

U.G. Doehn
ARUNDLE & KIN
3. The Ground of Time

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Prelude:

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.

Chapter 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 Convertors - 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 extorted, 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 Convertiors 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 Convertors. 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 Convertor and Billy-Joe's twin.

Tika was even more lost after Billy-Joe had changed sides, no matter whether her brother cared more then 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 Mel 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 Mel right away. Meanwhile Tika missed the joint trips more than the monthly excursion to the Conversors' Island. Even more because Billy-Joe was not the same anymore. After all, what had a dingo to do with a giant kangaroo?

Conversors 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 Conversiors’ 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. Yoshele 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 Yoshele. - 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 Malicious 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 or 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 Conversior 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 joint 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 Converter 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 und 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 Animations. 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 ruffle 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 surly 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 save, 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 telepathetic-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 then 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 Sublimations' 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 what 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 the 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 Humperdijk'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 stroke 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 the 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 understand. 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 lighting, 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 no-where-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 depetrification 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 offsprings 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 popping 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. Its 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 near-by 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.

"It's 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 Humperdijk 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 break-through 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 Sublimations' 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 then 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 thought, 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 Convertors 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 then 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 socle 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 extend.

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 extend. 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 Conversiors Island, while the main stem carried the Isle of Wisdom-tooth.

Conversiors' 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 Infernalialia

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 Infernalism’ 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 boor 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 boor 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 then 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 were 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 extend. 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 depetrification 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 mer-folk, 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 millennia, 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 where 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 Stäel 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 Converter, 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 scrabbled.

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 millennia – 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 to 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 pulsated 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 octopods?

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 easily 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 heavier 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 “lessen 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 Conversors 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 Somnors 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 'De-petrification 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 smoothing 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 Infernalialia’ – 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 Infernaliala 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 Convertors' Island that was not visited during the late moon phase, as the confused Convertors 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 site 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 Humpertdijk recovered soon.

First reports of Somnors' 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 Somnors 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 gloriole 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 where 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 gave 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 gloriole 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 Quantum

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 extend? 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 then 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 Infernalina' 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.

**

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 Infernalina, 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.

**

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.

**

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 pulsated through her body.

'How nice, after all these years' she wondered and clang 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 then 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 breakthrough, 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 Sublimations 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 genuinity 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 bee-hive.

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 Infernalism 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 develop 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 bionics 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 then 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 premise, 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!"