted at last – (the Advisor avoided the direct verbal confrontation) – you better ignored such an Isnogood, he felt need to see in South-Michel since that mean punch towards his ears – the effect still troubled him considerably. No matter that you saw nothing – quite opposite to his own punch in reverse.

You couldn't see the effect but you could hear it all the better. – Well, in fact, just one person could, and that was the Advisor himself. That was why South-Michel's publicly demonstrated suffering annoyed him all the more, as this was what the dwarf in fact did, you wouldn't believe it.

“Creation, by all means – nice a creation that is” South-Michel grumbled, and carefully touched his swollen nose – pointing out that this was the truest and latest creational innovation, that couldn't be ever erased again.

Never ever had a thought turned into being like that, not only initiating the deed - but performing it likewise. This was indeed a new quality of the 'Phenomenology of the Spirit' as a great philosopher put it^{lix}.

“It's rather a kind of newly discovered quality” the Advisor nasalized. He seemed to be making fun of South-Michel, which incredibly upset the latter in return. Things ran towards a newly inflamed uproar in the arena of the virtual centre of all universes and galaxies.

“Not with me” South-Michel groaned and the Advisor acknowledged “That may God beware.” However, it was too late.

Adrian Humperdijk was already introducing the opponents. His trained voice of much reportage of sportive events stretched and modelled the syllables the fashionable way, in order to grant his subjects more volume and importance. Which was easy in case of the dwarf, whose name he could intonate well tempered and resounding, stressing the syllables one by one and ending with a long – oooorn – for Capricorn – very successfully.

While the Advisor couldn’t be handled likewise, who regarded such as a bad omen.

However, his conviction forbade superstition, and therefore he swallowed the bitter pill. Expecting the defeat to come.

Someone who is going into the battlefield in such a mood, needn’t wonder the outcome after all.

Pooty as referee jumped about like a fluffy wool-pad in the middle of the ring. Arundle took care of the Advisor this time, but she didn’t really like it. Not, because she shied away from tending the loser, but because the Advisor promised to become a bad loser.

South-Michel was movingly tended by caring Cory, assisted by her sister.

Both of them had never done this before in reality, and were looking forward to such a new experience. They were dressed – somewhat unfitting – in their beautiful Indian saris, and had put on the jewels of their mother Vasantha – for them also seemingly fitting for the occasion. - As this was not an ordinary box match but a principal encounter of the metaphysical kind, - nobody really cared.

Neither did any-one mind the considerable difference in height of the opponents, which was all too obvious while here in the box ring – out side no-one realized normally. When were they ever seen side by side?

“A great name for a small figure” – murmured the Advisor to encouraged himself – he tried in vain.

- Before he had the fists up - South-Michel nailed him down with a hail of blows – jumpy and alert like a punching ball until the senses of the so attacked faded.

Adrian Humperdijk got no chance, while he would have liked to comment only once something else but that more or less - always alike - Pump the Pummel match. Those sea sprites were also fast, but at least they took their time, while here and now the match was over before it had begun.

Thus, he could only sum up what had happened.

Arundle shrieked in her corner, - after all, she was the coach. Did she make a mistake?

Now, there he lay on the planks that meant the world, and didn't move any more. – Pooty counted and counted. Then the doctor came and checked the pulse, and when he didn't notice any, he gravely shook his head.

Another Blitz-victory and the confirmation of the title seemed to be certain for South-Michel. But at what price!

Arundle awoke - so scared was she. Once more, she had been fallen asleep. This time, when they vindicated to each other on that school band project, the Advisor had emphatically dissuaded them from doing.

In her dream the Advisor now lay on the floor and didn't move. She almost meant he deserved it, she mused, and felt ashamed of her ill feelings. - 't was of course nonsense worrying - as immortal as he was.

Still, the victory of South-Michel made her think twice, if you looked at things principally, and considered what South-Michel stood for.

30. Searching for Mentors

What did South-Michel stand for? “Might be a suitable theme, though - for your final exam” Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots said, and gave Arundle a kind, reassuring look.

“Push everything aside, leave the big wide world on its own for the upcoming months” she went on.

That was the way all of the teachers were speaking in all ten subjects. But she wasn't really afraid of – and if at all - then before the test papers written under supervision.

From now on each test counted, and there were four more to come. This meant grinding and swotting and grinding again.

“And do think about your future, it's high time. All of a sudden you hold your diplomas in hand and then what? It's always the same” the Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, recommended.

You couldn't fail in her subject. It was too practical for that, no matter if you lacked in theory. There was always the practical side of 'the other way of seeing' and that they all had learnt by then. Beside the fact that they all knew themselves pretty well by now. Therefore, the most gifted trained with the newcomers, even those who didn't owe the appropriate colour yet, which might be raised in the exam for the first time.

With Professor Slyboots Arundle arranged a verbal test, as was possible for exemptions and Arundle was an exemption! By that she skipped the classic themes of physics, which weren't her favourite, the more as so you had to calculate, because she then would surely fail.

Billy-Joe promised to help her, when she taught him grammar in reverse. His rather limited English didn't show, the more so as he wasn't alone with that – still the fact annoyed him.

And so it came that Arundle had a considerable small study group sitting around her, who all wanted to improve their English, and learn how to express or forward what you wanted to say, and write it down properly as well.

Where had the time gone – with all the collected erudition of Somnions and Animations – promising incomparable advantages?

It had been an all too transitory knowledge over the years - light like a dream, and tender like a soul, so to speak. Nothing enduring, if it wasn't picked up and hardened. The dealing with such knowledge was careless, as it could be repeated at any time, this was the way things were looked at, even by the teachers.

In fact, everybody stuck to the theory of 'learning to learn', and for that the characteristics of Somnions and Animations fitted well.

Unfortunately was the theory of learning to learn no subject. Still that didn't matter really as nobody intended to cause problems for those who wanted to get access to one of the major universities, either over here or somewhere else in Europe, America or Asia.

The School of Inbetween had an excellent reputation and with a diploma from here you could get almost everywhere. It was one of the elite institutes on world scale.

In the term before last it was high time for the candidates to look for a mentor, who was supposed to guide her or him through the heights and depths of the exam in close personal contact.

A very personal and trustworthy relation was of course necessary, that ideally had been built up over the years. This wasn't all that easy for the numerous age-groups, and thus a system had been developed giving all candidates a fair chance of getting the mentor of his or her first choice.

That way also those teachers got a chance of becoming chosen who were not so well liked. Each teacher was allotted five students maximum, that was more than enough, experience had shown.

Not all people are made for exams, most aren't, and some are not at all, and those were the candidates who needed most help.

The discussion of sense and nonsense of exams never ended therefore, and here in the School of Inbetween it arose at any occasion anew, - and this year in particular, because so many students had to be examined. It was not only the number of students that made this year-group so strong, but the personalities and talents of the examinees:

Strong personalities like Arundle and Billy-Joe, and of course Tibor, or Flory and Corinia, just to name a few.

The trustworthy relation between mentor and candidate did not only refer to the personal likes but also to vocational provenience – at best – thus it was laid down in the accompanying recommendations, wherein you could easily spot the voice of dear Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Headmistress. That was of course no failure, quite the opposite. And for this term they didn't lack of such exceptional and extraordinary candidates, who had found their Mentor by heart.

No-one remembered similar intensive and job-related relations. Too many situations had there been where you met on eye-level or even saw the white in the enemy's eye together, so to speak.

Thus, students and teachers were more alike blood brothers than anything else, united in sisterly passion – thankful for the lifesavings more than once. And while such facts didn't show in everyday school life, it never wholly faded in the memories.

Arundle couldn't make up her mind between Grisella and Scholasticus, but finally decided for Grisella, while Billy-Joe choose Scholasticus. Thus, things were settled for once.

The choice was appropriate in both cases, and emotionally their verdict was also best. With their decision the exam stress spread further, and infested the chosen teachers. While noticing their amiability for once – feeling the strain of responsibility likewise, as they of course strove for the best of their disciples.

“Forget about the colours this time” the Commissary Headmistress, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk recommended. – Dorothea, who had been taken over, couldn’t stand the double workload. Besides, Marsha and Adrian were a well-trained team – in life and at work. Dorothea had enough to do with all the administration work and public relations she decided, and strove for consequences.

Marsha’s suggestions were often not really helpful. And more than once you had to do just the opposite of what she recommended. This might be the case again this time.

All of them knew how important the colours were, and that sympathy was surely a question of the right colour. Matching colours seldom failed, and so it was the other way round. While of course pigeon-grey and watery-blue didn’t form a substantial contrast – thus, you couldn’t speak of opposing spheres.

While things were different with a strong green and an also strong red of even blue. Only few combined inside such large-scale differences in colour, or harmonized with representatives of complementary or neighbouring counterparts, if you tried after all transforming such schemes into the abstract of the plain scale, which wasn’t advisable anyway.

Moschus Mogoleya wasn’t really amiable, for what reasons ever. His teachings he managed just like that as far as his major subject was concerned. Apart from that he had nothing in the backhand – not even a second subject. His teachings were all the like, no matter the labelling. Everything referred to green whirls. Thus, meteorology seemed suitable, all the more so, nobody else was found for this subject. His geo-physical knowledge could well be compared with a gifted beginner.

However, he had a strong feeling for atmospheric conditions and of course for whirls of all kind. This way he could pronounce routes and strength with great reliability.

And as cold his character appeared, his subjects were laden with passion. Rational arguments weren’t his cup of tea. Many a statement of his couldn’t be proved, no matter whether they were true. He neither wanted, nor could prove what he claimed, and he was deadly insulted if you doubted in what he professed.

Should he do with such a strenuous mentor? Tibor asked himself, and couldn’t make up his mind. No matter whom he asked, they all uttered doubts and misgivings. Job-wise Moschus Mogoleya was not

reliable, some said who meant to know him, or really did. While his humane aspects were even more suspicious, Arundle argued who had once been his enemy number one. The other way round it wasn't any better. The two were trapped in an almost paranoid aversion.

"It'll help him, and won't harm you", Peter Adams encouraged Tibor, who still was fond of Moschus, that caused some strange ambiguities on his side and the queerest accusations.

Strange changes in the social climate there had been some, that couldn't be put right away on the Miseriors' account. – They themselves might have been kind of sloppy and threadbare or even righteous – seen in the aftermath – searching for a scapegoat and – oh wonder, spotting one, Peter argued, and Tibor was willing to see his point.

How should he decide? Did he decide against Moschus Mogoleya, then he would decide against his own nature – or what he meant to be his own nature – which fitted to him like a second skin, no matter what others thought of that.

Another question was, whether he agreed with what he was. And therefore he needed Moschus Mogoleya as well - to find out, and measure or even mirror behavioural patterns, he might not even notice otherwise.

Besides, Sandor was going ahead. He didn't bother with scruples. He did like Tuzla and Patagonia, who felt best taken care in their Dean's company. They didn't enjoy sweet harmony all the time, but they understood each other, and felt at home. Therefore, they dared an open word and risk a quarrel without fear. Because they knew they belonged together.

The three of them had made up their minds and had selected Moschus Mogoleya, the Dean of the Sublimations, as their mentor. Still Tibor couldn't make up his mind, because there was someone else. Things weren't as clear as he wished in his case.

Ever since he felt that tie of yearning between him and Penelope M'gamba, whose secret and widespread wisdom and knowledge attracted him. He would have liked to follow her on the way to Shamanism, had he only enough spirit and toughness.

At least he could talk to her. Perhaps she saw a wiser way for him, that didn't show. – He couldn't openly talk with Moschus, without choosing him, because of his difficult character. It might be the same even with Penelope.

Whether it was too late now to get started with Shamanism by entering this vast field of secrecies and wonders, he didn't dare to

decide. Tempting lure stood against deep consent. Was he allowed to follow his feelings in such a crucial question of everlasting concern?

Possessive was that woman likewise – by all means. However, if that didn't bother in case of Moschus Mogoleya, why should it matter here?

In deep thoughts the boy trotted along. You didn't see those nineteen years he had passed. This might be because of his slim appearance, which made him so suitable for that dancing with the wind.

Among those Sublimations down here on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth he was – no doubt – an exception. His sinewy body abounded in energy and his splendid mind was over-boarding of fantastic ideas, and made him careless once in a while. He then tried things, he better hadn't tried. However, that would calm down with the years. Besides, routine increased safety.

Would he give away such a splendid gift, if he decided for Shamanism? – His own brother, his fellow-students and his Dean would see it that way, because they had their limited horizon, that was only seemingly wide. Their horizon didn't go further than their eyes could see in the steppe with all its worries and fears – while still offering freedom.

Was it the tickle of news? Well, Shamanism wasn't really new to him. It had been him who brought that Shaman over here in order to free the befallen beast and Man. That was when the pigs died. He had felt the tickle for the first time, then – saying 'I can do better'.

His feeling he had pushed aside, he didn't want to be impolite with that wise man, but at latest now he felt this itch again: 'I can do better... if I was trained, and knew how to do things right.'

He was not the only one who had an eye on Penelope. She was a well liked mentor, Tibor noticed when he found himself sitting in the waiting-lounge on his stool expecting a lengthier waiting-period.

A lot of Shaman stuff was to be found about herbs and potions, and the like. Not always – but mostly from Africa. That was only natural, because Penelope was African.

At last he found an article about Shamanism at his home country, and the importance of the horse headed violin - he was electrified.

Like Billy-Joe who never could make up his mind why he had bought that not just cheap guitar, thus happened with Tibor. He couldn't tell why he had had his old horse headed violin shipped over

here to the island, against the declared will of his arbitrary father. Never before such an idea had come to his mind.

While now he couldn't do otherwise. The ancient heritage was supposed to remain with the family, insofar his father had been right. Still he had taken it. The drive had been stronger than the prohibition, he fought in vain.

Now he got stuck with that article, and forgot everything about him, until the kind Professor bade him in her parlour. His vague desire, he had felt somewhere inside, turned into firm certainty under the impression of that article and the impact of the horse-headed violin he felt, without knowing the whereabouts. He only knew, he wanted to go the way of Shamanism, and he wished his eyes and senses to be opened as well as his heart and spirit.

His eyes were opened when exorcising the Miseriors, and his heart by South-Michel's reel the other day at the beach party. His spirit however, that he knew, would be opened right here and now by nobody else but Penelope M'gamba.

The Professor was chatting merrily and at ease about this and that. They also spoke about Zinfandor, who was well, Tibor learnt. But then the Professor had a look at the clock on the wall and turned the conversation towards the cause of the meeting, which he told her right away.

His strong wish he founded in the attraction he felt towards Shamanism. He also mentioned his little experience, he had gathered, and still made him curious. He also referred to the horse-headed violin, and the magic of that summer night's dream and South-Michel's reel.

With little gestures and few words the Professor made him open up before her ears, giving her access to his inner life. She agreed wholeheartedly with his thoughts and ideas of how to open heart and ears, thus she was prepared to open his spirit as well.

"Fine, then" the Professor summed up. "There is time enough, I can see a vast ocean ahead of us. What I know, I'm going to share with you. Be patient with me – and with yourself. Keep in mind that Rome wasn't built in a day either..." she added laughing.

Tibor wanted to add something, she knew already, whether she would guide him as his mentor through the upcoming exam, because his last term in the School of Inbetween had just started.

"It's in your file, - see..." and she lifted a file in front of her. "This is yours" she said opening, and showed him the day of his entry - as well as the expected date of termination.

“Very right, in about nine months, more or less... In that period a human being is growing up in its mother’s womb. Why not a young Shaman as well, don’t you think so?”

Penelope M’gamba smiled friendly, while closing the file and rising.

“If you don’t mind, we’ll meet every week from now on” she said, and off he was back in the waiting lounge where to his big surprise Tika was waiting.

Florinna and Corinia Hare were one year apart, however, since they were in the School of Inbetween they had become adjusted. Corinia didn’t want to be excluded, because Florinna and Arundle went to the same form since primary school. Thus it happened that Corinia worked hard and developed enormous eagerness, while Florinna did it more the easy way, as far as traditional schooling was concerned.

Both were well liked by their fellow students and the teachers – all of them, without exception. And all would have liked to take care of the sympathetic teenagers, now when their last term began. All meant to know want the best would be for them.

For both sisters an academic continuation of their education seemed arbitrary. While both had their own ideas, when it came to the subject. Since she became acquainted with the mer-folk Corinia had made up her mind. She wanted to become a Deep-sea-Archaeologist.

Florinna couldn’t yet make up her mind. She knew only what she didn’t want to do. Therefore the teachers weren’t of great help. the sisters had another question to solve. A question that had to do with their attitude towards life, and what they inherited from their parents and ancestors. Under on circumstances they wanted to be parted, neither of them, while Corinia even went as far as changing her subject if it came to the worst.

“We stay together, in any case” they decided – “as long as possible” and added “no matter the costs...”

They wanted to go ahead dually in any case and become archaeologists like their father – if necessary with different points of emphasis. “And for balancing between body and spirit we will take part in a traditional classic dancing education.”

As mentors they chose the Headmistress and the former Vice-Headmaster, who both agreed with delight. Adrian would become

Cory's mentor, while Marsha would take care of Florinna. Both fitted well with the colour-scheme, and that was of great importance.

31. Tibor and Tika

Tika had never overcome the attack on her life. No matter that it was proven now a thousand times that Arundle had had not the faintest part in the assault. Deep inside Tika could never get rid of the idea that Arundle was her enemy and competitor.

Her brother - Tika had found late. Not before the age of six - sister and brother had met. And it was by accident that they later found out about their relationship. Thus it happened that Tika fell in love with Billy-Joe (as much as you can fall in love at this early age.) When they then became brother and sister, she had under great sacrifice managed to alter her devotion, and gave it another direction. At least she thought she did.

But this didn't hinder her from being jealous on Arundle. And the more she became pushed aside here in the School of Inbetween - the more this jealousy inflamed. How much had she tried to control such ill feelings - she never really succeeded.

Then Tibor came into her life, and everything changed at once. In one magic moment - nobody can ever find really out about - great feelings overwhelmed her. It was love on the first sight for both of them. The green whirlwind conquered her heart just like that, somewhere up in the air on the verge between land and sea.

Tika burst into blossom for the first time in her life, and felt well in her human appearance, although this was virgin ground for her.

A lot that had tied her to Billy-Joe she now transferred on to Tibor. She pocketed him in her mind, just as she had collected Billy-Joe before, because her shy nature wasn't altered by this love altogether.

Still she was able now to keep contact with her kind. But it was too late now for deep friendship with other girls. Such were built in the years she had been devoted to her brother.

Sitting right there in the waiting-room she realized with absolute certainty that she had lost her brother for good and irreversibly, when

she saw Tibor coming out of the Professor's parlour. She listened inside and searched for the well-known itch in her soul. It was gone, and she knew that the time had come.

Now she realized her inability of forming friendships and enduring them over a lengthier period of time, and nourishing contacts, although the reference had altered or was disturbed for good.

And thus, the fare-well hurt doubly, while she knew that she had lost Billy-Joe to Arundle and not only to Pooty and Walter, but now as well and finally to Professor Scholasticus Slyboots.

The last step of this long and hurting fare-well ached most, because the separation was now for ever. The end of a long way was reached, that was parting and guided each in his or her direction. Something inside her meant to know that their ways would never cross in future.

She couldn't think of a more distant relationship. The idea, of thinking in love at each other from afar, didn't come to her mind. This was all the more bewildering because they weren't separated in reality. The fact that they still were so close hindered in reverse the process of reflection on her side, so it seemed.

In reality Billy-Joe had become unimportant for her for quite some time already. Still the connection had been there, and only now, when she realized the facts, she became aware of what was now destroyed for ever.

Thus, she used her time waiting other than Tibor had, although she had come here for the same reason. Since Tibor had decided to become a Shaman, she felt as well the call.

Penelope M'gamba was a sensitive person who heard the grass grow, in matters of that kind, and inquired Tika's affairs intensely and carefully. What she found was alarming. Tika was a genuine shaman talent.

Tika never troubled Tibor with her worries. When they were together, they had better things to do, than to talk about brothers and family-ties. The more so as Tibor wasn't free in this respect either and had his own lot to carry.

No matter whom she asked, almost all had their own lot to carry family-wise. Most suffered from sticky ties which couldn't be cut. Other felt the other way round and were longing for maternal warmth in vain, they had lost far too early, causing an everlasting cold in the soul. Too much affection – the lack of love – too mild or too severe

parents – there was no ideal each and every one suffered from the one or other extremity.

“We are all disturbed, the question only is - how” was Arundle’s conclusion. Bothering Tika with such finesses didn’t help her at all. Quite opposite, she reacted allergic against such arguments from above, and Tibor felt just alike, which forced their mutual acquaintance a great deal.

Now their joint mentor confirmed, they had another even more touching connection, woven in a secret place, that joint only selected souls and reached only enlightened spirits in the unreal world between heaven and earth. Here, in the pantheon of the world-soul, their Totem Animal kept waiting, and asked them to unite the Converter’s way.

Tibor surprised himself as a horse-headed violin, while Tika handed herself over to her second nature, and didn’t surprise Penelope or Tibor, who were accompanying her. Be it, that Tika played so much more delighted in the light of the full moon, wasting no time in howling at her as she used to do, whenever the moon arose beautiful and round and full on the soft velvet-blue nightly sky.

“A horse-headed violin might be a niche Totem animal” Tibor mused and didn’t know quite, what he should think about it. Strange enough, he felt his hands remaining, enabling him to play himself.

For melodies he wasn’t short. As small as his horse-head appeared, there was space enough, if it was true that melodies were formed in one’s head and not right away in the chest or the throat, where they belonged.

The whole trouble between South-Michel and the Advisor about the Cardinal Mistake was just ridiculous, and caused Tibor’s violin to a mighty Homeric laughter, that was right away transformed into an expressive melody – (much to the pleasure of the awakening nature), and got under the skin of the earth, so to speak, causing the earth to shiver, quite so as if some snowflakes settled in your unprotected neck unexpectedly (or an eagle’s feather, or a glowing cigarette end – the latter leading to a wild quake, eventually.)

If things get together one by one that way and one to the other and the other again – and so forth – then it’ll show what’s coming next and what’s gonna be. Until somewhat likely the wink of a humming-bird may finally end up in the furore of a hurricane.

Tibor knew not quite where he was. A second ago the converted Tika howled much less than usual, but still – while he lacked of comparison, and Penelope didn't stay on the island more than a couple of minutes.

Tibor worried a little, that there was no space for him. The weather alone was a problem. Such a violin was a precious instrument and needed special care. His thin legs carried him with pain and in no way over long distance.

He couldn't enter the cabins of the guards. They'd feel disturbed and overlooked. A dry cave, not too deep and uninhabited would do. But that wasn't found in the vicinity – at least didn't show up on the meter.

Tibor's fusion with his horse-headed violin led to hefty arguments among the Convertors. However, while nobody could remember a similar case, the uproar went astray. Until next month a dry soundproof cave - soundproof it had to be, some of the Convertors demanded, while the majority was of the opposite opinion. Many had been listening to the miraculous tunes in sheer ecstasy. This part overruled the minority, who claimed protection in reverse.

“They want indeed to have a sound-absorbing wall built right through the island” it was said.

“Those, who still were in doubts had opened their eyes at the latest now” South-Michel said, when he learnt of the quarrel.

“What broken blokes those are, while being part of the misfitting kind. Who ever wants to doubt the existence of the Cardinal Mistake, find proof of its survival right here...”

While Tibor was fiddling around with the horse-headed violin, Tika used her time for herbal studies. Convertors' Island was inhabited by all kinds of strange herbs and brushes. The wind had brought about the seed in hundreds of thousands of years, coming from everywhere and mingling to the most stunning new breeds.

With insects it was hardly different, while insects had more trouble getting here from far continents. Some however managed and founded fertile colonies.

It was a pity that Tika wasn't allowed in her Totem animal costume to collect herbs and insects. While she had enjoyed chasing

about with her botanising equipment to show her mentor all the treasures there were.

However, Penelope seemed to be rather content that such was prohibited by the regulations valid for Conversors' Island, thus she didn't enforce any change, as was demanded by her two eager disciples.

That way, Tibor didn't fall back too much. While they chased about as humans jointly on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, where the wind hadn't brought less seed. Tika proudly showed her friend what she had learnt already, and for some plants they jointly sought a proper name, while following the procedure of Carl de Linné^{lx}, and made Tibor burst into blossom, who was now able to realize that this blooming Latin wasn't all that useless in reality.

“Proper names aren't everything. More important are character and healing or poisoning effects, and all that...” Mentor Penelope M'gamba eased Tibor's effete. “Knowing lest naming is what matters”, her credo was.

32. Time to say Good-bye

Thus, they all went apart. Each in the direction he or she had chosen to be best, or was part of his or her identity. “Not for the school we learn, but for life” Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk the Commissary Headmistress let the students know, whenever she saw the chance to do so.

Arundle plunged into a sphere of the most the filigree buildings of thought ever, that is, the philosophy of the German Idealists, which turned out to be most difficult. Billy-Joe tried the same with Einstein, Feynman, Hahn, et al – hardly less awesome.

Still, or just because of that, his mentor Professor Scholasticus Slyboots was content with him, and so was Professor Grisella of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots with her disciple Arundle.

Time went by, just like that. And all of a sudden it was there – the big day of triumph, wherein the bitter drop of fare-well mingled.

In a final public viewing the marks of all examinees were published, and the Loblolly Girls 'n Boys school band played to honour them, who made it quite well, the almost would like to be band

members noticed somewhat nostalgically. Because it meant the final fare-well from their youth.

Was it said four years ago in that basic course ‘Get to know yourself’, ‘All starting is difficult’ it now said ‘All parting is difficult’.

And while the start up had been sometimes frustrating, the fare-well hurt that much more. Inbetween there was for many a dream, that had become real, and of which awakening did hurt incredibly.

In vain, they tried to comfort each other, by promising to write and chat and mail and meet each other virtually any time. As for once they all knew it – it would never be the same again. At most comforted the first big come-together next year, as it was planned.

Even the Somnions were little better off. Although they could meet whenever they liked in their dreams. While here was a danger, not only the Aborigines suffered, who lived the dreamtime more than their real life and wholly turned away from reality by that.

For all that meant that they had to take care and balance the forces and gifts they had, and had to rely on them alone with that.

Had only the island not been so small. In the beginning there had been University-classes going on, even promotions had been possible in cooperation with the alma mater of Sydney University. But then thing widened and such had to be cut off finally.

Plans of reconstructing Conversors Island failed because of the righteous veto of the Conversors. They saw in such measure an unacceptable limitation of their development and unfolding.

The other way of limiting the number of newcomers had been considered. However, that would have meant to stop the scouting tours around the world, in order to trace the hidden talents and contact them. Because thereof the School of Inbetween lived and drew their self-recognition and saw here the basic task.

Now, while the good name of the School of Inbetween was spread widely, more and more children asked for entry, and were not always gifted enough, but were pushed by their parents.

As a scout you needed a good sharp eye to separate the chaff from the wheat. Still, such facts didn’t lower the flooding, so to speak.

In short – a universal extension was no realistic option, while the opposite seemed more likely. When lowering the age of entry you might increase the chance of advancing talents earlier, and train them before they were buried under the avalanche of disappointment, that came about unavoidably in the early life of most human beings in their habitual surrounding.

Fact was on the other hand, that the school-leavers now were left alone in the early age of 17 or 18 into the cruel world outside, and had to do there without aid and protection.

Still, you couldn't see what the consequences would be, as there had been only one weak age-group before, that suffered under the effects of an early disruption. While now this numerous age-group would be sent on that same track.

Thus, not only the school-leavers looked ahead scared, but the teachers as well. They felt their responsibility further reaching then the school boundaries. That was why they granted the school-leavers the way back – “just in case, you may not need it, but if you do, you are welcome.”

The mentors worried most about those students who came from far away. For them a fund was installed, because they lacked of money in general, which led to an absurd situation in case of Tibor and Tika.

Thanks to the help of Penelope M'gamba, and also by their own initiative, they had managed to find a Shaman near-by, who was willing to accept them as disciples.

Where she lived, there were no administrative authorities, and no campus with lunch, and mail address, where Dorothea could have sent them money.

While some girdles of kauri-shells were welcome as an entry-gift. They were harder to purchase then a check was filled in. In addition, Penelope promised to look after them in person. They arranged for a magic connection each full moon, when the griffin darkened the full moon, when they would meet at a fixed sacred site, where things would be straightened out, she let them know mysteriously.

This was, no doubt, a somewhat circumstantial, however very original mode of connection. Penelope M'gamba liked it mysteriously. This was an ideal equilibrium. Fact was, she ran out of targets, because she had to stay away from the common routes of air-traffic. That was way she was brooding over maps with Zinfandor, to figure out where to go.

Billy-Joe and Arundle had their own income by their shares, just as Tibor, who was one of the creators of the de-petrification-potion, that was now used so successfully. While money would be of no use, were he wanted to go.

Flory and Cory managed to persuade Arundle and Billy-Joe to jointly look for a suitable university. Their father had done his best –

he was a lecturer himself, and pointed out two likely sites, that would meet the needs of all four of them.

He considered the climatic and ethical conditions as well as the scientific ones, while the Professors there had to meet the high standards of the School of Inbetween, and Professor Hare had of course to agree as well.

So, the four of them met again - after extensive holidays apart in the furthest ends of the world - at the beginning of march - very near to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth – in Sydney - for their first university semester.

Flory and Cory registered for Archaeology – following their father’s foot steps, so to speak. Arundle decided for Philosophy and so did Billy-Joe (just for the time being – as he put it.) In addition, he took Physics, and Arundle Sociology.

Where they already driven by home-sickness, making them to decide for Sydney? Well, of course there was the recommendation of Professor Hare, who was neutral and considered advantages and disadvantages likewise.

One advantage would certainly be that Tibor and Tika were near as well. However, this advantage and the closer conditions of their way of being would come in sight only later.

The final decision for Sydney had been something else, and for that all four of them accepted also minor disadvantages, one of which was that Billy-Joe wasn’t boss in his own house so to speak. He had to decide for Walter and Pooty likewise. And Pooty was not welcome in Pretoria – the second choice. Because animals were not allowed on the campus there.

“What a nuisance...”

“How retrogressive...”

“You feel like pushed back into the 20th century.”

“Those are the late reminiscences of Apartheid...”

The four all agreed – while they were in fact five and at best they had liked to have Pooty registered as a student as well. He had received his diploma from the School of Inbetween. There was even a photo taken of him in a tiny cute robe with a square little hood on his head, him posing right in the middle of the age-group.

Looking backwards, they realized from afar very clearly the plentitude and richness of the School of Inbetween, as a kind of pioneer deed.

Why should they accept their demission? Why should they make them fit into a system they mistrusted?

As an indulged pet Pooty would become depressed. He would suffer similar to the Magic Bow when enduring in the strong-room, because he was part of the prohibition of arms.

The idea of a university of their own was dawning behind the horizon, and emerge like Aphrodite on her rosy shell, as was painted by renaissance genius Boticelli. Long enough they had waited. How could it have happened that they accepted their demission in the first place? They didn't understand themselves any more. The argument, that there were objective facts to be obeyed, had obviously intimidated them, and lulled in their spirit and imagination. As if such an institution was a matter of space.

Sure enough, they couldn't dive down into the virtual world for ever, as this might cause depression and loss of reality. But they surely had the means to find and build a suitable site.

"What about a space station? We might even be able to take one over."

"Why not the whole moon?"

"Yes, the moon, why not the moon?"

"My father likes the moon..."

"Our moon has no infrastructure yet, and the moon of Laptopia might be a suitable hide for time escapees. With a whole university however, we would run into trouble. That would surely offend the first universal principle of reality..."

"Law you mean..."

"I don't mind..."

"Still, a brilliant idea, could be mine" Pooty boasted, who revived, while things got started for his sake.

All laughed, Pooty was somehow right. Thoughtfully they kept on musing. When Arundle raised her voice:

"I don't know – don't you see it likewise? I can imagine or Island-University only in close vicinity of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth."

The others nodded. They agreed with her, and were homesick already. They would have best returned right away better today than tomorrow.

"And if we rebuild Conversors Island? It's hardly smaller than the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and quite alike. We would easily get away with some twenty floors..."

"We would have to leave enough space for the Conversors – as much as now..."

And everybody had to move each month for four days, in order the grant the Conversiors their common grounds.”

“...while underneath life should go on as ever? I cannot imagine that. Such an institution cannot be cut off hermetically, that no sound escapes. While there would be living over on hundred people. We would need a landing strip and some room would also be required...”

“...and a landing stage for boats, and a lagoon with a pontoon...”

“and besides, everything must be just the way we are used to...”

“Everything is up to the Conversiors...”

They stopped for a thoughtful pause. –

“Couldn’t we top up the Isle of Wisdom-tooth?”

“... right, in the middle, by some twenty floors...”

Then there would be still space outside and around for parks and gardens and the helicopter port...”

While you could fix **that** on the roof...”

“Or the Conversiors move for good – there must be an uninhabited island nearby. Needn’t be big, though.”

“Right, they’re hardly more than twenty...”

“If at all...”

“It’s a kind of dying species, somehow...”

“Is that how you see it?” Billy-Joe said, somewhat gruffly. That was another problem he hadn’t tackled yet. How would he get back to Conversiors Island in the first full moon night from the city each month? He could suppress such urge a couple of times but not forever.

Tika and Tibor were happier as they could say. Their Shaman was a good-natured woman – ancient not only in years but even further in wisdom. She preferred the Tasmanian way of life, which you had to get used to.

However, she didn’t force her new disciples to adapt her style or follow her example, but let them do their thing. First they built an own home and got settled. Tibor had bought a boat he could pay just like that – he wasn’t yet used to the fact that he had plenty of money. With the boat they could sail to the main island whenever they felt like doing and wind and weather allowed.

The island had no name, because it was so small and unnoticed, and had never been settled because there was no potable water, except

what you collected. Thus, Tibor purchased a huge basin he dug into the ground, where they collected the water from the roof and adjacent space around their home.

Of course they wanted to find out why the Shaman was so famous and well known all over the place and the whole area, who was living far from any settlement or human dwelling - all over the New Zealand islands and even further down South until Tasmania, where she originally had come from – most likely.

“She’ll be able to fly” they wondered and Tibor thought of his Shaman from home, who never touched the ground, but drifted about like a balloon.

When the full moon was there, the two disciples discovered something else, which enriched their relation again. Tibor was just beginning to strike with tender little paws over the belly of the horse-headed violin of his, and Tika stretched her furry limbs in the light of the full moon, preparing for a good wild beat. They hadn’t yet let their tunes rise towards the sky, when a magnificent phoenix rose from the hearth under the roof of the Shaman and tuned in on the first tunes of Tibor’s violin play with the most beautiful twitter.

And soon the three of them were rejoicing and shouting for joy under the moon, who started sobbing, and those who carefully looked saw a huge teardrop running down over his pale cheek. And while she did so, even the stones down here on earth, in the round being piled for protection of the new pond, began to sob as well, while the basin was still almost empty, thus they could go on for ages...

Meanwhile over there, in Sydney, three young women were dreaming of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth - bringing forward their worries to their former teachers, as far as those were accessible. In convincing words they explained their ideas and conveyed their musings, asking for an urgent General Meeting.

They referred to detailed alternative projects of an architect which would be available as soon as they had the details in inch and foot. Of course unanimous and top secret. They would be able than to present at any time from now on appropriate plans for any alternative.

For the Professors the dream turned into a nightmare sooner or later. They only saw the avalanche of costs rolling by, not to speak of the dust and dirt, and nuisance, and noise of a construction site of such dimensions. You could forget about the peace and secrecy of the islands.

Besides, would the Convertors agree? Would they accept the limitations, if at all?

33. The House Deep Down Under

Tibor figured it some 50 miles from here to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, when he was back to himself again. The horse-headed violin was lying in its case as innocently as a sleeping baby. Tika was dressed up again in a neat dress – while the Shaman couldn't do without her habit, no matter of the two disciples – that meant she didn't wear anything but naked skin.

Penelope had come to check, after being informed of the assault of the girls. However, they all at once were aware, as it is with Shamans. You needn't words for that.

The dream had raised them all, Penelope confessed, while repeating what she had learnt from those plotters in Sydney (as they used to call their homesick former mates.)

Her mission now was clear enough. They needed a location for the Convertors, either for good or for the time of the construction work, if the new project would become realized at all, of course.

That was her secret mission Penelope repeated. "That's why I'm here, dear colleague and Honourable all-wise Susamee" Penelope addressed the Shaman of the island, somewhat sophisticated, as to Tibor.

The so addressed however, gently smiled and nodded, the more she listened, giggled and nodded, and giggled again. Thus Tibor only could check the proper route, "which would be overcome as follows", he said "With the helicopter to the mainland island, where I'm waiting with the boat and from there I'm taking them right here in no time – well, some 50 minutes or so... it's just a rough idea yet, might even cut down ... all in all, less than two hours. Of course it's different and other than usual, however that it is by now for people like Adrian or Corinia no less. I wonder how Cory had managed the full moon over there in Sydney anyway."

"Far away and unpopulated, tended by a Phoenix, a Dingo and an autonomously performing horse-headed violin, what else do you

want?" Penelope M'gamba summed up what she had learnt and achieved of Susamee's Island.

Thus, the island was found and with that, the major obstacle was overcome. The new University could be built, while the School of Inbetween was hardly bothered by the construction work.

Four months time it would take at least, or even six, at immense costs, while support was uncertain – that was a challenge made for Dorothea. She burst into blossom and, as if it had to be so, she became pregnant one month after the beginning of the construction work.

The first trial with that new site had been done by the expatriates. Watchdog Will Wiesle reported for the Convertors, who were out of mind during full moon, as is well known.

"They all felt well. Susamee's Island was dark and mysterious, and there was a lot to be explored. Big enough it also was. While the tour forth and back took some time, mostly because of the change of means of transport."

Tibor promised a better solution. A copter port would certainly do, but needed permission of the Shamaness. Such could be found somewhere abroad at the other end, were nobody would be disturbed. And surely was granted by the generous woman. You didn't need more than a plain flat field for that anyway.

Susamee's Island was scarcely populated by animals either, because the island was young. That was why the invaders could hardly disturb the few. There were only about twenty invaders coming anyway, and they all were trimmed to peacefulness. While for the meat eaters there was always a filled jug with fresh blood available, which the candidates donated the month before.

It wasn't supplied by a slaughterhouses nearby anymore. Because this blood had never been really fresh for once, while it was infested by the horror of a terrible death and contaminated accordingly, and didn't taste, - only the greediest would gulp.

Shamaness Susamee agreed on the whole. She even made friend with Watchdog Will Wiesle, who burst into blossom because of the new and improved task.

He courted Susamee despite of her age with diverse presents, she willingly accepted. She decorated herself with all kinds of necklaces, earrings and the like, and covered her body with a sari, and had Tika do her hair.

Monosyllabic she still remained. And who wasn't able to read thoughts was lost in her presence, because he didn't know what was going on.

Watchdog Will Wiesle liked to be sent to Susamee's Island and spent more time over here than on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. He even thought of building his own home – which was in full consent with the Shamaness.

While she didn't let things bother her, but she hushed off at night as she was used, collecting medicine at secret sites or meeting patients wherever they were, and took access the shaman way.

For Watchdog Will Wiesle however, she dressed and made herself up. For him she became a desirable woman again, who was hiding behind a distracting sight, nobody overcame, be it that love opened his eyes.

Dorothea managed to find a clever building supervisor, who succeeded in keeping the limit. While most of the construction work was done in the interior of the island (things did change later) it looked all different. For outsiders it looked as if a terrible chaos was broken out on Conversiors' Island.

The natural conditions in the suckle of the island favoured the plans of utilization of the former volcano slot, that had been inactive for at least ten thousand years. And South-Michel ordered a gang of his dwarves for assistance, who fulfilled sheer wonders in the depth.

In principle, Conversiors' Island didn't differ much from the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Under water the two islands looked as if two flowers were growing up from a joint root in the mainland shelf of Australis, where-under the city of the mer-folk was hiding.

South-Michel took it personal - as his very personal challenge. He visualized some kind of Pater-noster connection between the two islands. Thus you could get from one side to the other.

“That's a great idea, but who guarantees us that things won't blow up one day?” Marsha wondered - “...would save us a lot of space, though” Dorothea said.

“We're drilling a channel cross to the slots – that's what they still are, - so we have an emergency outlet, just in case...” South-Michel eased Marsha down.

“Final guarantees won’t be granted, I’m afraid, but things had been quiet for a very long period of time ... and you’d be affected anyway – so that’s no difference over here.”

He had the 25 storey interior building in mind that housed the students’ dormitories and all other facilities – which had been built on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Fact was of course, that they moved on thin ice, so to speak, all over here in this area, where the skin of Mother Earth was thin and vulnerable.

“Volcanoes take the outlet with the least resistance” South-Michel put in, and referred to the appropriate measures considered by the dwarves.

“Those little ones are real experts” he proudly added, thus managing to ease sensible minds to a certain extent.

The Australian craftsmen never met any dwarf. The Australians worked from the surface downwards while the dwarves were busy the other way round. They developed a system of corridors and slots by means of which the two shafts were connected in the depth.

The Australian gang overcame a distance of about 50 yards, while the dwarves covered a distance of more than one thousand yards. And had there not the shelf been, they’d gone even further, as such depths weren’t unlikely over here, as long as you stayed clear off the glow.

So, South-Michel felt safe and was certain to be able to keep his promise, that no volcano outbreak would bother them, as long as the safety outlets were in order and in proper operation.

“You might get the flood wave still afterwards, just in case - that’d be kind of a nuisance, though...” he mused. Remarks like this didn’t comfort the frightful minds, in no way.

Secretly, South-Michel could only shake his head, when confronted with such ignorance. And that with people who had to know eventually. While it could be, that those who were acquainted with the matter, didn’t share their knowledge with those who had no idea of what was really going on, while being experts in their own field.

‘Strange people – those contemporary humans’ he wondered, and the Cardinal Mistake, he once more saw quite clearly, showed up in the brightest red before his inner eye, like a dangerous inflammation.

In Sydney, where homesickness had initiated remarkable activities, the banned were sitting and moaning (now, no longer!) when they thought of their island. They were looking forward instead on all reports giving notice of the advancements of the construction work. Every night they collected the latest news by means of the Somnors and were thus well informed.

Dorothea's spirit was in no way limited by the growing child in her womb, quite the opposite. – "Pregnancy is no disease" she let her husband know, who always tried to calm her down.

For Cory and Flory she had thought of something special. Therefore she was corresponding with Professor Hare, whether he would be interested in a scholarship at the new 'Island-University' as it was called provisionally – "only until we get a better idea..." she answered questioning and doubtful gazes.

Most of the present teachers intended to go on bi-trail – as had been done in the past already, by those who had be here then.

People like Peter Adams now saw there chance, and hoped for an own chair. And the not so clear cases checked their papers, if they were qualified enough, or did their best to qualify right away. Either by handing in their records and merits of former days or sit down and write on a topic of interest to have such accepted accordingly.

Once again Dorothea travelled around the world – this time accompanied by her husband, which wasn't quite what she wanted.

However, as a mother-to-be she claimed a different attention from the men's world, as she was used to. Therefore she didn't really mind having him at her side. He might even be of help, eventually.

The stock market was attended and a new edition of shares was installed to stimulate interest. And thus Dorothea's desk was flooded with applications of all kinds, while still absent. She urgently needed assistance she realized as soon as she was back.

The applicants for the School she handed back right away to Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, and the applications for the university-to-be were handled by Adrian Humperdijk, with the directive to postpone or refuse right away or refer to the School of Inbetween for a start.

She herself and her sister handled the few applicants for academic teaching, while both understood the art of reading between the lines meanwhile, and separated thus the chaff from the wheat quickly.

There were still far too many applicants, the Board had to decide upon at a later date. While agreement was soon reach about Professor Hare, the more so as he passed the colour-test with bravura. (not as a

Somnior, however, but as a kind of Animatior – with a remarkable – somewhat perforated aura in faint blue.)

Furthermore was Archaeology highly welcomed on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, now with all these experiences in Atlantis. Quite a few of the scholars favoured such studies, and intended to register for the subject later.

Esoteric studies weren't wholly disgraced on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth or rejected as a whole. Thus, those candidates who were able to teach such matters, had to be carefully chosen. Separating the charlatans and frauds from the truly enlightened was a complex matter, the more as so the applicant was young and good-looking.

Professor Penelope M'gamba was still looking after her academic reputation. Her curriculum wasn't all that straight and clear. Therefore, she suggested to have someone like Shamaness Susamee being appointed as teacher, and even offer her a chair in the new institution. While she was meant to be the last living Phoenix. She'd liked to have added – 'Like I'm the last griffin.' But didn't do so. She didn't want to wake up sleeping dogs, that is raise an argument about the pros and cons of Conversion in general or converting into certain specific animals.

The term ended. Nothing kept the homesick aspirants in Sydney. And for this time, there was no reason for Flory and Cory to travel abroad, because the big move was just about.

The construction work on the scholars' housing area was almost completed and the apartments or houses were waiting. Similar to the set-up on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth the houses of the Professors' families were neatly grouped on surface level in some kind of round village with a little market place in the middle and neat front yards.

Last minute installations, like pre-bred green became rolled out, while moving gangs unloaded containers at the near-by landing stage, where formerly the boats of the Convertiors landed. While ships anchored way out and stayed safe from the shore, which carried the cargo by.

Family Hare was first to move in. The girls had to share Billy-Joe's camp site. Their beds had been given away for good to newcomers. It was kind of provisional outside. However this didn't really bother them, as long as they were at home, and that's what they were.

But now this time was also over, thank God. “You are staying with us, Arundle” Vasantha Hare decided, and didn’t accept contradiction. Like a cluck she assembled her former chickens and forgot, that the young ones had grown up meanwhile, and where on the way to become hens themselves.

The Teachers’ Board kept sticking to the colour-scheme and aura-blessed candidates, there was no alternative. Who didn’t owe a colour was not allowed access. There were no doubts left in fact. And nobody, who didn’t have an idea, understood what was really going on.

And thus, the secret grew and became even more attractive. A lot was speculated and tried. Faked applicants were sluiced in and were promptly rejected – polite but consequently. It didn’t take more than five minutes.

On the other hand, limited, neglected and ragged slum kids were pampered, and treated like raw eggs. “That shall understand, who can...” the refused candidates said and retreated enviously. While the whole wide world was open for them, but not this little island.

Thus the ‘Island University’ - which kept the provisional name – limited in number. Hardly more than fifty students had registered and now didn’t fill the lecture halls and almost got lost in the wide corridors. Because the set-up was made for some three hundred students.

Twenty five academic teachers were planned, who would live with their families in the small village around the neat market place in two storied detached or semi-detached houses.

Dorothea – recognizably in good hope – started counting the weeks and days to the D-day, as she put it, but this fact didn’t limit her spirit. She held the planning tight in hands and didn’t allow any exceptions. She would take care of avoiding all those little weaknesses and failures that she was realizing in the old premise, no matter whether they formed part of its charm and attraction.

Only those applicants were accepted, who had passed the exam in the School of Inbetween before. This was what the Board of Teachers agreed upon finally after lengthy negotiations.

Those, who insisted nevertheless, had to prove capability in at least one term and passing the basic course “The Other Way of Seeing” successfully, and owed at least a gentle touch of an own aura.

34. Maternity

Shamaness Susamee didn't object teaching. Thus, Penelope M'gamba agreed with her to split the subject into a more practical and a theoretical part.

She suggested this, because Shamaness Susamee resisted entry into a lecture hall, all the more one so deep under the surface. The idea alone made her sick, and caused fits of claustrophobia. What ever fled the open arms of Mother Nature couldn't be worth much. With 'open arms' she meant everything that was accessible on the surface. In addition, rectangles were unbearable to her.

Penelope felt ill humour getting hold of her. She nevertheless became aware of the degree of alienation she had accepted, ignoring the itches that came about with compromises and was sorry, that she surely had passed a red line a long time ago without a chance of a way back.

Be it, that she became lazy, be it, that she had been weak ever since for such a consequent life-style. Thus, she felt also admiration. Here opened a treasure, many should get the chance to nourish, one way or another.

"As a matter of fact, things down there are more round than square" Tibor objected, and Watchdog Will Wiesle nodded. "The dwarves don't like rectangles either."

"You should get to know South-Michel, indeed" Tika added. "South-Michel is a miner with roots way back to Atlantis, you know..."

Shamaness Susamee cocked up, but didn't say anything, but was thinking her part and hoped that people didn't clearly understand her, because she found her musings no good either, almost silly, in fact.

Watchdog Will Wiesle, blind-folded by love, whenever he met her, made her heart soft and her soul melt and made her give way to all stubbornness.

Should she have it a trial – only once, just to be sure, she was right? She covered her body with a sari and draped all kinds of jewellery round her neck and arms and ankles, and entered the helicopter for the first time in her life. While it had been easy for her

to travel the Shaman way. Well, in fact, she didn't quite know whereto.

The pilots knew it all the better and it didn't take an hour, when they landed on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, where she was welcomed by an illustrious committee. Its members had been pre-warned and thus omitted all contacts with buildings, but walked through the park and around the beautiful rim topping the crown of the island. When Adrian, who joined them under way, pointed out how well the construction work was advancing all over the places.

Lucky though, South-Michel zoomed in, and Susamee was highly pleased to meet in him an old acquaintance. – It would have been strange, if they hadn't met, living in the same area for so many years.

While South-Michel was swaying, Susamee was swaying likewise. And thus, they swayed away towards the Pater noster, which had an entrance over here. The trip through both tubes took about half an hour, normally, but could as well speed up, but that was uncomfortable.

Therefore they did it the slow way, despite the fact that they were leaving the surface. The idea was to make her familiar with the device and show her at the same time the beauties of the world below. Thus, make the Shamaness change her mind.

Their way led them through all twenty storeys of the School of Inbetween. The glass cabin walls opened the sight to the outside, and you could see, were the journey went.

As soon as the sea level was reached, the sight didn't change much at first. You could see the shimmering water at first but then the sight darkened and the speed increased, until the middle of the tour was reached, where the speed slowed down again and windows opened to the other side, where you could see the water again and a little while later the new facilities of the university. Here, the craftsmen were still busy. Only a few floors were completed and inhabited.

The Pater noster ended in the middle of the little village of the Professors and their families. The cabin door opened and Shamaness Susamee stepped out, taking a deep breath and welcomed the day back, by lowering to the ground kissing it devotedly.

Then she raised and looked quite amazed back over the open sea some 500 yards to the neighbouring island where they had started from some minutes ago, and couldn't believe her senses.

Penelope insisted in showing her guest around and to have a look at the Shaman Teaching Centre, especially designed for the purpose. Most facilities stemmed from her, and she was very proud of.

“No rectangles, as you’ll see – everything organic, everything genuine...” Shamaness Susamee couldn’t decide whether to ridicule the whole matter, or to admire what had been achieved. Penelope was happy with it.

But then, something else caught the Shaman’s attention. She listened into emptiness, turned the eyes inside, thus you could only see the white, then turned around her axis a couple of times and disappeared, just like that.

What had happened? Dorothea needed help - to be precise - help on delivery, and Shamaness Susamee was in her element. At once she was at the site and realized what the matter was. She pushed here and pulled there, supported one way or the other, and in no time the baby was on the world.

A girl, beautiful as her mother, if you could see that already – and Scholasticus could, and for the mother she was even more beautiful.

Shamaness Susamee rubbed it dry with a bunch of leaves, and put it in her mother’s arms, and showed her how to comfort it with mouth and breath, and had her feel the motherly caress.

At first, Dorothea didn’t dare, but then she closed her eyes, and felt her own flesh and blood, accepting it wholeheartedly, in overwhelming jubilant love - just as unrestrained as was once generated in the closest communion of passion.

Fear of flying was not her problem. Shamaness Susamee had the helicopter, which brought her over here to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, take her back to her own island. As soon as she arrived, she let her disciples know what had happened and what was going on. She knew they were eager to learn everything.

As she detested obedient souls, she did everything to avoid an air of one-sided dependence. Therefore she asked her disciples to go over there by chance and see with their own eyes, what was going on.

Their return was as sure as the coming up full moon, she certainly knew. Insofar her freedom wasn’t all that free. She well might have the wrong ideas in mind, though. Such musings were further from Tibor than the moon. Quite the opposite, he was eager to accompany his teacher when collecting herbs or healing clients – a privilege Tika had.

Shamaness Susamee saw in Tika a natural talent, or did she see herself in her, when she had been young?

In any case, she favoured Tika's company – the more as so in serious cases like death or troublesome birth, that happened more than often. Shamans were obliged to death only little less than to life.

Sulamith's birth pushed aside everything that claimed importance – for the young parents, anyway, who realized how well-known they were all over the world. All the way from Germany the congratulators came, and the area over here stood all in flames, so to speak. Peter Adams even invited some Jewish folk-musicians from his home-town. He was convinced – the chance of good luck was worth the effort.

Shamaness Susamee cared about the proper totem animal and couldn't decide between extravagant extremes, she didn't however publish.

“No-one can do without totem animal” was her credo and she pitied the parents, who didn't know or didn't care.

“Those who were born outside in nature, either in the woods or fields, needn't care about totem animals. There are always witnesses around somewhere. Each and everyone have a chance there. However, closed in, in a room - surrounded by rectangles – what kind of harmony would be likely to possibly show?”

Arundle inquired her Magic Bow on that, who discussed the matter with the Magic Stone. Neither Pooty, nor Billy-Joe or the Hares had an idea for the right thing to do. Had they been the three holy kings from the Far East, coming for to anoint her queen, but they weren't either.

All that ado for a new born child, the parents didn't even have a name for – in fact they were in doubt whether the one they had chosen – fitted or if a better and more suitable one could be found.

So it was Arundle who donated the little creature a proper name, who she called all by herself ‘Sulamith’ meanwhile. She had her Magic Bow etch that name in the shaft of a golden arrow, the Magic Stone then covered all up in a pink cloud that lowered smoothly down to earth and came to a halt right above the cradle. There, the cloud unfolded, and had the arrow with the etching appear, thus the parents, when witnessing, believed in some kind of revelation.

Thus, the question of naming was settled at last. Both parents wholeheartedly agreed. Some drops of fresh water confirmed the covenant. That was a nice gesture of the rectangle minded beings,

Susamee agreed with. Things weren't too far astray from the totem animal, she had in mind.

35. The Pater-noster Accident

'Four to six months' it was said. Sulamith was born for a good while and there was no end of the construction work in sight. The bits and pieces took much time. And thus the teaching started only hesitatively surrounded by construction work in process all over the place.

Whole floors were locked, the Pater-noster rushed through without stop, or even slowed down, while the cabin door remained locked.

As the Teachers' Board had decided on high hurdles on entry for candidate from outside, there was no hurry now, anymore. Had it not been for the nuisance, they would have managed very well with the available space and facilities for the time being.

Would those empty floors and corridors really be nicer, if they had been ready? Nobody could tell – as long as they remained empty.

More than twenty floors, some kind of strange, though, had to be furnished. None was alike another, because the natural shapes had been used, and channels - the water had been digging over many centuries - had been taken into account. – "As far as possible" – it said from the architects, who were very proud of the ecological concept. With twenty individual floors you had to be aware of the unforeseen.

Had it been too much of the unforeseen? Was it a miscalculation? The unexpected occurred, everybody had been afraid of, and kind of worst case as well. It happened like this:

The dwarves couldn't stay away from the Pater-noster shafts for once. They improved their work continuously, be it for the speed or the air circulation, or the like. Things, they felt very important, anyway.

As they were used to a life in the underground, they knew better than someone who was just passing through for half an hour or so, going up and down, the more as so the cabins were closed and had their own oxygen supply which always started working as soon as the air outside became intolerable.

The unexpected happened – while accidents occur when least expected. The dwarves might have drilled a little too deep or grinded and polished too forceful, or they had miscalculated the thickness of the wall. And that, deep down under, some 500 yards below surface.

Water came in. First in drops, then as a small rivulet then finally flooding the whole lower part of the shafts.

The whole fine work was ruined. In hurry divers dived down from the surface and the Nautilus was set in march. The leakage was thus found at once, and a provisional stuffing by means of a leakage sail could be managed, that was sucked in by the pressure difference in- and outside. The immediate threat was thus banned.

“Imagine, there had been people under way from one side to the other” Marsha mused when the message came in.

Right in the centre point where the water stood highest and any rescue seemed impossible, low hammering was heard from inside out of a cabin, as was heard by the divers.

“Knocking says, they’re still alive” was the obvious conclusion. But for how long?

Immediate action was required. Unfortunately, Dorothea and Scholasticus were on shopping tour in Sydney with little Sulamith, so everything was up to poor Marsha again, who didn’t have the nerve for that.

In her distress she called for Arundle and for Pooty, the keeper of the Magic Stone. They could perhaps do wonders again.

The Magic Bow negotiated intensely with the Magic Stone, but didn’t come to a positive result. Arundle didn’t understand nor accept such conclusion. She remembered many similar situations where people were saved by magic. There had been much worse circumstances, she brought to her bow’s attention.

“This is different here and now” the Magic Bow let her know. “we would be asked to offend one of the major laws of metaphysics, which says that devil’s work cannot be supported, and would be regarded as a demonstration of power, as seemed the case now and here.”

Arundle didn’t listen any more. She was upset. There was someone in danger of life and they didn’t want to help.

“What kind of demonstration shall that be, after all. All we want is helping...”

“Well, that is the mistake. You want to interfere, and stop the wheel of fate by indecent means. We cannot serve such a matter. That’s out of our range.

“Well, over there in Atlantis the other day you did also help us to get away as soon as things went from worse to worst.”

The two magicians started chatting again, in their specific inaudible way. Then the bow raised his voice and let them know: “What we did in Atlantis we will have to stand for, no matter how hard the punishment will be, but now and here things are entirely different. You’ve got to help yourself.”

That was it then. Arundle knew by experience that it didn’t make sense to push any further or fight with harder weapons, while the hardest matter remained the stone, and this was his nature.

The dwarves seemed to have foreseen such outcome and had started to work themselves down from cabin to cabin. To do so, they had the divers to connect them with soft elastic tubes, and had them fixed to the cabin doors by suction and pressure. Then the dwarves cut holes, and had air blown inside out, thus getting to the crucial site, where the locked-in already showed symptoms of suffocation, because the interior supply of oxygen had been used up all too soon. They were sitting there for almost two hours.

Three witty teenage-dwarves had taken access to a cabin, by stealing the general key to the shafts and the system in the engineer’s booth, when the work-force had left for lunch. The teenagers then started the system, that had been stopped for urgent repair-work in the shaft.

“Those guys could get the system started undetected only, because the workers were gone for lunch” the shocked engineer in charge pointed out all over again.

When the system was in operation, it happened. A supporting crossbeam crashed and went downwards almost unhindered some two, three hundred yards, like a ram and cut a hole into the wall, being rather thin at that point, thus giving way to the water pressure. That was the preliminary explanation, how the accident had happened.

When the teenage-dwarves were saved, everybody was relieved. It was great luck that South-Michel had been near, because the youngsters behaved like wild cats and didn’t accept any treatment but tried to escape, while they didn’t even know where they were.

They had been taken to the medical surgery on board of the Nautilus, that was still on stand-by at the site of the accident, waiting for new orders, while the initial job was done.

The youngsters seemed to respect South-Michel, the more as so he kept swaying and didn't touch the ground, because he wanted to be present only virtually in the Nautilus.

The three Isnogoods had to endure for some more hours, while they strictly denied nutrition. The tea that had been served, they poured on the floor or on the walls, with all signs of disgust.

Thus, the crew was happy to get rid of the goblins finally, when they were picked up by a dwarf-police-force neatly dressed up in cute red uniforms, as soon as the boat moored at the home dock.

When Arundle learned of the circumstances of the rescue mission, she finally realized why her Magic Bow didn't want to help. Couldn't the two mystery-mongers have said a word? Obviously they had had an idea whom they would find in the cabin. Therefore they stuck to the second or first most important universal law of white magic, that says – "Never lend your power to the services of evil."

A law, rather high-brow, Arundle wondered, and less clear than the wording suggested. As usual, it was a matter of interpretation, and in this case the question was, whether three misguided youngsters could be pushed over the line of good and evil.

Doing so, might be kind of backfiring. Who were they to make such commitments? On the other hand, a lot of damage had been done, and much more could have happened, even more so as so the evil had pulled the strings. Yes, it would be strange, if Malicious Marduk would leave them alone. He surely was looking for his chance and would take it. Chaos was his profession and terror his hobby.

It might be a good idea to have those goblins vaccinated as well. There was still enough serum left over and on stock even in the Nautilus.

However, it was too late now. The three rascals had been taken away and had disappeared in the depth of the earth, where only dwarves and goblins find their way, and even those only with map and compass.

Before the shafts could be emptied from the water, the leakage had to be repaired. Otherwise the provisional leakage-sail would have been broken, because of the high pressure from outside. That was immediately clear to the experts.

That was why the repair work turned out to be tricky and time-consuming. The workers had to fix things first in stiff diving gear from outside. They built a waterproof cabin and fixed it to the wall of

the shaft. After that the bricklayers could enter with their facilities through the sluice to repair the breach.

After that, the water could be removed, which was also a difficult task, because it had not only to be moved over long distance, but also against the force of gravity.

South-Michel apologized a thousand times for the three naughty goblins. He insisted on that way of putting things, and explained such as follows:

“A dwarf’s life lasts usually twice as long as a human life. That’s the reason why dwarves develop slower. Before they a really grown up, it takes some thirty years. The pHase between twenty and thirty is therefore called the goblin-pHase. Each dwarf was a goblin in his youth. Even I was, while it’s a very long time ago.

Goblins have all kind of nonsense in mind. They love pranks and don’t stick to rules. They break all orders and fight even each other, if nobody else is in range.

All dwarves know that. That’s why we take precautions.

The youngsters are separated from society and live in lonesome shafts, where they cannot get out. Be it, that something happens and then they manage a flight, like in the case, we are just investigating.”

Now the humans knew the facts – ‘lucky we didn’t vaccinate the youngsters. The dwarves surely wouldn’t have liked that, first of all South-Michel’ Arundle mused.

Since that box fight with the Advisor and the broken nose, it looked as if he had returned to his goblin-pHase, while this was surely exaggerating things hopelessly.

Arundle decided anyway to report about the construction work with Dorothea and Scholasticus. In a way it was of course advantageous, on the other hand they became quite dependent and vulnerable.

Who decided on the Pater-noster in the first place, anyway?

“That’s a good question” Scholasticus agreed, when the little family had safely returned from their shopping excursion to the mainland.

Dorothea couldn’t remember. “It’s almost a year ago, and so much has happened meanwhile...”

“Was this not South-Michel’s idea, originally? Fact was, he was heart and soul for the project, right from the start...” Adrian now put in, who had come with Marsha for a cup of coffee, just as Arundle and Billy-Joe, accompanied by Pooty of course.

It was one of those beautiful summer days. The sun was laughing down from the cloudless sky, and therefore the guests preferred cold drinks to coffee.

The Pater-noster wasn't yet in operation again and thus, the two newly inscribed students on the 'Island University' had come over by boat, you could see it moored at the landing-stage, because the Slyboots house - they still resided on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth - had access to the waterfront. How could it be otherwise on such a small island. – Well, the houses opposite were blocked by the harsh crown of the outer rim, while the exit of the Pater-noster was close to the other side.

Everything was near here, anyway. While the diameter of the round-shaped Isle of Wisdom-tooth was only little bigger than the twin – just about three quarters of a mile.

The deeper you went, the wider the shafts became, as soon as you had left the upper region, where wind and water had done their job, washing away the soft material. Thus, the upper neck had become thin and vulnerable in parts.

Those craters were filled with soft material and seemed to end on the base of the suckle, while nobody knew if this was so, or if the shafts went further down to the soft boiling kernel of Mother Earth.

However the inhabitants hoped for a more shallow ending in the concrete of the mainland that was putting its umbrella far out into the deep sea, resting on millions of similar pillars as the two, just being mentioned.

No geysers or smoking outlets were found nearby however, and thus, the geologists were optimistic that the area would remain stable and calm, as had been for the last ten thousand years, at least.

Any openings most likely had been closed by a tectonic move in ancient times, and were now further out in the South sea area northeast of New Zealand.

On such assumptions the whole concept relied. Otherwise life would have been too much of a risk over here. Nobody would have dared to build some twenty floors down into such a crater, where over one hundred children and teenagers lived, while a second project of the same kind was now erected in the adjacent twin, encouraged by former success.

The Isle of Wisdom-tooth was regarded as relatively safe in an area of tectonic instability. The danger of becoming rolled over by a gigantic monster-wave was much higher, than any volcanic activity in close vicinity.

While this was also against any realistic experience, and nobody had really to worry about, because the upright rims on both islands were in part almost one hundred yards high above average sea-level, and only the small landing stage and the lagoon were really endangered. Therefore, you could certainly do with such risk.

Thus were the facts. The deeper you went down under sea-level the wider the suckles became, and wholly met on the final ground of the shelf.

And right here, where the suckles met, the geologist spotted the crucial point, whom Scholasticus had employed for investigation purpose of the cause of the accident, where the water must have come in. However, this area could under no circumstances suit with the explanation given as to how the accident had happened. While right here, the tunnel of the Pater-noster had to go horizontal, as it was the turning point of the system, where the deepest point was reached.

How could any pole or ram hit right here? That was absolutely impossible if that thing had crashed down inside the shaft. Something else must have done the damage, in order to have the water break in at that spot. Something from outside, to be precise.

36. Dwarves at Work

Now, after the accident the humans asked themselves how the dwarves worked. Dorothea, as the responsible person in charge of the whole project put a formal request forward to find out, with the architect's office in Sydney.

The result didn't surprise. For such a tunnelling project of that size, you needed at least a planning period of some two years, depending on the expertises about the conditions and substance of the ground. Only if things turned out advantageous, you had to figure at least two further years for construction. The cross-tunnelling would certainly be the major challenge. The insertion of a suitable drilling device would be a complex task, and you had to reckon with unforeseen circumstances.

Together with this advice, Dorothea received a schematic draft of the project and the form, the tunnels would take, that is, the Pater-noster-double-tunnel, as a matter of fact, because the cabins had to run

back as well, like in any such systems - like ski-lifts or other alpine cableways.

Because of the widening of the suckles in the depth you had to plan the tunnelling not in the V-shape, but in the U-shape. While the 'U' would combine roughly two 500 yards vertical legs and another some 500 yards of a horizontal leg. While only one hundred yards led through populated areas – half on each side. All the rest was blind-folded – so to speak.

This was what the draft showed. Who ever managed such a construction, was a master of his art, and would be years and years ahead of his time, it said in the final conclusion. It would be advisable to have the horizontal leg completely covered with steel-tubes, in order to avoid the risk of damage, as the pressure was very high so deep under water. However, details had to be reckoned at the site by experts. A very careful check would be advisable in any case, before setting the existing system in operation again.

“That’s what we are doing right now” South-Michel let the established task force on this purpose know, that had been formed by miscellaneous individuals from both islands. When the plans and advice from the Australian architects were discussed and evaluated.

“However, instead of steel we are working with hardened gold, which is doing well, and we do not lack of it, just the opposite, we would have trouble with the making of steel.”

Dorothea had the costs in mind, such material would demand, but then she recalled that the whole project was done for free, and thus, she kept her mouth shut.

Meanwhile, the students on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth went on travelling with the common lift, still in use, or went on foot all the way up or down, depending which floor they were on.

On the other side however, the Pater-noster was badly needed because it was the only means of vertical transport available, while climbing or descending on foot was of course still an option.

Thus, the plans of reconstruction should be realized as soon as possible. And would be done as South-Michel assured, but wouldn't find out about the initial cause of the accident, while it seemed clear by now that the three youngsters weren't responsible, at last, while considerable damaged had been caused by them anyway.

The dwarves were relieved and went to work highly motivated and courageous as soon as it became clear that they didn't do anything wrong.

They were however as eager as the humans to find out about the cause, so the Nautilus was ordered once more, as this was the only means they could think of, neglecting the nixes and naiads, for what reason ever.

The leakage had been closed and the preliminary coverage was removed. The site could now be examined carefully. If there had been an outer cause, they might still find traces.

Thus, it was done. South-Michel took part in the excursion in his own way. The divers disembarked and collected at first what was left over by the workers, as well as rests of the leakage-sail. Then started looking for traces of any kind, and soon found something interesting. Under the sail the ground had been conserved, thus the divers noticed at once leftovers of a phosphor-bomb, that must have exploded right there.

The cause of the leakage was found. And the dwarves were thus out of the woods, so to speak, and the goblins weren't responsible for the flooding of the shafts. While their prank still was a weird one and inexcusable. They still had pinched the keys, and had operated the system illegally.

When South-Michel learnt of the phosphor-bomb and saw with his own eyes the traces of the explosion – by looking through the panorama-panes of the Nautilus, he became thoughtful at once.

He should no longer keep on ignoring the negative tendencies some of his disciples of the ocean were taking, who adored him on the one hand, while kept on doing as they pleased on the other. Little could be done, from his side. Their devotion meant not very much.

Was there a guerrilla building up in the underground, unnoticed? Those sea-sprites were no goblins, who enjoyed pranks of all kind but were miles away from murderous assaults of such sort.

He had noticed what was going on since democracy and vegetarianism was on the march amongst the semi-nomads of the depth, and had learnt as well of the vaccinations that had been going on in favour of the new course. He hadn't been fond of such measures. On the other hand, he saw the good coming from the new course and highly appreciated the progress on all levels.

What were his options? South-Michel was somewhat at a loss. From his exulted position little could be done. Somehow he had to get closer to his disciples, the more as so the wild ones – now being pushed aside or even banned. How could that be achieved?

South-Michel wondered to and fro, and back and forth until he had – what he meant to be - a brilliant idea. He recalled, how the drylanders had become upgraded, when he presented himself in their

company behind that panorama-pane. What would it mean if he fully charged his possibilities as Emissary, as he never yet did? He didn't yet see the need of doing so.

While now things were on the verge. Serious consequences were threatening, he was short of good advice. While there were still two angels at his side – that is the side of the Emissary's, he could set in action as he pleased, thus it said clearly in the creational master-plan.

In order to be very sure, he reconfirmed, whether he could determine those two angels by himself or if he had to take them from the general angel pool.

“There are no limitations” the heavenly advice said. “Do what you think is right, dear son” the answer read, somewhat stealthy, South-Michel noticed, but thus was the old man after all.

(He felt more like the buffoon than the ‘dear son’, when thinking back what fate had held in the backhand for him.)

After all, he got green light. Thus, he made Adrian to his arch-angel with the flaming sword and called him Heskiel and Corinia Hare he made his angel Bionike with the green peace-whisk.

As he knew how to convince people on something, they liked doing anyway, he emerged for them in a dream, in the most holy and most convincing appearance, they couldn't resist – he knew by experience – and that was a speaking cloud. That always did it, and came about authentic. Because the holy flames got at the called and enlightened them the proper way, which was of course his in that case.

In fact he didn't want them to do anything spectacular. They should only keep their eyes open, and find out how the splitting was going on, and what could be done to glue things together again, without having the one or other side losing their face. While the supporters in the old dominion for the little Robin Hoods of Australis was growing considerably. Among the traditionalists in old Melisandria on the other side of the world those Australisan rascals were styled as the last upright manikins.

The question no longer was, who would guide the proper course. However, as clear as it seemed in the first euphoria of victory after the revolution, things weren't any more. For the vegetarians and democrats the matters of the state surely weren't as clear and decided as they used to be.

Prime Minister Boetie had a hard job meanwhile and required any support she could get, and highly appreciated Corinia Hare's additional support as a heavenly ambassador, causing wonders and was hopefully turning the rudder to the better again.

The role of the archangel with the flaming sword, as had been chosen for Adrian, wasn't quite as clear. For him there was nothing to be done yet. Or was he expected to knock his flaming sword in a destructive manner, thus destroying tunnels, that were disturbing the proper course of the world?

South-Michel overdid. No more better fitting examples came to his mind, in fact, and no more unfitting ones for the archangel with the flaming sword. What else was such a creature supposed to do but demolish and knock down what came along his way?

Should he reconsider the use of such angels again, before letting them free?

Had that foolish archangel with that silly sword caused the accident unnoticed after all? Had that sullen being been busy in advancing obedience, following the guidelines of the new power, the heavenly father had known beforehand - almighty and omniscient as he was?

Were those traces of a phosphor-bomb explosion in fact the notches of the flaming Arch-Anglican sword?

Such opportunity of revenge the Advisor would not let pass unused. South-Michel did feel a strange itch, though. No matter how unlikely it appeared. Thus he cancelled the two angels right away, to be on the save side in future.

Corinia and Adrian would know anyway what should be done, and would do everything they could in favour of the mer-folk. They might have to be slowed down here and there a little, but all in all they had done a good job so far as ordinary saints.

And democracy wouldn't harm meat-eaters either, if they didn't want to give up their bloody toil all together. They might even become aware of the absolute value of life as such.

Besides, he had an idea of how to undermine the awful rites of sacrifice. He had to invent a language of signs, that could be understood by the silliest of the meat-eaters.

While up to now things went totally wrong, because the more he rejected the cruel sacrifices, the more they slaughtered. He kept on yelling "stop it, stop it" and they pretended to understand "stab it, stab it".

As soon as he got a chance, he would send them the Advisor. Who would teach them the hard way, what it meant to misinterpret voluntarily what was said by a divine force.

He would bid the Advisor therefore to come down. Perhaps with glowing tongues, South-Michel imagined. Then his naughty followers

wouldn't get away with their foul rubbish any more, and would notice how self-destructive, silly and cruel they in fact acted.

Because of all such eventualities South-Michel soon couldn't help it anymore. What, if they started eating one another, came it to his mind. That would be even more horrible than everything up to now.

Then he had an idea of how to kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. He would ask the two parties to execute a sacrifice tournament. Both parties should erect stone altars, and pile their food, and burn it symbolically, as things like that normally don't work under water. He could demonstrate his likes and dislikes that way.

Thus, he visited the priest of the meat-eaters in a dream, and ordered him to do accordingly, which he then promised by all means.

While Cory had a word with Boetie on the other side, who South-Michel made aware of his intended measures. Thus, she could pass that on to the Prime Minister. So it was done this time again.

Prime Minister Boetie also doubted that you could light a fire under water, however, she trusted in Cory, who said –“let me just do it”. Her only prerequisite was that the whole procedure had to be celebrated in the light of the full moon. - Both sides agreed on such conditions, without further argument.

The altars were built, and the goods were piled on them as soon as the full moon rose – things were done in shallow water, as was agreed in, because the moon had to be seen. The false priests were still busy with their bloody task, when flames arose from the pile of seaweed on the Vegetarians' altar, and burnt up in no time.

The false priests were perplexed, and the naked horror was in their faces, while they did what they could, and kept dancing around their sacrifice, even carried by glowing debris from the depth - a clever fellow brought. But in vain, the meat didn't burn. The lava became soon black stone and the flames died even sooner. The bloody pieces remained as bloody as they were. A light and clear fire, as that on the Vegetarians altar wouldn't appear.

Now the meat-eaters' priests couldn't escape any more. Adrian, although suspended of his Arch-Angelical mission emerged with the flaming sword, and hewed about left and right. And it was great luck that he didn't have his glasses on, thus his strokes went astray.

Still the false priests fled and were very much ashamed, that they had cheated the people for so long a time. They had in fact known ever since how false their way of sacrificing was. And not only their way of sacrificing, but their whole way of life.

South-Michel was highly satisfied with Cory's trick, she had read somewhere. In ancient times one of the prophets did likewise, and no matter whether it was said how he succeeded, Cory could add two and two. Besides, she was an eager pupil, not only interested in deep sea biology but as well in chemistry, that was closely related to biology.

And while everybody was talking about the phosphor-bomb, she remembered. Phosphor ignites with oxygen in the water if fed with burnable matter. Phosphor looks like stone, thus it had been easy to pack some of such stones water-proof, and bring it down here. She then had to unpack and mingle with the seaweed on the altar and the flames went up right away.

South-Michel overlooked the ceremony from his heavenly standpoint below the feet of his disciples, and highly appreciated the sacrifice of the Vegetarians, while denying that of the meat-eaters and their false priests, unmistakably.

Nobody could turn around his appreciation, and have it the opposite. Over were the rumours, the Vegetarians would follow the wrong Emissary, because he once showed from above.

South-Michel's South-Michel

From above or below

Will never be shoven to and fro

The followers of vegetarianism and democracy chanted, somewhat queer and without much sense, and made Cory their High Priestess.

This kind of service she liked better than the angelical job, South-Michel had intended for her, but luckily rejected soon enough.

('Who on earth would ever believe that someone like this - not only did commit that he made a mistake, but have it corrected right away' – the Advisor commented on such alterations down there, as soon as he learnt of what was going on.)

37. The Bombing Raider

Soon it became clear that the 'semi-nomads' as South-Michel neutrally addressed them, weren't capable of such assault. While proving their incapability in that sacrifice competition, where they failed. Had they known about the pyromaniac effects of that material, they'd surely have employed it for their bloody sacrifice.

“They might have laid the bomb without knowing, how it worked” Cory wondered, and Adrian agreed: “Could well be” – then he went on: “I’d reckon, they are well able to do so. Someone who slays whole villages, doesn’t mind blowing up a tunnel, as long as he can do harm...”

“I don’t know. Perhaps they are appeased to a certain extent after South-Michel denied their way of living clearly” Cory answered.

“Well, that’s now, but what was it like before?”

“Anyway, seems very unlikely, though” Cory objected.

“Who’s then the assassin?” - Both didn’t know the answer.

They were waiting for the Prime Minister, who was in a meeting. Much time wasn’t left, because the moon had clearly started reduction. They’d better be going right away, anyway. However, they relied on the Nautilus somewhere near this time. The submarine would certainly pick them up, and would save them half a day, they could spend now.

Corinia was in her element down here, she noticed time and again. In favour of her sister and Arundle she had taken up general Archaeological studies in Sydney, where the three stayed together because of her. While her very subject was deep sea Archaeology that was taught here. Unfortunately the whole institute was on excursion for this term somewhere in the South Sea.

Things were all different now, because of the new ‘Island University’, as the newly built place would be called, if no other name could be found. Hadn’t it been too misleading, they might have chosen the name ‘Roland-Waldschmitt-University’, while ‘Anonymous-University’ was probably too impersonal or also misleading.

The new institution would have an own deep-sea section, that was quite clear. They even had a very suitable vehicle for that in form of the Nautilus. Thus Cory was very optimistic and so was Adrian Humperdijk, who reckoned to promote one way or the other.

Finally the Prime Minister was available. Adrian formally reported of the sacred performance, and Prime Minister Boetie was very pleased about the outcome. She gave Cory a thankful wink and thanked them very officially for their efforts.

By means of such heavenly feed back she got further with her programme a good deal. The news spread about in all Australis soon,

although, there was no TV, and people had to rely on audio waves, which were also very effective. Thus you could speak of some kind of radio in a way. A system without receivers. The waves had to be emitted with considerable strength and on the proper frequency.

As soon as they had finished their report, the two Convertors hurried to get away. The Nautilus was near by and soon came in sight. So they headed for it and signalled permission to come on board. Clear signals, as they thought.

The crew enjoyed the company outside and waved back friendly. They took it as entertainment because they were young and inexperienced, and didn't know Adrian and Cory. Or they couldn't recognize them through the thick pane. While they didn't take any necessary action to get them on board.

The more and heftier the two returnees waved from outside the friendlier the watchmen answered. They laughed and clapped their hands of joy, when the two started gasping for oxygen. They realized for the first time, how South-Michel must have felt for being so badly misunderstood by his disciples.

A stone from the ground smashed at the pane and ended the farce. The watchmen realized at last, that they had to do with a matter of non-routine, and notified the Skipper, who took immediate action, and saved the swimmers, who were re-converting meanwhile – in the very last moment from suffocation.

The Nautilus was searching for the bombing raiders, thus it said in their official order that was supported by South-Michel, who also wanted to find out the truth about the assault. The truth might help those banned semi-nomads to find a way back to their former community, thus, was one of his options, as he also knew what sort of rascals they in fact were, and that a bombing assault wouldn't be the worst deed on their record.

But were they really capable of such a tricky deed? Were they able to do the planning? Had they the means to start ignition? As cruel as they were, as dumb they were. There must have been a brighter brain involved, one way or the other.

If it was no-one from down there, he must have come from above. No other option was likely. Without technical support and proper devices no-one would dive some 600 yards, without risking injury,

and have a bomb placed and ignited, precisely at a certain point, to cause such severe damage, as was done by the assault.

They were dealing with a carefully planned and executed attack, prepared in the long run, with precise knowledge of the whereabouts and location. This was no incidental matter, surely not.

Not even Dorothea knew what exactly was going on down there, who was in charge, and was best informed anyway. So how could someone else know more than the best informed insider?

The Pater-noster site had been wholly out of range of the Australian builders. Only the dwarves were familiar with what was going on, and even that was doubtful, because they didn't do much planning and co-ordinating and each just did, what he or she did, while the outcome was really remarkable.

Had they a mole in their ranks? A dwarf on the pay-role of the wicked? A spy right here, where for centuries no-one broke in or even noticed that there was life at all?

Executing such an assault would hardly be a matter of the little ones. They stayed away from water by nature and would never cover up with a diving suit. Besides, such suit wouldn't fit anyway. Dwarves were short-legged and stunt.

They loved the soil and didn't mind thick layers above their heads, while others might suffer from claustrophobia. But with water it was something else. Water, you couldn't push aside and form or dry.

Knowing that there was only a thin layer of concrete matter left, made them uneasy. They seemed to smell water over distances and through thick walls, and cared for safety ranges. Thus, it was very unlikely that they accidentally cut through the wall, while working on the tunnel.

The Pater-noster system had been operating alright before, and was shut off only for further advancements in the tunnel. Of course, those in charge wondered now, why the act of sabotage occurred coincidentally with the youngsters' prank, when the labourers took their lunch break.

Once more, very intimate knowledge of the whereabouts of every detail, must have been available on the assassin's side. While the three young goblins were the unlucky ones being at the wrong time at the wrong site, and without doubt had nothing to do with the explosion. They were surely no trained suicidal assassins. In fact, they had hindered the worst when giving alarm. Otherwise the leakage wouldn't have been noticed at such an early stage, and might have cause much worse damage all day long.

No matter, where the experts were stationed, either in the Nautilus, or safely at home, or in one of the study groups, no-one came about with a convincing idea of how the assault could have been planned executed.

Therefore, everybody now reckoned with the enforcement of the inner protective casing, to have the Pater-noster system made as proof as possible against assaults of any kind. Everybody knew of course that this was not possible at a hundred percent. Such a system would always remain vulnerable, and would offer the rapacious wolf, luring somewhere in the hide, always an unprotected flank, so to speak.

Should they make up their minds and give up the whole project as such? And travel by boat again back and forth as was done in former times?

But what would the dwarves say, who had put in so much effort and know-how in the project? What would South-Michel say? Could they remain friends, and even advance friendship and understanding, when doing so?

Did they really want to risk all that? Surely not. However, they had to talk. They had to talk first of all with South-Michel and find out whether he was going to lose his heart on something probably not worth it.

The dangerous murderer and former assistant of Professor Henry Baranasias of the McGill University in Toronto, Canada had been deprived of his civil rights. - Catalanius, as was his name, was kept under special warranty in the state prison of Adelaide, where he succeeded in the most spectacular flight ever since.

Of course, there was black magic involved. Things like that never happened without support of the evil forces who owed the tendency to draw their disciples deeper and deeper into the hellish abyss, thus, no way led back to decency and civilised behaviour with every ruthless deed. So it was here as well.

With the help of Malicious Marduk, Catalanius started a riot of the convicts and set the death-row in flames – some hundred convicts and wards died in the fire, as a consequence. Whether Catalanius was amongst the dead could not be verified, while the corpses lay cramped in clusters before the locked exits, which had in vain been tried to open.

However, Catalanius was not among the dead. When in the prison the phosphor-bombs exploded, he was already gone and threw the corpse of the laundry-truck-driver into the deepest abyss, where it would never be found.

His flight was well planned. Some miles behind the prison a helicopter was waiting at a lonesome site of a former factory that picked the escapee up and fled with unknown destination.

Some days of rest Malicius Marduk granted to his disciple in a previously arranged hide, to get used to the freedom again, and to feel the old strength again, he had missed for such a long time. Strength that wasn't his own, as he still not quite understood, but was let by Malicius Marduk, who was going to use him again as a willing horse.

The search by the police for eventually fled convicts was more or less a matter of formal plight, while nobody knew if there had been survivors of the flames. Thus the investigation was soon given up. - The missing laundry-truck and driver was handle as a separate case.

As soon as Catalanius felt fit, he went to the southwest coast. There was an old former military camp, where recruits had been trained for the war in Europe. Here, Catalanius experimented with all kinds of rocket-ramps, and Scud-rockets, which turned out to be not precise enough for his purpose. In order to realize the perfidy Malicius Marduk had in mind, precise smart bombing was required a hundred percent. Besides, the range was of major importance as well.

The shooting and bombing towards the Southern Polar Sea didn't bring the wanted results for a long time. Then however, he made it. The rockets crashed right at the aimed spot.

Next, he had to find out about the exact depth of the target, where the bomb was destined to explode. Then the plan would be perfect.

How perfect it was, you could see by the effect. The Pater-noster tunnel between the islands of the so much hated competitors broke, and no-one was able to find the proper cause. Thus, this was an assault, Malicius Marduk was fond of.

The Nautilus returned home from its unsuccessful mission. At last, two Convertors had been rescued. Some good the voyage did have at last.

Cory's trick with the phosphor, she was reporting, raised the mood a little. By means of that trick the newly appointed High Priestess of the mer-folk managed a real coup.

South-Michel's position was settled, the desperados remained in the shade, if not altering attitude, and return back to decent manners. It was certain now, that they had nothing to do with phosphor, because if they had, they would have used it for burning their sacrifice.

Dorothea at last found out about the right track, at least one of the more promising traces, they had been following up to now. When reading the newspapers, she came about three articles that were raising her curiosity.

One was about a riot in prison and a conflagration in the state prison of Adelaide. Another was about strange explosions of unknown cause in the Southern Polar Sea shortly below Tasmania and a third one about the theft of some modern missiles from the atomic secret depot of the Australian Military Forces.

On request, Shamaness Susamee confirmed the explosions in the Polar Sea. Tibor came with the news up in hurry, as such explosions had been not far from Susamee's Island, as a matter of fact.

Finally Arundle was supported with her general suspicion once again. None of her friends seriously doubted that Malicious Marduk had been pulling the strings again once more, and was responsible for the Pater-noster accident.

The Australian Forces also had come to similar conclusions (while different suspicion, though) because you could see some speedboats cruising about rather close to the site of the explosions. While the one blow towards the Isle of Wisdom-tooth seemed unnoticed by them luckily, as otherwise the secret School would have been detected, and the veil of secrecy would have been lifted for good.

When the extend of the catastrophe was finally realized, the shock went deep. Malicious Marduk developed incredible power and betook as it seemed to unlimited possibilities to commit his terror.

Was such concentration of the evil might allowed at present, or did this offend the interstellar directive of proportion? - as Arundle lately had learnt of - without in fact remembering however the exact details. It made a newly arranged visit to the Advisor unavoidable and peremptory.

Thus, it was done. Billy-Joe and Dorothea for this time - headed for the virtual centre of all universes and galaxies, together with Arundle, where they met the Advisor without any circumstances, which was more or less uncommon with him.

Arundle brought forward their claim and Dorothea was able to enrich the tale with brutal facts, she had collected. She made very clear that it was absolutely impossible for human beings to enter an atomic depot of the Australian army in order to steal missiles and

rockets and stuff the like. And so was the conflagration as well as the flight of the murderer Catalanius from state prison of Adelaide, without magic means – “that is black magic means, to be sure what we are talking about” she added, with a meaningful gaze at the little appearance she wasn’t yet used to as much as Arundle or Billy-Joe were.

Arundle had even seen him in a nightmare, when escaping from the death-row in flames.

Not to mention the training exercises and the assault on the tunnel. Their very simple question now was, whether Malicious Marduk was entitled to do all that in the present. “Can his power over human beings here and now be absolute?” Arundle summed up their quest.

The visitors saw the Advisor winding in trouble. But they didn’t give way. At last he resumed in a lengthier monologue about the self-contradiction of the evil, which didn’t really help.

He even referred to one of Germany’s greatest poets, who saw in the devil some kind of servant of the Almighty by having him say:

‘Ich bin ein Teil von jener Kraft,

Die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft.’^{lxi}

It might well be that the one or the other of their projects wasn’t yet ripe for the time being, the Advisor added after a thoughtful break, while Arundle could see how his Tinnitus was getting at him again, which raised bad feelings against South-Michel and his disciples the mining dwarves.

“Cui bono^{lxii}” – he sweetly screeched while fading and had them stay back without advice, and without giving them a further gaze. He wanted to let them know by such exalted behaviour that they had overlooked something very important, they should think over first.

Perhaps her former Mentor, Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots might know better. Arundle would ask her, what it was about that mysterious ‘Cui bono’, and the whole context, that it was in. Perhaps, Grisella could make use of such mystery and saw sense, where they waded somewhat blindfold in obscure mist.

38. Claustrophobia

The Professor knew a lot about such matters. She became alert and almost busted of the huge quantity of knowledge, she had gathered.

“Cui bono - this is, what the Advisor told you?” she asked somewhat rhetoric, when Arundle reported what had happened. The reference to Goethe she just about managed all right, but that she didn't need, as Grisella knew everything at once.

In fact this was the basic theme of the whole drama, that went on in the second part and turned out to be true, she confirmed.

Arundle once more noticed how far she was away from real knowledge. She was still a beginner. There was so much to be studied. So little she knew, and so much there was to be known. While you were lost in this world without knowledge. Perhaps it was that, the Advisor had wanted to let them know. However, Dorothea saw things somewhat different. She didn't understand the Advisor that way.

“I understood that we should stay away from that tunnel-project. We also should be careful with those dwarves, and have us not involved into affairs we do not oversee or agree with wholeheartedly.”

“There is somebody who learnt how to listen to the substance” Arundle thought and admired Dorothea for that. Because such clear message hadn't reached her senses. Perhaps she had again only listened with minor attention. As she often did. She couldn't listen to the Advisor properly. And perhaps he then realized such, and this was why he retreated the way he most often did, and she felt left alone with the most challenging questions. While he in fact answered and she just didn't notice.

She would have a word with Billy-Joe on that. For now she had to pass on the message at ease.

Adrian Humperdijk felt closely related to South-Michel, and so did Corinia Hare, for they had been chosen to be his angels. Such affection was not spoiled by the fact that the angles' option had been given up, the more as so Cory had become South-Michel's High Priestess of the mer-folk.

The worries about the Pater-noster troubled Dorothea, while the golden tunnel was ready for use by now. The dwarves were very proud of their achievement and would have been deadly offended if

Dorothea had cut off the whole matter. This was definitely no option any more.

The teachers and the students were looking forward to the comfort of this means of transport. Some had done the trip back and forth up to four times daily. And they would be rather frustrated if this service was cut for what reasons ever.

Some enjoyed for the food – back home, as they put it - because they were used to it. Others came to see friends or get placed on the favourite seat in the library. While their new dormitories still felt strange enough for the former school-leavers.

By ferry they wouldn't have intended so many visits back and forth. Provided the system was working, you could just jump on the device and got comfortably seated in soft cushions – you could relax, or dream, or chat with the neighbour, and in less than thirty minutes you had arrived, depending on the floor, and how often the cabins had to slowed down for embarking or disembarking purposes, while somebody had to be taken with a specific cabin, instantaneously and in no other.

This was the situation. Dorothea hoped in vain that the attraction of the novelty would fade by the passing time. The longer the system was in use, the better it was liked. While now people urged her to get it started again, as soon as possible, which could be done any time, when the dwarves signalled they'd finished with the final coating in the crucial segments.

Life was normalizing over here, while the construction work came to an end. Now the emptiness was felt when no-one disturbed the peace, but had to be endured instead. The Island University was filled only by some twenty five percent. There were five branches and you could notice the process of organisation, in the initial stages everywhere. There were no libraries yet ready, and you couldn't get the literature you needed.

Thus Dorothea referred to the Internet, where you could order books or copy them down, if you didn't like to read them online, or have them sold after use to the library. Which meant a steady improving flow of specific literature.

Scholasticus was occupied by the role of a new-born father, so to speak – far more than by his occupation as a President. However, he wanted to spend as much time as possible with his daughter and accompany her development. He thought to know about the singularity of this experience, because both parents weren't the youngest any more.

Dorothea was late with thirty seven for a first delivering mother. Scholasticus was no youngster either, shortly before fifty, thus they added up to over eighty on the scale of life.

In order to manage with the new tasks of caring and advancing his daughter, Scholasticus ordered a lot of more or less suitable literature, and asked for advice from all sources you could think of. He wasn't afraid of asking inconvenient questions. So he trusted in Shamaness Susamee and relied on her the more as so she cured the unavoidable infant diseases just before they were breaking out.

Furthermore he initiated an infant nursery. Because with the extension of University Island there had been a considerable increase in personnel, many houses which were built for the staff, now was also filled with young infant life.

Together with an expert the young parents trained and performed all kinds of activities with their children, like baby-swimming, or gym exercises as well as singing, and eurhythmy.

Scholasticus was present everywhere. He movingly cared for his infant, fed and changed nappies, cared for fresh air and walks, when he had his child bound the African style on chest or back, and accompanied her first movements, whatsoever.

No wonder, Sulamith's first word was something like 'dad', and this seemed only just for the proud father, who was happier, as can be. Scholasticus adored his little princess unspeakably.

While walking around the island daily, Scholasticus noticed how small both islands were. You rounded each in less than an hour. Now he got an idea of how the relatives of the teachers and employees felt, who had not the daily workload to overcome, and had to face this narrowness every day.

The more as so in the beginning where there were no tasks for them, many a one was overwhelmed by fits of claustrophobia. If you had no definite task to fulfil daily, you risked being overwhelmed by depressions.

This might be one reason, why the Pater-noster was so well liked. It was some kind of diversion – and not only that, because the trip through the tunnel conveyed an impression of far distance and greatness, and promised a kind of virgin land on the way and on the other side, which of course was an illusion. While there was always something new to be detected as long as the constructions work was in due process.

By means of the underground connection the area of the islands doubled not only but increased manifold, as the water in between turned out to be some kind of lagoon in fact, that was part of the land.

An impression that was enforced by the steel barriers all around the lagoon against shark attacks, which had been installed after the horrible experiences with the killer-sharks.

Dorothea now did her best to improve this inner 'lake'. First of all she had the barriers enforced and increased in height, thus they served as breakwaters, while the sides went down now some sixty feet, and the floor was put underneath as a kind of steel net over the whole ground, preventing thus any attack from the depth.

Nothing and nobody who was thicker than a man's arm would gain access into the 'inland lake', as the construction was swiftly named.

In addition, Dorothea ordered some fifty house-boats, some she just bought second hand, others she had constructed after her special design, which were brought from the mainland when the sea was calm by towboat. Thus, the lagoon was embroidered by house-boats and received its specific character and charm.

The houseboats were very well accepted and soon Dorothea had loads of inquiries. Each family wanted to have an own houseboat, to spend the weekends there and have thus, the illusion of width and luxury.

Those who thought that Dorothea's imagination would be exhausted by such achievements failed. Dorothea had more in mind, and something entirely different. What she intended was in a way tricky and implied opposing aspects.

Since she had installed that archive of the former students, she hung on a world surrounding dream, while the Isle of Wisdom-tooth formed the spiritual centre, that sent its rays into the world. And for that you did not only need brilliant ideas and stunning research but also multipliers in a worldwide web.

The archive of the former students formed the base of her ideas. And on this base the web should grow. If they managed to establish some kind of swimming paradise right here in the lagoon, this would certainly meet her imagination – some kind of hotel, consisting of individual houseboats. Space was there enough.

The archive of the former students stored the addresses of most former students. All she had to do, was to let them know about their former home base, where they received the basics for a life outside. She had to attract them for their former spiritual centre and even remind them of their promise, or on their singularity.

There were reasons enough, to come here on the way back to the roots, and combine with holydays on a paradise island.

The clientele was limited and chosen because of the status the former students had. While they might want to bring with them their relatives, who might not share the singularity.

The Grand Assembly of both islands should decide on that. They had to decide on the whole project as such, of course, anyway.

Dorothea's plan split the community into pros and cons. The cons insisted of splendid isolation and referred to the secret status of the School of Inbetween. Nobody was able to grant for the formers, who might have changed, and even less for their relatives, who might be wholly ignorant subjects.

With horror they recalled the festivities of the opening of that archive and all these failures, that followed. Things like that the cons didn't want to experience again. And a hotel, where everybody could go in and out more or less uncontrolled, would grant for more confusion and even chaos.

The argument was so fierce that Dorothea stepped back with her proposal. Such a severe cut into the lives of all of them, she didn't want to have done by a majority vote – no matter the outcome. It would mean the end of peace and consent. Thus, the plan was postponed for the time being.

A huge safety-double sluice at the air terminal had been built, just in case. Where four people could be screened and examined for their colour at the same time.

Dorothea didn't let arise any doubts, that the islands could only be entered by the called.

“What about their relatives?” – The relatives and acquaintances were the weak point of the hotel project. “What do we do with the relatives?”

“We can't send them home or put them under quarantine – or could we?”

“Why not?” Dorothea wondered.

For the time being she gave in. At least she did as if she gave in. Scholasticus knew her better. Dorothea was not the type for that. She only searched for another way to the target, but that she never lost out of sight. In this she was very alike her sister Grisella, who supported her in this case quite different to their argument about that Cardinal Mistake.

The ‘Splendid Isolation’ as the position of the opponents of the hotel project was called, had a great idol in the policy of the USA before the First World War. They were certain that isolation was the

only way to protect and keep all those secrets in their range and vicinity, whether mer-folk or the little ones.

For both their discovery would have meant extinction – sooner or later. You just couldn't imagine what would happen if the international press would start up with a merciless hunt. While scientists wouldn't be any better, and might even treat them crueler, as soon as they got hold of them.

There was indeed a lot to be considered.

Dorothea encouraged the students of all ages to invite their families. She did receive loads of requests anyway, she so far had repelled up to now.

Any disqualified guests were put on the 'Three Days' Package Tour' and were shown about the islands in closed vehicles, similar to a Safari Park Tour. For this purpose a small railway had been built, on an adventurous route along the peaks and lows of the rocky rims.

On the second day they were invited to the Archive of the Former Students, as well as to a Pater-noster trip back and forth. The special highlight on the third day was then a one day trip to Susamee's Island with the Nautilus, where the tourists stayed overnight anyway.

As to Dorothea such family visits didn't need extra permission, as they were covered by the existing rules, which were of course a matter of interpretation.

Not too long ago some fathers had been allowed to anchor their yacht down at the landing stage for a couple of days. (After passing through a very tricky maze out of view of the coastline, where they lost control of course and location.) Thus, secrecy had never been absolutely strict, but was more or less granted.

39. Isolationists versus World-Citizens

The Hares had settled meanwhile in their new premises. Their furniture had arrived, and the front garden was set, and job-wise things developed as well to Professor Hare's satisfaction.

The categorisation and evaluation of all the material from Atlantis would take months of acerbic toil in the laboratory which was established for that purpose.

Such task was tackled together with Professor Grisella, Lady of Griselgreif to Greifenklau-Slyboots, who was dearly engaged in such mission since she had been in Atlantis in person.

As former mentor of Arundle she could motivate her for a joint march to that site once in a while. And thus a merry flock marched along the time-scale with a gay song on their lips seemingly out into nothingness. Quite similar to those children of Hamelin, who followed the Pied Piper, when the citizens refused the proper pay – as the fairytale goes.

Grisella was still afraid of travelling by air or the like. That was why she stayed back soon and had others go on her behalf. Too many sudden rescue coups had been taken in the dying and dooming land far, far away.

It was Professor Hare who wanted to see with his own eyes what it was like to be viewing a dying culture. No matter how empathic he felt, he was nonetheless fascinated of what he got to see. Professor Hare was one of those scientists who would do everything for their science. Therefore, he wished to involve colleagues of his from outside, no matter whether they fitted the strict requirements.

By that, the little family was torn apart. Florinna stayed with her daddy, while Mrs Hare took the position of Cory, who was strictly against the opening up and the new project, and would have better skipped the Island University as a hole, but have made concessions. Even those submarine excursions some of the fellow-students undertook with their families, she viewed as risky and even hazardous in a way.

While it had been the Nautilus, which attracted those witty teenagers from the ground to show up and perform for an attentive audience. It didn't need much effort these days to have pictures sent in no time around the world, taken from those dancing naiads and nixes in front of the panorama pane of the submarine. And you could hardly imagine what storm might be lashed out by that. If they raised the curiosity of the right (that is in fact – the wrong) people.

In vain, Flory argued what kind of people those relatives and guests were. Nobody would be allowed on the islands without the colour-test screening at the terminal on entry.

In vain the pros asked for more confidence in the security-system that had been reinforced and extended as part of the construction work. So nobody would be able to spot and locate them, if not guided by black magic or by a mole in their own ranks, as had been the case

formerly. ‘The system never fails but people does’, they said. But this couldn’t be helped by isolation. Because isolation led to ignorance.

“All visitors are kind of brainwashed on departure automatically and any reference to the position is thus erased in their memories”, Arundle added.

“Yes, and the general defence of the whole functions in a way, we do not quite understand ourselves. We are only allowed to believe and hope and trust, that the system works. This is how Dorothea explained it” Flory ended her hefty plead with pathos.

For her mother, who was present, things were thus clear and straightened out, because Flory had been very convincing. However Cory had other aspects in mind which weighed much heavier in her eyes

As High Priestess of the Emissary South-Michel of Capricorn she knew about the needs and hopes of the mer-folk, as well as about the dangers threatening from above. There were very few untouched spots left on the ground of the oceans. A trip around the world from Bermudia to Australis was kind of suicide mission. Meanwhile it was much likelier of not getting through, than the other way round.

First of all, the aggressive methods of the fish-trawlers caused the trouble. They wouldn’t get caught, therefore they were too clever, and if it happened, they cut themselves free. While really dangerous were the harpooners with their bow-cans and dum-dum bullets, which smashed everything they hit.

Those trawler-crews called them sea-cows, as the naiads reminded them on human-like animals – this is what you could hear in the taverns from drunken, boasting fishermen once in a while, but nobody cared.

The conflict between pros and cons began to dominate the meetings on all levels, especially among friends. Cory told of course what she learnt from the mer-folk about prosecution by the trawler-crews. She was very upset when this basic conflict was put on a shallow and false level of secrecy and trustworthiness into existing security-systems. Meanwhile the endangerment was a far wider, and the existence of the mer-folk was on the verge of extinction.

“My ancestors were also denounced of their humanness by the whites” Billy-Joe said and a sad look came into his eyes. He also took the side of the isolationists.

In fact, his relation to his mentor had never been so close, as would perhaps have been wishful – neither vocational nor human.

Thus Billy-Joe opposed him in this question as well, and didn't accept Dorothea's somewhat sophisticated arguments, which Scholasticus accepted as his own – being her husband.

Arundle realized the conflict between the sisters near-by, because she lived with the Hares for good now, and therefore, Billy-Joe often came for a visit, the more as so he was – in joint cooperation with Pooty – the keeper of the Magic Stone - thus still responsible for the marching tunes and rhythms on the way along the time-scale towards Atlantis.

Vasanth Hare still suffered under the burden of the British colonialism and imperialism, she and her family had experienced partly in person still. For that reason she did understand mistrust against well-phrased arguments, which sounded so nice for the moment, but were soon gone with the wind of time.

Nonetheless, she felt that Corinia overdid, when she focussed on the dangers threatening the mer-folk. Nobody on the islands agreed with the methods of the fishing industry, that was going on for years now and had done great harm, but couldn't yet diminish or even reduce the number of individuals down here. This was done by interior troubles to a far larger extend.

Vasanth Hare could see the chance that was hiding in Dorothea's idea as well, and why she felt attracted. She saw the chance of change to the better in the world as well, and Dorothea's project could be seen as a kind of spearhead mission.

A new value system had to be spread, and for that reason the 'Splendid Isolation' had to be given up. All registers had to be pulled, all friends and co-workers had to become motivated and attracted. Here, right in 'the Hub of the Word' was the centre of the new power. Here, those in the know had to be gathered. Enforced and with fresh spirit and new ideas, they would be sent out and back into the wide world spreading such impulses, the world was so desperately in need of.

There they were again: those well-sounding phrases. But what happened, when you dug to the depth of such superficial words? What was there to be found?

A new value system, that based on time instead of money. And offered the chance that the relations between people changed. But what, if the negative utopia realized? What, if an even worse system of exploitation would replace the old system instead?

There it was again – the question for the Cardinal Mistake, that had come into Man's history, and was so hard to spot and hence to overcome.

If the new value system could be installed without Cardinal Mistake, the aim of history would be accomplished.

The Isolationists with their objections didn't see or didn't want to see this exigent target. Their worries were of a different quality and didn't meet the real challenge that was due right now. They were looking backwards in a way, and still dealing with matters too closely related to the past, and therefore outdated and obsolete.

Didn't they have access to the processes of consciousness and the theoretical construct where it stemmed from?

It wasn't quite so. Billy-Joe was well able to see the point, while having problems in showing Arundle such contradiction wherefore there was no answer yet. He only knew he wouldn't succeed in getting her out of Dorothea's influence.

"You know, what we Isolationists really mind?" he one evening said, while the extended family Hare was sitting comfortably on the porch: "It's your forced optimism with which you talk yourselves crazy, and mix up your high-brow ideas with real sound facts. Each of us happened to fail that way, each of us has talked him or herself into fierce rage and was stricken by his or her 'Ultimate Overall View' (like the Advisor), or by his or her 'Ultimate Perspective Discernment' (like South-Michel).

From both we can learn something. Depending on your standpoint, your sight is going to change, while you look at the same thing, and see everything your friend and fellow sees – but from a different perspective. And then it is not the same anymore, but becomes something else."

Arundle protested. The hotel-project was something real and sound, that was Dorothea's strength, she said.

"Here you are again, you put things upside down. Dorothea doesn't want a hotel-project as such. She wants to create some institution capable of multiplying an idea and spread it in the world.

And this idea has its centre right here with us on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Dorothea believes in this idea, without having understood it right or have it made her own. She acts in blindfold belief, because she assumes that her husband, and her sister, and you, Arundle, have the ‘Ultimate Overall View’ that only have to be spread and that’s it, and the world is saved, the history’s arrived at its target.”

“Dorothea witnessed almost everything that happened” Arundle answered: “The trouble with Anonymous, those raids of the Miseriors, and everything that is coming up on us. She knows what she does. With her project she wants to steer against a development, that is threateningly in sight...”

“How do we know, that we are really ‘the Hub of the World’? Only because your father changed sides and came to us, it doesn’t mean that we have found the king’s road. Perhaps the real opposition has much deeper roots. Perhaps you find it in Tasmania or in the Australian outback, or somewhere in Mongolia, in Patagonia or even under the shelf with the mer-folk and even below, where the dwarves live.

If Mankind gives up such last battlements as well, then Malicious Marduk has really won, and then comes what we see coming up threateningly on the horizon of the future. And the whole nightmare becomes real.”

“Ah yes, and you are becoming Shaman in Laptopia and I the Princess at the court of the almighty Rolandus? I see, what you mean. And thus it’s convincing. The whole is some kind of scissors, that was getting apart more and more, while both blades belonging together eventually...”

Billy-Joe didn’t quite know, what Arundle wanted to say with the scissors. At least, she seemed to understand him. What he said, wasn’t new for her anyway. But no-one had always everything in mind.

One of the great skills in life was to have the right thing available at the right time.

“Should the alternative really be either to refuse radically the whole civilisation and become naked like in the beginning of mankind, leading a scarce and endangered life? Still a life with an almighty brain, and well cared in the dreamland, and connected to eternity, well equipped with spiritual gifts of empathy and telepathy, and the inner richness of the universal soul?” Arundle said with a meaningful glance over to Billy-Joe who nodded with so much agreement and openness and preparedness in his eyes, that she felt like a bee, approaching a longing cupula stretching out towards her.

“Well, I’m afraid, this is not where mankind is standing right now. And this beginning mankind will never meet again, at least the mankind as we know it.

I’m with you, when you demand that we care about the losses, that we take serious, what we are lacking and the so called primitive still owe. However, I deny to believe that such abilities are inseparably connected with primordial suffering, or that the wide great dreamland can’t be conquered again. Over here, in the School of Inbetween, many things work, don’t you think so? And we do live all in all rather civilized, don’t we?”

Arundle smiled convincingly and even infested Billy-Joe by that. Perhaps they were really on the king’s road. Perhaps their island was really the ‘Hub of the World’, Billy-Joe thought, and perhaps were the Isolationists just too narrow-minded in a way.

40. The Hotel of the Hub of the World

The arguments were all laid open by now. Both sides did understand the other rightfully. Now they had to come to an agreement.

Neither side refused to be ‘the Hub of the World’ any more. Quite the opposite. They all believed that something great had been accomplished over here. Something, that had been lost and conserved in history, and had been re-discovered and activated by them.

Both sides were unable to explain in detail what that was, that had been re-discovered or reproduced, to have it described in clear terms. While they of course were able to describe what had happened, and what was going on, but that was not the essence, both sides felt, as soon as they tried to exemplify.

Thus they couldn’t do better then talk of ‘the Hub of the World’, hoping to express what really was meant, while both sides agreed that what ever went on in this Hub of the World was prepared to shape the world and grant it a renewed and better face. By gaining influence on a development that was on the way anyway. As evidence they held in hands their own studies on Laptopia and the bitter revenge of Anonymous about the secret doings of the time-mafia.

You couldn’t really rely on reports from the future. There was no definitely defined future to come any more. Therefore Arundle

suggested another look at what emerged as a multitude of futures “each lining up along the time-scale (which is in fact an infinitely wide highway.) Thus, futures may show similarities, but never become identical. Just as no leaf that’s falling off each tree ever is identical with any other leaf ever.

Each leaf remains a leaf that’s certain, but that doesn’t mean leaves are alike. There are differences, and they might be neglected on the first sight, however, they are there, I daresay.

If we transmute such example on the futures of the world, than we see on a large scale what it means, and we also see the whole, that is in our case, the value system based on time. That’s going to come, as it looks. But the way it is shaped, how much injustice comes along with it, who will become the profiteers, and if the masses will be the big losers like in the old system, the future doesn’t automatically prove, despite the negative outlook we already experienced.

What we want is clear. The new system has to be used to the benefit of mankind. And for that the course must be set now. A sense of agreement has to come over the world. And this is where we come in, and the Hotel of the Hub of the World, as a locomotive and stronghold of the new consciousness.

Ingredients we support from both sides, whether ‘Isolationists’ or ‘Citizens of the World’. The better future we jointly strive for. Thus, we may jointly reflect and weigh our paces, we have to undertake, in order to approach our aim.”

Hefty knocking of eager knuckles signalled agreement, as Arundle had hoped. Nothing would be more wrong than a majority vote here and now. Not the domination of a certain position was the aim, but a joint strategy to overcome the misery of the world. They had to strive for trust and should never give up hope to gather enough people of good will , as long as there was still time to do so.

“Can you see now, what I mean, Billy-Joe?” Arundle asked – “let us do everything we can, that you never become a weird Shaman of the Churingas, and I not the silly princess at the court of that strange Emperor Rolandus. That much openness must be in the damn future, for heaven’s sake. Malicious Marduk mustn’t have the last word.”

“Your trustworthiness in God isn’t really what it could be” you could hear the Advisor just swaying in. South-Michel agreed stunningly. Arundle’s curses had made him shiver. “No one escapes his or her fate”, he said sweetly when he had himself back. He pushed his thumbs in the armpits of his waistcoat and jacked up and down on his toes.

For now, the Advisor did agree no less benevolent. Was this the beginning of a divine friendship? Dorothea glanced over to Arundle meaningfully.

All the assembly noticed the swaying mood like an air-stream through the hall.

“Don’t you make a mistake now” Dorothea swore to herself and started feeding her baby, to keep her busy. Besides, a feeding mother was an image well liked by the Isolationists.

Dorothea couldn’t escape her way of being and that was half calculation and half chasing effects. She always played with something, most she did so with her female attributes, or like now, with maternity.

Little Sulamith enjoyed her attention nevertheless.

The project received a broad base and was accepted by an overwhelmingly vast majority. In fact there were no opposing votes at all.

Now they had to figure out a set of rules. For that purpose mixed study groups were formed, with equal shares of Isolationists and World-Citizens.

Dorothea could go on now with the construction work in and around the artificial lagoon. She planned to have the outer edges embroidered by houseboats. In the centre the main hotel building was planned, with reception, dining hall, kitchen, bars and fitness studio. In addition, she planned a modern sub water recycling plant for waste and fresh water regeneration, combined with an adjacent garbage funeral. The heat of which would be stored and transformed into electricity.

All houseboats were connected by water- and waste-hoses in closed circuits. The ecological disturbance factor tended thus towards zero.

Wide footpaths went through the set up star-like, centring in the middle. Thus each guest could reach the main building on dry foot, as well as the neighbouring houseboats. The whole set up looked from above like a spider web, the centre of which was the main building.

Ten Chinese arched bridges granted free traffic on the water by low boats, while masts had to be laid down.

Sailing and water sports were however still possible – outside, as in former times – in the lagoon on the other side of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth adjacent to the outer landing stage and the submarine dock.

With her construction plans Dorothea killed three birds with one stone, so to speak. She shortened the way between the islands to some 600 yards walking distance, and enabled hotel-guests to get to their dormitories on foot, while their luggage was brought by boat, and she devaluated the Pater-noster system to a certain extend.

While the route through the underground still remained attractive in bad weather and for the tourists anyway. The dwarves took the chance and built in all kinds of discernments into their world on the dull vertical part. Thus, the trip reminded more of a tour through the fairy-land of a pleasure park, then a means of traffic.

All kinds of mysterious images, golden devices of undefined nature, blinking stones in all colours of the rainbow – even little ones, dwarves and goblins were to be seen to the lucky ones – thus, the trip was a real highlight and touristy attraction.

Dorothea let the dwarves prevail, did however ask, why secrecy was of minor importance here, that was a major topic normally, and therefore put in a formal request to South-Michel, who argued that for dwarves such performances were common all over the world in each pleasure dome and the like. Tourists would certainly not ask what kind of little ones were acting, as believing in such mysteries was outdated, anyway.

As a matter of fact, Dorothea didn't decide on such matters alone anymore, but had her plans approved by a joint commission of Isolationists and World-Citizens. She even asked for assistance when producing a brochure for the former students. The resort had to become known as such to the respective public.

Representing themselves as 'Hub of the World' required sensitivity, while pushing suspicion of megalomania aside, was certainly a tricky task, they not quite managed to perform.

But quarrels the like did bother the formers far less than the PR management feared. Perhaps those formers lived already too long being aware of their own singularity.

The programme sent to all former students was indeed exceptional. Arundle even arranged with the Advisor a weekly date for Anonymous, where he would present and defend his opus. Any such gig would be a sensation as a matter of fact, because the author was regarded as gone astray.

When Arundle met him thus again, she realized a certain progress in his esoteric career. On his relaxed mime she noticed deep peace, while he seated himself cross-legged slightly above the ground, and

had his transparent hands wave through the air once in a while, but never hectic or impatient. No matter how silly the questions or provocative the comments were.

This was not the person who once had been her father. The wrath and frustration had gone altogether. His answers were always precise, his comments witty, and his knowledge seemed inexhaustible.

Thus, this weekly exercise became a great success. Many visitors only came to see Anonymous. The success of the seminar caused South-Michel to encourage his disciples to go on with the embellishment of their tunnels, as those visitors would go the Pater-noster-tour at least once.

The dwarves were free to instigate all kinds of themes, they were devoted to or attracted by. They paid their tribute and toll likewise to the visitors' expectations, all the more so as their intentions matched. Dwarves liked mysteries and mysticisms of all kind, as long as they were subject or part of.

Treasures – hidden or found ones - enjoyed their souls, and made them feel important, - a feeling, they strove for more than anything else.

When Cory brought forward a formal request of Prime Minister Boetie, suggesting a water ballet as tourist attraction, the alarm bells began to ring at last. They were on the verge of giving up secrecy, if they kept on following such trend.

However, they didn't want to disappoint their friends and suggested in return whether a film could be made instead, showing the same scenes but alienated by the medium, with an entirely different effect. At least this was the hope of the commission, responsible for such public relations.

Naiads were of course common already in numerous films, just like cowboys and cattle. None of the audience would suspect real nixes and naiads, but well disguised actors.

A film could eventually be shown without running the risk of delivering the mer-folk to discovery by press and public. So the film was made and became a great success and a highlight when shown in the hall.

Former Conversors amongst the former students were of course most interested in paying a visit to Susamee's Island, the new refuge of the Conversors. While they had to accept that the former grounds of hidden lust were occupied now by busy students. Thus, they were carried over to Susamee's Island without much jostle by helicopter or submarine.

And if it occurred, and the full moon was standing over Susamee's Island, you might hear strange sounds intermixing with the common ones.

Where else, if not here, was this allowed or even desired?

And when then the circle of the carefully listening audience surrounded the horse-headed violin, that was producing the sweetest, most stunning melodies and tunes autonomously;

...and when a yellow she-dingo-dog tuned in with the clearest voice on the highest possible pitch;

...and the others tried as well as they could to tune in likewise;

...then it could happen that the stones surrounding the blood-pool near-by, started sobbing and had big tears thinning the obscure liquid they hosted. While a phoenix swung off the hearth-flames of Susamee's open kitchen-fire, topping the singing ever more in utmost jubilant joy.

41. Emeritus Hans Henny Henne

Nobody on the grounds of the School of Inbetween believed in a rocket attack. The protective screen prevented from such attacks. This was the decided opinion of the community, who felt safe under the protective cloak, that disguised to place not only, but also cared for absolute security.

Only in case of emergency – for rescuing survivors after a storm - drifting about the area, or risking to get smashed to the rocks and cliffs all over the place – such protective cloak was lifted for seconds, to enable a rescue team doing their job.

Survivors were taken to a mainland hospital as soon as this could be done, and hardly recalled that they had been meanwhile safeguarded by other sources before.

Still, suspicion arose of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth that the leakage in the Pater-noster tunnel could only be caused by a long distance smart bomb missile. All other options were eliminated. All traces had been analysed and investigated thoroughly until the final and only option remained.

Certain debris on the ground of the sea near the leakage spoke a clear language and guided towards such cause. Which didn't make

things easier. The safety-measures taken and in use, didn't allow such assault. That was the dilemma.

The position of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth was revised daily. The code was produced by an old enigma system from the Second World War. The island emerged on each radar screen daily somewhere else, and couldn't be seen with plain eyes anyway. And an energy grid prevented any kind of collision by air, water or land.

Energy was derived from the inner of the earth by a bionic photon-exchanger on mega-nano-transmission basis.

The ancient inventor and constructor of the instalment had been missing for decades, and hadn't been amongst the tourists that were now coming towards the Hub of the World, either.

He came in the end, finally – most likely too late.

The commission, still dealing with the leakage after over one year of severe investigation, was happy to have finally now found an expert, that is, the inventor and constructor – but he was very old and not so fit any more.

He tried at best he could, but couldn't find any mistake. Coding and energy-transmission worked still perfect, as far as such could be seen on a first sight.

– "...With one restriction" the old Emeritus Professor Hans Henny Henne warningly announced.

"During the last months of the war, the Allied managed to unscramble the code of the German Enigma Coding system. That didn't mean of course that now all the world was enabled to decode the many messages that were on the air, because the breach remained strictly top secret confidential, and was only known to a very limited number of selected individuals", the Professor explained.

"Who ever is now fiddling around here, must have access to the secret circle or to the secret reports left behind. There is no other way of cracking the code."

"Yes, but how come nobody detects us, who passes by the island or collides, because he doesn't see? That will remain an eternal riddle. As much I do appreciate the fact as such" Adrian Humperdijk, the former Vice-Headmaster, who was due to become reappointed again because of the tremendous increase of workload.

He was member of the committee therefore, consisting of his wife, the Commissary Head-Mistress, who had taken over from Dorothea again, after the baby and all the additional tasks.

They welcomed the ancient Emeritus Professor Hans Henny Henne as a special guest of honour, who once designed the blueprint of the protective screen, under which they were hiding ever since.

“The energetic grid simulates something like dust or mist” the latter just explained “and transform the image at the same time somewhere else, where the island becomes visible, like a Fata Morgana. Who ever tries to steer towards the island, will be diverted by a gentle semi-bow. He will reckon such as the drift of a hidden jet stream or current, if he realizes at all, as the islands are in fact very small”, their guest went on.

“And how come, that once in a while boats come here in heavy sea and bad weather?” Marsha wanted to know, who still worried about such events, while being years ago now. A sailor had been rescued then out of the boiling sea in one case, while the other was a yacht to be saved last minute from the grip of a greedy cyclone.

“The system reacts on the international emergency alarm code, if the circumstances demand. This must have been so in the two mentioned cases. This is the only explanation why the ship-wrecked managed to get through the protective screen”, Hans Henny Henne explained and looked rather proud of his never failing system.

When asked for the forgetting charm, Hans Henny Henne just shrugged and said such was none of his business.

“I’m scientist – by the way – what is there to be forgotten, anyway, when nobody knows what he should remember. Even those who set foot on island, didn’t know where they were and you will not have given them your exact position, I assume” Hans Henny Henne said laughing.

They didn’t indeed do. After a short stay in the hospital, the ship-wrecked was sent to Sydney by helicopter, while the other went on after the storm on his own, as soon as the weather allowed him to do.

As proud navigator he was eager to define the course himself, while the general course was clear anyway. He trusted in the calculations that had brought him here. No matter whether they complied with reality. Australia you couldn’t miss anyway as long as he kept westward.

The rusty pensioner Hans Henny Henne – way ahead in his eighties, proved to be inexhaustible. What ever there was, any facultative event or excursion – he was with it. No matter where it went, Hans Henny Henne took part. He showed interest in almost everything. He asked questions, was charming and polite, as long as you didn’t refer to his baby, that had brought him here.

His special interest was raised by Anonymous and the Advisor, who jointly appeared. The latter didn't leave his protégée unguided week after week – for almost a year by now.

Hans Henny Henne seemed to have read the book, that is - he worked it through, you could see after a few minutes of exchange, the Advisor, as well as Anonymous - realized to their satisfaction. A brilliant brain like this was rare.

Therefore, Anonymous - some weeks of valuable exchange later - asked seriously, whether Hans Henny Henne would like to come with him, or whether the bonds were still too tight and insolvable that kept him over here.

This was not the case. Hans Henny Henne felt the other way round. His sense strove for more, he was very certain, he said grinning, as if he had reckoned to be ask such question. He indeed felt fatigue, while not really being dissatisfied with what he had achieved during his span of life, however, the one or other invention was still rummaging about his soul, he should have better not made.

“Oh no, we don't view at that as absolute as you may feel now” the Advisor tried to smoothen the upcoming enthusiasm for the supernatural and transcendental on Henne's side.

“Visit means visit... - well, for some it became more than that indeed. Well, we'll see...” the Advisor said, and took the Inventor Hans Henny Henne by the right hand, and Anonymous took his left hand, and all three peacefully drifted off, not much different than before, when the two divine guests swayed in that way.

Somewhat short – and for the remaining lumps of mortal clay disappointing in a way - the lengthy advertised event ended all too soon and abrupt. While they then became aware that none of the present had understood the book. Some even had forgotten about the title.

Was that the educational level they had achieved? Was that the effect the Isolationists feared? Did tourism undermine the substance by sensation? Was the steady suction of passer-bys killing the substance?

Perhaps the entry-test should become widened by a quick-test on the book? - Those in charge wondered, as they feared that Anonymous and the Advisor would never again show up in future, after such a scandal, because the lack of knowledge of course became obvious, and couldn't be hidden before the divine entities.

More than one thousand former students Dorothea had on records and was very happy what could have been done in one and a half years – neglecting the substantial loss and its contra-productive effect in reality.

Had the expectations become true? Did the multiplication factor apply? What was going on in the world in matters of a changing paradigm? And what about the justice in such processes?

Had they put the bet on the wrong horse? Dorothea wondered, because she stood with both feet firmly on the ground. In the Internet ideas and news were spreading by millions in a few hours. A thick book however was something else. But the quintessence, the message as such, should get at the masses and perhaps the Internet was the more adequate lever in getting at the billions.

Or was she only disappointed, since that swirl, when the Inventor Hans Henny Henne was elevated, while Anonymous shocked the audience, which turned out to be absolutely incompetent?

The warnings and reservations of the Isolationists hadn't been all that wrong. Many of the formers didn't look for anything else but an additional and exotic kick, as was advertised, and offered in fact, and didn't care much about the message, they should spread in the world henceforth. They weren't able, because they didn't understand what they were expected to do.

Did they make a mistake over here on the islands? Had the dark side infested them with further agents? Was it the pressure to success, they had built up on their own? Or did things tune in just like that without additional cause?

The colour-screening was no obstacle any more. Those who came in passed it eventually. And if there was nothing to be seen, the controllers didn't look so close. The more as so most of them were beginners and were just learning the other way of seeing themselves.

In dubious cases it said – “a scarcely noticeable aspiration of light grey – or - a tender pale greenish outer rim – ice-blue, very faint stitch...” and the like. The counter-controller waved the aspirants through, as soon as the first hurdle was taken.

There were few complaints for that, and if there was one, then the controllers referred to the workload or their lack of experience. The controllers nor the controlled had to fear consequences anyway.

Was a guest through the control, he changed roles and became king, the entourage of the islands obediently served. What was originally meant as earnest instruction soon became mere folklore, like everywhere in the world, where tourists goofed about.

Thus was the twisted situation, when Inventor Hans Henny Henne turned in, as a strange precious piece of primordial matter. He was himself a very child of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and was still infested by that strange passion that each real disciple somehow caught, and held in its grip lifelong.

Besides, Hans Henny Henne was marked by the prevailing causes, and was now saturated and well resting in himself by a completed life. – He was now ready for the coming world, prepared to return home finally into that ominous ‘Unio Mystica’ he never gave in dreaming of, and would never be able to, no matter what would happen to him.

“And had it been just for the one, things would have been worth while”, Dorothea said somewhat defiant and proved her instinct for trustworthiness. She felt, more than she could bear, and was hiding behind her extrovert façade – who she was dealing with. She could have started crying without knowing why.

Yes, Hans Henny Henne had an air that raised her tears, while at the same time made her laugh just like the name as such did, - what a name: Hans Henny Henne!

Therefore, she suggested as soon as there was the chance, to look for another way of publishing their ideas - a way, they had neglected so far.

“We’ve got to go online” she summed up her musings, which Hans Henny Henne had obviously stimulated without intention. – To be precise – her musings were such, which turned up by the fierce contrast to the group of accompanying tourists in their obscene innocence and ignorance, when they smuggled themselves by the balanced control mechanisms of the islands, and thought it a victory when they succeeded, without minding the risk they ran. Their triumph was all fake and false, while meaning a further blow to Dorothea’s grandiose intentions – deadly blows in a way, she couldn’t compensate.

This might be the true cause for her tears or for the Homeric laughter she had kept under and behind such tears, breaking through once in a while. What else could you do but laugh?

It was no big thing to strangle the flow of tourists. All you needed, were suitable controllers, who took their matter serious, and knew their job.

Soon the information got round that only few inquirers were accepted for entry.

Fact was also, that the number of former students wasn't endless, and most had either come or wouldn't come at all, for what reasons ever. A premise like the School of Inbetween neither attracted the masses, nor would have been able to handle them, if they had come.

The lobby on the centre-pontoon became quiet. Many house-boats were empty, or were charged back by the former residents as a week-end domicile again.

Billy-Joe finally got his solitary site in the open under the nightly dome of heaven, as he was used to since he was a little boy, and never gave up striving for.

Inhabitants on both islands felt relief – at least those who noticed the change, while those responsible for the project got a chance to accept the facts which had been all too obvious already beforehand as well.

The 'Hotel to the Hub of the World' didn't suit the demand as lever of change of the course of the world.

The most valuable achievement might have been the coming home of the congenial Inventor Hans Henny Henne. Perhaps the Hotel had a right to be only until Hans Henny Henne had come home and fulfilled his fate.

A hectic, breathless time was over now. Peace and thoughtfulness returned and the people realized how they had been occupied by the activities, no matter where. The effects had been noticed everywhere.

What was the matter with the congenial Inventor Hans Henny Henne? Did he take his most important secret with him? What was it, the Advisor had to talk over with him and Anonymous? Would he send him back some day, eventually? And did Hans Henny Henne know, where he was going, and what was waiting for him?

Hans Henny Henne appeared like a promising comet of hope on the horizon, unnoticed by the world for a long time and only enlightened for a short period of time before he vanished again, shortly before his final aim. While he shone, he spent bright light and cosy fire and filled the hearts of the human beings who became aware.

Perhaps they'd been well advised if they had also started looking for his testimony, those in the know on the islands asked themselves, and Dorothea had at once an idea, where they could begin with the search.

Many weeks had passed since the congenial Inventor had gone. The house-boat of his, still housed his property, and was attended as if he still lived there. All his property was still stored and safeguarded.

There were no relatives to be notified of his passing away, while the doctor confirmed and certified the facts as such by means of a document. Just in case things weren't set as they were, Arundle and Billy-Joe took a trip again to the virtual centre of all galaxies, and asked for an audience, which wasn't granted however.

Arundle wasn't even allowed to see her father. The Advisor was kind of rude. At least he confirmed that Hans Henny Henne preferred to remain up here, as he could go on in peace with his researches and bring them to conclusions. Anonymous did take refuge very similar some years ago, the Advisor mentioned.

"Our friend doesn't need anything from down there" the Advisor confirmed with a smile to Arundle's unasked question. "Nice of you anyway, to think of that, its all yours now."

So they knew what to do. "Normally you leave behind a letter or something, when you do such step" Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, the Commissary Headmistress of the School of Inbetween, objected, who was looking after formalities as was her job.

"Well, well, he might not have known what was going on with him" her husband, the former Vice-Headmaster, Adrian Humperdijk, thoughtfully said, while all in the round nodded, when welcoming Billy-Joe and Arundle back from their journey, being all curious about their report.

Dorothea was officially asked to open up Hans Henny Henne's locker, the key he had still on him as it seemed. Arundle had forgotten to ask for that, while she had had other things in mind, and didn't want to bother the Advisor with lapillus, who had been so short-cut and closed up anyway.

They weren't explicitly allowed to take care of the belongings of the passed on the one hand, while on the other they weren't prohibited either, thus they decided on their own, referring to the Advisor's 'its all yours now', Arundle did remember in their favour.

Besides, they all were curious as can be, and assumed sensational secrets, as they hoped to find Hans Henny Henne's complete oeuvre being left behind, and Grisella hoped for a similar effect as with Anonymous' work.

And so it really seemed. The small locker was packed and stuffed with tightly scribbled bundles of paper of all kinds, as could be seen by a brief look.

The stuff was something for an expert. With that Professor Scholasticus Slyboots and his assistant and newly appointed Professor, Peter Adams, the two Astronomers and Physicians were asked, as it looked.

For reasons, they both were convinced of, the two believed to have in hands evidence of absolute importance, the world was longingly waiting for, in order to lift the last secrets of time.

If you could manage to have a whole island disappear as you wished, and have it shown up again likewise somewhere else, then you certainly could accomplish other stunning things as well.

42. Hans Henny Henne's Testimony

When looking through the piles of paper both scientists had to accept, that Hans Henny Henne hadn't been an orderly person. The mess was incredible. Scholasticus lacked at all of patience, while Peter Adams at least tried to find access to the labyrinth of that brilliant brain, but of course would have favoured it much, if he'd have had a chance to get help, from which side ever, none the least the author himself, who wasn't out of the world, so to speak, that is, only in a way he was, but in another he was still accessible.

After several weeks of sorting Peter Adams came about with some kind of systematic, whereas the bundles were sorted in three categories, he piled in three separate heaps, in order to bring them into a reasonable inner structure, and have them copied and filed in three main files of three different colours.

As by the colour he named the first one the blue period, the second one the green period and the third one the grey period. By means of colouring he also wanted to give reference to the contents.

Scholasticus adored his former assistant for his congenial idea and had he not yet been Professor, Scholasticus would have made him one. So enthusiastic he was about the system, although he didn't understand it.

He admired any kind of systematic only because he lacked of such ability. This was clearly the limit and made him aware again how tight his possibilities were and how limited his abilities.

The first – the blue – complex dealt with the access to the coding and the calculations of the purposely induced declination. Without an own enigma they would be at the end already before they had started. The intimate knowledge of the coding device enigma was arbitrary, as well as the understanding of the systematic of the coding and decoding processes, as well as the administration of the endless slope system, only the inaugurated had access.

Where did you get such an enigma device, and who would train you the handling and the crypto clearance connected therewith?

When searching for the hardware the researchers got into a disgusting brown swamp, that was undermining the surface of the earth, consisting of rightwing lunatics – collectors of army-stuff and weaponry of all kind, as well as of ‘Herrenrasse’-ideologists and rightwing global strategists, and there dumb followers.

The Professors had nothing to offer but money, that would have raised interest. Money wasn’t the main aspect in those circles, although, everybody was longing for, even those skull-enthusiastic peddlers on the many thousand fairs, and Internet-platforms, where they offered their obscure merchandise.

Thus, Peter Adams purchased an enigma. Only to find out, that it didn’t work. Nobody could tell why not. Was it because they were unable, or was anything missing? Nobody could tell. What they really needed was an expert, who knew such device and knew how to operate and tend. Besides, he had to get access for them to the endless slope which was as secret as anything could be.

Hans Henny Henne, in his youth close friend of the young James Edgar Hoover, had managed such hurdle with bravura those days. They could read in a memoir.

The situation had been entirely different then. While now, no threatening monster was luring locust-like, enforcing a precarious alliance, melting together what soon after fell apart in dismay for good. At least so it seemed. Time changed, and the viewpoints separated as well as the way of life, Hoover once stood for.

Their relation to the world of secret agencies was a marginal one. The only clue was an old comrade and fellow student of Peter, who might recall him even better then vice versa, because he still owed him a great favour.

However, nobody wants to be reminded of ancient depths – definitely not by someone stemming of the dubious circle which Peter

was connected with in the eyes of the American Intelligence Services, where Peter's former friend was serving.

Peter had to do all he could in order to be invited for a brief talk. During the meeting he was trapped without noticing at first and ended up as a mole and undercover agent on a free lance basis. This was the only way of getting any further towards his aim – the secrets of the enigma.

All that he did for the science. Had he known by then what this meant in the near future, he'd run away as fast and far as his feet could carry him.

He was trained on the old enigma, that was still top secret because it still worked and still was the backbone of all coding what so ever.

Peter found out finally why the enigma which they had purchased didn't work. The two cylinders with the key-codes, - that is the heart of the device – were missing. Cylinders you just couldn't get anywhere, no matter how hard you tried, except with the Agency, he was now committed.

Their own enigma was only the outer image of the working device, and could at best serve as a nostalgic piece of history for the freaky scene where it stemmed from, meant to drape the mantelpiece or showroom of such dubious clientele.

In fact, the cylinders weren't worth a dime either without access to the endless slope, that was turning day and night since the days of invention – endless, as the name said.

For overcoming this obstacle, Peter Adams had to involve even deeper. His whole inner life had to be screened and his life became reconstructed. What he had done, how he made his money, who he was friend with or acquainted. – As he strove for the top secret level – that is – he didn't want to but he had to – otherwise there was no chance of getting any further. It was the only way of getting access to the endless slope and the entry procedures. A fact with very inconvenient consequences as Peter Adams soon realized.

For now this hurdle was taken. It was a kind of mystery, so it seemed. He was in the system, and was trained on that miraculous device of espionage prevention.

While being trained he realized that knowledge alone didn't get him any further. Not he could carry away information, instead the system required information from him and sucked out of his fingers, what he knew or even didn't remember that he knew.

At that point he finally became aware that he had been cheated. He had taken the bait like a pupil without life experience. He had

given away his soul, so to speak, in order to get information. Information he now had, but couldn't use. Instead he had been plundered and wasn't himself anymore.

His cry for help reached Arundle one night, who went to bed because strange pain overcame her in the middle of the day (on the southern half of the globe time's the other way round.)

He managed to pass on to her an idea of what was going to happen to him and how much he suffered – over there on the other side of the world in the strong-room dormitory of a secret premise far away from any human home as an apprentice of the J. Edgar Hoover Institute of Applied Crypto Clearance Technology of Los Alamos.

Arundle immediately alarmed Scholasticus, who talked thing over with his wife as well as with his sister-in-law in order to keep those in the know as limited in number as possible. They asked Arundle to see the Advisor as soon as possible, and also have a word with Hans Henny Henne because of that blooming enigma.

While thinking things over, Scholasticus asked for permission to join her. It might be wise to have the information straight and direct, because Arundle was no expert either. Besides, he nourished bad feelings in his heart, he might get rid of that way by letting the congenial Inventor know what mess he had left behind, and what trouble he caused them. He surely could have anticipated what workload was connected with his material.

Dorothea also activated meanwhile her channels, intending to get the poor man back, and have him saved from the fatal trouble he was stuck, while this was not to the least his mistake as well.

Fact was that his record was clean. He was a Canadian citizen and Honourable Professor of a small University in process of foundation – but still...

Arundle got ready for the trip to the virtual centre of the universe and Pooty had the command. The Magic Bow activated the space cloak, after having discussed at length the route to be taken, as usual with the Magic Stone.

Why they had their argument wasn't so clear. Was it because of awkward circumstances out of their range or sabotage from what side ever – the trip didn't succeed, but ended up in an endless waiting slope with a telephone voice and a nice melody, they were soon fed up with. Time passed and passed and the endless slope did what the name said.

Meanwhile, Dorothea could prove what she was able to do and Grisella was also busy, and had her worldwide contacts work. After

all, no less than the future of the world was on the verge. That was why she had to give her best.

Their image as 'Hub of the World' had gone further at last than expected, both noticed independently (with some satisfaction). The tourist business hadn't been so fruitless, but had left remarkable traces, Dorothea learnt to her contentment.

All kinds of celebrities and influential people had obviously been sluiced incognito through the place over here. Not all had made such fuss as had Hans Henny Henne, who caused trouble enough in the aftermath, with his sloppy testimony.

"So what, never think bad of the passed away" Grisella said and meant it. While Hans Henny Henne hadn't really passed away, so they knew, but that was another story.

"This may understand who's entitled" she murmured, the telephone lever still in hands between two calls. The telephone never stood still these days, while she imagined his good old face before her spiritual eye.

Dorothea had her clientele know, how close the break-through was. "The world's on the verge" she assured them repeatedly, since Anonymous had rung the alarm clock.

She praised Peter Adams at best she could, and had he known, his ears had resounded far away in detention and torture.

Dorothea gave the plot a turning by showing the dubious role of Peter's ruthless friend and his deeds in the name of the CIA. This was a course everybody jumped on right away, but came to a sudden halt as soon as they'd have to show their true colours before a tribunal.

She was able to influence the public opinion in favour of the victim, and thus turned the case instantaneously.

After endless hours in the endless slope the virtual missile was set free into the open nothingness of space, where the strivers erred about until they were caught by the gravitation of a celestial body that turned out to be the moon of Laptopia.

While being there, they searched the empty rooms and found indeed some things of interest, Anonymous obviously had forgotten or purposely left behind. Did he do so because such scripts were worthless?

There was in fact evidence of Hans Henny Henne already. How could that be? Had Hans Henny Henne been member of the Brotherhood of Infernalina as well, as it said in one letter which was signed by him. In this letter he terminated his membership in the Brotherhood, because of "insurmountable differences" as it said.

Hans Henny Henne had not been the person he pretended to be, so it seemed. After all, he had been involved in the misdoings of the Brotherhood.

However, were they not underway in a similarly dubious mission right now? In life you always came about circumstances which might lead to misinterpretations, like in case of Peter Adams right now. Still, it was Scholasticus who found the letter absolutely interesting and detecting.

“Let’s assume, there is something in it” he wondered aloud – “then Hans Henny Henne isn’t such an innocent character, but was sticking in the same swamp your father was in, Arundle. Don’t you agree?”

“...he’s pulled himself out by his own...” Arundle put in, who couldn’t do otherwise but agree, while Scholasticus went on with his musings: “If this is so – and there are little doubts left by now – then it was not incidental that Anonymous ordered him or was it the Advisor himself – which might turn out to be the same anyway. Perhaps Hans Henny Henne has to pass a clearing process, similar to the one your father had to undergo. That would mean, Hans Henny Henne isn’t the noble character, we thought him to be. In the end we have nourished a snake on our bosom its deadly bite is hurting poor Peter Adams right now – deadly as kind of metaphor hopefully...”

“Do you mean we can expect a similar important oeuvre from his side as we got from Anonymous?” Billy-Joe now interfered, somewhat cool.

“This might be a little late in this case, I’m afraid. Here we do have to do with a kind of last minute conversion, so to speak. While your dear father converted voluntarily and way ahead on his free will and by conviction, when he realized the full impact of the evil. – Well, let’s hope and pray for Hans Henny Henne a similar turning in fate – had been quite a nice handy chap, in a way...”

“Right, but can we be sure? We might err in his case – wouldn’t be the first time, though...”

Such a letter only says that there had been contacts, but they had been finished years ago, as you can see from the date. Seen from a scientific point of view the Brotherhood of Infernalía was dealing with interesting matter. For a real scientist this must have been rather seductive, and could have led him easily astray.”

“...Would explain why Malicious Marduk so easily spotted our island, by cracking the code of the defence system, which nobody else ever achieved.

His singular oeuvre might stay with Hans Henny Henne, while he possibly betrayed us – and that’s no contradiction.

Conscious or unconscious – we cannot differentiate now any more. However, we all know what Malicius Marduk is able to do, and how easily he seduces human souls.”

“... and animal souls as well” Pooty made himself heard in his pouch.

“The mistake is to be found much earlier. – Yes, that makes sense, all of a sudden, everything becomes clear. And what did we wonder and couldn’t explain...” Arundle murmured, and had the crucial happenings of the previous years pass by before her inner eye, as they came to her mind and as far as she could remember:

“That assault on Convertors’ Island, where Tika was hit by an almost deadly arrow...

The scornful voice in the wind before the crash into the sea...

The madness of the pigs...

Walter’s incredible suffering and death...

The attack from the depth...

And all those many disgraceful troubles amongst each other” – all over she meant to notice the hand of Malicius Marduk, without being able to prove it.

Meanwhile it became obvious that the School of Inbetween and the whole of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth as well as the adjacent had been open over the years and unprotected against Malicius Marduk, while the community thought to be safe under the protective hood.

This was how it might have been. Finally she understood, and felt a deep satisfaction in the aftermath, nevertheless.

All they had to do was altering the coding by inventing another system, and had to keep that secret and prevent Malicius Marduk to get hold of it. Then they’d rest in peace, so to speak. The continuous attacks and mean raids and surprising ambushes which they couldn’t prevent, because they never expected an enemy from this side – all this trouble would then be over, and they’d finally be able to live and dwell in peace.

From the moon of Laptopia the spearhead mission returned to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth without any further trouble.

“If the Advisor doesn’t want to be found, nobody can find him” Arundle explained their failure. Besides, the Magic Bow was offended

and the Magic Stone was even deadly insulted because of that silly matter, Billy-Joe reported, who had been informed by Pooty.

Arundle intended to try again in her dreams. With Peter she managed as well. The poor fellow was still kept in detention of the secret services, and nothing had helped yet to get him released.

His curiosity now became his doom. He knew too much and that couldn't be erased, if he didn't accept a total brainwashing. However, he wouldn't only get rid of the secret knowledge, but also of all his knowledge he had piled up during his academic career. Those in charge of the Intelligence Services didn't believe in a forgetness charm, but stuck to their brachial methods – so it looked.

On the other hand was an Intelligence Service of a civilized state not allowed to ignore basic human rights (definitely not if the delinquent was publicly known and under constant guidance.) Therefore Peter Adams couldn't be kept in detention for ever. So Dorothea and Scholasticus could pick him up three months later in Guantanamo. Peter Adams was broken. His tormentors didn't put a forgetness charm on him, but they did something much more evil, they deleted all his memories of his stay, by traumatizing him badly.

Dorothea was disgusted and so was Scholasticus. That would have juridical consequences, they both agreed. They'd never accept such a treatment.

It took months before Peter Adams was able to go back to work. - As he was the only one who overlooked Hans Henny Henne's testimony, nothing had been done while he was away.

He wasn't so sure any more that the system he had ordered the papers were the ultimate solution still. They had a copy of this set-up anyway, so he could start shovelling around again, without risk.

The work stabilized and encouraged him, and he felt new courage to face life.

The worst during his imprisonment had been the lonesomeness and the uncertainty what was coming next. His torturers always came about with something new, that was entitled to humiliate him and to break his spirit, which had been the aim of the whole procedure.

Had Dorothea not built up so much public pressure, and had involved so many influential celebrities, they'd surely succeeded. It had been only a question of time. Not even the strongest psyche was able to stand such stress for ever.

Slowly the memory returned now. While the whole enigma-complex was deleted and gone. Only touching it caused him severe - even physical pain. His tormentors had reached their goal.

Scholasticus made him familiar with what had happened while he had been away. The whole enigma-complex was now obsolete because Malicius Marduk was member of the inner circle of those in the know, and thus had become master of the endless slope. The encoding of the coordinates of the islands had to be transformed into another cryptic system. Otherwise, the islands couldn't disappear - that is, couldn't be shown elsewhere instead.

For this purpose a specialist had been hired, who was at work already. Before the change could be achieved, the transmission of the energy-grid, that is, the most important part of alienation, - had to be seized. Because, if only one loose end would come free, not only the whole system threatened to collapse, but the islands as such, and would rant and rave them unavoidably to destruction.

Best would be if they construed a one to one model of the energy-grid-system under mock conditions. Before this goal was achieved they had to stick to the old system, which meant that they lay open before the eyes of Malicius Marduk. However, they wouldn't be discovered incidentally by cruising yachts of fish-trawlers.

Based on the instructions in the blue file a model of the system could be reconstructed and became activated.

With the model they used energy from the sun instead of the inner earth, which had the advantage of being constant. This fact had been the reason why Hans Henny Henne based his system on this type of constant energy.

"... or was it, because the evaluation of the sun-energy had been way behind those days" Billy-Joe put in.

Over there, on University Island all roofs were furnished with sun-collectors. Thanks to the hotel there were many more roofs now than just those of the centre-village of the employees.

This was what Peter Adams realized who began to pick up and return to his former shape, as far as scientific work was concerned.

Time was pressing, the islands had to be steered out of this zone of endangerment as soon as possible. Any time a sudden attack by Malicius Marduk was likely. Despite the fact of mistrust and trouble he was sowing just by keeping up such insecurity.

Tika hadn't yet fully recovered from the assault and was still hostile towards Arundle. She might never give in, no matter how long

the wound had healed. The scar would remain, whereas the invisible was the enduring one in question.

The model did work, and the crypto-specialist could install and test his system. He inserted the applicable daily code into the new system and the model disappeared by mystery. The team went outside, and found it near the laboratory somewhat flimsy settled innocently in the grass.

Now he had only to find the heart of the real system, which wasn't so easy, because it was hiding under the Isle of Wisdom-tooth in an unexplored area. The device was well protected and hidden, so that generations of students had been passing by almost daily without noticing, while their protection and security was produced and granted.

The blueprint of the system proved once more the geniality of the old inventor, as far as precision was concerned. Otherwise the model wouldn't have worked. Everything was precise by the thousandth inch, and so it was with the whole system, thus, the new encoding system could be installed in no time.

From now on they were safe and sound, no devil would be able to get in – no one who wasn't invited. The open sea swallowed the two islands (the earth could hardly swallow them) and had them appear some miles further, either here or there, on the radar screens of the passing ships or aeroplanes.

Who ever tried to steer towards such fluoresced point on the screen found himself cheated. As soon as you approached the marks wandered in any possible direction, while the energetic grid prevented collision.

The encoding system named Simultex worked by a simple principle. By means of a probability-generator you received daily changing figure codes, which were implemented automatically without manual interference into the endless slope, as soon as it had been started. Thus, a care-free maintenance was granted.

Those in charge of the islands were relieved, and so were the students. The time of suspicion and conspiracy was over now. Accusations didn't work any longer, as soon as the last Miserior was defeated and driven away.

For the mer-folk a time of disfigurement came to an end. The outlaws were detected as victims of weird forces, responsible for the bloodthirsty and murderous appeal of the befallen. As soon as they

became vaccinated, they regenerated to decent beings, who were quite willing and able to give up the bloody tradition, they used to boast with.

So all misfits who were captured became vaccinated, and in most cases a grey devilish shade became extorted, that disappeared in the groundless clefts towards the liquid inner core of the earth, where they hopefully gathered and were trapped in their original home and hell.

South-Michel had been informed, because everybody cared about the dwarves, who held residence at an even lower level than the naiads and nixes of Australis under the shelf.

Just in case, the dwarves had been supplied with the serum as well, and soon started a campaign to limit the worst forms of goblin trouble. Goblins were of course most vulnerable and were therefore suspected to house the evil ghosts if left alone and unprotected, as had been the case, while the coating security shield was out of order.

The dwarves also discussed whether it might be a good idea if they limited the goblins either in number or duration. While the serum might still be a serious interference into the nature and the habitual reality, that was likely to alter the way of being fundamentally in the long run. Was this, what they really wanted?

On the other hand was the tuberculosis vaccination by now accepted and praised as an advantage and progressive step ahead, although it had been implemented from outside as well. The long life was in fact based on such measures, while tuberculosis had been a serious plague for many generations. The way of life down there without sunshine and loads of dust made them vulnerable for that. Similar to the disease the excesses of puberty with all kinds of aches and pain could be seen, and might be limited by a vaccination, or even overcome at all.

Thus, the broad discussion about the self-understanding and identity in both tribal cultures led to a more liberal attitude. The traditionalists didn't have the last word any more, because they threatened to suffocate all life under their traditional coating.

Slowly the fundamental discernment was spreading, that change would go on infinitely as had taken place ever since. The major trouble with progress was, that it was going on, no matter what the political actors intended. Change was not the culprit, but people were who tried to take advantages and privileges from such fact.

Society could only protect its members by consensus, as could be seen right now once more. Unity arose when people met and listened to what others had to say, and talked things over together until agreement was reached.

43. The Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscope

Peter Adams gradually recovered. His recreation was stimulated by the university routine. 'Small is Beautiful' seemed the motto. The participants seldom exceeded ten in number, thus, communication and contact was certainly intense.

Because of this concentrated care all students quickly advanced and filled their gaps, where ever they occurred.

The boundaries of the subjects weren't yet fixed but permeable to a certain extend, and neighbouring matters could easily become of concern, as seen necessary. The more as so the young and the old Professor were closely related. Peter Adams very well knew that the wife of his former boss had saved his life by arranging his release from imprisonment. He'd have starved to death without help from outside in Guantanamo.

Dorothea could be certain of his life-long thankfulness, and more than that – his deep devotion. For that reason he became Godfather of little Sulamith, when the young father asked him to. While Vasantha Hare became Godmother. Dorothea had wished so explicitly, because she liked Vasantha despite of the fact that they had only met some months ago, when the Hares moved here as well.

The women came from the furthest ends of the world by origin and still were attracted right away, when they met, they both wondered. Their husbands on the other hand didn't get further but were exchanging formal politeness and didn't know what to speak with the other, as they were stuck in their limited universe of their specific subject, and personality, so it seemed.

Dorothea as well as Vasantha soon realized this fact and tried in vain to change their husbands' attitudes. Peter Adams functioned as a kind of moderator between the two men and was therefore invited as well, whenever the couples met privately.

All Professors were expected to care for open and social houses. Little societies therefore met occasionally on neutral grounds, so to speak, down there at the houseboats which were available again after the flow of tourists ebbed.

Out there, on the water it was so romantic. The subtropical nights invited for company. On his pontoon you could hear Billy-Joe softly singing with his guitar. Arundle stayed with him once in awhile, and tuned in with her dark somewhat smoky voice, thus indicating the world wide phenomenon of music, guiding towards joint targets while developing a musical sense.

The elders realized stunningly how little conventional small talk had to do with real conversation. And the Professors noticed how solitary they were at the bottoms of their hearts, and how lost in the world without their wives.

This was the main reason why Dorothea and Vasantha searched for a suitable candidate for Peter Adams, and had those in question show up at such occasions, just like that.

Dorothea didn't sack any of the personnel – now that there was almost no work left in the hotel for the girls. They spent their time mostly idle, walked about flirting with the young men in their range, and enjoy themselves. Most of the maids and waitresses were students who earned a little extra money. That was why it didn't look all that bad for the young Professor, neither way. Intellect was combined with beauty and youth, what else could a young academic desire?

“Jew should she be, after all” Dorothea said to Vasantha and her two daughters, as well as to Arundle who was in the know as well. Dorothea knew from her husband that Peter Adams was no orthodox, but still Jew enough, when it came to earnest considerations.

So the conspiratresses put emphasis on nonchalance. The bigger the event, the more accidental the encounter would become, and the more likely the initial spark would ignite the flames of passion.

Arundle felt like Amour with the bow of love, while her bow was of a more general type.

Amour's arrow hit its target as was supposed to be – two times right in the middle of two hearts. Judith was the chosen one, a graduate student of nano-physics and member of the appropriate faculty of the University of Sydney. She had been jobbing as hostess in the 'Hotel to the Hub of the World', hoping to combine recreation and a little extra money.

Judith Kornblum was a well built appearance, just right to get hold on for a tormented guy like Peter, and to have a family with, and Jewish she also was, what else could he wish?

Peter Adams felt like in the seventh heaven. From afar, from Canada - an old aunt came by – his last living relative, so it seemed, while the wedding day was fixed.

Only three months after they met, they married. The Kornblum-clan welcomed the new member of the family, be it as son-in-law, or brother-in-law, or else, by all means.

Judith had a big family. There were three sisters and two brothers. All Kornblums together – there were some aunts and uncles, and of course many cousins as well – all the Kornblums insisted on a big Jewish wedding, as it should be by tradition and old custom.

The Kornblums didn't live together but were spread all over the globe. However, Judith's marriage nobody would miss. Many tears were flowing, tears of sentiment, or joy, or of reunion, or of merry memories – stemming from what eye ever.

And then the couple left for a honeymoon in Israel, both had dreamed of independently.

Only four months later Peter Adams opened up the last of Hans Henny Henne's files, at last. Nobody cared or dared before. The only one who'd been capable would have been Scholasticus, and he was busy otherwise.

Fit as he was now, Peter Adams engaged in the challenge of a very special kind, as he soon noticed. It took him another half year before he rightly understood why no-one else had tackled the file, but claimed workload instead, like in case of Arundle and Billy-Joe, who were busy with their final exams. They were the only ones, who might have been able to take over from Scholasticus, who failed, for what reason ever.

Nothing had been done all the time – just nothing. And that was really astonishing if you considered the contents and urgency of that file.

But for such blaming it was definitely too late now. Therefore, Peter Adams got involved all the more, supported by his wife, who proved to be a first rate expert.

The two of them needed another year of research and considerations before they brought some light into the affair, and astonishing facts appeared. And what was even more stunning, those facts were of the concrete type, you could do something with them.

This was when Judith came on stage. She saw the chance and grabbed it. And what she found out was more than any one ever could have dreamt of.

One day the young couple felt ready to present their findings to the local public. A general meeting was called in.

“What are those papers of Hans Henny Henne all about?” Peter Adams opened the meeting, that later became the most famous introducing of the one and only ‘Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscope’.

“It had been my own order, my own system that is presenting now something absolutely astounding. In such a case you have to be very careful of course. Not Hans Henny Henne, but I drew the lines and found out about connections, the former inventor might not even have seen. This you have to keep in mind. What ever is going to follow, all kinds of risky conclusions and extravagant musings – not to talk of mere speculations in this context that are pressing forward. However, they turned out to be useful not earlier then there were clues in some kind of reality, and be it the faintest, and even fainter then there could be. While Hans Henny Henne’s ideas cover the most unbelievable tiny dimensions you could think of, that is, in fact, you aren’t able to think of, because it has to do with thinking as such.

This is the dilemma. What ever goes on, it’s moving in so tiny intervals, that there is no meter yet. And this is where Hans Henny Henne comes in. He claims to have found a method of stretching the time – a kind of Slow-motion-technology in the nano-range. –

So far the first step, but that alone isn’t worth a dime. Because you have to see what you slowed down, and to do this, you have to enlarge the sight. Enlargement therefore is the second step.

The rest of the papers in the file deal with the construction of an apparatus bound to stretch time, so you can see tiny spots of light, after being enlarged enormously – that is a million fold or even more.

Slow-down and enlargement interrelate. Only what can be slowed down dramatically can become enlarged and made visible. This way it is possible by means of the Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscopy to get discernments into the Nano-verse. While the Nano-verse – I repeat myself – is far too small and short living for our dimensions and relations.”

The key-word Nano-verse had to be uttered and all who were in the know cocked up right away. The members of the General Assembly of both islands who had been interested in Hans Henny Henne’s testimony were alert now, no matter whether they’d been dreaming or drifting away in their minds.

“As long as Hans Henny Henne lived no-one tried to actually build a Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscope. Thanks to Judith, this

has changed. Judith tackled the task and I proudly present some major targets has been achieved along the way to the distant final aim. But it'll come, you'll see." Thus, Peter Adams finished his report.

Mrs Judith Kornblum-Adams raised and all could see that she was in good hope. She was married for over a year meanwhile.

With a dramatic gesture she uncovered an apparatus that looked a little like a motorbike without wheels, while the handle-bar extended into something that reminded of an eye-doctor's Ophthalmic meter.

The handles on both sides of the bar were movable and served as adjusters of the picture the user saw when looking through the ocular.

"On the right you slow-down" the young woman explained – "and on the left you enlarge. A clear picture you get in the optimal focus of both adjusters.

- ...and more than that is not yet available, not at present, anyhow. But we are still in the beginning. This prototype is the only of its kind" she added with pride in her voice.

"...and built was it by the future Nobel-price winner of Nano-physics – Dr. Judith Kornblum-Adams" Peter added jocularly.

The audience raised to standing ovations and kept on for a good while. Judith tried to slow them down but didn't succeed. Finally she got hold of a microphone and screamed:

"Thank you, thank you so much, but I'm the wrong addressee. The honours deserve someone else. All I did was following the instructions. It's all in there..." and she lifted the heavy blue file, then turned away and stroke her belly, because of the turmoil inside. Her baby seemed not to like what was going on outside.

It took a little while until all calmed down. –

"Most important is the prime mover. It's functioning the same way as is the protective cloak. There are others who are more capable than I am to explain that, I'm sure. The Spectroscope derives its energy from similar sources..."

The defence shield was indeed a personal matter of Professor Scholasticus Slyboots meanwhile.

What was he allowed to disguise? Since that new encoding system the whole matter seemed rather save – stressing on rather – While you could never be absolutely sure...

Scholasticus decided to keep covered. He knew how easy it was to blab things out. The less they knew the better, he thought. It was so easy for a witty thing to prattle away what he or she had heard. And soon all their safety was gone again. Well, not as a whole, but still. A lot of work had been invested in the new security concept, and a

frustrating work as well had it been, so nobody cared for a second trial. Not to mention the enormous costs for the new device.

“There have been enough technological revolutions this day” he concluded his scarce remarks on the energy-concept. “Our energy-supply is efficient, clean, neural and more or less inexhaustible – that much I’m allowed to say, my dear ladies and gentlemen” Professor Slyboots ended his formal interlude and nodded at the Commissary Headmistress, who thankfully smiled back. Because the coming up point on the agenda – that was once again overloaded – was a matter of her own concern, and had to do with her position which was by now a little more defined again.

The assembly had to discuss and decide whether a double top was desirable or whether the whole institution should be kept in one hand.

Much spoke for the ‘Double Chair’ but as much spoke for the single – ‘Big Chair’ as well, the more as so you considered the ‘Hotel to the Hub of the World’ physically located between the institutions.

The most important question that had to be cleared was, if the matters of the School of Inbetween and those of the Island University were of different kind basically, as far as the administrative side was concerned, but also in other - more contextual regards.

Finally the colour-scheme and the screening of all applicants set the goal towards unification.

Marsha saw her chances fade. She wouldn’t dare to handle the whole lot, and would therefore not apply for the ‘Big Chair’ as she and her husband used to call the united top.

While Dorothea felt quite capable administrative-wise – now that Sulamith was no baby any more – and would have liked to go on with her successful management unhindered.

However, she didn’t want to do it on Marsha’s account, who she loved and regarded as a kind of motherly confidante. (They were some 20 years apart.)

Adrian had no decided point of view on that, except that he longed for a little more easiness for himself and his wife. Thus, the mega-job wouldn’t suit his wishes – definitely not!

Insofar he did have an opinion at last. But he would have arranged himself as he always did, and would have probably extended his double life, as he knew himself with one foot amidst the mer-folk, so to speak, while the other was stuck comfortably at home in a cosy slipper.

In short, would things remain as they were, he would apply for the Vice-Headmaster again. But he wouldn't candidate if the other option succeeded.

That was a clear statement. Marsha was thankful for his openness, as it helped her with her own decision. She also announced that she would be available only for the 'Double Chair' and for no other option.

Thus, things were set, the assembly had to decide – and decided for the 'Double Chair'.

Was it a victory of reason or of weakness? In fact, nobody could imagine how to go on without Marsha, and on top of a University you needed a real Professor after all, this was universal consent. (Marsha was only 'some kind of Professor'.)

Thus, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk was elected Headmistress of the School of Inbetween and was appointed extra-ordinary Professor of Somnambular Affairs, while Scholasticus Slyboots was elected the first University President. Dorothea, his wife, was elected by a vast majority as the Administrative Director of the two subdivisions (including the 'Hotel of the Hub of the World'.)

And finally - Watchdog Will Wiesle was nominated Security-Manager, a job he deserved. Adrian was elected Vice-Headmaster again and Peter Adams became the President's deputy. The assembly mounted into some kind of an election party.

The prototype of the Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscope – in short SLOMES - was the attraction of the party. Everybody wanted to have a quick look through the ocular, thus long queues built up for that. However, most stumbled away confused. They had looked into the starry sky by night with strange and other sights then the Milky Way showed, and didn't know what this meant.

Judith however confirmed to those who really wanted to know that they had indeed seen the most little matters of the world, that had been slowed down for them and made visible by enlargement.

"To be quite correct, we show some kind of film, we are able to manipulate. But we do not rape the Nano-world. Not all the world is been slowed down and enlarged inside, but only an image thereof, - thus we do hope and so it was laid down in Hans Henny Henne's script. His epochal work is going to be published soon, I do look forward to."

Whether this explanation of Dr. Kornblum-Adams really improved understanding, could well be doubted. However, closer you

didn't get to such phenomenon. That had nothing to do with Judith's ability, but with the complex matter as such.

44. Hans Henny Henne's Descent to Earth

Arundle didn't want to believe in coincidence. Oh no, they should have found such letters. That was fact. How did that work? First of all, Scholasticus realized the urgency of the matter, right away. Arundle tried to remember. Yes, Scholasticus found and regarded the letter absolutely interesting and informative.

How did he put it? By means of that letter Hans Henny Henne was not at all as harmless as he pretended. Instead, he was stuck in the same swamp as Arundle's father had been torn down.

Hans Henny Henne had been member of the Brotherhood of Infernalía, the letter clearly said, and that could easily be proved. The letter was supposed to be still somewhere up here. As far as she remembered, it had been Scholasticus who took it. She would ask him as soon as possible.

Therefore, they thought it logical then, that the Advisor and Anonymous had caught him, which only could mean that Hans Henny Henne was not as innocent as he pretended to be, while showing the mask of a tourist, interested in everything new and exciting.

All what happened to Peter Adams as a consequence – the enigma-trouble and his CIA encounter - hadn't been accidental either. Although, nobody could predict how greenhorn-like Peter stumbled into any possible trap.

Still it could well be, that they nourished a snake at their bosom, the poisonous bite of which Peter Adams caused so much pain, that he only managed to survive many months later, and was still being healed by his dear loving wife.

Not even the honeymoon was able to cover the wounds inside. Peter had come back from Guantanamo as someone else. He was not the same who had gone out in order to crack the enigma code.

What about the great invention and the construction plan of the SLOMES? Did this apparatus fit into the frame of a conspirator's assault?

However, a conspiracy might be planned for a later date. Or - perhaps Hans Henny Henne had not been ready, when he wrote that letter.

The idea, that the Brotherhood of Infernalina would have ignored such epochal piece of scientific work – was very unlikely, though. -

Slowing down the time, braking time down – that was it – that was what the Brotherhood had been searching for so desperately and rigorously, minding no sacrifice or bloodshed.

Fact was, Hans Henny Henne had been in touch with the Brotherhood of Infernalina, there was no doubt possible.

What did the letter say? Arundle tried to remember, but it didn't help.

“So what” she thought “all I have to do is ask Scholasticus. He took the letter then – or didn't he?”

Scholasticus also remembered the letter, and like Arundle he remembered the contents of great importance, otherwise they wouldn't have been kept in the time-slope and catapulted down here to the moon. This was what Billy-Joe and Pooty confirmed anyway. The two had managed to get through the pHase of silence both magicians covered up with, when they had to deal with ‘the Incidence’ as they called it.

There were areas none of the ‘tow-legged’ was allowed to touch, the stone and the bow whispered at each other secretly in the shade of the night, while they put emphasis on ‘two-legged’, as if such were absolutely ridiculous clowns.

Only Pooty didn't see himself as ‘two-legged’, not in the sense of the meaning, anyhow. The fact, that he could move on two legs didn't make his front paws to arms, despite the fact that he could use his little fingers rather well.

Thus, he cocked up his ears on the other side on Billy-Joe's pontoon. He didn't understand every word, but that much he got. It had been the derivation that caused the landing prohibition, that had been sent from the highest source. While the diversion to the alternative destination, that was the moon of Laptopia, had been part of the landing instructions.

Ignorant as they had been, the Magic Stone and the Magic Bow had tried a forbidden landing all over again, until they had been threatened with severe punishment by the tower of the virtual Centre-Isle – the loss of the magical gift and license, in the end.

From that moment on things worked, just like that, and in no time the whole mishpoke met at the wrong target, that was the moon of Laptopia. Obviously being sent there by purpose.

Scholasticus had taken that letter. Billy-Joe recalled that too, and all of them had read it. But nobody remembered the exact phrasing, that had become important by now. Did the letter refer to the dismissal of Hans Henny Henne or was it an application of membership? Did he want to get in with his letter or did he try to avoid his dismissal?

Where was the letter? Scholasticus searched and rummaged around through all his many piles. He went in the institute and looked at home in his study. In Dorothea's office, and even in the Headmistress's office he had someone search. – All in vain; the letter couldn't be found, as if the earth had swallowed it. - Scholasticus blamed himself for his negligence.

As soon as it became clear that the letter couldn't be found, Scholasticus checked with Bill-Joe whether they got a second chance, and had him ask Arundle and her Magic Bow. They agreed right away and so did Pooty. If anything was wrong at all, it was the constant quarrel between the Magic Bow and the Magic Stone, who blamed each other for being responsible of the entry and landing prohibition, that however had nothing to do with them but had been charged for an entirely different reason. How else could the stubborn have been moved to search the moon-base carefully?

The most important they didn't find there yet, anyway. Therefore, the Advisor knew for sure that any future approach would be redirected towards the moon of Laptopia again.

The most stupid would eventually realize that things were strange. In order not to heat up frustration above boiling point, the Advisor sent Hans Henny Henne together with Anonymous down to the moon-base as well.

Anonymous was habitué there and was well acquainted with the whereabouts. And first of all he knew what kind of papers there still were.

Thing happened as predicted. The entry was prohibited again. This time for 'humanitarian reasons' so the travellers learnt, which sounded even more threadbare to the magicians than the previous diversion due to workload.

They didn't fiddle around this time however, but follow the guiding ray to the Laptopian moon-base, where they arrived in no time

well and safe. Anonymous and Hans Henny Henne were there, already waiting for them.

“You may excuse the Advisor”, Anonymous explained and Hans Henny Henne added “important state affairs”, and offered their help. First of all Hans Henny Henne, who was eager to please. He had a bad consciousness because of all the trouble he had caused – without purpose, though. Nobody had forced Peter Adams on that secret service trip, he had done on his own, and was responsible alone for what then came about. Had he not known that former co-student and mate he’d most likely avoided all the grief and trouble which came at him.

Anonymous was willing to give a detailed report on the former director of the Max-Planck-Institute, who had been Hans Henny Henne, then.

Being asked for that letter in question the space travellers had first found than lost lately on the moon base – Anonymous didn’t know either. Such a letter, he said, had never been at his disposal. As Chairman of the Brotherhood of Infernalina he had been informed about all important applicants, while the detailed recording had been in the hands of his former deputy.

Anonymous got sad and sighed, and you could see the pain in his face, the mentioning of ‘that person’ alone raised.

Hans Henny Henne couldn’t remember either. He was certain that he never had any contact with the Brotherhood of Infernalina – the name as such was unknown to him, he said.

“However, such an institute is larger than you may think” he went on and looked so trustworthy that the alarm-bells started ringing in Billy-Joe’s mind. (Billy-Joe might have been the most sensitive one among the group of space travellers.)

Arundle and Scholasticus gazed also meaningfully at each other. Arundle was certain that someone who lacked of memory that way, had something to hide. Too many incidental circumstances seemed to be meeting here at once. This was certainly more than simple repression. It seemed almost, as if Hans Henny Henne was consciously negating this part of his past. And that would be something entirely different, if he did.

Arundle would have liked to have a word with the Advisor. But as he was not available, she stayed at her father’s side – at least she tried, because the latter stuck to his esoteric enrapture.

Besides, there was no chance of a private talk, because Hans Henny Henne was always present. Thus, you could hardly enquire about him.

They jointly searched the wide rooms of this Laptopian outpost instead – rather listless, as nothing was found except that common space junk of robots. The artifacts seemed to be taking care of the station very well, as far as the human side was concerned. While they cared little about themselves. The human guests felt lesser welcome the longer they stayed. They noticed some kind of atmospheric tension, they couldn't explain. Thus Pooty asked Anonymous quite frankly whether he knew of the whereabouts, and he answered no less frank in a way that didn't fit with the esoteric attitude of his.

“I have the clear advice to hand over Hans Henny Henne, who is bound earthwards again, for obvious reasons, although beyond understanding.”

While saying so, he faded and left the stunned party alone with Hans Henny Henne who looked quite surprised as well.

“That's the way the Advisor is, he leaves the hard toil with others” Arundle commented the sudden departure of her father, while imagining how hard such a decision had been for him.

Being confronted with the alternative of either remaining alone back up here on the space station or coming back to earth with the party, he chose the latter, the more as so late honour was waiting for him because of the career his inventions kept overcoming at the time being.

“Those Nazis like von Braun were no decent personalities either” Scholasticus was lecturing – “those allies were content with lip service. Nobody cared what it was like inside the hearts of such renegades – as long as they did a good job.”

In fact such musings were no part of his obligations, Arundle realized, but didn't comment on that, instead she heard Scholasticus say

“So, you may join our little party, if you may...” and felt somehow disgusted. It was high time for Hans Henny Henne to prove his conscience before leaving with them. The Magic Stone would reject transport of a dubious character anyway, if things weren't settled to his satisfaction beforehand.

“As a matter of fact, he has everything he needs up here” the Magic Stone uttered convincingly. He didn’t feel well with his rejection, either.

Hans Henny Henne was thus stuck halfway to earth and felt a little like Robinson Crusoe.

In no time the virtual spacecraft diminished in the endless width of space that was now flooding over the lonely man majestically, as soon as the talkative humans had gone. However, he was not in the mood of silent contemplation.

What should he do? What should he live on? How should he keep him busy? His papers were missing, and his laboratory anyway. In his panic he started searching the space station, but as he was an old man, his forces soon weakened, and he had himself settle on an old strange looking couch, where he, as soon as he closed his eyes, fell asleep immediately.

At least in his dream he completed his earth-bound trip. As soon as the earth had him back, he felt sheer joy and unspeakable happiness. The fact alone that he felt life back again was of indescribable gaiety – that is to say of pulsating ease and snugness of the limbs, he had never felt before or just had forgotten how this felt.

As a scientist you didn’t have time for such idle musings and introspection. This earth-trip might not be all in vain though, he felt forced to admit. And he wondered, why Robinson Crusoe didn’t think about such matters – in his way.

When he awoke, he noticed a flock of servants surrounding him, who gazed very close with their x-ray eyes at him, thus he shrieked half awake. Who reckons with such surprise?

But then he recalled where he was, and he ordered a supper meal – something light, that wouldn’t be irksome and heavy in the stomach as he yearned back into his dream.

Obedient a huge artifact with a large keyboard before his belly stepped forward and pointed with his scissor-hands at plate and cup on the right, as well as cutlery on the left, and invited Hans Henny Henne to help himself. And that he did.

However, the food was disappointing – some undefined stew of differentiating colours tasting dull. Listlessly the old man poked about on his dish and had a sip of the liquid that was supposed to be coffee.

He soon retired, and this time he went to a real bed, which he found next door, and slipped into an unexpected soft bed, covered by a cosy blanket, where he soon sank back into sleep.

Down on earth scruples arose in the meantime. Had it been really necessary to leave that old man alone up there on the Laptopian moon? Whose idea had that been, anyway?

However, Marsha (as soon as she learnt about the whereabouts) also agreed to have him simmer for a little while. He might perhaps remember then what his relations had been with the Brotherhood of Infernalina.

Nobody wanted to blame him or strove for revenge. It was too late now anyway. However, he should realize that there was no ivory tower for scientists, where they could do what ever they wanted, without minding the consequences, while pending on the intentions of their investors. How else could that be?

Had they only found that blooming letter, proving such scruples. Ignoring facts didn't get the old Professor any further. That was why nobody supported Hans Henny Henne.

A careful health-check Hans Henny Henne had to undergo after his release from the claws of the artifacts. This brought clarity into the dubious twilight. The old Professor suffered from a light form of dementia. Therefore it had been no wonder that his memory failed.

As soon as this was made known, the Magic Bow and the Magic Stone felt ashamed for their lack of intuition, they had shown in the question of transport.

(A medical crew had been sent to the old Professor some days later, when the Advisor asked Arundle about the whereabouts of the returnee.)

There was then only one question left, and that was why heaven didn't accept him for good, but had sent him back to life.

On earth, things went their way, and Anonymous - who looked at things from above -, felt fits of homesickness and nostalgic awe – it had been such a nice time, though, at last after all - down there in the end.

The eager Judith Kornblum-Adams, who was sitting over the papers almost until the last labour-pains, was responsible that Hans Henny Henne's nano-experimental writings were not only published, but also received the attention they deserved.

After a delay of almost twenty years the Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscope that was built after his instructions, did work, while still

pending on the energy grid of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, which remained in secrecy, and wasn't mentioned in the papers either.

“One of my early sins” he called the secret installations inside of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

“Had been kind of final exam” he said. “Finished before I left for good... didn't return, though, until now, when I read this little ad, Dorothea had placed in all major papers around the globe.”

45. SLOMES

Judith delivered twins – a boy and a girl. What a surprise. There were many twins surrounding, while there were no family-related equivalents, neither on her nor on Peters side, as far as he knew.

Peter was absolutely exited and Judith was absolutely exhausted. “That'd it been, then” she commented laconic as soon as she recovered a little from the complicated Caesarean-cut birth, after the medical staff of the little clinic on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth had done their best.

“Two are more than one” the men comforted the young father, who was thinking ahead already and meant to have to bury his dream of a large flock of children.

“Be thankful for everything that went alright. Imagine what could have happened...”

But Peter shut Adrian's mouth quickly. He didn't want to hear what could have happened, while the three weren't at home yet.

While Judith was busy otherwise, Grisella took over the attending of the senile young author. Five years after the sensational success of Anonymous' settling of scores with his former life as the Chairman of the secret Brotherhood of Infernalía, it was high time for another highlight.

The world was waiting for such an advancement. Everywhere you could see cracks in the morose stag of the money-system. Exchange bourses emerged, favoured by the Internet and span about the globe, basing on trust for trust.

The crime rate was extremely low here, and fell under one percent – favourably reckoned. While realistically you didn't jump over the five percent hurdle either.

What ever occurred in the field of the big change in paradigm could be certain of a broad public interest. The discernments into the nanoverse by Hans Henny Henne fitted well into that frame, and had reverence to the phenomenon of the present. No matter whether most had only a very faint idea of that matter.

All the better worked his instructions for the Slow-Motion-Enlarger-Spectroscope. These instructions were precise and clear. Rough estimates figured that some two million SLOMES were built in the first half year after discovery. How many of them actually were put to work and functioned accurately, couldn't be found out and was of little interest for the media and the public.

A clever small firm offered construction sets in a kombi-pack. If you ordered one set, you were offered a second or even a third set, if you agreed to build these as well on your own account. As soon as you delivered five completed functioning sets, your own one was free of charge, because you had paid with part of your life-time, right in the sense of the new times.

This procedure increased the number of SLOMES-permits dramatically, and the state was beginning to show interest as well, because it was in desperate need for liquidity.

Around the world meanwhile some three hundred thousand billions were short, therefore any additional tax was most welcome. While the fees could be granted either in labour-credits or cash.

In many countries every third citizen soon owned a Negative-Credit-Account and could be sent to labour-camps during his annual vacation, where he had to spend his time. Being granted free meals and accommodation.

Mostly young people enjoyed this possibility and acquired all kinds of more or less useful things like the SLOMES – which was pretty useless – being looked at in the light of the day.

What ever could be purchased that way was taken into the NCA-system (Negative Credit Account system). Until someone made the most stunning discovery of the century.

Perhaps it was only a rumour, spread by the Mega-Global-Player, the SLOMES-Ltd meanwhile had become.

Two hours of meditation in front of the SLOMES gained two extra hours in life-time.

Someone who – let's say got seated in front of the SLOMES by eleven o'clock, awoke after two hours of meditation not at one

o'clock, but still at eleven o'clock. As was shown on the clock installed in the Spectroscope steering device, where the two handles for slow-down or enlargements were fitted as well.

The effect had most likely to do with the slow-down lever. Because all other watches in the room or house were bothered only very little.

Still, the absolver of such a procedure felt refreshed and restored all over. Whether this was only a Placebo-effect or real didn't really bother – because people tuned in on such procedure, and soon a vast minority of households called such an apparatus its own. In no time almost a billion people had access to such a SLOMES.

The SLOMES took over from the TV-set and Internet devices. Regular cueing in front of the home-spectroscope became common, so that multiple sets were developed with two or even three users at a time, that were later increased up to five and finally even ten users, who were allowed to take a refreshing look into the nanoverse at the same time.

Such comfort did of course cost. For a moderate device with five sets you were charged some twenty credits.

“Sounds, kind of overcharged in the first place but if broken down into five parts, such twenty credits for five or even ten persons was a relatively moderate price per head of just about two years. And this amount could be split or even transferred...” the advertising said, and was answering the most common worries of potential clients, who were interested - or already partly convinced - in the latest model of a multi-settee SLOMES.

The design had been improved meanwhile. The new SLOMES didn't look like an altered motorbike or a disguised home-trainer.

In the governmental supported SLOMES-factories there were some 500.000 creditors working meanwhile, getting rid of their debts. Depending on talent and education they produced or administered, or they pampered and educated –just as in real life.

Those creditors were dwelling in huge labour-camps. They were fed and cared for to their satisfaction. They only lacked freedom. – Many of them were later remembering that time as the best time of their lives.

Others saw it somewhat different, when they figured and reckoned that they spent more time in the labour-camp than they saved while sitting in front of the SLOMES set at home.

Still, the age of the people increased considerably, statistics figured out since the invention of the SLOMES, from 75 to 80 years. One hundred years were soon no exception any more, but became

average soon. And most important, the aged didn't show. They looked fit and lively, and for those, who couldn't cope for several reasons, good care was available, thanks to the many creditors who had to pay their debts in time.

Besides, the spare-part and transplantation medicine didn't sleep either – quite the opposite, because the demand jumped up just like that, because the common precarious organs like kidneys, heart, liver, lungs and joints as well as arteries and vessels formed the neuralgic weaknesses. Despite the fact that most forms of cancer were on the decline. The slowdown of the tiniest particles had obviously positive side-effects. Cancer-cells either degenerated or slowed down in growth.

The brain was also considered. All kinds of clone-models were bred in secrecy for ethical reasons, but didn't prove suitable for other reasons: cloned brains lacked of life-experience. Identity transfers didn't work.

Ethically acceptable were only the voluntary donations of organs – which were of course a very limited sector. While the breeding of organs on the basis of extracted cells was a more promising field of research. The biggest problem here was the time-factor. In most cases the demand was ordered far too late, thus the breeding had to be based on insufficient material or there was no time for ripening the organ before transplantation.

Say –you needed a new liver – than the organ was too damaged already. Therefore considerations of installing organ banks at an early stage were earnestly undertaken. And spare-part-plants for those who could afford it, were installed, where you could order either your own breed or closely related tissue.

Those, who cared for an own depot had to pay some hundred credits, which was for the time being practically impossible – while you had the choice for a certain period of time of substituting this by a bail of half a million either \$ or €.

The medical procedure worked well. All you had to do was to extract some cells of the specific organ and put them into a breeder and had the organ grow. For able physicists or biologists this was no big affair any more, and was done already manifold, thus, the rumour went.

The breeding of hearts and brains was still crucial when it came to the aesthetics who believed such organs to be the seat of the human soul and individuality.

While the mechanotronics amongst the specialists in matters of transplantation medicine didn't sleep either, but noticed the signs of

time by coming forward with divers bionic models, especially those concerning the heart, that hadn't yet been successfully cloned so far, for the given reasons.

Their strength was the combination of inorganic and organic materials. Plaque-resistant platinum-pipes replaced the coronary vessels and electronic stimulators took over or supported the functions of the atrium.

Hans Henny Henne – meanwhile his own regular client with the SLOMES – accepted at the age of one hundred the Nobel-prize for Medicine in Stockholm. His outstanding performance however became thus reduced to a practical side-effect. But he let things go as they went, as he had been a timid person all his life long, and didn't change now after his resurrection.

He still hadn't overcome the accusations of his new friends, but he had nothing to reproach himself with. He had never had anything to do with the criminal organisation he had been accused to be member. While the veils of forgetfulness sank down over him – in his case a very special form of dementia, he himself managed to stop, by having all his brain-contents transferred on a mini-disk, he could get access to by the sane part of his brain.

As part of the disease the cerebrum and the cerebral cortex were affected by the degeneration, thus it was advisable to refer to more basic brain-parts, which were very capable of taking over steering functions.

Arundle wondered meanwhile whether the Advisor had pulled their legs with Hans Henny Henne, and so did Billy-Joe. – Both made friends with the friendly old man instead, and soon became used to the somewhat bewildering hesitant processes of the intellectual apparatus, because of the mechanotronic peculiarities of his cabled brain.

As a matter of fact, Hans Henny Henne was wholly present and thus he seriously wondered whether he should try an engagement in his old days, and begged for Susamee's hand, who in fact denied, because she didn't want to offend Watchdog Will Wiesle. His friend she would enjoy to be, she let him know coquettishly.

“Never displace an old tree” she jovially said in good mood. Such a proposal she didn't get any day, the less as since by a Nobel-prize winner.

The blooming crucial letter that had caused all the mistrust was found as a reading marker in one of Scholasticus' port-folios, and was found by mere accident.

The Professor had no idea how the letter could have got there. The letter denied a request of cooperation, and was by style and contents a typical standard letter of denial, as they were sent by secretaries on their own.

Thus it hadn't been dementia that caused Hans Henny Henne to forget about this letter. He had most likely never seen it, but had routinely signed it with the mail.

Sulamith Slyboots joined the Primary School when the Adams-twins were just about to start walking. Their mother, Judith Kornblum-Adams, had been honoured together with Hans Henny Henne in Stockholm likewise for her part. After all, she had been the first who managed to construct a functioning SLOMES.

SLOMES Ltd was then founded on her initiative and still was some kind of family affair of the Kornblums while expanding these days incredibly.

The further Arundle and Billy-Joe went with their studies, the less the Advisor was to be seen. Perhaps they now became too old for such kind of visions, they wondered, because they both couldn't think of a better reason. Neither the Magic Bow nor the Magic Stone provided them with explanations of any kind. Had they overdone on their divine account when they asked for Hans Henny Henne's resurrection?

While in the aftermath it looked as if Hans Henny Henne's return to earth had been the best that could have happened to him in his life.

Billy-Joe made it a point of honour, and so did Arundle to strive for a doctor's degree. They were both brooding over their dissertation, which ate him up, as the Magic Stone noticed with frustration. So the stone talked things over with Pooty in sinister darkness of the Medicine Pouch, whether they should look for a more capable bearer.

They soon agreed on someone and had it not been necessary to change places over a larger distance, they would have done the change right away. But as it was, they shied away from this step, the more so as it would have meant the separation from the Magic Bow as well.

Arundle was perhaps only a little more disciplined. She did at least one hour of intensive exercising with her bow daily, and trained

conventional bowing as a means of balancing the lengthy sessions behind the desk.

The bow enjoyed the sportive experience, and sometimes, when he was in the mood, he played her pranks by setting each arrow into the centre, or had her fail each shot, as he pleased.

Therefore, it was a real surprise for the Magic Stone when he and the Magic Bow were asked to set course on the virtual centre of all galaxies, in order to pay a visit to the Advisor and Anonymous – a very last visit, so they understood. While they both knew very well, that such silent thinking didn't mean a thing over here.

The ancient Emeritus Hans Henny Henne was available, but Arundle and Billy-Joe had more and better ideas. They intended to ask the Advisor and Anonymous whether they would counter-read their dissertations as co-examiners – a very disgraceful role, in fact, nobody was delighted of. Both of their themes were closely related to the subjects of interest they shared.

While Arundle wouldn't have been able to say where the interests on the side of the Advisor was located. It had been just a feeling of hers, that shouldn't cheat her, she hoped. She meant to have heard a clear 'yes' from the Advisor already.

She was now only after a definite agreement from his side, and didn't consider a negative reply, which might turn out to be a big mistake. You just couldn't force the Advisor, not matter how clear-cut logic seemed. She might be overestimating her intentions immeasurably. While first of all, they had to achieve a meeting as such.

Besides, she was looking forward to meet her father again, whom she had to give regards from earth. Mrs Waldschmitt had escaped her tax-consultant-office once more. And this time mother and daughter intended to visit the picturesque New Zealand. Right now, Mrs Waldschmitt spent her last days before the return flight on Billy-Joes pontoon down there in the hotel resort of the 'Hub of the World'.

Billy-Joe had changed subjects after leaving the School of Inbetween and turned to the social consequences of the physically inclined change of paradigms.

Since the fundamental discourse between the so-called Isolationists and the so called World-Citizens his ideas were circling around the social consequences of the change of paradigms – and how this change could be influenced. He as well was convinced of the upcoming of that change.

Anonymous was the authentic prophet since he published his epochal work on the failures and mishaps coming along with the change. Therefore Billy-Joe not only wanted to get support from him, but also confirmation for his isolationist approach.

Was it because of the good intentions, that the mood as a whole was positive on the imperial isle out there in the far no-where? The visitors swayed in nevertheless, and right away without any trouble. They landed right at the bottom of the imperial swing-chairs, which started swaying right away, and were put into ever more hefty swinging, as Arundle had never experienced for years – not in her presence, she recalled, that is, she didn't recall.

The Advisor was usually hiding behind one of these pillars, to appear unexpectedly. So he did this time as well. Billy-Joe faced a strong fits of disappointment, because he couldn't see Anonymous accompanying the Advisor, when the latter jumped in with an elegant hop down from one of the swinging chairs. Just when the chair almost met the ground. He stepped aside like an exerciser after a performance on the bars, put his arms to the sides and bowed courteously.

Billy-Joe and Arundle bowed no less respectful and Billy-Joe even bowed and scraped and waved a non-existent hat, as he had seen from South-Michel.

Anonymous smiled imperially and much Rolandus-like already, his daughter realized not without a first trace of timid admiration. If she would tell mother, she wouldn't believe it or bust of pride, she thought, and Anonymous smiled some degrees more favourable.

For a family chat the matter was too official, they all noticed, and kept in line and stuck to their roles. The more so as the Advisor asked Arundle formally for their demand.

She told him right away, as far as her own request was concerned, and received all the answers she had longed for, and stenographed them down on her scratch-pad she had taken with her.

The Emperor grabbed Billy-Joe's arm and stepped aside down along the colonnade with a philosopher's gesture. Billy-Joe respectfully listened and stenographed eagerly as well what ever came from the celebrate mouth, and soon felt forced and confirmed.

More personal questions the protocol didn't allow. Two strong guys grabbed for the swinging chairs and a third heaved the Emperor in the seat, and up he went to the top, where a green faced princess, who was fed up with the pomp, had been swinging all alone, despite the fact that she suffered from sea-sickness.

Was the Princess a natural daughter, Arundle wanted to know. Up to now she had felt certain to be her father's only child. – How you can err! The Advisor broke into a Homeric laughter, and the whole court tuned in, and even Billy-Joe was affected. Was there something all other dug but she didn't?

The audience was over. The swinging chairs disappeared in the background, and cold fog came up out there, which mortals better avoided. So they covered with their protective gear and had the Magic Bow and the Magic Stone do their job.

46. The Natural Daughter

“Has Daddy a second child?” – Arundle busted forth as soon as the line was set and her mother was heard finally. Mrs Waldschmitt had actually only called in order to confirm that she had arrived sound and safe back in old Germany. Arundle couldn't care less, and told her mother what she just had found out about her father, and what he had become meanwhile.

“Imagine his new occupation is Emperor, and he is called Rolandus. Well, and the green-faced person next to him in these swinging chairs, claims to be his natural daughter.”

Arundle was stressing on the term natural as unnatural as possible, in order to focus on its importance.

Mrs Waldschmitt looked bewildered at her phone than hung in for the time being. It was high time for the little one to become acquainted with the economical sides of life, as could be shown right now.

She went to her office and had an Internet connection installed, which didn't cost a penny, but was covered by the flat rate anyway. It took a while until Arundle was found. So Mrs Waldschmitt took the chance to glance over the incoming mail – a big pile had been gathered during her absence, which hadn't been worked through because it was private mail.

A nice side effect of such cam-corder-connections was that you needn't press the lever to your ear but could talk freely in the range of the microphone.

A pompous envelope with a picturesque huge stamp raised her curiosity. It contained a letter announcing the following:

<His Imperial Majesty's Entourage has the Honour of inviting Mistress Elvira Fedora Waldschmitt to take part in the Enthronisation of His Regal Highness Emperor Rolandus in Galactica on Doomsday of the Year One of the Renewed Kingdom of Heaven.>

Mrs Waldschmitt examined the letter and the envelope from all sides, and even turned the inside out for any further advice, but in vain. So she dropped the thing in the waste, thinking it to be a new advertising strategy for some sort of perfume, as the stench still stood in the room, that evaporated from the card.

Arundle had arrived finally and waved her arms to raise attention. So Mrs Waldschmitt forgot about that funny advertisement and tried to satisfy her daughter's curiosity.

However, it wasn't very much she could say about that so-called natural daughter. So Arundle explained what she had found out and what had happened on that virtual intergalactic centre. Her mother was all astounded how far her daughter came about.

"Emperor Rolandus, you say?" – she asked and fished the smelly card out of the bin again.

"I think, I do have something for you" she said, noticing that the letter had been from her former husband - that is to say – about him, to be precise.

"Seems to be a rather set character. After all, a notification. An invitation might have been more appropriate, though. On the other hand, if you consider the location... Might have been somewhat troublesome to get there, anyway..."

Arundle eased her down by pointing out that she hadn't even got such a notification, but became aware right now only of that enthronisation that must have been taken place just recently.

"And I thought I could tell you something real thrilling about Dad.

Well, that's quite something, isn't it? He and Emperor – and you should have seen this entourage, that is marching in every time. It seems, as if they all are named Rolandus, because the Emperor we met years ago was also an Emperor Rolandus, am I right, Billy-Joe?" she said and turned to the background where Billy-Joe uttered an almost silent 'Yes'.

"As a matter of fact, we are looking for a second evaluator for our dissertations, you ought to know. And Billy-Joe was thinking that Anonymous would be just right, because he is on the same wave... – at least, that is, what Billy-Joe has on his mind. But that doesn't work any more, of course, as Anonymous has now become Emperor, and most likely won't be able to do the job, - or is he still, Billy-Joe?"

Billy-Joe nodded fiercely still in the background. “Has given me some helpful hints” he said somewhat self content.

Mother and daughter looked at each other meaningfully, as far as this could be done via cam-corder, because they remembered the communication between the two rather different persons, but that was way back and years ago, and a long time before Mr Waldschmitt’s Great conversational Awakening, so to speak.

While her half-sister became more familiar, Arundle felt a certain shyness, when thinking of her. She even infested her mother, who seemed to feel something even through the web, at least she thought so.

“That’s the way, a mother feels” Mrs Waldschmitt thought and thus empathically took part in the confusion her daughter was in.

In a way Arundle was glad that she hadn’t to sit on such shaky seat for the time of the ceremony. On the other hand she felt a stitch of jealousy for being put back.

But Arundle didn’t want to analyse her confusion. Still she checked in Dorothea’s big lexicon in the office, where she had been called. (Billy-Joe took over meanwhile and exchanged some small talk with her mother.) First of all, Arundle wanted to find out, what a natural daughter was, after all.

In the lexicon she found out that this referred to children of unmarried women whose fathers were married otherwise or not married at all, as were the women in most cases. In former times begot by the feudal lords, who behaved like madmen. Worst in times of absolutism and later on in the pseudo-feudal slaveholder system of the Southern States of the later United States of America.

After Arundle had read that, Billy-Joe tried to bring her down. He did this with the gentle smile of his, you couldn’t resist. “The Advisor”, he said, “had called the Princess a natural daughter of the Emperor only to confuse Arundle. His intention had been to get her out of her camouflage, and that trick had been successful, as could be seen”, he went on. – “The Princess as such didn’t show much natural appeal. While this was of course a matter of interpretation.”

Mrs Waldschmitt understood and didn’t understand likewise.

“Didn’t work, after all. Arundle couldn’t be tempted” Billy-Joe added. “Arundle didn’t tune in on the bail. Perhaps, because we all had to laugh” – and confused the poor mother with that completely, who still stayed in front of the cam-corder.

“Quite an amazing thing” she mentioned again and again, whenever quietness broke out, nodding towards the screen with her raised chin - waiting for the things to come.

Arundle had gone to the washroom, so Billy-Joe was all free to explain to Mrs Waldschmitt the complex emotional situation, resulting from the appearance of that Princess. “Arundle couldn’t help it, - has been having feared such facts for a long time before” he thoughtfully went on.

Mrs Waldschmitt thought to know somewhat better what was going on in her daughter. She therefore wanted to find out when the princess showed up for the first time, in the mentioned manner, and made Billy-Joe wonder how she could know intimate facts like that at all.

But than Arundle was back and Billy-Joe swallowed half of the sentence that lay on his tongue, so to speak.

“We are, who we are” he intended to say. But then he thought of the Shaman of the Churingas, who was getting nearer to him likewise. He was less then a hundred years away meanwhile, and got closer any day, he figured, while he was soon celebrating his twenty-fifth birthday.

“You do have to keep in mind, what time is doing with you” he said to Mrs Waldschmitt just like that, now, while Arundle was listening. “See, and reckon how much time a hundred years are. If you look at that, you surely get rid of the fear you alter ego is pressing on you, as it appears to be rather unreal. Perhaps we do overestimate our abilities of dreaming and wandering places, now with the web, where all people are interconnected worldwide, and can speak and see each other any time. All we have to do is go online, that’s all. Everything is much more definite by now. Only along the time-scale we can’t go on that way. But that will come as well.”

Billy-Joe’s thoughts took him away into the wide lands of philosophy. He forgot about Mrs Waldschmitt, who was still sitting in front of her cam-corder, and didn’t dare to leave the room. She was rather astonished and listened as well as she could, while Arundle showed signs of impatience, and finally broke out, when Billy-Joe had to take a deep breath.

She pushed him aside, looked intensely at her mother through the ocular and wanted to find out now. So, Mrs Waldschmitt confessed at last, what Arundle had suspected already, and that was a meaningful liaison of her father.

“A kind of early wrong-doing in his youth, as he confessed to me. - he had lost out of sight for good many years... – and then you came, and everything was all different from then on, you know, you were our real and only child...”

Arundle learnt only little more than she had known before, despite the fact that she knew now for sure, and needn't rely on assumptions.

“You are becoming twenty three years of age, without knowing such basics. What did you think of that? Did you think an only child is not interested in such facts? How much did I long for a sister. How much did I envy Florinna and Corinia.”

Now, it was a little late for such accusations, Mrs Waldschmitt thought. She was the wrong addressee, after all. It was Roland who had failed.

It was high time to say good bye. Mrs Waldschmitt had been underway for twenty four hours, and the fact that she slept some hours on the plane changed little. She longed for a real bed. Even more so as Arundle seemed to give in and accept the facts as such. Things couldn't be changed anyway. Definitely not from her side.

“We'll stay in touch, I promise, have a nice time, dear.”

At least Arundle knew about the facts - or what she thought the facts were. Because things weren't as simple as she put them. Reality still was more complex than that, and was by far less simple.

With her musings on the parallel worlds she had been closer to the truth than ever since, but she didn't focus on that right now - and in this context, for whatever reason.

For the time being she felt rather content of not having to sit green-faced on a rocking chair in one hundred years, and work through that silly protocol of a court, beside all other negative outlooks on the future.

This was the one side, but when she thought of the Advisor, things looked much different. She did enjoy the conversations with him. And if she had to renounce such talks for some time, because the Advisor didn't care for her, or for what ever reason, she missed something precious and important in her life.

Being her co-examiner for the time being, he couldn't slip away during the coming up months, because he had firmly agreed on the job. Well, he did, or didn't he? She wasn't all that certain now.

In her ideas she was living in her own worlds anyway. Therefore, her dissertation also dealt with the phenomena of time in the poly-verse. She was absorbed by that and could dive into this poly-verse like into the dream-world, she never questioned, but raised stability from there by defining the reality basically new and founded it on conceivability and imaginable probability.

Arundle thus raised the thoughts into reality and put it on the same level as the so-called solid facts of the material world.

Because the deeper you explored the so-called facts, the more vague they became. As to her definition not only the concrete was real, but also everything else that could be imagined and thought.

By that she extended the limits of understanding, which had become obsolete anyway, but still limited the thinking and the research in physics and sciences in general.

Still, Arundle noticed new and other limitations, as they arose from the verbal conditions of human being. Because imagination and thinking were following the inherited tracks of tradition. No matter how free an individual felt. The horizon remained thus tight.

All what could be imagined was still just a faint veil of the possible and unimaginable. Confronted with the opening up of such realities, the human imagination proved itself as a meagre little daisy amidst the splendour of orchids of Amazonia, or perhaps a little closer – in the wide sea of Dutch tulip-breeding, while daisy won't grow in Amazonia.

The unimaginable possibilities form a powerful factor, which cannot be dealt with in language alone, in order to think it or transform into language. The researcher will experience similar discernments as the biologist in the secret depths of the oceans, where he discovers beings of an indescribable singularity. Beings so strange, that no-one could ever dream of them. The human imagination just lacks and fails.

Arundle didn't want to go deeper into detail down here at the bottom of the sea, when it came to the mer-folk. There were surely hundreds, or even thousands of strange forms of life, not the most excessive imagination could dream of. Same as we are being left alone with the unspeakable.

With her mentor Arundle discussed regularly and in detail every week the progress her dissertation made, and was generally well accepted. Grisella was proud of her disciple, even more so as she knew her from the early days of childhood, and had guided her progress in life.

That much time had passed, and so much had happened. Arundle was like a daughter to her, she well felt when they sat together in grounding exchange of ideas and thoughts.

Arundle would make her way and would stick to her mission. That was very clear to the Professor, no matter how vague the outlook still was. Having her as assistant would be quite something the

Professor mused and felt happy about the facilities available now. She could do her best to grant Arundle's career.

One step on her ladder of emancipation was to get rid of the Advisor's ties, whom she didn't find qualified as co-editor. But how could she make that clear to Arundle? And how could she do it in a way she accepted it?

Arundle was still living in her worlds like she had been doing ever since and often enough the layers of reality mingled and couldn't be clearly separated.

As a student she should have known that you could only nominate a real Professor holding a *venia legendi*^{lxiii} as examiner or co-examiner.

This is what Grisella was thinking when she felt a slight fits of nuisance. There might be hiding a rather exulted little Princess in her darling.

She laughed partly angry, but also passionate. She did know Arundle's difficulties with that so-called 'natural daughter' of her father, who had altered so dramatically, and had even become Emperor at last – what a career.

However, such title didn't replace a proper nomination over here. While she didn't doubt that Anonymous with his epochal best-seller would have made it at almost any university.

While she thought that, Grisella noticed her mistake. She had mixed Arundle up with her friend Billy-Joe, funny enough, while the so-called Advisor was even worse, who was Arundle's first choice.

So she secretly arranged with Scholasticus to countercheck the dissertations of their disciples in reverse, thus avoiding any probable congestion or distraction, from what ever side in the future.

Despite such worries she was also very keen on Billy-Joe's writings, which had to do with the late quarrels between the so-called Isolationists and the so-called World Citizens, right here, on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Scholasticus also saw the point in the argument. He knew that the consciousness of the average Physician ended at the gate to the ivory tower, where he sat in, researching. "Not only the consciousness of you physicians is ending right there" Grisella said while she was talking with her brother-in-law about their two disciples, who were now mutually accepted on both sides.

They were convinced of the quality and originality of both dissertations, despite the fact that they were still in the process of becoming established.

47. Here-Site and Now-Time

“What about a sample? I’m really curious. I’m sure you have something for me” Grisella wanted to know and pushed her encouragingly in the side. She knew, she was right. “Just load me something down on my laptop, will you? I’m really curious meanwhile. Besides, I do have a little spare time right now.”

Arundle didn’t think twice, but did as she was told.

“In the beginning you find a reflection on the essence of time – as a beginning...” she said as casually as possible – “titled:

<Here-Site and Now-Time>

Time used to be a kind of convention. Right from the beginning, people used the heart-beat at ease as the basic metre. While the sequence of days and seasons were deriving naturally, you could more or less precise divide, being a local agreement, that could be altered by necessity, and calendars were set by the movements of stars and planets. Conditioned by season and the eclipse of the sun, days were regionally of rather different length, while the female cycle of the moon added the months and supplemented the years and seasons.”

Thus it went on – that the adjacent tribal culture didn’t have a linear understanding of time, but understood life in cycles, following and taking over from each other in the same cyclic manner.

Grisella stopped. She couldn’t yet see clearly where this long-winded reflection aimed. You could see the effort, and the resentments of the so-called Isolationists, you could also discover. However, Arundle didn’t glorify anything, as others did. She didn’t idealize this first form of social organisation to the lost paradise. She didn’t reflect on the mystic advantages of such a way of life in close relation with nature.

However, that might follow soon. Only that much the young author wanted to make clear. Mankind didn’t need an idea of time on that level of culture, and therefore didn’t develop one.

Grisella stopped again. She looked on her watch. She still had some minutes.

Instead of looking closer at the advantages of the tribal culture, Arundle turned to Monotheism – the early fruit of the Israelite tribes. The Israelites failed to overcome the shortcomings of magic

transcendence, but lost instead the advantages of such nature-bound dwelling.

Reference to the German romantic period intended to prove such, however didn't meet the point – Grisella realized. This might be worth while discussing. She would surly be able to stimulate more and more precise arguments.

She stopped reading and went for lunch. In the afternoon she would meet Arundle anyway during the office hour, as was agreed.

In the meeting she confronted Arundle with harsh critique: “Where the mystic correlation with the forces of nature is lost, God becomes jailed in the triangle of rite, sacrifice and punishment. The own spirit becomes obsolete, because the own needs overwhelm all inspiration. The voices from the transcendence hardly pass through the screams of agony.”

Arundle nodded and took notes eagerly, than she added agreeing: “Yes, even Billy-Joe's Churingas did better than that – well that is – are going to do better in the far future. – The fact, that tribal cultures cannot become extinct, indicate, how vital they are, and that they bring along something of great importance that is essential for all other forms of culture” Arundle agreed to what her Professor had said. She would certainly take up the criticism.

They might even be on the train of discovering the beginning of the Cardinal Mistake, that might be found at the verge of change from tribal cultures to antique city-states related with monotheism, that was developing antithetic.

“The question is, whether loss and gain are in balance and if human life became fuller”, Arundle added to what she had said before.

Since she was able to look into Billy-Joe's self (whom she took as a representative of the tribal culture – which might not be wholly true.) And since she understood his way of organizing his life to a certain extend, - this way of life appeared to her like an unreachable ideal of human culture, rather than an accidental step aside on Man's way to fulfilment and extensive development and unfolding of all sources and potentials.

“The pHase of pantheistic presence, when Man was able to realize the divine reality, is indeed fascinating”, Grisella put in. “ In fact, if you only look at the daemons of the black magicians you may feel creepy. But people like the Shamaness Susamee or Billy-Joe, Pooty and Walter show a tremendous lot of knowledge and a kind of wisdom, that is not only sympathetic but cannot be reach on otherwise”, Grisella was speeding up.

“We’re only short of South-Michel now”, Arundle thought and asked herself if the dwarves would also be subsumed under the category of tribal culture, or even the mer-folk...

“You mustn’t have too tight a look, I’d say” Grisella nodded agreeing, as if she had read the thoughts. An ability, that was trained over here in the School of Inbetween.

“Things like that were lost in the so-called process of civilisation. Very few do believe in the art of thought-reading or train it systematically, like we do” Arundle wondered, and Grisella nodded again, as if she had understood.

Arundle glanced over her script. Grisella looked on the watch. The hour had passed just like that and outside somebody else was surely waiting, indicating how fast the time had passed.

So they parted. At the latest in a week’s time they would meet again. Grisella intended to read on, as well as she could. And that she did.

She learned of the epochal deed of a Jewish prophet of Nazareth, who turned thing upside down by sacrificing the flesh-derived God for Mankind in order to get Man out of the creational generality of all beings. By way of this means, they received indeed the necessary value to become worth the sacrifice, which had long-term and lasting consequences, Arundle was able to show and describe in congenial phrasing, Grisella liked best, because it reflected her subject and fitted well in.

While to the end Arundle’s turning towards Christianity seemed Grisella kind of patch pocketed. Perhaps she overdid a bit, by pretending to know God’s thoughts. Or had that really been laid down in the scriptures?

Vaguely she recalled the famous sermon on the mountain. Perhaps Arundle’s impudence was based on that sermon, and was no impudence after all?

The contradiction that tore the medieval society apart was well extracted and outlined. Arundle was in command of a light attitude, touching the subjects and have them show up for short periods of time then disappear again, without really getting lost. Grisella was delighted.

The further she read on, the more she was attracted by the historical frame that was outlined. Arundle connected in great wide lines the millenniums and centennials interrelating them with modern guidelines of scientific and philosophical provenience.

Of help might have been without doubt by now to focus on the being as such. Otherwise the script could be mistaken as idealistic and would lead the reader astray on a very wrong track. It was high time to have the reader enter the world of quark and quantum, Grisella felt. However, that would certainly come soon.

First of all, Arundle was on a good track, Grisella concluded and grabbed for the script, she had put aside in reflection to read on.

Her expectations were not disappointed. Arundle referred to Marx' praise of the classless society and the empire of freedom Marx had in mind that was so closely related to the Empire of God as Jesus of Nazareth had exemplified in several allegories which were nurtured by the same teleological mode, as most clearly demonstrated in the following allegory:

Another parable he put before them, saying: 'The Kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.' (Mt 13, 31-32)

The German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel procured the same parable by replacing the grain of mustard seed by an acorn, Arundle found out.

The reason, why the German philosopher preferred the acorn to the grain of mustard seed, was perhaps that he didn't know or didn't expect his readers to know the mustard shrub or tree, but was familiar with the generating of oak-trees – as Arundle somewhat mockingly concluded.

The history of Mankind would be then reflected by the parable of the acorn, just the same as by the grain of mustard seed, because the acorn also becomes the biggest of all trees in the German forests.

The social growth as seen by the Nazarene or the German philosopher – was likewise regarded as a natural affair, as if things grew just like that. A view that was severely opposed by Karl Marx, who explained and described such growth as the most dramatic and fundamental class struggles, generating by dialectical method the growth of Man.

Marx on the other hand neglected the sheer bio-mass of Man, that is approaching the tenth billion in the 21st century and is exceeding all boundaries of human imagination, just by number and incalculable potencies of productivity and inventive spirit.

Mankind's growing – as Grisella's disciple put it – not in biological terms alone, but also 'humanisc' covering all dimensions of humanness.

If you only looked at the nightmare of the amorphous chaotic mass, you reflected a strange picture of Man. Such a human neglects his own potentials, and has no trust in the collective corrective, which always comes too late, but still does its job most stunningly, and seeks its track, coming from a wholly unexpected side.

Arundle was on the right track. Grisella found herself confirmed the most stimulating way, and felt reminded of her own dreams of her youth, she had nurtured deep in her heart, buried there, but never forgotten.

Now she could see them growing up, and blossoming in the nicest possible way, being enriched in humanised terms.

48. The Feast

The job was done. Arundle and Billy-Joe received their doctors' hats in a ceremony that turned out to be more sophisticated than expected, and received their diplomas – the first ones of the newly appointed Island-University. The whole staffs were very proud and proudest of all was the President, Professor Scholasticus Slyboots.

Meanwhile the corridors didn't echo the rare steps of passer-bys. The institution was humming of life everywhere on all 24 levels of the subsoil building.

And still were craftsmen of all kinds busy in the hidden corridors and caves in the back of the socle. South-Michel's dwarves couldn't be stopped. However, orderly experts from the architect's office also mingled to give the bustle a formal touch.

The investigation of the assault on the pater noster tunnel had come to a surprising conclusion. There had been no assault. The whole affair had be a chain of unlucky incidents, an accident, no-one was to be blamed for, while the debris of the rocket couldn't be explained finally.

Some people might try and discriminate the dwarves and have them show up in a gloomy light, because their attitude and eagerness led to envy and questions about their character and shyness. They

were different. They never got rid of the touch of the unreal. Their deeds and constructions were mistrusted likewise.

“What ever they come along with, is a risk and will collapse sooner or later...” was the prejudicial opinion. They worked just too fast and fulfilled gigantic tasks with the most primitive means in no time – managed to drill through the hardest rocks without any technical device – at least you couldn’t find any in their vicinity, whenever you tried. And where should modern technical knowledge derive for them?

For the dwarves the worst thing was already that someone knew of them, and therefore they didn’t try to correct any false opinion spread about them, after having had an extensive discussion with South-Michel.

Scholasticus, the new President, confronted South-Michel with the alternative of either leaving for good with his dwarves, or keep quiet for the sake of peace and secrecy. There were already loads of inquiries in Dorothea’s office, which could hardly be satisfied, no matter how she tried.

South-Michel promised improvement. He and his shy but eager dwarves kept grimly on the depth of the earth, searching for all kinds of treasures which weren’t honoured by ignorant humans.

Just a few tunnels they would dig and have them clad with a little gold and diamonds as they pleased.

The boundaries were set, and solid steel pillars granted the stability of the islands from top to tow, so to speak, while the socles could meanwhile be well compared with loaves of Swiss cheese, because of the busy dwarves.

Dorothea had to try hard in order to raise funds for that additional safety measure. What she saved on the one hand, because of the dwarves, she had to spend on the other – at least she thought, she had to.

Nobody would ever find similarly strange shapes of rooms and corridors, with artificial light from hidden wells and secret domes – certainly no university or campus. Therefore, such locations were reserved for graduates only. Not to seduce anyone fiddling about on the glittering walls by night.

Somewhat beautifully scaring most of the students found the site, when entering for the first time, and couldn’t imagine to work and stay there day by day. – Still some managed. And the Sublimations, who were so much possessed by wind and width, enjoyed the hidden glamour most and thought it a great honour dwelling there-in.

Had Tibor not been merrily engaged to his bride Tika, he might have come over here from Susamee's Island in order to take possession of such locations.

"This can be helped" South-Michel uttered somewhat loudmouthed, when he learnt of such demand. He asked a squadron of dwarves over to Susamee's Island by helicopter and had them go to work right away. And in less than one week they were completely disappeared in the ground.

Materials which they couldn't find, they had brought here – well packed and hidden under severe control – strange machinery and tools, never seen by a human eye before.

Watchdog Will Wiesle was in his element and didn't rest day and night until the whole splendour was expedited in the earth.

All that South-Michel did for Tibor, because he liked him and adored him, as a friend of the winds. He liked him the more so as he embodied the most obvious contradiction to a dwarf's self. But still enjoyed and appreciated what the dwarves did, like all other Sublimations on the island.

But first of all South-Michel did that for Tibor, because he had heard him play the horse-headed violin once with his heart-of-stone melting tunes. Since then he couldn't get the Godly and heartbreaking sound out of his ears again – almost as inconvenient as the Tinnitus, he felt reminded of. And he began to understand the Advisor in the after math.

Perhaps, if he was allowed to participate each month in the concert of the self-induced horse-headed violin, so he thought, he might get rid of this inconvenient side-effect and only the Godly pleasure would remain.

In any case he would have a dependence and a good reason of coming over here and had his timetable altered respectively, he had to justify as well. That was the way it was, though. Master in his own house was he not, but who is that?

Yes, there were several festival-occasions. Arundle and Billy-Joe feasted until they became sick. They drowned their new titles in champagne, they weren't at all used.

The party was great before and the self-induced horse-headed violin did its best in the moonlight of the full moon, while the choir of the enchanted topped the mystery of the night. The stones started sobbing and even the moon couldn't keep countenance but had tears rolling over her cheeks and dropping heavy on the moist ground with loud splashes.

The sea went foamy and the naiads and nixes covered their eyes in the water, not to show too much of their emotions – thus they were.

From under the ground dwarves' eyes spied through mole-hills, and South-Michel placed himself virtually under the moon, holding the Advisor in his arm. Both sobbed and excused one another the Tinnitus and the bloody nose.

Only the ancient Emeritus Hans Henny Henne couldn't manage with his brain-cables. Either it was the bionic gearing or the fact that music didn't ever bother him all his life. (Such people there are.)

Susamee had him join the circle of dancers, and he let go, because he felt passion for her as well, just like Watchdog Will Wiesle, who was watching the two carefully, and caused Susamee to try a ménage à trois. Only in theory of course and wholly esoterically – almost virtual, because they weren't youngsters any more, except the Watchdog, to a certain extend, who was meanwhile leading a sound and regulated life again, thus presenting himself of advanced age as well.

“Wine, Wife and Chants” the old drunken Hans Henny Henne stammered, whose bionic gear just chuckled in, as soon as he sat back on his tear-wet rock. Because the self-induced horse-headed violin had stopped. The false animals went also silent and crept - because of the silver-stripe on the horizon - back into the underbrush, where the self-induced horse-headed violin followed on hurried thin little legs, having also to avoid the light of the day.

This exactly was the time, when Billy-Joe vomited because he was sick of too much champagne. Arundle did likewise, partly of love, and while she could imagine something for the first time in her life, - as soon as she would be clear in her head.

Volume 5: Council of the Menora

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1. The Colloquium

„Do things change, while known? Does knowledge influence the course of things?“ Grisella asked her questions into the open,

so to speak. Each and everyone could feel addressed or nobody at the same time.

“I think” Arundle answered after some time elapsed “it’s like occult glass moving. As everybody knows or suggests, what could be right in their sense. He or she gives his or her finger an unknown drive. While everybody is doing this, the result turns out to be marvelous or even strange. The outcome doesn’t meet anyone’s intention – neither the unconscious nor the conscious...”

“That’s kind of queer, I didn’t look at it that way. They all cheat and he who cheats hardest wins” Pooty exclaimed. Billy-Joe just shrugged. In Arundle’s reply he couldn’t see any connection to Grisella’s questions. But he was too polite to bust out with that.

Grisella was also not happy with what was said. “Let’s take an example, then things might become clearer. Do you have any idea?”

All were wondering badly, but nobody opened his or her mouth. It wasn’t easy to find something that happened and that was known to those involved. At first, the participants of the colloquium thought of forces in nature. A thunderstorm for example. Everybody, who experienced a thunderstorm, knew what was going on. Of course not in detail with reference to direction and impact of the atmospheric unloading and if the course was kept once taken, or might change direction, which was of course unlikely. Storm and clouds would follow their paths. It would thunder and flash and the detonations would come done just like that. You knew all that, but couldn’t change. Your knowledge wouldn’t alter the ongoing event.

‘Was this meant?’ - Arundle asked herself in a general air of empathy which ascertained her that everybody was thinking of a thunderstorm, just as she did.

“Than you know what you have” she said therefore aloud. “... and know it not. A while ago four gulfers fled into a cabin and were hit by a flash of lighting. They surely wouldn’t have done so, if they had known, what was going to happen to them. They might have stayed away if they had known that there was no lightning conductor installed. With that, I’d like to say, that you may know what is going on, but you don’t know how far it is of your concern. This is the only way a herd of zebras may approach a drinking well without panic, in order to still their thirst. And the mother of a just born deer can leave its fawn in order to graze, who might be fetched by the fox, while the roe is away...”

“I think, the deers approach the water source one way or the other” Billy-Joe acknowledged Arundle’s explanation. “The thirst and the herd instinct keep them together. Because alone and thirsty they are no less surely determined to die...” – and Pooty added “no, - in fact more definite, that’s for sure...”

“Yes, and the mother roe runs out of milk without proper nutrition”, Billy- Joe went on. “It’s everywhere a match of life and death. Animals live with that basic decision. Still, such knowledge doesn’t change their behaviour or the course of things. They live exposed flank with death.”

“Like tin soldiers” thus it came to Arundle’s mind – “those who stubbornly march into the battle with pipes and drums, and march on into showers of bullets until they meet their aim...”

“...and those who survive several of such attacks, believe in a wonder and feel immortal soon.”

“...and then they meet death...”

Grisella eventually had the big questions of historical dimensions in mind. Populist decisions, requiring the agreement of the masses, in order to become valid. Things like genocides or war entry – and the like.

“Everything is getting worse if people know what’s going on – everything is done with more consequence, if people know what’s going on...”

“Or the other way round...”

**

Grisella’s colloquium had been shrinking considerably. Could one reason be the way she had it run? There were only Arundle and Billy-Joe left, as well as Pooty with the Magic Stone, who had never been in fact real candidates. And of course the Magic Bow shouldn’t be forgotten, who held the same status.

More for nostalgic reasons they met weekly at the same time. And sometimes, if things turned out that way, also Flory and Cory joined them. While Grisella still insisted on an open event. But this week Cory was away with her deep-sea-laboratory and Flory accompanied Professor Hare to some excavations. While Tibor took care of Susamee’s Island, who used to participate otherwise more or less frequently. And Tika joined him when ever she could, that wasn’t often the case, because she accompanied Shamaness Susamee meanwhile regularly.

The training of Susamee's two disciples was soon coming to an end. In fact, you couldn't take a regular exam, at the site where they had been studying. They did learn by heart from their Shamaness and depended much on her feelings. Sometimes she certified Tibor the highest level, but then she attested him lack of empathy in general and in specific. Thus Tika had to console him at best she could, who had yet won Susamee's heart ever since.

Susamee didn't like Tibor enough, so it seemed. She liked him somehow, but that was not the same as if you loved somebody, and saw in her the ideal daughter you had always wished to have whole-heartedly, as was the case with Tika.

Tibor seriously considered to look for a male master. And without Tika he would have done – at least he thought he would have.

He never doubted his talents. He thought himself highly gifted, and that was perhaps his major mistake.

In Grisella's colloquium, he managed very well. The Professor would have highly appreciated it, if he had applied for a doctorate, and so had Moschus Mogoleya, his former dean. But Tibor was stubborn. He had in mind to become Shaman together with Tika, and to share a Shaman's life with her.

That was absolutely clear to him. He was meanwhile in his twenties, and his brothers at home in Mongolia were married for a long time already and had loads of children.

On Tika's side in the Australian outback, things were quite similar. And this was what both knew. Therefore, they delayed their exams artificially because afterwards there would have been no reason for them to ignore the demands of their nature, which would have liked to gain the lead.

After all – why were you Shamaness, Tika said to herself.

**

When Tibor was overwhelmed by such notions, he forgot about the self induced horse headed violin, and what it meant for him. He forgot about the audience that came together every month. Even the phoenix abandoned the flames in order to listen to him, and learn for its own amiable singing.

He then said he might manage alike in the steppe as well. And his own Shaman would be available there, and wouldn't abandon him for a girl's sake – definitely not for a girl like Tika, no matter how dear she was to him.

But so he only thought, when he was really fed up with everything, and frustrated because of the set-backs he had to suffer from the Shamaness. Tika was there to smoothen such strain, and more than once did so very well.

Tika had become the pivot in his life. And sometimes he asked himself if such dependence was perhaps a big mistake, but then love overcame him and he pushed such contemptuous ideas aside.

**

Had Tibor been here today, he would have answered Grisella's question with a clear yes.

“Yes, things do change when known. Knowledge influences the course of things. If you know what's going on, than your influence is definitely growing, you may even alter the course they are taking...”

Perhaps he was too much of a Shaman already, to see things differently, and Billy-Joe had only forgotten about his Shaman heritage inside, if he didn't realize such interdependence any more. Perhaps he had only been overrun by the question.

Of course it mattered of what concern such matters were. Such a little thunderstorm was of course easy to overlook and judge, and might well be influenced by force, and course, and time. Delays were only one method of influence.

Thunderstorms could be banned, for example behind the banks of a river. Not always, but once in a while... And the wind blew harder or weaker if you pleaded it rightly. You could ask such a jet-stream to take this way or that, have it go straight or around... And those animals at the water front weren't handed over to the law of chance only. The dice had been thrown much earlier, long before the animals fell. And on the battle field with those tin soldiers the selection went on by determined principles, for what reasons ever.

He, who didn't obey the might of fate, didn't get very far, but found death under increased pain. Goodman Death did his job and when he was cheated by days or weeks or even years, the pain increased proportionally.

2. The Riot of the Trolls

Billy-Joe could feel Walter approaching. It was by paradox that Goodman Death made himself known when life was close to its summit, as if the highest awareness was connected with the deepest abyss. As if death and life were even closer interrelated. As if the one couldn't do without the other.

He might be able to see Tibor alive and in person still, he hoped, and climbed off the helicopter, that had taken the Conversors to Susamee's Island, where they would stay for almost one week. Thus it was arranged and fulfilled since peace had come, and the dwarves protected the underground on both islands.

South-Michel took great care of that. The shock still set deep. The riot of the Trolls still wavered about the underground, or rummaged in the bowels of the earth, depending on the point of view.

With a strange prank things had started. Nobody could by now say anymore for certain, whose fault it had been, and where the accident took its pace. Fact was, that three young racketeers executed a prank in good old Troll fashion. Which wasn't really something outstanding, but filled each dwarf deep inside with secret pride. As he felt reminded of his own youth, which grabbed from the past way forward to fill him with sweet memories or imaginations of things that could have been done than likewise, but weren't for what reasons ever.

He may even feel envy, but it was good envy, envy of the kind that made you smile, not the yellow burning envy that dragged you down.

With such prank things had started, while the world underground still had been in order. Because shortly after, tranquility returned. The construction sites boomed, the buildings got ready. Susamee's Island received another floor, because the island was similarly shallow as was the Isle of Wisdom-tooth and its twin.

As long as everybody was kept busy, everything went on smoothly. Where were the Trolls then? Now, no-one seemed to know anymore. Had they really disappeared into the deepest Troll-solitude? As their appointed lot, they had to endure, but didn't like it, and weren't liked for it either? What was a Troll supposed to do amongst his kind in the deepest darkness of the earth? Where was there fun that made a Troll to be himself?

Ah, yes, the vaccination! Trolls had become vaccinated, but only those who had been caught. As soon as the other Trolls realized what was going to happen, they disappeared. And since

then, they were hiding in the inner earth, where it was deepest. There they sat waiting, to have such cup pass. And that was what was happening.

Nobody thought of the Trolls and their pranks anymore. All were busy building and didn't know what to do with all that workload. The days were too short and the weeks not long enough. The sun settled too early and the moon didn't stay long enough in the sky – depending on what they just were doing.

**

The workload charged its toll. Tuberculosis was spreading and killed the old and the weaker ones soon. When the Trolls learned of their parents' and ancestors' fate, they came back from their hide, as they were needed suddenly, and couldn't grow up fast enough.

Soon each Troll, who was half ways sensible found himself in a responsible position. And the more Trolls thus sluiced in, the more were there to follow. Because each Troll, who had settled, cared for the coming up wave, and they were still wilder as they were closer related to the basic state of Troll-ness.

In the end, hardly tamed Trolls became teachers at school, or even policemen. Thus, the fox was set to keep the geese, in a way.

If things like that happened a thousand fold, then a lot was suddenly happening, and you realized at once that a social revolution had taken place, and the take over of the Trolls. But then it was too late already. You couldn't reject the Trolls any more. And you couldn't keep on hoping that they would calm down as still more Trolls were there to follow, as all dwarves began their lives in such state.

Soon the saying spread: "Don't trust anyone over thirty" – the dwarves-state became a Trolls-state.

**

South-Michel of Capricorn published a severe warning. As a consequence all construction work was prohibited, and where ever there was still constructive action, the security service stepped in. Even shutters were erected, separating the unknown areas from the publicly known ones. However, for those clever little ones there was no real obstacle. So Dorothea came about with her major

weapon. She threatened to lift the secrecy and have the underground laid open before the eyes of the public and the media.

That meant of course some kind of suicidal manoeuvre, as the islands would be prostrated likewise, because the reporters would of course not differentiate between friend or foe. However, what should she do otherwise, in such a crucial circumstance? Before the islands would sink, as was threatening, if the destructive diggers weren't stopped, so it seemed – an outlook that might be totally wrong, however, not all that unlikely.

South-Michel's interference didn't meet open ears, or if, only a few, down there. The sensible dwarves suffered from burn-out or suffocation and tuberculosis, because they had worked too hard. Many of them became depressive. Depression was the most widely spread chronically infested disease down there, because the dwarves lacked of sunshine.

Those, who had favoured the vaccination now doubted whether such measure had been the right one, because the Trolls had become alert and upset by that, and their wrath now exploded and led to the revolutionary consequences, now to be seen and experienced.

The Managing Board of the School of Inbetween and the adjacent Island-University considered seriously, whether or not to evacuate all premises, built by the dwarves, and have such areas sealed and closed for good – best with concrete and steel, so not the strongest dwarves could get through – if there was any material at all, that could resist dwarf-power. - Such hadn't yet been checked out.

Nobody had yet found out. Such an idea might be all in vain and of no value at all. What was such a measure worth while, if the Trolls were still rummaging about all over the place, as they had done before and couldn't be overlooked by any security service system?

Trolls weren't bad by heart. If you got in closer touch, you realized that. You could have fun with them. But they were spontaneous and incalculable, and had always something unexpected in mind. Therefore, living together with them was strenuous, and in a way exhaustive. All other affairs seemed less important, which might not be acceptable, as there was still a lot of very important teamwork required to bring about results and new approaches in the scientific investigation work, that was going on. The world was on the verge of apocalypse and was desperately in

need of help. You couldn't accept some delicate Trolls spoiling all that.

**

Dorothea decided to go on in a dual mode. First she installed a sanatorium for the tuberculosis patients and for the depressive dwarves. For that reason she gave up part of her hotel project, that was proceeding meanwhile rather mediocre, as the stream of tourists was meager, even more so as many weren't welcome, because of the lack of colour in specific, and the lack of sensibility and empathy in general.

The old people enjoyed the sun very much they had been missing for so long, for most it had been all their life. As the dwarves looked like little people, the other hotel guests didn't realize their difference. They did however wonder why they weren't allowed to enter the area, that was declared as sanatorium, and was explained by danger of infection.

Tuberculosis was no deadly disease any more, but wasn't convenient either. And who was willing to become infected just like that?

By that venture the bad image of the School of Inbetween was bettered considerably among the dwarves. Since that Troll-phobia had been spreading about, the humans were regarded as stubborn, and ungrateful, as well as intolerant and egoistic. Modes of being the dwarves knew all too well from themselves, and were therefore quite capable of noticing them with others.

In addition, they lacked of humour and were unable of any acts of generosity, nor were the dwarves, because this was the price they had to pay for growing up. On the other hand, they were very busy. The dwarves laboured hard and were true and just friends, who did everything for their kin and friends, and surely gave their lives as well, if demanded. At least this said the ethos of the dwarves. But as always theory and practice only seldom match.

Since the Trolls weren't dumb, but knew very well where the train was destined, so to speak, they enjoyed the level of pranks only as long as they could tease adults with that. Being now in charge themselves, they gave up such notions soon. The hard reality of the day demanded a lot of sense of reality, no matter whether it looked so or not. Thus it appeared to the outsider, who looked at things and didn't know about the living conditions, but referred to the visible image, which was indeed shining of all that

gold and jewels and what other materials the dwarves used for construction, like others did with bricks and tiles.

With that sanatorium, Dorothea managed to correct a little of the bad image the School of Inbetween had. Little by little she altered the view, as she didn't demand anything in return for what she did them good, but rejected consequently any such appeal. The sanatorium was intended to give back what the humans had received from the dwarves, she pointed out. Other than in former times, when the 'surfacers' exploited the dwarves more or less involuntarily, by never rejecting any of their offers.

Fact was, the 'surfacers' didn't understand the dwarves, and never rejected any of the offers they received. Had they better known the dwarves, they would have known that you couldn't take for granted what was offered by them, because they always overdid, and had therefore always too much workload.

Finally Dorothea found out about that, and that was high time, she herself realized. But now they knew. She shared her findings with the other colleagues and gave them an discernment into a dwarf's soul, South-Michel wouldn't have been able to do any better.

“”Never take for granted what a dwarf says. Humans always see things anthropocentric and consider the state of the world that way. But the world doesn't run that way. Otherwise there would be no dwarves, but little humans. And they wouldn't dwell subsoil, but somewhere at the bottom of the sea or where ever...”

South-Michel only said that, because he was the idol of the mer-folk, while the dwarves had meanwhile chosen Tibor as their idol, after a long period without any idol at all, since he conversed into a self-induced horse-headed violin.

Very likely, the dwarves would have been able to live in the lands of the pygmies or in the African savanna. The pygmies thought them a kind of kin when once a little band appeared on the surface in the Kalahari. The dwarves on the other hand figured the pygmies as a kind of off-spring, who didn't manage to get subsoil in time when Atlantis was destructed. Perhaps they didn't notice anything in their desert from the destruction.

For the real dwarves this trauma was part of their genes. Therefore they would have never managed to stay for good on the surface, to make a living there. The lack of comfort – they said, was the main obstacle already, they would find there. This it how they argued.

The greed of the people from the surface they knew all too well. Vast parts of Africa were undermined by unscrupulous diamond-surfers and had become a dangerous area for dwarves, while those drillings were going on into incredible depths, where even clever dwarves were helpless and could hardly get away or hide.

**

Thus, the revolution of the Trolls turned out to be an overdue liberation act of the dwarves against the greed of the human beings from the surface, who misunderstood the generosity of the dwarves as megalomania, and let them go on with what they boasted. They didn't mind how unlikely such intentions were.

"How can they have palaces built for them without offering anything in return?" – the Trolls asked their ancestors, who didn't have an answer.

"This is the outcome now. You see what you have achieved with your tuberculosis, and your depression, and God knows what else."

"Had you kept a little more of your Troll character, you wouldn't have been trapped that way."

The dwarves now accepted the criticism of their wild offspring. The more as so the latter weren't naughty any more, now that they were responsible for the community, and ran the public affairs. They took great care for freedom and 'Troll-ness' – as they put it, because this was their prerequisite. And they managed very well with it. They didn't mind when things went to pieces once in a while. Even collapsing tunnels proved prankish excesses – as long as no people were harmed seriously...

**

The sanatorium turned out to be the first step into the right direction. After all, the human beings sacrificed some comfort and handed over the limited space available. This was what the dwarves realized at once – all of them, not only those of old age. They all knew, how precious suitable space was, because this had been the tremendous trouble since ages in the underground.

Very few types of soil, sediments and concrete were suitable for residence. In fact, such facilities had to be produced in hard toil and labour. This was far more complex than other necessities you

could think of. From the dwarves point of view, it was the most challenging task ever. Those who were able to find a suitable location were hailed as heroes and were aware of the most obedient attention ever.

While courage declined with age, the Trolls were better off. More than once, it was their spirit that opened new horizons, so to speak.

The exploration of Susamee's Island was such an undertaking. It turned out as a great success. Therefore the remaining little ones – mostly disabled people, had now to be brought over there as well. It was of vital importance to get away from the unhealthy grounds underneath the shelf, where water couldn't be stopped from dripping, and poisonous hot fumes from the other side ruined the little breathable air that was still left.

Such disastrous living conditions had been the reason in the first place for the spearhead mission. It was a question of timing right now. Were the preparatory works advanced enough to offer provisional shelter for a couple of thousand to come? That was the question, then. Neither was there an exact number, nor a proper means of transport yet.

For a new and good start, they needed help – mainly for the many disabled. The sanatorium was but one of the crucial aspects. Even South-Michel, who had taken the part of the people on the surface, so it seemed – changed his attitude, at last, and took their side again. He had been so busy with the merfolk and all their trouble, that he almost forgot about his own next of kin.

Megalomania was the least of his aspirations. He was one of them, after all, and when he accepted this fact, things began to better.

“Was such an exodus likely to succeed?” he wanted to know from Dorothea, the facility manager, on behalf of the dwarves.

“Some three thousand there might be, more or less. We do not count our heads...”

Dorothea asked for some time to do some calculations, and felt happy, as she was now able to give back at least something, after having received so much. She talked things over with her husband, who was the President of the University, and with Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, who was the Headmistress of the School of Inbetween. She did that, to be on the safe side, because she was all too happy to get rid of the severe problems that had arisen, since the dwarves were involved more than it was good for them, instead of caring for their own well.

She could now ask for sound calculations by proper architects and engineers for the many dubious projects still under guard and responsibility of the little ones. She would thus get rid of the uncertainty, that hung over their heads since that accident, and hadn't been settle since then.

She could charter a ship, or could use the Nautilus, she reckoned.

While this was kind of unrealistic. She'd better think of a real ship. You had to disguise the little ones as Pygmy tribes, or a special kind of Aborigines, or so. She had to find out.

Perhaps she had a chance to get a ship without crew, or even buy one. Then the Skipper of the Submarine could become Captain and the crew could take over all other duties, while some of the elder students could become assistant seamen for the time being.

Susamee's Island was some hundred miles away only – reckoning the inclusion of the camouflage as well as the resulting deviation.

Something could surely be done. A vessel of their own would be no bad idea. When the transport had been done, there would be other ways of using it, as a swimming hotel or for excursions, and the like – Dorothea hadn't yet given up her idea of a hotel.

3. The Transfer on the Last Bounty

Dorothea checked with her connections all over the world. In almost any major harbour she asked for information. A not too big ship was she thinking of; not pricy though, but still in good shape, that could be taken over without many formalities. To be on the save side, she founded a shipping company, and was astonished how easy that was, if you had the money as well as warranties. You didn't even need a Captain's license.

All she had to do was to open an office in Sydney. She did that right next to the heliporter-port, where the copters started and landed for the Isle of Wisdom-tooth ever since, and had it manned with a trustworthy person. That is – with two, because Intelleetus was all too pleased to accompany his father on that mission. Grisella would certainly be free to visit them at any time, she was informed, when they departed.

There was not much to do yet. The idea was, to enlist some trustworthy real seamen of all ranks. The Captain of the Nautilus, who had been asked to take over the Skipper's job, refused. His abilities wouldn't fit for such an occupation, he let his boss know. "That's no false timidity, neither this way nor that..." he said, without clarifying one way or the other.

"I wouldn't have a Skipper handling the affairs of my boat either..." he argued and thus the matter was dropped once and for all.

**

"What about you, don't you give the wet element a trial?" Dorothea asked Arundle and Billy-Joe. The two looked at each other. They were guests with the Slyboots once more and were sitting in the garden. The sun was shining bright from a cloudless sky. Dorothea's remark made them cock up. Did Dorothea know what she was asking?

The two addressees of her assault spontaneously nodded, without any recheck. Such an adventure was just the right thing for them after the dry period they had just passed.

"And Zinfandor we take with us. He might even have a Skipper's license. Its worth while asking him anyway..." Arundle hollered. She recalled their sea-adventure, when Zinfandor proved himself a very able seaman.

Zinfandor Leblanc indeed owed a Skipper's license. He was registered in Montreal, Canada at the Naval Office there. His papers were sent to him on request without any trouble, as soon as he proved his identity.

A major obstacle was thus taken. They had an officer in command, that was a good start.

A ship was also found, and with it a little greasy factotum who was well acquainted with the ships interior and the heart of it - the engine. He loved the old girl of his more he could tell, and would have died without her, so he let the Skipper know. His name was Stanislaw Michiniewsky. He was from Gdansk on the shores of the Baltic Sea.

When the deal was done and the ship was sold, he was the most happy man you could think of, and Dorothea and her acquaintance were happy because of the clever deal. Dorothea was able to prove her abilities again.

The ship was rather small, just about 1000 G.R.T. (gross register tons) and had been shipping along the coasts of the Australian and the New Zealand's seas, and was named Last Bounty.

So she had been doing until her last owner had been drinking himself to death. After months of idle waiting for any heirs in vain, the ship was then put up for public sale to cover the fees. Dorothea was the lucky one to make it, as there were almost no other auctioneers.

Old aged as the ship was, it was still in good shape. Especially the engine, as Stan was mentioning repeatedly in his Pidgin English: "German Craftsmanship, German Craftsmanship"...

In fact, the ship stemmed originally from the Hamburg ship-builder 'Planten & Blomen' - the little mechanic repeatedly mentioned, who held a piece of paper in Cyrillic language at hand and a certified translation, proving him to be indeed some kind of engineer.

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The two big hatches of the Last Bounty before the bridge were fitted with additional decks. For the time being, such attempt had to suffice. Thus, space for some five hundred or more of the little people was available. Theoretically, the transfer of the whole folk would be done in three or four journeys.

Under the guidance of dwarf-inspector Barnby the team of inspectors was flown over to Susamee's Island, because the radio-connection with the Trolls didn't suffice. The Trolls mistrusted any kind of technology other than their own. They suspected any device from the surface people.

Susamee was looking forward to the invasion. This was something, she would rally enjoy. Healing alone became boring. Doing good to individuals was a fine thing - so far so good, but saving a whole people was something else. 'Being under pressure and looking for the blessed lands - what on earth could be more challenging, but dealing on God's behalf, and define, and mark the site where happiness was waiting?'

As it looked, they would seldom or hardly ever meet. The dwarves withdrew from the surface, as soon as they set foot on the ground, and would return only for special occasions, like the Trolls' pranks or some other duty and plight. So Susamee was all

too glad to get in touch a little, and was looking forward to see them once in a while on special occasions, like when the horse-headed violin would be heard in the pale dim light of the full moon.

The solitude over here was something, she could hardly stand. Tibor and Tika helped a little, and so did the Watchdog Will Weesle, and the Conversiors, but there was still capacity available, so to speak.

The inspectors – there were four all in all, and Barnby was named one of them – were very happy with what they found on arrival. The area under the island was sustainable and fit for digging, and offered work for the next couple of years. The sea was not too deep. The bottom was also solid stone, not too hot and not too cold – just right for the maltreated folks, after their bad experience with their former dwelling.

The spearhead mission had done a good job. They never gave up hope that they were able to convince their fathers and mothers to come over here as well. Since they knew that the question of transport was solved to a certain extent – while they knew of course, what their next of kin thought of a trip on the water...

The same people that had caused them so much trouble, might now turn out to becoming their saviours after all. No matter that they still didn't see the point, and took for granted what the little ones did for them, and the more they did, and the harder they laboured, the more critical the unthankful surfacers became, it was a real shame.

The inspectors just had to ignore such facts, because when they didn't, the Troll furor came over them, and they would have loved to place a real big thing. However, they were here on the wrong site, because there were no addressees and the ones there were, were entirely different, so it seemed.

The Shamaness was just great, and so was her disciple. Only the boy might be of the other type. After all, he lived in his palace in the underground, like a king of dwarves, and enjoyed the comfort and the splendour every day, while still missing the daylight, and ignored the little sunshine they managed to bring in through a system of mirrors. An unthankful being that was, what he was.

At that state, the inspectors didn't know of the self induced hores-headed violin. They didn't know, what was going on over here each month. They might even take their one obligation too serious over here, and were opposed by their own hands as well.

As soon as they noticed what was going on, they became a little more generous. “If someone’s out for pranks, then its us” the workers hollered after the inspectors who went about in their special outfit, avoiding dirt at best they could.

“Have them come, and we’ll see” they said. They had to move in and keep their powder dry, so to speak. The big move had but just started.

**

Dwarves were terribly afraid of water. And now they had to go overseas for a couple of days. There was no real choice, because the airlift would take ages. Thus, a ship was the only realistic alternative. Air transport would have taken years or even decades. And the water would get at them in any case, that was dripping in already at the site where they came from, to an unacceptable extend.

The little folk was not yet on board. Through the air it was much easier. And magic would be an option either. Inspector Barnby knew of the secret forces some of the human beings on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth possessed, but they wouldn’t share such with them. They treated their magic like a disease, nobody was allowed to get notice of.

And yet, the contact was caused by magic in the first place. Someone who was able to march to Atlantis was supposed to be trustworthy, thus was the logic of the former generation. As a consequence they laboured so hard, and thought of the nicest and most precious things. Tunnels they built and palaces – worth a king.

In return they were offered now that ship – an old outdated vessel, hardly fit for bad weather. – They had to accept, there was no choice, Inspector Barnby decided. The dwarves were too polite to argue and put in demands. They didn’t rage or argue, but inside the turmoil was going on. And the question couldn’t find an answer, why magic wasn’t used. Magic, of which they officially didn’t know, and wouldn’t learn of, as long as the humans didn’t openly use it for themselves, either.

To be fair, the Inspectors had to admit, that they didn’t publish their own magic either, but also kept it in the hide.

Perhaps it worked this way in the world, and there was no magic able to transport a couple of thousand beings from one point to another, just like that. This was the one aspect, another was, that

it had to be a real exodus – a noteworthy intersection into their lives – a voyage, with all kinds of hardships and perils, because in the end the promised land was waiting.

Inspector Barnby got tears into his eyes while he was imagining what things were really about. But a real Troll doesn't cry and so he pretended to have a grain of sand in the eye.

They hadn't been asked how they managed under the shelf, when living conditions changed from bad to worse and then even further from worse to worst, when they didn't have time to preserve their own needs, because all their power was used up for the labour the unthankful ones took for granted. Who only had their own targets in mind and didn't bother the toll the dwarves had to pay, when ruining their health. Any such sign was ignored, and there had been many. The dwarves were too proud to complain, but still hoped that their agony was noticed – and so it did in the end, while it was almost too late, at least for those, who had died already, and there were surely more to follow.

As long as everybody only saw his or her advantage, the world wouldn't turn to the better. No matter how hard individuals tried. There were exceptions, some of the students and scholars on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth showed at least some understanding. Otherwise the exodus wouldn't have been possible, that was now arranged in close cooperation.

Even Inspector Barnby had to admit that. They weren't all as bad as the mine proprietors down there in South Africa.

Thus were the facts, when it came to the exodus, as far as the dwarves were concerned, who didn't bother much about the crude realities of life either, like finding a proper Skipper, and a trustworthy crew, you could rely on. They didn't know about the worries Dorothea and her team were fighting with. Should they have faith in Zinfandor Leblanc, after all what happened? Or should they even do the trip without a real Captain?

Meanwhile, Zinfandor Leblanc's papers were carefully checked in Sydney, where they were sent from Montreal. They were complying with the Canadian standards, which weren't all that different from the Australian, because both countries belonged to the former British Commonwealth.

In fact, the Commonwealth didn't mean much any more, and was a kind of paper tiger meanwhile. However, in this field it still proved a livid consistency you could hardly find in any other branch of public affairs.

Zinfandor Leblanc received the necessary attention and was accepted basically, while still short of some time serving as an officer and navigator. His vita was carefully checked and rechecked, and in the end, Dorothea managed to straighten it out the way it should be.

In short, Zinfandor Leblanc finally looked back on a sound record, proving his qualification. Some ship-owners were pleased to help out, when asked by the attractive new colleague of theirs. Even the insurance company agreed, and accepted the alterations made in order to take over the amount of livestock, after the proper airconditioning was installed as well.

Officially the Last Bounty was declared a livestock transporter, which wasn't too far away from reality. Because cattle needed most likely even more oxygen and fresh air than the dwarves, who were used to rough conditions in this respect.

Zinfandor Leblanc was thus made Captain and Skipper, while Stanislaw Michiniewsky became the Chief-Mechanic, certified by a special permit. The sailors of the submarine became the decks crew and the submarine Captain was registered as the First Officer, and so was the Second and so forth. This way, things were settled orderly.

Billy-Joe became Steward and Cook and Arundle Communications Officer. She had to pass a crash-course on that in Sydney, to get acquainted with the necessary procedures.

Ten men and two women formed the crew, because the submarine cook was taken over as well, and might provide a helping hand to Billy-Joe, who didn't really like the idea at all.

Dorothea made sure that there was nothing missing, especially the nautical instruments and charts. The times of the morse telegraphy were gone, and the good old sextant as well. Navigation was done by a tricky three-point satellite navigational system, you could rely on far better than the former.

The first test-trip was the transfer from Sydney to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, and was managed with bravura. The weather was fantastic, the sea was calm – so it wasn't really a proper test to find out about the crew's ability. Everybody was looking forward to the upcoming challenge, while responsibilities were shoven about from person to person, as far as responsibility was concerned.

The declaration of the cargo would become an insurmountable obstacle, when it came to any official investigation. But such matters, the dwarves didn't bother, who could only complain about

the things they experienced, of being not the way they wanted them. They still would have liked to become beamed over unnoticed, while sleeping. But that was not the way things could be handled – not in this case anyway. Some stress and fever had to be. For a new world, they had to bear some hardship and find new routes and a new gate.

The queeries began right with the boarding. There were no proper docks on the island and the ship had to anchor way out, where the water was deep enough, and the cargo had to be taken over by boat and barge.

Such a barge, as the name says, is a lofty shaky thing. The swell was high unfortunately on the day of boarding, and the low boats could hardly be tamed, even more so as the dwarves were scared to death and didn't dare to move, when asked to grab for the ladder to enter up. First attacks of seasickness occurred in addition.

You could some hundred people fit into such a barge, and the crew had hoped to transport one third on top of that, because the little ones were so small, thus, they would do in three turns.

When the crew asked their passengers to put the life jackets on, they were found far too big, while there were only some hundred children's vests, thus they had to be taken back for the following load. But the dwarves didn't want to give them back after they were safely on board, and couldn't be convinced either.

So the larger vests had to be made smaller, and Dorothea ordered some thousand children's life-jackets, which were flown in the next day already.

So the forlorn band had to stay overnight on board already. Nobody wanted to risk them return, after all the mess they had had to bring them there.

The dwarves' screaming and howling was heard all night long and strained the nerves of the crew and the helpers as well as of the left behinds who were waiting in the narrow drafty shed ashore.

The weather became fine the upcoming day. The safty-vests fitted properly, and the barges smoothly passed the distance in a couple of minutes. Even boarding turned out to be managable. And no cases of seasickness occured either. The ventilation pushed fresh air into the decks, and the sea routine was thus picked up soon.

Down in the decks there were kitchens installed, and the crew reckoned the dwarves to cook for themselves. They couldn't possibly feed almost a thousand hungry mouths, besides, none of the crew knew about the dwarves' nutrition habits.

Part of the front hold was reserved for additional cargo, none the least for the dwarves' food supply. However, even machinery was put in there that was needed for further mining. All that had to be organized and planned and could hardly be done with those scatterbrains, who didn't even manage to straighten out the number of family members there were, who couldn't make up their minds, or decided to go with the last possible tour, while the previous ones were either fully booked already or needed special attention for what reason ever.

A census had never worked down there. Not only because of the mentality of the dwarves but because they were just unable to find out and count the heads in the clan.

They didn't see the need anyway. A barge was filled, when nobody stayed behind on the stage. The decks were filled, when nobody kept waiting for further entrance. While everybody was hurling about, and nobody could keep calm down there.

As soon as the barges were empty and were on their way back, the Skipper ordered the anchor to be weighed, and the Last Bounty took up speed and got out of the vicinity of the island and headed for Susamee's Island. The land soon disappeared. The left behinds waved until they weren't visible anymore, and water was all about the ship.

As there were no openings and windows, the dwarves didn't see what was going on outside, but stayed savely in the hide, and were only disturbed by the swell the ship had to pass. Where they stayed, the light was dim and only came throught the skylights. The fans supplied good fresh air and did the elderly people well. Some very tough ones even tried a look from above and moved with their little chairs on deck. Nobody minded as long as the weather was fine and the crew still could manage to pass.

On the bridge the proud Skipper stood on his first authentic command of his own. But nobody knew. The Chief-Mechanic was in the same situation, but couldn't be seen, as he was sitting in the ships belly next to the roaring engine, where he stayed for good, day and night, to show only up on deck for some water or drink or food. While he showed up for the meals regularly as was his plight as an officer to present his brandnew uniform with the neat stripes on the sleeves.

While on board, the dwarves kept on wearing the fashionable safty jackets, which could be flattened and blown up automatically.

You only had to pull a plug and the air was sucked in, or press it out, as you pleased.

They seemed to treat such vests as presents for good, so Dorothea ordered another two thousand, just to be on the safe side. They should be available soon, because the Skipper figured to be back in one weeks time for a second and even a third trip, either the same week or the following.

However, he couldn't know what was going to happen, when the next full moon was due.

For the time being he had other problems. On arrival the crew became aware of the fact that they didn't have enough boats to handle the embarkation properly. Instead of the barges they had to use the small safty boats, that could take only some twenty passengers at a time.

The sea was quiet, and even the most scared ones dared the hop on board from the ladder. Unfortunatly the little ones were too small to handle the oars, so the job had to be done by the crew as well. They had only a short distance to overcome but it still took a whole day until the last passender was savely landed. They were lucky that the ship could get so close here.

The Captain had an argument with the dwarves about the safty-jackets, as he didn't yet know that there were more to come soon. But finally gave up. Billy-Joe and Arundle tried to mediate but in vain. So the little ones kept their acquired property, and the crew had to return without live-safer jackets.

Arundle sent the appropriate message to the home base and after the confirmation that the new supply was ordered, and would be waiting together with the next load of passengers, the crew relaxed as well, and even the Skipper calmed down, noticing that there were plenty of the large sized vests still available for the crew.

"You cannot go back tonight" Susamee decided, and even the Skipper obeyed. The helicopter was landing and the Conversiors came, because the full moon was on the verge.

At nightfall all dwarves were safely landed. The crew was fatigue to tears after the rowing all day long, because the little ones had been too small for that. Heavy enough they would have been. And if you go such a distance some ten of more times, you know what you have done.

For soothing, the tired men experienced a very nice surprise, and for those who didn't know yet, it became unforgettable.

4. Tibor, the Idol

The Convertors converted and the moon rosed. The Phoenix sprang into the open kitchen fire, burnt and was reborn again out of the flames. The self-induced horse-headed violin played and the stones sobbed. All about in the darkness you could see orange spots in the dark of the forest and underbrush. Hundreds of little beings hurried about and whispered, and listened. Several began to sob like the stones, and even the tough guys, just escaped the Troll-pHase were affected as well.

What they heard, went beyond limits. The marvalous tunes made the Phoenix rising, who tuned in right away as soon as he was reborn. Tika was howling sweeter than ever, and sounded almost divine. She had had a training meanwhile, and her performance was recorded every time by Watchdog Will Wiesle, in order to record her improvments. Tibor had initiated such recordings, who wanted to improve on the violin as well.

When playing music, Tibor knew again why he was here and wouldn't give up such way of life, even if the chairmanship in the Empire of Ghosts would have been offered to him.

Where would he ever find such an audience? Had there been hundreds before, there were now thousands, because the dwarves didn't need an extra invitation. None of them remained in the hide. They didn't retire before the day was dawning, and the Convertors disappeared into the shade of wood and underbrush, where they spent the day.

For the crew it became high time to leave. At home, another band was waiting, and this time things worked out much smoother, because they had experienced by now, and handled their passengers with ease and patience. That was most important. The dwarves had to be kept in good mood. They needed the feeling of being important and liked in order to be sociable.

**

Had any one ever thought of the dwarves' habitation? What did they eat? What were they living on? Where did they sleep? How did they raise their offspring? Were there schools, an administration, governmental authorities?

Those weren't curious questions, but should be answered if you wanted. to help someone who you didn't understand, and who you knew hardly anything about? The infrastructure alone was a miracle. Where did they put their garbage? Did they solemnly live on mushrooms? Did rats eat their left-behinds? As the horror story went.

When the Last Bounty put to sea again, the crew members wondered in any case, why there was no rat to be found on board. The cook noticed it, because the cat came to the kitchen and pleaded desperately for food, which wasn't her way of behaviour, confirmed Stan, who had to know, because he was already some fifteen years on board, he roughly reckoned.

Tired as they were after a long and sleepless night, the blubber of the self-induced horse-headed violin still clung at them like morning mist over the mount of the river Themse in far England.

**

When the Convertors had left, the technicians came and built at last the camouflage system, following the plans of the congenial inventor Hans Henny Henne, because Susamee's Island was no ordinary place any more. That enchanted the dwarves, and slowly feelings of thankfulness and passion took over and conquered the hearts – even of the most repellent Trolls.

The people over here meant it well with them, no matter how unintelligible they remained. Just look at that funny present they received, when they started off for that journey, and that was asked back afterwards.

Such audacity and impudence even the oldest amongst them had never experienced. And those people didn't seem to mind. For them such a behaviour seemed absolutely normal and in order.

Tibor took great part in the change of mood, despite of such slash-back. His playing of the violin on the self-induced horse-headed instrument of his topped everything. And while he looked somewhat dwarfish despite of his humanness, - at least with regard to his behaviour – he immediately advanced to the saint of the new island. He fitted well into the appeal of awakening and uprising of the new time.

Such admiration and passion Tibor of course realized. He enjoyed the sudden honour, that came about him without any extra effort. While he had known that. With his gigs he touched the hearts of everyone who joined the audience, as soon as he started

off for a performance. Where even the stones started sobbing, no-one resisted at length, no matter how rottened and stoned his or her mood was.

**

As soon as all passengers were on board, the Skipper ordered the barge to be taken over and had it fixed to the front hatch. That wasn't a big thing with the front crane. Thus, they had an additional solid cover, while turning the barge upside down and had it lowered carefully that way.

Once again Zinfandor Leblanc proved his abilities, as he didn't miss the chance to have this manoeuvre operated own-handed.

His new role as Captain fitted him well, and what he missed on experience he balanced by eagerness and punctuality. The submarine-captain was also satisfied, who had an eye on Leblanc, because of his dubious past.

The second journey already was joined by the ship-owner. And so it was by Penelope M'gamba. For her a berth was found in the Captain's cabin on the spacious stern deck.

The team of cooks was topped up, because the crew had noticed how poor the cooking abilities of their guests were. While they enjoyed good food, which was the reason for much a Troll's prank.

In the underground many things didn't grow, you needed to enjoy life. So the dwarves took over the one or other hint, and didn't mind the surface so much any more. On Susamee's Island a protected area was awaiting them, that was under special protection and couldn't be found by any-one, who didn't employ exceptional forces – that hadn't been working over here so far. Thus, they could feel relatively safe outside their usual hide in the underground as well.

**

As ship-owner Dorothea was even more impressive than as a Manager. The role fitted well, and thus, Scholasticus couldn't resist. He had to go as well. "For four days the university has to do without me" he said. "Besides, we are always in contact, thanks to the communications structures down here in the South Pacific."

In fact he referred to Arundle, who was in charge of the communication on board, but he didn't want to show too much of his admiration for her. His friends did understand him anyway.

When the full moon had passed, Billy-Joe returned with the Conversors just in time to take up his duties as a ship steward. He was reminded of his days as porter, and didn't like the feelings that came up with that. Even more so as he had to wear one of these terrible uniforms again. He might think over his new career, while still all options were open.

The ship-owneress handed out the life jackets personally, that were available in sufficient number and size. The latest delivery had arrived just in time. And as she knew now about the dwarves expectations', she made the handing out of the jackets some kind of fuss.

The school band played, and all students and pupils gathered at the harbour where the barge left, and under strange tunes the life jackets were handed over. The weather was fine, and thus they all got on board with dry feet and even the fearful ones enjoyed the ceremony.

On the other side on Susamee's Island Tibor would have liked to welcome them, but it didn't work. Without full moon the self-induced horse-headed violin didn't work properly.

He tried anyway. And his tunes sounded alright for those who had no idea. His own ears didn't mind the loss of quality. However, thankfulness and joy weren't really offended.

Many a dwarf – mostly the elder ones – kissed the ground of the New World as soon as they set foot on. They sobbed and sobbed even more, as soon as they were met by Tibors music – which seemed to wave over the whole island. – A well hidden system of loudspeakers took care of that.

Susamee – covered up unwillingly by cloth, as nakedness was supposed to offend the dwarves, was sitting on her throne on her open porch. And she felt very sorry that she couldn't have the phoenix emerge from the flames. She tried with Shaman chants instead, that resounded not all that bad by the help of Tika, and offered a fair picture of welcome.

Thus, the arrival of the second contingent was no less pompous than the departure ceremony.

This was, what the dwarves had missed. A little attention, respect and admiration. Not deep inside the humans' hearts, but

visible, audible and touchable. Had the humans acted the like before, they would have had the eagerest friends, and diggers, coming about with the most precious presents out of the depth of the earth.

In the thousands of years, as long as they were digging, they had gathered quite something. And often the elders didn't know themselves where their treasures were hidden.

In the aftermath they praised themselves for having arranged such a nice palace for their new Idol. Even more so as he did appreciate it, and showed it as well, which wasn't often the case with some other humans, who could hardly stop complaining with all kinds of worries for whatever reason.

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The barge was just taken over and tied down on the front hatch, while the deckhands made everything clear for weighing the anchor. When the sky darkened. Right here, so close to the shore, it seemed unwise to endure a gale. The anchor might fail and they'd been thrown ashore and smashed to the rocks, just like that.

The other option was to leave as fast as possible and get away from the land into the open sea, where the wind even blew heftier but that the ship had to endure. Zinfandor figured the strength by five to six – still far away from a real gale or Typhoon. But that could change any minute down here where they were cruising.

There was only one save option, they had to head for a mainland port. Running back to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth would have postponed their trouble only, and wouldn't have changed anything, because there was no port either, and thus, they ran the same risk there.

On the other hand, there was still the last group of refugees waiting, and the shipowneress wanted to get back as well, and so did her husband. In any case, they would have had to answer strange questions in any port they'd come in. The installations for the passengers had to be somehow hidden or even removed for the inspectors, who always came on board of any merchant sea-ship entering the harbour.

Dorothea and Penelope had a word with the Skipper about that. They concluded that it might be wiser to return to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, even more so as the distance was almost the same.

It was too late to take over ballast, and thus Zinfandor flooded the surplus tanks astern and in the bow, to get a little more stability, as the old lady was a little unbalanced without any cargo.

Soon, the Last Bounty danced like a cork through the rough sea. The waves couldn't harm her yet, and the deckhands cared for the hatches and had them carefully covered and boarded.

Up on the bridge the ship-owner and all her company was soon gathered, and occupied the place, and worried the Skipper with their fear, until he sent them off.

Green around the noses the women then sat in the Captain's cabin and screamed with every blow the ship had to stand, as if that meant the end. And when the ship swayed one way or the other almost upside down, the ladies shrieked full of panic and wished they'd been away, or had better things to do, like Arundle, who was busy in the communicator's booth, who was listening to the weather reports and checked for the location of the gale centre, as well as the course it was taking.

What ever she found out she gave to the navigators who were bent over their charts and maps to alter the course accordingly. The idea was to keep away from the centre of the storm. Either run ahead of it or slip away sideways, always hoping that it kept its direction.

The old lady made her twelve to fourteen knots with that push from astern. That was not much, but much more than the old dame was used to. Definitely more than she had made in her best times on her own.

Chief-Mechanic Stan was delighted and scared at the same time. For how long could the old lady stand such speed?

He lowered the speed a little when he looked at the thermometre. The pipes and hoses were clapping all too alarming. That would be it if a cylinder cracked.

The grease-tin was always busy and Tibor Khan gave a helping hand down here, who was the most reliable, as to the chief.

**

Tibor was on his way back, once again. He wanted to meet old friends again, he let Susamee and Tika know. Besides, Watchdog Will Weesle was on board too, as he was needed as a deck-hand urgently now.

Stan explained the most crucial points, they'd have to take care of down here. Without having the faintest idea, what he was actually doing, Tibor internalised the instructions and followed them, not minding what he was doing. However, he realized how much work it was to keep things going. Nothing goes on down here just like that, as those on the bridge were thinking. For them the engine ran as soon as their order was obeyed...

Running it was, but for what price! Not an instant of rest this monster spared. Definitely when you were alone with it. You sometimes wished to have three or four hands to still its thirst for oil and grease. And all that had to be performed in a sticky stench, while it was incredibly hot on top.

Thus was what the dwarves experienced with us humans, Tibor wondered, and got a little further towards the little folk. Human beings had no idea of what was going on in the depth of the earth, and what you had to endure down there.

Well, the diesel was running and running even after the storm had passed by and the good old Last Bounty was left alone after all. Far astray, she kept up soon, and found back on the original course, even before the day was dawning.

A half day late the Last Bounty reached the roadstead of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, where loads of little ones were waiting impatiently already.

Many astonishingly young faces were among them. "This is supposed to be the rest" Inspector Barnby, the coordinator and addressee for the resettlement project confirmed. Nobody stayed behind – "well, not in the accessible areas anyway."

Nobody knew what it looked like a little further and deeper. Barnby didn't know either. But thing could be arranged that way. A note was left and a message was layed down in any case, for those who came late – giving information about the exodus and the tribes' whereabouts.

**

The Troll-punks did what all punks do, they made music, when they didn't do pranks. They hammered and smashed on everything about that made noise and shrieked or hummed monosyllabic texts. In most cases hatred against the upper world or malice tales of pranks. Thus, the last journey was extremely strenuous for the crew. However, it was the last one and therefore

the crew didn't mind that much, and closed eyes and ears, and let them do what they did. In the long run, Tibor had to deal with them. But he stayed behind and intended to come back only with the next load of Converisors that was supposed to be coming soon. Therefore he didn't trouble himself now, and could keep his straight and upright mood towards the little folk. Besides, he needed them as audience for his performance on the self-induced horse-headed violin.

5. Freighter or Passenger Liner?

What could be done with the Last Bounty after the exodus was over? She did her best and so did the crew, first of all the Skipper and the Chief Mechanic. Selling was no option, and for a luxury liner she didn't suit either. Too much had to be altered, and wasn't worth while.

Such a vessel had just about one or two feet freeboard when fully loaded, so additional portholes you could forget. And without you couldn't attract tourists, who were spoilt these days, no matter what appeal they claimed.

Dorothea had such plans published, just to be on the save side, and to calm Zinfandor down, who cared for his future. His papers didn't suffice for passenger services, and he doubted very much whether he would be allowed to extend his license so soon.

On the other hand he got used to his new role, and didn't want to give it up again. Nobody, who had a feeling heart in the breast, would take away from him what he just had achieved. After all that malice and malfortune in life he deserved a second chance.

Except Moschus Mogoleya all agreed on such point of view, and Moschus Mogoleya was not the proper scale for that, who envied a fly for the sugar, or the wind for its game – if he was in bad mood, which was often the case. Despite his improved reputation as Dean of the Sublimatiors.

Meanwhile his subject section appeared him too small. This was purposely done he assumed, and was intended to keep his role small. While he didn't do any better as his predecessors, when touring for new clientele. There were only very few of them scattered all over the world, who were as hard to find as to convince then, to join the School of Inbetween.

This was why his subject section remained small. His new basic course of the other way of seeing was manned by only five new students. Two of which were doubtful candidates, when it came to the other way of seeing or dancing with the wind. The only green that came through them resulted in sea- or airsickness – this was no positive sign what so ever.

He had them train daily for two hours minimum at the SLOMES. Nobody knew why, and what this was going to alter or settle their problems. Except the fact that they became younger and probably even more immature than they already were.

It might indeed have to do with maturity, or the lack of it – or they just lacked the ability as such, and couldn't be helped. "You cannot enforce talent" said the iron rule and law you couldn't ignore.

**

A solution had to be found for the Last Bounty. There was not even a place where to rest. As long as she wanted to stay at the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, she had to be kept on roadstead, because the landing stage was far too small and fitted only for boats. If the weather was fine, things worked out alright, but in case of bad weather, the ship and the crew risked to be smashed to the steep rocks of the upright rim of the island.

There weren't suitable ports either, nearby. Of course, the Last Bounty could have taken up the former job and carry cargo from port to port, which might be the wisest solution anyway, but that was no option for the shipowner party.

"What would it be like if we opened up the sluice against shark-attacks between the islands or have them made movable? Then we could take the Last Bounty in the middle, between the two islands. We have a landing stage built as long as necessary, before it's getting too deep. That should suffice for a safe and secure base right here, immediately before our doorway. Would cost you hardly a dozen pontoons and would look rather picturesque. – And people might even live on board. There needn't be First Class cabins anyway..." Arundle suggested.

Dorothea was charmed by the idea, and ordered the sluice, and the landing stage to be built right away. Thus, it took less than two months, while the Last Bounty had to fight the weather outside on roadstead, until the pier was ready.

Accompanied by the rather unfitting tunes of the schoolband the Last Bounty passed the sluice and settled alongside of the new landing place, that turned out to be just long enough.

“Two or three breakwaters more would do even better” the scared Skipper complaint, who was otherwise satisfied. From here, planning was comfortable, no matter what jobs were waiting in the future, cattle, cargo or excursioners – right here, they were safe and hidden. Nobody in the world would discover them here. Since that camouflage system of Hans Henny Henne based on a new encoding, and they were finally rid of the enigma, as they were on the safe side by now.

The pier consisted of solid concrete, that was carried by in big pieces and installed right here. In addition, several pillars were rammed into the ground, and gave the whole thing stability, as the quay ran out into the open. The entrance of the sluice was stabilized similarly and offered additional protection, while the new landing stage was located immediately behind. All in all, it was a solid and safe line of concrete, that could hardly be harmed by storm and waves.

Thus, the Last Bounty was put on rest. The crew was payed off and the assistants returned to their common obligations. Only Stan and Zinfandor stuck to their seats, so to speak. Zinfandor didn't want to miss his stripes, and Stan his engine. Such an old lady needed permanent care. And Zinfandor had also more than enough to do.

He worked through the maps, and cleared the lockers, and got acquainted with the navigational devices, that had to be up-dated and kept up to date.

Whenever possible Arundle helped him, and so did Billy-Joe who came along with her, who got also acquainted with the matter that way. Genuine seamanship was after all something else, but waving about with a clean cloth and pamper passengers, who seldom deserved it. Doing so, had been no good idea in the first place. How could he have been convinced to take over such disgracing occupation, anyway? – He didn't understand himself anymore now. Fact was, he hated this serving job and was fed up with it right from the start. How could he make such a fool of him all over again? – Things might have been different when he had been a young lad, but now, with guts and brain, he couldn't understand himself at all.

Zinfandor was a different person since he wore those stripes. He was completely different, his friends noticed first of all Penelope. Working in the fresh sea air made him blossom. His weak health since his adventure on the sea ground seemed to be overcome. His steps were firm, his movements sure and relaxed. He didn't sneak about like a beaten dog but stepped like a man beside his Mistress, who he overdid by a head's length, and had her embraced with strong arms, and made her feel like a puppet, which she liked best.

This was the way she wanted her Zinfandor. Penelope blossomed in a new type of happiness and praised her fate that she hadn't given up hope.

Dorothea reckoned and calculated meanwhile how she got back the enormous costs of the reconstruction work. As a ship-owner she was entitled to carry on all kinds of business and have the appropriate transports done. With ten proper trips, so she calculated, she would have balanced the expenditures. But what sort of transport should she consider?

Cattle was of course very attractive because of the high return. On the other hand was cattle a fragile cargo with high risk in many ways. Storm, fire, diseases – there was almost nothing that was not endangering such transports.

On the other hand the cowboys joined the transports. They took care of the animals, fed and cleaned them and took care of the temperature and the fresh air supply. The engines had to run permanently, of course. The extra decks were installed already, after all...

However, once decided, there was no way back again. Such transports would mark the ship forever. You couldn't get rid of the stench again...

Even with the dwarves it would be all over then. While still some seemed to hide in the depth under the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Strange noises at night did indicate that there was something still going on, that scared the little ones among the pupils to death who didn't know, what it was.

The specialists were called to recheck, but couldn't find anything abnormal, except for the forbidden area, where humans had no access and would never be allowed to enter for safety reasons, so the regulations said.

Meanwhile, Dorothea came to a decision, with which she hoped to cover all interests. She decided on the tourist version finally. Some additional bulleeyes, fitted and hatched, were erected up to the level of the stern. Thus she gained some twenty cabins of the premier class, while the ones below weren't all that bad either.

Darker it became in the lower decks where no daylight would reach.

All in all, there was space now for some sixty passengers, but then it became tight already. Because the dining room was limited to some twenty guests only, and thus joint dining became a bit of a problem, and had to be done in three of even four sittings, because the crew had to dine as well.

The additional crew had to manage in the lowest deck deep down in the belly of the Last Bounty, when they couldn't find room to rest in the regular crews' cabins under the bridge.

Thus almost one hundred people were pressed into narrow space – theoretically – because they would surely never reach this limit in reality.

Still, the Last Bounty didn't become a first rate liner, no matter how limited the amount of payload was. But this was of no intention anyway. Neither the crew nor the shipowner wanted to have her become a jetliner. The exploratory flair should remain. In order to stick to that flair, the Skipper hoisted sails in the tops, which gave her an adventurous appeal while reminding of the good old days down here in the deep South where still many of the old folks kept on roaming.

In order to keep up with such history, the male party amongst the passengers was invited to join for watch services, while the women for cleaning and caring services, to keep them busy, and made them forget the lack of space. Almost nobody was idle in the mornings, while appropriate work had to be found accordingly.

This programme was called 'Active Holydays' and was soon accepted and well liked. In addition some SLOMES were installed deep down in the lowest belly, where they didn't bother. They were used almost round the clock, and seemed to be very effective, more so, as they were installed by the inventors themselves.

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After a period of becoming acquainted, the crew got used to the new role. Even Stan succeeded among the guests, when he advertised the service down there in the engine-room, and attracted

a few to join him there, once in a while. Although the service down there wasn't all that favourable.

You were doing a lot of strange things, while on active holidays, the people wondered. They peeled hundreds of potatoes without arguing, or cleaned toilets and bathrooms, made beds or even cleaned up in heavy weather what was left by their seasick fellow-beings, who couldn't stand the unsolid planks of a ship in rough sea.

When the weather was bad, Skipper Zinfandor preferred to return to the homebase anyway, because there were attractions, you couldn't find elsewhere. The marvels of the dwarves down in the abys of the pater noster tunnels, or the underground university, and the old hall with seaview in the basement of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

But when the weather was fine, the Last Bounty was sent on cruising in the Southern archipelagos, and might even touch uninhabited islands, which could only be reached by raft and boat. There, the tourists were allowed to sleep in the open, and live of coconuts and palmtree-leaves until they gave notice – just like former Robinson Crusoe.

Little extra personnel was required, and if, then they were found among the students who wanted to improve the pocket-money, while the standard crew got used to the job, and even preferred it to the service on board of the submarine.

Nobody was forced to serve – all were volunteers. There was toil enough. Thus, they enjoyed diversity and were looking forward to either job, no matter where it was, be it on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth or Susamee's Island, or on board of the Nautilus and the Last Bounty.

**

Penelope M'gamba joined her mate on board of the Last Bounty whenever she could afford it. The more so as she was terribly missing travelling since she came short of her conversational abilities. She felt attracted by the far distance. But didn't mind, that roaming on the surface of the sea could hardly be compared with the distances offered by the sky, as long as it was distance at all.

Zinfandor was rid of the conversational trouble, since he suffered health-wise so badly after his return from the bottom of the sea. He was happy to be in one piece again and fit of body and soul.

Even his license the clever ship-owner managed to improve, that could have otherwise become a severe obstacle.

But the sea is wide and the world is big, and time covers things with the veil of forgiveness and forgetfulness. Pretty and flowery words easily appear on paper. One word gets to the other, and at last things meet your requirements, which weren't sufficing before. While in the end only counts what someone's able to perform, when it's got to be done, and how he manages with King Alcohol, the secret master still – on all seven seas.

6. Doubts

In the end, Arundle had only summed up what belonged to them anyway, and Billy-Joe had done the same in his way, while his approach had been fundamentally opposite. For that, they received their doctors' degrees. That was unjust in a way. - Well, the others could have sat down in time and done likewise. But if you weren't familiar with writing (as was already Billy-Joe – in a way) and had to fight for each sensible sentence, you shouldn't be told such, just like that.

Did they get any further with what was intended? Arundle read her dissertation again with some distance. As soon as she was through, she took Billy-Joe's. After that she concluded that their writings didn't reach the level of Anonymous' book. While they eventually intended to do even better. In fact, they had just taken over the thoughts and ideas, sometimes without even noticing.

This negative way of looking at things came from the emptiness caused by the fact that they were through with the subject, which had kept them busy for such a long time. They just didn't know how life was going to go on from here.

That was why the challenge of the sea was just the right thing. But in the long run, they had to make up their minds of how to proceed in general. They envied Flory for her decisiveness, who became assistant of her father. Flory's heart was beating for Archeology since they discovered the lost Atlantis, just as Cory was fond of the deep-sea-biology, and didn't compete any longer as she had done for so many years, without purpose. This turned out to get clearer to the family under the new constellation.

Nobody wanted to admit such, most of all their mother, who was so fond of harmony. Still it was so, and had there not been the secret connection of the Somnors, all three were allied, the sisters might have drifted apart for good.

Flory was a case in itself. She didn't enjoy writing, and therefore had to go on writing. And the longer she did, the more she became frustrated. So she took any chance to get away from the desk in order to accompany her father. She did feel busy and challenged the proper way, while didn't get any further with her own project.

Her father, Professor Hare, sooner or later realized her dilemma, but didn't know the answer. The only thing he knew was that the Archeology, as he did it, didn't work under pressure of time. In fact, Flory had any time in the world. Nobody pushed her, there was no such pressure in reality. The pressure existed only in her mind. Nobody else was pressing, no merits were waiting behind the horizon. Just the opposite, here and now opened the fields and multiple approaches, like never before or ever again in future. But Flory was infested by the virus of time-loss, and discovered approaches, no-one had ever seen under such paradigm, not even her father.

The phenomenon of time was not only diverse but also opaque. Nobody was able to escape. Everybody would become aware sooner or later, and be it in the form of etymology and linguistics, as time was more or less exactly limited, and you could measure when exactly the time became limited, and when the future, and the past began, and since when the presence was due. While such changes were expressed in any language historically.

Be it, that you returned deeper into the past, and searched the furthest corners of the world for life-forms, the common people didn't even dream of.

Only the latest Ethno-Linguistics brought about, which way many tribal cultures really worked. Former researchers didn't take the chance, which was now done by the comparative language-research.

It was worth while to learn a language first of all, instead of teaching the savages in colonial manner the own – i.e. 'civilized' language, as had been done under the cover of charity.

This was why Flory didn't only care for relicts from the past, but also took interest in the living witnesses. And where ever she met such, her heart was beating higher, because there she was in touch with her friends, her sister and her mother. While her father

preferred to deal with relicts in graves and settlements, he undug, as were many to be seen these days, since the Americans had started to follow the rapist traces of Europeans, using aeroplanes and sonar and radar, and high definition photography. Thus disguising archaic sites, which had been hidden ever since.

**

Time had made the former friends to be drifting apart. Where were those days, when they marched with a gay song on their lips towards Atlantis, or approached the cloud-banks of Laptopia? Studying had destroyed all that, so it seemed to Flory. And she felt bitterness. Each of them was engaged in his or her special field. They existed only in that ivory tower, in the scientific differentiation, where each was forced to produce stunning innovations.

As a matter of fact, all her friends should have been as sad as she sometimes was, when she thought of the good old days, that were gone for good.

Not even for dreaming there was a chance. Her nights in Egypt, where her father had been drawn to once more, didn't match with the nights of the others, and thus there was no chance of meeting that way, and there was definitely no other. Only Cory and her mother stuck to specific times and arranged something. Why was there internet and telephone? There could always something be done, if the will was there.

Was this what lacked? Perhaps someone had to make the start. Perhaps Cory, who was in the area, while she was diving away permanently with her maritime institute.

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The merfolk was – by the way – a species with an own language. Which was so complex, that it was impossible for human beings to learn it or express themselves in it.

“Etymolocially spoken, this language is a kind of missing link”, Cory explained and looked rather meaningfully, so that Floy became envious again.

Well, you can't do two things at once, that was the reverse side of the medal. And why should their good old study group become involved in such a language, with all the confusion and implemantations of all kind of non-human or even supra-human

aspects? Which wouldn't be available just like that, or 'en passant'. Seen that way, Cory was very right, who criticized just this fact.

Judgements came far too fast, just like in former times in Laptopia or in Atlantis, where all were far too soon at hand with a judgement or an own point of view. Which hadn't been all that difficult then, as this world had passed, after all.

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Arundle didn't feel well either, in fact as bad as Flory did. They infested each other unknowingly. While Arundle wasn't able to express her sentiments as precise as Flory. Perhaps she lacked the distance. She was definitely not happy with what was going on. Sea-faring only seemed to alter things. And you didn't notice the true whereabouts. Besides, Billy-Joe was always near, whether as steward or as navigator. And Zinfandor also gave her a homely feeling, no matter how strange he remained. In fact he was somewhat simply fabricated. But that as well was a matter in itself, dealing with a psychopath and his world from inside, seeing it with his eyes – or try to do so, after all.

Because Zinfandor still didn't work alright. Even not now as he stood his man as Captain and Skipper. His fate might be similar to Captain Ahab's, who got lost in the infight with his enemy and didn't notice till the end, what he really did, and why he acted the way he did. This might be the fate of every Captain, who has no-one above him (but the Almighty), who could straighten things out for him, and set his head in order.

**

What happened to Billy-Joe that he had himself put into a uniform – the hated uniform of a servant? Had it been only because he couldn't imagine to stay behind and let Arundle roam? Did he think he wasn't capable of more?

Stay with her at about any price? In the weakest hours, when he felt absolutely honest with himself, then this seemed so. He took his lot because of Arundle. Like he had so much taken up on her behalf, and would surely take up a lot more in future.

She had introduced him very basically into the forms of the past and the future. Whereas he was living so present, so timeless and dreamtime-like – on the jump at any time. Because what had been, had not been as well. Not even Arundle was able to alter this

fact. It would remain this way: their world meant to be additional, and their affairs were additional affairs. Because of this, he managed to become involved. He became a jumper between the worlds, and Arundle was pleased to let him enter her world.

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Those who had been involved in the publications and inventions were well off. The anti-petrification-potion was worldwide handled as a medicine against depression. That meant for the inventors that the dividends were floating permanently. Dorothea cared about the financial matters anyway and did a perfect job that way. Tibor had his share unknowingly and without being interested at all. He didn't even take notice of his financial status. Because this would only bother and disturb him.

Those who were not involved in the serum were covered by Anonymous's publication, and last but not least by the miraculous apparatus of the outstanding success of the SLOMES. As shareholders they entered into spheres of the super-richies. And those who stayed apart, or like Moschus Mogoleya for undefined reasons, was still flooded by the aura of wealth, because there was no way lest via the School of Inbetween. Dorothea took care of this, who very well handled the time and money equivalents, after her bad experiences with the invasion-trials of the so-called 'Brotherhood of Infernalialia'.

"I just had to" she always stressed – "I'm not at all fond of money-making. My passion traditionally is the spending..." she argued with a benign grin.

She wasn't quite that way. Little Sulamith however didn't miss anything. In fact, she almost drowned in the plenty since she came into this world.

"That might indeed be our problem" Arundle thought – "the problem of all of us. We are swimming in a world of wealth and what we wish to do, it's already done and recorded. Only what we research is our genuine own, and can save us and beware us. Things like that are being thought by themselves" – so she felt, and wondered.

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Oh yes, Corinia felt what was wrong with her and her sister and their joint friends and comrades. But what should she do?

Should she give up what she had achieved, and what she believed in, and where she had the greatest possible discernment as well as possibilities of help and protection – at least she hoped. She noticed of course the contradiction. But was the view not tightening on all of them as soon as it became focussed by the demands of the task and the pressure of circumstances of life?

As a matter of fact, those circumstances weren't dictated by the big questions, but remained as they used to – as parts of the trivial everyday remedies. And that meant after all to tidy the flat, and to clean up the dormitory. Or in terms of the sub-water world: to clear the inner habitation and have the streams of fresh water pull in, in order to get rid of the waste until the water became clear again.

How big was a city allowed to become? Were there natural limits with reference to the number of heads? And then the language problem. If you turned in on that. If you started learning the language. At once a new universe opened, and you could get lost easily. You might even forget why you entered it first of all.

Did you get lost or did you conquer this new universe? Nobody could tell you. It was not as if you knew that success was waiting for you here or there. When you began, you didn't know the outcome – you never did. Failure was likely, nothing was granted in fact. Definitely there, where the ice was as thin as this, as was the air for breathing. When the sight became clear and clearer, and you felt jubilant, although nobody could ever be certain, how far this was realistic or factitious, and why you had entered in the first place.

Boetie hadn't known before hand that she once became Prime Minister. She could have failed on each hurdle of the route towards the aim, and could of course fail each coming up day anew. And what the worst was: As Prime Minister she had lost many targets out of sight. She knew no more why she acted. She acted, because she had to, and because she didn't have the choice, and because there was no way back and no escape.

All labour and work only led further apart from the aim, which got lost that way, while it still remained seductive, the more it faded and the lesser it became.

With such paradoxa you could easily fiddle around. But where the hard reality was rubbing, you soon noticed, it might be better, when you stayed away from certain things, if you didn't want to risk severe harm.

Well, the watery walls weren't all that rough down here. Down here on the first level that opened up for the living beings. Or was it already the second or the so and so maniest level, because the dwarves shouldn't be forgotten either, no matter how little the surfacers cared for them?

For the dwarves, one single ray of the sun was often as precious as for a gambler was the jackpot of the state lottery. This jackpot others might exchange for a new liver or new lungs. Which wasn't out of range any more, while the dwarves weren't aware yet.

And then such an individual might think about it and ask timidly, if half of the jackpot wouldn't suffice.

Because, what was he doing with a new liver if there was nothing to digest for it? – you know what I mean!

Richness is no matter in itself or makes sense only if you enjoy spending. And without health it's not worth while and not at all easy.

In any case, the dwarves kept access to the surface world. In fact no highways up there, but little narrow trespasses and hidden gateways, where they could sneak through. Such access they missed in a way on Susamee's Island, they realized. In fact, there was nothing to be seen up there, and this was the main reason. This was why they thanked their comrades who still remained at the old site, despite of the inclement conditions there. Foul surroundings that became all the more severe and insurmountable while they were alone and on their own now, separated from the common flock, so to speak.

On the other hand, they didn't have to fight about the last crumb of bread, but scooped out of the plentitude, and dry spots could also be found, free of charge, while no coughing clusters of the diseased fought for the seldom sun-rays. In the new premise they might even cure their disease in the sunny new health resort.

Doubtful however was, whether they would ever again become the old. Was there any one who understood them up there? Some of the brighter ones sometimes believed to have found an adequate attorney in Billy-Joe, others swore on Arundle, who was able to produce some sensibility despite of her liberal basic attitude, while the goodnatured fundamentalist Billy-Joe, who soon cared too much about principles instead of the dwarf and his lot and obligation in his only world, as there was no other, and that was the point.

What happened to all those transplanted beings, who were put into the oversized cloaks of the dead white man, who now dwelled in the slums of the outskirts and had handed them over to alcohol and drugs? They became nothing, but lost everything, even the last bit of what once had been their identity, until they even became fed up with dreaming.

Down here they were lucky because Tibor was there and cared for them in the health resort, which was definitely no slum-like place on Susamee's Island – still...

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Not quite, the stubborn insisted, and mingled into the dreams by hushing with tripling feet through the dormitories, because in their dwellings underneath there were loopholes and hidden trespasses the lot.

Nobody had to drill with pain and dig. And those who loved their buildings most, learned to understand them – sometimes unwillingly and rather to their astonishment – still they understood. Not idle admiration for the splendour of precious stones and jewels, but the understanding between man and dwarf, because understanding is no oneway street. This was why even the impertinent picked up a lot, things, they didn't like, but a lot, which stunned them so they wished to adopt. Whether they succeeded or not, was another question. First of all, understanding was growing.

7. A Dwarves'-School of the Other Kind.

The reason why the housing area of the dwarves was so wet, was caused by the merfolk – that is, not directly by the merfolks themselves, but by the fact that they lived in the hiding under the mainland socle, which interfered into the geostatics of the underground, and made the sediment thereunder vulnerable and porous. The sediment became pressed and pushed and after some time showed little resistance.

As soon as the water had started trickling, there was no more way of preventing it from entering. The water was then flooding in smaller rivulets first, and then in streams later the underground habitat of the dwarves. By then it was high time for them to leave.

Above the merfolk's tunnel things looked quite different. In the neck of the islands and first of all in the many hundred yards wide base – that is to say the two bases, there was found solid hard volcano rock, more poured than formed and often out of one founding. Hard, solid and impermeable. Be it that someone drilled himself through it in hard toil. Even then howeverm the hole could still be controlled. It didn't fringe, didn't enlarge on its own, or was following the surrounding structures, as they were no soft sediments but soild hard volcano rock.

This was why the craftsmen so easily worked down from above by following the given tunnels. The sea only spilled away what could be spilled away, and that was no granite from the inner earth. What remained, stood straight in solid pillars and granite fastness for eternity. Be it that another eruption from the innerst of the earth would alter the outer shape of the globe once more.

Talking about their desperate situation forbade honour and pride and discretion anyway. Because dwarves didn't publish things like that. Not even each other they told about the puddles of salty water under the bed and salt crusts under the plates. They not even mentioned the spoilt mushrooms or the hunger that gnawed in their bowels and couldn't be stilled. That was not their way of behaving. They preferred to carry on or stirr the world around a little by pinching here a crumb and there a biscuit. Just as much, that it could hardly be noticed.

This was now all settled. The disgrace lay open, the main bulk of the little folk was gone – sent to a sanatorium to become cured in a hospice. Reservation – they called the idyllic island, only the best could be said about. Reservation the stubborn called it in deep disrespect, because this it was in their eyes.

A piece of land granted and provided by some kind of self-induced master-breed, who felt so superior, that they didn't even notice their shameful highbrow behaviour any more. They had been sent there, because they had become obstacles in the eyes of the surfacers (such went the saying among the little folk, who were all too easily caught by such nonsense, as was happening anywhere in the world, when demagogues stirred up pimitive emotions who didn't know better, or didn't want to know better.)

Once more it worked fine. The reservationists became round and fat and recreated perfectly. They didn't suffer from asthma assaults any more, and the tuberculosis was beaten as well. For hours and days

the recreationists lay lazy in the open plain sunshine without doing anything or shuffle the earth about as is dwarves' obligation.

No good could spring of that. For pranks there was no need either. The most vaillant didn't know what to do with their fits of courage. The Trolls didn't know any more that they were eventually Trolls, but wondered about their aggressions, which they fed into psycho-social projects instead of living them out in order to become real dwarves.

Thus were the nightmarish stories being told about the brave new world, the land of promise - Susamee's Island, where milk and honey were flowing and to all dwellers the right of self-fulfillment would be granted.

Was it so, the dwarves did perform rather poor in the sense of their dwarf-hood. With the left behind misery also the drive had passed to overcome such agony.

(While it is in fact almost impossible to overcome any trouble if it had gone. The question was, what then could be done.)

As a matter of fact the polemic of the ones' left behind, wasn't all that miserable after all. All the more so, as they felt unwatched, and therefore began to occupy the level above the merfolk. There it was dry – well, at least dryer then underneath. And there the dwarves – and that might be the most thrilling challenge – secretly spied on the suferacers and their funny occupations they were after.

'University' the surfacers called what they did. Therefore they occupied rooms the heart-blood of the dwarves was adjacent which were worth a king. There they sat the whole day long. Some talked, other took notes. And every two hours a bell was ringing, and all jumped up, and rushed outside. Most went to the cafeteria. There they sat around again, while they were eating until a new sign of the bell made them rush back, and the same game started all over again.

Down here the walls had ears and eyes anyway. The dwarves had cared for that, when they worked over this part of the socle. – If you listened long enough and spied what was going on, the funny behaviour began to fill with sense. Had there not been the troublesome human language, which stood between them, they would have understood even better.

However, that much even the dullest realized, here people were learning and studying, and in the end something sensible came about. This was what the more clever ones managed to understand, the more they became acquainted with the mode of speech. If you tuned in on that, you step by step realized that the

subjects weren't all that odd. While emotions and feelings played a vital role as well, and were as important as the words.

Telepathy was after all part of the basic set-up of a real dwarf. However, it had to be readable what was disguised that way. The confuse stuff the surfacers kept shovelling about in their brains could hardly be called thinking – at least not in the sense of the dwarves.

The idea began to settle: “We also want a university. Had we known, what we had been building... yes, had we only known...”

A few even raised. Perhaps it was high time to open at last? Much more couldn't become destroid. The homeland was lost. The water came flooding in and the disabled were sitting in a sanatorium and listened to the tunes of a self-induced horseheaded violin, who made even stones sob and dwarves anyway.

This they knew from the secret spies, who went there each month when full moon came. They mingled under the flock of Convertors rushing towards Susamee's Island. So the contact never got lost.

‘Sly little mouse
wispering round the house.’

Tibor, the Lord, presented himself. His call rushed ahead of him and while he met here mostly stubborn atheist ears, he found openings still. Because Tibor didn't care about divinity. Eventually he wanted to mediate that also the left-behinds could find access and open the paradise up for themselves as well. Would they once be here, he knew for sure, they wouldn't long away anymore, but would stay for good. (This might even be true. After all, the left-behinds knew from their spies, what was waiting for them.)

No Saint like Tibor knew everything after all, and knows about dialectics and what it meant, to expose what's inside. And if there is nothing, which comes out without teasing, or just too little, that the tickling might not be worth while, the cat might bite into its tail, so to speak.

The dwarves needed Professors as well, that was clear to the frontmen. But they should stem from their own ranks. The most gifted, the cleverest and most experienced should they be. And they should teach the little folk all what was needed to run a future-bound life. There was practically nothing, that didn't fit into the scale, they decided after some thinking things over.

Sure enough they had to find arrangements with the surfacers. They had to become more acquainted with their way of thinking or

they would become extinct like so many indogene peoples and races – this they knew already from Tibor, whom they thought able to become one of their teachers. Besides, he had this sacred flair. And when he called, they would all come.

The dwarves mixed something up with that universal call. But that didn't harm the affection. Main thing was, they got started. Tibor was looking forward anyway, when the rat transmitted the news. The rat introduced itself as a trained rat, who was underway by order of the left behind dwarves, who wanted Tibor as their official teacher – granting him full freedom of research and teaching.

Had those stubborn pigheads known what this meant, they would have better skipped such an appendix, because they knew quite well what they were going to let their comrades in the so-called paradise know.

Seen from this angle, it were the old values, and nothing new, definitely nothing revolutionary would be allowed to turn the old-time tough way of life upside down.

By that, some kind of auto-dynamic evolved. From Tibor came the suggestion to nominate Billy-Joe. And where he was, Arundle wasn't far either.

Susamee was eager to pass on her immense knowledge as well. She felt it better taken care of with the dwarves than with most of her own race.

“Herbology for the young dwarfess”,

“Birth-assistance for Shorties”,

“The dwarfess and her Home-pharmacy”

– such were the challenging titles of her curriculum, perhaps quite likely to the teaching of a peoples' university.

“Just to make sure, everybody knows what we are talking about.” She declared with a friendly smile.

While the two new doctors and the little sorcerer didn't do as easy, though. Had Tibor not had his horse-headed violin, which he managed to bring into account very efficiently, the masses would have dissembled quite as fast as they gathered. Thus however they streamed by and this was why he was getting cocky.

In the beginning the lectures were held in the premises of the Island-University with agreement of the president. However the dwarves didn't like that, some even hated the idea as such.

Others cared about the lost souls over there in the reservation, as they put it. And this was why the monthly flights to Susamee's Island became overbooked, until the helicopter crew protested and resisted to transport such "nasty bunch of impertinent little monsters" – as they put it. Not even one they'd transport in future.

A rat had gnawed the hose to the steering well and they almost crashed. No proof was ever found that the dwarves had to do with such an act of sabotage. No letter of confession was found either. Still a lot of rumour went about.

This was why the ship-owner was asked whether a transportation would be generally possible. First on a trial basis, of course. In the long run however, the idea was to set up a regular ferry service, either in bulk or by capita, as would please the crew. Because the owner figured quite something out of workload to be acquired that way. Thanks to Tibor's image and attraction. There might come up something really great.

Meanwhile the left-behind dwarves dug in their element. Their ambition was to come up with an own univeristy roomwise as well. A university with everything, not only structural but also material, with everything that belongs to such an institution – or what they thought to belong to anyway. While they didn't have the faintest idea of what belonged to a univeristy, at least not as far as the administrative side was concerned.

They built of course, in the dwarves' manner and for dwarves' needs. That meant low ceilings and tiny furniture. Besides, a campus should also go with it. This was the place where the students would sleep and spend their free time, they soon found out.

While they also could stay on board of the Last Bounty, not only for the time of the journey, but for their whole stay. That would have an advantage, and they hadn't to move so often.

Since that incident with the rat in the helicopter, the President of the Univerity didn't see things as cool as he used to, and he minded a lot, whether or not the extensions were made on his grounds, and a new native tribal branch would be added.

At best Scholasticus had liked to have such orcus also expediated to the mainland socle under the mainland shelf, the more so, because Adrian was bothering him for months with his merfolk.

“What’s good for the dwarves is also good for the merfolk”, Adrian exclaimed theatrically once in a while, when he returned disappointed from his sub-water trip, because the ignorance was huge down there. That caused him to recite Berthold Brecht from whom was said to stem the saying: “Stupidity makes itself invisible by enlarging immeasurably.” –

This sentence could also come from either Adorno or Horkheimer. “It would fit quite well to those high-brow pals”, Arundle commented the saying, who liked it very much. However, the sentence intimidated quite a bit. Were they then already huge or were going astray in that forest, where you couldn’t distinguish the individual trees any more? As such erring would certainly go along with stupidity as well.

Arundle appeared only as the carrier of the magic bow, just as Billy-Joe, who was bearer of the magic stone. This was why the dwarves were very interested in these two as teachers, as neither the bow nor the stone could be booked without their carriers.

The spectacular sessions did obviously not pass unnoticed by the dwarves, the two had put on stage. Because the dwarves had their ears and eyes everywhere. This was the way they were. This was how they got along in this world. Of course they would have liked to have such spectacles started by themselves, where the energy was humming and flooding like the tickling water, they now were on the verge to get rid of at last.

‘What could have been done with the surfacers should work with the little folk as well’ could also be noticed otherwise, if you had an ear to hear the unsaid, anyway. The dwarves were kind of self-satisfied, even cheery in a way. They were very fond of what came to their minds, if it was of such kind.

“Trolls should certainly been taken care of – no doubt about that. Trolls represent our most innovative forces, they carry on the capital of our future” Inspector Barnby said repeatedly, who had installed himself on his own as there was no appropriate council to speak for the dwarves on Susamee’s Island, yet.

The former council had dissolved, when their members emigrated in majority. They took care now of their health and wellness, instead of dealing with the rough wind of politics.

“Right-o – what Robbin won’t learn will never dig Rob” such, or similar went the saying, the eldermen recalled from their visits to the surface of former times. This was how someone had put it long time ago.

“Could have been so”, others nodded and looked affirmatively at each other, while having their little limbs covered in steaming mud, puffing clouds of smoke out of their long bent pipes.

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Captain Zinfandor Leblanc and Chief Stan, with the tongue twisting name, felt very happy. They didn't mind to go back and forth the same route. They enjoyed sea-faring so regularly when the weather was fine. It could be so for ever. The ship was equipped now - dwarves back and forth, and sometimes even Conversors joined them. It was like on a cruising tour, very romantic. The travellers were fed up with those bumpy helicopter trips, anyway. It was a change, and therefore nobody minded sparing a couple of days. The monthly adventure became adventurous again that way.

However, with the rest of the crew, the Skipper was in trouble. Only a few were free regularly. It had been different then – kind of exempt situation – which now turned out to become routine. This was why the shirt got closer to the submarine-men than the jacket. The jacket was in this case the Last Bounty. And this was why Captain Leblanc was left out in the cold more or less alone.

Troublesome he talked himself hoarse. In former times you shanghaied your crew just like that. The sea was wide those days and the nearest port far. And often enough the steam had puffed off and the waves quieted down, so to speak. The shanghaied man had become a nice neat sealord who was proud of his merits. Some even with a boatsman's or Officer's stripes on the sleeve of the marine-blue jacket.

Zinfandor himself had become a sailor that way, a long time ago. This didn't work these days anymore. Besides, there was the plight of secrecy – you weren't allowed to talk about your duty in public. And you couldn't look into a man's heart for that, whether a true heart was beating in his chest, you could trust in, and who deserved confidence.

The ship-owner was helpless, and the dwarves couldn't be argued with. For them it was a question of honour. It was bad enough that they had to ship back and forth, just like that. But if there then was even a foul apple sluiced in – you couldn't imagine what then would break loose, and what would happen if the secret was lost.

For them the whole ship should have been hidden under a magic hood and had travelled unseen that way. Some kind of camouflage craft perhaps – preferably not on the water, nor in the air.

First of all the crew had to become stocked up. “Less than six is a crime”, Zinfonador murmured – “had to be good men. No students, but true blokes, with spirit in the bones and a sailor’s mind...”

There was still the little shipowner’s office next to the helicopterport in Sydney. There was little work, but a representation was advantageous in many ways. Be it for the irregularly showing up back-packers of the second generation, who had inherited the secret of the island from their parents, and who tried for traces now on their own. Not just a big number, but they were there, and for them the office was good enough.

Genuine seamen from the public sign-on office weren’t yet in the focus. Dorothea didn’t want to go that far. There she had had loads of offers, of course. Well, perhaps not masses, but an appropriate number. The unemployment rate down under was chronically high. That came from the mentality the sociologist argued, and because of the world economy in turmoil.

8. Debtors and Credits

Since the money-system was deprived – while money lacked in all governmental cashes, a time-value system had become appropriate, on the verge of replacement. With a diffuse lobby of interestees in the hide and loads of other secret interests connected with. It almost looked as if all the world agreed in a diffuse consense. Dealing with time-based credits became really fashionable. Without trouble you could buy, and the debtor was rid of his trouble by that, as soon as the redeem was due. You had no worries any more – not for the time of the repayment, anyway. This was why more and more people ran into such trap, with astronomical debts, they wouldn’t be able to repay in two lifetimes, so this became and remained often the final stage in their life.

Could they get access to those desperados? The ship-owner asked herself. They had to be good seamen, of course. For this kind of a speak-easy job as was offered on the Last Bounty, the more experienced people were demanded. Their living was granted comfortably. So it was almost like in the free life out there. With one difference, they couldn't sack, just like that, in fact, they were destined to remain for good.

Some Creditors had changed over to a system of loan-workers. They had just too many debtors under contract, and didn't know what to do with all the manpower.

This happened to the SLOMES-trust as well, since the demand of do-it-yourself-sets declined in order to avoid debts, or because the market became saturated.

Yes, there even were people who voluntarily stepped into the debt-trap with the SLOMES-trust. "Then you needn't worry any more", they argued, just like that. "Pick the rose before it fades" they repeated the company's slogan, that was persuading from the advertising screens everywhere.

This slogan might even be true.

Judith had the greatest scruples by then, and was on the verge of extracting from the family. Peter anyway, who was hit by mere horror, when imagining where he was involved.

One million debtors tinkered about their SLOMES daily – well, a lot of malfunction was among them. Still the production was appropriate to cover the need world-wide. Because the trust now had branch-offices on each continent. They all worked under the same principal.

In order to keep the power over a long period of time – many debtors were marked down with a hundred years – the workers remained voluntarily of course, in front of their binoculars of their own SLOMES. They did that for hours – hours they claimed to be the light in their sad lives. This was what was talked in rumours. Because all that sad, this life was not, compared to the lives of those on the so called free market.

In short, Dorothea swallowed the bitter pill, and asked for long-term-debtors in an appropriate firm, whose life-time would most likely end before their debts were repaid.

Seamen they had to be, real seamen, with a long life at sea. "With experience in the appropriate field, and of solid shape", as Zinfandor stressed all over again.

"With guts in the brain and strength in the bones". Preferably without relatives out there. Lonesome left-overs – "old, strong and

ambitious” – “Somewhat some kind of quadrature of the circle” – seen that way, Arundle commented, when she learned of that. She did so, just like that, because Dorothea knew the critical demands of her clientele all too well. For them the development went the wrong way. They saw Laptopia appearing threateningly on the horizon of the future. And she herself remembered the thick fingers, and all the trouble, because of a bite to eat in that future transgalactic gas-station.

So it was. Suddenly, things put up speed and went their track, and before you realized, you were involved in something, that was so much different from what you intended.

Was it all that bad, when she offered the stranded a last good resort? When they found a last spark of sense in their lives?

The shipping company offered a lot. More than any other, Dorothea was sure about that. Diversity, humanity, self-assurance – were the qualities you couldn’t buy with money or life-time. As debtors the individuals concerned acquired the true pleasures of life – the world was paradox by now. Not everywhere and not always, but, so she hoped, often enough. Because not the humanity did decline. In the opposite, because the old inhumane money-system was de-constructed at last. Consequently humanness was on the march. While didn’t yet show. But that would soon come.

Anyway, Zinfandor got some work to do. And while the chief-mechanic Stan, with the unspeakable name, was there, he became involved as well.

First tender strings of sympathy arose. So the Skipper asked the ship-owner to have Stan enter the captain’s bridge, so to speak, to help out for coming to decisions.

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What a bunch of characters that was, - passing by. Like from a horror-cabinet or from an old peoples disabled inhabitants assortment. Poor forlorn creatures, pitiable, as they were, had to be examined anyway. Pleading with tears in their eyes for a last chance in life.

It was a hard job to stick to the criteria they had established, by all means! How much debris does life have pass by or even spill ashore.

The search stretched. Other agencies became involved, whose wretched candidates lived under even worse conditions. The two

seamen suspected, that the candidates offered, weren't even real seamen. Most of them were vagabonds, legionaires, hobos, dockhands, yes, and also a few months of seamanship in the widest sense. Perhaps they had even been to sea for some years. Quite a few might have been trained hairdressers, who had given up their occupation to become a greaser and get a chance to see the world that way.

At last the Skipper and his chief succeeded. The first candidate was found. A second followed some weeks later, and before the year was over, they had six names on the payroll. Six more or less hopeful pals who felt lucky while showing. They might even feel still the itch in the blood, and the longing for the far unseen beyond the horizon, while the bottle was in reach. – However, they were no drunkards, they kept on swearing by their mothers' souls.

The truth would be found out soon enough. A little discipline would do them good in any case, they all frankly admitted. For them the SLOMES was worse the effort. Judith was all too happy to donate one. She was still ashamed of her family, because they had collected uncountable wealth in a very short period of time. And found it now very difficult to give such wealth back, as was declared repeatedly by them. Sharing affluence was a heroic intention – the everyday practice looked different. Those, who ever had to distribute resources, knows how difficult a task that is. While throwing away was no solution either.

Blokes much alike Stan and Zinfandor were found, while the two didn't look comparable – in no way. It was the spirit that formed the string of likeliness. So the six new crew members were of different appearance, but of the same fabric, so to speak. A clever brain might have separated them into two categories. The ones he had called 'Stans' the others 'Zinfandors'. And might have met the point. It was that way.

But as it is in life, the most solid man showed greatest interest in the ship's engine. He was gifted, and had an open mind for technical stuff. This was a rare gift indeed, as Stan knew all too well. Such talent he only noticed on his own side. He had never met someone like him in his long life at sea.

On the other hand was Zinfandor pushed toward a tiny person, only half his own size, who qualified himself best as a navigator. This was why he became the First Officer, and the Skipper's right hand representative on the bridge. He was a very able navigator.

He knew the world and was acquainted with all ends of the globe. He knew a lot about weather. He knew what it meant when hot and cold jetstreams met from North and South . He even knew about monster waves, and how you could avoid or fly off them, as they all had their herolds. Only a few could read the message or recognized what was due.

“How shall we call him?” Stan and Zinfandor wondered. Because he was Indonesian, and his name was a tongue twister for the Europeans. Whether there was a nickname, they wanted to know, and the Navigator had an answer for that. Because he ’knew of the heavy tongues of the whites and of their heavy heads – most of them had. There were exemptions of course, but not here on board.

“Call me Ishmael” he shouted gayly and spread his arms wide as if he wanted to embrace the whole world. While he recited of a play he once had seen and helped to put on stage in a sailors’ home somewhere in Djakarta.

“A play of an insane whaler-skipper who fell in love with a whale, or something like that, and couldn’t leave him until the end.”

Stan was luckier. His Pole was named Pole, there was nothing to keep in mind, and that was after Stan’s liking. Pole was no real Pole but from Latvia. And the people there were also known for their funny long and tongue-twisting names...

Things were settle that way: The Navigator was called Ishmael, and the assistant-mechanic was called Pole. Both were put into smart uniforms with broad golden stripes on the sleeves the Navigator, and two smaller red ones The Pole, marking him as the second man in charge of the engine.

For those who still had trouble with their length of the name “The Pole’ there was a second choice, and that surely would do, and that was ‘Wazlav’. This name was indeed very homely, and reminded Stan of his lost home, back in Poland. So Stan loved the long Latvian Pole for that, and called him by his artist’s name ‘Wazlav’ - and an artist he was with the engine, no matter his names or his original Latvian one, which was definitely unspeakable, even for a real Pole.

Wazlav and Ishmael were ‘Hundred-Enders’ – this was how the lifelong victims in boudage were called. They had no chance of ever getting rid of their debts. Just like Stan. They stranded ashore like a misled whale, and couldn’t be helped.

One day, Stan therefore decided never to leave the boat again. And he stayed on board. What he needed, he found here. And now the world was showing up with him. What could he else wish? “Stay on board. There you know where you are, and what you have. Out there - there are only traps and snares awaiting you...”

Master Wazlav nodded then bleary-eyed and reminded his women-tales, which had caused his malaise and led him into bondage. While he couldn't refrain from boasting.

Master Ishmael went silent, when asked about his past. It was of no interest to no-one, was his final decision. Zinfandor accepted this, and felt as if he was talked over instead. And while he himself was no ‘Hundred-Ender’ he could have easily become one.

Their SLOMES the officers established in the officers' mess. There it stood small and secure between the board for the dishes and the narrow table, where you couldn't sit opposite each other but had to find a space for your knees aside.

The two giants on the one side didn't work at all, so each had to have a tiny one opposite. As a matter of fact, they hardly met anyway, because of the watches, and because the boatswain and the carpenter, who were exempted from the watches, joined them as well, and were expedated into petty-officers' ranks generously, whereas they preferred to match with the sailors before the mast. There was three times as much space, if those nasty tourists weren't swarming about which was the case of course, because this was the sense of their service. Those tourists had to be fed – same place – in three shifts then.

While the dwarves' food was sour fare, the buffet for the world-travellers was excellent. Even the Officers came over to join them, while the choice was left to the steward. As a matter of fact, you had to remain flexible, and avoid unnecessary conceit. Therefore, the ‘parlez’ was ‘nonchalant’ and never arbitrary. They all were much too sensible for that, and had their bad experience with authorities of all kind. But you never spoke about that, and never started unnecessary questionings. With that you could easily get in trouble, stripes or not. But lucky them, things never went that far.

“Each got to keep his dignity” was Zinfandor's advice, he handed out every morning to his officers and crew members – a total number of four. More couldn't be found so far. This was why they sailed the slow way, but orderly, and clean, and proper as far as seamanship was concerned. Unexpected needs would have caused severe problems, indeed.

Two men were on the bridge, one in the engine-room, and that was it. Three were free of watch in their berthes. In addition, there were the steward, the cook, and Boatswain, and the ship's Carpenter – and that was it.

More couldn't be found under the limitations, they had to obey. So it became tight, when manoeuvring about in the port, or on roadstead, there they required an additional helping hand or two, which they might find amongst the passengers, if there were any. But Zinfandor didn't like the idea of depending on "those tourists", as he called them.

9. Hundred-Enders

The Skipper regretted to have accepted the Boatswain, and the Carpenter as well. What was the use of those watch-free fellows, who were dawdling abroad, fraternizing with the passengers, and pleasing the ladies like coquettish roosters?

"We can't move while on watch and afterwards you better go to sleep. Because in four hours time it says rise, rise, again..."

One of the two had bad eyes, and had no idea of navigation, the other had no idea of electricity, and couldn't even exchange a bulb. Things like that he didn't study, he said. He was definitely too old to change anything on this behalf. – so said the Carpenter – a man of the woods, as the name said, a man for the wood. This was his way of looking at things. And so he did with a malicious grin, knowing all too well that on a vessel like the Last Bounty everything was iron-made, except the sills of the hatches and the furniture in the messes and cabins.

As a matter of fact, Carpenter was just a definition of a petty officer in charge of almost everything that could break on such a ship. A sort of caretaker – no wood-worker, as might have been so in the beginning of sea-faring.

For the boatswain such loopholes didn't open. His superiors could well assume that he was the cleverest and best of all deckhands – able to show his inferiors what everything was about. In this case, however, things didn't work that way.

On the other hand, the boatswain was a nice guy, good-natured, humourous and affable, but workshy. He was able to play

the harmonica fine and bewitched his fellowmen as well as the tourists, all the same. For the music's sake they wouldn't have liked to miss him.

As a matter of fact, the crew lacked the youngsters, the ordinary seamen, such you would look for in vain amongst the Hundred-Enders, while a regular ship's mate could well be fifty years of age. Those, who didn't manage the sailor's exam by that age, would surely never succeed, and had to become a greaser or ship's-steward, or cook, if he didn't give up sea-faring at all.

There, another pot had to be opened up, and for that the secrecy stood in the way.

All crewmen of the Last Bounty were marked by a plain fact – they had no relatives. Nobody was waiting for them. Nobody wrote them or cared whether they existed. In fact, nobody even knew that they were alive.

This was how things stood. And they would have been the poorest and most wretched human beings of the world, if they hadn't met each other. This was why they overlooked little weaknesses, that life brought along. Each in his own way and ability. You wouldn't change a dull lame mare to become a fierce galopper, but might proceed well step by step.

With the men in charge on the bridge and in the engine-room, Mr. Ishmael and Mr. Wazlav, the crew had hit the jackpot, that is in fact two jackpots, which couldn't be said of the petty-officers and not of the deck-hands either. Where they all just losers? You shouldn't go that far, that might be indecent, in fact, the sailors weren't all that bad. They did their job at the rudder and hardly missed the course as long as the weather was fine.

On deck they knew what had to be done. They knew how to remove the nasty rust, as well as to paint everything, made of steel and iron. The winches they handled so far alright, and the anchor chain wasn't yet broken, which could easily happen, when you let slip the anchor too fast.

Named they were simply 'Sailor one' and 'Sailor two', Boatswain, and Carpenter, for other names nobody cared, and weren't common anyway. Who knows for how long? – this was what the Skipper and the factotum, that is the Chief Mechanic Stan decided, and the second in command wholly agreed on that as well without own suggestions.

The search was still going on for additional crew members, and the ship-owner did her best. After all, she had to take care of her daughter, who needed the mother. With all that workload at the university and the stock investment business Dorothea was involved, there was hardly any time left to bother here as well.

Nephew Intellectus was back again on the island. His dad Amadeus had lost interest in taking care of the Sydney office at the helicopter-terminal, where now an aid was sitting again who had no idea of what was going on, then being polite, nice and friendly to the adventurers passing by in increasing number by the time, because the summer was approaching down under here. They tried for a passage on the Last Bounty and for a permit for the islands.

This meant of course additional turns for the Last Bounty, and not only the ten days passage with the Conversiors back and forth during full moon over to Susamee's Island.

The dwarves took the chance and travelled back and forth as well. One group came, the other went. The ones looked for recreation in the sanatorium, while the other cared for studying at the new Dwarves' University, or were even nominated as teachers, and well pampered for their wide knowledge and prospects.

The latter had come out of the inner earth and from far times for that purpose. Now, that the call of a universal uprising was spread into the furthest ends of the dwarves' world. Such never had ever happened before indeed – well, definitely not for a very long time.

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Where did all the 'Hundred-Enders' come from? How did such an ungood development become started in the first place?

Ever more individuals gave themselves up. This development was alarming. Only since she had to deal with them, Dorothea realized what was all about with those poor beings. The people just gave themselves up, and fled into a modern form of slavery. Nothing could be palliated. The so-called time-work was for them but a form of slavery, as it meant lifelong total dependence.

'Hundred-Enders' didn't fit into the category of regular time-work, because of their amount of debt. For them, this situation was clearly the final destination. They had nothing to lose anymore, and nothing to expect in life. Their lives were all over, often before they had really begun.

This was so for most of them. Because of the most severe mistakes, which they made, when they were young. When nobody was there to protect them from their greed. In fact, there was no limit – that was it. There were not limits what so ever. Each could run into debts as he pleased, and nobody did signal in time or protected him before himself. This couldn't work alright in the long run. People weren't yet so far, and it is doubtful that the great number ever would be. So much autonomy didn't suit them well, as could be seen.

In reality, you hadn't to deal with autonomy, but with persuasion of the advertising strategists, and their tricky manoeuvres which led right into the inner centre of the beings, where they lay helplessly prostrate to the manipulations. This was a form of structural force, so tricky and sly, you just couldn't help it, and nobody had a recipe against it, or how to get away unharmed.

Those with huge accounts didn't mind. Such individuals could shop as they liked. Somewhere the whole rubbish had to go. Very little of what was purchased served a meaningful purpose. Or if it so did, only a minor one, while the accessoires formed the true value.

There was a SLOMES for example, with a diamond-embroidered bioncular, and a handmade, golden steering unit. This was put on the market for enormous time-share-credits, of course. Such a prestige unit might require some twentythousand credits and would mean lifelong dependence of many human lives. While this price was charged somewhere else, but where the unit was delivered.

Such were the excesses Judith was fighting, and made her come across with her family clan. This was not agreed upon, as her brother maintained. He was the man in charge of the innovations' department right here in Sydney in the braintrust of the company.

Well, in fact such exasperations weren't the rule either, but of course tried the company to prevent from shrinking which began after the first big rush, when the markets became saturated.

Everybody wanted to stay young, instead of becoming old and shaky and mentally limited. This would come anyway soon enough, however, definitely a lot of time later, than in the old days. And those, who stayed upright and had their accounts filled, could easily become one hundred and fifty years, spending their lives in splendid leizure.

Old became the dependant and ‘Hundredenders’ as well, however they suffered, and the pain of the lost life-time gnawed on them, and led them eventually into a comparably early grave. A reason for that might be the fact that the time-sharing didn’t leave them enough leizure to regenerate oderly, and to spend a few hours daily in front of the SLOMES. Or they had only access to poor quality falsifications, which didn’t help in fact, but reflected wholly on the Placebo-effect. –

Tricky cheap plagiats out of the ominous depth of the Chinese Empire as the controllers suspected. Customs secured millions of such falsifications - being imported by dubious receiver organisations, who avoided the official channels and had their imports smuggled, - unnoticed by the authorities.

The ‘Hundred-Enders’ were in fact the true problem. That is – the problem became transparent on their behalf.

While the constructive forces of the human race were not the only ones at work. Next to the constructive dimension were destructive notions. And even the best guarded life by a SLOMES was not safe from this seduction. Life couldn’t be saved from destruction. The outworn organs had to become exchanged or had to become repaired by bionic means, there was no other option.

This branch of industry was very costly. For a ruined liver you had to spare at least five thousand credits. But the fewest drinkards owned that much. Their addiction had consumed in advance what became so urgently required.

Thus, a two class society established with fatal dynamics, when the have-nots increased dramatically in number. As a matter of fact, they were the most desperate clients in need of the organ transplatation and repair services.

Those who could achieve it, cared in time for a Clon-Account with his or her critical organs. This was ethically acceptable, because you didn’t deal with strange genetic material, but only with your own, you had replicated in time for future use. The replica were kept swimming in an organic liquid and had no access to conciousness or to any body, before being planted into the proprietor’s body. But then this was in order. The organs came to their naturally destined location automatically, so to speak.

By this way you could meanwhile not only replace the fast growing liver, but also kidneys, lungs, hearts, knees, and any bone that was ruined. Even parts of the brain were replaced that way. While this form of transplatation was the most crucial. The Ethics

Commissions of many states forbade the replication of brain parts – even those without cognitive functions.

What the transplantation medicine couldn't achieve was handled by means of bionic artifacts. Bionic repair was in a way the opposite of the transplantation medicine. While there were analogies in procedure. Instead of replanting bio-matter directly, you incorporated functional spare parts.

No matter which branch you favoured, the transplantation-tourism boomed – as you can imagine. Many a government was overthrown that way. In the long run, progress couldn't be stopped anyway. Such was the public opinion-to-be, around the world. Nobody, not even the dismissed, realized what happened with them. Many couldn't ask this question any longer, whether they still were human beings. They just didn't know anymore.

If you were put together out of a variety of spare parts, you lost your identity at last. At the latest when you became sterile, because semen and matula-cells couldn't rely on an own base, but dried out. Then, at the latest, you might notice what had become of you.

**

With a negative Credit Account the end of the flagstaff was soon reached anyway. Nobody would repair or handle your medical case. Surgeons denied treatment, they claimed workload and referred to long waiting lists, the aspirant might put his name on.

“Perhaps again in some 30 years, if you please...?”

For an acute cirrhosis this would mean the death sentence, of course, while no pre-arrangements had often been taken, and a time-lapse breeding couldn't be achieved in any case.

No-one was openly cynical or proved himself inhumane in public. But under the cover of decency, bad notions and dubious structures arose. The world became a dorado for the proprietors – and this was exactly what should have been avoided. Anonymous had warned in his book.

Legally, there could little be done. Democracy didn't hinder such development. The responsible asked themselves how this could have happened again, while everybody had been warned. Still they ran open eyed into destruction and were on the verge to stumble into agony.

The 'Hundred-Enders' demonstrated the weakness of the new system, as well as the limits of the credit system. If you couldn't evoke new resources like attempts of converting, which certainly would be suspected of being counter-manipulative or even arbitrary – you were lost. And nothing of help was in sight.

The question was, how to help the 'Hundred-Enders' without revolving or ruining the whole social system, and open up for manipulative and arbitrary strategies. While arbitrariness was on the verge of rolling up its sleeves for poor tortured mankind, in. Such the hotheads should always keep in mind, when boasting about with short-reaching parley and unripe suggestions, who were climbing the pedestals and desks here and there, in order to stir up riots, as was quite common in certain areas of the world already, so rumours were spreading, while public news information sources withheld such.

10. The Intergalactic Counsel

Judith was so upset about her family, that she couldn't carry on. Something had to be done. She also noticed how dangerous the situation was. One spark could ignite the powder keg and have them all blown up, so to speak. She therefore asked Arundle to forward an emergency request to the Advisor. She couldn't think of anything else.

Personally she felt closer to South-Michel, but when it came to substantial demands, she felt more secure with the Advisor. Why that was so, she couldn't answer. Arundle would know, what had to be done. Judith explained the situation in the company and what went wrong. She pointed out that there was a tremendous increase in 'Hundred-Enders'. A problem, Arundle hadn't yet hardly realized, were there not the troublesome search of a suitable crew for the Last Bounty.

So she could sing a song of the hard toil of dealing with people, who couldn't care less, because there was no future perspective, no matter how long they would live on. While amongst them there were others as well, who were of another fabric. The term was kind of collective and inclusive. As there were also Two-Hundred-Enders and Three-Hundred-Enders amongst them, who had found a way of running into an even

severer debt-trap. Betting-debts, unserious manipulations of dubious circles, private debtors with tremendous interest-rates had been employed. There was a lot of criminal energy involved, cheating was only the milder form you could experience in this shabby sinister shade in society's niches.

No-one cared how someone could get rid of a debt of two hundred years. This was up to the debtor and nobody interfered. The least the state. While the state granted autonomy and the human right of liberty, while dignity was trampled to the ground, as was freedom as a consequence.

**

This was why Judith contacted Arundle, who talked thing over with Billy-Joe in term. Billy-Joe had a word with Pooty, who asked the Magic Stone, whose keeper he was. Judith wanted to see the Advisor in person and had at best also taken the twins along. Dorothea should also go, because she felt strangled under to lot of workload. Something had to be done for her either.

Yes, and if Judith's twins Rachel and Aaron would go, Sulamith couldn't stay behind. Both mothers hoped for a divine light-shower for their offspring.

But first of all the inacceptable situation of the SLOMES-Cooperation, they were both involved, had to be mended. What was going on in there was grown on their soil. Warnings had there been a lot, but they weren't obeyed. The whole SLOMES affair had its beginning on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Judith had built the prototype after the plans of Hans Henny Henne. While her brothers later founded the SLOMES-Corporation and sent out the construction-sets all over the world.

**

What had to happen, happened. But why had Anonymous sacrificed himself? Were all efforts in vain? Why did they fight the heroic battle against the Brotherhood of Infernalía? Why did they fight for the liberty of the School of Inbetween and prevented its hostile take-over?

Things couldn't end now like that. What was going on in their names, nobody ever had intended. Still it happened, and they were responsible in a way. They alone. Something had to happen – “Advisor, we are coming!”

The Magic Bow understood, when Arundle explained the situation, and he managed to persuade the Magic Stone for this time, who had his objections against such a heavy payload.

“We’re gonna be overloaded” he predicted, and blushed in all his splendour. He shone in all colours of the rainbow. Judith and the twins were enchanted and were looking forward, as only three year olds can do. Sulamith was stunned and looked like her mother. As if she didn’t really know what she should think of that. She was coming into such difficult age, where you started to ask for the first time, whether there were people next to your parents who could mean really something for you.

The Magic Bow feared for the worst – perhaps an emergency landing on the moon or an endless waiting slope instead. However this failed by far. Just nothing happened. The Advisor was hiding behind his column, as he used to do. The Great Hall of Fame and Glory kept vibrating and rumaging with excessive energy. For the offspring the light sluice opened and covered them with light tender fingers: once to and once fro – and the twins kept singing – “round about the easy snout...”

Sulamith became big eyes, while her mother sobbed tears of happiness and even Arundle had to struggle with a clod in her throat. Judith was all too busy with her twins.

When they all came back to normal, the Advisor stepped forward from behind his column. But how did he look like? – that was no more their Advisor, Arundle noticed. That was not the common Advisor at all.

“Special occasions need special replies” the Advisor, who was no Advisor any more, whispered. He was no Advisor any more, but an Advisoress. “Special occasions ask for special replies” the being repeated coquettishly.

Arundle was not amused, but felt ashamed. Judith didn’t know the Advisor yet, and Dorothea had had little to do with him up to now. That would become quite something. ‘You want to save the world once more, and that that...’ she stutted to herself.

After all the Advisoress seemed to be informed at last. She said, she knew Judith and from Dorothea she had heard only the best. “Yes, that is the course of the world. This is the way it goes. Who ever try by heart...”

The Advisoress was by no means less strenuous but was irritating with that hi-pitched voice and effeminate gesturing. The Advisor was always good for a surprise, Arundle thought and caused a happy smile on the lips of him – that is – better - of her.

For a moment Arundle felt like looking back into the old known face of his, but she must have been wrong.

**

Judith talked off all her frustration that was heavily laden on her maltreated soul. She was ashamed of being the cause of what was going on in a way. But the Advisoress only shook her head gently, and repeated her sermon of the course of the world, and of false objections and lack of timidity.

“What’s happening is happening, and what must be, must be” she said just like that.

Arundle mocked and Billy-Joe gently knocked into her ribs to have her come down, when the Advisoress continued:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” (Mt 13, 31)

All of them looked bewildered at each other. Judith had expected to become criticised, and Dorothea as well, because she knew how easily she lost her temper, if things were running the way they’re supposed to do. Things didn’t really run badly, though. Had there not been those damn side-effects – small ones at first, and neglectable though, which became bigger and bigger however.

**

‘Through the light they are after all, that’s the main thing...’ Judith noticed herself thinking, and was ashamed again. The world was upside down and it was her fault, and all she kept on thinking was the well-being of her offspring.

Dorothea was familiar with the ‘Hundred-Enders’. What, if they also...? But the Advisoress waved her off smilingly:

“Snow from yesterday, dear sisters. Snow from yesterday, snow from yesterday...”

She didn’t allow you to speak up, or turned your words in your mouth and the thoughts in your mind.

“Yes, the grain of mustard – that’s it – ...confusing, isn’t it. That’s the way it is with parables. Think of somethings else now:

‘Look at those sky-stormers,
not the fat and ugly wormers.

Yug, who's gonna stay,
 this is things do turn their way.
 Fare well for now, I've got to hurry.
 Must fly and flatter, I am sorry.'"

While reciting the Advisoress faded like mist in the morning sun. There they sat on their energy cushions and their bums were grumbling. It was high time for the return trip back home.

It was done, as said, and there they stood all of a sudden amidst their island. Shining the ones, adviceless the others, each as they deserved.

Sulamith recovered first. She was in the critical age, when you started to questioning your parents.

"Mom, I thing the Advisoress troubled you a lot", she therefore said and looked uncertain, and somehow pig-headed, expecting her mother's rebuke.

"Do you really think so? Did you understand so much more than I did? I won't send my 'Hundred-Enders' away, but grant them a convenient eve of life, no matter whether this will take another hundred years. You can be sure about that..." She looked now challenging back, and felt on one level with her daughter, and only hoped that Sulamith would not give in.

But there the light was in between. She knew that, by her own experience. The light made you feel very strong for the moment. You thought to understand everything, because everything lay prostrate before you, all open and transparent.

How nice she was. So unbelievably young and blossoming – on her way to open. Only the wings of the butterfly you had to imagine, and she would have gone up and away, so light and aetherial as she was for a loving mother's eye.

"Yes, my angel" she whispered with a merry smile, that had her face shine up so noicable in the mirror of the unreal reflection, that even the others took notice thereof.

The twins became uneasy. Sitting quiet for so long was against their age. Besides, they wondered how strange they were looking: like glow-worms – a bit frightening as well.

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Verbal denial didn't suffice, after all. It was high time to regain influence on the course of the company. This was what her husband told her all the time, she began to realise. She was the holder of the SLOMES patent. She had built the prototype. Well,

only by following the blueprint. A masterpiece not even the inventor himself had been able to fulfill, who didn't trust his own calculations, or lacked of patience.

The scrambled message of the Advisoress made her uneasy, like all the others who had taken part in the space mission, but she didn't yet really understand.

What would Peter think of it? Would she be able to reconstruct the message? What did it say? Well, she could ask her fellow travellers.

When she contacted Dorothea for that, she realized that each of them had understood something else. Arundle also just recalled a model for world history, that suited her soul.

None did know precisely what she had heard. They were only sure, that it had nothing to do with the butterfly wings Judith meant to have seen for an instant. They were sure about that. So Judith was back at the beginning, before it came to "The Assembly of the Intergalactic Counsel of the Light" (as Arundle baptised their little meeting) – while all agreed just like that, when they assembled for their aftermath rehearsal.

Judith by then knew again what had to be done, no matter what the others understood or had heard. The negative Credit System had to become rejected on a world-wide scale, without any question. Because with the NCA (Negative Credit Account)-System the trouble had begun. The system had been helpful in the beginning, in order to improve the sale. But then things went out of control, and nobody was able to steer the processes. A means of distribution had become a man-eater, swallowing everything and everybody on its way. While she was in charge.

She had to begin right at the offspring. Because the origin was her own company, the SLOMES-Corporation.

11. The NCA-System

"Let's put it that way, the Advisoress conveyed us the impression, that there is something wrong with the system, as if we didn't quite understand the parameters, don't you see it that way as well?" Arundle opened the little aftermath meeting. This time without interruption by noisy kids, Sulamith proclaimed with her just about ten years, presenting herself as a real woman.

The twins lay in bed and enlightened the night while sleeping, and made her mother to peep and check frequently. But they kept on sleeping sound and merry.

Judith had asked for the meeting. She had eventually wanted Peter to participate as well, but there had been objections, because he was undoubtedly a man. So was Billy-Joe, but he had to be accepted as a necessary evil – well, if he could be addressed an evil. Because he transported Pooty and the Magic Stone, and was the bearer of the bagging giant kangaroo, which relieved him in a way to a certain extent.

A strange anti-male mood had come up with the sudden appearance of the Advisoress. Well, probably not really anti-male but definitely not in favour of males. A mood like ‘men are disturbing’ or ‘men overrun women’, or ‘women are different, when men are present’ – each could find the suitable cause for herself.

Billy-Joe handed the Medicine Pouch over to Arundle, claiming workload. Zinfandor, he said, had asked him to exercise a little nautics, as he had registered as assistant navigator on board of the Last Bounty. “...on a trial basis for the next three months. Gives us a chance to be together, though”... Because Arundle still held the position of a communications officer on board.

Among the ‘Hundred-Enders’ no replacement could have been found yet. – And now, while the regular trips had become necessary, because the dwarves had discovered studying, and because the University of the dwarves was located a few floors under the regular university. Therefore, the Last Bounty went back and forth to Susamee’s Island once a month. This took her almost two weeks with all that loading and disembarking and embarking here and there.

During the stays in the home-port Navigator Billy-Joe was of course allowed to take leave. This was one of the options he had claimed, while the other crew made the maids for the dwarves while ashore. Because the dwarves had declared the Last Bounty as their campus over here as long as they studied in the depth.

**

Judith had asked for that meeting and would have liked to have Peter, her husband, with her. But that was impossible. Instead

the Advisoress honoured them with her presence. And this time there might come something reasonable from her side.

After all, they were here on earth, that is to say on sound grounds and didn't flatter about on semi-silky wings, as might be the Advisoress' intention.

Judith noticed the hidden aggression and silent anger lingering all about, most likely because of Peter, but also because she intended too much. She was afraid of being rejected again instead of the necessary support she needed in order to oppose her clan. And so it was.

"Far too radical – Rome was also not built in a day" – a more stupid saying could hardly be found.

Judith's idea was simple but workable. She had made up her mind for that. Her idea was reduction – simple as that. Reduce the debts and relieve the debtors. Not a simple remission of debt but a remission in square. Because her remission was not just a simple remission but the reversion.

All NCAs (Negative Credit Accounts) should be altered from minus to plus. As far as the existential accounts were concerned. Which was of course the case with all real NCAs. The accounts of the rich wouldn't be reached that way – of course not – that was clear to Judith as well, she was part of this world. Who ever would try that, would cause the last great world war and the final and ultimate destruction.

Judith had the human beings in mind – all those stranded beings between hopelessness and desperation. To help them back to a perspective life, and made them find gladness and gaiety again instead of permanent grief and misery in slavery.

"Would such a remission of debts be not totally unjust? What about all those eager savers who afforded their SLOMES by savings and kept on working busy day by day, managing just about to get along. They hardly ever went on a holiday and couldn't afford any extras..."

"Well, well" Judith interrupted Dorothea's intervention. She had had that in mind too.

"For those we grant an annual distribution of what we have overcharged in life-contingents, without knowing what to do with it. How else did those dubious time-sharing-companies start off in the first place? Only because we big companies didn't know what to do with our surplus. 'We were happy to find someone who took over the surplus. And we received bionic equivalents in return. A win-win situation on the account of the helpless and the poor –

what a shame. We executed the mentality of the money-sharks. It can't go on like that. This was not meant by the change of paradigms. This is what my family has to realise, once and for all. We stand for the new time – so let's really stand for it..."

There she stood, with glittering eyes and extended arms. Her prophetic eye shone with visionary power. Before all, the Advisoress applauded that the wooden desk echoed.

"...but we do not want to ruin the honourable company. For that it is far too dear and precious to us, isn't it?" she added when the applause - which had been taken up by the others - faded.

"Everything has to be recalculated, while the question of justice isn't yet settled either, but otherwise – Brava, Brava, Brava – three cheers, my dear, to put it your way. We can see great things on your pace to future..."

And off she went, as if she had seen and heard enough, and didn't want to commit herself into affairs under liberty's command. There were more than enough limitations in the world already.

Dorothea twinkled committingly at Judith, when the latter came back to her mind. She had gazed after the Advisoress in an air of confusion, stunned as she was.

"Calculations have become my passion" Dorothea stated "In earlier times I hated this stuff, but nowadays with all those computers, it's so easy now."

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Judith and Dorothea reviewed the balance-sheets of the previous years. And when they noticed that this was not enough, they took a representative average from the analysis of probability, that was annually achieved in order to project the expectations.

They could take the figures over ten, then even over twenty, in order to get as closely to reality as possible.

So they were feeding the computer and had it calculate. They reversed the prefix of the NCAs, as they had agreed upon, and fell into a huge minus. A fact they could have found out without computer as well. All depended on the proper accounts to be considered. That was the major problem.

They tried for a while, this way or another until they came about some sensible figures, Judith could present to her family. However, both women weren't happy, yet. Dorothea feared that they had overlooked something of great importance and Judith still thought their proceedings weren't radical enough.

While, in fact, they hadn't yet moved in reality up to now. They had only analysed facts, and intended only to act accordingly.

They calculated and calculated back and forth. With a remission of debt every ten years, they could probably manage. That was all they could do. If they proceeded like that, they wouldn't gain any surplus any more, that had to be thrown on the market. A deeply imoral way, Judith reckoned, who was most embarrassed as the concerned originator.

"How can you dare to sell the human working time behind the backs of human beings? That mustn't be done, where does this lead us?"

Dorothea fully agreed and saw a point, where she could step in. But for now they tried to find out together how to clear their calculations and have them become sound. Which wasn't easy at all.

"We've got to ascertain that this can't go on. People must be asked, before their working time is sold. Because this is nothing but a modern form of slave trade. How can that be in a civilized world, that human working time is peddled and shoved about like cattle in the slaughter-house? With each and every contingent is a human life connected, and the fate of a human being is decided. Someone gets caught and his life is sold on, and gets to a soul-peddler or a time merchant. Another might be lucky because he is allowed to work for the SLOMES corporation, and may even hope to be taken over, if he wants, after his debt is settled, and would go on – probably on his own will."

"Freedom against security – among the Hundred-Enders you may find many who'd have given up the idea of freedom for a piece of security, and would give their last bits and pieces... – It's a cruel and brutal world out there..."

Judith was shocked. What Dorothea revealed had been out of her horizon.

"...and you think we get along with that?" she asked somewhat rhetorical.

"If we do such debt-liquidations every ten years, and transform the accounts, then the SLOMES corporation needn't sell any contingents, but can utilize all surplus working time in their own facilities. That would mean the end of all time-share-contractors. They would fade away in the long run, if no allotments would be thrown on the market, do I see that right?"

Dorothea nodded. "If my computer doesn't fail. But that you all can check internally. I do rely on the data you gave me, and

your figures are supposed to be rather actual. Of course, I didn't consider the volunteers. They would come in addition to what's in the pot. And there are quite a few who go on after the plight with a regular contract."

"Yes, well, the SLOMES corporation is a social employer, that's for sure. 'Same wages for same work' is their oldfashioned slogan, which stems from the time of the trade union movement in the early 20th century. These days it's meant that all work is handled equally, whether voluntarily achieved or otherwise accomplished."

"And I see what's going on on the worldwide market. We've got to go somewhere with our wealth. Each month shares in profits for our book and our patents are floating. I'm trying to get into one of those time-share contractors, to take over and then to liquidate them right away, or transform into agencies for voluntary work. That seems to be a good chance to spread about some confidence and vital spirit. Because those Hundred-Enders are so devastated and do not dare to tackle anything, while they aren't yet hardly over fifty, which is no age these days. Look at me. If I tell you, how old I am, you wouldn't believe it, anyway."

Dorothea enjoyed fiddling coquettishly about with her age. She still couldn't refrain from doing so. Judith knew of course, how phenomenally young Dorothea looked. She would surely go on for a long time to do so, because she invested a lot of time and energy, as well as the assistance of the surgeons. What the SLOMES couldn't achieve alone, she attended daily quite some time, would be solved on other ways and by other means.

Happiness was after all, a kind of fountain of youth.

If Sulamith was today about ten years old, and Dorothea delivered her in her late forties, then she was – yes – then she was indeed not all that young anymore.

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"...and we wouldn't write red figures, then?" Judith gasped inaudible, she shouldn't show, of course. After all she had to convince everybody in and out of the company and family, which was unfortunately almost the same. Her position was a mighty one, but not all-mighty. That wouldn't work in such a big company.

Instead of giving a straight answer, she referred to the calculations of her company-staff and to the verifications of an independent analyst, who had come to similar results. "Besides, I

do of course, rely on my own calculations, and they are clear and definite. If we go on as we discussed, then this will mean the end to that scandalous slavetrader mentality. Who are we, after all? What are we doing? We cannot seriously deal with human lives and fates, as if they were spareparts. And that means – we cannot lose anything, but win everything.

Behind our backs ugly procedures sneaked in. I do not assume this was anyone's intention. However, it worked out this way. And now we have to do everything possible to stop such, and take care that never ever happens again, what has been done to human beings. Our image as a company suffers a lot. We cannot yet overlook the damage done in the long run. We are the SLOMES-corporation – the motor of the future – we promise a happy future. Long life, happiness and harmony inside and outside, with the whole world..."

Judith was standing with extended arms again, and shining eyes. But this time her audience was the shareholder assembly, who had come together for that extraordinary meeting, she had asked for.

Dr Judith Kornblum-Adams was already a legend while still alive, and that even more so, because of her domicile in the Southern Pacific, where she dwelled and researched, refraining the outer world and unreachable for anybody, the least the press, who took their chance now by shooting pictures, which might make a fortune on the market. Such an opportunity wouldn't come again so soon.

12. Tika's marriage

With all that hustle back and forth Susamee's Island wasn't the quiet place any more, it used to be. Those concerts in the moonshine became real Open Air Festivals and attracted thousands of visitors. Especially in the summernights, when the self induced horse-headed violin whimpered extraordinarily intense.

Susamee tuned then in, after the phoenix had erected back up from the ashes of the hearth fire where he had himself burnt up – as was the way things were set in a phoenix's life.

Not only the dwarves, but the Conversors were affected by the old lady named Last Bounty and were looking forward each month for that voyage over to Susamee's Island. This was why the Last Bounty was underway half a month, all in all. Sometimes she rode at anchor, because Susamee's Island had no proper port yet. In the uncertain and steep ground, this was kind of dangerous, especially when the sea was rough.

This was why the Island's Council decided with agreement of Susamee, of course, to have a port built near the landing strip of the Helicopter. The water was deep enough there, but not too deep, so that the pillars, basing the pier, found solid grounds. Thus it became a rather attractive set up.

The Last Bounty came for a trial mooring, and a little improvement had to be fixed, because the ship was a little longer than estimated, and there had to be some space back and forth for manoeuvring.

Otherwise the pier was perfect. The only disadvantage was, that the way to the underground entrance lay on the other side of the island, which meant an exhaustive foot-march for the dwarves. With their short legs they weren't fit for such kind of convey. This was why a plastered road was built, where goat-driven chaises could be travelling as required.

One attempt attracted the next.

While it became quiet again on the front side, where the Shamaness and her disciples were dwelling. And even in the full moon you had to enter the inner island for a couple of hundred yards, in order to become involved into the turmoil.

Only the tender sobbing of the self-induced horse-dead violin could sometimes be heard, when this the westerly winds allowed. But that was no nuisance, quite the opposite.

This was why all were happy, and the dwarves could make up their minds one way or the other, and needn't bother whether they disturbed anyone.

You couldn't, of course, expect such considerations from the Conversors. Because they didn't know better and followed their nature, and because it happened the same with the originating dwellers, they didn't mind.

Only Will Weesle, the lonesome guardian, remained, and became kind of anxious, all alone, with no real human being on the island. Therefore the Last Bounty was a relief for him, with all those characters on board.

Because she lay on the other side of the island. He also moved there as soon as the full moon was coming up. He built a solid hut, that became a kind of arrival and departure lounge for the travellers, as well.

There was always something to bother and claim, and if it was the weather, which Watchman Will Weesle couldn't influence - how could he?

Sometimes he regretted that he was not travelling any more as a deckhand on board of the Last Bounty, as he used to in the earlier days, while Hundred-Enders procured all vacancies now. Thus the provisional crew became replaced.

Will had enough to do anyway. He still carried his lot as a submariner on the Nautilus. He had his position there, which no Hundred-Ender could take away from him. What ever he decided, it would be his own decision anyway. He certainly didn't want to leave the scene on Susamee's Island all up to old Hans Henny Henne, who was wooing for Susamee just as bad as he did. The two men were both hopelessly addicted to that fading beauty. And so, the forced separations hurt, and affirmed his verdict to pay off officially.

Captain Leblanc regretted Will's decision very much and tried to attract him with all kinds of promises. However, the trips of the Last Bounty turned out to be too frequent - the traffic became just too heavy, and ascertained Will Weesle that he had come to the appropriate decision.

And so it was definitely in the eyes of Susamee, who was very fond of his wooing, because Hans Henny Henne could become very strenuous, especially when he mixed up his bionic wirings in the brain, and did and talked a lot of nonsense as a consequence. Then she was all too happy to see him move on for his lectures, or in order to claim his doctorate of honour, over there, on the University-Island. After all, he was the original inventor of the SLOMES.

His absence was eagerly exploited by Will Weesle, who wooed heftily for his adored grace. He seemingly did a good job, because his beloved let him carry on. Nobody is ever too old for love.

He his case, Susamee knew after all, that everything was genuine - well, almost everything, as things had changed in his case as well. New teeth he had already and next he would get a new liver. The organ was just being bred out of stable cells he had passed on in his youth. The liver would cost him some 200 credits. So he thought, but

in fact the real costs would be 2000. However Dorothea skipped a zero in his favour. He had only to apply for it and could be almost sure that the boss would decide in his favour.

Whenever possible, then Tibor spent his time with Tika. And Tika in reverse, liked Tibor very much in return. While she was increasingly confused to a certain extent about that self-induced horse-headed violin of his. Something had gone astray, so it seemed.

Secretly she moaned about the times when a yellow huge dingo had been after her. However, it could as well be the unexpected fame, Tibor was gaining with his violin. After all, his violin became the door opener for a teaching position over there on University-Island.

Tika still sailed in her master's shade, so to speak, and that wouldn't change so soon. She didn't feel frustrated, quite the opposite. She felt comfortable and wouldn't have known where to look, in case a band of eager dwarves would have looked at her in expectation, or a mixed group had been sitting opposite.

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Susamee loved dwarves for being misfits. But also because they were related to her own nature. The age had covered a lot on her side. But she knew the fire of impatience, she could still feel burning inside.

And perhaps it was just that fire, that was eating Tika up now, because she didn't want to let it be. Tika wasn't fabricated so easily. However that was known only by Tibor meanwhile, who couldn't care less, so he hoped. He as well doubted his possibilities on this behalf and hoped for Susamee to tune Tika back by maternal passion.

So it happened, that the couple, who so heartily longed to be together, met only for a week or so each month. The rest of the time they went their separate ways, resulting from the duties they were obliged to.

Susamee could become rather impatient, when being kept waiting. Well, she did wait for one or two hours, but you shouldn't forget about her for good.

Although Tibor was not the favourite disciple of his mistress, he very successfully transformed his meager knowledge, and passed on his shamanian wisdom at the Island-University with one major advantage: He still held in petto his magic violin, which assured him the attention of the audience. Meanwhile he managed to play it even unconverted rather perfectly. Besides, he had a quick tongue and was not timid at all. He presented himself self-assured but in no way arrogantly. Little weaknesses of his, as there certainly were, he over-played by producing the green whirl of the Sublimations, if he found a gifted student amongst his audience. (He primarily attracted the female spectators, which caused Tika to wonder and worry not the least.)

Under such circumstances, what could become out of their relationship, the young woman asked herself, and that she also asked Tibor, who didn't know any answer. Best would perhaps be, if things remained as they were, was his dull suggestion.

"As if this would be so easy" Tika complaint, because she knew something she had to come about with, before she could talk it over.

In her mind she was hearing the cries of exitment, no matter whom she contacted. Any objective consideration of all facts and circumstances was in nobody's range, so it seemed. As a matter of fact, she had made up her mind anyway. Still, she would have preferred to have Tibor come about it on his own.

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Watchman Will Weesle got his new liver first. He blossomed. The yellow stinge in his face faded. "...needn't give up heavy drinking" her was told in hospital. "Well, perhaps a little more moderate..." the surgeon suggested after the operation, which had caused no problems. Therefore, Weesle was very glad.

The wildest times lay behind him for almost a decade now. It had been his boss, who saved him then. You couldn't address it diverently, what she did for him. Without her he would have passed away. To be more precise the devil would have caught him, because he would have been the victim of those develish Brothers of Infernalìa.

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Tika was expecting a baby. This was a great joy. Billy-Joe became uncle and Arundle some kind of aunt (they weren't

married yet.) Arundle feared the martial rituals generally connected with the elementary events in life as was common amongst the tribe-members of Billy-Joe's acquaintance. She mistrusted Billy-Joe in this, who of course claimed to be miles away from such primordial customs. This he certainly was in his clear mind, but emotionally he wasn't free at all, but still stuck deep inside. She was almost sure that she knew him better, than he himself.

Arundle was devoted to physical completeness. She didn't even have holes for ear-rings. This was one of the rare things she was thankful for to her mother. Because she had been rigorously against such things as tatoos, and piercings, in fact against permanent marks of any kind.

Thus, there were worlds coliding. And when Billy-Joe looked at Arundle's snow-white skin, he did understand. Ritual scars would have been some kind of sacrilege, she had to be protected against under all circumstances.

In his world something was always written on people's bodies, for what reason ever. Some things were of deeper sense, but most neither the marked individuals nor the performers of the marking understood, what was going on. Things just happened, because they had been done aloways this way. And were part of life, just like the air people was breathing and the enjoyment or the suffering, humans had to endure.

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In order to form a solid basis for their offspring, Susamee decided to have her two disciples married the proper way. And because she didn't want to offend any holy feelings, she informed herself about the rituals which were common where her disciples came from.

In fact, they came from very different parts of the world, that is, in fact from wholly different worlds without any connection what so ever.

In order to simplify things a bit, Susamee invited the old Shaman from the Inner Mongolia, who had been once here for a very unthankful occupation. She assumed him best to have an objective view, after all she had learnt about him from Tibor. To have Tibor's father come over here didn't work. Defenitely not the conventional way. And another one he was not allowed to take since he was grounded by the communist idea.

Other family members, on the other hand, were not allowed to do such trip without the head of the family. And a proper visum for Australia would have been out of range anyway.

As Tika had no proper relatives, not even a foster-family like Billy-Joe, things seemed to be fairly split. On the island there was family enough. In fact a very colourful one, however without ties of blood. But that didn't hinder love – just opposite.

So the two had a remarkable marriage, in which most guests could mirror themselves, because there was a bit of everything. After all, marriage-rituals aren't all that different anywhere in the world. While the robes, which were worn, conveyed a different impression, though.

As it was hot during the southern summer, the proper dressing was of minor importance. While nutrition caused slight irritations. But after the long stay in the School of Inbetween for almost all of them, they were accustomed to a general tolerance in this respect.

Still, clear offences against taboos, were of course, intolerable. So the one or other favourite had to be avoided, as far as reactions were known, or could be expected.

The marriage ritual was thus performed. In order to express their happiness, the wedded pair lifted up on the level of the Mongolian Shaman, who was not allowed to touch the ground, especially not the strange ground over here.

This then looked rather grateful, and was uplifting in the sense of the word, when the couple became wedded aloft and the Shaman spoke his strange sermon, not even Tibor understood.

Gladest of all was Susamee. Because she would become now some kind of grandmother. While she had no children of her own, since she made this unforgivable mistake while still young. So she was all happy that Tika was not going to make the same mistake, but decided for life.

The wedding took place in the hotel named “The Hub of the World” which was located between the Isle of Wisdom-tooth and the University Island. There was a lot of space now, and the atmosphere was still somewhat stimulating as well.

The Last Bounty was lying at the pier and had flags and lights fitted all over the tops, which gave her a picturesque and very impressive appeal. The ship housed a band of dwarves, sent over here for the wedding ceremonies.

Unfortunately the period of the full moon was not available for obvious reasons. This was why the party had to do without the stimulating play of the self-induced horse-headed violin. But a

recording of the last great concert was softly playing in the background, which was, of course, not the same, and gave only a weak impression of what was real. Stones wouldn't start sobbing – in fact, there were none available on the dry land.

While the party went on long after nightfall, a sudden and unexpected danger occurred. The drunken dwarves fell into the water and had to be rescued. Lucky enough the merfolk took care and threw the little ones back ashore as soon as they captured them. You could be almost sure that they didn't overlook anyone. Still it was some kind of excitement whenever a half-drowned was pushed back ashore. Nobody had reckoned that while planning.

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All had come. His old dean Moshus Mogolaya had even tears in his eyes during the wedding ceremony. Although he pretended to suffer from some kind of allergic irritation.

Zinfandor, all dressed in navy-blue with four Captain's stripes on the sleeves, acted like a chevalier of the old days, what Penelope M'gamba enjoyed very much, who stayed close to him at his side, and didn't let go.

In fact all had come – down from the rail of the Last Bounty Stan kept on waving whenever someone looked up at him. He was also dressed in his neat new uniform and waved his cap, so he needn't have to wear it. He hadn't yet become acquainted with the stiff thing. He was used to his soft woolen cap.

Stan never left the ship or his engine for long alone, while for this night he dared to leave the engine-room for a little while.

Other 'Hundred-Enders' stood near by at the rail and watched the ongoing party ashore. Feasts of such kind were beyond their imagination, and made them feel intimidated and uneasy.

The colars of the midshipmen looked somewhat strange around their old necks and faces. But such was the order of the sea, ever since, and had to be followed on such occasions.

Dorothea had been able to purchase a large amount of very reasonable seamen's gear and cared now that it was worn on occasions of this kind.

Boatswain and carpenter were also clad in neat suits. The only difference was that they wore white trousers and had only small angles on the lower sleeve. So they were easily spotted.

Even the Stewart, who was normally kind of sloppy, had a clean white jacket on. He cared for the drinks, whenever glasses were empty.

When the music stopped at land the boatswain got his harmonica ready and the carpenter sang one shanty after the other. And when they came to a genuine reel, the deckhands hooked up and jumped like youngsters in a circle, howling and hissing the more they got drunk and time went by.

Down on the major pontoon, where the dance floor had been installed (Dorothea had established) – circles of young ones were built who did alike the seamen. If they didn't even rose from the ground when Tibor or his dean Moschus Mogoleya assisted, or other fresh blood joint. While their abilities were limited. The good old times of Patagonia, Tuzla and the Khan brothers were definitely over and gone.

Sandor didn't even manage to come to his brother's wedding. He was now Chieftain and first Khan of the Golden Cohorte (which was rather a title of honour, but a military rank, as it used to be.)

While he could have accompanied the Shaman, what he indeed had intended, when something unexpected happened. The Shaman rejected him. He didn't want him to come along on the journey, but told him not why.

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For huge green whirls you looked in vain. A faint green flicker here and there, was all. This didn't hinder the joy of dance, not for the grounded in their majority. There were the unmusical individuals like Hans Henny Henne who stood on each others feet as soon as they got close to dancing. Most likely the traumata from the early youth functioned that way, and now it was far too late to overcome. All the more so in case of Hans Henny Henne, the aged inventor of the SLOMES.

Strange enough how talents became bedded. The one is overthrown by melodies. He hears spheric tunes all over and needs to grab only into the emptiness to catch for them. The other sees orders of little signs without effort. All he needs to do is write them down and try the outcome.

Of this kind was Hans Henny Henne, who couldn't see how far his talents moved him away from Susamee. Because, the further it might be, the deeper would the satisfaction become, when they met on

the reverse side of reality. He also thought in circles and whirls. This was why Susamee couldn't slip away. Yes, there were common grounds.

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After all, they were here in the School of Inbetween, where alcohol was strictly prohibited. Nothing had changed in this respect since the early days. And all stuck to it, also the teachers – especially they, because they had to act as shining examples. So there were no secrecies. And because they liked their school and because they were upright people, they didn't let things go, but took great care.

Since the days of the '**Hotel to the Hub of the World**' a loopwhole had opened. Teachers needn't fly all the way the Sydney in order to hit the ball. They could have a decent weekend in the hotel and could leave the school behind. Of course, you shouldn't publish, where they went.

Not all had the chances of Adrian Humperdijk. In fact, none – none of the old teachers, nevertheless. Therefore they took their chance. As a matter of fact the whole atmosphere was more relaxed, you could almost say freer since the extensions and the many reconstructions. Nobody had to flee from the claustrophobic narrowness of the islands to the mainland into the anonymity of the city.

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The rituals of this wedding were kind of tricky. Tika remembered a custom after the church, when the bride had to turn around to look back and threw her bunch of flowers backwards. One of the present young women tried to catch it, to become the next bride.

Tika found this custom so cute that she dearly wished to celebrate it, and that was what she did. When the whole party met the next morning by 10 o'clock in the little Univerisy chapel for the ceremony.

To make it short, it was Arundle who fetched the bunch of flowers – believe it or not. Was it because Tika purposely threw it in her direction, and had she even eyes on the back of her head, as the shamaness, she actually was? Who knows.

13. Honeymoon trip on the Last Bounty

Dorothea didn't give up, and finally she found proper seamen amongst the 'Hundred-Enders' – one real Navigator with the proper papers and two Midship-men. Fate had handled them rough.

The payrole filled nevertheless. And this was high time, because the trips to Susamee's Island became almost some sort of ferry service.

Judith managed to negotiate a real genuine liquidation of debts. However reversing the prefix seemed out of reach to the Board of Representatives of the Company.

This wouldn't be fair to all those brave orderly debtors, who payed their lot, credit by credit. Judith had to admit, the more so, as she knew from the Advioress, that she played on the wrong grounds with her ideas. Nevertheless she asked herself, and so did the others in the Council of Menora, what the proper grounds would be like. And what the true whereabouts of such dubious remarks of the Advioress would be.

Dorothea still went on with diminishing those time-share companies she had got hold of. Besides were there governmental initiatives on the way to wholly forbid such practices by law. And to stop the commerce with NCAs. While the UNO blamed the common NCA practice as violations of Human Rights. Failed however in the committee by the Veto of the US Representatives.

“What can you expect of a state who based its wealth on the bones of slaves” Arundle bitterly remarked. – The little group of women still used to meet more or less regularly. Their themes hadn't yet settled. Meanwhile the Advioress managed to make herself a little clearer. Repeatedly she pointed out on the wonders of metamorphosis, that could be seen every spring to everybody's eyes, when all kinds of caterpillars – after a period of pupation – emerged as butterflies. With this image before the eyes you should get on the road you took. “It can't be of real help to extend the state of the caterpillar existence unnecessarily” the Advioress pointed out.

Judith still wasn't sure whether she understood her rightly. Definitely not before she had had a word with Hans Henny Henne in this matter, who agreed with this allegory right away, when he

learnt of it, because he felt reminded of his friend Anonymous, who now dwelled on under the impression that he himself had also passed through such a state. He pointed vaguely upwards, when he said that.

“Does that mean, we are on the wrong trail, when we focus further on the extension of the span of life?” Dorothea asked, who was in full agreement with the extended youth, especially with her own. “Imagine what we all overcame already” she said, “and what we still can overcome” she continued, thinking of her husband, dear old Scholasticus Slyboots, and what he carried with him in his brain. “Would be a pity if this was all in vain” she said and snipped with her fingers to show what she meant.

“There are certainly good reasons for a long life. Still, we have to ask ourselves whether this could be our final aim. Whether the wish for eternity doesn’t bring other dimensions into the game, and a fulfillment of a wholly different kind.” The Advisoress objected, who spoke very clearly this time.

“To understand the value of life-span doesn’t mean necessarily that the time is the measure for everything” – said the Advisoress when she prepared for take-off, which she did the same way as every time by just dissolving.

“Give my dearest regards to my so maturely ripened bloke Anonymous, old hen”, Hans Henny Henne disrespectfully boasted behind her. He wasn’t sure whether she had heard him. And he was not in full agreement with what she had just left behind, to confuse the women and make them think.

Judith had pleaded for him to allow him in the women’s circle - “just for once” as she pointed out. She thought him to be of great value, no matter his rude manners. Besides, had he come for the wedding, and all that...

They might get further with him. Because somehow they felt lame and stuck in their intentions.

Again a feeling of frustration spreaded, regardless of the fact that the one or other idea had caught up with them, while they still couldn’t see in what shape the consequences might emerge.

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Arundle didn’t care for the flowers. She was the most surprised when she held the bunch in her hands all of a sudden. Well, she must have grabbed for it. She was definitely not superstitious, but once in a while she made an exception of the

rule, and today obviously was such a day. The whole day was exceptional and so had been the day before.

Billy-Joe was now a real man, you couldn't doubt that, no matter how she treated him, and what he was willing to stand, because he loved her. Had she not know such fact, Tibor's and Tika's wedding would have shown her at last. What their little dear friend showed them, arose fancies of very different kinds – with both of them. For the first time Billy-Joe didn't suppress such, but committed to his deepest wishes of his heart.

Yes, he longed for a common child with her, more than everything else of the world. How he now envied his little sister, who showed them, what had to be done. He was convinced that she did the right thing.

With the idea of a child Arundle could live, but not with the wedding- hullabaloo, as she was just experiencing. No sir, this was not her cup of tea, for sure not.

She didn't yet realise that a wedding was a feast for all the others. Quite similar to funerals and baptisms. Those primarily affected perceived little or no advantage. But for relatives and friends or acquaintances this was a most welcome opportunity to meet and exchange memories, and have old connections revived.

On the other hand it was Arundles conviction that the raising up of children was the matter of both parents. This was why she mused inside and checked her femininity, whether such an opportunity would ever come again, where everything seemed to fit, whether she should let it pass, without taking advantage, right away, here and now.

So she booked a roundtrip to the Southsea-Islands, as was offered in a brochure she ordered from the Agency in Sydney. She booked the luxurious wedding suite for herself and for Billy-Joe. She did that so early, that she still had two months to go, and to think about her decision. While the suite as such was traitorously enough.

She was sure, that Billy-Joe would like it. And they wouldn't be all alone, because Penelope would join them in any case. This romantic journey on the traces of the old Bounty, they intended, she wouldn't let pass by unused.

When she thought about it, Arundle mused, they could become wedded by the Captain, who was allowed to do so after the old Law of the Sea.

Now she had only to find a good opportunity to invite Billy-Joe harmlessly. And while she was thinking of that, she could

perhaps also invite her friends of the old childhood-days, if things didn't turn out to become too intimidating, as they probably didn't have any suitable acquaintance, but that could be found out.

So she extended her antennas in various directions, and ended up with a considerable little wedding-party. She booked the whole upper deck of twenty First Class Cabins on board of the last Bounty.

Billy-Joe was all too happy to agree, when she finally made her proposals. The date as such was a bit of a problem, but finally he managed, as he should have done the trip as Navigator. While the new Second Navigator (one of the Hundred-Enders, lately registered) got the chance to prove his abilities.

Tika and Tibor couldn't join because of the baby. But Flory and Cory were all too happy and so was Mrs. Waldschmitt, who didn't know yet of the secret reason of her daughter. For her it was just one of these trips, her daughter arranged every year.

"I hope, your savage will join us again?" She asked on the phone, when Arundle invited her, and Billy-Joe friendly waved in the background. They were phoning as usual via Internet and Camcorder.

Arundle was anxious to learn what mother would say when she learnt that he was destined to become the father of her baby. Most likely a storm about the cultural differences would break loose. That a marriage alone was difficult enough, but would be impossible under such weighty conditions. 'As if Arundle didn't have considered all that on her own, and surely, would Billy-Joe do the same on his behalf. Often enough they had talked about the differences, but of course, about the similarities as well. And these couldn't be talked away, after all.

The best would be not to overdo with the hurdles, and make no affair out of things. Arundle was no friend of insolvability nor of burnt in holes or in unremovable tatoos. Billy-Joe did agree, as far as she was concerned. Arundle's perfect skin should under no circumstances be hurt.

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There were so many positive replies on her invitation, that Arundle had their little crusade altered. Now the whole ship became chartered, and thus she got hold of the passenger registration list. This was no public journey any more, but an exclusive group tour.

The crew didn't mind. Quite the opposite, the less backpackers the better, as it would mean less trouble. The once established route however should be followed, as per Captain Leblanc.

"Well, well, Pitcairn will be on our way, for sure. What do you think, Billy-Joe? Is that a four weeks cruise?"

Billy-Joe felt snowed under – "you better ask your Navigator, Mr. Ishmael, or your second mate, now that you finally got him. Then, nothing could go wrong."

The island of the mutineers of the old Bounty was Arundle's favourite aim.

When Arundle checked her account, she started wondering. Instead of a remarkable negative booking, a sound amount had been credited to her life-time record.

"Might have to do with Judith's revolution, I'd daresay" Dorothea explained, when being asked. But of course, she had her fingers involved. A rumour had come to her ears, and that was why she couldn't do otherwise.

Accounting was not Arundle's stronghold. She let things go and took things as they came. Still, she was wondering a little.

The day of departure came nearer. Mrs. Waldschmitt gave notice from Sydney and wanted to be picked up there. Florinna and Corinia returned punctually as usual. The one from Egypt and the other from the depth of the ocean, were it is deepest.

The Slyboots confirmed their commitment and so did the Adams family. Nobody forgot about the date. All were prepared and ready to go, but didn't dare to announce things too loudly in order not to stir up and away the shy game.

The men twinkled at Billy-Joe in a secret manner, and the women smiled at Arundle with their most attractive smiles, whenever they met.

Somewhat bizzar it was. Much like in "Rosemary's baby" Florinna and Corinia agreed. They hoped however that Arundle wouldn't realize, because then she would have closed up, for sure, and might even have the whole thing last minute cancelled.

Finally Penelope got the wedding-suite to have Zinfandor pamper her at best.

There was space enough, anyway.

Mrs. Waldschmitt keen on hearing, she always was, when Arundle was concerned. This wouldn't become just one of theses cruises, no sir...

So she occupied her luxurious cabin unscrupulously and enjoyed the comfort of space, she hadn't to share with anyone. Which was the most annoying fact on cruises for single dames. Before she did that, she'd even prefer the mass accommodation between decks.

Why was there no solution for such a problem on a reasonable basis? You could of course book for two, if you really cared. You might even get a sound reduction for the food that wasn't eaten by the second person and for the service not used.

Well, such were the worries of a widow. Because this was the state she saw her in. The late escapades of her passed away husband she just ignored and had cancelled out of her life. It was better that way, and brought peace to her soul. Peace she dearly needed after all the turmoil. And best was after all, that she had been right in the long run. That he had been much better, than she had realized and experienced while he had been alive.

"When Arundle would become happy, then everything is alright with me", she whispered into her pillow and fell asleep right away as if she had been in Abraham's lap in her cosy soft berth. While the ship still lay ashore, safely moored.

This was alright with Mrs. Waldschmitt. Why staying two night ashore and move again? This way she had to unpack only once.

It turned out to be almost one whole week, because outside a typhoon passed by. Uncommon for the time of the year. The Captain wanted to have her pass. Mrs. Waldschmitt had some spare time before the returnflight. To be on the safe side she could always change the booking.

Then the journey finally commenced. The boatswain played on his harmonica for the farewell, and the carpenter sang at best he could instead of caring for the gangway, which was made of wood and would therefore be in his responsibility.

The deckhands didn't hope on him. They knew what had to be done, and didn't mind.

The Last Bounty headed sharply East and had the Newsealandish coast in sight on starboard. The old lady made good speed, some fourteen knots with the wind from astern. Here, near the shore the swell was less hefty. The bad weather had moved on. Still, the Last Bounty kept rolling uncomfortably, and the first passengers were hanging green-faced over the railing. So the Captain altered the course a little and the rolling became less. Instead, the Last Bounty pushed her nose now into the mighty

waves. A lessening of the speed did solve this new problem for a while. But then showers of foam came down on the passengers. So the Captain ordered them under deck and had them put on life-jackets.

All in all not an ideal start for the cruise. At least the old sealords stood steadfast. The big Captain's dinner had to be postponed for the time being and was delayed to a further date. The caboose remained cold – except for a pot of steaming hot punch. Who ever felt like it, got a bite to eat and a portion of the liquid with the Steward in the pantry, where you could find a quiet and dry seat along the two tables.

Not many of the passengers were found there. But the crew-members off duty helped themselves all the better. The boatswain fetched his harmonica and the carpenter accompanied him with some fancy shanties.

Arundle enjoyed the initiative, as the fuss about her person strained her nerves. Now, everybody had to care for himself.

“Come on, Billy-Joe, lets listen what's going on outside”, she said and made a vague gesture around. They entered the bridge, bade for permission to enter the operators booth, which was indeed devastated. The second mate was supposed to sit there, but he enjoyed himself with the crew.

“Well, well” Arundle thought and looked at Billy-Joe in a meaningful air.

Meanwhile Hans Henny Henne mixed with the crew. He wouldn't get seasick. But how did he get on board in the first place? Judith had invited him. “You don't mind, do you?”

Billy-Joe just shook his head. It was too late anyway. So he didn't utter objections, as Hans Henny Henne stood near-by. Might be not the worst idea anyway, Arundle thought. Her mother would find him an intersting mate at dinners, with an unexhaustable theme, her passed away former husband, of whom Hans Henny Henne had to report astounding things.

Outside in the sea around a lot was going on. A couple of faint calls further away, and far out of their reach bade for help. And a yacht nearby asked for rescue assistance as well. So Billy-Joe checked the position and informed the Captain to alter the course and run for help, which Captain Leblanc did right away. The Last Bounty headed straight towards the site of the emergency.

In such a bad weather the operator's booth shouldn't be left unmanned. This was almost criminal negligence. Only fishermen

or yachts dared to do so, who then were the ones who needed help first?

Arundle tried to contact the yacht in emergency but didn't get an answer. Most likely the automatic emergency-sender had been started without human assistance and was now sending the SOS signals.

The boat in need couldn't be far away by now. The Last Bounty headed with full speed towards the marked position. The bow was manned with an outlook as well as both sides of the bridge. The sight wasn't all that poor, if the foam hadn't come over in large gushes.

Saving people in this rough sea wouldn't be easy. But first the boat had to be found. Temperature-wise the chances were not all that bad to survive for some time in the water.

Something white flashed on starboard by two o'clock, distance about one hundred yards.

"Lifeboat ready for action" the Captain ordered, while the crew was on deck already, with life-jackets on and spare ones at hand, as foreseen by the rescue-plan. The lifeboat came down on starboard orderly, and headed towards the rump of the yacht, rolling upside down in the wild sea. Two dark bodies were noticed and taken over immediately. The rescue operation was perfectly executed. Even the difficult task of being taken back over by the davids was done fine, and before the deckhands got aware, the boat resettled in the fittings on the boat-deck of the Last Bounty.

The two rescued people were covered in blankets and brought to the sick-bay, where they were sorrowly examined by Mr. Ishmael, the 1st Officer. They were alright sofar except exhaustion and undertemperature, which was solved by a glass of hot grog, which made them revive right away.

Arundle reported the merry rescue operation to the coastguard headquarters, in order to inform other helpers, that no action was further required.

"Yacht Susanna, manned by two, rescued before the Newsealandish coast at Zero One Zero Two EAT, and taken over on board of MS Last Bounty heading for the South Sea." – What a night!

14. The Monster Wave

The rescued men were taken over the next morning by the New Zealandish coastguard between the Northern and the Southern Island. The Captain of the Coastguardboat praised the crew of the Last Bounty for an “efficient, fast and very successful action.”

“If he had known” Arundle wondered. The yacht had been detected by mere accident. Had she not follow her impulse to check what was going on outside on the waves. Who knows whether they had survived at all.

Arundles complaint was noticed by the Captain and passed on to the 2nd Officer, Mr. Melford, who promised to be more careful in future. And the ship-owner promised from her side to check for a final and valid replacement, in order to fill this vital gap on the payroll. Despite the fact that the law didn't enforce a Communications Officer for ships of that specification, as long as there were no passengers involved.

The Last Bounty hardly met the size, nor the definition, as far as the tonnage was concerned. On the other hand there was no official limitation of the operational boundaries. So a regular Communications Officer would be advisable.

Being still a transporter for cattle, which wasn't all that wrong, as far as the ship-owner was concerned, the Last Bounty took over dwarves in hundreds, who might be seen as a species between the borders, no real humans nor animals either, of course not. If their existence would be accepted in the first place, which wasn't certain at all.

Arguing that way might help with a hardcore insurance agent, but was morally in no way acceptable. A Communication's Officer was therefore the least that could be done. With him Dorothea might even succeed in extending the license again. Plans in this respect had been evaluated for several months anyway by the nautical authorities over there in Sydney.

If she succeeded, they might have to employ a nurse and even a naval surgeon. And with two mechanics they wouldn't do either any more, but had to add at least an electrician.

“This is all peanuts” the shipowner argued. She wanted to take care of that personally as soon as they had come back. Some ‘Hundred-Enders “with definite take-over under special conditions” as she put it, should be found.

Being in charge of the administration of the newly founded university, she had a lot to do. So it was high time to seriously share some of the workload. Husband and daughter claimed

attention. And she was fed up with the fourteen hours day, beside the fact that she enjoyed managing.

Sharing workload would certainly mean to open up for negligence. There was no difference in the office or on board of a ship. She might do well by handing over her office job to others and concentrate on the stock market, the time-sharing companies, and the ship owner's business – well of course she shouldn't forget about the 'Council of the Menora', she was a member.

As a matter of fact, she realised, that she suffered on all fronts, a fact she really disliked. She had to change things as soon as possible.

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The day after next presented a sea as flat as a mirror and the Last Bounty took her trail with comfortable eleven knots, heading for the island of the mutiny – Arundle's favourite target.

Why she was heading for it this way, instead of just dreaming there, she couldn't tell. It had to do with the circumstances and with the people, it was about. She couldn't dream of that, definitely not for the purpose she had in mind.

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On board of the Last Bounty lively action developed amongst the passengers. The boundaries were tightly set, and so inventive spirit was demanded. Captain Leblanc had a funny looking cage watered astern, a construction of the chief mechanic. The cage was sized thirty by ten yards and was carried by colourful airbags on the corners. The wirings were solid steel and the edges erected higher than a shark ever could jump.

The cage drifted free of the propellers, of course and of the rudder. An ingenious construction of Chief Stan, who did think of everything. As the cage didn't affect the cruising speed, the Captain had it in the water almost all day long, and the passengers enjoyed swimming and diving and all kinds of games. First of all Corinia, Adrian and little Intellectus, who wasn't so small any more, but exceeded the height of his dad and uncle by two inches.

"These are the genes of the Griselgreifs" Grisella commented on that, whenever possible, proud mother as she was.

From the Slyboots' side men tended to a firm trunk, while Intellectus inherited the slender limbs of the Griselgreifs.

Arundle needn't been begged twice either, and Billy-Joe even risked a jump from the highest tip of the stern. Making Captain Leblanc yell atrociously. He couldn't slip off the burden of responsibility, not even in the privacy of the water, where he intended to take relief, and enjoy his wife's company.

Swimming was no real option in the small cube. But it was a most welcome refresher and after a couple of minutes the comforters crawled up the Jakob's ladder hand over hand to take a rest in the deckchairs or had a round of bridge under the sun-sail, sipping cool drinks, read a book or chatt lowly not to disturb anyone else.

Stan came up from the underground to have a look at his congenial construction on its maiden voyage, and was highly satisfied.

His Captain asked him to have a trial on his own, but he rejected with all signs of disgust. "A real seaman no swim never..." he yelled and slipped away down to where he belonged. "I'm watchman, savvy" – you could hear him sounding up from the depth.

His assistant Mr. Wazlav, who was also called the Pole, couldn't be seen on deck. Well, he might have a rest under deck, but that was unlikely on such a beautiful day.

Corinia shared her passion for the water with Intellectus, also in her human shape. They hushed like silver arrows from one end of the cage to the other. They needed no three strokes of their legs for a distance of some thirty yards.

Adrian retired as soon as he noticed how surplus he was. His wife, Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk, was on stand by with a set of snowwhite towels to cover him up and protect his vulnerable skin against the rays of the sun.

Billy-Joe and Arundle were lying up on the highest deck, well hidden to the sights by anyone, and if they hadn't been so busy with each other, they might have noticed how everybody avoided contact. So they didn't wonder, how quiet and peachful it was and enjoyed the solitude of the sea, the air and the sun, just as they were used to on the pontoon in the lagune at home on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

The Magic Bow had surrounded them in addition with a magic circle. He knew why, as he could hear the green grass grow, so to speak. What he heard or foreboded, sounded strange to him either.

He couldn't make up his mind, and come to a conclusion. The magic circle he proceeded, to prevent people from stepping on Arundle by accident. The Magic Stone should take care of Billy-Joe, as applicable. Which the latter had done, of course, and not that alone...

Never again would Mr. Melford, the Second Officer, leave the Signal Officer's booth unattended. No matter, what the weather was like, whenever he was on watch on the bridge. He always had the loudspeakers of the booth switched on. "Just to be on the save side" as he put it. He didn't want to risk a reprimand like on the other day. But nothing special could be heard this day except some peeping and howling.

All of a sudden the Captain popped up in the doorway, wet and almost naked, with a bewildered look in his eyes. Like an animal he scented his nose up in the air, and showed signs of terror.

Orders he yelled. The cage was pulled up, in a hurry and was stowed very carefully, as well as everything that was loose on deck. The passengers had to put on life-jackets, and had to hide under deck. There was no time for explanations.

And then Mr. Melford heard on the radio what his Captain had scented beforehand already. A monster wave was heading for the Newsealandish coast. Newsealand sounded as if it was, but it wasn't. If a whole ocean was stirred up, no shore would be left save.

Only in the waving shirt, which he had put on in the meantime, Zinfandor rushed towards the map-stand. Where was that monster wave exactly right now? Was it ahead or was it astern? Would it come from astern, or where they already on its back?

"How much speed do we make over ground?"

"Negative, Sir, negative. We make negative speed over ground" came the answer after a couple of torturing minutes.

"T'was about time, at last!" Zinfandor slipped into his trousers and sat down. He asked for a cup of coffee and enlit - rather relaxed - a cigar.

"with us on its back the monster can't do us no harm. But we mustn't come near land. But there are more than 500 miles of open sea astern. All we gained during the last days. We make a little negative drive. That means we move in the right direction. We swim down on its back. We can't do more than wait, right now. All

we can do is pray, that the second monster isn't following right away. But normally they aren't as fast. The sea got to inhale after all..."

Those around him didn't understand much, as they stood around palefaced and timid.

Arundle disappeared into the Signal Officer's Booth, and Billy-Joe joined her. Both of them listened to the garbled mix of waves. Arundle turned the knobs a little, but she didn't get far. She intended to commit a message to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, to warn those inhabitants who peopled still the facilities of the hotel of the hub of the world, and move towards the interior of the island.

There – she imagined – would be no acute danger of life, because the island exceeded the sea-level far to far, even for a monster wave. But not so the installations between the islands. They were the weak link. Without evacuation there would be lots of casualties to be expected, as sure as the amen in church.

Arundle got in touch with her bow, who signalled "Everything's clear, hotel evacuated, warning got through." how he made it, remained mysterious for Arundle, so she needn't leave her position. She felt irreplaceable aboard, by now.

"To Pitcairn, Poseidon wouldn't let us come, as it looks" she sighed thoughtfully. They still moved backwards. The suction of the Monsterwave, was still stronger than what the ship had to put up. At last they almost stood still. But didn't move forward an inch.

The night fell down meanwhile. No-one thought of sleep or a meal. Again sandwiches and the favoured hot drink of the sailors was served. This time as a weak punch with a fine cent of rum, and a strong tea to keep all watchers awake, while awokenness was certainly demanded.

Again Arundle listened into the intervening noise in the operator's booth. Was there any notification of the second monster? About the first they knew a lot by now.

"Epicentre – near the Tongas – height of the wave – 120 feet – with declining tendency – heading almost precisely South-South-West-a-Quarter-West – speed twenty knots – decreasing."

Those data were followed by a listing of all the endangered islands and coasts and the importance of protective measures. The Isle of Wisdom-tooth was not among such sights, as it wasn't at its true location and unknown.

Was the low speed of the monster wave a good or a bad sign? Zinfandor reckoned it a good sign. "The wave pressure of the

explosion – (so was his opinion) – must have been incredible, most likely singular – we will see...”

He thanked Arundle very much for her help so far, but need her help still and any possible support. Even though, he reckoned to be an expert concerning monster waves, it was still helpful to become supported by the official media, the public air traffic and by telegraphy.

The night went by. Nothing unusual happened. And everybody sat back. Yawning was everywhere. The passengers trickled off and disappeared into their cabins and bunks, despite the fact that the emergency situation hasn't been lifted. And they were still requested to stay close to the saftyboats, lifewest girdled and emergency pack round the waist.

Zinfandor realised, whatn was going on, but didn't say a word, because he didn't believe in the second monster wave. Adundel didn't hear anything on the radio, and the good old Last Bounty headed with two knots genuine speed over ground. As it looked, the monster wave was due to run idle.

What had happened along its course? Whole groups of islands had become evaporated. Individuals who could rescue themselves first, drowned a shor while later. Houses, boats – everything, what ever property there had been, was smashed or spilled off shore.

On the Isle of Wisdom-tooth all pontoons were damaged. The houseboats lay smashed in the sharknets. The centre pontoon with the hotel building was sunk and had been pressed thropugh the sharknet, that had become torn under the weight. Only the devastated quay of the Last Bounty withstood the terrifying forces of nature. What would has happened, if the Last Bounty had been there?

From Susamee's island nothing was heard either, as this island didn't exist officially either. But hasn't been directly in the way of the monster wave anyway. Besides, there were no installations on sealevel, and the quay was located in the rear, anyway, and couldn't be reached by the highest tide. The island as such was located as a kind of protective wall, definitely higher than those 120 feet of the monster. If that wave was still so high and hadn't lost height already, running for hours by now.

With every obstacle it lost power. Until it finally reached the Antarctic coasts, not much of it would be left. Africa would hardly notice anything and Patagonia almost nothing.

Arundle sent Billy-Joe nevertheless, which was nothing by means of the magic stone. He was back in no time. "All clear, over there" he reported. "Tika is the happiest mother of a son. Emasus is he going to be called, Tibor let us know. He sends his regards and asks, how we are. If we became married and everything, as it's custom. I said that there was no time for that..."

Arundle blushed, but unnoticable in the dark. She fiercely embraced Billy-Joe and blamed the monster wave. Would they ever find their way to Pitcairn?

15. On the Isle of the Mutineers

Mrs. Waldschmitt made friends with Hans Henny Henne, the constructor and inventor of the SLOMES, who bore his years well. Due to his many implantations in many parts of his body, he stood his ground, so to speak.

His friend in heaven would forgive him. While with Susamee he wasn't so sure. But she needn't necessarily get notice. As far as the shipmates were concerned, he hoped for discretion. Besides, they acted quite normal and hardly noticable, they thought, when they hushed secretly through the gangways on the way to each other.

Hans HennyHenne's brain wasn't always properly wired at night, that was why one or another function failed or were limited in its mechanism, while was on the other hand excessively functional, and caused him to shout aloud or knock against the wrong doors.

Afterwards he didn't remember such malfunctions at all. While the other passengers did all the more so. Some might be reminded of a plate-warmer by such behaviour.

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"Call me Hilde" Mrs. Waldschmitt wispered during the Captain's dinner, that was due after the salvation. "What do such formalities mean?" Hans Henny Henne was not the man to let such opportunity

pass in vain, as the chevalier of the old school, that he was. Thus a late amour fou started. While the dinner went still on, they exchanged first passionate kisses. And as they didn't stop after a few glasses, they didn't stop after a few kisses.

Since then things went that way, almost every night. Until Mrs. Waldschmitt stopped the disgracing situation by moving to Henne's cabin, and the mating noise in the narrow gangways came to an end. She was flattered to a certain extent – after all, was she the cause – but was at the same time distressed. Such in front of the child's ears...

But such child had to handle her own affairs, which differentiated only gradually from hers.

Somewhat strange and ridiculous such behaviour always seemed to outsiders, all the more so in the beginning of an affair.

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Dorothea would have liked to return immediately, when she learned of the destruction of the 'Hotel to the Hub of the World'. As shipowner she had the power to do, no matter what the order of the charterer said. Besides, she could have arranged with Arundle. But Scholasticus was against it. "You desperately require some days of relaxation. You look so pale and exhausted."

By experience he knew that such a remark would impress his wife, more than all reasonable arguments. He ordered her strict bedtime and for himself as well. That was why the two didn't get out of their cabin any more.

Sulamith had fun with her cousin and with her aunt Grisella, who liked her niece a lot. So there was no lack of babysitting for the eleven year old girl.

Judith kept going as well, who felt like Dorothea. Basically everybody felt the same, because all their heartblood clung to the islands. In three or four weeks would there still be time to care. Things had to go on without them for now.

Such decision didn't hinder the busy exchange of information, on all possible ways and channels. The Somniors dreamt themselves home and the Animations undertook extensive soul-excursions. And the world-wide-web for normal beings did also exist, after all.

Without emergency the magic stone and the magic bow refused the request for transportation. "Repair-instructions can not be put under the category of emergency", the magic bow exclaimed. He

would utter herewith also the opinion of the magic stone. Both were in compliance with that.

As the weather stayed on for a couple of days, the Captain had the swim-cages set up, and the busy far ‘niente’ put a golden veil over the whole ship.

“We wouldn’t be too far from the destination” the Captain hollered. “Perhaps two days, more or less, so far, if nothing unexpected happens – Well, there is nothing of that kind in sight, but you never know...”

The Captain intended to add the lost days in the end. Mrs Waldschmitt changed reservation for her return trip, just in case. “To be on the save side – nobody is expecting me on the other side”, she added thoughtfully and looked bleary-eyed at ‘Hansiman’, as she adressed him intimately.

Arundle managed the rebooking via satelite from the operator’s booth, by electronic ticketing. “This does not only save paper, but is also much safer. Because the travel-documents couldn’t get lost.”, she explained.

There would remain four weeks all in all, which had to suffice. Mrs Waldschmitt had a valiant grin in the face. At home nothing held her, but habit, which she could give up easily – the sooner, the better, so to speak. For something worth while.

She felt a little like being raised into the feudal state. Things turned upside down. She got access to circles where the air was thin, it was said, but she felt more than well. “How great is life, when you fly from summit to summit. How colourful and rich and manyfold is the human being, who unfolds in love, when there is a proper chance...”

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Arundle had reached her target, but it wasn’t the final aim, her own mother cared for that, yes, the own mother...

“After all, let’s do the job” – Captain Leblanc committed his obligations. He didn’t lack of witnesses. Mrs. Waldschmitt became Mrs Henne. Not an advantageous change of names. On the other hand, should she have picked up her maiden name again? Only to keep up with changing habits?

Hans Henny Henne was the happiest man in the world, and arranged for a wedding, generations would recall. On the height of the festivities Arundle and Billy-Joe dismissed to the island of the mutineers. Close by the last Bounty had anchored. The two found themselves resting comfortably in the day-warm sand, dreaming

dreams of valiant mutineers with exchanged roles. Billy-Joe felt so suitable in the sand, as if made for that. How could she stop hurting him? Why couldn't she just open up and cuddle in his arms. The impulse was there, but something stopped her from letting thing happen. Or when she did let go, which occurred once in a while, she viewed it as a weakness, that had to be made invalid.

Billy-Joe was so generous. It was not the age. He was just about two years older, that didn't grant such wisdom. It was his character, his, or the character of his folk. Something she would never get sorted out.

Perhaps this was what frightened her. She didn't want a tribal brother, she wanted an individual, just like herself. Perhaps she was only afraid of Billy-Joe's lack of individuality. With him you always came into the general, no matter what it was about. Somehow archetypical it was, when you entered his way of thinking. You became an archetype yourself. You could hear him think then in his head "Alas, that's the way whites are. After all they have other advantages..."

No wonder, when wrath overwhelmed her, when she argued and formed strongholds. Who was willing to be put into a drawer? Without noticing, or with noticing too late. And later it was too late. Its like a switch being turned and afterwards everthing is too late. The train has left and you stay behind with empty hands and sad heart. And then it is said "You whites think too much."

She didn't mind the truth so much. Well, it surely could be true, that the whites kept thinking too much. But she didn't think as a white, but as Arundle, and she didn't want to be discriminated for that. Not for something she wasn't responsible for.

"Teach me the way you like me to be, as I do with you, continuously. Otherwise there is but permanent harmony, and I'm afraid of that, because we both behave carelessly, and our aim is comfortability. Then suddenly the big disappointment breaks out, because nothing comes over any more, and nothing between us is thrilling anymore, so it seemed. Because we are afraid, that our love has died."

"Just you look around, just once, Arundle, where are we? Where are we now? You are here. The sand has waited for you for two hundred years. Feel it, just feel it. Look at these stars, and look inside you at the same time – yes, do it at best at the same time..."

She did as was requested. Did anything melt? "Hold me tight, dear, hold me tight..." they lay there holding each other tight, desperately, as if it was for a long farewell.

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Mrs Waldschmitt cancelled her flight, once and for all. She could fly later at any time. A lot could be arranged from down here. There wasn't too much to be arranged anyway, because she had given up her tax-consultant office a year ago.

'Hansiman' would perhaps even join her. "Not a bad idea, to see the homelands again", he uttered. He hadn't seen Germany since the Nazis took over. He was taught by his divine friend Roland now, and he believed again into mankind and that man could change – to the bad and to the good. Unfortunately mostly to the bad, but seldom enough also to the good.

And then he told her about her ex, that she became rather sad. She regretted not having experienced his swing.

"Yes, there was a Saulus really exchanged for a Paulus" he exclaimed, and Hilde couldn't stop the tears. She still enjoyed. It was something very special. Especially for him. Whether he understood her? She turned her eyes upwards. Hansiman pressed her tight and whispered at best he could with his hearing aid – "he'll understand, you can be sure of that. He is now in quite different regions. He has made a qualifying jump upwards, and has absolved a heavenly carrier, we couldn't even dream of over here."

And then he told stunning Hilde, what her ex became. There were bits she knew already, Arundle had mentioned the one or other, but in the context things sounded even more unlikely. Unvoluntarily she had the picture of the man before her inner eye, who had left her to follow his nightmarish illusions, and that wasn't complying with the angel-like being, she learned of now.

"Are we talking about the same person?" she asked questioningly, when Hansiman overdid. "Sure enough, this is Roland, as he dwells and lives... well, dwelling might be the wrong provision, he doesn't dwell really any more... I had my turn halfways, but was sent back. My time wasn't over yet. I had something to absolve, it said. Was about the SLOMES. Well, yes, you know, the thing they are all sitting in front of, and steering into the valve. Yes, and now I am famous, as I always wanted to be. But do you think, you notice anything of that? At best it's disgusting and clumsy. Alas, Hilde the heaven must be thanked that I found you. Yes, heaven be thanked..."

Overwhelmed by his own words Hansiman embraced Hilde und pressed her to his heart heartily, that she almost fainted. His bionic

muscles worked more than perfect. Hilde sighed, so he loosened his grip.

“You can hardly breathe” she whispered and was pure devotion.

16. Reconstruction or New Start?

The last Bounty was homeward bound. Pitcairn, the isle of the mutineers, lay astern. The passengers enjoyed the ‘dolce far niente’. They knew what was waiting for them at home. Their thoughts were travelling ahead, but still didn’t bother the atmosphere. Only Arundle and Billy-Joe weren’t affected by the future. They remained in the presence and enjoyed the moments of eternity, they experienced.

Because of the reconstruction-works going on in the lagoon the Last Bounty could only take over fuel, while the passengers bound for the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, disembarked. A band of dwarves asked in a hurry to care for a hometrip. They mistrusted the reports from their new home. And wanted to have a look with their own eyes.

So Stan, the chief-mechanic just ordered as much fuel as required for the new destination and back, from the spare barrels that had remained unharmed in the hurricane. Then the vessel took off again towards Susamee’s Isle. Some Convertors slipped aboard last minute, but just in time, because the helicopter had been damaged and couldn’t take off. So they had been lucky, because the full moon was close.

Tibor was with them. He went back to home and wife and child, and of course to play the horseheaded violin.

Whenever mom and dad ‘redressed’ (as they put it) and even Granny Susamee took off, Emassus came to uncle Will and the seven she-dwarves, who were eagerly looking forward. But this he would realise much later, when he himself would begin to ‘redress’, as was likely with such a pair of parents. But that would be clearing in the due course of puberty.

With the diminishing Last Bounty also the board romance disappeared and everyday life took over. Hans Henny Henne and his newly wedded wife preferred to travel on, as soon as they noticed the chaos. “I have arranged for myself quite a nice home, where we go,

you'll see", Henne explained and Hilde believed him all too willingly. She had to get used to her new name, the former Mrs Waldschmitt realized. Every time the steward addressed her with her new name, she shrugged.

The two days turn was routine after all. Things went the proper way. The weather was fine and the first class belonged to them, as the dwarves preferred the dark lower decks, and neglected the daylight, especially when it was reflected by the water, as was the case. The Conversors also cared for the solitude of the comfortable cabins, while the whole ship stood at their disposition. Just for the meals the people gathered in the dining room. But even there, the dwarves didn't like to show up or become involved in talking. Not even the food they wanted to share, but cooked in the lower decks, where they found it rather cosy and neatly arranged.

Alongside the ship's side double storeyed beds were fixed. Each equipped with a neat colourful curtain. In the middle there was a long table fixed to the floor, and little chairs, also fixed on both sides in comfortable height. Two kitchens, washrooms and sanitary installations were found left and right of the stairs. There was space for some hundred little passengers. But filled there was no comfort any more. Now it was quite different. The hammocks above the table from one side to the other, weren't needed these days by night and therefore stowed away, so were the blankets and stuff.

The same installation was to be found in the lower deck underneath, where never a ray of light reached or appeared.

Thus some 600 little-ones could be carried. Exact figures however, you could hardly get. Until today no-one ever found out how many dwarves had left the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, or were travelling to and fro.

These days with the regular and bustling exchange, no counting was possible, neither way, and for what? Who cared? As long as the dwarves enjoyed the way they lived, the humans could be content. Still the people in charge never got rid of a feeling of uneasiness. They were thinking of things they could do them good. – At least they thought they did, and what they were thinking of, was supposed to be at best for the dwarves.

This was the margin they followed and behaved. There was no real communication. You could see that right at the time being. The humans shyed away from the dwarves. (Although they never committed.) And the dwarves stayed away from the humans even more. Flashlike they hushed down the gangways and eyed round

corners. here a cap and there a bit. Almost nothing could be seen or noticed from the litte-ones. Only when everything was quiet, as quiet as it can be on board of a motorship, you could hear sometimes low hammering and singing out of the ships deep belly. As if they were at work with something. Yes, they were extremely busy, the humans knew. That wasn't much, but about all, they knew about dwarves.

Tibor was probably the only human being, who managed to stay in a room with dwarves for a lengthier period of time. After all, he gave srminars and lectures for them, and also invited his own kind.

As long as everybody followed his lectures, everything was alright. The trouble began as soon as they started discussions. Most of the dwarves hushed away then. They didn't care for exchanging arguments. Which didn't hinder them from adoring a once dedicated idol. They allowed the idol to adress very openly to them, whether they believed or not, but always listened, what he had to say. They did care for what he said. Otherwise there would have been not so many who came over here from Susamee's Island. While it was so much nicer over there, for studying purposes. Well, things weren't all that bad over here for them anymore. They occuipied the second underfloor of the University-Isle, warm and dry as it was there, after all.

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The debris on the lagoon between the islands was still there, just as the monsterwave had left behind. Evacuation had been just in time, lucky enough, and no casulties had to be claimed. Some minor injuries had there been in the rush of the flight. But the wave as such didn't catch any one.

The high rocks on both island had withstood the flood, and cut it apart, so it passed by rather ineffectively, while the damage in between, in the lagoon, was all the more heftily.

As they weren't the only victims, they found it very difficult to find craftsmen and material in the area. They of course were not the only affected in the region. Requests from everywhere fell upon the brave tinkerers to the furthest end of the continent and Southern islands.

Even her NCA-debtors were asked by Judith for experts. She promised prompting conditions and guaranteed amortisation of loans for twenty years or even more.

When the helicopter was operating again, the first craftsmen were to come, and went straight away at work. What was reusable, was piled up neatly ashore.

Dorothea developed meanwhile a structural plan and a reconstruction blueprint together with the architects, who were still the same who built and planned the university on the neighbouring island. Because those people worked reliable, and they kept with them where and for whom they were working in secrecy.

The basic concept of a shark-protected inner bassin, was still regarded as the best possible solution, and couldn't be overrid by any other model. So this part of the reconstruction was already in due course. The old net and sluice with the mighty doors were to be put back into operation, as far and as soon as possible. Things to be replaced were replaced of course. Soon the barrier between the islands was erracted and connected what belonged together again.

At the time when the project had begun, Dorothea had lined up residential boats alongside up the artificial barrier. Which later became replaced by pontoons, on which picturesque sheds and cabins were built, giving the hotel a kind of hula-appeal.

Unfortunately the cabins and pontoons were all gone by the flood. No one could foresee such a mighty monster wave, which was certainly very unlikely to repeat in future. Still there were typhoons under way occasionally and were to come every season. They could also harm such fagile facilities. So it might be wise to go back to the caravan-boats. They might be safer, and surely were statistically seen.

For the same reason the lobby of the hotel wouldn't be reconstructed in wood, on the central pontoon, but would be erected on migthy stone-pillars and solid underground on the pier, which was widened for this purpose. Unfortunately the nice symbol of the hub of the world was somehow out of balance by that move ashore. But this had been just fun anyway, you noticed for a couple of seconds while approchuing by air, and then never again. From the ground you never and nowhere could get a glimpse of that hub.

The Last Bounty was kept busy. She transported labourers together with material that could be stowed in the front holds. While the rest of their belly was redesigned for passenger travel. Nobody considered it worth while to alter the setup.

Among the volunteers from the SLOMES-Company, the desperately needed operator was finally fond and registered as regular

crew-member. That made everybody of concern happy at last, as the pay-role was completed that way, at length after all.

Well, a proper cook was still needed, and one or two deckboys wouldn't be wrong either. Really content with the crew a caring Second Officer in charge would never be. So it was here too. Mr Ishmael, the navigator, couldn't be happy either, as he was responsible for the consignment and completeness, next to the Captain himself.

17. The Maroons

Not all the NCA-debtors shouldered their debts, so to speak. The number of flying NCA-debtors was growing, as a matter of fact. So was the social policeforces at the same time. Such forces had nothing else to do but to stirr up those refugees where ever they were found. In the beginning, most of them tried to hide in the city-slums, mainly in the Northern capitals, where things were somewhat favourable for them, because of the pan-diseases. They carried on illegally somehow, at best they could, and that was not much. While the forces became aware of that of course, and many were caught.

Therefore, new modes of escaping came up. This time the hail wasn't searched in the unanimous crowd of the city but ways led out into the open countryside. Professional sluicers took over and proved to be more effective. A worldwide operating organisation of sluicers soon built up. They had their basis in the so-called red zones – devastated rural areas, far away in deserts, mountains, moors, and left behind open pit mining areas.

There the Maroons (as they were called, referring to the former slaves in the old days) – gathered and formed social communities. But in the eyes of the authorities and the distorted public they were regarded as criminals, who pilfered small towns and villages, or built up a might means of exchange by cultivating drugs.

Drug consumption raised noticable - especially in the slums of the mega-cities in a kind of cirulus vitiosus.

Those who were sitting in the debtor's trap, became soon victims of drugs. As soon as they became addicts, they didn't bother anymore - first of all about the blooming system which brought them that far.

Such tendencies (they were as yet tendencies) met Judith's ears rather rank, and also alarmed those in charge of politics and welfare,

like churches, trade unions and social services. Justice became the major topic, more than ever, and the basic question of dramatic cuts of obligations to a reasonable level never ended. Regular procedures were desperately needed. Things couldn't go on the way they went. If things went on unregulated, anarchy of the worst kind threatened society. The dangers were realistic. The Maroons were but the spearhead of a threat arising. Action was desperately required.

There were surely other opinions. And thus society was split once more in conservatives and liberals. The latter regarded the mode of self-organisation in principal helpful and some even saw the Maroons as part of the solution, and not part of the trouble for the future. Which was probably a dangerous and naive position, and had little to do with realities, as was seen and experienced by those, who had suffered under the cruel acts of the Maroon-bands, or just said to have suffered, for what ever reasons – being stirred up by opinion-leaders of a foul and backwards heading status quo.

The situation wasn't easy and clear, and the range of action was very narrow. A private initiative, like Judith's, and be it as powerful and mighty as could be, had a better stand, and was therefore well accepted from most sides. The competitors hoped for bankruptcy, and the governmental authorities enjoyed the peasing effects. While the sufferers enjoyed at last, when they were much better off afterwards, because they were no longer pressed aside and risked to diminish at the edge of society.

While the organisers and sluicers didn't either like such initiatives at all, because they attacked their power base. They were interested in continuous supply of victims from the cities. Only masses move the world finally.

The rioters didn't care whether or not the masses were organized and had fair aims. The riotors didn't care for aims. They mainly cared for riot. This was their view. And this was worth thinking twice. You would never be able to bring those misled masses back to normal, even the naivest had to accept this. Those who had missed the train, had no chance to get back on, but another world had to be created for them. – Form them and by them!!

The way back was definitely blocked for ever – i.e. for a very long time. The underdogs and parias and outcasts and desperados developed their own identity, their own pride and their own values, they lived after. and such contradicted the valid values considerably. Particularly when it came to violence and honour and pride.

Such weren't negociable for the outcasts. And this was why those of good will failed. Those who favoured the state's monopoly of

power certainly shyed away from revolutionary power. Their major mistake was, that they didn't realize in what a turmoil mankind was. And that the aim only could be to give impulses towards a future, worth living. But what were the true impulses towards a life worth living? That of course was the problem. No one could look into the future, if not assisted by magic means, and if so, he couldn't be sure that what he got to be seeing, was a true image of the whole, or just a tiny bit. Nobody could say if the forces competing were heading towards doom or heaven. Success was relative in any case. The fate might look favourable, but the status quo remained untouched, or was blocked by those in the way, no matter how much heartblood they gave for their course, if they were honest to themselves.

Thus a tendency pressed into being, while nobody knew whether it was good or right, or both, or neither good nor right. The lesser the authorities committed in the chase of the outcasts, and the less noticeable those behaved, the lesser became the friction on the surface. The police became more reluctant and the authorities were all too happy, when they could ignore the whole subject.

As soon as news spread about assaults and hold-ups, and of pilferages of arms' depots, and the like, the switch was tuned back to alert and counter-action. Especially when bank robbery or blackmailing was involved. As soon as the underdogs got aware of that, and stopped such activities, and thought of other ways of self-keeping – things soon turned back to ignorance.

Non-violent forms of self-keeping were looked for and taken over by the Maroons, and became in the long run rather challenging. Maroons developed independent and self-sufficient structures. They referred back to long forgotten old forms of tribal modes of being. The more so, when they met tribes and left-behind descendents, as were found in Australia, in the rain forests of Brazil, Peru or Ecuador. – Or even in the devastated tundra of Asia, on solitary long forgotten islands, and where ever tribal life had survived or was refounded. Such a self-sufficient life in accordance with mother nature then became an impulse and the basis of hope, for all humans with good will.

Thus, the settlements of the outcasts were almost forgotten. An unseen world in the world emerged – undetected, unnoticed, secret and challenging. In small numbers the drop-outs disappeared and found solitary paths on their search for freedom and happiness. They were heartily welcome in most cases, and joined the tribe, sooner or later. While on the way to that aim, old dangers lured. And once more

robbing bands drew the attention on such growling thickets of the unknown.

Less and less became the talk of the social borders in the centre of power. While those responsible knew that something uncontrollable went on out there, but they didn't look too close, as long as there was no alarming need.

With those maroons the main stream society had similar problems than the saturated dwellers of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth had with the dwarves on the neighbouring island. They were there and they were so different. And that was about almost all what both sides knew from each other.

Basically it wasn't much different than things had been always with forgotten minorities. The difference was perhaps that society had begun to produce such minorities systematically, so to speak. Voluntarily or involuntarily without declared intention. That was about all the difference.

Because systematically didn't mean that there was someone who planned or produced the new savages. They were there. They seemed to be unavoidable. They formed the magnet and nucleus of those who had fallen through the grids of society, and therefore had to become sorted out. So with their flights, they did exactly what they were expected to do. They disappeared.

Like this, or similar to this, the situation was found by the analysts and scientists, who, if they defined themselves as progressive, at least specified such loss as dramatic and sad. Because the fermentive power, the initiative, the imagination and goodwill, which was available here, was lost. Society actually lacked of such means, or had them handed over to the robotic artifacts.

The mainstreamers didn't even notice what happened to them, how they lost their autonomy and integrity, bit by bit.

Life became long and longer. 100 years of age was nothing special. Everybody could get so far, if you behaved and kept yourself properly, at good health, thanks to the regular sittings before the SLOMES and the regenerative bionic medicine, who could do all this and even more. Robotic artifacts showed themselves quite often as the better surgeons. Artifacts overlooked the breeding of the spare organs – better, more punctual and more precise than any human, and were therefore chosen. Who wanted his kidney being ruined by a careless apprentice - being somewhere else in his or her mind while tending the stock. He was perhaps dreaming of the girl next door or vice versa of the boy from last night's stand? Things like that couldn't

happen with artifacts. They never day-dreamed, you could rely on them one hundred percent.

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All this happened in secrecy behind the backs of the people and was still in 'statu nascendi', that is, it was going to be. It was scarcely more but a trend. Those SLOMES determined life for quite some time. And God knew what was going on in the laboratories and hospitals. Those who worked there hardly understood, what the neighbour next door did.

The institutions were by far too big and fell apart into so many separations and sections, that nobody ever achieved an overall view, as long as involved in person. Even that was not so certain any more. The robot artifacts began to overrun the humans and displaced them. They were faster, more effective, and worked harder and stabler.

No talk about birthcontrol was necessary, and all the emotional fuss. Birthcontrol was regular reality. Nobody missed those fat-bellied women in the streets. And when one did appear, people looked aside disgusted, as if that woman was suffering from an infectious disease. They were seen only a short while, then disappeared.

The more civilised the humans became the less interested were they in such borderline experience, like the act of birth or death. Happenings of that kind were regarded as unfair interruptions in the flow of life, you had to stay away from, at best you could. Children were regarded as the number one risk for poverty and misery.

You were indeed able to forget that you also were born, when you were in the due course of becoming and celebrating your one hundred and twentyfourth birthday with a big party. If you were still able to let the popsy-wopsies dance, so to speak. What did such a person care for the future and the coming generations?

Fresh flesh and rounded forms were no longer natural privileges but had become the standard equipment of any woman who cared, and that were all of them, more or less, who could afford.

And all those, who didn't obey this lawlike habits, who wanted to give birth to a baby, sank into the gutter, where she belonged to in mainstreamers' eyes. They disappeared, and weren't seen anymore in dark channels. If they were lucky, they found access somewhere in the desert, where a tribe of Maroons lived. Not seldom they suffered on the limit, and were hardly able to keep going by the means nature provided, and that wasn't much in many cases. Freedom meant

permanet search for food, water and shelter against cold, rain, sun, wind, and threatening wild animals or marauding bands.

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Judith came up with this topic in the Council of the Menora. Such was as yet a peculiar, uneasy and unnecessary problem. A little like the occurrence of mental diseases, and neuroses and the like, as was common in the 'fin de siecle' at the end of the 19th century. Misfortunes like that always existed, so it seemed, and this one had opened up a new outlet, one of the worst kind, and as disgusting as unnecessary, so the many of mainstremers believed and uttered.

You could hardly differentiate between fact and polemic twist, or even frank lie and false evidence. While the development was just in the beginning. Things looked in a way as if the eager press had something found to thrill the mainstrem society, and make it stick together. Something threatening, that was indignant, wild, anarchic, and dangerous, something that was accompanied by unlimited pregnancy and uncontrolled fertility on the most primitive level.

Reporters, who claimed to have been at the sites outside in the wilderness, presented unsharp photos accompanying their reports. showing tophless women with hanging breasts and wild hairbush. Big-bellied children, men, drinking goat-blood, or groping inside a piece of cattle, eating bowels. Poor miserable creatures they were. This was the fate those drop-outs were heading for, so the message was.

Such a fate was threatening all, who wouldn't adopt and accept the mainstream way of life. This was the clear message. And such a fate nobody wanted to suffer. So pity arose for the poor beings, who – although by own fault – had been brought into such a state.

However, pluralistic as things were handled in a societey with democratic principles the reporters also had an ear for the drop-outs, and gave them a voice too. And they didn't hesitate to produce quite different reports. They also claimed for authenticity and the reporters in favour also claimed to have been at the scene just like the others. Perhaps at a different site and with other Maroons – well, that must have been it, and could be the answer.

They wrote about idyllic sites and produced quite different pictures, no less authentic than the ugly photos of the others. Their beings looked happy, healthy and gay. The children were but ideal and their mothers beautiful. They were placed next to broad-shouldered Tarzan-like fellows. While the reports accompanying such pictures

sounded rather different as well. There was no talk of savagisms or falling back into stoneage and barbarism. The opposite – by their advanced knowledge which they brought with them, those Maroons produced fantastic progress with those tribes they joined. But they didn't fight and rape nature, but acted in accordance with the 'Mother of all Life', as was said. 'That way civilisation also works', was their credo. Health was also a ressource of life, and guaranteed a long life, no less. Thus was the critics' approach.

Who ever came across his life, could now make his choice, whether he believed the panickers or the enthusiastic followers of the new way of life. While both sides were certainly cheating, more or less. The one side confirmed the mainstreamers in their prejudices, while the other stimulated the doubters, and might help with the decisive final step.

The Council of the Menora, i.e. first of all Arundle, saw through such polemic ado. Still they had to agree with both sides partly to a certain extend.

Conditions of life weren't at all easy outside. So, Arundle and the sisters Florinna and Corinia headed towards such sites in their dreams to find out and see with their own eyes. Because regarded from outside, the mainstream critics seemed to have a more realistic view.

Conditions of life in basic exchange with nature was all but easy. The adopted cultural techniques helped far less than they promised. However, when the first steps of adaptation had been successfully done, and the state of nature handling, which proceeded the guest-society was reached, then – all of a sudden – abilities arose, which had been unimportant before, and showed astonishing new ways out of miserable conditions of life.

Often they were little and all practical improvements. The use of a lever, or of water-power, simple operational techniques, thanks to the knowledge of the location of organs. Things, that had been in the dark future on the stone-age level.

By the new brothers and sisters you accepted advice which the missionaries offered in vain long before.

Instead of fleeing the draught, and leave the fields alone, in order to find a more fertile soil, they now started digging for fountains and wells.

The stock of cattle and other domestic animals were increased, and first indicators pointed towards a certain welfare, not yet hairdryers and washing machines, or elevators and the like, but bricks and shingles for stable and warmer housing. Sails on the water, rudders but paddles, blocks and spiers and the like, to become more

flexible on the water. Improvement of such kind didn't question the whole way of life. The newcomers often realized that they only confirmed, what the Maroons had had in mind anyway, without actually practicing it, as some improvement seemed to point the wrong way, and had to be severely discussed or even rejected. There were surely very effective ways of killing of men and beast. What terrible traps the white man had founded, in order to catch precious fur, or fish by means of explosives – also a terrible and desasterous way of hunting, as soon as gunpowder was invented, and the ingredience were found in the open. Things and practices the like weren't practiced, and the systematic way of the White Man was definitely no option.

Most and best advice came from the rejectors, who had turned away from the hated system very clearly, and started fighting it. By subversion, and, as it didn't work otherwise, by flying and by inventing a defined counter-culture.

Where such individuals took part in the game, very positive and stimulating outlook could be produced. The results here were definitely no fake but alternative fact of the best kind.

People like Billy-Joe, well educated isolationists with kow-how pulled the strings. Instead of scarcity and deficiency, an alternative way of life was realized by means of intelligent strategies. This was no self-destructive denial, but a better and truer life.

With such leaders the drop-outs became the ferment and the spearhead of hope and future. The christian view of the last who became first, was realized in a miraculous way, while the change of values assisted such development.

Such ideas, brought to conclusion, meant a change of paradigm and by consequence it was, what the alternatives already had started to live. That was why the reaction was as hysterical as it was, as soon as the public got aware. That was the reason for the conservative press to publish fake news at best they could, and tried to put things upside down. They feared the non-violent, unrepressive society and mobilized the dark forces. Being certain that the old elites would only give way by the loss of their lives.

This could only be dried out. Only by a radical change of values was it possible to break the power of the old leading culture. But the political new force was far away from such change. As the alternatives could easily be outnumbered, as they were still small in number, while the mainstreamers counted billions. Not even the old Maroons had yet been activated, and the tribes weren't at all united.

Just timid those little flights occurred, little brooklets, whereas streams were needed. Still, the permanent loss demoralized the system, as those who left were the best, and thus undermined the consent. Consequently the Maroons called their areas non-repressive free zones, as total freedom reigned there-in, at least by intention.

Imagination was unlimited. Those who ruined their neighbours nerves, moved on, because freedom was the guaranteed privileges of all, and included the respect to the freedom of others. Being left alone, the actors soon found out, what it meant to be left alone, and were eaten up by solitude. Thus the absolute freedom became punishment. And thus the comunion without repression was payed the utmost attention.

The arguments about the 'Hotel to the Hub of the World' that were exchanged between the World citizens and the Isolationists now showed up again on a wider level, concerning the whole world. While no-one could say, which side was right, and which wrong. As the change of paradigm was not wholly rejected by the ruling class, and nobody wanted to confront and oppose the change openly.

As soon as thing became concrete, such changes separated society, just like that, and each side blamed the other of fake. The alternatives blamed the mainstreamers to stick to their privileges, and those in reply, blamed the alternatives of anarchy, they wanted society to end up with, so ran the false tale.

Nobody was content with things, as they went on. There were only losers, and increased in number, therefore they couldn't be ignored. The suggestions of launching private individual initiative sounded naiive and cynical. Especially in the ears of the drop-outs and mis-fits, whose existence was questioned.

'Not the people are made for the system, but the system is made for people' thus was the credo of the humanists, to be found on both sides. 'It's got to be for the people. If it can't fulfill such function, then it is invalid and needs adjustment.'

The leaders of the system knew of course that there was something in such arguments. Because individuality meant multitude. Not all humans could be measured by the same scale. They all functioned not by the same laws or accepted the dictations of poverty and disease in the same way.

The clever ones searched for alternatives, and didn't follow the mainstream, and didn't allow the sytem to utilize their abilities and power to their needs. There were gamblers and batters who enjoyed

risks or even couldn't do without, and were addicted to cards and things, either win or lose – as a matter of fact – mostly the latter.

Confronted with such outlook the humanists weren't able to answer. How could you help those, who rejected help? What could you do with those who preferred to give up life instead of hanging on in a false life? And who said to the decision-makers that their decision was wrong?

Seen from a certain point of view, those people acted reasonably. If you considered a certain amount of egotism and unquestioned will of life. But with such assumptions the trouble already began. And the change of paradigms proved already, that there was a point in the radical criticism.

The money-system had stumbled over its own feet, not only, but also proved incompetent in a globalised world, and couldn't be steered either. All intentions to install artificial brakes, were outnumbered finally. The search for a new leading value-system was in due course.

As long as the lifespan was uncontrolled and only limited by the individual, the span of life couldn't be chosen as the regulating factor, and nobody cared for the accumulation of life-span-genes. Each individual was given a certain quantity, as proved in the end. One had meagre 40 years, another merry 95. Both didn't do anything to regulate or influence such flow. In this sector things happened uncontrolled. As long as this was so, the life-span couldn't be regarded as a measure of value, although – in accordance with the quality of life – always had had the highest possible value. That could however be influenced very little.

As everyone knew that, it wasn't worse while to think about ways of influencing such value-system, nobody ever undertook. As long as this was so, money had to grant its means of exchange, and had to represent the absolute value, which in fact had long been handed over to the value of lifespan, which ever since had been the true and final value, and nothing else.

Those, who giggled with billions and millions daily, knew best on the slippery grounds of stock-exchange sites like NewYork, Tokyo, Frankfurt or London, and the like.

Since the invention of the SLOMES the situation had drastically changed. Now, everybody held in own hands the course and quantity of lifespan, and what he or she was willing and able to do for it. Others however, made up a different calculation, as the strategists of the globalisation reckoned. Especially the youth made fun of those who prolonged their lifespan without noticing, that it was meaningless

and unworthy living, while those concerned either didn't even realize or made more or less effective efforts to alter their situation.

18. The Arms of the Menora

"We wouldn't get any further, this way." Arundle quite well saw the Gordian knot and she felt like Oedipus and take the sword and cut it into pieces, if anyone ever solved his or her problems that way. The Advisoress didn't make things easier. As it was him or her who packed into the debate a lot, which seemed not to refer to the subject of concern. Confusion instead of clarity was the only consequent outcome.

So she finally brought the Menora into consideration and the historically grown amount of arms, up to nine, while the ninth, the center arm, had a different function, and what this meant with reference to to eight armed model. Because the creators must have had something in mind.

"The many arms might have had practical reasons", Pooty said, who felt quite homely with Arundle. So he repeated the famous words of great German poet J.W.v.Goethe: "More light, more light is needed..."

"The famous last words of the most famous German poet" Dorothea indicated her sophistication. "Pooty is always good for a surprise." Arundle said being pleased by such stunning reply. "The obvious might be the nearest at hand, and the correct", she nodded.

But what meant right or wrong in such a case. More light could have been produced otherwise as well. You needn't alter the number of arms of an item of sacred value, all the more, as there were thousands of candles of that kind already in use.

"It could well also be a question of symmetry..." Judith mentioned, who should know best as a Jew. That was of course also somewhat prejudicial. Why should Jews know better?

Most likely this was true, and was already part of the identity, making of them the chosen people. If you could talk about Jewishness that way at all, which was questioned from many sides, last but not least from the Jewish side, who identified in such a positive

discrimination already the goat, producing envy and jealousy and causing the most horrible devastations and progromes the Jewish people had to suffer over the centuries.

Despite the fact that their range of action was limited, those partisanships succeeded in forming values out of nothing, so it seemed. Values the craftsmen and merchants in the Christian surrounding didn't even dream of. How dull and unimaginative those appered, compared to the successes, how poor in spirit and character.

Only when it came to plundering and murdering their witt was present. With torturing they outed themselves, and presented an inner kernel, that usually was almost shyly hidden. Such beings didn't know themselves anymore.

Starving in poverty and misery they envied the better-off. Those paupers tried in vain to be like the victims, they embraced them with the iron grip of the torturing virgin – “Wilst thou not my brother be, I smash your head, just wait and see..” – they mocked in blunt ignorance.

A similar attitude could now be experienced against those Maroons. And even more of that came up, while rumours were spreading of mysterious well-beings outside beyond the edges of the known world. Freed from all taxes and obligations, and in accordance with the natural surrounding, the Maroons, so was said, succeeded in something new and extraordinary, that was without comparison in the past.

Such were the rumours, fired by the press, and didn't want to seize. Whenever there was low tide in politics and the public, the theme was brought up again. It was refreshed and dusted, and proceeded with a new sensational make-up.

Some pointed out the mishaps and whatever ugliness there could be found, while the other side reported of advantages, you couldn't even dream of, and proud Maroons raising and claiming to be no-one's but only the Creator's noble knights.

The whole bunch of the female lot of the Council expected clarification from the Advioress. What was her opinion of the Maroons, and what did she think of the mocking mainstrem. Which side did she chose?

However, the Advioress didn't let her being trapped. “Often”, she uttered “things only seem to be contradictory, and divert from the matter in question. - Sometimes”, so she said, “ those Maroons seem to lift a tip of the cloak above the upcoming. But then, the tip is

dropped again, and the glimpse you might have been seeing, fades in the invisible.”

Bewildered looks quitted her remark. “There is a lack of courage and imagination, no doubt about that.” – the Advisoress shook her head defiantly. She realized, also here, nobody understood where she was heading to.

However, it could well be herself who didn’t quite understand, not knowing enough about the bionic gear, and had to find out about the loss of identity, because she didn’t bother much about it. This might be so, because she didn’t have an explicit identity herself. Or, to be more precise, her identity was an overall attitude, as if she wasn’t existing in person. Thus she tossed through bounderies, the human brain wasn’t able to dig anymore. Therefore it was meaningless to think any further.

It was up to the women of the Council to show the Advisoress where her limits were. Which wasn’t simple at all, the more so, as they weren’t sure either, whether they understood. Make a bird clear, that it lacks of hands, and a fish the lack of limbs.

Only those who want to exceed their limits might knock against such walls. Well, in fact seldom, and only in reference to neuralgic bounderies of identity.

Any woman might have an idea of the castration-fear, but she wouldn’t be able to feel it. This is just an example, what is meant by loss of identity. The loss of identity is frightening. That’s most important. Now they had to bring forward such fear, and have the Advisoress understand the problem better. Because in her general overview, such negative motions didn’t exist. And if they were there, such notions wouldn’t overwhelm the whole identity. But only if that was the case the Advisoress might be able to dig, what fear meant. Because fear is only real, when you become overwhelmed. Little fear, doesn’t really exist. Fear is either whole or non-existent.

Thus Arundle reckoned and made up her mind on behalf of the Advisoress in a telepathetic mode. And the others took part, as well, as far as they were able to. While they went on talking smalltalk. Still, the one or other idea was achieved, and thus communication was not all that meaningless, or without substance, although the original subject might have become out of the range of the inner eye.

Anyway, the women should have been reminded of their original subject. Sure enough, some wouldn’t have been able to tell, how they lost their original trace. Although they all agreed that it had been sufficiently expelled.

They had taken off this time from the Menora with nine arms, the so-called Chanukkia, as was celebrated on Chanukka. While no-one was certain whether they really referred to the nine-armed Chanukkia or was it still the eight-armed Menora. In any case, the Menora had been the input of the Advisoress. She had made her input in contrast to the much too narrow view that existed of the new Time-Value-System. As the women of the Council weren't able to deal with this subject, the discussion had soon begun to dissolve, and was handed over to the free balance of associations.

While in fact the Advisoress had of course a lot in mind concerning the nine-armed Menora. The Menora was so meaningful, because of its ninth arm. And the aim of the Advisoress had been to have the women – and later others – find out what it was all about the nine arms.

There must have been good reasons why a further arm had been added to the eight. 'Nihil est sine ratione': Nothing is without reason. And the advice – more light – by Goethe, didn't really enlighten the case.

The reference to the light was all too obvious with a candelier. But this was not relevant to the Menora. The Menora was different. The question was the multiarmedness and perhaps even more important the equal height of all arms. None overrode the other. They were all in the same height, each was equal to the others. The Menora stood for democracy – for equality of all. While the question came up, who was meant by those arms.

What was all about? What did the Menora symbolize? And only for that reason the question of the ninth arm of the Chanukkia – the special Menora - was relevant. Why nine arms, why not eight or six, or seven? And why were the arms all equal, while inequality was all too obvious of everything you could think of.

"Yes, an ancient symbol" it was said, and thus ended the explanation. As if the growth out of ancient times was explanation enough. As if such old symbol would guarantee access towards appreciation and truth by mere age. And thus read the Prize Question of the Menora: Does age define the truth and value of the Menora?

19. A Question of Intelligence

The pier for the Last Bounty was located alongside the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Therefore the lobby of the main building of the Hotel to the Hub of the World had also been set up there. It had to be put somewhere. And the settled ground for the pier seemed to be a solid and obvious base. The craftsmen came and erected the building in no time. Being located close to the water, solid brickwalls guaranteed stability, to stand floods and tides.

The architects and statisticians calculated and figured out all kinds of pressures from any side, and came to a diameter of one and a half foot. Thus the building looked like a defiant castle, that could stand any attack. While in fact only tectonic stirred up floods by sea, wind and waves had to be reckoned.

About the rest of the installation the initiators of the whole facility did a lot of thinking and planning. Nothing seemed good enough for the self-appointed judges. What ever was brought forward was criticized, and rejected. Only the basic concept of the shark-barrier found acceptance. But as soon as it came to details, like the sluise-doors, the planners came across.

While the facts couldn't be set aside any more. The pier of the Last Bounty defined the depth of the bassin, that meant some three feet had to be added, in order to guarantee enough water under the keel.

All agreed however not to plan now for a bigger vessel in future. While everybody knew quite well, that the Last Bounty wouldn't last forever. Her lifespan ahead was by now rather limited.

The reconstruction of the lagoon, with those tiny fancy bridges and outlets for lighters and barges in order to transport the luggage of the passengers was set aside by the Chief-consultant and Manager. Such a system had been rather complicated and time-consuming, because motorcraft couldn't be utilised in the narrow tracks. While wriggling became rather strenuous in the long run. Barges couldn't pass on their ways to and fro the check-in, because of the narrowness of the gateways, thus empty boats had to wait at the nearest crossing to let the full ones pass.

Wider tracks therefore should now be considered. While the former isolationists opposed motorcraft in favour of environmental protection. They favoured physical power of muscles and sinews which might fit even better. While as an alternative pedal-driven vehicles were also considered, or even favoured over rowing-boats.

This way passengers had to become involved, and got an idea what was meant by active holidays. Sailing was also considered, and the isolationist fraction gave way here as well. Photovoltaic energy by

sun-collectors and windcraft in order to produce electricity was wholly in line with them either.

This argument was brought forward and weakened the hardliners point of view. There was no logic in forbidding little wind- and sundriven engines base on electricity-power. However they still claimed their point, stubborn as they were. While Arundle managed to reach an agreement and turned the rudder around.

Billy-Joe was on the side of the isolationists. He changed rather naturally over to the side of the environmentalists, and had now to stand for their convictions. In their point of view, motorcraft was an absolute no-go in the lagoon. Their last and final argument was noise, which would ruin the whole location and disturb the guests' rest.

Motors on electric basis however weren't noisy. They didn't smell either, and didn't acquire space, while running on replacable energy, the more so since dynamos were connected to the pedals in the applicable devices. Wind and sun were used anyway. Be it by small propellers to accumulate energy, or by little voltaic set-ups, collecting sun energy. Both systems could easily be installed on ferry boats. Thus some boats ran already on a probationary mode, in order to find out how practical or unpractical the one or other way of producing energy was.

Billy-Joe, as the gallion figure of the environmentalists, stood for his case half-heartedly, and felt a little pushed around, so Arundle's stand was an easy one. As a matter of fact Billy-Joe minded very much being pushed forward by the isolationists, and reckoned that Tibor would have represented their matter much better. Because he didn't stand with one foot on the other side, - well, not in the open anyway.

It was high time that someone stood up and clear those humbugs, which definitely belong into the trashcan for a long time – you should be realizing. The storm and the monsterwave however had spilled the old quarrel up to the surface again, as if it had lured in the depth of the sea.

The conflict bore in it a notion of total ignorance, Billy-Joe reckoned meanwhile. However the worldcitizens' side was by no means cooperative, but acted as if their case had made the show. As if they had been wholeheartedly confirmed by reality. While there were of course some questionmarks left. What was the point of view with reference to the Syndicat of Infernalía, who demonstrated a similar attitude with reference to the world as a whole, while in the underground a lot of ugliness was hidden. These people couldn't deny in the long run, where they stood. They needn't publish, they had

hoisted their true colours for long, and were disclosed. There was no need for more publishing. Definitely not after Anonymous's book.

World-Citizens, and that they had to accept, were after all Citizens. And this fact had to be accepted by the World-Citizens on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth as well. What that meant, did ask for an explicit explanation. All you had to do, was take a look on the Bourgeois decade, and what it did to the world.

That much for the World-Citizens, who meant, that such labelling didn't grow on their own grounds. While the Isolationists counteracted, as they also felt ignored and misunderstood as Isolationists, and unjustly accused. Meanwhile they wouldn't be Isolationists any more, they argued, but somewhere found between vegans and purists, and repellants of civilisation, where they probably fitted better, while perhaps not really yet.

As a matter of fact, you didn't get far, when thinking in drawers. Neither on the one side or on the other, both sides consented.

The old abyss had only opened, because the lagoon was going to be reconstructed. For one side far too slow, and for the other in ungood hectic. They claimed tranquility and solid planning and reckoning, while actionism threatened to override the scene once more. As if there was someone hidden pressing forward, as if there was urgency other than artificially produced. While a wave had spilled away a bit of comfort, there was no need for hustle. How much easier and better was a life without permanent pressure, all the more if it was artificially produced.

For long decades and thousands of years the lagoon could well do without arteficial add-ups. Now it had made itself known, and had given advice to the humans, that their installations were but mere trumpery. And what did the humans do? They rebuilt what nature had taken back. And why did they do it? Because they thought they knew better, and because they wanted to show nature, how to better it, while the opposite had just been proved.

The purists hardly accepted the pier, more so as it withstood the flood. The ship had to have a save refuge in a good harbour. Erverybody agreed on that. The alternative would have been to relinquish and have no vessel at all. But nobody really wished to do without. The advantages were all too obvious. But why did they need a hotel?

The hotel had been wrongly proportioned and planned right from the start. The statistics of the School of Inbetween over the last 50 years clearly said, how many absolvents there were out there in the world. So you could calculate on the fingers of two hands how long

the run of those on search of their past would go on. And how many would actually come and visit the place from where they once took off.

For non-absolvents the isle was prohibited anyway, no doubt about that. At least was this the argument of those who wanted to keep the secrets of the isles. There was so much to be protected. Both sides agreed in the scrambled site and location, the supply of energy from deep down under (as built after the blueprint of the genius Hans Henny Henne.)

Henne, had started off as a world citizen, but was influenced more and more by Tibor during his old age. And Tibor was influenced by Tika and Susamee, that was why he didn't show any world-citizenship any longer. He uttered no objections when it came about reckoning the future, and the question whether to wholly open or push at least back the limits. Such a change would of course be of influence, and might even risk the identity. Even a blind could see. you cannot prolong good wine indefinitely. At a certain point of no return it would become spoilt water.

Thanks to Hilde the aged inventor got new spirit. He remembered his world-citizenshipish convictions, and Tibor became rejected, which didn't bother him much. He knew of his influence on quite a different end, but figured his influence probably too effective. He was so sure about the dwarves, who really adored him, because of his playing the horse-headed violine in the state of conversion, when he was not quite himself.

Hans Henny Henne unmusical as he was, influenced the dwarves nevertheless, the more so as he learnt now of his influence, while it was fading.

Did the dwarves turn the wheel? They had been keen on Henne's inventions all the time. Especially the technology thrilled them, and where the subsoil facilities were hidden. Be it the wholly self-sufficient power plant or the camouflage screen, they participated in, but couldn't reproduce. So this technology interested them most. They would have loved to uncover such sources.

Hans Henny Henne wasn't prim at all, or a mystery-monger. The only thing was, that he didn't exactly know what he had been able to perform. There were no blueprints any more, or never had been. Order-keeping wasn't Hans Henny Henne's favourite.

Peter Adams still tried hard to put the rests of the heritage in order. In vain he solemnly inquired the newly arisen. Since Henne's brain was repaired, important connections and synapses had most likely suffered. Despite the fact that Hans Henny Henne gave a wholly

intact impression, while occasional deficits once in a while had to be accepted unfortunately.

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The whole community had fallen apart in two opposing parties, so it seemed, and Tibor felt himself being torn apart too. That was why he didn't out himself this way or the other, and let Billy-Joe alone, which wasn't difficult at all, as he retired to Susamee's island, where he enjoyed family life.

Susamee really liked being a grandma. While she was rather sad that Hans Henny Henne had left her. However, she was wise enough not to treat Hilde as a competitor. The more so as Watchman Will Weesle became a real sunshine, now that the awful pressure was taken off him, and he needn't always fear to be abandoned by the adored.

So to speak, Hilde advanced the peace process. And they all realized the positive influence she had on Hans Henny Henne. In her presence he became a different man. Abilities and characteristics of his turned to the surface, he didn't himself ever noticed, or were forgotten for ages. While he would have blamed the bionic add-ups, he could make reliable for, as he said.

But this loophole was stuffed by Hilde. Yes, Hilde was a wild one, being set free. She now became aware of herself, after a privational life in the shade of a despot. Because a despot her Roland had been, despite the fact of the changes he had made in the meantime, she wouldn't doubt. Unfortunately she hadn't been able to participate in the new man.

So the frontier of the isolationist crumbled, who had changed and altered a lot already, and now had arrived in the arms of good old Mother Nature on their retreat. A pure and honest nature, for sure. And the more they began to accept the views of others, the more they realized the contradictions and shallow phrases on their side.

"Our technology is good technology" it was said from all sides, "we have a deep understanding and an agreement with nature, other than the culprits, who can only destroy, because they are so alienated and have no idea of the real substance of life."

Billy-Joe did know it better. Only ignorants and misled spoke that way. And he didn't stay closer to them as to the ignorant world-citizens. He wouldn't expell even Tibor from that. His understanding of nature, after all, which he had brought here from the Mongolian steppe, you could forget, as this was pretty kaput.

Tibor admitted that. However he still didn't see himself questioned basically. What you experienced in his Mongolian homeland was not so much the closeness with nature, but the heritage of a hard warrior culture. In the steppe a high culture experienced itself in these days on the decline. Therefore lasting agreements with nature would be searched in vain. Still certain knowledge had been kept in the collective memory with a natural appeal.

Billy-Joe knew it better. His own people stood miles ahead of the true savages as they had found refuge in Tasmania, but that he only knew by rumour.

Thus, this position broke apart soon, as soon as you took it for granted. The so-called bad technology was always in the hands of the other side. Still the world-citizen faction gave way sometimes. Perhaps had - what they gave free - not even a name. It was as if they suffered from a blind spot, as if they didn't notice the big danger, but still meant everything would go on somehow. As if progress was broad enough. As if progress would allow anything, and wouldn't smash doors and gates on its way to doom until the natural basis of existence was used up wholly, and be destroyed irreversibly. It needn't be true what the beings of good-will believed and hoped. They hoped for real genuine chances on every junction. They believed, that the direction could be altered any time. And they certainly believed, that they were able at any time to give the whole affair a push into the right direction.

Just right now – the bionic revolution! How many hopes were connected with it. But what was reality like? What was done with all those sensational discernments and discoveries? – Well, nobody really knew. What was going on in the wide world outside there, nobody overlooked. Too much happened, and the amount of people had become too big. Despite the fact that the means of communication tended towards infinity, while the individual still was left alone with two ears and two eyes and one head. How should an individual ever dig what was really going on in the world, whose witness he was?

It's easily said "up to date on the height of times" The world-citizens claimed such a position. But could they fill it? Of course not, they were in the same situation as the Infernal Brotherhood, they became left behinds too soon. The train had gone without them, while the future started in any moment. Man can only run after it. He can't get more.

Well, had there been opened a loophole in the meantime? Were there apparatuses like the SLOMES, which put aside the mist over the future? For short moments and for able spectators? This dream of

mankind would never be fulfilled. Who broke through the timeline, who saw further than the foggy cloud waved, might see something, but what he saw, had not necessarily to do with the track of history, he was trapped in. There were more or less bigger likelinesses, but not more. After all, something moved on the time scale.

Delaying the time or stop it, is easily said. With reference to the future that would mean, that it had to wait a little. That its entrance was hindered, because someone or something had erected a barrier, the future couldn't get over, but had to take time. Not much, but noticeably enough. Summed up for all parallel lives on earth of all contemporary individuals, this was a remarkable quantity. Perhaps one or two big world seconds – or how was such a sum measured? That would add up to – lets say – ten years per SLOMES user (and that would be comparatively small in case you believed in the euphemistic reports of prolonged living, as could be read online already.)

These could of course be pomposities. And were most likely such. Well, may it be. Everything was glueing tightly together, astoundingly enough. If the whole SLOMES – stuff contained only ten years per individual, that would mean with ten billion of earthlings a remarkable one hundred billion saved years of life-time. The years would not pass by, but were still going to pass by. They built, so to speak – a hidden part of the future. To be exact, part of many likely futures.

Was it okay to sum them up? In theory this could be done easily and could help to understand. If a man had 100.000 hair on his head (which he has in average), and if those hair would grow daily zero point three three three millimeters (what they do in average), they would grow thirtythree metres per day. But of course set in sequence, what a hair never does in reality.

Both phenomena are impressive, without doubt, while the time itself saves only ten years in those one hundred billion years. If time has such a consience at all, and understands what is meant by saving, which is unlikely, and can surely be doubted.

After all, everything is just a question of perspective, and then many human senses come into the game, those predicted odds, everything has to pass what is wanting at us or should be wanting or shouldn't. The shut off is in the end more difficult. Our eyelids are rather thin, and the ears hear to the inside as well. Not to talk about feelings or thinking. When we think, a form of sensuality comes up, which looks indeed strange to the one or other.

20. The Conflict

The women section of the Council understood themselves more and more as a third party in the internal battle for the correct line. Part of their position was of course the defense against all disturbances. Where-ever the polarisation occurred as a disturbance, it wasn't spared. This led to the forming of a third party. There were of course other reasons as well. But such were hidden in the dark, and had to do with the gender alteration of the Advisor.

Over the many years Arundle did know him, she thought him to be transgender. But why then this latest outing as efemminised twitter? Being now a kind of female, and that meant, that he had before been male. Otherwise the gender transfer didn't make sense.

The Advisor/ess would have vehemently opposed such assumption. She would have argued, that it was for any female harder to live, think and speak. Only therefore she came up with the idea of changing sexes.

"I do not want to expose myself repressive again", she uttered jovially – almost like the Advisor himself, who was fond of such gestures, and was certainly still hiding inside the Advisoress.

Arundle was a little sad, while she accepted the necessity. Because it didn't help insisting, that women should show courage and empower themselves. They just didn't do it. Either not at all or in a strange and peculiar way, as if they wanted to please and to become loved and wanted.

This they longed for doing without men. Still their behaviour differed, as soon as a man was around. Even for herself, Arundle could realize the change.

Now there was the third faction, instead of peace coming in. The beauty or also the problem of the third faction was, that they were cut of a different wood, so to speak. Yes, there was a cut right through some woman, whether she admitted or rejected.

Some stood with three legs in all three factions, if this would have been possible. As Arundle and after all also Grisella could gain a lot good from all three factions. They could see the dialectical coherence instead of the antagonisms.

While the female position wasn't really a position in the true meaning of the term. But that wasn't the isolation either, if you

thought about it properly. And the world-citizenship forwarded a psychological condition better than a point of view.

Still grave decisions derived from those factions, and pointed way forward into the future, and set the course for tomorrow, while nobody really knew, what was produced here and now. What was coming, was written on another sheet on the back of the wall, so to speak. From here, you didn't get far with wishes, despite the forming facts.

Everybody would immediately accept, that a red wall, which overcame the nagging tooth of time, would remain. Perhaps a little less red, but all in all it would remain a red wall. You could compare this the other way, looking backwards at remaining walls the like. If it was built well and solid, such walls withstood centuries. No other than the ancient oaktrees, if not cut by a saw, because a conquestive Emperor had had to raise a fleet out of nothing, and had by each fregate used up two and a half thousand two hunderd years old oaktrees.

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The Advisoress let Arundle know that she intended to take a more male attitude again. While she couldn't say what that changed for whom. "It's like with those high heels. You put them on and after the first seconds in panic you realize, how you become straightened, how the proportions gain consequences. And you know once more – yes – I'm a woman, and I like to be a woman. – For a man lesser such aids are available. Some say a uniform induces a push that way, comparable to the high heels. But I don't really know. Well, I never put on a genuine uniform. What we in heaven put on for garment can hardly be called a uniform. While a certain equalitiy is produced, what might even be intended, I am almost sure. Quite likely to school-uniforms, which form equality. Nobody feels better, nobody shows privileges or the opposite, what sometimes is even harder. Its all a matter of the point of view. I presume."

The Advisoress halted for a meaningful break, before she went on: "Well, things that equalize us and fix us and take or even steal our individuality from us, aren't helpful in advancing our own thinking and judging. They fulfill the purpose of uniformity, no doubt about that. While womanliness is of course no uniform you can get rid of like highheels and the like. No matter, whether she will be brought into limelight by such accessoires."

Tired by her long speech, the Advisoress faded visibly, even sooner than her words did.

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The Hotel to the Hub of the World revealed in new glamour – much likely more professional and more invitive, with reference to the long distances and the furnishing of the bedrooms on the platoons. Supported by a fully furnished vessel for all kinds of cruises.

The dwarves on Susamee's island had been busy as well, and had arranged the public areas the best they could, thus the subsoil trip became a genuine adventure. Influenced by the pater noster system on the home island, they invented on Susamee's island a similar installation - at least by principle. Instead of the boring up and down of the functional part, imagination had taken over. Out came a mix of kind of roundabout, marygoround, and ghost train. The trip was accustically accompanied by sweet sounds of the self-induced horseheaded violin. The music fitted to the video clips, which hushed by on the walls of the tunnels rather lively and realistic.

Things like that became of course known in the designers' world and all those better off people among the inaugurated, who could afford tourism, got to know this way what was offered down there, deep under, so to speak. And who ever had left behind a bit of a colour-talent inside, such a trip was a must. Hoping to be accepted as a tourist, while the talent didn't suffice any more for the sight, while hadn't been accepted as a student. Which was rather often the case with the offspring of former deciples. There was certainly no-one who had rejected the chance to get in and become one of the chosen few.

That was of course unfair to all the gifted underdogs, who were all over the world. They wouldn't even get close the a travel agency, rather than even booking a journey. For doing so, they lacked of everything, last but not least of credits.

In the slums and reservations other laws did govern. That, however, didn't mean that there weren't as many talents as elsewhere, probably even more. But they weren't found by the talent-scouts.

So the Isolationists feared that a middle class spring-tide was due, and that the few vacancies each year would be blocked, so that those in need would again be left behind. which certainly couldn't be it.

While the proportion since Arundle's and Billy-Joe's entry had been fifty fifty, the ratio of the slum kids went down over the following years continuously. While the renovation of the hotel gave the whole thing another dramatic push in the wrong direction.

The incongruity existed, all of them agreed, not only the isolationists, or naturists and how else they meanwhile addressed themselves, especially those who contradicted the world-citizens. While the world-citizens didn't feel well facing such a one-sided development.

Meanwhile the percentage dropped down to below ten and even further, because the talents, who showed up as rucksack-tourists soon built the mainstream. And no matter how serious they were examined and sorted, they showed a fair amount of talent. Especially those in the colour range of blue and grey, while the green and red shades lacked.

But this was already known by Moschus Mogoleia, who went on scout-tour every year by now, and was gone even further and even checked the jungle areas meanwhile. Which caused him, as a child of the steppe, a good amount of trouble and inner resistance. Could it be, that he looked so unsuitable in the green damp thicket of the jungle? He didn't approach the people over there. They ignored him and showed him a cold shoulder, so to speak, and kept in the hide, what he was so eagerly looking for.

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The office of the School of Inbetween was in close contact with a lot of NGOs and welfare organisations in the slums on the Southern half of the globe. There were especially desinged brochures and handouts, explaining how to look for talents and how to recognize them. While the helpers were untalented altruists, who cared about the fighting of misery all over.

The life didn't get easier with such 'exots', as some of the world-citizenal pupils addressed them, in a kind of high-brow attitude. A trend which caused trouble for Arundle. She and Billy-Joe remembered quite well the start-off problems, Billy-Joe had to overcome. It weren't the educational deficits as such – which surely did play a role – while the social background had been all the more important.

Although the teachers of the School of Inbetween had then blamed the different talents. That even might have been true. The sociological differences had however come on top in any case. Still, in

the long run, former enemies became best friends, as the example of Tibor showed, who couldn't stand Arundle in the beginning, while now they were best friends.

For the tribes out there and for the slums the absolvents of the School of Inbetween were of remarkable value. The Maroon thing most likely developed the way it did under the leadership of former students, who returned after school to their homelands, to take over responsible positions, as chiefs or shamans with the tribes, or in the ghettos, often as scouts towards change – the so-called Maroonisation – being in full swing. While such facts didn't bother the mainstream, instead vice versa would have been seen with mere pleasure, had there not been the devastating term of Marginalisation. (A similar unword as had been Maroonisation before already.)

Scruples caused such a development – and that was a shame – seldom enough among the world-citizen-orientated main stream of society, at the utmost once in a while.

The world-citizens of the School of Inbetween were not that kind of ignorants, but were in fact miles away. The social orientation for them wasn't at all easy and not really precise. All agreed on that. Nobody however had an idea for a more precise term – like as well on the other side with those isolationists, who lacked clarity as well. Both sides only knew about the contradictions. While other differences lost contour and faded in foggy distance.

But the difference existed, no doubt about that, despite the foreground harmony, which had existed before the catastrophe. – now with the devastation of the hotel and the lagoon, the contradictions came up like lava.

The isolationists might have liked it even better to just put away the debris and let nature take over the lagoon again. They spoke that way anyway. But as they had no chance of winning, such a lip confession was easy peasy for them. – After all the pater noster existed, they argued. People could reach the other side with dry feet, no matter what was going on on the surface, so the reconstruction of the lagoon didn't effect the subsoil installations at all. And for the sailors a genuine regatta course would again be available. Thus they opposed the reconstructionists. While everybody knew quite well, what it had been like before. Without the surrounding the gap between the islands had been a dangerous trap. It hadn't been suitable for sailing or surfing or swimming at all. Even when the wheater had been fairly fine.

Therefore no objections were raised right away. And the older – first of all Billy-Joe – remembered this time very well. Even the hardest fighters for the renaturalisation admitted, that no races had taken place there - at no time. Instead the incalculable suction of the sea, once in a while, kept away any boat. The only time when a boat crossed, was when the Conversors left the mother island to pass over to the other, which was done by means of a strong motorboat.

The waters in turmoil had been stilled by the installation of the shark-defence device, and thus became indeed a kind of a lagoon. All the more with the settling of the pontoons and houseboats, thus the natural flow of the water was disrupted.

Billy-Joe was one of the leading isolationists and naturelovers. His word weighed, and the critic passed, thanks to his clarification, without effect.

While good-natured Dorothea picked up the suggestion eagerly. A course for sailing-boats was a splendid idea, and exactly what she had had in mind. For that she certainly would give up those fancy little bridges and things between the pontoons, which had proved so vulnerable.

By limiting the reconstruction, the Hotel would become smaller, but the lagoon more attractive. and would fit perfectly into the new pattern, as if made for what was coming up. The masses wouldn't come anyway, they had been rejected before already, since the entry conditions had been limited because of the increasing acts of sabotage.

Without aura you were dismissed undoubtedly, or rebooked on an alternative tour. Dorothea had arranged for a contract with a travel agent in Sydney. The alternative was an island, close to Susamee's, however without so much ado, like dwarve dwelling, glittering caves pater noster and the like. Well, not yet. While things were underway the busy dwarves signalled. For the time being a water balet could be seen performed by actors, who had been masked with invisible masks – so it said in the brochure. In reality Corinia and Boetie finally succeeded with their idea, which was challenging them ever since.

The disappointment wouldn't become all that overwhelming. Although the customers had been informed about trouble with the aura. There were even TV-colour-testing-stations installed where you could test your disposition.

Those installations worked with a utilisation-factor of two to onehunderd, which wasn't bad. Those who passed the test had a nintynine percent chance of passing the real test as well.

However, those testing facilities weren't established everywhere, but only at certain busy points round the globe. And there you had to find them first of all. Well, yes, that was already part of the adventure, you were facing. Those who lacked patience and stamina failed right away. Without the inner call you tried in vain.

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Thus Dorothea got green light again and the naturalists convulsed inside, while nothing could be argued. All limits were kept, and secrets as well. Nobody would be able to spot the location of the island, definitely not the correct one.

There was still that uneasiness. The isolationists felt betrayed and sold. They felt being opposed at the pillory and delivered to the world public, who couldn't do better than spreading lies and forgeries about and over them. By tricky assumptions put here and there, more and more of the truth and secrets of the islands were on the verge of becoming disclosed. And if nothing could be found, fake news became invented. To the readers outside it didn't matter, as long as the news sounded sensational, and sensational was almost everything Dorothea uttered, because she was so beautiful.

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Meanwhile pictures governed the reportage and texts only accompanied. Thrilling pictures said more then a thousand words. Taking photos was of course not allowed, definitely those that appeared in the web right away, but couldn't be stopped.

There were meanwhile reporters of the unscrupulous kind enough – what mattered aura to them!

At that time, nobody knew of the falsifications on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, allowing also normal beings without aura to get access. In most of such cases it was a blue-grey shade, which was easiest to be fixed to the body and lasted for almost one week. You got awful pimples from the paint and looked like a sprinkler box, but what didn't people all do for success and a good series of photos. If the photos were the right ones, you had enough to live on for a couple of years, or even life-long.

The site where to acquire such a fake aura was located in the old town of Sydney, in the backyard of a tattoo-studio, and was committed by an old wellknown acquaintance named Anastasio Baranasias.

The means for the fake was a pasture mixed with phosphor. The whole body had to be generously rubbed with such ointment. Those who underwent the procedure shone even for the trained eye – greyish-blue – and passed the sluice as a Somnior or Animator right away. If not rechecked by the automatic scanner, because it didn't indicate alike. So the entry of the betrayers was at least contradictory. While the individuals in question insisted on their right of entry, and demanded a recheck in person by an orderly commission. Before that, they argued, you couldn't be dismissed, just like that.

Well, the commission then saw what they were supposed to see: the grey-blue shade on the blank skin on arms and legs, on the head, and if this was demanded, on the whole naked body as well. Still such a candidate was examined with mistrust, because his aura didn't shine through the lightest shirt or pants, but had nevertheless granted entry, as to the regulations.

At first nobody uttered objections, until the administration became alerted by fake news in the press, with teasing photos. At that point the reopened hotel was busy again, and finally the penny dropped. Security had been noticed, the fake pasture was detected and the betrayers dismissed.

Unfortunately many fakes were online and couldn't be erased any more, no matter how hard Dorothea tried. Anybody could get access to those reports at any time. But Dorothea didn't give in and began to publish in the web matters of interest related to the islands, and soon had millions of followers. Her pages soon acquired much more attention than the dirty sites of the pirates, as she quickly addressed the enemies of the islands. Which gave them an unwanted publicity push, but couldn't be helped. So the culprits had a name at last, and that was better than no-name.

The secret agent in Sydney, Anastasio Baranasias, was upset. While he had followed the development with great fun in the beginning, when things went down for the islands, as he had a personal chicken to pluck with that rooster Henne, and with the other hen, who claimed the grand title of a President: The rooster and the hen – Anastasio Baranasias almost died of laughter about such – as he saw it – unbeatably fabulous joke of his.

The whole mishpoke over there caused him a sour throat, as they had done him great harm, and had interfered with all his plans. Which wasn't funny at all. So it was just just, that he pulled their legs. The secrecy was their weak point, that he knew from former days. He would get them right there.

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Baranasias was only a meek shade of his former being. As a matter of fact he was only the alter ego, who had lost his person. His person had gone for good and it was all their fault. - It was all their fault. Because as an alter ego you weren't a real human any more and had to run a life in the shade. That was why he had to hide and live in the dark. He didn't even have personal documents. He had been buried, since that woman had come, and had claimed to be his wife. While Henne conquered such snake that old horny chum.

At that time he had been dismissed, as if a snake got rid of its skin, and leave it behind. But he wasn't dead, but still alive, and he felt what life was, and what he felt was horrible.

Now he ran a life in the shade, and there it fitted well into the picture that he produced shades, so to speak. Those side-effects of the potion weren't at all harmless, as he made his clients believe. Yet, most of his clients didn't listen anyhow, but were eager to gain the camouflage.

However there were side-effects and long range consequences. The aspirants were poisoned by phosphor, and there was no help, the disease ended deadly. All that for a couple of photos and the satisfaction of having them in the papers for weeks, while the amount of credits wasn't too bad either, they got for them. Honour and bargain – two sides of one medal.

At that time they didn't know about the devilish effects of the elexier, they had been poisoned with. Had they known, the majority had surely rejected.

Baranasias was less than half a person, because he was the alter ego of a revived. Would his human be simply dead, he wouldn't be any more either. As it was, he was just earthly junk, left behind, while an astral figure erected, in order to jubilate up there or what ever resurrected beings do.

Life couldn't do without trash, for them either. A little dirt and garbage was left behind, no matter how strong the clensening had been beforehand. An earthly life they all had lived, so trash couldn't

lack. They all produced debris. You could also call them side-effects, just like Baranasias' lotion, which had the inconvenient side-effect of a sneaking death.

His false name had eventually been Henry, but being his alter ego, he found Anastasio fitting better. The real Henry didn't exist any more that was why he was so shrivelled and wizened – no real human being any more. Therefore he didn't need anything anymore: A little tobacco for stuffing the pipe, one or two glasses of liquor daily, that was all he needed.

21. Anastasio, the Alter Ego

Henry Anastasio Baranasias he had to call himself. A Professor from Toronto, despite the fact, that he hardly had acquired the necessary command of English for such a profession. Such those sly fools hadn't taken into account. He, himself had never admitted, especially not when it came to the break, and one catastrophe followed another.

One day the former assistant stood in front of his door. Covered with blisters all over. As mutilated as he was, Anastasio had to grant him refuge. He had cared for his blisters, standing the moaning and groaning for weeks, while becoming less and lesser by the time, when the subject named Waldschmitt took a shark turn of one hundred and eighty degrees, and presented himself as a 'Do-gooder', because his daughter had laid hands on him. She and her begotten appendage on those rotten islands, from where so much might shone up. Being the wrong nevertheless.

In those days there had been support. But then their master secretly abandoned, and left them alone with the debris of his reign. And they didn't have better things to do but attacking each other. While that woman was mainly responsible for that. It was her and only her who forced man against man, mating with the victor, that horny bitch.

They all had to pay the bitter toll. The woman lost her life and Baranasias lost his life and his identity. And Catalanius lost his appearance, that altered in the fire of the state prison of Adelaide. It was a wonder that he survived the fire, while being distorted for the rest of his life.

Would Baranasias had been the same, he would have sent him away when he stood there so pitiable, and didn't know what to do or where to go. A hunted criminal on the desperate search for refuge. And now this bloke was sitting here, as his factotum – or was it the other way round, meanwhile? Because shades of themselves they both were. Horrible and pitiable as they were, but didn't limit their wickedness.

Thus they came about that devilish lotion and sold it for good bargain to the greedy reporters. They were all thankful – if they had just known! While the two inventors didn't know by themselves what the outcome might be. Nobody knew about the side-effects at this state. The two cheaters couldn't be blamed. Besides, what ever happened could be charged against the islanders, while the strangest things went on over there, anyway.

Tests with mice proved loss of hair but naked the nicest aura you could think of. Ugly as the naked creatures were they soon covered up with awful ulcers. The guineepigs didn't do much better, although they didn't fade right away. The testers thought that a success, and closed the test phase. What pigs could stand, was good for humans, was their conclusion.

As they didn't ask for permission, there was no need for, they had nothing to care or fear. The only thing they cared was that a proband faded right away and hung on like that for the coming weeks. And so it was. That was why they took their wonder-medicine for granted. All the more, as it served its purpose. And this they realised when they learnt about the intimate photos from the islands, and filled the pages of the rainbow-press all over the world.

Hundreds of greedy reporter asked for access, and found their way to the backyard tattoo-studio, where you could get the miraculous lotion. It was the safe entrance key to the island, if you acted clever enough and didn't out yourself as a reporter, but hide as a dynamic backpacker.

Not all of them could jump on that train, be it that they were too old or too fat, or lacking the intellectual touch backpackers supposed to have, or else. Not all, who asked for entry were accepted. Thus Catalanius offered flanking attempts of adjustment. Baranasias was too weak for that. Besides, he was most of the time absent minded. The liquor ate up his brain, while lacking the original body anyway. Thus it was a wonder that he still was alive.

As Catalanius looked awful with his burnt face, the assistant helped him. Unfortunately it was not the same as the previous one, who had been killed by Catalanius in a spell of jealousy. The assistant

was new, a kind of double, that looked quite like the original. While the brain and the character differed remarkably, as to Catalanius, who was hard to please. Perhaps things changed in memory, as often happens, we desire something so badly that we think it had been ours before.

In order to simplify things, both men addressed the double Viola, who didn't know what it was about with that name, so she didn't mind. The more so as she came out of the gutter and was glad to find a solid provision.

The false Viola developed a certain cleverness, how to outnumber Catalanius' orders, who remained in the background, because he looked so awful.

For the tourists they had to act the 'Do-gooder'-part. Those on the island stressed on that behaviour. Not only the aura had to fit, second came right away this 'Do-gooder'-thing, and had to be presented wholly authentic. Of course no reference of being reporters or journalists had to be dropped by purpose or by accident.

Since the latest publications, which became known on the islands as well, the people there became even more careful. Still it took quite a while till the controllers finally recognized the false aura, produced by the phosphoric lotion.

Before, other devices had been tested already. The first instrument had been a kind of lie-detector. The test with that instrument served as a means of checking the Gut-mensch appeal, and was re-established and used now again as a side-effect device.

But this hurdle was also overcome by the swindlers Baranasius and Catalanius. They produced mock-exams, right at the time the detector was installed, which gave the absolvers a certain chance of outnumbering the detector.

Assistant Viola trained the candidates, how to overcome the test. She rented a lobby in one of the more reasonable hotels in town, so that the affair looked impressive, and to push the charges up.

The bigger publishing houses didn't care about costs, and paid any price, as long as they got access and at best placed a mole inside. The preparatory seminars boomed, and soon there was no chance for individuals of getting in, no matter how much money was involved. In questionable cases the organizer claimed support, while the lotion was handed out anyway only at the very end of a course, as the crowning highlight and confirmation of the exam. While a new mole with the Gut-mensch-label was born together with the fitted fake-aura by means of the phosphoric lotion.

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As can easily be imagined, such development led towards dramatic turmoil on the islands. The two approaching parties were drifting apart again. One side spoke about the closing down of the hotel, while the other favoured a strikter entry-control.

Dorothea didn't want to hear anything about closing. For that, the enterprise was far too good, and far too beautiful, and beamed and radiated into all the world, as was the job and sense of the hub of the world.

The aim and target had to be kept in sight. There was no sense in baking small rolls, so to speak, and to rescue the own skin, while the whole wide world was to become rescued. How should you influence a development, or even determine its course, if nobody took notice, while you were hustling in the unknown, at best you could.

More important was to spread not only the SLOMES, but the ideology and view of life connected with it. For the machine it didn't matter, what ideas the user had in mind. They functioned for all and all the same, and served a diabolical brain and a black heart no other than a good one.

The web as a mode of distribution was nice and dandy, but didn't suffice, so said Dorothea. The web was just one way – and not the best. Face to face contact was much more impressive, and was by far more effective, while it could seem just a little drop of water on a hot stone.

The few that were visiting the islands, were of course little more but nothing, compared to the masses, which had to be moved. But those affected by the spirit of the islands became located into influential positions, they became multipliers. The effect and radiation wasn't to be underestimated, after all.

Dorothea therefore suggested to install holiday-crash-courses for late-comers with regard to talent and achievement of the SLOMES certificate. Using the resources of the University. So that the adults didn't feel dumb, when sitting with pupils, which easily could happen in the School of Inbetween.

This was the solution also for the other problem which threatened to split the community. Because in such courses soon came up, who was false and fake. A little colour on the skin didn't do in such courses, you had to hoist your true colours the genuine way. While you noticed the aura with others only when gifted yourself.

This way the swindlers were disclosed. Watchman Will Weesle became a true investigative specialist. He proved psychological

intuition, and succeeded in several cases of confessions. The disclosed showed repentance, because the life on the islands was convincing, and demanded highest respect. Many of the disclosed would have given a fortune if they had been allowed to stay on the islands for good.

While such cases increased, the Deans of the university installed special seminars for renegates, which were highly frequented, the more so when Dorothea gave a monthly lecture. She managed to tickle out of them, what Watchman Will Weesle had overlooked.

Thus the offspring of the unpleasant manure was soon found, that had spoilt the everyday-life on the islands. One day Dorothea undertook it in person to answer the challenge. As boss of the administration she was responsible for the orderly immigration and the regular flow of the tourists. For reasons, she didn't quite understand, she asked Emeritus Hans Henny Henne to accompany her, as well as his newly wedded spouse, who both of them wholeheartedly agreed. Did they get a chance to once again dive into civilisation. While Hilde wasn't used to so much solitude. For that reason she often undertook the voyage on the vessel with the dwarves or the Convertors, they meanwhile also preferred the sea-route, although it took its time.

Such a trip was after all more romantic, and reminded Hilde Henne of her stormy romance that had changed her life so dramatically. She never regretted one single day, although Hansiman snored terribly. There was little chance to alter, so he would take the chance in Sydney to see a specialist.

Mrs Henne asked Arundle for company. Together they wanted to have a look on maternity- and baby garment. Arundle didn't want to go without Billy-Joe – who should – as she saw it – show also interest in everyday affairs, instead of only caring for the underprivileged.

Was she – after all – not allowed to make herself known? she asked retorically, with a light hysteric afflux, which might be caused by the pregnancy and the output of hormones. She insisted, in any case, on the same rights, and her obligation, while Billy-Joe had no objection to withdraw from her. Why should he? He confirmed, honest as he was, and that he wanted to be.

Billy-Joe was no hard-core naturalist and isolationist any more, and he wasn't dogmatic either, dogmatism was against his nature, while he agreed in many dogmatic affairs. So he couldn't swallow everything – all the more from his kin. If they bothered him all too stupidly, and tried to span him before their bleak cart, because he had just offered himself, and because his voice weighed heavy

everywhere. He wished to stay and remain available for affairs of conviction instead.

Now he was looking forward to stroll over the shopping mall with Hans Henny Henne and Hilde, and have a look at the one or other utensil, that they were going to need soon.

On the island a nice place had been found for the young couple. Not just seabound, as Arundle had wished, but also not too far away from the waters, so that Billy-Joe could go on with his spleen of spending the nights in the open unspoilt. While a solid roof was available for the going-to-be family. It was an attractive dwelling at the edge of the village on the University-Isle. Arundle had furnished it comfortably. While she pitied a little that she had to say a final farewell to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, no matter how close it still was – hardly a mile away.

Since the great flood, living on the water – as it used to be – was out. While meanwhile some boats scratched the edges, where tourists and dissidents resided. All those who couldn't get or didn't want access to the stone house on the pier.

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The party got on the helicopter in bright sunshine. Watchman Will Weesle had finally overcome the limitations, thanks to a perfect testimony. From now on he was again allowed to set foot on the grounds of Australia, which had been prohibited for quite a while.

He took the opportunity and travelled under the wings of the little party back into the seducing arms of a metropolis. The quarter he intended to visit, was well known to him. And change had been almost none, he noticed, while looking for that tatoo booth, where they suspected the centre of the espionage to be located.

The area was almost as dark as the sky, while it still was daytime. A thunderstorm was on the verge of coming up, as it was used to the time of the year.

The booth soon was found. Billy-Joe and Watchman Will Weesle formed the vanguard, while the others were waiting in a taxi, Dorothea directed round the corner. What both intended they didn't hardly know themselves. First of all they wanted to look around unsuspectingly. They might as well ask for a tatoo.

In fact Will Weesle intended to get a nice tatoo in the back. Susamee had challenged him that way, and he had no objections, of course. But this needn't be right here. Such a piece of art was first of all a matter of trustworthiness. And that was definitely not given here.

They were welcome by an elderly middle-aged lady, who had seen better days, but still was attractive enough to catch the attention of Will Weesle, who blushed when asked for the purpose of their coming in, as if that wasn't all too clear in a tattoo shop.

Will Weesle forwarded his demand without getting precise as to where the tattoo should become located, the shop-assistant shook her head and said:

“Today is no good tattooing, oui Monsieur? Coming again other day...”

“...no, no we are journalists and would like to see the boss. We would like to know if he can help us, as we were told. We have heard of an island, you only get on when you are shining like a glow-worm at night...” Billy-Joe stepped in, while the woman intended to turn around and disappear behind the curtain, replacing the door, leaving the room right away.

She stopped and grinned more friendly. Billy-Joe seemed to have hit the proper jack.

“New clients, Viola?” a voice from the back was heard. The woman nodded in silence.

They had a foot in the doorway, so to speak.

“...give me a downpay of onethousand credits and name. Going to Intercontinental hotel tomorrow, ask for Professor B a r a n a s i a s, oui Monsieur?” She stressed on each letter of the name. And raised her hand as if writing it into the air.

Billy-Joe pulled out the checkbook, which was practically out of use meanwhile, and looked for a pinpad, then scribbled, signed and handed it to the woman who took it and checked it against the light, even smelled at it, then put it into the drawer of the cash desk. The slip of paper with the names on, she also threw in, as if getting rid of garbage.

Someone spending a thousand credits would certainly come, and if not, just too bad.

Billy-Joe asked for the exact time of the meeting tomorrow, and if any reference was required, but the woman waved him off. “Come any time after ten”, she said in a hurry on the verge of disappearing in the back, from where a scar hand stretched for her.

22. The Crash-Course

That was it for today with the defense against espionage. The party went to the hotel, Dorothea had booked for them, and after a quick lunch they headed for the Shopping Mall. However the elderly people couldn't stand the speed of the youngsters and said goodbye for a break in one of the cafes alongside.

Packed like a mule Billy-Joe trotted behind Arundle and was pleased by her fun, despite the fact that he lacked of the proper sense for such amusement.

By now only close acquaintances noticed the change in Arundle's appearance. But things changed from day to day, and soon she would need the dresses and hangers, she was looking for now.

"We surely have better things to do than celebrating a big party, you certainly realize", Arundle told her mother, when she asked later at night if a wedding was due now. Mrs Henne had in fact thought the two had been looking for wedding gear.

Mrs Henne nodded devoutly, however she didn't see any cause of hindrance. As to her nothing special was pending, she enjoyed the everydaylife of the islands and lived carelessly day by day. She couldn't tell her engaged daughter, of course not, who was feeling on her fragile shoulders the weight of the whole world, feeling responsible for each and everything. So she was – her Arundle.

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Precisely at ten o'clock the following morning, Watchman Will Weesle and Billy-Joe Karora stood in the lobby of the Intercontinental Hotel and asked for the symposion of Professor Baranasias.

The friendly lady at the reception checked her records then asked for their names. – "Ah, yes, Karora and Weesle, here you are." she said after a while of concentrated skimming. Obviously the book-keeping hadn't been as sloppy as it looked the day before in the tatoo booth.

The woman from the tatoo shop was also totally transmuted. In her elegant cocktail dress she looked absolutely serious, if there hadn't been that certain acrid tension around her mouth, uncovering unwillingly some kind of beastly cruelty.

Professor Baranasias on th other hand gave the impression of an absent minded intellectual, as if he wasn't all here, but waved like a shadow in the background. He also didn't speak, but let his assistant do the talking, who obviously tried hard to overcome her accent, but couldn't deny her French origin, which didn't sound vulgar any more, but charming.

“What the surrounding make a change” Billy-Joe thought, and Watchman Will Weesle once again was on the verge of becoming again the victim of the siren, like many years before. Which couldn’t actually be possible as all the world had become alarmed by the terrible crime. The media had been full with it. However the likeliness was so stunning, that he mistrusted his cognition.

Yesterday in the tattoo booth he had been uneasy already, but now he felt so deeply moved, that he had but one thought, how to escape from here. But it was already too late.

They weren’t the only guests. You noticed right away that the others didn’t come from here, and why they had come. “Funny enough” Billy-Joe thought “Some people you spot miles away of their profession.” – They would come into trouble at the intensified entrance procedures, since it had become known that spies were sneaking around on the islands.

Watchman Will Weesle was too stunned and puzzled, to think at all. But he couldn’t make his eyes turn away from the woman. He noticed how he was drawn towards her, as if she was the north pole and he a loose piece of iron. How would that work out, after all?

More and more candidates came by half past ten, and the Symposium began. The lady introduced herself as Viola Duprée. The name electrified Watchman Will Weesle of course once more and shocked him so deeply, that he almost faded.

Instead of listening and taking notes, as would have been his duty, he stared at the woman and clung to her lips as if he was dying with thirst.

Billy-Joe, who noticed that something was wrong with him, pushed him, and whispered somewhat angry, as it seemed to be wholly up to him, to disclose and record the foregoing of the culprits.

Dorothea wanted to know what exactly these people knew, and what the purpose of the Symposium was. Billy-Joe was happy to finally find that out at last. This was a clear introduction into the interior affairs of both islands, filled with absolutely secret details and insider knowledge. Billy-Joe was deeply shocked.

There certainly was a leak and there had to be a mole. Billy-Joe couldn’t explain or understand otherwise, what he learnt in that session.

The Symposium seemed to come to an end. Each participant got a sheet full of instructions, together with a tube of lotion, that had to be rubbed in a day before the trip, carefully all over the body.

Prepared this way, you should get to the islands just like that, all the more if you put on the camouflage suit on top, that could be

purchased right away. The younger you looked, the better. As well you should prepare a suitable legend and keep that in mind for the whole stay, how you managed to learn from the existence of the islands. If possible, you should refer to old acquaintance, who had either been themselves on the islands or had knowledge of friends or relatives who had been here or had had something to do with the islands or with absolvers of the School of Inbetween.

Two legends were available, that could be copied in and adopted, and altered to the offspring and course of life of the individual. Taht was very necessary. Otherwise the forgery might become too obvious.

This latter part had been taken up into the preparatory symposium, since the controllers had become stricter. It was the answer to the Dogooder-scanner, you couldn't overcome otherwise, as it worked like a lie detector.

At the very end of the session the participants had to pay another one thousand credits. Billy-Joe again pulled his check book, but this time there was a pin pad at hand. And Billy-Joe was made reliable with his personal NCA. He would have to clarify this with Dorothea right away.

One thousand credits was no peanuts, you had to manoeuvre a heck of a lot to get that cleared without inflow from outside. Will Weesle also woke up now, as he was also challenged that way.

Both of them feared to become overcharged and be brought into trouble before the correction could be done. Behind the whole credit system the mightiest agencies were hiding, who preferably laid hands on the youth. Whom they ever had in their grip, would never be left alone again as long as he lived. Because the NCAs couldn't be overcome by the solemn own force of any individual.

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In the afternoon Billy-Joe gave a detailed report of what he learned, and Dorothea took care of the Watchman personally. She sent for Susamee, while Billy-Joe was in contact with Tibor, so that was no problem.

Susamee came at once in order to save, what could be saved. She laid hands on her Will, so that there was no chance for him on other thoughts or demands, and employed all her seducing powers, which still were remarkable.

By that way Watchman Will Weesle received the intimate tattoo, which took alone half a day. After that he was pretty sensitive and could only rest on the belly.

This way the false Viola came out of his mind, while she was really the wrong one. He was now able again to let the dead rest.

With Professor Baranasias things were a bit more complex. "With him, I don't see clear, yet" Billy-Joe said, who had been able to study him, because he had been rather transparent.

He hardly looked like Waldschmitt, at least not the Waldschmitt Hilde Henne had known. Still he was somewhat genuine, as far as the stripped-off skin of malice was concerned. This part of his Waldschmitt had forgotten, so it seemed, when he put it aside. How this creature had managed to get to Sydney would remain a secret. Everything else was at last quite clear, and could be reconstructed by the circumstances.

The burnt-out and flame-stained Catalanius disappeared after his successful flight from the state prison of Adelaide and found refuge with Baranasias, and didn't reappear until now. Catalanius worked as a tattooer, while he in fact was no artist of the needle. In public he covered his face with a mask of leather, that made him undiscoverable, for one thing, but mainly because he looked so terrible with his burnt face. While his appearance, as it used to be, was posted all over the places in public buildings and with the police.

Tattooing was nothing but camouflage. Thanks to secret connections to the Do-gooder in eternity the alter ego managed to enter the thoughts and memories of the former being of Waldschmitt. This way the false Professor remembered the whereabouts on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, as he himself had spotted at his time.

Meanwhile things had changed a lot, because of the construction work going on, but the basic set up, as well as the attitude of the individuals, hadn't changed, and had remained incalculable to a certain extent.

"Do-gooder, remains Do-gooder, none of them ever gets out of their skin" Baranasias giggled, as he himself was a stripped-off skin, that was why he couldn't stop giggling.

Such an empty skin of pure malice was a real challenge for Arundle and the Council of the Menora. Such a problem the Advisoress hadn't taken into account. She hadn't thought of that, while she should have known. After all, the idea, of having Waldschmitt escape into heaven had been hers right from the start.

Perhaps they had forgotten up there, what a steep career Anonymous had absolved meanwhile, the steepest ever, so to speak. Waldschmitt hadn't only become Baranasias, but also the famous Anonymous, and what else derived from that. Reasons therefore would remain and wave on forever in the dark of timeless eternity.

Nevertheless, while all institutions failed and only the Almighty's undisguisable decision was left, things like this weren't allowed to happen, definitely not up here in heaven. However quick judgements weren't the things required. First of all clarification was needed. No-one knew as yet, whether the suspected was the true mole. There might be a far stranger connection, the leak wasn't the real leak, as a matter of fact. But there was another mole somewhere else. A mole, which was much more real. Who could know?

All these co-incidencies were, after all, more than extremely strange, the Advisoress had to admit. She didn't sound very profound or reliable in this matter.

The identity of the false Professor was cleared, more or less, at least in theory, that is, as we all know, grey and colourless. So Dorothea took the right measures. She accepted the challenge and the battle against the disposed skin, wherein pure malice was hiding.

As manager of the university she informed the police, but too late. The trio had flown off. The secret nest in the old town of Sydney as empty. The police efforts hadn't been very intense anyway, because there was no definite charge against Baranasias, and Catalanius hadn't yet been disguised by Dorothea either.

When the police finally discovered Catalanius' true identity, which they managed by means of the DER-tests to be found in the studio, he and his companion had left for good.

The latter was no empty leaf either, the police also found out, while her genetic fingerprint was found in the records as well.

Catalanius could easily add two and two. Other than Baranasias he was of solid matter, and could be hunted down. That was why he disappeared, as soon as the love-sick Watchman Will Weesle disguised his true intentions. He knew both, Catalanius and Baranasias face to face. Had he looked more closely, instead of adoring the false Viola, he would have realized, what was going on, although the appearance of the two had been altered a lot over the years.

His negligence gave the trio a remarkable lead. Immediately after the Symposium or while it still was on, Catalanius had left the scene. The police found the place in the old town of Sydney empty, when they finally showed up. None of the refugees tried to pick up anything. Catalanius must have warned them while still in the hotel. So, not the faintest trace could be found of the false Viola, while the empty shade, once had been Baranasias, had of course faded likewise.

"Perhaps he can dissolve anyway at any time and disappear that way, with his transparent body, in order to reappear elsewhere"

Arundle wondered. “That’s rather typical for a Miserior” Billy-Joe agreed.

Arundle had finally made it with her mother to the hotel – packed with loads of shoppings. There they learnt of the failed capture.

“You are not going on a gangster chase in space, do you – in your condition?” her mother argued, when Arundle arranged herself to do exactly this. Billy-Joe accompanied her, what else could he do? She ignored her mother’s warning with an annoyed glance.

Arundle was almost sure, that she would come in vain with such a bad news and wouldn’t be able to insist on a statement by the Advisor. But you never know. He might jump about with a naive explanation at hand about the strange and very questionable connection between Anonymous and Baranasias. If there was any such connection left, anyway.

“Almost anything is possible first of all, that should be clear by now, dear” the Advisoress twittered. - In the way the Advisor enjoyed his appearance for the time being.

“The evil is not out of the world, as you surely have noticed, when once overcome. Which is quite a while ago by now, isn’t it?”

“But who thinks of things like that? and then my father, after all – right after his purification. To me it looks like a bottomless negligence. How can such a filthy rotten little alter ego be forgotten just like that, and is now goofing about on earth wholly on its own?” – Arundle hollered quite upset. The idea that her father had doubled just like that, and in such an awful way, made her sick.

“Doesn’t he himself realize what’s going on with him?” Billy-Joe wanted to know. He couldn’t understand either and shook his head in disbelief.

The Advisoress smiled her sphinx-like smile, which made her look rather cute, and overrode the expressive play of the features of the Advisor.

“No answer is also an answer”, Arundle thought and looke over to Billy-Joe, who shrugged meaningfully. Something told him the truth. Up here, they didn’t have any idea, unfortunately.

“It seems so”, he uttered uneasily. “Afttr all is he your father, and Emperor is he as well, meanwhile. What ever this means. I don’t think that he has any knowledge of such an impertinent appendix of his, he had left behind on earth.”

“If it was him, who left such a monstrous something behind. Perhaps some-one tried to foul him. Could well be, couldn’t it?” Arundle didn’t really believe in what she was just saying, and Billy-

Joe didn't want to argue with her, not in her maternal state, as a matter of fact.

23. The Mole

Billy-Joe remembered his own alter ego quite well. He didn't dig too deep into its soul, because that wasn't necessary in his case. For he automatically assumed that there were no differences between his own self and the self of the alter ego, and that it was good enough to explore himself, in order to find out what was going on with his own self and the self of the alter ego.

Could the Emperor not do likewise? Perhaps he just had no idea of that filthy sub-saucer of his, he might indeed had left way behind on earth. If he had known what was slumbering in the hide, being very active as well, he would have taken measures, wouldn't he? Someone like him was certainly provided with a variety of possibilities.

As far as the alter ego was concerned, it was definitely no mole. The suspected Baranasias hadn't even been near the islands. How should he then be the mole? Of course he took care of the fake tourists. He trained and safeguarded them in order to get them on the islands. Someone who knew, that they weren't kosher - and of course, who they really were. The rest was easy peasy. Once on the islands, there was a lot to be seen and to be discovered. The mean creatures found loads of material. You found it everywhere. You had only to bow down, or scratch a little with the tip of your shoe - so to speak.

But what if Baranasias had found a malice way of chasing through the premises, like Miseriors did? Perhaps he sold in Sydney the lotion and the rest he sold on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth?

Familiar enough he was with the whereabouts, as a matter of fact, while having spent some time together with his original assistant on the islands, years ago. He might even be able to slip into the skin of any contemporary fellow. Someone who was engaged with the entry-procedures, or the hotel, for example.

At that past time, there had also been a lot of construction work going on, and dwarves had been busy all over the places. So Baranasias could still be suspected of being the mole again, he would

even be the ideal mole. The only question was, what he would look like – well – if it was him, of course, which wasn't certain yet. He had to be seen after all by his compradores from those slippery magazines and gazettes of the yellow press. How else should they have been able to contact him?

And things seemed to be working, as it looked. This was no one day fly from yesterday, which would be disappearing by tomorrow again. If not disguised now, by the responsible security forces once and for all.

Did Baranasias enter his victims like a Miserior? On the other hand was his closeness to his true and former self quite a challenge for the alter ego, all the more they both differed very basically, which actually couldn't really be. While the good and the evil characteristics had been polarized. Still there must have been a connecting clamp. While this was the characteristic of an alter ego. So many things had happened, obviously too much, so that this connection had been cut once and for all. Which hardly could be. The halves shouldn't know anything of each other. While this was by now nothing but pure speculation. There was not the slightest evidence for this conclusion. Even the identity of Barnasias wasn't really ascertained, while indices directed towards his former assistant and dangerous criminal and escapee from the State-prison of Adelaide.

The endangered were alert in any case and anyhow. They surely knew about the malice of the culprits, and what harm they had to fear from them.

Together with Grisella and her clientele, Scholasticus rehearsed all possible suspects. Dorothea joined them right away, the more so, as she had in fact certain suspects in mind, who might turn out to prove the suspicion. But she didn't want to press forward, but wanted to see and hear, what the others had in mind.

Well, they thought about their part. Arundle came up with her old story of the one thousand faces of Malicious Marduk, and Billy-Joe added that the structure of the conflict repeated again and again, and was not only stunning but might by now demand a faster reaction.

“We become insecure and doubt our abilities, and start suspecting each other. That is exactly the climate Malicious Marduk requires, and therefore reproduces it again and again, at best he can.”

This back-up by her mate was water on Arundle's mill, so to speak. “This is exactly what he does, and we become trapped again and again. Think just for a moment that Baranasias was connected with the Emperor, i.e. Anonymous or my father. - I don't know how Marduk manages, but somehow he succeeded in reviving a corpse,

and fill it with life. But how did he manage to get access to the human remains?- The empty shell looked like the original, didn't it? Don't you remember, in the hotel? Just mere coincidence? And what about Viola and the crippled assistant – well, the latter the least, I'd reckon..."

"And if there had been a clone from the old Waldschmitt, way behind and ahead of his change?" Grisella put in.

"Could well be, after all" Dorothea agreed.

"That would be just in line with the Brotherhood of Infernal", Arundle confirmed, who should have known.

"They have certainly produced clones of themselves, in order to exploit them on their pace towards infinite life" Grisella pick up the thread.

"But why Baranasias, and how could the clone adapt the image, while the original changed his sight so often?" Dorothea wanted to know.

"I was thinking up to now, that Malicious Marduk required a real image to slip in. It wasn't clear to me, that he could produce an imago..." Grisella thoughtfully added.

"If he really can..."

"Shall we now go back to the old strategies again?" asked Arundle looking around – "as we handle things then? Our protective umbrella, the counter-strategy and the joint tongue-twister move by Animations and Somnions?"

"For that it is far too early – besides, we don't know our enemy yet. He hasn't as yet entered the scene, as a matter of fact, all we have is suspicion..." Grisella assisted.

"Well, yes, the Trolls" Arundle replied "Their permanent upheaval, and now this ultimate attitude, and the picture they show of the dwarves..."

"And of us as well...", Dorothea nodded. "That's rather negative."

"Right you are – we all feel the same. And it's so unjust. But that is certainly intended. The idea is to provoke us so that we make mistakes and overreact..." all agreed on that.

"Has there never been some-one neutral down under? Is it really so unacceptable down there?" Arundle wanted to know.

They all looked at each other. No-one had thought of entering the lion's cave. Only Corinia once dreamed herself down. While she wanted to see Boetie and moved down one level deeper by accident.

"Well, humid was it and not really comfortable. But I didn't think about it much. Who could imagine that they all became ill? That wasn't to be foreseen" – Cori added.

“Let’s keep in mind. We should be blamed of something. First the Trolls tune in, then the attack with the disease follows, and now this invasion of false tourists” – Dorothea summed up the crucial points.

“And this right now, while nothing could help, and we overcame everything” Arundle added. somewhat confuse and thoughtfully.

“Right you are, that must be recognized as well, and the way we did it as well. The logistics and everything” – Dorothea referred to Arundle’s hint about the exodus. Because that was exactly what Dorothea had had in mind. “Three thousand bad-tempered dwarves... without the Last Bounty we would have looked rather dumb.”

“Well they hadn’t been as moody as you said. On board they were in the contrary quite gay – really glad to have escaped the miserable rat-hole” – Billy-Joe went in.

“ Our standard suspects we can this time disclose” – Grisella gave the discussion a turn.

“Yes, Captain Leblanc is definitely out of the danger-zone, meanwhile. On the contrary, he definitely improved” - Arundle agreed.

“It all depends on the dwarves this time, in fact on the Trolls and what picture they are presenting. We accepted it without objections” – Billy-Joe couldn’t get rid of the dwarves.

“Yes, we accepted without any objection, trapped in our bad consiousness, we didn’t present ourselves very convincingly” – Grisella was willing to step back and rehearse the whole affair of the dwarves.

“The scenario fits, that’s the handwriting of Malicious Marduk...” Arundle put in.

“While the pieces of the puzzle still won’t fit...” Billy-Joe objected.

“What does that mean?”

“Well, the identity for example. Baranasias is definitely the malicious shadow of your father, no matter how this makes you feel. Your mother confirmed that to us once again. How this could happen, we don’t yet know, but it became true. We can’t deny that” – Billy-Joe objected, although very uncertain, as he accompanied Anonymous on his conversion-trip.

“Leave my mother alone. You don’t want her milling into the circle of suspects, do you? At best then Hansiman as well...” Arundle rejected.

“Suspicious in the way that mean spirits get hold of them, is basically everybody on the islands, there aren’t any exceptions, I’m

afraid. We learnt that by troublesome experience in the past.” Grisella put in.

“More important than the question of who is hiding behind Baranasias, is the question of the appearance he has chosen on the islands this time. There is proof enough that Baranasias and Malicious Marduk interact. The latter enjoys malicious jokes by entering innocent people, that’s all too well known” – Judith made herself heard.

“That was how Peter suffered incredibly, and not only Peter...” Dorothea had in mind to limit the circle of the suspects to the hotel. She also tended to neglect the standard suspects, and could that do more easily, while new suspects showed up. Her personal new candidate was the new operator, she had had so much trouble in finding, but only finally succeeded. He was a drunkard and game-addict on top. The liquor she would have excused, but the gambling passion had taken desasterous dimensions and made her quite uneasy.

The man called himself Luther Lommel. He was the typical Hundredender, as can be. Someone, who seemed to search voluntarily for swamps to sink in. His whole life did he spend in opening up new scenes of despair, in order to fill old gaps, until one day he ran completely out of breath and was cashed the traditional awful way.

Dorothea got him out on bail for an incredibly high sum of thirtytwothousand credits from one of the most suspicious NCAA (Negative Credit Account Asylum)¹⁰ quite close here, near Adelaide, and saved his life.

Almost in the last minute, just shortly before cashing. (a barbaric custom on the march, which carried on the pure horror into the public debates on the development of the Time-Value-System as a whole.)

However, thankfulness is a weak partner when life carries on. Lommel had promised to regulate his life in future. As a matter of fact, people tend to promise anything in such a situation.

“What happens to the hopeless cases? What shall society do with the notorious cheaters?” – Thus were the sour questions of the self-righteous, who were sitting on the thick credit-cushions, they had inherited, and were angry about those, who behaved as having also such a big cushion, but in fact didn’t. The opposite was the case.

This was why the idea of cashing came up. Those, who had sold their lifetime, and had no chance of ever clearing the negative account, became excluded from the human society, and was reduced to the state of a clone. That meant he could be slaughtered like a clone for repair purposes, in order to complete another human being. Such practice was free of any charge, while in fact it was some kind of

murder, or even worse, as the victim lived on as long as the vital organs stayed with him.

Such species – you couldn't call them individuals – were put into asylums, where they had to wait and see their fate being fulfilled. Before the final and casual decision of the extraction of vital organs, relatives were informed or friends. For the very last time a call for help was published (and Dorothea had answered such a final call in case of Luther Lommel.)

If nobody answered, the fate of the victim was finally sealed. He was distracted into pieces and sold on the organ-market for repair, as far as the condition in which the parts were, did allow. What couldn't be used here, was then handed over to a pet food producer. By this way a corpse might gain the value it was due, partly or in the whole. Which had been rather unlikely in case of Luther Lommel, who had to bring the extraordinarily high sum of thirty-two-thousand credits. This was why Dorothea auctioned him for less than sixteen-thousand in the end.

24. Luther Lommel

Luther Lommel was indeed a signal officer and had qualified himself by running through all likely military and civil trainings. You could even call him over-qualified, but that was the only positive qualification he possessed. Beside his little (or not so little) weaknesses he was a nice fellow and a well-liked comrade. However, as soon as it came to gambling, when fun began for others, he became very serious.

This was why he soon got stuck again and Dorothea had to free him. Was the vicious circle starting for a new round? In vain she thought of a means of getting him out of the trap. To his misfortune quite some dubious fellows among the tourists enjoyed the trip to Susamee's Island and spent daily some time with a round of poker in the passengers' parlour.

With the comrades on board there existed an unspoken agreement, concerning Credits, however, this couldn't be assumed with strangers as well. This was why Dorothea received quite some sight bills, that made her hair raise. – She now understood, how the poor devil ran into his malaise.

Luther Lommel had an open ear for all kinds of whisperings, referring to a way of getting rid of his debts. While he insisted on keeping precise record. He was definitely willing to settle his debt. His debt was in fact the reason for him to gamble, so he assured himself, and believed it as well. In his twisted logic he saw here the reason why he took immense risks and wouldn't give in, no matter how mediocre the cards were, he was holding.

The further she thought about it, the more suspicious Luther Lommel became. He soon became her only suspect, more so, as he didn't show up with new sight bills for quite a while. That would mean, he had opened up a new source for loan.

So she shared her suspicion with the illuminated Council of the Menora. And because she was able to present her suspicion so convincingly, the women in the Council accepted and agreed with what she presented.

As a matter of fact, the women didn't jump on Luther Lommel, without reflection. It was him alone, who provoked the suspicion. Perhaps they should have become alarmed because of the obviousness of the case. Thus, they later thought.

For the time being, a chain of guardians was installed. Arundle joined the crew as the assistant signal-operator with the closest contact job-wise. And Billy-Joe learnt to play the cards in general, and Poker in specific. Together with Tibor, who was a kind of addict borderliner, they soon enjoyed the thrill and challenge of gambling.

Pregnant, as she was, Arundle wasn't really helpful. The child, most likely a girl, was due in about two months. But a cruise once in a while would be relaxing, the more so, as she got the chance that way to see Tika, in order to find out how family-life felt in the middle of the twentyfirst century. Another turn of the year should however be likely. Had she had the choice for when delivering, she would have preferred the upcoming decade. Her claim based on no sound reason.

If Luther Lommel was the mole, so the eagerly engaged couple agreed upon, then he had had to do suspicious things. However, he didn't. Luther Lommel had nothing but gambling in mind. All he was after, were streaks of luck, and the hiding of his losses. Beside that, he was a taciturn, inward-bound character with a poker face, you couldn't detect anything. His duties he did well. He stuck to the operator's times, as were laid down for his kind when at sea. He delivered all news punctually and without delay, while there were very few, as a matter of fact.

Leaving a round of gamblers was not easy for him, in fact most strenuous. However, when duty was calling he obeyed, and did it far more relaxed if some-one of the crew stepped in on his behalf - "in order, not to let the streak of luck be torn apart" - as he put it. He was still convinced of his extraordinary feeling for luck. No misfortune, no set-back or backslash would change his mind. And he would rather die than admit, what kind of an unlucky fellow he was, who was badly treated by life, while being unable to handle the adiction.

If some-one confronted him with his adiction, he wholly denied it. He was in no way adict to anything, he said. In fact, was gambling the only way of helping himself out of the vicious circle of debts, so he argued.

If some-one then objected, that things were just the other way round, and said that gambling drove him into the fathomless hole of debts, he smiled mildly and forgivingly and referred to his past by moving his hand up in the air. And the past looked indeed the way he saw things. Under the burden of debts he would either be strangled, or he would land the one and only coup with much luck, and free himself that way, once and for all.

"While during the past, things didn't run well, as a matter of fact. But seen with a distant glance over the last fifty years or so, things didn't work out all that bad. Well, just as long as it went, actually..." – and his face overran a sad notion. He looked up to the sky and you could read in his face, perhaps for the first time. And what you then read, was so moving, so heartbreaking and true, that nobody dared to keep up that brisk, reprimand attitude, adicted gamblers were addressed in general by well-meaning individuals, who apparently had no idea of what they were really talking.

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Was it incidental, that such suspicious subjects approached Luther Lommel, who might themselves belong to the clientele of the semi-criminal scene, Poker were part of.

Since such individuals joined the poker-rounds, the strain of luck turned for Luther Lommel. Gambling he could, no-one could deny that – and he was never ever cheating!

Therefore, the fact that he didn't show up any minute with new loan-requests, or bills of debts, that had to be settled, not necessarily meant that he was fed from a dubious source. In fact, Luther Lommel was prepared to tackle his basic debt. But before that he had to handle

all his small debts with his comrades, until he one day entered the ship-owners office.

“That’s all won honestly” he shouted triumphantly, when the time finally had come. He threw a bundle of bills on the desk. “supposed to be some ten thousand, or so, I didn’t precisely count” he said.

Dorothea felt her hands sweating. She got her pocket-calculator and summed up her expenditures. Then she deducted generously the fulfilled hours of work, Luther Lommel had executed on board of the Last Bounty, and ended up with a remarkable plus of one hundred and eighty five credits:

“Now, you are free, for the first time in your life. You can do or undo what ever you like. And best of all, you never have to go back to the Poker table.” This opening perplexed Luther Lommel. For a minute or so, he couldn’t speak.

“Am I dismissed?” – he then asked, because he couldn’t fully dig what he had just heard.

“Of course not. In the contrary. You get a proper contract, and we the best signal-officer, we ever had – well that’s what I hope. All depends now on you. Nobody can force you, God knows – never ever...”

So it was. Luther Lommel became the first free Hundredender on board of the Last Bounty, who had freed himself on his own. – Well, yes fortuna had grasped into the spokes of her wheel, by two assistant messengers, named Billy-Joe and Tibor, who didn’t know what better to do with their surplus, and enjoyed the opportunity that opened up. While the tantiems of patents and the book sparkled like a warm shower, whether they ignored, as Tibor did, or accepted unwillingly. The flow of wealth was like a brooklet, and was - just like it – destined by the spring- and autumn winds – all depended on the world climate, so to speak.

Money never was a theme, since they dwelled on the islands. Astounding enough, because in their youth Billy-Joe and the Khan-clan of Tibor’s suffered in misery, either in the outback or in the desert of sowiet-socialist agony in Inner Mongolia.

They could have given those credits just like that. But that wouldn’t have been the same. For that, Luther was too much a gambler, and an honest one as well. A combination you seldom found, or perhaps you did? A true gambler seeks luck and not a strategy to trick it out. Winning yes, but not by all means, and definitely not by cheating.

Tibor and Billy-Joe successfully rejected Dorothea’s trials to refund their losses. Their losses came along with their identification

with the role of a gambler – just like that. They almost had an argument thereof, which wasn't worth while. For Arundle the whole case was just ridiculous. While she of course agreed in the importance of keeping Luther Lommel's face, and not only that. Under no circumstances the impression should come up, that the two laymen gamblers played reluctantly and wanted to lose, in order to make Luther win, which would have been the wrong signal as well, and had to be avoided by all means. That had namely meant that Luther Lommel hadn't been able to free himself by means of his abilities as a gambler, and by the help of Fortuna, the Goddess he believed in.

Under no circumstances should it look, as it seemed to be going to look, that Luther Lommel had been favoured. Nothing had been presented to him. He got what he deserved. Nothing was given to him, what wasn't his appointed share. In fact Fortuna had opened her horn for him at last, and had helped him to his true destination, so to speak. While Luther Lommel never doubted his destination as a lucky devil. It wasn't his fault, but his fate and shouldn't be stirred up voluntarily, otherwise the slash-back would be - and had been - horrible, so he saw it.

But grey is all theory – what was it like with his gambling adiction in reality? His debts had gone, there was no reason given anymore for gambling. Somewhat strange and inconvenient was the matter in any case. What should you do with all the time available now? And now Luther realized how much time he had spent at the gambling-table. He spent his time instead in the operator's booth as a real workoholic. And in fact a lot could be done in this field of action, while hundreds of amendments had piled up which had to be incorporated into the manuals. The workload of only one annual pile took at least one month. You couldn't just take the latest amendment, hoping to solve the problem, but there were of course previous and other action required.

This was just one field of action. By tradition the communications officer was responsible for the dutyfree staff being sold on board not only to the crew outside the harbours, but also to the passengers. And a wide range of goods used to find their way into the fathomless depths of the hold, being set up front.

Luther revived this old tradition with fervour and both, tourists and crew were thankful for that. As soon as the harbour lay behind, crew and passengers cued in front of the narrow warehouse, which in fact was but a narrow sticky and dark cabin, stuffed to the tops with all possible goods, you can think of, liquor and cigaretes, and perfume were the most favoured articles.

While selling, Luther Lommel also got in touch with the dwarves as well, who overcame their natural shyness in his case. The dwarves liked Luther Lommel right from the start, nobody ever found out why. Perhaps it was his way of behaving, he presented himself always somewhat bad-tempered and brisk, and always showed indifference, as if he didn't want to sell anything of his goods, but only handed them out reluctantly, with sloppy elegance, arguing about costs and currency, or exchange rates and what else happened to come to his mind. While in fact, all was settled in internal currency, of no public value behind his back by the ship-owner, who ensured that the shelves never ran out of any good.

He never advertised any of the stock he held. Quite the opposite pretended he that things weren't worth the price they cost, and were all worthless rubbish. "What do dwarves need perfume?" he asked meaningfully. Or he said: "Selling jewellery to you, is like carrying owls to Sparta" – and more so funny sayings, which were liked very much by the dwarves, who couldn't stop giggling as long as they stayed in front of that little hole, awaiting their purchase, or just remaining there because of the fun they had. The dim light also reminded them of their home.

This was why Luther Lommel found his way up front as soon as the port lay behind. In order not to neglect his communication's duties, he wired the radio Wan-wise. By this way he was able to handle the communications business from up front in the shop. He thought that a brilliant idea, no matter that the Captain had his objections. However Leblanc let it pass, because Luther did so well in keeping peace on board, by pleasing the dwarves and trolls likewise, who also mingled between the little folk, without being spotted right away.

It would have been easier, if he had put the opening hours in a way that they didn't come across the communications business, while the stand-by periods were precisely fixed for any vessel at sea.

But things worked as well as Luther had arranged, and this way the whole ship could hear, where the operator was located at any moment, and seemed to be the most important person on board. This role Zinfandor Leblanc had no objections of sharing with him.

Mr Melford disagreed. He was the second navigator and traditionally responsible for nutrition supply and distribution, exempted was the duty-free luxury segment, which wasn't so easily to be separated, no matter how pithy the set-up seemed in this case. Dealing with passengers differed quite a bit from handling crew comrades. Running the duty-free shop therefore would have

overcharged the man, no doubt about that. But how could that be brought into his limited vicinity? You just couldn't sell dried out American blondes without filter, just because you got them a nickle cheaper.

Anyway, Mr Melford had enough trouble with bloody pork halves and sticky rice, and all that. While loads were eaten up on those ferry- and sightseeing trips, while freshness and vitamine-push was essential for the sake of those out-powered creatures from deep down under.

The kitchen store was on the other end astern, and it was hardly possible that both areas interfered.

Perhaps that it was, what Luther Lommel required. A sound flash of lime-light once in a while: to be someone meaningful, made him swagger proudly about. After all, it could well be his megalomania which was favoured by the dwarves and Trolls, making them aware of a spiritual relationship. What Trolls compensated by pranks and dwarves by hard work, Luther Lommel did by gambling. Well, he used to do so, while meanwhile this gap was sealed. Being confronted with such crude facts, he couldn't deny but accept that there was something in it. So the sword of Damokles was floating above his head, so to speak. The adiction could break out any time, as soon as his role was questioned or had become meaningless.

It was indeed a real kind of va-banque play the brave ship-owneress had taken up with and on behalf of Luther Lommel. A lot of damage and old wounds from long ago burnt like fresh ones under the thin skin, so to speak.

She took nothing for granted meanwhile. When Mr Melford complaint, she was as well alerted, and asked herself what could be done, or could be done by him. In case there was just a misunderstanding, it shouldn't be up to her. Her nature forbade to let things burn.

The point was not that some-one felt important for something out of his range. But the other way round things didn't show a more favourable site, if people were stripped off their responsibilities, as often enough occurred.

Every-day life on board tended to get stuck in dull routine. Nobody realized any more the importance of what others fullfilled. They all had their extraordinary fields of action. The crew was formed of such specialists. And only the joint orchestra produced the masterpieces which were fullfilled in order to drive a vessel safely through winds and waves, keep it sound and orderly - month after month and soon also year after year.

Such gifts were called Seamanship. And because seamanship was demanded, mainly the lack of it was blamed, like in case of the boatswain and the carpenter, who tried in vain to hide their weaknesses behind a veil of music. While they certainly knew, one day the day would come, when they had to stand in for their failures.

25. The Council of the Menora

Luther Lommel was no mole. That was certain by now. Both assistant commissioners of the secret Poker rounds assured. He wasn't even a pure gambler and addict, but suffered from ignorance. As soon as his way of life changed, he revived as to the given outlets, and developed a promising appeal, while he wasn't able to through everything over board, that had been useful and helpful during the struggle of his former life.

Billy-Joe and Tibor came up with an official report on their findings. For that purpose they had received a special permission to join the meeting of the secret intergalactic Women's Council of the Menora, only women could belong to. The Advisor changed gender just for the sake of it.

This Council was by now the most important instrument for planning and creating the future. The Advisoress seemed to desire likewise. In any case, she participated in each and every meeting of the Council, and made all participants routinely and punctually shining, which gave the Council its name. Because Menora means just chandelier.

Permanent members were right from the start: Arundle, Dorothea, Judith, Grisella, and Pooty together with the magic stone. Pooty was in fact kind of trans-gender and hadn't outed himself in the one or other direction, and the magic stoness hollered that such a silly question wasn't really meant for her and kissed her backside "to say it with plain and clear words. We are, what we are, aren't we, Pooty?" Her foppy way of putting things raised however the question about the part of the body in her case, she was likely to lack – as per the other members, while nobody minded.

"Our Billy-Joe we shan't miss" the magic bow whistled, who addressed himself futher as Bowess, which was kind of suffisticated, while she claimed the same rights in her case, just like the magic stoness.

The going-to-be-father couldn't join here. Billy-Joe wasn't willing to force anything here, but others did for him. None the least his sister Tika, who wanted to do something on behalf of Walter, who used to have a bellybag, and now was hiding inside Billy-Joe to come out each month, while goofing around in Billy-Joe for the rest of the time.

Tika was of course in, while she didn't participate the meetings regularly, because of her obligations otherwise. "That has to change", the Advisoress mentioned sweetly. The same applied for Florinna and Corinia, who timidly hid in Billy-Joe's shade, but were noticed by the illustrious guest.

"Would you eventually activate your big boss – Shamaness Susamee - also to show up here", the Advisoress took the opportunity to inquire. While the meeting began.

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In order to justify the Menora, it became necessary to reach the magic six or seven, or eight, or nine – "if there are then ten, it's no shame either and the twelve as well. With eleven and thirteen it's all the same." – After all, almost any figure showed advantage, as per the Advisoress. "In is everyone, who went through the light" said the basic rule they all stuck to, while they had in mind a democratic procedure, the selection based on.

"Who then elected us?" the Counsiloreesses asked themselves and looked into stunned faces. Not even they, themselves!

So far so good. The question of the whereabouts of the mole was in no way off the table. The general question was, if such an illustrious assembly should be bothered with unimportant questions the like, while the counsiloreesses didn't yet know what the Advisoress was hiding, willing to trump with the joker she kept waiting in fact, while ready to play at any time.

"Malicious Marduk is never harmless" she mentioned without obvious connection to what was due. "Not when he is invisible and indisguisable. Then his poison is already growling in the bowels of the victim, who doesn't know himself. However, if you realize how harmful such poison is, then you start asking, what kind of poison this is. And if Malicious Marduk is indeed undetectable, to the extend he would like to be. If it is his poison, that you are feeling, but don't exactly know."

Reflexions of such confuse kind the Advisoress forwarded. Thus you became aware, how blind she was tapping in the darkness. And so

it was. Malicious Marduk threatened like a menetele on the wall. And the fact that it had become quiet about him, didn't mean necessarily, that he wasn't active and present. This was how Arundle saw things. After all, she had just recently experienced Baranasias and seen him with her own eyes – as visual as he then appeared. Because really real he hadn't been.

A faint idea was born in her mind of a kind of chain or net, in which the mole should struggle at last. Nothing of that kind happened, at least not up to now. Were they mistaken? - Failed the trap? They didn't know better. – Afterwards everybody agreed that Luther Lommel never fitted into the culprits profile. The attacks and fake suspicions were much older than Luther Lommel's presence.

But Luther Lommel would have fitted so neatly. And that could have been the intention of Baranasias alias Malicious Marduk, who became by now uneasy in the windy figure, and was most likely searching for a more solid dwelling, while the scar-face wouldn't loosen his grip.

In order to stimulate the wrong suspicion, there had been seductive poker rounds, with carelessly filled pots of great sums. And by that way Luther vintaged a fair part of the Credits the hard way, and enabled him to pay back his debts in a relatively short period of time to his mistress, the shipowner.

By that time Baranasias pulled the strings already all by himself, and was choosing a simple disguise, which was easy enough, because he was hardly more but a shade. As soon as he set foot on the grounds of the islands (in his skiny appeal he travelled inside of the luggage of his clients in the helicopter.) He got out and somehow managed to become a giant moth – a huge bat-like insect, which was uttering strange cries, but was otherwise - kind of inconspicuously chasing about in the twilight, in order to implement himself into the soul of any available sleeper, he had of course to test out beforehand, as not all were prepared to open up, as was required and enjoyed by him.

The mole was in fact a moth, and that had been the mysteriously hidden secret of the Advisoress – her trump she held back. Arundle asked herself, when they all were assembled again in the Council of the Menora, what would come next, whether the old nutcase Baranasias would appear as an orchid – a gigantic flesh-eating orchid of course.

She didn't hesitate to publish this idea in the Council. And the more the ladies in the round thought about it, the deeper the idea could settle, until they became almost sure, that it was very likely to see it transformed into reality. They even reflected that the culprit might

have access to their thoughts. That he in fact was in desperate need of such stimuli, while nothing anymore came to his mind. Therefore, everything was most welcome, no matter how silly the ideas sounded. – So a flesh-eating gigantic orchid surely topped the gigantic moth, which was certainly bizzare enough. Telepathic mind-reading was after all no privilege of the islanders.

However, who had become victim of the moth? Whom did it crawl into the soul? Where was that silvery trace of slime, which mothes left behind, to be found? In one of the sailors perhaps? Or with the two merry musicians? Or even Stan and Ollie (The Pole), the unequal machine-crew? The Steward or the Cook perhaps? The truth is not always simpler then the theory and not necessarily logical. More so, when Malicious Marduk's hand was in the game.

Both private investigators (as Billy-Joe and Tibor saw themselves) plodded about in the dark, while their job was done by helping Luther Lommel out of his misery. While darkness was the allotted medium for a giant moth, which shyed away from light and at best hid in the deepest depth of the lowest deck, where never ever a ray of sunlight made it, and where the water under the keel was gurgling, if you payed attention and quitened down, which was sort of unlikely on a Motor Ship, as was MS Last Bounty.

The moth started sniffing about in the dog-watch, when everybody was tired, and even the duty-officer risked a closed eye. With its long nozzle the moth entered the brains of the sleepers, mostly through the nose, and stole their thoughts and made them its own.

This way it became familiar with the funniest things going on. While things were kind of mess being aquired that way. Thus it aquired everything that people had in mind, but unsorted as can be. The moth wasn't able to differentiate and put in order or sort by importance what people were dreaming.

It just took what it got. It was simple-minded. The main thing for it remained the opportunity. And at best the moth remained hidden. Fluttering up the staircases, was not what it was after, but the opposite, because getting caught there was most likely, it knew by experience.

Somebody then yelled the cry "A giant moth, help, a huge gigantic moth"

followed by the little less stupid answer "where, where?" – "there, there!" – "but where, where?" – "It's gone now!" – So people shouted back and forth and to and fro a minute or so, which gave the moth the chance to disappear, most favourably back into the depth of

the lowest deck where the dwaves used to stay, in case they were on board.

By that time Billy-Joe and Tibor weren't yet wholly able to fix themselves to the moth's trace, while they just overcame their false suspicion. They pleaded the innocent for pardon, not only inside but also by sound reparations in a way that arose Luther's suspicion, and made him threaten to give in, despite the fact that the fortune was on his side and caused the investigators for a modest alternation.- Just a little, not to make him think that the luck had left him.

This was how Luther Lommel overcame them regularly and made him not only happy, but freed him from his adiction. For Billy-Joe and Tibor this meant that they were free now for another job. That was why they now fervantly took up the trace of that moth. They also informed Luther accordingly, who promised to have an open eye for them, especially in twilight or darkness.

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They soon realized how Baranasias sneaked in, however, they didn't know what he looked like, and how he got his information. While this never really became clear. Whether a giant moth would help to get traitors in, remained an unsolveable riddle, completely lacking in logic. The moth as busy hiding while being chased and threatened to be killed all about the place.

Already Luther Lommel's contribution could hardly be imagined. – On the pokertable – yes, but immigration? And that was the clou. The traitors had to be sluiced through the controls, not only the backpackers but also those you smelled the foul fish three miles ahead. Many couldn't do else but look obstinate and utter junk and dirty talk, even if they tried else.

Still such comrades had passed – once in a while and right now as well. Billy-Joe and Tibor saw them with own eyes in the lounge, and at the Poker tables. They pleaded for access as if it was a great honour to become stripped by Luther Lommel.

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Had there been irregularities at the control panel? Yes, there had been – but years ago. Tibor decided to have a word with Watchman Will Weesle, he seemed him the most reliable. The explanation might be rather simple. And instead of searching a mole, it would have done

to enforce the entrance control again, as was common anyway in times of a crisis.

While they spotted the lotion trick by themselves, as a matter of fact. (Shoe-polish Billy-Joe called the lotion the traitors used in order to shine grey.) So he hit the point except for the phosphor. By which the traitors were punished soon enough. It didn't take three days until the skin began to peel, like with a heavy sunburn. Accompanied by stains and pimples all over the body, which made them look horrible. By that time they were sitting in the copter again. Their cameras were confiscated, respectively the films. While meanwhile a lot was done digital, so the most spectacular pictures were already online. And what they had stored in their sick brains could also not become deleted, but could be read in the upcoming weeks in the yellow press.

Wholly relying on the colour-scanner proved a big mistake, while everybody felt safe by the double control. A meaningful error, so they had to learn.

**

Watchman Will Weesle confirmed what Tibor and Billy-Joe had guessed right away. The irregularities in former times had to do with the entrance control, which had been in the hands of first semesters. The idea behind it was to train them and give them a good chance of testing 'the other way of seeing'.

Since then the double control had remained valid. But as beginners mistrust themselves more than the colleagues, they tended to confirm the judgement of the first control. And that meant in other words, when you passed the first control you were actually in.

At that time the system, which was still in use, had been installed. Since then nobody saw any serious reason for updating, except perhaps as far as the beginners were concerned. Well-trained colour spotters had taken over. Well – and failed unfortunately. The colour-scanners could be cheated likewise.

26. Sam and Mynona

The system was now obsolete. The colour-scanners could well become deranged, and might find a place in the museum of the school

– since it became clear how easily they could be outnumbered. Now you had to rely on the eye again, and the seers of the other kind had to prove their talents again. While they didn't grow on trees, but were the most precious good the school possessed, that had to be pampered at best.

Under no circumstances they wanted to get back to a situation where gifted students overtook exhausting drudgeries at the control panel, either here on the islands or right back at the Sydney copter port. As a matter of fact had working conditions never been sufficient, neither the social ones but even worth the conditions of the light, so necessary for a proper job of that tricky kind, as was colour-scanning by the pure eye. In such an atmosphere no mysterious mode arose. Creativity and imagination were rather killed but stimulated, and positive energy you searched in vain.

Thus the conviction became loud to limit the immigration drastically, and allow only selected guests access to the islands. In theory this sounded great, but as it came to practise, you soon realized how difficult it was to draw a discriminating line, and to keep it. While justice was still a precious good, and Dorothea uttered a justifiable claim for supply guests, and surely was right with her demand.

**

“And what would happen if we just turned around the pike?” Dorothea suggested in one of the meetings of the Council of the Menora. They could also give entry-lectures analogue to the lectures Baranasias had held for the cheaters in Sydney, where the capability of standing the entry-conditions was trained and tested. They could do similar seminars on their part as well, but this time the other way round of course, and with the opposite intention. What the dark forces could do, could as well be done by them. By this way the entrance procedures would become localized one or two steps ahead. And perhaps they could find localities which suited the colour-scanning better than the circumstances they now had to master.

Those last minute bookings however couldn't be accepted any more. If no-one was found who gave his or her ok right on the island on arrival, and stand for it with her good name.

The little cruises became limited to two per month. And that was really enough. While the Hotel to the Hub of the World (in short - the Double H Double U) would be stripped of guests, who were located right away on board of Her Majesty's Motor Ship (HMS) Last

Bounty, as was the official name. Dorothea, being the ship-owner, as well as the hotel-owner, didn't really mind. All passengers would be allowed ashore only for facultative excursions, on guided tours, and so it was. However, when the main building became devastated and only a bleary-eyed couple or some frustrated members of the university staff seated the bar-stools and couldn't find an end, while the room was waiting upstairs, or if not, could be claimed right away, the urban flair of the double H- double U-hotel began to suffer.

While on the other hand Dorothea learned that the fake reporting in the yellow press slowly changed into a more positive mode. If she wasn't all mistaken, the public relations efforts seemed to succeed, slowly but step by step.

In order to create those entry-lectures stylish, Dorothea rented a kind of observatory next to the copter-hangar, to be precise topped the hangar for a light-flooded locality, lighter as light can be.

The students of the School of Inbetween were however forced to move. While those gifted with the 'Other Way of Seeing' train a little while on the trip not only with their fellow students, but also with the formations of clouds. And because the classes switched, others were due the other weeks.

No group was left on its own but was accompanied by a teacher. So qualified competence was guaranteed any time. That was different. While in former times the students had been on their own with the meaningful challenge.

Later, when on duty, the students were pledged to take their time and not to hurry. No matter whether the process took the whole morning, while the aspirants had little more to expect but the colour-scanning. Everything else was pure routine, they could easily have learnt from the travel-documents or brochures.

That was why there was little news for the guests, while a solid exploration of their aura, as far as given. With that the pros and cons of the trip stood and fell. A fact that made the case unacceptable in a way. While the aura didn't guarantee the proper behaviour a hundred per cent, nor did the lack of it automatically result in misbehaviour. While witty reporters had entered illegally, it didn't mean that a fake hurdle had been built up, unsuitable for the prevention against destructive elements.

"Has there not been the saying yet, that a fake reporter could be smelled against the wind over miles? What to hell has the colour-scanning then to do with it? We all know it better, as a matter of fact." Dorothea claimed and the other Concilloresses nodded. Objective criteria weren't required in order to expell the unwanted. Common

sense was good enough. Besides, modes for travelling were fixed anyway, so there was no chance of shooting unwanted and mistaken photos and move about disgracefully.

As long as the arrangement remained valid and all tourists were housed on the Last Bounty, no harm could be done. All the more, the facultative excursion programme could be altered or cancelled at any time. There were certainly tourists, who shouldn't get access to the secret catacombes of the dwarves, or the playgrounds of the nymphs and nixes.

**

An even more challenging aspect came to Arundle's mind as she undertook it to accompany a flock of students to the observatory on top of the copter-hangar in Sydney.

The group and herself discovered jointly two potential Sublimations, of the highest grade. Arundle couldn't believe her eyes. While the scouts and seekers had a hard job by travelling around the world, when it came to Sublimations, who were extremely rare. No matter whether they searched the furthest sites of the world.

Such an opportunity the school couldn't let go. Thus Arundle pleased and pledged the two first of all, until they agreed to become presented to the school's general assembly. Everything was done to keep them, while there were of course obstacles to overcome.

**

Encouraged by this discovery, things went different from now on, as far as the preselection was concerned. And many people could be found on board of the Last Bounty, who wouldn't have believed it by themselves, but had undertaken the adventure "just like that" as they put it.

Many a back-packer had made his or her fortune that way. And through the school went a fresh breath, while the followers dripped scarcely and by the common channels. For what ever reason.

As could be shown by this new source, the reason was not necessarily found, by the lack of the gifted, but how to approach them. The talented didn't know of their talents, and were utmostly surprised as soon as they took notice.

Thus the struggle against unwanted moles and spies became a source of renewal and enrichment. No-one understood anymore, why things hadn't been handled that way earlier.

Sorrows, as far as the new blood was concerned, had existed ever since in certain sections.

**

Something might have torn and teased the new candidates of hope to find their way down here, while following rumours glorifying the islands. – Sam Smiley came all the way from Idaho. He was a farmer's boy without much of an education. He felt drawn on the big trail around the globe. He followed the call, accompanied by a harpoon in his bandana and the guitarre over the shoulder – his most important luggage.

He was the one. And he was in the right age – perhaps a tiny spur too old – but with seventeen not too old, in order to learn all what was needed to become some-one special.

Sam was a friendly open-minded fellow – slim by appearance and sensitive by nature. Just made for his art, he, however, didn't have but a faint idea yet. Only sometimes, when he stood beside himself, so to speak, (Sam didn't reject a joint here and then) he felt like swaying. But he put that on the effect of the drug. while, as a matter of fact, he was tied to the ground instead, than made him fly.

Sam Smiley alone was remarkable enough. But he was not alone, while he was accompanied by Mynona Wilder. The two had met accidentally, the way you meet while travelling. And they found out that they were almost neighbours. Because Mynona was also from Idaho, but she wasn't at all proud of it, nor was Sam. So it was.

The reason why they had been driven out into the wide world, could surely be found in the narrowness of Idaho. Tightness, that wasn't necessarily mirrored by the landscape, which was vast and empty, but in the minds of the people.

They had met on the plane, on the way from Los Angeles to Sydney. They looked at each other and knew it at once. And they stayed together ever since, as if forced by fate.

Sam made music. Mynona sang a little or collected the money from the passer-bys, if there were any, willing to spend a nickle for Sam's art.

Had they only known, what stuck in them! And what they jointly could achieve. But they didn't, and therefore they didn't even try, and were happy with what they got for the somewhat dry country-music form Idaho.

They were pretty busted flat, when they approached the observatory of the School of Inbetween on top of the copter-hangar,

but found it closed. So they unrolled their sleeping bags, stunned by the Southern brightness of the stars and fell asleep soon, while the young love was burning in their hearts, and filled their senses with a carpet of the plenty, which opens but for a few in love. Everything else would show up.

The rumour didn't fail. What they had heard, was nothing compared to what they experienced the other day. Of course they passed the test with glow and glory, which the students of the art of the other way of seeing undertook with them.

In fact, something almost like jubilation resounded. While for many of Arundle's students was it the first time, that they became aware of the contours – and that in such a strong shiny green.

The young lectress became upset, and wanted to have an immediate word with Tibor. She couldn't get hold of him on his far island, but Shamaness Susamee promised to pass on, what was transmitted to her, although she didn't quite understand neither the importance nor the relevance at all.

Arundle had her doubts. Not because Susamee was of advanced age, but of her limited mind. However in this case, she seemed to have passed on all information properly, because Arundle found Tibor right at the copter-terminal, when she flew in from Sydney with Sam Smiley and Mynona Wilder on board, who hurried on and just caught the vessel. As they didn't want to have their journey spoilt. The Grand School Assembly met nevertheless, which had been arranged.

Arundle felt reminded of herself and Billy-Joe when they became aware and were chosen, likewise. Both had had little or no family-ties. So she concluded that the two Idahoians would as easily be convinced of the advantages of the School of Inbetween as they had then been.

A last hurdle, many of the members of the conference believed to know, would be the Dean of the Sublimations, the aged and meanwhile grey Moshus Mogoleya. While he became more relaxed and less eager and self-opiniated, as he used to be. It was his faculty the two would have to join, as positively green as they were.

A change of generations might as well be wishful and necessary here, while the Head-Mistress and her deputy were already on the verge of resigning from active services. As well as Scholasticus and Grisella, who intended also to reduce their lot, or even give up their commitments in the School of Inbetween for good., and concentrate on the adjacent University.

As Dean in substitution of Mogoleya, Tibor would very well suit. He would be the ideal candidate. The more so as he by now had enscribed for the Doctor's degree, since Shamaness Susamee

definitely preferred Tika as replacement or deputy. Susamee left no doubts about that. But why could there be only one Shamaness on the island? This couldn't be made clear to Tibor. This seemed to be a primitive idea to him, and reminded him on the Showdown of a Western movie of the fifties.

For no detective reason Susamee seemed to be certain that there was not space enough for two youngsters in her vicinity. As if they would steal from each other the butter on the bread, so to speak. Tika tried to explain it for him. She spoke about spirits and ancestors, from whom you got notice of that kind. But Tibor didn't really believe her this time, while he eventually believed almost everything she said. While the explanation this time sounded like dictated by Susamee and learnt by heart.

Moshus Mogolaya didn't resist, and didn't stick to the Dean's chair. A little more time for his own studies was exactly what he was looking for, so it was heard from him. – Tibor wondered how they all had misunderstood the old miser.

Since there was the University, the faculties of the School on Inbetween disgraced themselves to a certain degree. And as his faculty swaggered along and no great jumps could be seen ahead, he thought that the time had come for him to change into a University career. While it might be a little late for him, as well.

The director signalled 'green light', as Scholasticus put it with a mild smile, because Moshus Mogoleya's Somnions green tickled him in the nose. There surely was a field of action, where Moshus could do some good and only little harm. The dwarves might be willing to become trained the green way. By nature they were very alike, to a certain extend.

**

“Would you be prepared, and would you agree to take responsibility?” – Marsha Wiggles-Humperdijk interrogated Arundle. She meant to say, whether they were prepared to manage the school alone. Arundle agreed after a quick glance over to Billy-Joe who would of course be in the boat, while they soon would be three. But that would be no hurdle for her, nor for him. The real question was, if they could imagine and accept the life-long outlook on the life of a school-director's couple, because this would then be their appointed lot.

27. The Giant-Moth

With all those changes around her, Penelope M'gamba felt suddenly alone. While the Convertors orientated themselves more and more over to Susamee's island, she asked Tika as well, if she was willing to become Dean of the Convertors, as well.

"It's no hell of a job – it's more the title, otherwise there isn't much change." – she tempted. She had in mind, that it might be of advantage when the connections between the islands became more intense, which was realizable, thanks to the Last Bounty, anyway.

Tika, however, refused. Tibor had just been promoted, so such a commitment would be too much for her, for the time being.

"Perhaps next year", she said. In any case, she had to think about it, and had to have a word with Tibor and Susamee. She most shyed away from those neverending conferences, and the necessity of speaking in public. On the other hand she felt of course pampered by Penelope's offer. After all the set-backs, she would at last be set on the same level as Arundle.

She would be the Mistress and Shamaness of her own island, because Susamee decided "to hand over and pass on the spoon", as she put it, when she learnt of all the changes in due course on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth. Perhaps the additional task might be too much for her anyway, Tika reckoned.

"Pass on the spoon. – you name it, how dared she?" Tibor commented Susamee's intention. He had served a couple of years under the dominant woman, and knew, what he was talking about. His new job he would keep in any case, not matter whether this meant to spend a lot of time on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Things weren't all that clear between Tika and Tibor. Because Tika raised that existential question again and forced him to decide one way or the other. While she had to make up her mind, and couldn't do. Would she decide in favour of the Dean's profession, she would also be obliged to spend part of her time on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

The dwarves would manage without surface guards. and there were still the Hennes and Susamee and Watchman Will Weesle, after all. While Susamee had no intention to move. In fact she wanted to please Tika with her offer. She couldn't move because of Watchman

Will Weesle. Not now, when he finally managed to get rid of a competitor, while not by his own force.

When Will heard that Susamee wished to give the spoon up, he misunderstood the saying and was so deeply hit and moved to tears, that he had to be put to bed, where he lay for hours in a darkened room, sobbing and moaning heartbreakingly. While Susamee had picked up the saying somewhere, and didn't recall the context or the grave adjacent note.

In fact, she didn't want to live forever, so that was clear to her, but she couldn't tell Will, who was so much younger, and feared the outlook of being left alone. That was why the presence of Hans Henny Henne troubled him in another way. Henne reminded him of Susamee's mortality. Which was, of course, paradox, as Hans Henny Henne was technically seen, the most advanced product of the everlasting faction. His annual check-up, when all the spareparts were checked, or replaced as necessary, guaranteed a never-ending outlook.

Susamee, on the other hand, was proud of being all genuine and natural "besides a little lifting here and there" she admitted with a twinkle – "and that, I've done myself."

Besides she was cycling as well with that newtype of SLOMES, as everybody did. The idea had come from Watchman Will Weesle. "Why not combine the necessary with the comfortable" he said to himself and added pedals to the island-owned SLOMES. That way everybody could do something for feet and legs while having a meditative sitting in order to prolong and refresh brain and soul.

Others copied his idea, and soon everybody cycled. So Hans Henny Henne, the eager inventor wondered whether so much energy should be wasted. Therefore he invented a warm-water-system which could be plugged in. He couldn't stay away from such tinkery.

When Captain Leblanc told his colleagues on board of the Last Bounty of this development ashore, Stan, the engineer, thought that a great idea, while pedalling was already common on board as well. He however thought of a far better system by connecting the pedallers with the freshwater production device.

That was very effective, and passengers learnt that way, to use only the amount of fresh water for showering they before produced.

**

Sam and Tibor communicated right away on the same wavelength. And Mynona also felt at home at once on Susamee's island.

She liked little children and little Emasus was happy about the new playmate. Tibor taught the pair the secrets of their art, they were gifted with, without noticing. In a crash course they acquired the tricks, you had to know, in order to cope with the moody winds and make them servants.

Emasus had inherited his father's talent, and made him so proud. The little boy danced with the wind even before he was able to walk properly. So his mother didn't want to stay back, although she insisted that she lacked any talent in this respect, what so ever. But perhaps she was afraid of losing her conversability, when switching the colours.

Maynona and Sam were accepted wholeheartedly in the communion of the School of Inbetween. In fact, they were sooner in as they realized, while Tibor was their Dean.

The former Dean, Moschus Mogoleya, had resigned at last, "for health reasons", so it was officially said. The self-induced horse-headed violin played a heart-breaking farewell in the light of the full moon. The magic bow cared for the military aspects of the grand tattoo, and had invited martially looking warriors on a virtual base from ancient Rome, or was it Atlantis?

Moschus Mogoleya sobbed like an abandoned dog, chained to a castle's gateway. And did that for the first time. He would have loved to repeat the ceremony, and have a second farewell. "Yes, we must repeat that" he said again and again with a breaking voice, and tears sprang again out of his eyes.

The invention party of the new Dean – on the other hand - turned out to be celebrated kind of meager. But that was the way Tibor wanted it, who was now grown up and had left behind all those little childish humbugs ever since.

He just formed a green circle with Mynona and Sam around little Emasus, who climbed up into the air in his mother's arms, as if both were drawn up by a miraculous hand.

The violin to have been playing, he reckoned rather unsuitable, however. While he was not in the mood. And waiting for the full moon, was no option either, for other reasons. Besides, he took care of his faculty anyway already, since Moschus Mogoleya had abandoned and ruined it, at best he could, as had shamefully be admitted.

Since their generation left a good while ago, nothing had been done, new talents were out of range. With the help of Mynona and Sam Tibor hoped for fresh winds blowing, and have the forlorn flock of Sublimations aired and spirited.

You could see already how well the newcomers did, when they joined the circle and lifted it up to incredible heights, instead of the timid jumps the group performed, when left on their own.

So Tibor was diving already deep into loads of work as the new Dean, and had no air of feasting what so ever – not yet.

While he was still self-righteous, he was meanwhile able to see things in a more objective light, and sought for true justice, he was all in favour ever since.

**

Tika also took over the second problematic faculty, after hesitating for a good while. The Convertors weren't in good shape either, which also had to do with the previous Dean. Since Penelope M'gamba got stuck so miserably as a castaway, she was not the same anymore, and couldn't converse as properly, as before. At least she didn't show any intention. The wound was sitting too deep. Besides, she came into the years, and therefore it might be just natural, that hormones turned tipsy-tosy.

It was high time to give her stool free, and so Tika was grateful, who finally turned in, and accepted the generous offer. Penelope promised a soft turn-over. If Tika wanted it, she would keep an eye on the awful parts of the task.

"It's all about field-research", she explained. "I am not myself anymore, and that is noticed by the students. I think, they have a right for a full teacher, and that I am not any more – no, no, no objections, I know my limit, - and it's been reached for a good while, I'm afraid..."

Tika didn't know where to look. She had no objections, and didn't want to be impolite, so she uttered a few lame compliments.

Penelope deeply sighed.

**

Conversion was also a question of the proper drugs, Tika knew by experience. Many problems only occurred, when bad mistakes were made. And that happened to all beginners. Therefore, her training with Shamaness Susamee had been the right education for her new position as a Dean of the Convertors. Like Penelope M'gamba, who came here to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth filled with a great treasure of herbes and totems out of the deepest heart of Africa, so she also had something to offer. And that hopefully turned out to be of as great a value as the former Dean's knowledge.

The worst mistakes occurred already when looking for the right Totem-animal. This is how it started, and then aches were unavoidable. Because where-ever there were hidden obstacles, or only faint traces of aversions, the self turned into a wrong imago. Probably only mistaken by a tiny bit, perhaps a likeliness to be hardly noticed, but that could be already enough, to commence a tragic fate, that could later hardly be altered.

Hadn't she learnt it from her own brother so drastically, she would have reckoned it as envious twitter, that inflamed again and again, whether this all could really be. While it never became clear, what really was happening then.

Conversion is but a mere word, but what is it? How real is, what happens?

Was, what could be seen from outside, real? Could it be, that cells and bodyparts became sorted anew again? Or became something visible, that was always there, but was hidden and covered?

The secret of the Conversion, that Tika knew for sure, and better than many of her mates, hadn't yet unveiled for nobody.

As the soul erects from the liveless body of an Animator, the Imago of a Totem-animal could as well erect from the body of a human, that is – a Converter. No matter what it then looks like.

But who pays attention to what stays behind a wolf, when he erects and stands up in wrath, and spreads nameless terror, and unspeakable fear? –

The twilight is doing the rest, and dawn throws a cloak of desparation over the scene. Such conversions never occur in daytime, of course not! Only the silvery light of the full moon teases the creatures of the darkness off the human remains.

Well, Tika was in due course of founding a brand new theory of the Convertors. Not even Susamee was in the boat yet, while she knew most. And she knew of course, that she wasn't burnt monthly alive, to raise off the flames as Phoenix.

“What steps out of us, is inside of us” – was the basic rule, Tika set up. “You must see it as characteristics. Nobody is always angry, while still impetuosity is lurking inside of us, ready to break out and overwhelm the whole being, if you let go or can't hinder.”

With such queer sayings the new Dean of the Convertors explained her view of the world “out of the perspective of a Converter” – so she put it.

“And what substance does such an Imago consists of?” one of the clever pupils wanted to know, who was sucking each word from the lips of her adored idol.

“What do we exist of, all who are sitting right here, and we, who people our dreams at night or swagger through the worlds, if we employ the gift?” – Tika asked back. She also didn’t know the answer. But one thing she knew: Who ever hurt the Imago, hit the human body likewise. This was what she experienced the hard way.

Unfortunately Penelope M’gamba neglected to reflect the Conversiors’ faculty in theory as well. Viewed by objective eyes from outside, she had been hardly more but an administrator, who took care that things went smoothly each month, and that there was space enough for all. The latter had been mainly her personal problem, as she knew what it meant to lack of space, conversing into a griffin. In fact each Dean set her own priorities.

**

One of Tika’s most clever students was in many ways remarkable. There was her Totem animal first of all, that wasn’t a real animal. Well, not in the sense of moving on its own behalf. It was short-living and didn’t last longer but a moon-phase each month, quite likely to Susamee’s Phoenix, that had to become reborn anew as well.

“My body seems to be kind of intermittent host”, the clever girl concluded consequently. Before the giant moth rose, a caterpillar had to hide and transform into an awful looking huge cocoon, that lasted for almost a day of the precious time unmovable, while a gigantic moth took off the second day. That moth then could of course move – by gosh, you wouldn’t believe!

Almost bat-like it hushed about the darkest corners and caves, while the plain moonlight was already too much for it.

So by Nelaza, so the student was called, Tika became aware of the true secret of the Conversiors. While Susamee had made her think already, Nelaza rounded the picture up now. In her case a visible body remained back on earth, when the moth took off, there was no doubt about it. You could see the interrelation as clear as daylight, that had to be in range with that Phoenix already, but by far, less obvious.

At best Tika would have liked to check the vulnerability, but she didn’t dare. How could she think such an awful thought? Things were all too obvious right away. There was no need for testing again, what she had experienced on her own body. Those who did harm to the moth, would also harm Nelaza, i.e. the human body the moth sprang off. For Tika that was so clear as had been the silvery moonlight when that arrow hit her, long time ago.

**

Nelaza was kind of special in many ways, not only as a giant moth. And Tika was all too glad to have met her.

Nelaza helped her with a revolutionary view on things. The phenomenon of Conversion had to be seen in a totally different light.

When the Emeritus Scholustikus Slyboots learnt of the new Convertors Dean's theory he was kind of electrified. He rushed to his former assistant Peter Adams, who was an aged Professor himself meanwhile as well. Peter Adams was alerted by the news and forwarded the information to his wife, a specialist of Nanotechnology and responsible for the basic SLOMES-technology.

Tika's Convertors Theory, (or should it be called just a hypothesis up to now?!) alarmed and alerted them all, because it seemed to fit perfectly into Judith's studies, i.e. to the most stunning aspect therein.

While in the case in question, no Nano-bits, but converting beings were concerned. Stunning as to Judith was the fact, that some Nano-bits and certain beings behaved by the same pattern, and followed the same procedures. Tika's discovery seemed to have the quality of a real sensation.

So far only Nano-bits were able to show up at different sites at the same time, but could never be localized or watched together. Harm, done to one of the two Nano-bits, also occurred to the other, no matter how far away.

Up to now, the strict separation of the Nano-universe and the physical world had been accepted so far. The barrier still stood. No-one ever managed to break through so far. But with Tika's interpretation of the Convertors conversion, the barrier was blown. There was no distinction any more between the world around us, and the micro-cosmos with its special and so stunning laws, or should they better be called phenomenons?

Of course many questions arose. The first and most stunning was perhaps, what substance it was, that erected from the human remains in the procedure of conversion?

"Have we to do with matter at all?" Judith addressed to the Council of the Menora, while reporting of her latest discernments. And so the women learnt what was known so far of Nelaza, the giant moth and the Convertor's Theory by the new Convertors' Dean. A complex matter, sure enough.

Dorothea was of course alerted by that giant moth, she had so much trouble with, and wanted to know if the moth was really the same. Had poor Nelaza been the moth they had been chasing, and almost killed?

After the rehabilitation of Luther Lommel all were convinced of his innocence and consequently focused on the moth instead, suspecting it to be the mole and culprit, responsible for all kinds of malfunctions, terrorist attacks and awful deeds, none the least of which were the fake reportings in the papers around the world, meant to ruin the good name of the school.

Seen from a distance, such a suspicion seemed somewhat strange, while the Councilloresses wholeheartedly had agreed. All the more as Baranasias was suspected to be a kind of Converter too. Even the Advisor didn't comment here, who generally didn't hold back with irony and doubts.

28. The Uncertainty Principle (as Miracle)

Arundle was deeply shocked in the aftermath. Shouldn't she have reminded back, for good reasons? She had then been blamed of the attack on Tika. And still felt guilty, although she was as innocent as her baby 'in spe'.

"Why for God's sake, didn't you warn us, because of the moth?" she exclaimed upset.

But Tika didn't feel guilty -- in no way. She belonged to the Council of the Menora officially, but hadn't participated so far. That was why she didn't experience the fuss about the moth, while being on Susamee's island so far away. At that time she didn't bother about the faculty, she now became responsible for. That was the wind of change.

"So far, thing went alright" she tried to calm down Arundle, who shouldn't become upset because of her baby 'in spe'. "We don't even know by now, whether Nelaza and the moth at that time were identical. Perhaps there were other moths before her. On the other hand – the time would fit. I looked into the record. Nelaza had been at the school then, that can be proved."

"We do not understand our little Nano-world as yet at all. And instead of getting forward and escape from the field of casualness and

probability, we meet the same phenomenon in our reality as well, and now even want to tackle.”

“If its really the same”, Grisella commented Arundle’s interjection. Grisella had no idea of the nano bits and pieces, but she believed in her brother-in-law, who referred to Einstein, who never gave up his disbelief about the strange behaviour of the nano-bits. “If he doubted, we should do likewise”, Scholasticus would have grumbled, if he had been present.

Grisella forewarded his injection unquestioned and brought Judith into trouble. How should she now present the whole theory of the SLOMES or give at least a quick glimpse inside? - “For the time being, I can only say that: Facts speak their own language, and don’t care about the doubts of Professor Einstein. The reason why the SLOMES work, is based on that Uncertainty Principle. What we call uncertainty, the **Either Or** referring to the locus - or to the time-definiton, is our source. The gain of time stems thereof.”

“...and if we translate this for the Conversiors, we are exactly where I want us to settle in transition. I and my Imago can either **BE** at the **same time** or **appear** at the **same place**. But never both. My **Self** is either present as my **I**, or as my Totem animal. Because we both are corresponding entities”, did Tika pick up the thread. Excited as she was, she had almost forgotten about the moth in danger, which wasn’t hurt after all, while certainly endangered once in a while, and here and then.

“Yes, at the same time we only appear at entirely different sites. When you see the one form, then the other form is elsewhere and cannot be seen here.”

“Or one after the other. First you’ll be seen, and then the Imago of your Totem animal, and then again you, and you are still you, and only you. – Yes, from such a perspective it makes sense”, Arundle nodded and Tika was glad that they agreed. The opinion of the compeditor of long ago days still bothered her, perhaps more then ever.

“And the Sublimation follows the same principal?! Is that what you mean?” she added. Tika wanted to know it really.

The women in the Council of the Menora gazed stunned at each other. This interjection didn’t make sense at all, came to their mind. So they didn’t comment but thought things over, and Arundle was first with a preliminary suggestion. “The circle of the dancers was to be seen in an instant, but in the next disappeared and flew as a green whirlwind high up in the air. Well, you believed to see it there as you could hear the screams of joy out of familiar throats, so you had to

believe they were the same as they used to be on the ground a second ago.

So, the same phenomenon appeared right here, as noticed in conversion. It was impossible to see the dancers on the ground, and the whirlwind high up in middle of the air, at the same time.” And this was what she told her mates then, and surely convinced them.

The Advisoress also agreed and uttered this by a discrete but soundless clapping of her substanceless hands. She still didn't say anything, but looked positively amused. While the magic bow and the magical stone hollered and screamed like madmen, almost obscene, as if they had forgotten where they were.

As a matter of fact, they were accepted only with patience and snare, so to speak as the borderline hybrids they were, just like the Advisoress, who was demonstrating that she also was subsumed under the same law and principle. Beside the fact that she could appear either the male or the female image, but never both at the same time.

Those were indeed a lot of hints, more than most could stand, because what opened up here, exceeded the capacity of the common sense. Such you could accept, and that was it, or you hid behind Einstein and denied with him God's capacity for gambling. (“God doesn't gamble” – so goes Einstein's verdict.)

The magical stone and the magic bow shared the same opinion. Their little demonstration of agreement might suffice, so they hoped. However in vain, while the Counciloresses were thinking of a way of getting rid of the misfits, and have them reduced to their basic gender, they here just represented in such an awful manner, and then have them consequently dismissed.

That could however not be done without the two, who were quite well able to read thoughts. So the women gave up: They didn't see a likely chance of proceeding, so they closed the meeting and decided to meet again at a later date. The stars might show then a better constellation, when the moon was rounding and the Convertors were on their way. But they proceeded without having reckoned with their host, (in this case with their male-suspected magic guests).

‘How people resist, how they stick to their little secrets and wonders’ the magic blokes let the women of the Council know instead. ‘They do not want to lose, as if they found the highest joys of the heart therein. Instead of being pleased by the discernment, they moan, and instead of rejoicing, they sob, and instead of marvelling,

they close up. What a peculiar form of being humans are!’ the two magic fellows agreed with unspoken words.

There was however no alternative, they both knew all too well. The dwarves were no alternative “Definitely not” the magic stone ascertained, who should know, because he also came out of the depth of the earth.

“It’s that way” the magical stone went on “if someone knows how a the piano works, he cannot play the piano. He can only do so, after having trained a long time. And a master he most likely never become, if he isn’t talented or if he lacks motivation and endurance or fun.”

“Or everything... Not anybody can learn everything, what can be learnt. And sometimes it is so hard to be learnt, that only gifted can – that’s the way it is, after all...” the magic bow agreed.

Again the Advisoress showed agreeance the same way as before, and the Counciloresses gazed at each other stunned and bewildered.

What the magical fellows had wanted to let them know, had nothing to do with the reaction they emitted. The women felt somewhat stripped, and the Advisoress seemed to be on their side as well.

Frankness is not really an option of women’s circles, or was this an unfit generalisation already? Arundle didn’t think this to be quite likely but even desirable, while interfering with the sharpness of the bright brain. But she didn’t dare for peace’s sake, and not to offend the harmony-minded assembly and their reaction on the behaviour of the two hermaphrodites, who could only keep up, because they hung between the genders. A woman couldn’t have dared – no way. Not if she wanted to remain in the group.

How valuable had the group become for all of them, why should they dare to risk it? The expectations were so high. So much they had as yet achieved and so much still to overcome.

The little crisis they were just in, offered a chance to reflect again, if men were really unwanted, if men were really only part of the problem. Had the world become wiser, or smarter or better under the supervision of women? Had it become better since women overtook the responsibility for the future? And what was the Advisoress’s part?

They knew by now about the secrets of the Convertors and the Sublimators, at least they had found some kind of a trace, by spotting the origin in the nanoverse. The transfer from there to the real material world was to a certain extent the achievement of the Council, but had probably little to say. The time was ripe for such enlightenment. Soon

it would become common sense, like before the wonderworld, and stunned would only be, who had no idea what so ever.

No-one dared to bother the Convertors with rationalizing their gift, lest the Sublimations – about whom all kinds of explanations circled. There were mainly two contradicting ones. On the one hand there was the classical aerodynamic interpretation. Rotation generates uplift by thickening below and by thinning above the green whirl. That was a clear and clean fact. The only thing was, it didn't work. Such a thickening couldn't be proved, not with the available forces in reference to the lift-off weight. The weight was too heavy, and the mechanical forces far too low, the wheelers could achieve.

The second, the electromagnetic theory, had trouble in explaining the generation of the field. After all the gravitation had to become topped locally for a short time. And this was when this interpretation got stuck. Sure enough you could produce strong fields, but they caused an entirely different behaviour of the objects, then could be observed by the dancers with the winds.

Compared with the two modes of interpretation, the virtual imagination-thesis sounded by far more elegant and sound. While nobody could explain, why so many billion nano-bits were caused to behave identical, and became open to a will, that came from the dancers. And this will had to be so strong, that it could with-stand in the thin zones of probability, which was very unlikely, statistically seen.

Diffusions there were many. How could they then crash over the sea? Arundle asked herself, while reckoning in the circle of the Menora the pros and cons. How could that happen, while their body lay fixed to the ground, if you followed the new theory? – The corpses drowned and were reanimated, and not some fancy imagos.

Alas, what ever happened to the Imago, also happens to the body, didn't it? Whenever the Imago crashed into the sea, the body did alike, but set apart for a second! In the moment of death both would come together again.

The theory of probability wasn't able to give an answer. In other words, no matter which side you harmed, the corresponding equivalent suffered just the same. In that, Convertors and Sublimations were exactly equal and identical, seen in the light of the theory, which intended to explain the miracle, in order to unveil the mystery, and take it no longer for granted. Because miracles are only those phenomenons of reality you have no explanation for.

At that state of reckoning the Counciloresses of the Menora brought the momentum of talent into their reflexions, in order not to

strand in mere positivism. By means of which they wanted to tackle the criteria of repeatability, the final true measure of any sound theory. Thus, they escaped the trap, and assured themselves, that there had to be a loophole for the gifted. Despite the fact, that theoretical discernments had to be objectively valid in general, certain predispositions had to be excluded from the mainstream.

The main obstacle was the proportion. Out of approximately 10 billion individuals, who peopled the world, only some hundreds were gifted in the way of the Convertors and Sublimations. That was but one of the criteria which had to be taken for granted. Before any experiment would be going to work, the candidates had to be found, and that was of course already a kind of miracle, that lacked of objectivable data. Only a trained scout and adept of the other way of seeing, had a little chance.

Spotting the candidates was in fact a hell of a job, and sorting out the cheaters as well. When the first step was successfully made, the talent was then only recognized. It had then to be developed. And not all candidates succeeded, not all achieved the goal, be it the green whirlwind, or the moon-sick totem-animal. Mainly the latter was never seen in public, but was hiding at forlorn sites, and was then picked up after re-conversion, four days later, back in their human fashion. While green whirlwinds weren't seen at all, or if they were seen, the seers either didn't believe their eyes, or took it for the reflexion of a forrest, or a fata morgana.

The talents mentioned here could well be also compared with singular pieces of art. No one except the author is able to produce a certain poem. The same applies for painters or composers. Artists don't fulfill inexplicable deeds. If you don't call a piece of art inexplicable, because it was produced by a genius. The same applies to the Convertor's produce or the faint image of a green whirlwind.

"Enlighting fire with a pointed stick, appears miraculous to contemporaries, because we surely wouldn't succeed. Still this way of lighting a fire was one of the first inventions of the early mankind. If someone sets his feet right and employs the help of an air-cushion, or when he enters the Nanoverse willingly, and make himself known, then..."

"...you mean" - the magical stone interrupted the interpretation of the magic bow - "you mean, that's on the same level?"

"Well, yes, it's miraculous enough, in any case. Nobody would be able to do that. At least I don't know anybody" - the magic bow added, and Arundle nodded, although she was only half convinced.

She wasn't certain whether the bow was fibbing a little. He certainly knew more than he admitted here right now. "He could have helped me with that, a little earlier" she thought and felt him realize what she was thinking.

"Nobody asked me" the bow bluffed back and Arundle meant to feel him laughing suppressedly. However she could be wrong. Humour was not his favourite cup of tea. But she suppressed, what she was due to think at best she could. Running into an argument with him was the least she intended. Since she was sitting in the Council of the Menora, their relation was not the best, anyway. The stressing of the female part of man annoyed and obstructed his tender senses.

He didn't feel very male, as a matter of fact, he didn't feel very genderly after all. "Genderisation is in any case a limitation" so they had agreed – he and the magical stone. With genderisation he meant to put a finger into an open wound, blaming sex as the cause of the character.

The reason why the two endured the situation was that they thought it as a phase of a development, which would soon go by, leaving nothing enduring behind. While some of the ladies might awake out of their Sleeping-Beauty-slumber, and take things into own hands, instead of hiding behind male activity. And have men work for them. Especially where risky acting was required.

The two should have listened to themselves for once! Like boom companions they hollered along again. For months they had held back their anger, they had to endure for their male parts. While the Advisoress only dared to talk in a soft and tender tune, and soon couldn't do other any more, as if her vocal chords were frozen, or overflowed and powdered by female moisture.

Such resentments couldn't be ignored by the Advisoress. But she stressed on the successes in general and the success in the Nano research in specific.

"Still, his Eminence Hans Henny Henne is however the inventor of the SLOMES", the magic bow argued. They wouldn't give in so easily.

He didn't mind such details, but the exaggeration when it came to the conclusions. While in a male dominated world female inputs were very necessary, although they almost always were ignored, he saw the pendulum now turning the other way. And as the time became short, he didn't see a point in an overboarding single trip.

"Such fuss we can't stand" the magical stone agreed. "Without Billy-Joe, Arundle is rather helpless. What a pity she doesn't realize by herself..."

“The moth does, what it wants to do with them” – the magic bow added in a humourous air.

“While this goes on Tika’s account. Arundle has nothing to do with it...” Pooty put in.

“She has other problems, that’s true. But problems she has, and quite a few.” – all talked at the same time, which caused the Advisoress to faint, and was soon gone at all.

Was that the end of the intergalactic Council of the Menora? – Wait and see. Never blame any being for what it is. You won’t cause a change.

Nelaza would be questioned thoroughly, there was no doubt about. No matter how valuable she had been for the research-process. As the giant moth, she was suspected to be the mole. Despite the probability that there was another moth under way. But that was only a further assumption.

29. Malicious Marduk’s Exposure

Wherefrom came the idea, that Baranasias had changed into a moth, or a cocoon or a caterpillar, being smuggled in that way, inside the luggage of one of those filthy reporters?

By such means Malicious Marduk found back into the game, as per Arundle, who was quick at hand, when Malicious Marduk had to be localized. The long phase of tranquility arose her suspicion all the more. While his final defeat would occur only in the twentysecond century. If it was true, what the adventurers were going to face. While this faded in the mist of uncertainty, behind which the true future was hiding again. From the future you would hardly get other but graduated probability.

What ever they had experienced then, was it really the future, and was there **one** future at all? Seen from the latest discernments of science, this could well be doubted. But there were probabilities, and they shouldn’t be ignored. Because they had a lot to say about the fan of possibilities that opened up and became somewhat real that way. Whether all of them had been properly spotted, whether they fitted into the proper proportions, was another question.

For the time being there was no certainty with reference to Malicious Marduk, and of course no permanent victory. Malicious

Marduk might have had to stand many set-backs, his concepts might as well have failed, his creatures were disguised, or had finally separated from him under the pressure of truth – however, as far as he was concerned, he had not been reached.

While the good side had been able to score considerably. The defense stood well, and the invasion of the dark powers seemed to be almost unlikely. Still, the suspicion couldn't be ignored, that Malicious Marduk had found another loophole to sneak in. There were definite hints of the kind. A Trojan seemed to hide in camouflage right in the middle of the heart of the double-island.

“How nice it is that no one knows,
what gear I wear, what mask I chose...”

the Trojan hummed, whenever he felt unobserved, and that wasn't seldom at all.

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Mynona and Sam didn't like the idea of becoming separated. They protested. It was however common in the School of Inbetween to separate boys and girls. Most of them liked it that way. While standards remained the same as elsewhere in comparison.

The new Headmistress on the other hand knew by experience that youngsters shouldn't be treated all alike.

Her deputy was against an exception. although he never resided in one of those dormitories himself, but spent the nights in the open under the wide sky, to look for shelter only in heavy rain or bitter coldness. But he never favoured the idea of living together with Arundle. That came much later, when they were on the verge of leaving.

“Things are rather different with Mynona and Sam, you can't compare” Arundle objected. “You can't compare yourself with Sam. Do you think he would be willing to stay in the open at night like you? – Besides, they have a totally different motivation. I think we are not entitled to judge over them. They came here together, so we better let them stay together.”

“Let's ask Tibor then, let him decide” – Billy-Joe wanted to get rid of the responsibility. “After all, he is their Dean. Besides, it won't be wise to produce a case of precedence right now. We might as well ask Dorothea about her opinion, because she has the most experience with parents and sponsors.”

While asking the Humperdijks' for advice didn't come to their minds, although somewhat logical. Billy-Joe was already happy that

Tibor had come to his mind. While Arundle had touched an old scar by referring to his own strange habits. He still couldn't even imagine to dwell in such a dormitory, which reminded him on the horrible time in the Mission-School, when conservative religious hardliners tried to teach the little ones the advantages of what they reckoned to be Christian civilisation. Tika had suffered even more and longer under the bigoted regiment of the nuns, while he had then been able to achieve decisive impulses by the clan.

Such early experience stamped an individual life-long. No matter what later came. Such an experience you would never get rid of. You couldn't shake off or wash away, but follow you where-ever you go, like an invisible tattoo on the surface of the soul.

The deepest longing stem from there, and wouldn't stop winding, be the lost ever so far away, and unreachable, you still knew it was there and was shining, no matter how distorted your self was.

Neither Billy-Joe nor his little sister Tika had an idea of the origin of such images. It could as well be the oceanic feeling said to hide in everyone, and the first great ache of being delivered. Billy-Joe referred to the clan-life, that had been stolen off him. While Tika had little to forward beside her Totem Animal. No wrong had existed before the mission, nothing comparable had bothered them – well – so far so good – t'was wishful thinking, after all.

They had been torn out of their habitual mode of being. Their childhood had been stolen from them. They were disrooted and replanted and stripped off their identity. And because this had happened to them, they had restored deep inside the memory of a precious treasure.

Sometimes Arundle envied Billy-Joe for that, what all had happened to him. While this treasure had piled up deep inside, nobody knew, not even she, because she had no access, and slowly began to realize of its existence.

Meanwhile she traced down such hints and approached areas which Maya showed her. Maya, so she called her unborn for the time being. She didn't know, and didn't want to know, whether girl or boy.

Arundle had no such background. Where Billy-Joe saw a shining light, she saw but darkness and shapeless emptiness, and grey nothingness. The inner garden of his equalled her inner emptiness. His garden had been stolen from him, again and again a hundred times – still the memory stuck inside, couldn't be eliminated, a piece of incomparable remembrance. No-one could ever take away.

After all, she realized something that seemed to have little to do with what they were just dealing, and that was the fundamental difference between the World Citizens and the Isolationists. The conflict had to do with such memories, or the lack of them, in case of the World Citizens. And that was quite an discernment, she reckoned. While she still wanted to donate peace and limit the conflict.

No matter how many failures and false judgements occurred from such Inner Garden, it still was a sound measure for what people were doing, not only for the Isolationists, but also for the World Citizens. The latter had to deal with the lack and the loss, and had to realize what was missing in their coming of age at a very early stage.

And even further Arundle kept on digging: By means of that deficit you might even find the cause for the Cardinal Mistake of mankind, that sneaked in somewhen in history, without being noticed, when or where. The Mistake was just there, undetectable and omnipresent.

And if was right what Arundle and the Counciloresses of the Menora had found out about the Cardinal Mistake, then it was the coincidence with the loss of the Inner Garden and the upcoming of the Cardinal Mistake. While the Inner Garden founded the identity of tribal cultures.

The Inner Garden circumscribed scarcely what was missing. Not all humans shared the emptiness, as far as extend and value was concerned, but was mostly pushed aside or didn't reach the conciousness. And such people would vehemently deny, that they were lacking a most precious part of being. But thought themselves as proper and well-built individuals, who lifted their head high, when comparing with the so-called primitives.

What was meant by the Inner Garden? It was the paradise, as it wavered through history of mankind ever since. This paradise could shine up where people had access or lived inside, and this was the privilege of the tribal kids. This was what they inhereted from their mothers, who didn't know otherwise. It wasn't a matter of doing right or wrong.

Sure enough, there were various temperaments, there were also regoinal differences and injections – not all paradises were equally paradisiac, quite the opposite. The fact of being bound inside was the main clue. That was what counted, and that was why such habitats could be regarded as paradises.

The mother held the keys to the paradise in hand. They unlocked the door, while the family and the clan soon intervened, as well as the animals. The latter even to a growing extend.

What was the paradise alike? It wasn't the idyll first of all, while it showed idyllic aspects. Often such paradises were devastated sites, where life had to be gained the hard way. but wasn't seen that way by the dwellers. Because love and joy of life came first – the gracious feast of life as a chain of immediate awareness and ecstatic moments of happiness.

Such might be said just like that, and a lot could be said against it. And viewed from the outside, you might never be able to understand why famine, cold and heat do not employ the existential value, they deserve. All the more if you take the stand of a World Citizen.

To be not misunderstood, we are not considering global strategies and challenges by the growing population, but bother about identity. We deal with the question, whether the beings are pushed into an inner hell and shapeless emptiness, by which their life becomes a curse, no matter how brilliant and rich it might appear outside.

**

The inner hell was Malicious Marduk's target. Therefore those tribal cultures annoyed him that much. And tackling them was his favourite, no matter how often he failed, while so many of these people were in command of the Inner Garden of love and joy of life.

But where-ever hell has won, Malicious Marduk is gaining allies and aides, he can employ for his targets. By doing so, he erases the last traces of the Inner Gardens in them, which might have hidden somewhere deep inside in the furthest corners of the soul. While man never gets totally rid of his becoming. No matter how arid and unfruitful the inner landscape may have become, from which his longings and hopes derive. In the driest desert you discover scarce leaves or a thistle of the burning thorn-bush in the Saviors presence.

And the scarceier the green is, the shinier it appears to the inner eye. That's the way of beauty: quick it blossoms in the fertile jungle. But doesn't fade in the desert, while it grows out of scarceness and blossoms out of nothing.

**

What about Baranasias? How could it happen, that the empty shape remained, while the cleared soul of Anonymous rose to heaven? If it was true that it worked that way.

Was it always so, that empty contaminated shells stayed behind, while cleared and cleansed Astral-bodies rose to heaven? – It has to be

so, Arundle reckoned. Otherwise she hadn't been able to fix the two parts of the former being of her father in one. While thinking over and sorting out the whereabouts of the human remains, she noticed for once the concurrence of that image to what was earlier found out about Sublimations and Conversions.

Did cleansed souls rise? Did the earthladen, death- and ache-contaminated shells remain like debris in the material mud? Did the Uncertainty Principle disturb the Imago? Or was nobody able to look so close any more, as if you had to do with a three-dimensional picture from the early days of photography, when you couldn't see clear without special glasses, that meant here 'the other way of seeing'?

Was Baranasias just a Miserior? And were all Miseriors left-behind empty shells of malice, in order not to disturb the ascension? Or even to hinder by the weight of hell?

It looked that way by now, while Arundle never thought about it that way. The hidden solution offered here, appeared to be absolutely elegant. Even a little too plain. Besides, the question of guiltiness became further transponded, while the battle between good and evil was no longer pending.

From this point of view it looked as if good beings were overwhelmed and raped against their will. No space was given the idea of seduction and the uniqueness of the soul.

'But it isn't that way, when we give way to the seducings of the devil' – came to Arundle's mind. 'We surrender with flying flags and hot longing. The protest keeps quiet and sinks into nil – keeps quiet and diminish behind the sweet teasing of the poison, that is spreading all about us to take us in, with skin and hair. Scrouples come up only when resistance rise, be it outside or inside, while frustration and disappointment are generating, because the promises became lame and weak. They never keep what they promise. And that might be the good in the evil. In fact, the evil proves to be weak and colourless and without genuine fulfillment after all. Because the evil doesn't know real happiness, that's the wrongdoer's dilemma.'

Wholly different was the situation on the other side. Only those who weren't willing or able to give, or saw no sense in sacrifice and devotion, were in trouble.

Those remained outside, and had to search for a door to get inside. Had the individual finally found such door, a process of change began and took up speed and power the further it went, while no frustration mingled and happiness guarded and guided and never fell asleep.

Was that so? Was there no triumph of evil? And was any triumph automatically followed by the feeling of happiness? - O no, bad characters were never happy, not really and truly happy. Somehow they also triumphed, but their triumph remained cold and gayless. And the stream of happiness passed without touching their souls. On the contrary, where you found the 'do-gooder' who was bathing in the plentitude of the truly sacred.

Was it possible that other conditions ruled on another level of the being, where the culprits, wrongdoers and seducers found a secret corner wherein such feelings survived even for them, while an object of a wholly different kind took the basis – a dog perhaps, or the beloved daughter, they knew to be loved by? Could they feel that love as well? Did it reach their rotten soul? Those are the questions of the big change already, and Anonymous had generated unforeseen answers.

Such a quantum of wrested happiness then settled in the throat like a hook, as hurtful, or even prolonging the ache right in the soul. Thus such happiness couldn't be called true happiness, but endured as a steady pain forth and forth.

30. Metamorphosis and Earthbound Fate

The scales fell from Arundle's eyes. All of a sudden she saw clear, saw with one glance, how things fitted together. She felt as if she was looking into another universe with own laws, while directly interfering into the affairs of the earth. However people didn't realize, because they were separated by an invisible barrier from that other reality – unable to recognise. And still feeling the influence from there. The influence was there, whether they realized or not.

Arundle now was on the verge to understand what the Advisoress wanted her to understand, by all those hidden hints – how moth and butterfly free themselves all over again and again. Seen under this aspect, she was certainly right. The close tidings on earth hindered such metamorphosis and the following ascention, and perhaps this was what she meant. Because the way the butterfly overcomes the state of the caterpillar, the cleansed human overcomes the earthen lot. And here the question arises, if or how the SLOMES - with all the accompanying circumstances - hinders the processes. A long-lasting

life, as promised by the SLOMES-advertising, may miss in the end what was meant, and might end up on the wrong side.

Arundle noticed the dilemma, that resulted here, while the aim was clear, something else was meant. She understood now the growing desparation of the Advisoress. With angels' tongues she had tried to transmit her truth.

All she found was misunderstanding among the Council of the Menora. No matter what she utterd about life, it was taken for granted, according to existing standards, which didn't care about angelic states. The more so when it meant to leave earth, as had been the case with Anonymous.

As a matter of fact, he hadn't been seen on earth ever since, anyway. Quite the opposite, what he had left behind, was irresponsible mean junk.

And what became known about his heavenly state didn't invite – even enthusiasts - as followers. So the Advisoress stood alone in the rain on vast grounds, so to speak; emitting the rumour of polluting the earthen lot, like former hermaphrodite Puh-Tse in far away Atlantis, sticking to the heel like sticky cold slime. And it was up to Arundle to hinder such opinion, and disgrace the Advisoress unnecessarily. While the latter only wanted to point out the marvalous opportunities, to be found on the road of overcoming the earthen heaviness.

She eventually wanted to assure the humans of a beautiful life in eternity. And she also wanted to hinder the sacrifice of the transcendent reality against the earthen one all too soon, or have it disappear out of sight. The one had nothing to do with the other. But that couldn't be transmitted even in the Council of the Menora under the existing circumstances.

All the more was the Advisoress pleased by Arundle, who had the nose up once more. – Well, with such a father – this was eventually no wonder.

Purification should become visible again. By all longing for an everlasting life, with all the accompanying circumstances, which became by now rather conciderably, purification fell short without doubt, the Advisoress objeced, and she knew what she was talking about.

“In former times, when people had almost no time to become grown up, things were different” – the Advisoress lectured, somewhat high-brow “then a SLOMES had been necessary, but now livingconditions weren't that way any more. Nowadays people live on for more then a hundred years, and therefore have all the time in the world to purify, and foreward the matter of mankind a little.

That is, what people want, no matter what they all have in mind all the time. Happy and satisfied with themselves they are, when they blink like pure silver” - thus ended the Advisoress.

“Exactly” Arundle agreed – “and because they do not succeed, they get angry. And that is because they don’t have time enough, their earthen life is far too short, and leaves no time for them to properly understand life.”

The Advisoress looked around examining the faces, the misunderstanding she noticed, and hurt her. She might go back to single talks. Alone with Arundle she had had the best experience, like now once more.

Only with Arundle she felt understood rightly. What she was saying in a general mode, Arundle backed up, and added depth in a very helpful manner.

Arundle pointed out that the bettering of the world, was not only faith, but was the result of hard work, the individuals had to absolve. “Many just have no ideas or the wrong ones. And that’s even worse, as if they had no ideas... We earthen worms aren’t the slyest after all. Beside the fact that we are weak and instable, and are seldom able to endure, even to the right cause. On the other hand we have love. Out of love we do a hell of a lot, for our little ones we go through fire, if it must be, no matter whether they deserve it. Because love never asks for merits.”

The Advisor nodded and wholeheartedly agreed while the Advisoress had disappeared during Arundle’s long speech. She had turned inside out, or outside in, depending on the point of view, and was now dwelling at a site far away, from where the Advisor had just returned. They behaved just like nano-bits.

Was that now the final end of the Council of the Menora? – Arundle asked herself. The Advisor nodded, as was his mode, when reading thoughts, even before they came to her mind. And sometimes she doubted, whether such thoughts really came to **her** mind at all.

“...at last with that kind of limitations – ...don’t make sense after all – ...we cannot stand those ideological fuss any more. Our time runs off. The exclusion of men might have been a signal for the softies among them, who knows?”

The Advisor didn’t sound convincing, when he said that. He knew the male part, after all. But Arundle listen only with half an ear anyway, the question of the target-land bound her attention. She was thinking, how the question of the target-land could be forwarded somewhat lively and agreeably.

While only the trial would become a dangerous act of balance on the blade of the sword, so to speak. The conditions of Atlantis stood clearly and threateningly before her inner eye.

The hysteric mass-movement for the negation of the earthen lot had become awful traces, and had resulted in the doom. While this couldn't be it. Only for that reason life on earth had to be seen as a self-centered valid form of being, and therefore a development, that had resulted in the invention of the SLOMES had been very helpful.

Was the pendulum in due course of turning the other way round again? Arundle meant to hear the voices again, which asked for a fast and collective departure from earth. The outlook of landing right in heaven was in fact seductive.

Under the surface of mankind a latent yearning for death was waiting to break out. That of course was in no way the Advisor's intention. He, as well, wasn't able to make clear the difference between his standing for the earthen purification and the glorification of the heavenly aim. Life wouldn't gain value, unless the people began to turn things upside down, and have heaven come down to earth.

Had Arundle only known by then how the Advisor felt. Did he know what danger he procured? But he didn't open up. She had no access to his inner world of thoughts.

"You may burn your fingers, dear child" he mentioned tenderly and fatherly, and Arundle felt quite young again. Had the cause not be so tricky, she would have insisted on clearance. However things didn't work that way.

"We must find a straight line" she demanded very decisively. "We certainly are not interested in conditions as had been in Atlantis. Mankind hasn't changed that much, and still cling to the damned affection for death."

"Life on earth is no fun, so the yearning for another and better life comes up just like that", the Advisor agreed. As if this was the most obvious matter in the world, and no reason for the greatest worries.

"We need a clear guideline. I think we should go on as follows" Arundle objected – "We neither touch the SLOMES programme, nor the new doctrine of prolonged life, but keep as flanking attempts taken up meanwhile. Access should become easier. The aim should be, to allow everybody to decide for a prolonged life in freedom. The advantage is right at hand, while genuine purification and the bettering of the world may follow – if at all – when opposing poles meet again ..."

The Advisor appreciated highly, what was said, and made that public by loud exclamations of agreement. Arundle blushed. She didn't exactly know why. Her idea was basically simple. Whoever lived long, understood life better. He learnt more and understood the interdependences better, and wasn't helplessly delivered to the circumstances of life. He discovered his forming possibilities, and was likely to try them out, and might even be successful. From such a person you could expect, that he was able to give his share and do his part in the bettering of the world, and find his place in the world, to master the tasks successfully, deriving from there.

Such a point of view didn't oppose the preparation for an eternal life. Rather quite the opposite. Such a position anticipated to a certain extent what was due to come over there, while there was a spiritual dimension already working, that was determining the earthly life already.

People were busy on several levels. Life on earth was a rather dark and blind groping, similar to the moles' state. Still it didn't mean that there were no moments of happiness. In fact, many such moments fitted well into any average life, while the promise of a complete happiness remained the carrot before the nose of the donkey. Great danger was threatening, as could be seen when cultures and civilisations fell in love with death, and were affected by such a collective 'amour fou' (i.e. crazy love), and have the thousands march jointly towards doom, like those disturbed little rat-like animals called Lemmings, when crashing together or one by one into an abyss, without obvious reason.

"Still, you even find a morbid quantum of happiness here by anticipating eternal joys or even participate already by means of the so-called 'unio mystica' (i.e. mystical communion with God) – which is by no means modest, but seems to have the temerity of the highest degree. Thus is the communion in which Adam allies in wholeness over all borders right here and now by mirroring mankind's destiny" – the Advisor commented somewhat complex and dark, although perhaps a little less frank and straight than Arundle, who felt a deep warmth inside, and well understood.

The magic bow was reminded of his mother-country and a tear rolled out of his red eye and dropped into Arundle's neck, before it ran hot and salty in her dress and over the shoulder, where it finally faded. And Arundle suddenly understood, what the magic bow meant to her and how much she owed him. Without him she would be in the same position as the other Councillors of the Menora.

The reason, why she saw further and understood more, was entirely up to him. She wasn't sure at all how important it would be to publish her discernments right here and now, and that the logic inherent would overcome the others, so that they couldn't do other, but agree.

Was it really so important to know the truth? Could you not strive for the truth with half of the whole knowledge? you needn't be all wrong at last. Why should the members all bother now because of that blooming striving for death, as was supposed to be hidden somewhere in mankind, but seemed to disappear behind the SLOMES these days anyway! The Advisor might be right somehow. The idea of purification could also be installed into the struggle for life on earth. While this was a struggle and not the solidary cooperation in favour of the common wealth. – Yes, that sounded much better!

“I think, we leave it like that, right here and now, I would suggest” Arundle suggested, because the disappearing of the Advosoress caused quite some irritation among the Councilloresses.

“It's almost like the cancellation of the celibacy” Grisella commented in a moody air. She asked herself whether she suffered, but couldn't find any ache. What were the others like? – There were no objections, so she agreed with Arundle. The Advisor faded and by that the whole matter seemed settled. The Council of the Menora had come to an end, after reaching their goals – well, after almost reaching the goals, while the big hopes somehow stranded.

Women didn't do so much better in saving the world. They also had big trouble in forcing reality to disguise the secrets of the future, and the proper conclusions.

Their circle had been no less limited, while perhaps somewhat opener and more willing at work. In the end, however, not much came out, and the question, who stood behind the moth had found but a one-dimensional answer. All the fuss had been perhaps unnecessary, while the trouble they caused had done quite some harm.

The hot tear of the magic bow burnt still on Arundle's skin, and dug a trace in her memory. She would certainly never ever agree on a suggestion, while being fashionably upholstered, flattering the ego.

No pregnancy could excuse. – She had also to beg Billy-Joe's pardon. She did it in thought, and hoped he would read in her mind, so there would be no further public excuse and argument necessary.

31. The Therapy

Lord, let me know my end,
 and what is the measure of my days;
 let me know how fleeting my life is!
 Behold, thou hast made my days a few handbreadths,
 and my lifetime is but nothing in thy sight.
 Surely every man stands as a mere breath!
 Surely man goes about as a shadow!
 Surely for naught are they in turmoil;
 man heaps up, and knows not who will gather!
 (Ps39, 4-6)

Well, the sense of life – what a question: ancient but always fresh again and rather like new. Most answers you can surely forget. What do people do over here in this beautiful world? Whyfore the whole?

“I’d rather be never born!” sound the tortured through the centuries in deepest desperation and greatest pain. No matter where the eyes of the historian fix. The phases of happiness are but mere tender stripes amidst black currents of agony and unlimited cruelty. The latter seemed hardest to believe.

Man does the most cruel things with man, but why must they generate fun thereof? Wouldn’t the deeds as such suffice? What’s the sense of the extra quantum? While the unavoidable is already more than enough.

No way – because there is that diabolical drive underneath or amidst the rational calculation of death. There is an extra-quantum of cruelty, self-sufficient and sweet in unwithstandable seduction.

‘Look at the kitten, how it plays with the life of the mouse. The way it’s reacting as quick as a thought, not the tiniest move overlooking, even before it was to be made, foreseeing the direction of the intended flight. Does it enjoy the pain of death, the horror of desperation? Or does it play with the mouse no other than with a ball of yarn, perhaps a little lustier because of the auto-life exposed? Would a mechanical mouse also do? Or does it need the smell of deadly pain, to tease the senses utmost?

And do modest humans not employ the same notion, while thoroughly covered by neat convention?

Who dares to answer here freely and convincingly? – nobody, who is honest, and reflected, though. He had to be a self-centered miser, who could withstand such notion.

Well, yes it’s got to be cleared away, while it’s not steadfast enough, and won’t pick up with the orgies of creativity, meaning so

much more, when unlocked. But that's the clou sooner or later. Be it, because the presumptions are missing, be it that the endurance is lacking, be it, because the surrounding doesn't comply.'

'However, is it true that people become cheated and stripped off their joy of life, and cannot hinder? Or is it, that they build a fantastic castle out of a pile of shit in the darkest corner of their prison or dungeon?'

'Happiness is the spark, which people beat out of nothing. Courage not always stands up, often enough it is low, and deeply faint-hearted, and the yearning for death reaches out for such self. While he still has the anchor at hand, the tiny straw, the aide in emergency.'

'Often enough, otherwise we wouldn't be as many as we meanwhile are, we are becoming more, if nothing interferes.'

'The satisfaction of needs is a weak expression for what keeps us alive, and demands us to stick to our lives, no matter how sour we feel. We are like gamblers, who feel lucky when the run of bad luck ends.'

'Or like a soldier, who feels deep genuine happiness about the tranquility during cease fire. Such happiness may seem to us poor or even ridiculous, but it is still there, and perhaps a deeper feeling than the poet's, when kissed by the Muse.'

'Yes, by the paradox, those fortune-hunters, who can't do otherwise, but strive for luck, would run empty permanently, while others tumble from one lucky strike to the next, while dealing carelessly with fortune. Because luck is no proper aim, but the circumstance of our acting and striving. Luck is the colour, that suits us, when on the winner's straight.'

'Not the unexpected luck is meant here, but the feeling, that comes up, when something turned out well, we were longing for desparately. Happiness is the fullfilled expectation, the solved hope and of course again and again love in all shades and modes. Love is without doubt the mother of happiness.'

' When happiness endures, and is but a quick appeal, flashing on like a sun-ray, then it's tightly bound to love. But thus only the few experience. In general love appears ficklely.'

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Luther Lommel could sing a song of luck. He knew the hasty sides of fortune, his Godess of adiction. Therefore he could frankly

admit, that he was no addict to the cards, while cards were only the means and vehicle he required to reach his goal – well, or not.

Striving for luck contained the unluck. While strands of luck and unluck interchanged. But Luther defined what side he was in at a time. And that might have been the tragedy of his life, that he believed in such strands. He believed so hard, that they then happened – the strands of unluck in any case, that were following any strand of luck, as sure as daylight. That was the law, as to Luther Lommel. A law, he wasn't destined to overcome, while remaining his defined target over the years.

Now, since all debts were quitted, and all obligations fulfilled, and the desperation had come to an end, he could feel boredom yawning him insolently into the face.

Luther Lommel sprang into his work – and in the beginning there was a lot of work to do. Soon his booth shone in perfect order. All updates had been incorporated. The manuals stood like puppet-soldiers lined up. The frequencies and nautical calculation charts hung orderly and readably where they should. The sender- and receivers blinked. What had to be movable, was movable, even the stool turned and rolls ran in soft protectors underneath.

The duty-free area was cleared likewise. Cigarette brands were lined up in alphabetical sequence on the shelves, just like the perfumes, lotions and cremes and other beauty utensils, as were bound for the beloved at home, or for a darling-to-be, somewhere in the world, as far as the sealords were concerned.

As a matter of fact the tourists bought most of it, as if the duty-free shop was the only place to buy thrilling gifts from afar. While they didn't look different than those ashore. With one little but obviously important difference -- the governmental revenue stamp was missing, which were in fact discretely fixed, as far as the beauty-staff was concerned, and was spotted only by eager customs officers, who loved to maltreat tourists, when they entered the homeland shore over the mini-gangway of the helicopter.

Luther Lommel usually forgot to prepare them with the necessary details and limits of immigration and transit regulations. While surely the heaviest smoker wouldn't smoke a full carton in three days, or drink two bottles of finest Scottish Malt. The trend had moved in the opposite direction, meanwhile, anyway. But such news hadn't reached Luther Lommel and yet the conservative behaviour common in duty-free trade.

Luther Lommel was bored never the less. Despite the workload or because of it. He missed the strands of luck very much, and even a

little the strands of unluck, which had been a sweet ache somehow. At least he felt in nostalgic radiance.

Luther Lommel shouldn't have risked an eye on the gambling saloons, but he did. He did it, and the more often he did, the hotter he felt the flame burning, until he couldn't resist any more. He tried with yoga and autogenic training, and asked for psychological advice, now that he realized that the addiction held him still with tight grip.

There were no trained psychologists on the islands, no practicing ones anyway, but Susamee felt competent enough. She said, she would be able to help, besides, she liked him, and that was probably the main reason. While she hoped to learn some tricks of him, as far as the cards were concerned. She liked a game here and there, but was upset when she lost.

That was, of course, a big mistake. You shouldn't seduce an alcoholic with the stalest beer. Luther Lommel was of course rather amused of this therapy, and showed Susamee everything he knew, and that was a lot. – Everything you could collect in thirty years of practising. You would be an idiot, if you didn't pick up a hell of a lot.

Instead of discustoming the addict, both gambled like mad-men and Susamee didn't notice how she was twisted around Luther's little finger, and snuggled into a dark bottomless moloch. Or did she leave him in this belief, and was two steps ahead all the time, as tricky as she was?

Luther Lommel took it as it came and was pleased about his discustoming. While he was also proud, that such an important personage could learn of him something, and be it only the card tricks and the adroitness of the gambler's fingers.

But what happened to the discustomisation? Luther Lommel asked himself if he hadn't been betrayed. His time was limited, because the therapy could only take place when the vessel stayed in the harbour. At sea he could not be replaced.

Therefore he began to inquire Susamee by asking for the progress he made. Yes, Luther was so upset about Susamee's therapy, that he didn't look into the saloon at all, no matter what the other gamblers did or what the weather was like and how quiet the sea was, for the whole length of the journey.

He stared pig-headed after the sea gulls, which were diving after the junk the steward kept throwing over board after each meal. Or he looked through the orders for the duty-free saloon and the bar. When he didn't fetch his earphones to listen what was going on out there in the wide world. This was much more productive when the weather was bad. Still he was fascinated ever more, how far his ear reached

and the air-waves managed to creep around the globe. Well, waves didn't creep any longer, Luther Lommel knew. Since satellites accompanied the globe, you could reach every hidden corner, without delay, from everywhere and at any time. While on certain frequencies extra filters were installed by darkies, who had to hide what they had to say. Requiring exchange of news, nevertheless.

The former old-type telegraphy was out. Except for the submarines, which still clung to that means of the creeping waves in order to send and receive those ancient morse codes these days used by submarines and destroyers, their declared enemies. Luther Lommel could sing a song thereof. – remains of a long life at sea.

In short – gambling was distracted, since he felt exploited by his therapist. After each journey he wanted to tell her this time. But then Susamee bewitched him with her naked smile and he found himself back at the card table. She argued she still lacked the proper pokerface. And that was true. A clever opponent read from her mimes almost as well as if he had had a look into her cards.

Soon he only played, because he didn't want to offend her. He realized that he became worse and worse, because the game couldn't give him anything anymore. He began to see, what gambling was for most people: a waste of time.

Susamee was close to her target. She had killed two flies in one stroke. She could now stand her woman when playing Poker with the other Shamans at the annual general Shamans' meeting, and Luther Lommel had lost interest in the cards for good, so it seemed. No other drugs were necessary.

The thrill of fortune he felt like the donkey, striving after the carrot in front of his nose, was disguised and demystified. He recognized lots of other stimuli in life, like a good drop of liquor, excellent food, or the sunset, or just the warmth on the skin, when bathing in the mild light of the morning sun.

Life was indeed full of moments of happiness, the strands of luck were but one way under many. The feeling as such had become closer than ever. Puzzled as he was, he felt forced to exchange with others, what had happened to him. Because those, whose heart is full, overflows the mouth', so to speak.

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Literarily seen he was like a raw diamond, because he had no experience what so ever. So he took off clumsily, yet he had no problems in writing, because he wrote freely and wrote down easily

what ever came to his mind. Instead of staring stubbornly into his fan of cards, with a stoic air, in order not to unveil anything, he sat in front of his laptop and hammered like mad on the keyboard, or looked with an empty gaze somewhere afar, awaiting the next idea or groping for the best way of putting.

As a matter of fact, he hadn't been forced to give up his nature, which served him now, as his diligence was stimulated. Ideas he had enough. But instead of forming faint buildings in the clouds, he came about with something, that could be read, while it had to become lectured to a vast extend and couldn't remain as it was.

His rising was not yet the real top flow of creativity. Bits and pieces he produced, but the red fathom was still missing. Had he been able to find it, the flow might have become interrupted, or even stopped at all.

The guideline should be found later, when more material was available, so he hoped. Thus he slowly became aware of his way of producing, he had so irksomely to find out, like any human being, who must learn everything in life laboriously. The more did he enjoy, when he succeeded, and was honoured by the fruits of his efforts. While the process of writing became selfsufficient but was only the qualifying parameter for the outcome.

For the first time in his life Luther Lommel felt the waves of happiness carrying him away. Those were this time genuine strands, able to carry him over all hurdles, on and on, and no end was in sight.

He had a lot to tell! Such a long life contained stuff for a whole library. And what he didn't experience himself, he invented, was it then thinkable or imaginable, even frightening – so it was his property and experience nevertheless.

Such a real life didn't only consist of events, but is found in everything that is accompanying us. What drives through heart and breast, and head and kidneys? What is it, that make the famous butterfly flutter in the stomach and seek expression in yearnings and aches of the soul?

The time was also well chosen, because he had gone through many heights as well as many more depths of life. He knew the demands and fears of desperation and agony in deepest darkness, where nothing goes any more, and the longing for death takes over, and the yearning for an end of all pain, won't cease.

Yes, there was stuff enough, how difficult it ever was handling adequately, no matter how hard Luther tried – still some descriptions remained just drafts, not yet ready, but vague outlines. Nothing but a

faint idea came up, what the whole was going to be one day, the more so, as Luther hadn't yet found out himself.

But who manages better? Whose curriculum makes sense? Why were all these experiences made? Did experience serve education? Was life a 'Bildungsroman', an institution of purification?

What life was about, Luther Lommel not yet had in focus. While this question really bothered him, when he became aware of the senselessness of his existence during his struggle against adiction, as far as the struggle for rehabilitation was concerned: His adiction and the hunt for the strands of luck. Did he not step all the time on the same spot, and turned in wheels?

Perhaps others should decide. While too close a look may cause blindness. The years counted, of course, which were winding back an almost endless straight, fading in the mist of the past, while forward the distance had become rather short, as it suits a hundredender. The more so, for one who had just escaped death, by the hearty last minute purchase of his ship-owneress. He would certainly never forget. Very slowly he realized what a fate of namesless horror lay behind him.

What kind of world was it, where things like that were allowed? Without Dorothea's courageous intervention, he would lie somewhere cut in pieces, ready for transplantation, or even worse, had become dog-fudder, while the skeleton would be standing in front of a school-class. As if the adiction stuck right in the bones. That was of course nonsense. But what didn't scientists all do in their unlimited curiosity and in the mean enjoyment of power? His skull, he was certain, would have become observed in detail, in order to get hold of his fate this way. All that was now an old hat. Soon nobody would care for him any more. Not for him, but what was with all the others? He had never been alone.

Little by little and slowly the red string shone up and so Luther's curriculum became some kind of a warning and prophecy in the Anonymous's style.

Grisella took notice. She read and corrected. She cared for a publisher. And because she had a good reputation, Luther Lommel overcame all hurdles and aimed the target. He was commercialized with great effort and rose right up into the bestsellers' heaven. The subject was worth it. The public had to be sensibilized and alarmed. Of those endangered Hundredenders, there were far too many by now, to be ignored furthermore.

And this was, what happened. Luther Lommel's writing went under the skin, and hardly anybody could resist. Perhaps it was just

the uneven and kinky way of writing, and even the mistakes that hadn't been erased, which gave the little booklet its charme.

For a short period of time those killing sites, and 'slaughter houses for human beings' became the public skandalon number one. Governments and Parliaments became alerted and hastily revised the legal dimension of the subject.

Judith finally succeeded with her idea of an immediate and general remission of all pending debts and saved the SLOMES Corporation before 'the doom into barbarism' as she put it. While the loss was marginal, but the prestige rose immensely.

The company was transformed at the same time, and all employees became shareholders and participating owners. Where had such a calculation ever happened in capitalism? A company distributing their shares amongst the employees for good, and let go all debtors at the same time. These steps could only happen, because the SLOMES Corporation was by nucleus a family-owned institution, and Judith the undefined boss. "Chapeau Mme. Kornblum, Chapeau..."

32. Edmond

How you could fail! Nobody ever figured, while the likeliness was perfectly in order. As a matter of fact Hilde Henne's mother and her mother and also her mother's mother always gave birth to girls, therefore Arundle had been convinced to do alike. But now it turned out to be just opposite. She could say good-bye to Maya. "Postponing's no dismissing" Dorothea tried to console, in a pragmatic air. Everybody started right away and somewhat clumsy to think of an adequate name, while no-one was prepared. Not the far away grandfather or the grandmother, and the second replacement grandfather, who generously offered himself, although he had no such experience and never had had to do with children in his life.

" - Had loads of other things to do" he declared rather helpless. "Besides, I was missing the suitable woman on my side" he added thoughtfully and pressed Hilde tightly so she cuddled tenderly in his arm. If she had had the choice, she would have loved to be impregnated by this man, who'd certainly deserve it.

Anonymous didn't come alone, but was accompanied by half of the court. Hans Henny Henne met old acquaintance among, and it was

a great halo. The Advisor generously presented a halo. "Right in advance, prophylactically" he explained. "While he certainly will have to deserve it, the little comrade. So let us then call him Edmond, the Protector of the Heritage. This is the name that fits. If it isn't too sophisticated, so let the young mother decide."

"He's then going to be called Eddy" Pooty agreed eagerly. He saw it pragmatically, while he in fact preferred Walter, for reasons rather obvious.

The magic stone from Uluru had a ring of sparkles spread over the little creature, supposed to commit the choice.

Anonymous was accompanied by a little cloud that could be drawn like a curtain before the sun, and would always stay near at hand, as long as the childhood lasted. "My own invention" the proud grandfather explained. The cloud fitted to the airy consistence of his and was therefore more than adequate.

The other gifts were all alike, first of all those from heaven. Nothing solid was among, and when the messengers from above left, Nothing remained except that little cloud in one corner, waiting to be called. From the rainbow-coloured sparkles a few lay around still, but nobody noticed.

The wishes nobody could see, of course, or grab sensually. They were, like the colours – only visible or noticable under certain circumstances.

Edmond, what a name, strange and somehow confidential. 'Yes, I could get used to it', the young mother thought. She found back while the big ache faded. Happiness mingled into exhaustion, while the flow of visitors wouldn't stop.

The earthen gratulants came with flowers or pink pampers, while light-blue was due. Little Ed shrieked of joy and desire. The little cloud exercised by following Billy-Joe, when he brought his son to his mother for feeding, who could not yet get up and walk around.

Otherwise she had been very brave and strong like many a tribal woman, who retreat alone in the bush, and return only when they have the baby in their arms. Susamee had taken care of that. Her influence had done Arundle well, tranquility and patience had been of great help in her gravest hour. Arundle hadn't been alone, but the labour she had done all by herself, while nobody had been able to help.

Hilde was sobbing all the time, because she was so happy, and because everything had gone well. Hans Henny Henne stood by, somewhat clumsy and didn't manage to sorting his bionic limbs. He was not familiar with what was going on around him, while he most likely had the most challenging present in a suitcase, which was

another obstacle that had to be surrounded in the narrow hospital-corridor.

Together with Judith Kornblum, he had developed a handy version of the SLOMES, that fitted into a suitcase, and could be taken away while travelling. You needn't be a Hercules. The times of the mover-truck were definitely over. Everyone could employ his or her SLOMES – at least the new type, that was a prototype up to now, but kept what it promised.

“There are definitely more functions available” Henne proudly explained, and took the opportunity to unpack his present.

“You needn't get up for that. Yes, you stay in bed, as you are. We try it if you like.”

But Arundle waved him off somewhat tired. “Perhaps tomorrow” she sighed. And Hilde blushed like a hen and pushed Hansiman and the instrument away from the bed. Hansiman didn't know whether you could leave such a precious present unguarded, but Watchman Will Weesle signalled him to stay calm, and leave this up to him.

The moth attack was not yet forgotten, and Arundle belonged to the circle of the most endangered persons. Therefore Watchman Will Weesle was present to watch and hang on, all the more Susamee didn't show that she was going to leave, quite the opposite, she seemed to prepare for a lengthier stay.

“Here is where I might be needed” she said when questioning looks of the hospital-personnel fixed her, so strange an image she was, but dared no comments.

Arundle required her presence. She felt isolated in the single bed room. She would have liked to stay with other young mothers and their babies in one dormitory, but she was the only one at the moment – except one other - who had delivered this week.

But one more birth was due these days, so the room next to the Operating Theatre should be made available, therefore Arundle would soon have to move most likely anyway.

“It's just a dwarf” the station sister explained somewhat ignorant, but corrected herself after noticing the questioning glances of Arundle and the Shamaness. “A small-grown person with pelvis-problems” she added hastily, and hoped to make the word ‘just’ overheard or vanish.

Hans Henny Henne left the incredibly valuable prototype, - ready to service – behind, but exchanged a glance with Watchman Will Weesle when leaving the room. The Watchman just nodded quietly. He would stay in front of the room, where Arundle and little Eddy would finally end up. The suitcase he took right away. The

case was rather light, and had no appeal of a home-trainer any more, the old SLOMES reminded strongly.

The moving of the patients was a welcomed opportunity to interrupt the flow of visitors. No matter how nice such flow was, the young mother felt stressed and longed for peace and ease, only the Shamaness could grant.

“Tomorrow is another day and in two days our young mother will be at home again, if everything turns out to be the way things should be” – the surgeon on duty added, while the bed was made and little Eddy was put into his mother’s arms, where he felt visually well.

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Without much fuss Judith Kornblum and Hans Henny Henne had undertaken to develop the SLOMES further. And thanks to Peter Adams their ideas became real. Judith had always brilliant ideas and knew everything what was going on in Nanovers research, but this time it was Peter who managed the transformation just like that.

Hans Henny Henne consisted of so many bionic parts and limbs, that he as well could be regarded as an artifact himself. He was a kind of artifact with a human brain, and a human identity, while many functions did no longer follow natural principles.

This was why he wanted to pack as much of himself as was possible into the new SLOMES. And so the set took over other functions as well, but didn’t hinder minimisation. The set was now no static apparatus any more, as had been the predecessors, but a complex being with a self-fulfilling interior life.

In other words copied Hans Henny Henne himself to a certain extent into the new set, and widened the SLOMES functions accordingly. But that was not all. The SLOMES of the new generation became a sort of servant, who enjoyed the services he or she performed, as there was first of all the prolongation of the masters life. That was not all. You could send him shopping, but that was for another reason kind of a problem. He was just too precious to let him wander unguarded on his or her own in public.

Without doubt the time of total autonomy would surely come. Technically seen, he was more than able – as to the inventors. The sense and the mechanotronic of the prototype were sufficient without doubt. That had been proved. While improvements were most welcome.

Hans Henny Henne was really looking forward to see his double going online as soon as possible, but Judith hesitated. There was the

family on one side, who had a word to say as well. But there was the fussy side on the other hand, and the more or less likely side-effects, such a revolutionary step meant.

Productability was not all. Not everything that could be produced should be produced. With the old SLOMES a lot of change had come by, and even more had to be expected with the new one, while not all was wanted, but couldn't be avoided.

So Judith argued that the prototype wasn't ready yet, but required rehearsal and improvement. Some weaknesses were all too well known, but were in sight these days, therefore the public had to wait.

But Hans Henny Henne didn't have time. When his old chum Anonymous came over for a visit he raised hidden longings in Henny's breast, he would have given way the sooner the better, while the matrimonial state began to fade and turned over into everyday routine, with all those unwanted side-effects. Not only Hilde got to know Hans H

The location of Susamee's island - and on the other one - was also not all that attractive, while the sound of the metropolis still hammered him through his arteries. The teaching was also not as challenging any more as it used to be in the beginning. Therefore he would have so much liked to become public with the new prototype. In his imagination he saw himself teaching students in how to handle and teach the extended artifact, which had become so unlikely because of Judith's hesitation. Under such circumstances he could as well look from above, when it finally became public.

Judith had good reasons of taking her time with the set. The new being was in many ways human. Communication was even more productive and never frustrating. In theory a deep relation was built up between artifact and owner. You looked your mate not anymore into a square set of binoculars but into almost human eyes, in order to enter the conventional functions of becoming younger. While a deep emotional intimacy occurred, that exceeded even the deepest interrelationship with real human beings.

As to Judith was this the main problem. Would such intercourse not limit or even diminish the interrelationship with other real humans? Some-one who was cuddling all day with his artifact, might not need any human contacts any more.

Marriage, family, friendship, coupling would become surplus. It was quite likely, that Hansiman was suffering of the consequences of so close and so deep a contact with the prototype. And the reason was found for Hansiman's homesickness. Hilde was by no means responsible.

Fortunately Hilde didn't realize what changes were going on with Hansiman, since his old pal Anonymous came for a visit. There had been too much hussle because of Eddy's birth and all that. The baby occupied her emotionally and Arundle, her daughter, took the rest, so there was not much care left for Hansiman.

Edmond – what a name! The name would probably never take over, while Eddy was too likely. The Advisor, who suggested the name, had not thought that over. Billy-Joe didn't mind. He liked his ordinary name and wanted for his son the same. Other references, especially not of the dark kind, weren't his cup of tea – no way!]

Such a little shade didn't bother, because Hans Henny Henne didn't realize himself. He rather wondered what made him head towards the other side, while he felt totally earth-bound. The new SLOMES he wanted to see invented here on esrth, but then it would be high time for him to go.

He didn't know how to explain that to Hilde. He would have a word with Anonymous on that, who certainly had a word to say in this matter, as Hilde had once been his wife as well. Easiest would it probably be if she came along with him. But while he thought it over, he realized a hell of a lot of problems arising thereof, so it might be better to leave things as they were.

Beforehand he asked Judith, who he had the best wire with, while Arundle never got close. Despite the fact that they shared the same spheres.

He let Judith know that the whole bionic outfit was no good and ran sensible characters most likely into depression. Such a depression goes hand in hand with the loss of identity, caused by the over-alienation of organ parts and bio-mechatronic replacement-wirings. The body seemed to react unconsciously on such distortion with stress. And stress led to an increased erosion of the organs, and demanded ever faster and more repairs or replacements. An ungood race for life and lifetime was on the march then.

Such an armament was by no means a pat solution. In the first euphoria you felt strong and youthful, and life expelled like a colourful carpet. You felt invited to muse and plug the rose as long as it blossomed, as it said in the bionic advertisement.

Hans Henny Henne had by now grown out of this phase for a good while. Yes, he did plug the rose, he had taken a second and a third cup of youthfulness and emptied the cups to the bottom, while a stale aftertaste remained of his untimely behaviour. Deep inside he had become old, and that his body knew as well, at least the rests still available of the original fabric.

Judith intended to have a word with Arundle about her mother, and how she managed – while being a grandmother now. Whether she still enjoyed the youthful role she had taken over in the young matrimonial state, or might as well feel stress caused by the untimely expectations.

People are that way, they undergo the heaviest stress and ask for things, they normally would recognized immediately as absurd with others, but not with themselves.

Wholly new aspects came about with the fuss Hans Henny Henne produced and published. The yearning for an everlasting life would come to an end by itself. Nobody wanted to become a real Methusalem as a matter of fact, as long as life could be prolonged by the free will, and everybody reached the age he or she demanded. If no tree fell on their head, or evil men shot them down. They lived a long life as it was, with heights and also frightening depths, causing as well satiation or satisfaction, so that the one or other granny sighed in saturation, when thinking of the grave and the sweet everlasting sleep. A feeling, as after a heavy meal, that had eventually come to an end at last and after all.

Hot curiosity needn't be burning for what was going to come. It was true and genuine saturation, content saturation like after a meal, that finally had come to the very end, nothing could be stuffed in any more. But that was no reason to argue. As it would be ridiculous to argue because you filled your stomach after a long period of starvation.

No-one really wanted to go back to the decadent custom of the old Romans who ordered their slaves to tickle with tender feathers their throats to make them vomit and empty the fudder-hold to be filled anew.

Such orally fixed characters surely existed ever since, who didn't notice or didn't want to notice when boredom sneaked into the repetitions, and the thrill became thin and watery in the yet-ever-known, no matter how sensational it once had been. And they didn't limit themselves on nutrition, but handled the whole life as if it was a gracious meal. Yes, they might live for the only reason to make life but one great meal.

Such characters were fixed to the first level of the human development, and seldomly proceeded ever further. Thus they passed by other - more or less doubtful - satisfactions, first of all the spiritual satisfaction, that might show up on the horizon for the one or other contemporary fellow, mirroring the highest happiness of an earthly

being. Rather similar to the sunset glow, seeking a secret path behind thick cloud banks, to break forward suddenly right from the middle of the sky with red glow, while the world around has sunk into the mysterious dawn of the upcoming evening.

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Anastatio Baranasias was a genuine problem, because he represented a form of existence, that couldn't exist. This was how Hans Henny Henne and Anonymous saw it, who were personally affected by this matter, because Baranasias was the curse laden Alter ego of the latter.

The Alter ego of Anonymous was left behind on earth after his ascension. And that was very unusual, neither he nor Hans had ever heard of a similar happening lately. Nor of a 'de-cension' as happened to Hans at last.

This was a case for the Advisor they both agreed. Anonymous decided to take up the subject and use the visit to the newly born baby for a short talk 'en passant' so to speak. While the great event bound all attention and centered around little Ed and his mother.

But the Advisor kept covered and fled into laconic banalities: "Well, there are many things between heaven and earth, no man would even dream of" he declared solemnly with a sweet smile. He seemed to be overcharged, while his face showed astonishment.

"A curse laden Alter ego – a kind of shadow angel or an angel of darkness?" he asked, turned inside, as if he didn't expect an answer from outside.

"His Imperial Majesty doesn't know the answer?" he uttered, turning to Anonymous with disbelief. The Advisor obviously tried to shove the bogeyman on.

Hans Henny Henne and Anonymous looked at each other meaningfully. They never ever experienced the like: the Advisor without advice, that was almost like a well without water.

The 'Imperial Highness' (i.e. Anonymous) had to admit that he knew the volumes on the imperial shelves only by backs. He never took one out and open or even read in it. While the whole history of the whole universe was laid down therein. And the unsolvable phenomenon surely had to do with it, he doubted not an instant.

"You are forced to represent day and night, there is no time for reading records. Why do I have advisers?" the accused defended.

He decided to have a word with the Minister of the Cosmological Order. While this seemed to be a question of the basic partition of power, and the mode of affection of the material world.

33. The Yokel's Sacrifice

Did purification mean to get rid of one's sins and leave them behind like a parcel, containing an undone things-to-do-list? Who ever found it and opened it by accident was conquered by the evil contents hidden, and handed over to hellfire and devil's claw.

Even worse: did such wandering boxes of evil goof about? And not only in parcels and boxes but as well in empty skins? Did they marvel through the nightmares and fairytales as miserable creatures and scenes of terror and fear to death?

"Eventually it's got to be" Hans Henny Henne mused, who was very fond of sound logic.

"Each ascension might go along with an equivalent descent down to hell. Otherwise there would build up a disproportion, while the evil would surely be favoured. And that couldn't be."

Anonymous stunned in disbelief, but Hans Henny Henne went on: "That's quite logical. Its like blood-letting – the comparison doesn't fit exactly ... Well, but you surley can imagine what it means for the earth when more and more good beings ascend. The scale would move to the evil side. Therefore I think it necessary and logical to have ascensions and descensions kept the balance."

The Advisor nodded but looked somewhat frightened over to Anonymous, who was his boss after all, you tend to forget this over here. The Anonymous' curriculum was by no means the sequence of good deeds.

"Anastasio Baranasias didn't ascend, that's for sure", Anonymous commented.

"That's an offence of the world order, I would say" the Advisor added.

"...as long as we agree with the Honourable Professor, and that, I presume, we can." The thus adressed shrugged "...or it was balanced by my descend. After all, I came back. And if I may say so, I enjoy it – after all. It's done me a lot of good." Hans Henny

Henne favoured logic, no doubt about that.

“You mean, because you went down to earth, you offered a ticket for an opponent. Because what we can do, must be also allowed for the other side. I see, what you mean.” Hans Henny Henne nodded eagerly.

“Sounds convincingly” the Advisor also agreed.

“We’ve got to check this in the manuals” Anonymous addressed straight towards the Advisor, who took certainly notes on what His Imperial Highness suggested.

Even this title wasn’t mirroring the true powers – still you got an idea of the incomparable deference. Most likely because Emperor was a sounding title, you could imagine what ever you liked, as long as you remained on the adequate level. A real Emperor, and Rolandus certainly doubted to be such a one, might come shortly after God, while kings or counts or princes in comparison looked like usurpators, who sneaked illegally into power.

And this, by the way, was how it all started in heaven as well. And out came the devil, and that couldn’t be it. Perhaps the phenomenal carrier of Anonymous had to do with the circumstances resulting thereof.

Where had this ever happened, that someone out of naught and nowhere risen to the highest heights of the heavenly hierarchy? Or was that the seductive challenge Anonymous was facing? Was he threatened by the same fate? Was he also destined to crash into the deepest abyss of hell?

How could he! Did he not come out of the purgatory of passions? And had he not freed himself from the slimy embrace of power and voluptuousness?

That a creature like Baranasias stayed behind, was nobody’s intention. still it happened, otherwise Anastasio Baranasias wouldn’t be.

Thus something entirely new was on the verge to grow up, and was similar to the old Luziferian tragedy, but should under no circumstances become mixed up with it. The Advisor had a keen eye on that. He understood himself as the heavenly loudspeaker, to be exact, as the voice of God, while you shouldn’t imagine God obvious and concrete, and give him a figure and size, somewhat human by appearance, in order to build up a relationship, and embrace him as the head member of the family, in order to come along with him, or her. The gender question still pending and unanswered ever since.

That was why it was much easier to come along with the Advisor, and Anonymous as Emperor Rolandus had a similar function, after all.

From a certain point of view, they could be regarded as competitors as well. But that was a specific interpretation, being spread about in the world but didn't have too many followers.

In short, the question came up what happened when Hans Henny Henne would return and ascend again and reverse his original ascension. Would Anastasio Baranasias then be forced to return to hell, instead of goofing about on earth in ungood mission.

The School of Inbetween would get rid of their major problem that way. Espionage and terror-attacks would come to an end after all. The false phobia, which had done so much harm, more harm than the cause justified, by the way - (thus was the joint opinion of the members of the Council of the Menora) – could come to an end at last.

Was that sacrifice justified? Could the people on earth let go Hans Henny Henne, only to get rid of Anastasio Baranasias?

Hilde Henne cried desperately and sobbed to melt a heart of stone, but for sorrow and not because she was caught like when the self-induced horse-headed violin took over and bewitched the scene. Arundle stepped protectively forward to safeguard her mother, who wasn't herself anymore, and Billy-Joe stood by.

The Advisor kept covered as usual. On the other hand the logic couldn't be rejected easily, while Hans Henny Henne himself had uncovered the interrelation, more or less, anyway.

And that made things complicated. Even Anonymous had no advice, although he was Emperor and responsible, and he had - as a matter of fact – stick to his responsibility, no matter what his heart said, which was deeply divided.

He would have liked to have the old wise chum around with him for good, of course. Heavenly peace was waiting for him but eventually also quite some boredom. Hans Henny Henne however sparkled of ideas, and was able to inflame his surrounding. In the short period of time, he had been back, he had proved his outstanding abilities by inventing new solutions for old problems, he seemed to be the only one to tackle. No-one thought about rationalisation, or of skipping processes at all, which might be regarded as sound. While many things went their destined way unquestioned, just like that.

The specifics of the race were all executed, which might be regarded as stubborn and tricky to handle. Hans Henny Henne had proved in his personage not only that this was shortsighted, but also undertook suitable measures to overcome hidden errors, which had settled over thousands of years in man's history.

Thus those inspirerers often ran into unnecessary trouble, by starting off from outdated premises. Mankind wasn't all that fixed,

and things could be handled differently, although people used to do them in a certain way. And only a few knew whether this way was the only or the best. While genial strokes out of nowhere hit mankind once in a while. They seemed to fall of heaven and came about in dreams, or in visions, when time had come to give mankind a push and move the wheel a tick forward. For that the heavenly army was good enough. They watched over their earthen messengers, while each individual complied a heavenly equivalent, who matched with the earthen twin.

The matter was easy enough, and was no secret any more since the discovery of the uncertainty principle. But the discovery was not necessarily accompanied by the necessary understanding. The more so because a specific logic was required, not all people shared, while logic itself was a kind of inspiration, just as all epochal ideas needed a push.

As the Luciferian side gained influence with all kinds of fancy fuss, genuine inspiration appeared rather difficult. It claimed the stony path of moral as a by-product, while the Luciferian side used the broad avenue of exploitation and self-content power-play. Power, so it seemed, had a lot to offer. And you needed a clear brain to tear apart the webs, that were garnishing the evil.

Never was the evil allowed to appear naked, the shock would have been incredible and the abhorrance insurmountable.

But the abused didn't realize at once, who enjoyed the powerplay, while strangled in the end in abhorrence. Baranasias and his assistant were seen as warning examples by the eyes of those who could see, and such were lots on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Anonymous had managed to tear himself out of the mud in a genial pull. During his ascension something unforeseen happened, an unexpected exception so to speak, and could only be cleared by Hans Henny Henne's descend to earth.

This was possible, because Hans Henny Henne had his earthen work not yet fulfilled. He was sent back to earth and into life, and a second life had been granted with everything that belonged to life. And this new life was more beautiful and better than his first, although also not without thrill and highlights, while as well stained by several shades.

There was one thing, the Advisor didn't have in focus, - (although it was very unlikely) - and that was the existence of mean Anastasio Baranasias. He was the surplus on the evil side to keep the endangered balance. At least the limited human logic favoured such interpretation,

and was surely groping too short like with other subjects, the human brain and hand invented.

“Perhaps I can make myself understood a little better with an example” the Advisor argued. – well, Arundle thought he was arguing. Perhaps he only wanted to be polite, and didn’t want to make her feel somewhat limited and mentally reduced.

“Is it perhaps like in a game of chess? You do sacrifice one figure, for a likely victory” Arundle wondered and did so in order to justify herself. Then she continued as if she had just had an enlightenment:

“Ah, yes, I understand, that makes sense. The pawn sacrifice. What we now experience with Baranasias is the consequence of a pawn sacrifice. Yes, this makes sense.”

“...mind you – Baranasias is the pawn sacrifice, I’m afraid” the Advisor carried on and gave Arundle a sharp glance. “But only, if on the other side Hans Henny Henne also falls.” The Advisor’s glance said more than a hundred words, he passed on to Arundle. He pampered the young woman and made her blush, as often happened when he liked what she said or did.

Of course, this was just a parable. Reality was no game of chess. Arundle knew that. Reality was no game at all, but bitter earnest. What was going to build up right now could just as well fail and that would then mean “Good by dear world” – at least as far as the sunny sides of the future were concerned.

The nightmare of Laptopia was threatening. Arundle saw the route towards the abyss of doom before her inner eye. All gates and doors were wide open while doom was ‘ante portas’ threatening. “If we don’t manage to uncover the mal-doings of the giant moth, and fix the leaking communication channels here on the islands – that’ll be it. What other source do the informants then have to pass on all that filthy junk?” Arundle objected, but didn’t reach the Advisor any more.

If they wanted to get rid of Baranasias, they had to sacrifice Hans Henny H

34. Forbearance

Baranasias didn’t know about the conditions under which he carried on. His identity seemed to be granted, and he didn’t question, but regarded his existence obvious, and kind of natural, no matter how

artificial and sick he was. Because he was no human being in the sense of the meaning, but endeavoured in the shade between image and reality, as an evil thought, and malicious perfidy, and the leathern crutch of a horrible creature.

Unlike other wrong-doers he lacked of hope. He didn't long for anything, but did what was demanded. He functioned like a robot, quite similar to the bionic creatures, who spread in secrecy the further the bionic medicine advanced. They didn't act for their own sake, but proceeded customarily. While there was no such common sense. Many creatures could be found on all ends of the world, who didn't know from each other. But obeyed their creator.

Baranasias didn't question his fabric. He lacked of emotions, or if there were any, they didn't get closer but into his pre-consciousness. Still he suffered. He couldn't do else but suffer. And because his suffering never ended, he thought it an existential base. And he felt forced to tear his surrounding environment into his mode of being. And not only the close subjects but at best everyone and the whole world. He couldn't do otherwise. He couldn't get out of his skin. While he was hardly more but an empty cover, a kind of a blueprint, awoken to life by an evil force. He had but one purpose – destruction.

On the road to the apocalypse wound a trace of horror, following Baranasias and expressed in several strange modes. What ever it was, everything mounted in noxiousness.

By such injurious impact Baranasias experienced some kind of satisfaction. And that was why he clung to his life, beside the fact that it could not be called life.

Had someone mentioned the poverty of his existence, he might have answered, he should care about his own way of being, before interfering into matters of no concern. While in fact he himself didn't understand what was going on with him, and where he was drifting or what drove him. Quite like a Miserior – the category of beings he most likely belonged to somehow by now.

They all didn't want to end up finally in the deepest hell. They were drawn to the light like moths over to the living souls. They didn't give in until they were sent back into the world, after a banning ray sent them back.

All by themselves in everlasting darkness any life came to a halt, even theirs, because it lacked of awareness. There was nothing they could do. Nobody could be punished. The seduced were all damned and condemned, and didn't show signs of suffering, because they didn't cling on life. The corpses didn't suffer, because they were dead. You can only suffer as long as you are alive.

Those Misieriors didn't bother about decent silent suffering but about the absolute horror and the naked abhorrence of a truly innocent soul. At best for the first time, while the horror had no limit yet.

Life in hell was no fun for the semi-beings, the zombie-like creatures, the spirits of darkness. That was why the boss had trouble in guarding and keeping the crew together. Such guarding didn't go along with the chaos-principle they all obeyed. And that was why the banning became a big thing all over again. The so called 'Semi permeable membrane' separating the spheres had to be erected frequently and all over again, with a lot of noise and with many catastrophic side effects.

Similar to the day-night segregation the picture changed, and so did the world. In the good light the evil became rejected, but never disappeared, while on the other hand, the evil couldn't wholly eliminate goodness.- Plus or minus advanced or prevailed, depending on the state of being.

In fact, segregation never succeeded completely. On both sides left-overs remained, which hid or clung stubbornly, while the camouflage ability favoured the evil nature. On the other side honourable mimesis embraced the beings for good.

The principle of hope was the main reason for the good beings to prevail, thanks to an even crazier constellation, than the one Baranasias came from. The heavenly patience was not without limit, but sometimes expelled as never-ending. Even the meanest got his second or third or fourth chance, if it had to be so, even the hundredth, until he was really given up for ever, or was saved for good, after all.

Hope asked goodness to endure and to give not up, but hang on, while the impossible might occur once. It was a matter of the point of view. Those who were certain to live in a good world, weren't bothered by the question, whether the world was suffering in devil's hands.

If you looked with devil's eyes on the world, then the earthen lot became a cage of evil, in which man and beast were suffering. A never-ending toil and harm, only mercy death could end, in order to proceed you on back home, if you were lucky and professed the right duties. For example the tunnel diggers, flight aids or sluicers, just to name some professions, suitable for good spirits to free from the claws of evil.

Such a sight of the world was of course extremely wrong, because the earth would exist no single second longer, if darkness outweighed, and the evil had taken over all power.

However, there were times and areas where it look the like, and doubts overcame the human beings involved, then fleeing into unconsciousness. Instead of facing the challenge and follow the inner voice, while all the world around seemed to have become crazy, spilling like a mighty flood away, what culture had established.

While the hell on earth was not yet hell. No other than the heaven on earth, was no heaven either. but was nevertheless experienced by some lucky ones - - experienced for seconds, but was a foretaste of the true heaven – so says belief.

As long as such heaven could shine up, the side of the good wasn't lost, and the grip of hell was not complete. Swimming isles of happiness waved in the dark ocean of horror along. This parable might stand best for the situation. Sometimes there were many such isles, and of remarkable size.

While it could happen, that you didn't meet such a vehicle of happiness for months or even years, until you felt yourself threatened to be drawn into the depth, bare of all happy outlook. And from the depth you felt hopelessness tearing, and you felt too weak to defend, until you realized, that you yourself was on such an isle, but had forgotten to share your isle with others while it had been time, because the isle was separable. And as soon as a part had seggregated, it grew, and it tended to seggregate again, and again, and so forth up to the far horizon and likely further on into the invisible and uncertain.

Thus, things could change, and reverse to the opposite, and it required but a moment of negligence therefore, and it happened without assistance. No navigator was steering, and no vessel was seen in this ocean, if you didn't take the swimming isles for ships, and have the translation done by a SLOMES. Without, you didn't see anything. You didn't even know that there was something for those to see, who had eyes to see, and had learnt to see the other way of seeing. And for them was destined, what could be seen, while the others didn't understand.

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Florinna was pleased to take up the new task. With her father she travelled a lot and came into the furthest parts of the world. But further side-trips she couldn't afford, so she reported. She might even be forced to cut back. Still the side-job turned out to become a fulltime one.

This was what she reported to the new Headmistress, as it were, at night while dreamtime was on the agenda. Arundle and Billy-Joe

pointed out the importance of the job, while their concern was burning in their hearts. Florinna might be luckier as a talent-scout. When Mynona Wilder and Sam Riley had shown up, Arundle almost felt as electrified. She didn't believe any more in the reports of constant fiasco, that dropped in monthly into the Headmistress' office. Perhaps a generation change was also overdue among the talent scouts.

With Florinna a start was made. A pity was that Vasatha Hare's talent was limited to the dreams, otherwise Arundle would have engaged her right away.

Vasantha never thought to look for some-one of her kind outside the family. This would never come to her mind. That was why the ability of 'the other way of seeing' was not far developed in her.

After all you got rich bargain for any recruit, either in credits or common cash. The advantage of the Hare-family was, that they reached the furthest metropolises and landscapes on their hunt for archeological sites and excavations. There they met local guides to help them reaching the sites or assist language-wise with the museum people. The contacts were rather close and intense, and there were no problems when Florinna examined them secretly for their aura. Her mother was trained by accompanying her and soon found out the whereabouts of the art, and became an able assistant.

They found of course mainly Somniors. Only once in a while they also met an Animator. The outcome they mailed to the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, if they couldn't convince the candidates of the suitable age to travel right away.

Those who hesitated, were put on the mailing list and provided with appropriate material and information about scholarships, and how to get one. While talents didn't stick to boundaries and language-barriers, but preferred to hide in niches and at boundaries of human society.

Other talent scouts might have been too negligent Florinna assumed, who couldn't believe what she was experiencing. Hardly a week passed without a promising candidate.

While the rare colours were thinly sewn. Still something happened in her vicinity, and a lot more than before.

Not all talents could be motivated however to take up the road. Often parents and family-clans stood in the way. Young girls were mal-treated, becoming married far too early, and then no escape was likely.

Florinna experienced as a by-product quite some misery and alienation, that almost broke her heart. So much had to be done, and so little could she do. Some things however, she managed to do with

her mother, and that made her feel great, the more so when the candidates were thankful.

The road to the School of Inbetween was a one-way, and there was no return. Who once chose that road, wouldn't come back as the same. He or she would be widened and clarified, and would lose their naive innocence, but would gain more than language could say.

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Professor Hare was all in favour of his daughter's side-job, but when she ran into emotional trouble, and the job grew and grew, he began to worry if this was the adequate profession. He spoke with his wife of course, who took part as well. The findings had little to do with archeology, while treasures were also excavated, but treasures of another kind, he had certainly to admit.

Vasanthi agreed. Besides, she hoped that Florinna would become quieter as time went by, while it didn't look the like. Especially the fate of young women and girls moved her, and she thought, she had to do her best. Thus she acted on high risk. It did happen that she was dismissed of a country, and with her the whole team of researchers. Fortunately Professor Hare lectured at the Island-University, otherwise his daughter's behaviour would have cost his job more than once.

He realized of course how important Florinna's occupation was. It was no side-job any more, but her main profession. And her duty was surely more important for the School of Inbetween, than the archeological research. The more so, as the evaluation of the research in far Atlantis didn't lead to outstanding results. This could change however by means of secret magic, still hiding in the diffuse underbrush, Florinna heartily favoured.

And while Vasanthi backed up her daughter, Professor Hare also altered his needs. His situation still worried him. He saw himself soon way behind other colleagues, who were enticing away the best helpers and diggers, not to mention mules, horses and donkeys, you required to reach the excavation sites.

Professor Hare was a genuine practitioner. He loved width and adventure. He felt drawn out into the world, at best all alone, but had never admitted to his family. In a family you always meet limitations, which he never faced, when he was underway alone. He now had to take care of distorting affairs, while beforehand only the needs of the guild, and his free will governed. By now he also realized the conflict

of interests with Florinna – who – just like himself – tended to have her way, and stand for her interests by hook or by crook.

She could do so, all the more, as she didn't do it for herself, but for the School of Inbetween. This was at least what she told to herself, and convinced her mother as well, to back her up, while such behaviour turned out to be a rather bitter pill for the Professor, who was used to a wife obeying her husband's will. With one exception: he hardly ever managed to enter his wife's dream-world, or only a little, and not very deep, but only as far as she permitted. At least it looked the like to him. Vasantha denied such limitations, but told her husband that the dream-gates always stood wide open for him. So he finally had to blame himself, while he was lacking the antenna and sensors in comparison with his daughters, who didn't share his difficulties in that, but moved freely and unhindered in the wide range of a mysterious inner world, well embedded in the outer world. A world, he unfortunately would most likely never be able to enter.

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Professor Hares's worries were but one thing, another was the incredible push-up the School of Inbetween experienced. The new directing couple was of course very fond of the fantastic job Florinna made.

Since the Island-University opened, the School of Inbetween went down. At first, the signs were hardly noticed, but by now they couldn't be ignored any more. While the call for a change of generations plopped up, a while ago.

It almost looked now as if the change went on rather quickly. The new Headmistress and the new Deans were hardly elected and busy in their fields, when the atmosphere in general experienced a dramatic change as well. The depressive atmosphere and the ubiquitous suspicion, the fear of espionage and the quarrels thereof, seemed to be like blown away. Nobody understood anymore, why the dispute between Isolationists and World-Citizens ran into such a destructive dead-end. While the giant moth stirred up the minds inappropriately, even after Nelaza was disguised and proved herself as a decent person. She was in fact the only detected giant moth, and travelled meanwhile each month when the moon was full, over the Susamee's island together with all the other Convertors, to whom she obviously belonged.

The positive trend might also be caused by the new pupils. It was so nice to see them picking up all the structures and procedures common on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth and the School of Inbetween.

The teachers, first of all Arundle - felt as if they were looking into a mirror of the past, and see themselves young again. They realized the youthful fire from inside again. They experienced the identification with the youth and the wonders, they once detected for themselves and now for others, while they were the key-holders for an upcoming generation.

Whether the others felt the same, she couldn't say, but Billy-Joe received the youthful message of the uprising as clearly as she did. He could read it in her eyes, and she in his. The School of Inbetween and the parable of the reborn Phoenix out of the ashes, matched. The reborn Phoenix he was himself, but was someone else at the same time. His uprising flight described the wonder of life, how it's being lived, without being ever wholly understood by those alive.

The Shaman's Song

Of little help was what he found beneath.
 He cared for preparation, not release.
 Some spooky fits of nothing real:
 A lot of the unseen was here presented,
 Unspeakables were heard and represented:
 At last, those tiny ones he sought to win.
 Their Shaman was he, and their kin.
 He could not stand the evil foe,
 Without the help of Billy-Joe.
 You know now who we are?
 I am but you, and stand not far:
 We are but one – do fight for me,
 Mine is the other outer world - united shall we be.
 I lead your arm, I guide your ear, with eyes of yours I see.

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1. See and Be Seen

Mr. and Mrs. Henne couldn't share the enthusiasm of the many hundred fans, who assembled each month when the full moon was rising over Susamee's Island. Especially in the light summer nights, when suspense rushed in the underbrush, and the wonder lowered like a warm seducing fragrance. They noticed something was going on, but didn't feel it, and were completely out of their trace. They didn't even know what they were expected to feel, or what really was going on and what they witnessed. Because the fever didn't catch them. It touched them only by passing by, and didn't even catch them, when even the stones began to sob. They couldn't comply at all. They meant the tears to be the evening dew, wetting the rocks, to have a reasonable explanation for the stunning phenomenon, while there was no better explanation in sight.

Good-natured and generous they overlooked the exaggeration. They smiled at each other in quiet agreement and strengthened their necks while resisting against the sweet mists of imagination, they felt somehow surrounded. A lot of fuss was going on, they certainly noticed that. Long enough they were on the island. They had many dwarves seen, coming and going, while those hushed by as mere shades, and pushed each other while passing them, as if they felt endangered.

Not only the dwarves showed signs of worry, Tika and Emasus also didn't warm up in their presence. Watchman Will Weesle was the only one, who exchanged a word or two with them, once in a while, to keep their mood up and find out about the matrimonial state between them. A new competitor he just couldn't stand, but was afraid, that the old chum was on the verge of turning back to Susamee, who surely would appreciate his courting.

Watchman Will Weesle was tinkered of a raw and simple fabric. His combinations were the like: As long as all went well between the couple, he reckoned, Susamee would remain his.

There was no-one else around, anyway, except Tibor and the dwarves in the underground, but they didn't really count. While Tibor was the dwarves' idol and therefore lectured quite often over there at the university, in addition to his teaching profession as Dean of the Sublimators at the School of Inbetween on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Watchman Will Weesle felt quite similar to the Hennes, he also lacked of empathy and didn't believe in the sobbing stones either, but thought them to be wetted by the evening dew. However, he didn't dare to confess, because he might then be regarded as a stubborn yokel.

Secretly he therefore checked, if the rocks also became wet, in the nights without full moon, and they sometimes did in fact, but not often. The explanation, that the self-induced horse-headed violin caused such an emotional uproar in the stones, could neither be confirmed nor denied by his investigation.

In fact, he gave a damn shit about those blooming stones. The important thing was the incredible effect resulting thereof. The tunes of the violin flattered the ears, no question about that, Weesle admitted freely, but wouldn't get further. As far as he was concerned, the fiddling never moved him to tears, but stressed his nerves. While you couldn't say that aloud over here.

What really moved him, was the sight of Susamee, dancing uncovered in the pale moonlight, because she had inflamed and bewitched him, nothing else.

He also never saw the red fire bird, just like Hilde and Hansiman. Besides, all three didn't believe in the fairy of the so-called Convertors, and those so-called totem-animals hiding in the underbrush.

If you faced something at all, it was a bushy mob of hair lurking out of a cleft somewhere. When you took the time and strolled over the island by day, however you shouldn't do in the days of the full moon, as was laid down in the regulations. And Susamee severely watched, even when she was away. Will Weesle, in his function as a watchman also did his best to stick to the rules, and any offender would surely be sorry soon.

He didn't want to admit, like many of his colleagues, that he never saw with own eyes such a converted animal. And he never witnessed the conversion as such, despite of strange noises to be heard at night, but they weren't much different from the noises in other nights – perhaps somewhat stronger and louder, he would admit; and indeed livelier under the full moon, but that was it then.

Such an island was alive, after all. And among the animals, there were also nocturnal ones, and that was quite natural. While you better didn't mention. Such a profane explanation didn't fit into the magic view of the Convertors and their followers. The slightest remarks or – even worse – doubts – caused hefty reactions. You soon would be stamped a dull brute and drunkard, addicted to king alcohol, and unable to provide a clear thought. And with that the critics weren't all that wrong. Watchman Will Weesle also looked back on a drunkard's carrier. Therefore he was so thankful for his job.

Who would have taken him? Neither him, nor some other colleagues, who weren't better off.

Therefore they all remained silent, when things like the horrible accident happened some years ago, back on the twin island. While it had in fact been no great wonder that someone sneaked on the island, and almost killed poor Tika. Yes, so it happened on the so called Conversors' island, next to Wisdom-tooth Isle, now housing the University.

Weesle himself had been among the rescue-team, when they tore off the poor being of that rock. Why the misguided little creature ran astray that far, nobody would ever know. Taking her back to the little port had in fact been a hell of a job by night, in storm and rain. You wouldn't believe how heavy such a little one can become.

More death than alive has she been. And a long bloody dark track was drawn through the island. –

Well, after all, everything turned out to the better. But had he and his colleagues not been so drunk, the attack mightn't have happened - Will Weesle was convinced, but didn't dare to admit. His fantasy did not suffice to imagine, how he would have been punished, if anyone would have known. And so his consciousness hammered even worse and much longer, than the punishment would have lasted – the more so – here on this special site. Many times he had been on the verge of confession, but the seldom opportunities passed unused.

Instead of watching, the watchmen had been seated in their booths, had closed the doors and windows against the cold, and had slept, drunk as they were.

A bomb might have woken them up. It was Arundle who rushed through the wood with her wonder-bow and the pointed arrows. Had she not been, nobody had realized what happened to the little creature up there on the lonesome rock.

Was it mere instinct, or did he hear anything? Will Weesle awoke when he heard Arundle's cry, and soon after also became aware of what happened. He was sober at once. He and some others joined the group of rescuers. Those who pretended to have a command of 'the other way of seeing' didn't see, what was all too obvious: The watchmen hadn't done their job, even now some hardly moved or kept up with the searchers' group.

Being confronted with death, the one or other finally became sober like Will. And together they did a fairly good job after all.

It had been the time, when he earnestly thought about giving up the drinking, he regularly ran into trouble for. King Alcohol had ruined his family. He himself was a wreckage inside, and kept on fading in body and soul.

So it had been. However his healing and recovery didn't alter his view. He still couldn't see Conversors when converting. He only saw strange little beings, acting funny, before they disappeared in the dark of the underbrush. He saw shades, and heard noises like of ponies or dogs, but that was it.

He didn't witness such an arrival very often, the ado about the first landing was not his cup of tea, so he usually took the second boat, one way or the other.

Meanwhile things were less strenuous, while a lot happened inside the big belly of the Last Bounty moored on the new pier. The flood of dwarves also disguised the landing troopers. They spilled off the vessel and hushed flash-like by, hardly visible – indeed almost invisible for the human eye.

Had there not been the competition about Susamee, Hans Henny Henne would have been a dear comrade right from the start. While Will realized that the latter felt like himself, although he was an educated man and a famous inventor too. While he himself was only a watchman.

Hans Henny Henne didn't withhold his opinion and point of view, and that was a great advantage. You couldn't throw dust in his eyes. He could only be convinced by eye-witnessing, and when there was nothing to be seen for him, then there was nothing, while the so-called seers could say, what ever they wanted.

For a long time he didn't tune in on the tricky interpretation, his wife's daughter brought forward to his attention. As to her, he lacked the ability of seeing colors, as they appeared, like the color-blind, who are unable to differentiate red and green and have to live in a world of gray shades, and only realize, because they don't notice when to go over a street and when to stop.

“Well, they will manage to distinguish between the upper and the lower little man”, Hans Henny Henne commented, not really convinced, while he basically knew about such deficits of the human senses. However, he didn't like to be stamped as edificatory, all the more, when Hilde confirmed the same lack of ability for herself and for her former husband. An ability, that was said to be experienced by those gay folks on the islands deep down under.

Hilde's affirmative comment made him doubt, because the Anonymous he had happened to meet, had been rather sophisticated, and had given him the impression of being very familiar with such hocus-pocus.

So Hilde had to confess that she and her former husband had done their very best to ignore the world, their daughter had experienced and lived in.

Their daughter frightened them with all that introvert behavior and mystic ado.

“I couldn’t reach her anymore. A wall had been built up between us. It started early enough, and became worse as time went by.”

Hilde Henne sighed deeply, when she remembered, how she had suffered.

“And the worst was, we couldn’t help her, we didn’t know what was wrong. – and there was the school after all ... It was disgusting. I do not wonder why Roland couldn’t stand it any more...”

Hilde sneezed and rubbed her nose. She shook her head, and then gave herself a push. “It’s all over now, thank God”, she said then and tried a little smile. Hansiman gave her a tender push and grinned.

“We don’t miss anything, Hilde, do we?” he then said. And Hilde blushed. Hansiman turned out to be of the same kind as Roland had been. She didn’t know what to think of that. ‘Man is man’ she thought, and shrugged inside. You could do little to change general basics, after all.

It was not at all over with Arundle’s dream-world. In fact Hilde had found access into it at last. While she still didn’t see those colors by ‘the other way of seeing’. Perhaps she didn’t try hard enough. Her daughter frightened her a little for that. And she couldn’t stop worrying. Arundle wasn’t with both feet on solid grounds, even now when she became mother herself and should by now have learnt what it meant to be responsible for another being, and how useful it was, to be just normal, while any deviation as far as the growing life inside was concerned, cause the greatest worries.

Rather obvious facts become suddenly important. Almost each mother cannot withstand to count the fingers and toes of the new born. How she worries about the slightest deviation like sickle-shaped feet or birthmark... And beware the head would exceed the norm. The soothing advice: “This will surely diminish by the years” - would surely be not very helpful.

As long as Hansiman hadn’t altered his male attitudes he’d better stay over here, because he couldn’t use them in heaven, his old friend Anonymous had explained years ago while on the moon and before he left back to earth. “Not for Hilde, after all” he mysteriously added, while Hansiman had no idea yet, what was to come in this respect.

While Rolandus was of course very pleased by Hansiman's presence, he admitted unquestioned. Hansiman was a good sport, he knew from their time on the moon together. While Hilde had been a faint image on the dim horizon of the twitters, and Hansiman hadn't yet been the roaring deer, Hilde awoke in him, and did of course affect Roland to a certain extent, who had to think about long forgotten emotions, and his passed male-chauvinistic attitude. That was why he postponed the plans for a quick return to heaven for Hansiman. First there had some irregularities to be regulated, not only in favour of the disciple but also of himself, and certainly on Hilde's behalf.

Perhaps such an ascension should become connected with a local training. Hansiman might have also to learn 'the other way of seeing', before he could be raised into the inner circle of the chosen few. Otherwise he would not be allowed to ascend back up to heaven again. Because it was quite different whether someone was called, or decided to go on his own, and carry the cross of the world on his shoulders for a certain period of time, in order to lighten the huge pile of mankind's guilt a bit. Such ascensions were of course the exemption, and by no means the rule. Looked at the case that way, everything had to do with 'the other way of seeing' in any case. It was in fact 'the other way of seeing' that became the crucial angle and cross-over for all who longed for a glimpse of a chance to approach the Unspeakable.

Rolandus decided to have a serious word with the Advisor on that. Why did he have advisers, after all? To have a word with Hans Henny Henne in person might turn out to be contra-productive. Perhaps such an aspirant might turn out to be a shallow nut, and that would be awfully sad. So the oppressed Emperor sighed, and pushed the heavy thoughts aside, in order to concentrate on the obvious. There was enough work to do, God knows. Heavenly interventions into earthly affairs weren't easy at all, but most tricky and kinky.

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Hilde noticed it, perhaps more distinct than Hansiman or even Watchman Will Weesle, not to talk about all those nameless, who tried hard, without getting a chance. Under Arundle's influence, a lot had happened to Hilde. Right here, deep down under – if you want to see it that way, so close to and under the influence of the good savage, her daughter had chosen for husband, who stimulated the wildest dreams in Hilde likewise.

There might be the major difference of the genders, she reckoned. Would she be able to overcome her fear, then 'the other way of seeing' would follow, just like that, she was almost certain by now. But that secret horror wouldn't be shaken off easily. It settled too deep. And while she never dared to touch, she lacked of the ability to handle it somehow. On the other hand did she not push aside such empty mode, as she had done beforehand with Roland, and now again with Hansiman. With all their power men closed the outlet, and piled the garbage of their souls up into an insurmountable wall. Of course they never really succeeded. Instead they produced horrible eruptions, like a volcano in action, and quite likely to a real volcano, hardly to be calculated, to the surprise and fear of the vicinity.

Watchman Will Weesle didn't become a drunkard and brawler just like that, and Roland Waldschmitt the monster, he used to be.

'If individuals like the two manage to escape from their bondage, why should I not also succeed' Hilde thought, almost a little obstinate. But did she possess an aura too? Was there any sense in learning the other way of seeing?

The tests she failed regularly, and with her dreaming she didn't get far. In fact she enjoyed dreaming, and did dream a lot, but she never managed to influence the direction of her dreams. She dreamed incidentally and mixed, and only once in a while was she able to remember a dream.

Seeing wasn't a matter of the eyes alone, but was completed in the brain. And if the brain was blocked, you didn't get far. Certain things revoked recognition. This was the way recognition was made. Altering such, would be rather difficult. While the image of the wall was already a rough metaphor. Because such hindrances were in fact misled synapses and extensive straits of information, which couldn't be opened sideways, but only obeyed their destiny. And that wasn't the worst. The vital sensual functions were guaranteed that way, without which a human is no human.

Hansiman had explained that once, and she meant to have understood all that rightly. But then she forgot all this again very fast, and now she felt as if there had been nothing. While Hansiman tried so hard. She dared not to asked him again, not yet. Perhaps later, -- ... or right now, while the question of to be or not to be was raised. Would she prove her incapability, then her entrance to heaven was in danger, or at least very limited. The only advantage then would be, that Hansiman couldn't be taken away from her. This was what she understood so far. Or had she mixed up everything?

The other option prevailed of course. And if Hilde was honest with herself, she felt the tickling. And when she then thought, what she was going to accept on such a voyage without return, she felt very strange.

She would never hold Edmond in her arms again. And her own body would also be gone in part or as a whole, and so would be the sensations. Would they?

While her body annoyed and troubled her once in a while, it also offered quite some happiness, that could hardly be achieved otherwise. Seen that way a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. – For the eating alone’ – she thought and notice how the water gathered in her mouth. Hansiman was kind of a real gourmet, who had an idea of the ‘Haute Cuisine’.

Or all that travelling – with Hansiman it was always like a new start into the unknown behind the horizon.

If she was honest to herself, she tightly clung to her life, but had to give up in order to follow Hansiman to her former husband. Would that be really as easy as Hansiman promised? Fact was that he was in regular exchange with Anonymous ever since, while she hadn’t heard or seen anything personal so far, except the birthday party of little Edmond, when he presented himself as a little cloud on the ceiling, but there he hadn’t been really present – not for her anyway.

Quite similar mechanisms seemed to exist from the other side which limited you rather than freed you, although no one way streets existed. An outlook that threatened her meanwhile.

It was layed on the table by now. They could not leave, before she hadn’t learnt the other way of seeing. Anonymous even spoke of a basic precondition, that is, he had the information transmitted by the Advisor, instead of having an open argument. That was why Hans Henny Henne reckoned him kind of faint-hearted. While there was no use or need to hurry.

The truth was quite different: Anonymous believed in Hansiman, despite of his bionic gear, which now was useless and surplus and hindered the easy transfer, while he wouldn’t be alive anymore with out. That was also clear to all those who made up their minds on his behalf.

Her mother wouldn’t be the real problem, Arundle figured. Hilde was kind of closed up in a way, and had been this way all her life, but the second spring, she experienced right now, changed the matter to the better, and might be of transitory help right now. Billy-Joe felt the

like, who had a personal wire to her mother, somewhat almost upsetting, Arundle mused with a mild grin.

Hans Henny Henne was the problem, no doubt about that. With magic and psychology you wouldn't manage in his case, because he was by far too artificial. A typical border-liner, as they appeared increasingly during the latest years, while you couldn't pack them all in one suitcase. There was at least a clear split into two kinds. Depending on what side you chose, you got an entirely different picture, no matter that there were almost no differences to be seen from the outside.

It was all a matter of the right identity. But the problem of that identity couldn't be made visible. In fact there were no means at all to measure or define identity. Someone could point out as aloud as he could, that he was a real human, but couldn't prove. Because the bionic medicine was so tricky embodied and combined with the given fabric, that only experts were able to confirm or deny such a statement.

Hans Henny Henne was a being that suited the biography of Hans Henny Henne. It shared his memories, and was in full competence of the spiritual forces of him, only marginally limited, because the hefty dementia-attacks had not passed by without effect, which happened to occur lately and over the years. But all in all he didn't doubt himself and was enforced by Hilde. Since he met her, he enfolded and blossomed like a tulip in the mild sun of a springtime day. Her assistance made it all too obvious that he was still a real human man, no doubt about that. All the more, he hadn't experience such, as up to now. All his dried nature, the lack of sensibility and the lack of musicality, as well as the total lack of 'the other way of seeing' were all part of the same source. While this didn't mean that he lacked of any aura. That was a paradox, and from there came the doubts, whether he still was a real human being.

The ascension and the later performed 'de-ascension' back to earth was another hint of doubt. Seen from outside you could certainly end up with the conclusion that he was no real human being any more, you could prove that by sound evidence. He might be a clever cheat, working in two ways – inside and outside.

On the other hand was there the contact to the heavenly scene. And they wouldn't let a mole pass or a cuckoo's egg been laid into the heavenly nest unnoticed. But who knows – one should never say never, Billy-Joe mused, who stuck to his mother-in-law. She at least should know.

“You mean, no matter what he thinks of himself, he could be an artifact anyway?” – this sounded like the perversion in potency and was surely a misinterpretation, as was spread about by millions these days. Or it was no misinterpretation, but that was what it all was actually about.

Were those all hidden artifacts or bionic-wise prepared human beings?

Billy-Joe knew the answer. Or he thought he knew the correct answer. Because he had fought such a monster – way back in the upcoming future, on the field of honour, where the existence of the world was on the verge, while artifacts showed their unmasked image for the first time and made the humans gather in fear, who weren't needed in the world of the artifacts any more. Nothing, what humans required was also needed by artifacts, except a few prepositions. But the whole wide range of organic chemistry was basically without concern to artifacts, and could disappear together with the humans for good, while a few exceptions were still required.

Seen from that point of view, Hans Henny Henne was therefore a true human being. He required the organic world and at best in tact, while he otherwise would ran short of lust of life.

The time of the late twenty-first century would later be regarded as the Golden Age of the good Artifacts. While awful times were approaching mankind. A development was in due course, worse the worst nightmares of the poor creatures. While it all began with an almost harmless sort of flue spreading around the globe. It was the kind of flue as passed by every year, demanding its victims, until a suitable vaccine was found. While the first symptoms didn't differ from a regular flue, the long term effects did all the more, and affected first thousands, then millions and at last billions, while no vaccine could be found this time, other then the previous cases of a similar kind. They were somehow under control, and passed by, leaving no noticeable effect behind.

Not so the new great nightmare. The pandemia took off somewhere in the Northern parts of Asia, most likely near Archangelsk or the more Westerly located Murmansk. And spread slowly first, until it reached the metropolises of Helsinki, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo, Moscow and St.Petersburg. From there it speeded up. But that was already known from former courses of that kind.

Modern traffic technology didn't allow the effective limitation, while fingers pointed hesitantly out of the Northern regions of Asia

into several directions. The number of victims kept rising, but not yet unlimited. There were almost no casualties so far.

The pandemia differed in that to the epidemic flues of former times. That was the good news. The bad news was, that no virus could be found and no vaccine consequently either.

The miraculous disease spread and soon covered the whole globe. There was no help in sight. At least it looked so, for a long time. People tried with common hygienic measures, and were successful. First of all the hospital staff, who managed to stay free of contamination by consequent hygiene.

Unfortunately people weren't so consequent. Only a few were. Thus the disease was spreading further and further, and reached Central Europe. From there it swamped over to Northern America.

Other than former pandemic diseases this time the Northern regions were hit. The disease seemed to avoid the tropics. Neither Africa, nor South America or the Indian Subcontinent and the Malaysian Archiples were effected. It seemed to be a kind of a civilisation-disease. However it differed in so far as it didn't show interdependence with the way of life, but seemed to be spreading by infection.

This was how experts saw it, who stuck to the least straw, and would have loved to present a virus as culprit. But this Pandemia didn't intend to please them. Instead, the Pandemia went on spreading, and found victims on all levels of society, who weren't careful enough with hygienic ventures.

As the clinical picture was unspecific, many affected individuals didn't notice in the first place that they were sick, and saw the doctor far too late, sometimes only after several weeks or even months. They were sitting then wholly des-orientated in the surgery, and could hardly remember their own names, but argued about the sloppy personnel, without whom they would surely not have found to the surgery at all, while the disease led into a progressive inability of physical functions. The victims weren't able anymore to care for themselves. They had forgotten how to handle the simplest things, and were helpless like babies in the end.

The best implantations didn't help anymore. As soon as a new brain was installed, it was swamped by bad blood, and before the restoration of the personal data was finished, the identity had passed away again.

The common service personnel was surely overcharged. The servants ran off, afraid of contamination, and proper artifacts were not in sight as yet, but were in due course of construction.

More or less suitable artifacts were desperately needed, while the round o'clock service for the victims of the disease went up to astronomical heights. So what ever seemed somehow suitable was ordered and prescribed, at best to whole families, where one artifact could care for a number of patients. – Well, that was the idea, but what was the outcome?

The servant-artifacts soon were strangled by the workload. The result was catastrophic, as they gave up serving at all, and fled, just like the human predecessors the awful site.

Other relatives came up with other horror stories. A certain type of the latest model of artifacts mixed up the body-openings of their patients. This was noticed by the smell, neighbors reported to the authorities. But weeks passed by before the mal-functional sets were replaced.

The good news was: nobody died of starvation. Still the shit-smearred faces impressed the public, and didn't help keeping the ball flat, so to speak.

All in all technology picked up soon. The artificial servants became better and better. Their greatest advantage was that they were immune, and the disease couldn't do them any harm, so the officials reckoned. Until some models went crazy. They might even have been those who smeared their patients with shit. But they soon were spotted. They were bionic hybrids, without human identity. A new strand of development, that had been given up, after the fuss with such mix-ups became known.

Identity was a tricky matter. You couldn't just fiddle around, and hope that everything would turn out to the good and right. Artifact and humans should remain strictly separated. That was the message people learnt of the fiasco.

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The Pandemia came to a halt, finally. As it sprang up, so it broke down. The number of disabled people however remained on a very high level. Before the Pandemia, the centres of the civilized world had housed roughly a quarter of a billion cases, that were about two percent of the world-population. Now the statistics spoke of four billion cases, that were about thirty percent of the population. Every second inhabitant of the Northern metropolises was affected. And those who were still able to care for themselves, soon didn't like to do anymore, but also wanted to be pampered by an artifact of the most

advanced type. While a generation further, the whole affair started all over again, and this time even worse.

The damaged individuals, who increased in great numbers as a consequence of the Pandemia, suffered of mental malfunctions, but physically they were still able in certain field of action. Their fertility exploded, which had gone remarkably down under the influence of the SLOMES.

But that was now over and out. While Abortion-clinics could hardly handle the flood of abortioneers, where those unhappy and mentally disturbed or even insane subjects were sent to, mostly without knowing what was going to happen with them. As soon as they found out, they rejected the operation. No objections would help, while it became known what effects the pandemia had on the offspring. Therefore the authorities thought they had the right or even the plight to intervene and force abortion.

As a consequence of the Pandemia children with crippled extremities were born. They were helpless right from the first day of their lives and remained that way all their life. Without the help of an artificial servant they couldn't be.

Nobody as yet understood at that early stage, how this could be. The time had to pass by. But some decades later, the whole extend of the catastrophe came out.

As if the misery wasn't big enough by this first plague, such Pandemias occurred regularly in cycles, with ever the same consequences. And while it had been possible to keep up the sanity of the majority of the population, the following generations were definitely trapped. The mutations of the genes were never overcome. In fact the human genotype seemed permanently damaged.

Be it that the disease didn't break out in many cases or in so mild a form that it wasn't recognized as such. Fact was however, that seemingly healthy families came about with disabled offspring, while somehow cheating the screenings, or vice versa: wholly healthy children were born of diseased parents, or their predecessors.

Serious doubts arose among the scientists, as far as the research of the cause was concerned. Could it be, that the Pandemia was a kind of catalytic outlet of a phenomenon of an entirely other kind?

Was there a connection between the way of life, and the inherited disease? Had the increase of bad genes to do with technological progress? Could they be side-effects of ecological damage, unknown as yet so far? And if so, which?

Questions over questions, and no answers in sight.

Without the free tribes in the free zones, where the Pandemia couldn't step in, and never had, the fate of civilisation would be sealed at the latest. While the rejected and neglected outcasts – so it seemed - became the last hope for a future, worth to be called future.

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The Isle of Wisdom-tooth and the close by University Island, as well as Susmee's Island of the Convertors and the dwarves, weren't affected by the Pandemia. Not one single case became known. This was the advantage of the isolation, you subjugated somehow, no matter whether any of the World-Citizens agreed. Their picture of the world would have been badly offended.

While all noticed the challenge. The malfunction of the servant-artifacts caused Tibor to search for an entirely new approach. His musings started off with the self-induced horse-headed violin. Because he understood the instrument at best, as you can certainly imagine. He spoke about his musings with the other Deans, mainly with Arundle, who suggested to have Judith Kornblum and Hans Henny Henne come aboard the boat as well. So it happened.

First Tibor explained (what he never had done before), how he handled the violin, (i.e. how the violin handled him), and what it was all about the instrument. "It's without doubt a divine inspiration" he started off. "While it's based on the harmonies, which deserve as the necessary mode of reference wherein the tunes move. Their sequencing is destined by the Uncertainty Principle. The starting off point or the starting off harmony reflects the plentitude of the following tunes, while the suggested sequences are being selected in order to please the ear utmost. This would be one criteria, the likeliness is calculated. The task of the hands is going to be regulated by the likeliness. Each sequence of tunes, each harmony, and each tremolo, and each syncope or cadence is calculated by a fan of likeliness, chosen from the following events. The latter to be transformed is a matter of the perfect performance and a program in itself, that's regulating the settings of the fingers and the movements of the bow.

The head of the horse-headed violin you can compare with a HiFi-electronic tablet. Armed with an almost unlimited storage-modul and a thought-fast calculation-mode."

Those around him, didn't dare to interrupt, while surely many questions were pending. But Tibor went on without hesitating one itch.

“What ever has to become decided, is decided the same instant, no matter how fast the decision is, and is available right away. The result is an unreachable perfection, nobody and no sense can withstand, so even the stones sob, as soon as the violin begins to play. And you have to be blind deaf or badly disturbed mentally, if you can withstand. How this works in detail, hasn't yet been found out, but an investigation is in due course.”

Tibor grinned meaningfully and gazed over to Hans Henny Henne, who looked up somewhat alerted, while he hadn't experienced himself as disabled to such an extent. But that needn't mean too much, he wondered.

“The sequence of tunes is kind of a programmer's language. The language corresponds with any likely event inside the frame of reference. And this language is the basis, we have to start off. The violin may be put aside for the moment” Tibor went on with a quick gaze over to Hans Henny Henne again, who accepted the offer thankfully, and relaxed a little, because such a fundamental critique of his person, he hadn't expected in such a context.

Judith and Arundle also positively signalled agreement, while some ingredients seemed them to lie right at hand. They were elaborating in the SLOMES laboratories with supra-electronic hyper add-ons for some time already, and checked for implementations and brain-analogous connections of certain abilities, like the storage of data and information of all kinds, on a nano-versal scale.

“The idea is the following” Tibor went on, obviously not deeply impressed by the meaningful (or was it -- meaningless) silence?

“What's good for tunes, also works with other information. If you succeed in entering the wave cosmos around us, the same way as we enter the musical cosmos. - Yes, the cosmos can be entered in any possible mode. And we only need a language, in order to transcribe information. That means however, that the devices got to be programmed instantly, while the surrounding constantly changes in an incidental and chaotic manner, you cannot pre-calculate in advance, not in the sense of the proper meaning. While all depends on the adequate behaviour in any likely situation. Only then a behaviour like the smeared patients can be avoided.”

(The tale really went around the world again and again and made it clear to all specialists and engineers what a heck of a lot of workload they were facing, and shouldering – sooner or later.)

“Only with the self-inducing program artifacts become able to handle all eventualities of being adequately and correctly. Overlooking and anticipating the demands of the instant, embedded

into the likely frame of the upcoming future. And this will be done better, more correct and more farsighted than human individuals can afford. All you need is a keyboard, and hands to handle it. Equipped that way, we can expose the artifact where ever we want. It will find its way, or does, what ever it is asked to do. Only when the likeliness exceeds a critical mark, it will strike and ask for alternatives, or would do the needful things in order to get in contact with its master or mistress.

Yes, the artifact will have to learn the language of the world, while this cannot be done by any being, not even the most powerful machinery. No man has a complete command of his mother-tongue. In average, people utilize only about ten percent of the available vocabulary. This is the dimension, we should think of, while realistic.”

“We all know that in everyday life not all circumstances can be verbalized. A lot of what we do or leave, depend on non-verbal communication”, Hans Henny Henne interjected, who still gnawed on the cosmic harmonies he was lacking, as to Tibor, and therefore intended to search for crumbs.

Tibor saw through Hansiman’s intention and smiled friendly, and not at all aggressive.

“A lot would be won, if our artifacts wouldn’t mix up the openings of the bodies of their masters. We want orderly personnel for our patients, who cannot do without aides, because they need assistance in everyday life. That would be a good start. And for this kind of duty you wouldn’t even need language competence of more than one percent of the global language. Well, such a language had first of all to be written, before you could start to implement into the artifacts.”

“...such language should enlarge on its own then” Arundle interjected, who was all in favour of Tibor’s musings.

Judith nodded eagerly as well, and prepared in mind for the appropriate action.

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Hans Henny Henne postponed his ascension once more, and asked the Advisor to inform his friend Anonymous accordingly, and why he felt forced to do. The latter understood at once, and wished him on the Emperor’s behalf the very best, sound endurance, and good luck.

“The heavenly blessings are certainly yours” the Advisor added on his own, rather sophisticated, and disappeared before Hans Henny Henne had a chance to place one of his replica, he was famous for.

Hilde was pleased. It would have become quite a confusion with her two men together. No matter how elaborated they were meanwhile. For Hansiman she wouldn't go through fire and water, though.

Together with Peter Adams the old aged hoary Inventor faced the task of inventing a corpus, which suited all demands of a self-induced horse-headed violin, without being one. Instead of the strings, so he wondered, a keyboard would better do. While the hands seemed him appropriate, because there was always something to be done, like writing new orders, to adapt to the changing environment, in order to come to the adequate conclusions for projecting the next steps.

A cam-corder served for the visual-sensual recognition, and two sensible microphones did the same for the audio-sensual dimension, while olfactorial receptors, lent from the bionic surgery, enlarged the sensual apparatus of the artifact by another important dimension. Last but not least was the tender handling of the patients of great importance, and was a challenge to be overcome too.

For three of the five senses was cared. For the others suitable solutions would soon be found. While there was in fact but only one sense left. ‘what the hell does an artifact need a sense to smell?’ they were asked, and had no answer. While the last word hadn't been spoken yet.

At first the team started off with what was obvious. The first results then stunned Arundle in a strange manner. She felt set back into her youth, when the first prototype of the new artifacts stood in front of her, and gazed at her with their huge goggle-eyes.

Those eyes erected from a square dull face, slightly bent forward, as if standing in an obedient fashion, ready and prepared to receive orders. The square scull ended in a keyboard-corpus, with two thin arms on each side with extremely long and busy fingers, which hushed flashlight-like over the keyboard. Underneath, the little fellow stood on two thin legs with huge plate-like feet, on which he hushed rather soft and very quickly about, while the hands never stood still, giving new orders.

“That's for once the two-armed standard prototype”, Tibor explained. “...who can adjust to his environment and can react on each change, almost like a human being. When someone rings at the door, he rushes to the door and let the visitor in, or takes the mail, if it is the postman. His ability to talk is rather limited. Except “Go”, “Stand

still” and the like, there isn’t much he can transform and take over. That is, he listens or sees a challenge or an order, then he types it, and follows it right away. There is not the slightest delay. Orders will be transmuted, as soon as the sensual recognition demands.”

“Yes, we’ve given him a name. Suitable for his future tasks, we called him Severin (the servant). That’s kind of nicer than QX2 or VJQ” – Hans Henny Henne explained, who was very proud of the result of their labourings.

An good dozen people in the room waited to be served by Severin, who needn’t being asked, but hushed about with a tray full of finger-food. As he had only one hand free, his typing looked somewhat clumsy, so Hans Henny Henne wondered, whether they should equip him with an additional pair of substitutional arms on a stand-by basis for certain advanced and enlarged taskings. He would have a word with Judith on that. He looked through the room, but couldn’t find her.

Serving the champagne was no sweat for our new comrade. He neither broke the neck of a bottle, nor spilled the guests with the sparkling liquid. Self-assured with scarce gestures he handled the situation like a perfect butler, while his free hand went over the keyboard, and his fingers never stood still.

‘There you can see, what’s going on around you all the time, when you mean nothing’s happening’ Billy-Joe thought full of admiration. He put his glass down to have the hands free for the well earned applause, the first speaker was welcomed with, and that was Hans Henny Henne, as soon as Judith Kornblum entered the room on the arm of her husband.

As ‘Emeritus’ this privilege was his. So Hans Henny Henne brought out a toast on Severin, who seemed to understand, because he stopped and bowed and his face showed a kind of grin, - well, at least Billy-Joe meant to realize.

Severin then surprised the assembly with some kind of musical performance, which didn’t have the level of the self-induced horse-headed violin, while managing wholly without magic, remarkable as it was.

Again the finger hushed over the keyboard as fast as the eye could hardly follow. But this time he produced miraculous tunes, reminding of a harmonium with a very special charm.

That was a well arranged surprise, Hans Henny Henne agreed, although he wasn’t really fond of music. He might alter his attitude,

and become music-wise upgraded. There was a simple and easy to install a program now available. Hilde had found out for him. While he would hang on over here for quite a while, his life on earth might become upgraded that way, by such a dimension.

“See it also through the pink glasses of the divine life, you are going to have once – so that you don’t be blamed as the Bavarian in heaven was, when he was asked to perform on the harp the heavenly way. He tried hard, but neither enjoyed, nor was able to perform at all.”

Good old Hilde considered everything. Moved by such care,

The mood might already be pointing in the adequate direction. The tender tunes of the harmonium, embraced Hans Henny Henne, and perhaps for the first time in his life, the music made him shudder, in a way he used to shudder only, when an epochal result of research succeeded. While here it was some kind of such a success. However he couldn’t say what the reason for the shudder really was here, and what made him feel the strange way he felt.

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There was much work to do. From the prototype to the serial production was still a long way. Thus the scientists elaborated on for quite some while, as well with the multi-armed-ness of the artifact, but soon came to the conclusion that it didn’t lead somewhere. Most likely it had to do with the fact that we humans hardly manage to do two different things with our hands at the same time. Doing so was already part of an artificial world, and not open for the ordinary contemporary fellow. Such being was content or even happy when succeeding with just one task at the time.

While the two-armed-ness didn’t really limit or hinder the speed of obedience. The Severin was quicker in any case, and a quick thinker as well, and stood in bright contrast to the masters, who were mentally disturbed or even wholly disabled.

Still Hans Henny Henne implemented the one or other mental ability like chess or poker -- the more so, as there was no limitation space-wise. The basic set had been enlarged anyway, while the outer form still persisted in general, while it became enforced as required by the back or the legs or with an extra integral helmet for the head for protection. Thus the precious and vulnerable parts like eyes or ears were hidden behind crash-tested glass.

The weak parts remained the sensible fingers and the keyboard as such. So the team experimented with all kinds of protective measures,

like a cover that could be fixed in no time over the keyboard, while the fingers were protected with stainless steel gloves, still enabling Severin to type. But didn't look as elegant and wasn't as fast anymore.

Thanks to the self-induced modifications such limitations were overcome, the common robots were exposed. Only by the new programmer's world-language, with which you could verbalize everything, what could be verbalized, Severin was the first artifact who could join the human reality.

Instead of following the once set patterns, Severin was able to react and fit himself into the requirements of the circumstances. This was the basic preposition for an artificial creation. All that to the best and service of the human masters, as the highest and unbreakable directive.

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When developing a world-language the scientists could refer to the experiences they made in Atlantis. They even were able to adopt some parts. While the vocabulary had to be modernized – after all some thousands of years had passed meanwhile – the expressiveness and marvel of the language persisted and fascinated the scientists still. They felt like wandering on forbidden paths and secret traces of long parted ancestors. And they often felt, as if they had known something of their future, before the final down-fall.

Was this a sign for the contemporaries, pointing forward to their own future?

However, thinking that far, forbade the need of the hour, while the next steps had to be considered, and that was the agony of the disabled millions who needed help, while growing by number day by day, starving and even dying without proper help. The Severin program had to be pushed therefore by all means, while detailed improvements might follow subsequently in due time.

From the centres of the world you could hear the outcry of the devastated creature like a dark cloud of agony and desperation. Thus the Kornblums doubled or even tripled their efforts by postponing any other production efforts in order to bring forward the Severin line. The market felt like a dry sponge.

Additional utensils were added. All kinds of chaises and sedan-chairs came up and donkey-like twitters or laptopobils of all kinds, while Severin and Severine remained the basic feature, meanwhile enlarged by a female version, with slightly different appeal. Co-productions of all kind all around the world multiplied the output, and

step by step the most desperate needs were satisfied. Thus the hour of the worst desperation became the birth of a new way of cooperation. To the absolute paradox – mankind seemed to be on the verge of overcoming the plague of greed. Perhaps for the first time in history stood Man with one foot in a new time, or was it an insurmountable wall of ignorance?

3.The g-Propulsion

The wind of change was blowing them right into their faces – not necessarily pleasing. While feelings often depend on circumstances of life. Thus, incredible things were under way, especially when seen in a general world-view. Where did those new technologies come in, that were blossoming all over the world? Who would ever have dreamed that the sorcery of the magic bow didn't lack a rational basis? But was powered by a mode that didn't only govern the whole SLOMES technology, but revolutionized also - as a most welcome by-product -, the air-traffic as a whole?

How else could thousands of space shuttles be sent to the space stations in the orbit, some 240 kilometres above the surface, and revolving there with the globe?

The classical modes of power by rocket-propulsion or combustion-engine couldn't do any more in the long run. Far too much energy was used up that way, and the speed that was accumulated didn't suffice either. Not to mention heat and pollution. But how did the new type of shuttle get up to the space stations?

The beginning of the new type of power started in a way with Arundle's magic bow. That is – there were two starting points as a matter of fact. These two ways however never collided, because they were too far away from each other, and nobody really cared, as far as the bow was concerned.

The other and most likely more splendid mode based on common traditions, and was, how else could it be – developed by the genius of Hans Henny Henne. In his case it was a kind of accidental by-product of his research while developing the SLOMES technology, or to be even more precise – the encoding of the locations of the Isle of Wisdom-tooth at the first place.

Now the similarity was striking. Hans Henny Henne had had not the slightest intention to find a new mode of power source, or an alternative fuel for the air traffic. Rather the opposite was intended.

Arundle and her magic bow learnt of that dilemma, without much emphasis. The bow listened to the explanation of the Uncertainty Principle and what he heard was not only most welcome, but startling. He fiercely nodded and blinked with his magic eye and shouted "Heureka, that's it. That's what happens when you think strongly of a place you want to be, and start programming your target, while I contact the ultimate observer to cut the circuit short, until the latter risks an eye and decides.

As by the Uncertainty Principle any bit can not remain and be seen, but emerges elsewhere. In our case the site we long for. So simple is it. No magic but solid Quantum Physics."

The magic bow ceased exhausted for a good while and Arundle was stunned. "Now you say nothing" Pootsy exclaimed and the magic stone giggled. He seemed to agree with what the bow just said. This fact was remarkable in a way, as their willingness to cope was limited from his side in general, while the bow didn't stay apart but went in whenever there was a chance.

Hans Henny Henne was also delighted. What he heard from the bow was just the way he liked it. While the principle came close to what he experimented and found out while constructing the camouflage mac on the islands. Visibility had to be disguised then, and no object could be either located or noticed at the same time. Henne overcame the challenge by a tricky diversity-module designed for sea-ships of all kinds. While certain weaknesses, especially in the beginning did happen.

Inbetween lay the development of the SLOMES, a kind of nano-dimensional cosmos with astonishing effects on the observer.

The problems of invisibility had then at length been overcome and the SLOMES Technology was a great success, although hard to explain.

The new power source on the other hand came just in time, as the ecological problems made the globe suffer, and would soon be spotted as a major initiator for the frequent pandemia thread.

"Far too energetic, far too consumptive. That kind of forward motion must come to an end, the globe can't stand it anymore. The warming of the earth is continually rising. We must get away from the combustion-engine and the propulsion drive, which is even worse."

While he said that, an idea came to Hany Henny H

4. Back in Future

Arundle remembered back to the time when she had been young. Her first visits to Laptopia hadn't been very challenging after all. Were they on the verge of entering the former future in reality now?

Were they approaching the time, when the final battle was due, - Man on one side and Artifact on the other? It didn't look the like on the surface. As long as the first directive was valid, such an upheaval seemed out of the question. Severins and Severines were the blessing of the disabled mankind, surely not the curse, that formed somewhere else in hidden darkness.

But Arundle had experienced and knew the upcoming. She knew everything, and so did Billy-Joe and the other friends, who had discernments and or participated in person, years ago in the future, which was now on the verge to come.

In order to find out, Arundle and her family travelled to the sites they once had been way back in the future, that had come now.

Yes, time had almost come, the distance was almost none, while it didn't show in plain figures yet. That had to do with the calendar and the leak on the time-scale. Nobody, so it seemed, was in command of the exact facts. A couple of years more or less had to be considered. If things had been the way they showed on the day when they were misled and stranded in that valley near the gas station where they got thick swollen fingers, because they put them into a booking device, when they didn't have the appropriate currency. What they didn't know was that they were in the wrong century and that was why their fingers almost fell off, before they managed to return and have the device exchanged.

It had been Severin who helped them out, and Tibor became his inventor, without realizing what he did, as he had no memory back to the state when Arundle first met the Laptopians. Had Tibor known, he might have chosen a different outfit for the Severin.

The situation was kind of archaic, like in a Greek tragedy, when nobody escapes his or her predestined fate. Those, who manage to peep into the future, should be aware of the fact, that the future will one day get at him, or her, and pick up with him, or her, and realize what once had been seen. And that the real future was rather similar or quite likely of what had once been seen. Logic demanded that.

Arundle had badly struggled against the might of fate, and mobilized all her efforts and powers. She had employed and fought heaven and hell to avoid the upcoming. Now, when facing the Severin for the first time, Arundle realized that her efforts had been in vain. That fate was stronger.

Was she the only one who saw the evil upcoming? The picture of the past had become pale. She had been a child. Now she was an elderly woman, even an old woman, as to former standards, while the loss in time had to be deducted – If this was done, she wasn't all that old – any way.

Thanks to the SLOMES her age was no age any more. Her appearance was that of a woman in the best years, without much thinking of operations and things the like. She was now on that level for quite some time, and there was no reason in sight, why this should change.

Arundle had seen generations of students come and go. Together with Billy-Joe, with Tibor and Tika had she guided the School of Inbetween through heights and depths, always aware of Malicious Marduk, and perhaps a little too blue-eyed, as far as the rest of the world was concerned. Thus you feel as the 'Hub of the World', she sighed somewhat critical with herself.

This was the first real trip to Frankfurt since then, when she had been a child. She wanted to see with own eyes what it looked like these days. What did she expect? Would it look like Laptopia? Was she travelling towards future? The future, that was on the verge of becoming real and true, and was no longer a mere vision, but an iron fact, nobody could escape, no matter how hard he tried.

There was still some time left. But the Severin woke her up. All he was missing was the additional extra limb with the sharp scissor-hand of a Laptocop and the helmet on top of his head. For the General it might in fact be a bit too early yet. He might have been just born these days, she figured, while she easily could fail by a couple of years, with all that fuss with the time, that was supposed to rule these days.

Would the houses be round and the clouds heavy as lead to sit on top? Would Edmond govern one day? He was in the same age now, as she had been then. Would he wonder the way she had wondered in her time?

Well, this time no-one had an antique laptop in the luggage, or glided in by means of a magic bow, as she used to then. While she had almost fallen through the clouds, because she didn't pay enough attention, and didn't notice when she began to glide.

In a sense she made the voyage for Edmond. Not knowing however where this was going to lead. The past could certainly not be repeated, or could it? Well, she didn't intend to do so.

Had they been able to stamp the time with some sort of connotations? Did they manage to alter the course of reality – only a little bit? She would be as happy as could be for that. Not all was bad in the world, they were living in. Without those pandemias mankind would do much better, of course. She was convinced of that. The great Enlightener Anonymous had come and set a broad trace.

Some people knew at last what was on the verge, and what was likely to come up soon. Nobody had an idea as yet what was coming, while first indicators pointed towards the thread. Those disabled beings smeared with yag were just indices. Since the bionic revolution things weren't any more as they used to be. Science had lost control. They were already there - the fully automatised laboratories where no human being had access, where the artifacts reproduced themselves without human support. The name of Malicious Marduk was heard in this context as well, and made Arundle fear for the worst.

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A brave Severine brought her back from her reveries and musings. The Severine asked for her demands in a soft air, what her choice from the menu was, and served a steaming tray right away, as soon as Arundle made up her mind.

Billy-Joe's grey head bowed over in order to check the result of the procedure. Then he nodded somewhat hesitantly and soon the tray was steaming in front of him as well. Edmond smelled the roast and denied. There was no reason to wait then. The food tasted the same as it looked. And after two bites Arundle had the cutlery rest. She gazed over to Billy-Joe and Edmond, whether they could help her out of such calamity by freeing her of the tray. But both shook their heads with indignation and Billy-Joe asked for a strong liquor to get rid of the stale aftertaste, that was filling his mouth after a few bites.

"Food-wise its going to go backwards ahead, no doubt about that" she reckoned to feel Billy-Joe think, who was tracing the past no other than she did in order to find the former future now.

He also told himself that there were still some years to come ahead, no matter what else was going to happen. While indices the like, didn't help to ease him down. Edmond knew the tragedy only by the scarce intimations of his parents.

All civilised ate the synthetic junk their servants produced for them. As to the label it consisted of everything an individual required day by day. From a medical point of view this might even be correct, that the critics didn't doubt. But where were those days now with tamarind sauce and flying dogs or coconut-risotto on palmtree-leaves in lemongrass-cover - they used to date in former days?

In order to have a swim afterwards over to the pontoon out there in the lagoon? Had that been the sweet youth, or were those pleasures of life incompatible?

While Edmond quite well understood, what his parents were communicating without words. Things weren't lost at all, no the least for the inhabitants on the Isle of Wisdom-tooth, where the youth still met for lunch under the roof of the Southsea-cuisine overshadowed by romantic palmtree leaves. The magic bow confirmed accordingly by having his red eye blink, being hidden behind Arundle's chair unnoticed. While Pooty – as was his nature – embraced the magic stone in Billy-Joe's pouch, sighing once in a while, dreaming of Walter and the almost forgotten days - he couldn't forget, nevertheless.

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The Karoras were sitting in one of the latest huge supersonic stratospheric liners as they travelled from one space station to the next. From there you went by shuttle down to your destination, thus a trip around the globe was a matter of only a few hours. The shuttles commuted like busses in former days every ten minutes, and were of great advantage.

Down on earth you were rid of the noise of the planes and the pollution, while the lack of air resistance reduced the fuel consumption to a minimum. Scientists were busy in finding an even more effective means of transport on an advanced basis.

All major metropolises had their own Space Station, which served not only the city but also the surrounding area. For that reason hybrid-helicopters were available, being able to climb in no time the 20.000 height-metres. Those copters plied likewise every ten minutes and served a fixed set of routes. This way longer waiting time was avoided. On ground you travelled on with fast gliders, that followed the tracks of the streets, and replaced the car traffic almost completely.

All public transport was equipped with an automatic steering system. Crashes, like in former times, had become almost impossible. The artifacts replaced the human beings. The latter were spotted as the

greatest risks, and were therefore banned from steering wheels. The fascination for speed could still be satisfied. Inside the gliders you had a cockpit for the pilot like in reality, but wasn't wholly real, when it came to the transformation, as far as speed and turnings were concerned. Other means of transport weren't allowed and not even available any more.

So you had to travel a long way, if you wanted to experience the good old days full of dangers and perils, in order to risk your own head and life. But this was still possible, however illegally, in fact.

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Arundle was disappointed, while she had good reasons for being glad. Inside she had expected the picture of the former days, while this didn't mean any good for the earth. They had arrived in Frankfurt finally, and the houses around the Hauptwache raised high up into the sky, while gliders rushed some five metres above the ground over the heads of the multitude of all colours. No laptops that were busy writing on their keyboards were among them. But a sedan-chair was to be seen here and there, carried indeed by artifacts, that could clearly be seen.

Arundle would have liked to show her son how the future started in those days. She could have failed as far as the location was concerned. That she would land in the future Frankfurt had only been wishful thinking on her side at that time, and had been only a conclusion, drawn together with adults. None the least as Dorothea had been all in favour of General Armyless, because he had looked like her husband Scholasticus.

Arundle felt the itch of upsetting her little lappy in order to find out whether the Laptocops would come as soon as they heard it screaming, in order to arrest the tormentor, while she had fallen off the clouds then, because she didn't pay attention.

Would that cloud banks still suit for sitting like in those days? H

Her youth was gone, she had a grown up son, at least a hundred years or twice as much Laptopian time had passed, since the first contact, the traces of which they were due of following right now.

Arundle did it for Edmond, because he was in the right age. The same age as she had then been. Going on searching in Frankfurt was of no use, and while they were here, it might be a good idea to do a little sight-seeing. They might by chance discover a familiar site. You never know.

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Since Mynona was suspected somehow because of the giant moth, she felt uneasy in a way over here in the School of Inbetween. Or was it the wanderlust, they both couldn't get rid of – not on such a tiny little island? Well, the open sea was around, no doubt about that, and you could see as far as the horizon was. But that had been the same, way back in old Idahoh, where the blue waves were replaced by the yellow waves of the cornfields in summer.

She had learnt a lot, Mynona reckoned, and Sam Smiley felt better educated as well. Without the School of Inbetween, they would most likely never had found out about the green whirl. But now they handled the dance with the winds just like that. Tibor had shown them the best tricks ever. They managed to carry on two passengers. And while they meanwhile noticed, that those, not gifted with the other way of seeing, little could see, they managed to inflame their passengers, nevertheless. When the latter realized what was going on among them, and how they managed to gain height, they were done. Undescribable it was. And there was still a lot to be told to friends and acquaintance forever and evermore.

While you were in the whirl, you noticed little. On the ground the whirl was almost nothing, but as soon as the lift-off happened, you saw things with other eyes. The further it went the less could be seen below, and the ordinary contemporary fellow was soon left alone and behind on the ground.

Instead of inscribing at the Island University the two packed their backpacks, fixed the sleepingbags and a little tent, and took the copter to the mainland. First they wanted to explore the continent, and then they might carry on through the South Sea up to India. If it didn't work other – by their own power, which wouldn't be easy with all that luggage. But they had all the time in the world. Nobody was forcing them. The grand wide world stood open for them. They had nothing to lose, and little lost from where they came.

But it came all different. Mynona became pregnant, even before they had passed the South Sea. So they returned to Australia. Because they had felt well down under. The people were open-minded and Mynona could imagine to bring up her child there – for the time being, first of all. Back to Idaho – no way.

Then Sam had the idea with that resort. While they raised curiosity with the green whirls, where ever they showed up. As a

wandering troop their chances were little, and a big tross like a real circus was not theirs either.

So they settle on a fairly attractive ground, they had to purchase from the Aborigines. They didn't mind becoming cheated for the worthless piece of land, where little grass grew. They paid far too much.

But the highway wasn't too far, and that was important. What should a holiday-resort do without the public? They contacted their former Dean, and thus the idea of the Laptopia-Resort was born. Tibor mailed them, what he knew about it. He didn't forget the funny round houses, and the self-induced Laptops he described in detail, who ran about there. They were his very own invention, he just lately introduced to the public. He would certainly claim an appropriate amount for the resort.

"For the start one hundred should suffice" he let them know, while offering his visit. However, here in the outback clocks tick different, that was so nice about Australia, Mynona and Sam reckoned, that was why they liked it. The Laptops were scarcely covered as well as possible against rain and heat, while they weren't made of stainless steel, as a matter of fact, the two managers soon found out. With stiff joints they were as helpless as the clientele they were made for.

Once run stuck, it was a hell of a job to get them started again. With all that high-tec electronic interior inside, there were still a lot of old-fashioned stuff, that needed lubrication, as the vehicles in former days.

But things got started nevertheless, thanks to Tibor's initiative. He stayed on after his step-visit, when he noticed how slow the processes developed. He could have easily waited for another two or three months, and hadn't caused trouble with the production-line manager of the new Severin-type, when asking for a hundred extras beforehand.

Tibor also had the clearest vision of the houses and the setup alongside the narrow streets. After his blueprints the orders were placed – complete, with interior, family-minded and with guaranteed horrible junk-food being distributed daily from a central kitchen, as soon as the first disabled real clients moved in.

While the Severins and Severines didn't do anything useful, before their arrival, but were parading to and fro and up and down the narrow streets and passages, giving themselves orders by hammering on the keyboards with their long sensible fingers on the two thin arms,

left and right. That wasn't too much, the young going-to-be parents reckoned.

You could see Mynona sitting about with an inside directed gaze, caressing her belly, and Sam Smiley standing by, nodding eagerly and somewhat helpless. Somehow they weren't the former ones any more. Did the victims of the Pandemia look the like, when the disease broke out? Sam seemed to shrink. Something was wrong with his legs, and the arms also caused him trouble, he didn't want to realize.

"We can certainly dance with the winds, that worked out fine all over the time, we were away" Sam said, and Mynona looked up, shaking her head softly, whispering gently "That's no good for the little one" – "I can do alone" Sam insisted. But he knew how important a partner was.

"What would happen if we had that General march with his troops up, and arrest those people for mishandling their artifacts?" Mynona asked. She had heard something of that kind. In fact the one or other rumour you picked up, when you lived in such a school for years. Although they had kept to their own, and never had become warm with the others. Perhaps they had been just too old, when they started, and were spoilt by their wanderlust for a life on an island. Tibor had pleased them in any way, and had understood them better than they did themselves, so it had seemed to them.

Slowly a kind of a programme was taking up contour, promising gags and fun, so the name they gave it 'No-Future-Factory', sounded somewhat appropriate.

In the long run Tibor projected visits to the castle's interior, and a visit in those dark horror cabinets of the subsoil dungeons, which of course had first to be built. So the dwarves were needed once more, who were the only ones who could achieve such a task. An audience with the Prince-regent and his wife would certainly round the picture, while the castle had as well to be built and furnished first.

Such a project grew rather shapeless. Still the outlook wasn't frightening. Perhaps you would earn a livid lecture of how the future shouldn't be like.

The more he wondered, the mightier grew the imagination, until he had the ultimate idea. But then he knew already that he couldn't shoulder the whole affair on his own. What had started small, had to grow and had to become reality. A reality that didn't exist as yet.

All were demanded. How thankful he was, while Mynona felt the strong longing for stability for her becoming child. How glad was he, that the two had changed, and had come to him with their

idea. An idea that sounded crazy at first, while becoming the greatest idea of the century.

At last the School of Inbetween was faced with a challenge they deserved. At last they could prove what was in them. A challenge they required all their resources for. Because without those such a huge matter couldn't be handled, Tibor all too well knew. For one alone it was too much, and couldn't be handled.

Where did that idea come from? Who wired the wheels and shifted the switches? What would Arundle say? He never had been as curious as these days. That overdid everything he ever experienced. And not him alone. Nobody, he was sure of that, had ever experienced something the like, or would ever experience. What was going to build up here, was so singular, so unimaginable and at the same time so incredibly simple, that it just took your breath, whenever you realized before the inner eye.

True results were the most simple ones, and stunned exactly thereof.

People asked afterwards why nobody had anticipated such a solution, while it was the most obvious and the most simple solution, you could think of.

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Arundle didn't give up. She consulted her magic bow for once about the coordinates that were once in former times employed. "Can it be that something was mixed up, perhaps with the parallels of latitude?"

The magic bow bursted out laughing, he was giggling somewhat strange all the time already, as he hadn't done for a long time, and assessed her no answer. He felt like being asked for the riddle of the world, and was expected to pass on a formular. Visiting all Frankfurts around the world he refused however. "I won't do. Where there are those wonderful connections now available the common way. You travel with your people like all the others do. Will suit you just fine."

To Frankfurt on Oder the stratospheric cruiser wouldn't fit, the distance was too short. It would have taken them as long as the whole flight took all the way up from Australia. Besides, that Frankfurt was another disappointment, or a positive surprise. Because there was nothing to be seen. A boring dirty little town, as far as they took notice via online map. While the Frankenfurters swore on their city and praised it as open minded and urban as the

gateway to the East. But they didn't mingle and left after a few hours.

Next stop was Kentucky. The Frankfort there had a different spelling, an o for a u, but that was it. Otherwise the place was quite normal, while the Pandemia had raged badly, and the number of Severins and Severines was considerably higher than in old Europe. There were in fact some wandering Laptops, strolling about, seemingly senseless, or chasing their trace, while some guided their disabled masters or mistresses, either on their hands or by an necklace around the neck or breast, with neatly sounding bells.

That was a new variation, and had no equivalent in the former future, as Arundle remembered. Not to her consciousness anyway. So she departed to the next Frankfurt on the list (also with an o instead of a u) and so forth. The towns became smaller, but nowhere began a bell to ring, for sure not on the plain countryside. Because Laptops hadn't come that far. People did without artifacts. They kept their disabled and diseased in the families or the mentally disturbed under control in old people's homes. Those didn't mind, because they were absent minded, so to speak. Compared to the metropolises very little victims of the pandemia could be found.

Disappointed and frustrated the little family finally returned. While there was good reasons for pleasure, because the nightmarish future was nowhere in sight. The assumptions of former days, that they had done glimpses into the future seemed to be wrong. They might have had discernments into another world, other than the world they were living in.

On the other hand were there facts, which couldn't be ignored either.

Henne" he moaned aloud, while no-one would hear him down under. He knew himself, no matter what faded with the years.

Henne shot him really down, knowing that he couldn't do harm while on the verge of ascension. The Prince-Regent was his final role on earth. After that he would be free from all earthly lots, free for the plenty-ness in order to plunge right into plentitude. Well, a chat once in a while with friend Anonymous should be still likely.

As per plan Sam Smiley took over after the battle. His cut-off head would become exchanged immediately so Hansiman could carry on ascending complete. As far as he was informed, he would be picked up by a fire-chariot. "That's a special honour, only a few

deserve” the Advisor explained meaningfully, who had appeared to overlook the suicide mission.

Thus it happened that Hilde didn't even have a corpse she could mourn adequately. Together with Arundle, who wasn't better off, she wept barrels. While the corpse of the old Shaman was never seen again, and Pooty and the magic stone from Uluru were never seen either.

Perhaps they are caved in and sleep the sleep of death deep down under the shallow hill, which erects on the battle field, and reminds mankind of the fate of a saviour. They might be waiting, until someone in the far future comes to wake them up or – why not? – eventually also comes from the past.

7.Looking Back

“I want to know all about him.” The grief made Edmond's voice darker. ‘The voice he has also from him’, Arundle noticed - ‘as so much else...’

She couldn't keep the tears back and didn't know where to begin. This and that came to her mind, all mixed and upside down like flickering flashlights in a vast scarcely lit room of the past, or in the boundless open of a clear summer night with hundreds of falling stars popping up here and there.

In order to make things easier for him, the Repetitors decided to have the Prince-Regent also die, while he recovered at first according to the director's plan. Thus Sam Smiley got away with his unthankful task, which made him almost thankful, had there not been his queer mission.

As a consequence Edmond had to take over. While the role of the sad Prince went well together with his personal feelings in his state of being. As the young Prince he had the chance of looking his youthful dad into the eyes again, but was of course not allowed to mention any such relation. Sometimes he felt like looking into a mirror, and he could never be certain, whether he was seen likewise, while those visitors from the past were in a way not really real, but only some kind of images. Even worse it was, that he couldn't mention to his mother,

what he felt, and experienced. While young Arundle was active all the more.

The grown-up appearance of hers – in contrary – was rather mild and thoughtful. Edmond helped himself by distinguishing her as Arundle-Maman, the Phiosopher, who she had been all her adult life.

She knew of course that the Repetitors asked far too much of him, while Edmond was no Superman, but couldn't be changed. The planned future didn't give way to any loophole. The visitors from the past had gone too far already. Directing was by then a matter of consequences, stemming from what was given and had happened so far. While (the young visiting) Arundle remained the spearhead. The way she handled the little prince by teaching and supporting him together with Florinna and Corinia, was just fantastic. While the Prince had to be saved from the claws of the artifacts, to have him educated in a humane fashion, with a lot of fresh air and light, and even more love and caressing, but without exposing him permanently to the TV-screen.

In order not to become so surprised by the entering visitors, the Repetitors searched for a plan. Therefore they collected all kinds of data, and stressed their memories, whether they couldn't remind a little better, how it had been and what was going on in which sequence, as soon as they got on the way. For that the magic bow was of course the most wanted partner, who should have known best, as he did all those transfers back and forth in no time. But his memory was limited, and the facts lay back some hundred years.

Thus the plan – as soon as it became real – showed white empty spots the lot. Those were the times when nothing had happened (that is in fact – nothing was going to happen, as everything that happened, did happen in the presence – that is – these days and weeks or right now!)

So, not much was won by the chart.

Among the Repetitors his report met severe opposition. What he did was a crime, no matter whether the subjects were Nixes or Nymphs or Troll-teenagers, and human laws didn't suit. Adrian Humperdijk, the former assistant Headmaster of the School of Inbetween', tried his best in that. He was after all the presidential adviser in Australis. Corinia also had a word with her friend Boetie, the Prime Minister. But South-Michel had the clergy on his side. So nothing changed. Nobody could stop the teens from changing the sides.

Thanatos was a great womanizer and a charming seducer. Had he been of this world, he would have been raised into the Olymp like Don Juan or Casanova. South-Michel's task was an easy one though. He had only to arrange for the transport and for the appropriate habitual adjustments necessary, and certainly for the protective care.

- ^x Uluru is the Aborigine name for the Australian Ayers Rock
- ⁱ Sublimo = lat. lift up
- ⁱⁱ anima = lat. soul
- ⁱⁱⁱ s lat. Area of the unknown
- ^{iv} false step
- ^v mode of operation
- ^{vi} Figure in Greek Mythology who used a thread to find back her way in the Maze of the Underworld.
- ^{vii} Lat. The Man of understanding
- ^{viii} lat. Man standing upright
- ^{ix} lat. Endless sea
- ^x lat. Man up risen on two feet
- ^{xi} The dice are thrown
- ^{xii} lat. Nursing mother – that is the centre of a University.
- ^{xiii} Lat. Vicious circle
- ^{xiv} “A rascal, who’s got dirty thoughts in mind.”
- ^{xv} The Theory of Relativity says that time is referring to the location in space.
- ^{xvi} Jewish sacred Candlestick
- ^{xvii} Man governed by his technological knowledge
- ^{xviii} The take over of the power of a state.
- ^{xix} Famous saying before Wellington’s victory over Napoleon.
- ^{xx} State of birth
- ^{xxi} Take over of a state’s power by force.
- ^{xxii} While just being born.
- ^{xxiii} Greek; the absolute multitude
- ^{xxiv} The ability to multiply
- ^{xxv} The equal part of other parts
- ^{xxvi} lat. way of naming
- ^{xxvii} Surprise attack
- ^{xxviii} William Shakespeare: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark
- ^{xxix} lat. Act of birth
- ^{xxx} lat. Law
- ^{xxxi} Lex = law
- ^{xxxii} Laudatio = praise
- ^{xxxiii} Anthropocentric = putting human beings into the centre of existence
- ^{xxxiv} Valuta = currency
- ^{xxxv} Circe = antique Greek sorceress
- ^{xxxvi} Schroedinger’s cat = famous mental experiment proving the unpredictability of the future.
- ^{xxxvii} Rolandus, Emperor and Head of the World
- ^{xxxviii} French Philosopher and predecessor of the Marxist theory of overcoming the misery of the world.
- ^{xxxix} Speech of honour
- ^{xl} Nanoverse = the inner World of Atoms
- ^{xli} alter ego = the better (more experienced) I of a person
- ^{xlii} Jean Jacques Rousseau found his in the Mercure de France in 1749 it read : Le Rétablissement des science et des arts a-t-il contribué à épurer les mœurs ? (Has the reestablishment of the arts and sciences contributed to the bettering of the customs?)
- ^{xliii} Mars, Venus, Earth, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune
- ^{xliv} false step
- ^{xlv} educational mode
- ^{xlvi} a exemplary repetitive event
- ^{xlvii} Spökenkiekerei = ancient (Hamburgian) German Fortune-telling
- ^{xlviii} One of the basic assumptions of Karl Marx in his materialistic theory.
- ^{xlix} Somnio, somnia, somnium = lat. dreaming
- ^l An early writing of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche with this title
- ^{li} Unio mystica = mystical unification with God while alive.
- ^{lii} primordial germ-cells capable of reproductive doubling.
- ^{liii} Wide-spread Gnostic religion based on the struggle between good and evil, competing with the offspring of Christianity.
- ^{liv} Mario Vargas Llosa: The Storyteller
- ^{lv} Meat-eaters
- ^{lvi} Shakespeare: Hamlet „To be, or not to be, that is the question – whether ‘tis Nobler in the mind to suffer The Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune, Or to take Arms against a Sea of troubles, And by opposing, end them?”

^{lvii} Ludwig Thoma: The Bavarian Beer-drinker in Heaven

^{lviii} Anne Sewell, Black Beauty – end of chapter 3

^{lix} Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Phänomenologie des Geistes

^{lx} Carl de Linné, Swedish biologist (1741-1783) developed a binary nomenclature – giving each specie a Latin double name –one for the specie and one for the kind.

^{lxi} I am part of the force, which always strives for the evil, but creates the good at last. J.W. Goethe,

Faust I.

^{lxii} To whose advantage?

^{lxiii} Life-long permission of lecturing at universities