

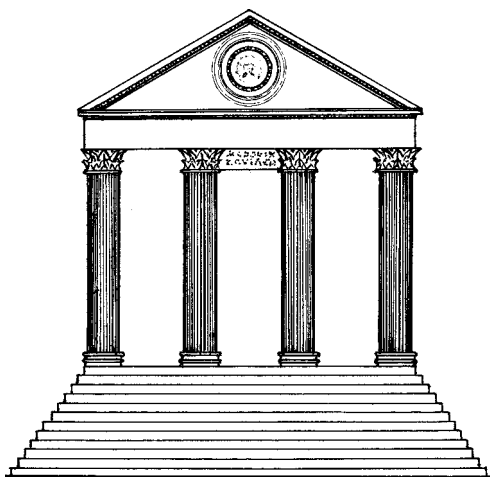


THE
MERLIN
SET-UP

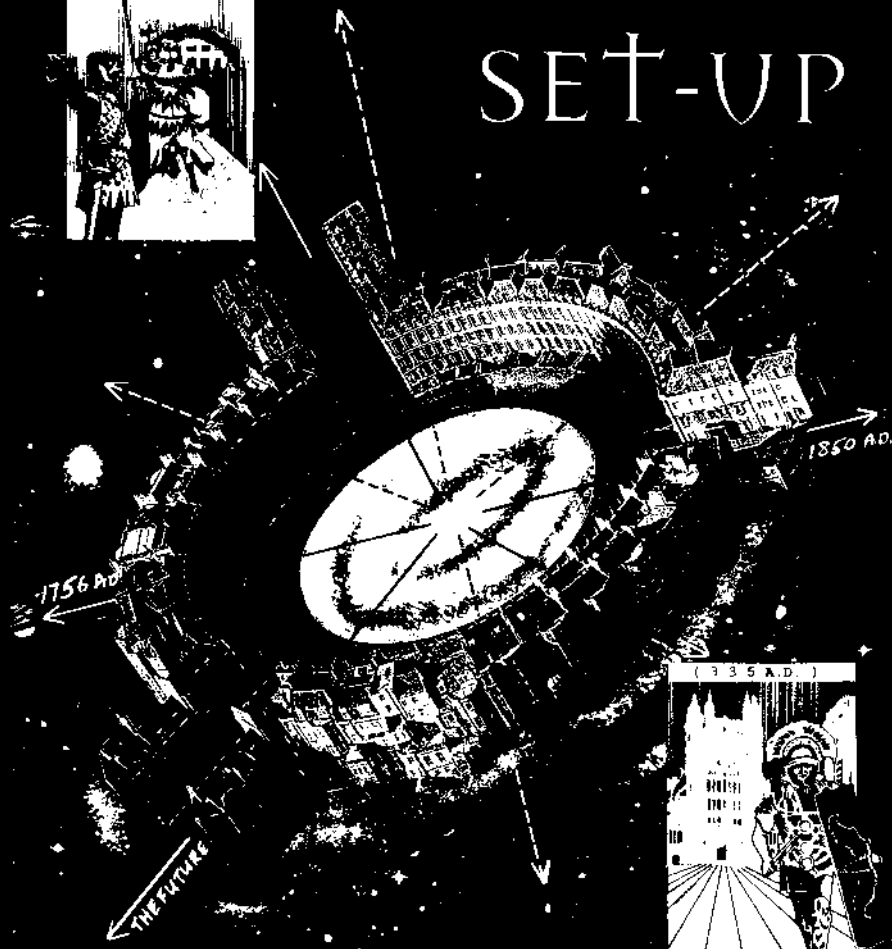
INCLUDING SEQUEL
Margaret Mann

THE MERLIN SET-UP

Time Travellers Through Bath



THE MERLIN SET-UP



TIME TRAVELLERS THROUGH BATH

THE MERLIN SET-UP

by

Margaret Mann

Published by
Tayar Books

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DEDICATION

To my children, for their support and encouragement – Christopher, Jennifer (who did the illustrations), Peter and Gillian, who died but is still part of the family. I also had my grandchildren very much in mind as I wrote.

And to the memory of their father, Jack, and my father and mother who made it all possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE PLAYERS

A list of the chosen knights of The Round Table, their Ladies and their 20th century 'Stand-ins'.

King Arthur Sir Oliver Lodge

The Three Grail Knights:

Sir Galahad Teilhard de Chardin

Sir Percivale Charles Williams (C.W.)

Sir Bors Paul Tillich

Sir Lancelot Havelock Ellis

Sir Gareth John Robinson, a Bishop of
Woolwich

Sir Gaharis Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Sir Lionel Julian Huxley

Sir Hector John Dunne, the 'Time' man,
and Aircraft Designer

Mordred a cynical and arrogant
scientist

Merlin In the spirit of William Blake
and a 'Time-Lord'

'My William' Merlin's name for Blake

Elaine, the Grail Princess Diana, Princess of Wales

Blanchefleur, the Grail maiden An expert in 'Earth' studies
and Percivale's true love.

Branguin (also Dindrane) Christine, a former nun and
Eleila's maid

Guinevere an unhappy queen

IN THE SEQUEL

Sir Tristan	Aitchen H.N., a one time Provost of Coventry Cathedral
Gorvenal	Claudel, a physics professor at a London university and Aitchen's friend
The Irish King	A leading Irish Republican figure (Brendon)
Princess Iseult, the King's daughter ...	Brendon's daughter – Eleila
Irish King's Chief Steward	Brian (Land Agent)
Iseult's cup-bearer	Conor (Groom)
King Marc of Cornwall	Raymond, an Ultra- traditional Church dignitary
Karherdin	Stephen, son of a Jersey parson
Iseult of the White Hands	Helen, daughter of the Jersey parson
Bryn (Armour-Bearer)	John, the Church Secretary

PART ONE

1

Arrival

It was the autumn half term in Ireland and four young people – no longer children, they told themselves – boarded the plane from Shannon Airport in Eire to London Heathrow. They were excited in anticipation of the flight, but were soon settled in their seats by the kindly stewardess.

Thomas, a ‘snazzy’ dresser, was in light trousers and a jacket which was rather jazzy, but fashionable! At 16½ years of age, he was the oldest.

Lucy, also very dress-conscious, in tights and tunic, was the youngest. The other two, Samuel and Gillian, were in more casual country wear – sloppy, pastel coloured sweaters and green T-shirts, one with dolphins on it. They were brother and sister and were taking their friends with them to stay with their aunt in Bath. Though living in Eire, their parents were both English.

Below them the green patchwork pattern of little fields – all shapes and sizes – had given way to St George’s Channel, glimpses of which could be seen now and then through the billowy, white blanket of clouds over which they flew.

They were eating, with restrained delight, from the fussily prepared tray of goodies lately handed to them; they had just unwrapped with fascination the packets of white plastic utensils and food supplements – it was good to be having one’s lunch while sailing above the clouds and feeling warm and comfortable too.

They were now approaching the coast of Wales. Tom didn’t like the sweet. “Yukkie,” he said with a grimace, after taking a small bite.

“I’ll have it,” piped up Lucy who sat next to him, and she grabbed at the delicacy as it nestled in its paper cuplet, thus causing the plastic container to fly into the central aisle. This made them giggle. Sam was watching the wings of the plane as they banked slightly and Gillian was intrigued with the shadow of the moving aircraft which was reflected on the banked-up, fluffy clouds.

It had been cloudy and drizzling when the engines roared into full

power and they took off, but now there was a clear, bright-blue sky above them and the sun shone into the plane.

Suddenly, Gilly thought she heard the strange tones of a voice. She had heard it before, and recognised it as the voice of her little tree-sprite – Spriggy. It was the same sprite that she had allowed into the very receptive side of her brain at her twelfth birthday party, after the big beech tree had fallen in the storm back home.

She had rather forgotten about Spriggy lately, but she was pleased to know that it was still with her and also that no one else in the plane could hear it. Spriggy was referring to the shadow-plane outside the window and was becoming quite excited. “You are all going to travel in a sort of shadow-plane very soon,” it croaked. Then, the next minute, its voice had risen to a rather shrill pitch – “A Time-travel machine, faster than sound and faster than light. I’m going to take you all to meet with Merlin at his launch-pad in Bath. You’re coming from a land of mythical beginnings to a city where it has all come together,” it added, mysteriously.

Gilly looked at Sam, and then at Tom and Lucy on the other side of the aisle. They were all enjoying their drinks and now Gilly attended to hers and turned away from the phantom plane. She was looking forward to this visit to Aunt Sophie and she still had a pleasant feeling of anticipation unmingled with fear. She trusted Spriggy.

They had a good landing, the wing-lights flashing, and hurrying to catch their coach they followed detailed instructions from parents. They were, after all, in the world’s busiest airport. Settled at last in their new mode of transport they ate their chocolate bars and slept fitfully on the way. They’d had an early start that day. Again, the only one to notice certain happenings was Gilly. She watched the red sun go down and the pale moon come up. It was she who first saw the twinkling lights of Bath. They stretched right up the surrounding hillsides and clustered around the crater-like hollow of the city. A jewel indeed! And ‘Queen of the West’.

“We’re nearly there!” she cried, waking up many dozing passengers including her friends. Sam, already awake, hailed the riot of lights ahead of them.

Everyone began to gather up their belongings and soon they were passing right in front of the floodlit Abbey. It loomed up like a great rockface, but raised and shaped by man. They passed the famous Pulteney Bridge over the Avon. Aunt Sophie was at the bus station to meet them with her rather old and battered car. They all crammed in.

“Well done, you lot!” she said, “and you’ve done it on your own this time. Here you all are, safe and sound.”

“I hope we’ll stay that way,” thought Gilly, remembering Spriggy’s rather bizarre suggestions and forecasts. But she still felt a warm inner twinge. Sam related the highlights of the journey and Tom and Lucy answered the questions from their hostess and received welcoming remarks. On the way down Great Pulteney Street, built in 1789 and still looking amazingly elegant with its ‘Greek Temple’ museum at one end, Sophie pointed things out. They saw the two Victorian letter-boxes which, she informed them, still had ‘VR’ embossed upon them.

“Victoria Regina” said Sam with some pride.

“The old bat!” cut in Tom irreverently.

Sophie smiled to herself. “When the boxes were installed,” she went on, “letters used to take 14 hours to get to London by Mail-Coach and Bath was the first to provide even this service. Before that it took days.”

“Even though grand historical figures lived here then,” remarked Gilly.

“Yes, and the wide pavements were for lady’s hooped skirts!” said Sophie, as uphill to the southwest of the city they drove. Stately mansions climbed up beside them and went on beyond Sophie’s dwelling, where the party now came to a halt. “Poor horses,” mused Gilly, “had to go up to the very end.”

“That’s her window,” said Sam, after alighting from the car and looking up at a tall building. “It’s right near the top and, boy, it’s got a view!”

“I hope you’re all hungry,” said Sophie, “I’ve been shopping all morning.” Supper over, and feeling too tired to talk, her guests were soon in bed.

** *** **

Gillian, after having seen the old Abbey from the balcony that night, enhanced by flood-lighting and amid its attendant lines of street lamps, was impatient to see it again in the morning light. Creeping from her bed, not disturbing anyone, she donned her woolly dressing gown, carefully pulled on her new slippers – a present for the visit – and entered the quiet lounge. It was filled with a pink glow. Unlocking the glass veranda door, she stepped onto the balcony. Fiery streaks and banks of rosy clouds met her eyes.

“What a sunrise!” Gilly caught her breath in wonder. “What a sight!” There, spread out on her right, was the city of Bath, its cream coloured stone caught by the rays of the rising sun from her left and reflecting the magical early light. The same Abbey, surrounded

broadly by other spires and towers (Gilly counted seven of them) was flushed with a lustrous beige. The crescents and terraces of Bath now presented an enchanted dream city. The tops of the trees in the Circus were visible, and behind rose Kelston Roundhill with its clump of trees on top.

Clasping her hands she heard Spriggy say, "I told you so! There will be no end of marvels on these visits. This is setting the scene – and the old chimneys stand proudly against the splendour."

Gilly crept back to bed, hugging herself with pleasure.

** *** **

"Well, we will all go into town together today," said Aunt Sophie after breakfast, "and I'll show you around. Although Sam and Gillian have been before, they may have forgotten some things – like the best place to get good Bath buns and 'Sally Lunn' buns with lots of butter!"

"No we haven't," retorted Sam.

"But there are new shopping precincts open now," continued Sophie. "Tomorrow you can all go on your own and get the bus back. After all, you came all the way here by yourselves! There are many buses past here, going up and down between the University and the city."

2

In The Present

The youngsters were amazed at the number of tourists still around in the city, and especially in front of the Abbey. In what is called the Abbey Churchyard people were still sitting at tables outside, as it was a sunny day. They were eating and drinking and chatting happily. Tall period buildings, including the Roman Baths on one side and the National Trust shop and the Monk's Coffee House on the other, surrounded the big yard. Outside the entrance to the Baths and Pump Room, where there was a queue, there were some street entertainers. There were many buskers around the city playing on violins, pipes and guitars – some accompanied by a cassette player beside them. There were also jugglers, comedians and fire-eaters.

“We could well be in the Middle Ages,” said Tom, “if it wasn't for our clothes and the sound of traffic in the distance.”

Sophie and the children stood in front of the tall West Front of the Abbey and gazed up at the scene. The angels climbing up and head-first down the ladders on either side were a bit age-worn – and indeed, some were headless – but they made Lucy think of a joining up of heaven and earth, which she had once heard a Sunday school teacher speak of. She had never forgotten it.

“It was Oliver Cromwell's soldiers, you know,” announced Sophie, “who enjoyed knocking off those heads. They were told that these were idols and therefore evil. They also had a go at the dignitaries on either side of the grand old door. These statues could have been St Peter and St Paul, after whom the Abbey is named. Half of one of their long beards was destroyed!”

“The tree with its tangle of roots and short bushy branches, and the two ladders there, was to do with someone's dream, wasn't it?” asked Sam.

“Yes,” answered Sophie. “It was Bishop King's dream. That is God at the top looking down...”

“You told us that the Abbey wouldn't have been re-built at all that time, if it hadn't have been for the dream,” interrupted Gillian. “That shows how important some dreams are.”

“And how ‘thoughts are things’,” quoted Lucy vaguely.

“Those puritans have a lot to answer for,” mused Thomas aloud. “But think of the money spent on the Abbey now – the expensive flood-lighting at night and all the heating and maintenance.”

“Yes,” agreed Sam, “and this whole West Front was washed clean a year ago.”

“So now we can see it in all its original glory,” said Sophie. “The light honey colour catches the evening sun. It’s still a well-loved ‘pile’ – a man made creation.”

In nearby Abbey Green, where the monks used to play bowls, the children fed the pigeons with crusts and old biscuits that Sophie had given them. The birds fluttered down from the ledges of the Georgian buildings around. They mixed in with the red and brown fallen leaves from the old plane tree in the centre, and pecked ravenously at the treat.

Then our party went for *their* treat, to the old pub in the square called The Crystal Palace. There they sat in the back garden and enjoyed their fizzy drinks. Sophie had a lager as she felt she needed it. Meanwhile she related how Lord Nelson had stayed here after the Battle of the Nile.

“While he was recuperating,” she said, with a playful look, “Lady Emma Hamilton lived quite near and became his mistress. His father lived just across the square as well.”

“Was she a school mistress?” asked Lucy in a puzzled way.

“No, silly,” laughed Tom, not very kindly. “That’s what they called men’s girlfriends – when they weren’t married to each other.”

“Well why didn’t he marry her?” persisted Lucy.

“Oh I expect she was otherwise tied-up or something,” replied Tom, dismissively.

“Actually, they did have a daughter, and called her Horatia, after her father,” finished Sophie.

“You know, I’ve seen scores of those plaques on the walls of houses in Bath,” added Sam, “and the inscriptions include many names we learned at school, like Clive of India, Captain Cook of Australia and Livingstone of Africa. They each stayed here a while... even General Wolfe of Quebec fame.”

“Also,” said Gilly, joining in the conversation, “famous poets, scientists and musicians lived here. Actually, there are bits of history popping up everywhere – they even found a Roman mosaic floor underneath this very pub! You told us that, didn’t you Auntie?”

“Yes, I certainly did,” replied Sophie, and then, feeling talkative after her lager, she went on happily, “Many Empire-building pioneers came here to retire. That huge Empire Hotel, and the Guildhall and

Art Gallery, were built in honour of Queen Victoria, Empress of India. Her statue outside the building still looks down on us... Anyway, it's time we went," she finished up. "I'm boring you all, I'm sure."

"But we were the greatest power in the world in her time," said Sam as they got up to go.

Coming out into the square they noticed that the pigeons were still foraging about hopefully. "They couldn't believe their luck with us just now," commented Lucy, smiling indulgently. But Tom had other views.

"They're only vermin you know," he interjected forcefully. "They carry germs, mess up all the buildings and pavements and do a lot of damage." Lucy looked crestfallen. The others ignored him.

"I'll bet they polluted old Victoria's statue," he said, with a grin.

"That's been cleaned up too," added Gillian. "And, anyway, it was the starlings who messed that up. They come in every evening in great flocks, always at sunset, and perch upon her person for the night!"

The party then moved on to the famous fish and chip restaurant in Abbey Gate, just under the archway. Then they felt ready to sally forth on the rest of their sightseeing tour.

Next, they 'did' the Roman Baths and saw a little of what the first great Baths must have been like. Together with their idols and votive offerings thrown into the water, many magical cures recorded in stone have been discovered. They were reminded of the Celtic origins of this worship of hot springs and of the people's faith in their healing properties. They also greatly admired, and were quite affected by, the famous 'Gorgon's Head' which had been excavated nearby.

The controversial 'Head' is now believed to depict the old Celtic Sun-God. The Romans dedicated the waters and the temple alongside the Baths to Sulis-Minerva, thereby combining a Celtic Goddess with one of their own. They even called the town *Aquae Sulis*.

All this information Gilly had just been reading up in a guidebook, and she was sitting on a large hewn stone when she heard her inner voice again. But this time it was quite different from Spriggy's high-pitched tones. It was a deep and reverberant voice and it was reciting a poem...

*"Bath, mild Physician of Eternity, mysterious power
Whose springs are unsearchable and knowledge infinite..."*

"That was your first taste of Merlin's words of wisdom," cut in the familiar voice of Spriggy. "He's quoting from one of Blake's poems called 'Jerusalem' and it's where he describes Bath as the 'Healing City', the seventh among Albion's (Britain's) other cities, the voice of

Bath speaking to them in tears through its western porch. He is complaining that its gate is closed to the West and... Oh, blast! ...Merlin's gone now," finished Spriggy.

Puzzled but excited by all this, Gilly got up and followed the others through the souvenir shop and out into the street. She noticed on her way through the shop that Bath was called the City of Flowers as well – 'flowers that bloom luxuriously and fade unnoticeably', someone has said. And she noticed that the Abbey used to be called the 'Lantern of the West' because of its large stained-glass windows. All these facts she gleaned as she passed, eyeing the many mementos displayed for sale.

As they skirted the Eastern walls of the Abbey on their way to the High Street, their attention was drawn to a wall plaque, which told them that it was in the old Saxon building on this spot that King Edgar was crowned in 973AD as the first King of all England.

"Good Heavens!" gasped Lucy. "That was about a thousand years ago."

They carried on through the town strolling down little alleyways, hung with flower baskets and lined with colourful shops, until they came to Union Passage where they stopped outside a 'New Age' shop called Arcania. Gillian and Lucy were so intrigued with the display in the window that they decided to go in, and the others followed.

The place was full of young people milling around the amethyst pool, sparkling crystals, semi-precious stones and other artefacts. Looking at the huge variety of coloured candles and incense sticks, Sophie remarked upon their hypnotic affect, making people candle-holics!

"I suppose they make everything look and smell more mysterious," said Gillian thoughtfully, as she stared at some fantastic pictures.

"But all those weird figures and faces frighten me a bit," added Lucy.

"Some of them," explained Sophie, "are depicting a 'Mother Earth' Goddess figure of the old, occult and pagan religion; this included witchcraft and many ancient beliefs. Actually, the word 'magic' just means 'wise', but all this sort of thing seems to be coming back into fashion again."

"What does 'occult' mean?" asked Lucy with genuine interest.

"It means 'hidden' or something secret," replied Sophie.

"I like secrets," Lucy muttered, turning to Sam who had been listening to them nearby.

"Good Lord," he exclaimed, "all this is really putting the clock back you know. Anyway, the word 'pagans' in Roman times only meant 'country dwellers' – for the Christians lived mostly in the towns."

“I see,” said Sophie, feeling rather impressed.

“Yes, and remember, the cruel old ‘Witchcraft Act’ was only struck off the books in 1951, and now there are more than one million white witches in England!” declared Thomas smugly. He had just joined them in the secluded section of the shop where they were talking and had heard Sam’s last statement. He felt he could do better though.

“There are some quite sexy things in here, actually,” he went on, always out to shock the girls.

“Oh good – at last!” called out Gill, ignoring Tom’s words, for she had just spied a book about the Holy Grail. It stood out for her amid all the others there extolling their Egyptian, Mayan or Red Indian sayings and symbols. She saw a Celtic cross as well and was pleased to find familiar subjects displayed.

On their way out, they moved through the many customers towards the door. No one noticed Tom slyly slipping a small, shiny stone into his pocket. He couldn’t help it, he told them later – its colour cast a spell.

Next they explored the new Podium shopping precinct with its outside pillars and inside escalators. It was a nice change from the ‘back to nature’ cults they had just left. There was, though, a giant Sun-like face that was lit up in one of the tall windows facing the street.

The youngsters loved the opened-up novelty shops and spent some money there and in the supermarket. Above all this, there was a well-stocked library and several restaurants. The Italian-style one was called The Piazza. Gill pointed to the roof over an adjoining teashop, while calling to the others:

“Look, they have painted an ancient Greek scene up there,” she said. “Can you see the robed figures on the balcony – some carrying pitchers and the blue Mediterranean sky above with the doves? We came here on a previous visit.”

“And the fluffy, white clouds,” prompted Lucy. “It’s brilliant!”

Leaving the Podium and passing the impressive, light-coloured building of the Post Office with its pillared, semi-circular entrance porch, they turned into Green Street. The party passed an Art Shop and a Greenpeace shop – one with watercolour pictures in the window and the other with a large, cotton-filled globe in theirs. The words underneath this last object read ‘Hug-a-Planet’, and below, in big lettering, ‘EARTH’, then ‘Care of our Environment’.

Passing by, they looked back along this narrow old street and saw the magnificent outline of the Christopher Wren Church of St Michael and St Paul facing them from the end.

“There are pillars everywhere in Bath,” Tom concluded, “but it’s all ‘of a piece’... I can see.”

They were soon in fashionable Milsom Street, having passed a new and thriving shop called ‘Past Times’ and resisting the urge to enter. They then had their attention drawn, by Sophie, to an old inscription high up on one of the buildings, which read ‘Reading Room’.

“That was there in Jane Austen’s time,” said Sophie, “and wouldn’t she be pleasantly surprised to see the new one!”

While looking around the big Waterstone’s bookshop they felt it was more like a church than a shop. There was music playing in the background and people were silently scanning through the myriads of books on display, all in their special categories and compartments. There was a very long list on the wall, naming every subject under the sun. Sam found the section on model aircraft and Gillian on pony care. Tom couldn’t seem to settle for any special thing and Lucy followed Gilly about as usual, sharing her animal interests. Lucy loved and admired her friend.

Downstairs in the basement there were small alcoves, one of which housed books on Christianity. It was shared with other religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. It also had books on cults, prophecy, ghosts, the latest heresies, and mythology. There was a beautiful new volume dealing with the Arthurian cycle. The others found Sophie leafing through it when they came upon her at last.

“Come on,” she said, when she saw the children, “let’s go upstairs to the coffee shop – I’m dying for a cup of tea.”

The self-service restaurant was in a Georgian room with the walls part panelled in wood, and with decorations to match. There were large round tables which people shared, and some very Bathonian type customers sat at them – well-spoken, well-dressed, but not standing on ceremony. Some were reading newspapers or books, some were writing and some had very young children with them. One woman was breast-feeding her baby. This embarrassed the boys, but no one else seemed to take any notice. There were also some Welsh people who had crossed the Severn Bridge on a shopping trip to Bath, and giving themselves away by their lilting accent.

Tom identified a well-known actress sitting at another table; she was probably appearing at the Theatre Royal. Tom whispered this to Gill. The youngsters managed to get down some homemade cakes, flapjacks and milkshake, while Sophie drank her tea.

“After this it’s the Circus,” she announced.

3

The Circus

On their way to the Circus they passed by the Assembly Rooms, which housed the Museum of Costume. Here, there were tableaux illustrating the changing fashions in Bath during the last 400 years. The clothes were all original. It also contained the Grand Ballroom with its crystal chandeliers.

“We’ll go in here another time,” said Sophie. “We’re all a bit tired today and we’ve not finished yet. Thank goodness it’s all down hill back to the car.”

Finally they entered the Circus, built to the same dimensions as Stonehenge and not at all like a circus with performing animals and clowns. The three four-storeyed crescents of classical beauty rounded its circle with dignity. A large stone acorn surmounted each of the rooftop parapets. Looking up and around, Sam reminded them that it was pigs’ liking for acorns that led Prince Bladud to found the town that would later become Bath. After he was cast out of his father’s house for having leprosy, he became a swineherd and one day followed his herd to a swampy crater and watched them wallowing in the mud.

“Listen to teacher spouting legends,” said Tom, laughing in a good-natured way.

“He’s quite right though, the story has the first reference to the healing properties of the springs,” rejoined Sophie. “That mud was special.”

“It healed the pigs of their skin disease and then healed Bladud too!” cut in Gillian, wanting also to stick up for her brother.

“Good for the pigs,” teased Tom. “But the waters don’t seem to heal many people now, I guess.”

“Well dear,” said Sophie, “it’s true that most people now either bathe in the modern and very hygienic public baths or go to other sports centres around. But there’s still the old hospital for rheumatic diseases in the town where they use the hot spring water.”

“We can drink the spa water again now after the pollution scare,” confirmed Gilly, “but it tastes horrible!”

“The baths themselves are about to be redeveloped you know; it’s just a matter of money,” bemoaned Sophie.

In the middle of the Circus on a wide grassy mound stood five majestic plane trees. At this stage they were shedding their leaves and making a variegated carpet of green, brown and red beneath them.

By this time everyone was pretty well exhausted. Gilly and Lucy sat down under one of the trees and Sophie leaned against another, studying the new guidebook she had bought. The boys stretched out on the grass, and Sam remarked to Tom: "I think... really... that a lot of this healing thing only works, doesn't it, because of a sort of awesome belief in the magic? Such ancient waters, gushing up all the time from the depth of the Earth. Oh dear! Here I go again."

The afternoon sun was transforming the leaves into radiant hues and suddenly it seemed to be very still in the Circus. There were, for the moment, no cars or coaches doing the round and an air of expectancy pervaded the place.

Gilly caught the voice of Spriggy again, seeming this time to come from the tree behind her.

"Would you like to see all this as it was 150 years ago?" it said.

"I suppose I would," Gilly thought. "If I could be sure to come back to the present again."

Spriggy said that this was understood. "I'm already in contact with a fellow sprite that lives in the tree behind you. The tree was here 150 years ago. It tells me it was not much more than a sapling then, but it grew quickly because, with its neighbouring trees, it was planted over a disused well. The Circus inhabitants used to draw water from there."

Spriggy paused, and Lucy, who knew Gilly's moods so well, whispered, "It's your tree-sprite again isn't it – what's it saying this time?"

"Shh! I'll tell you later," replied Gillian quickly, nudging her friend and still listening intently.

"Now, it says to me," continued Spriggy falteringly, "that the sap of its tree is beginning to go down ready for its winter sleep... but then it was young and virile like you, and could absorb the surrounding atmosphere and activities." There was a strange silence.

"My new spirit friend is trying to remember," broke in Spriggy again. "It's all stored somewhere in each one of us sprites, you know. I can, for instance, still remember the night my own tree was destroyed, and, yes, before that even... Oh good! This other sprite can remember too. Though the memory is dormant, he thinks it can be brought to life for a short space with my co-operation."

"What will you do?" enquired Gilly, quite calmly.

"Well my master can use his scientific knowledge and the latest techniques to bring it about and..."

"Who is this master?" interrupted Gillian.

“Merlin of course, silly. I told you I’d met him since I’ve been with you. Surely you know about the great magician and prophet, don’t you? I’m learning lots and lots from him,” announced Spriggy.

“Yes, I’ve read about him, but I thought he was dead,” mused Gilly, defensively but still just in her head. She felt a bit peeved now.

“In the tales of King Arthur,” Spriggy said, “he ended up entombed in the trunk of a tree, deceived by his girlfriend who stole his magic spells! But he’s been active again within and outside of living people for the last three centuries, and now especially for your generation. Didn’t you know?”

Gillian just wished her sprite would get on with explaining the plans, and this thought was duly transferred. Spriggy then began to map things out.

“Merlin tells me that trees, and even stones in some cases, can take us back hundreds of years – it’s a matter of research and of new ways of recalling things,” continued Spriggy.

“I suppose our ‘time’ is different from yours and Merlin’s,” thought Gill.

“It’s non-existent as you know it,” confirmed the little sprite proudly, having discarded its rather playful mood. It was now deadly serious.

“Listen carefully,” it said with an air of authority. “Be here tomorrow at midday. You must board the open-top bus which stops beside the Assembly Rooms. It circles twice round the Circus many times a day, carrying tourists from many countries, including British visitors of course. Anyway, stay aboard until you arrive at the Grand Parade where you get off again. Something will have happened to you on the way.”

“I hope the boys will come with us,” wished Gillian, now quite excited.

“I’ve told Merlin all about you four,” went on Spriggy, “and he seems very interested in you all. I really think he wants to meet you. He tells me that we can only take you back a few years by my method because the retrieval of details from the past has not yet reached far enough to get further than 250 years or so. But by another system of his own you would be able to go back further and further and further!”

“We may not want to do it again!” blurted Gilly, raising her voice rather apprehensively.

“You’re talking to yourself now,” warned Lucy worriedly, looking around.

The spell was broken and Gill turned and looked straight into the eyes of her friend. “I’ll tell you and the boys about it tonight,” she said. “And why we must come here tomorrow. But it’s all very secret.”

Sophie rose from her relaxed position by an opposite tree where she'd had her back to the girls. She shook her windcheater and called to her visitors.

"Come on you dreamy lot, get moving. We must get supper over before those favourite programmes of yours," she said as she led them from the Circus. "You know, the ones on the TV that you wanted to see. What were they now?"

"Oh! *Tomorrows World* was ours," said Sam with a yawn.

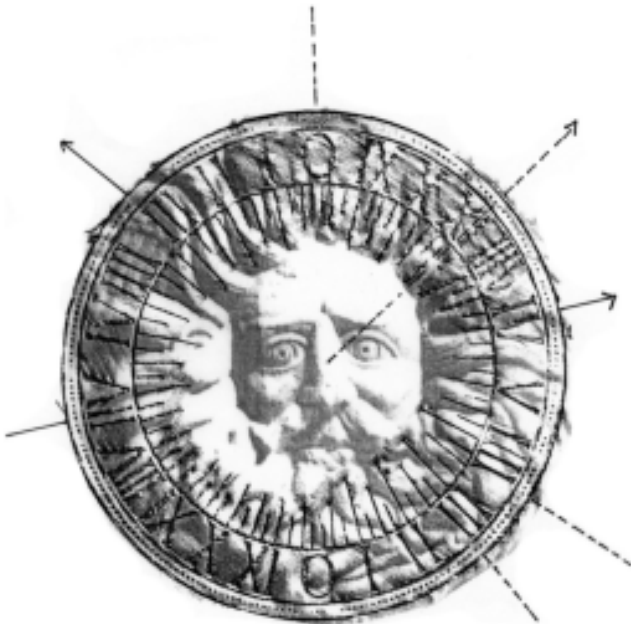
"And ours was that Victorian series filmed in Bath. A Dickens story I think, or was it an earlier period piece... Jane Austen perhaps?" Gillian wondered.

"Yes, it was," remembered Lucy, "and I've seen it before. But I don't mind really. I'd like to see it again with Gilly."

"Isn't it strange," commented Sophie as they hurried down the hill. "Our television sets really act as our communal eyes and ears focused on the world – and, I suppose you could say, upon our past, present and future."

After a pause Sophie added, "Did you see those brightly-lit moving images on that TV screen as we passed a window in the Circus?"

"Yes, I did," answered Tom. "They hadn't yet drawn their curtains. It looked translucent in there, with reflections of the whole world."



4

A First Trip Backwards

When, that evening, Gill told the boys and Lucy about her anticipated adventure for the next day and asked them to come with her, she was at first disappointed. Though Lucy agreed, the boys hesitated.

“What daft, airy-fairy ideas you girls get into your heads. The people on the bus will think we’re mad,” said Tom in his rather cynical tones.

“They won’t suspect anything unusual,” parried Gill. “They will just see four bored and sleepy young passengers... I guess...”

“You mean we might be in a trance!” exclaimed Lucy.

“I don’t think so – not in the way you picture it anyhow,” said Gillian.

“It will only be a quick glimpse of the past, I imagine. Don’t worry,” Tom repented.

“I can never understand why everyone is so nostalgic about past times,” said Sam, “and so loves to relive and enjoy them – on films and in books. My scene is more in the future.” Sam looked thoughtful.

“It’s because we only remember the good things, I suppose,” suggested Gill. “Anyway, we may end up with a trip into the future as well, if Merlin plans it.”

In the end the boys agreed to go with them and to keep it secret. Sam was always ready for an adventure – even a phoney one.

“Nothing will happen anyway,” Tom remarked, “but it will be a good laugh.”

The next morning they told Sophie that they wanted to go on the city tour bus, and she was pleased to pack them off with some pocket money and instructions about refreshments for them in town. “Be back for early supper with me,” said Sophie.

After walking to town, and having plenty of time in hand, the four young people went to the Abbey Churchyard and sat at the tables outside Binks Café. It was a fine day and they ordered various drinks and some very substantial cakes and pastries.

“Who knows what time we’ll get our supper,” said Lucy mysteriously. Over the way, customers were going in and out through the revolving door that led into the Pump Room Restaurant.

“It’s very posh in there,” remarked Gilly, looking across. “There are waiters and waitresses, chandeliers and a Trio ensemble playing there. I went in for tea with Sophie once.”

“Doesn’t your aunt mind you calling her that?” asked Lucy.

“No, she’s quite modern really.”

Nearby, there was a lone figure with a microphone, loudly pronouncing his faith to the mainly uninterested passers-by, who seemed to avoid him.

“What will you do in Eternity? Are you saved from your sins?” he cried, addressing anyone within earshot. Then, assuring them that Jesus was alive and would return to his world at any time, he questioned their readiness.

“God always keeps his promises,” the man continued persistently and then, looking around appealingly at his scattered audience he coaxed: “You know you only want forgiveness and peace of mind. Not God’s wrath!”

“How does he know all that?” asked Lucy, after listening for a while.

“He believes it,” said Sam. “That’s faith again – but it might just make it come true some day, I suppose. Though not for us in the way he imagines it: *now*. Quite differently I should think, by a sort of sea-change.”

“He takes all the words and stories in the Bible quite literally,” added Gillian, “instead of the symbolic truths behind them. I read about these things somewhere and it struck me that this man may be in a kind of time warp and is afraid to come out of it.”

“At least he doesn’t call his God ‘She’!” grinned Tom, biting into his Danish pastry. “He’s a fundamentalist of course.”

“Sophie says that some people are using tag-ends of the old ways of viewing the Christian story to protect themselves from the blast of the new. But hackneyed expressions don’t cut ice any more,” said Sam.

“What does ‘hackneyed’ mean?” groaned Lucy in a long-suffering way.

Thomas answered her with a chuckle. “It means stale and boring words that have lost their teeth, so to speak – but there stands a brave man!”

Sam joined in again after this and tried helpfully to even things out a bit. He told them how he’d once heard a new teacher say that great truths change their shape and colour for each generation. “We never had him again,” he said, “but I always remember those words. You must admit, all the same, that after 2000 years this devotion to a onetime historical figure is pretty mind-blowing, and may well prove something,” he ended.

“Come on,” said Gill, feeling slightly edgy now. “We’d better start walking up to the Circus.”

“Yes, we mustn’t be late,” agreed Tom rather sarcastically.

Lucy loitered a while, making a slight detour on her way out to the street. As she passed, the preacher stepped forward and handed her a card, so, as she left to join the others, she read it.

“Seek your happiness in the Lord and He will give you your heart’s desire,” it said. It was from an Old Testament Psalm of David – a famous King of the Jews – and printed by the Good News Media from the Good News Bible.

On the other side of the card was a New Testament text with words spoken by Jesus of Nazareth who was believed to be a descendant of King David. The passage read: “I am The Way, The Truth and The Life...”

Lucy was asking questions of herself as they went through town. “I wonder what my heart’s desire could be?” she thought, and “Who really is this ‘Lord’ he talked about?” Reflecting upon the word ‘wrath’, which she remembered from her Sunday school days, meant anger, she was reminded of the few awful times her father had lost his temper. “How would God’s wrath be?” She quickened her pace and caught up with the others as they were about to cross a busy road.

“You’re very quiet,” said Gilly. “We should have waited for you to catch up before. Are you feeling OK?”

“Yes thanks,” Lucy answered, “but there’s something we must talk about tonight... if we still feel normal after our adventure, that is.”

“What’s normal, I wonder?” smiled Gilly putting her arm around her friend. “Cheer up! Life’s becoming very exciting. Just trust me and Spriggy.”

By now they were climbing up the pedestrian Bartlett Street where they passed some antique shops. In one of the windows they noticed two horned gramophones of the old ‘His Master’s Voice’ type. Each had what looked like a wooden box at its base, with a winding handle and a price tag.

“Good God!” exclaimed Tom. “£500 each, but what a trumpet! It would be really cool to have one of those playing at some of our parties back home.”

“Yes, it would be great,” agreed Sam, “except... well the tunes would be so old!” They both laughed.

They came again to the massive building of the Assembly Rooms, with its many large, classically styled windows. It was ten minutes to twelve and they sat down on a seat in the broad open space outside the entrance porch.

They had all seen the tour buses before. The buses lumbered around the city, plying between the historical sites, their passengers peering round, a bit vacantly, while the guide droned into the microphone.

This is how it seemed from the outside – but I expect they were enjoying their trip really – the customers I mean. The competition to attract them was fierce and the number of buses was increasing.

Painted on the outside of each bus were famous landmarks including the Abbey, the Florentine Bridge, the Crescents and other scenes. There were words as well: ‘Jump on and pay inside’, and ‘Listen in on Bath’s past’. Each bus had the name of a Bath celebrity on it. There was Sally Lunn, Jane Austen, John Wood, I K Brunel and the Goddess Minerva. The bus that arrived on the tick of twelve o’clock had the name of Ralph Allen printed on its side.

After boarding the bus and paying their fare, the four youngsters climbed to the top and sat waiting for a few minutes. Gilly opened a book.

“Who was Ralph Allen?” asked Tom casually.

“Well, I read that he was a great benefactor of Bath and a one-time Mayor and Postmaster,” related Gillian. “He ran his new cross-postal services from a wing of his great house on the hill – Prior Park.”

“His postal reforms were the beginning of the Post Office as we know it today,” added Sam. “Aunt Sophie told me that the first ever stamped letter was sent from Bath... with the Penny Black stamp on it.”

“Also,” quoted Gilly, “he supplied his partner, the architect John Wood, with the stone for most of his buildings in Bath, including the Circus. It all came from his quarry on Combe Down.” She now shut the Guidebook, for the guide had started his commentary. The bus slowly made its way into the Circus and began its first clockwise circle around the ring.

The guide commented on the sweep of the four-storey houses with tiered rows of mini pillars – twinned and triple-styled with one style for each storey. He pointed out Doric, Ionic and Corinthian.

As the talk went on about Roman amphitheatres and the intricacies of the sculpted stone plaques stretched out above the white doors, Thomas leaned over and whispered to Gillian. “I told you so, Gill. Your pipedream is a non-starter! Just forget it.”

They had completed the first round – the guide was still on the subject of the plaques, and how each motif was different – when they started round the next circle. They were halfway round when something did happen – ‘in the twinkling of an eye,’ you might say.

Suddenly the four of them were standing on the wide pavement of the Circus and the bus had disappeared. They were just there, and feeling quite ordinary, but other people didn't seem to notice them at all. A few of them were walking around and one or two were being pushed in what looked like early versions of the Bath Chair. There were some horses and carriages waiting outside two or three houses and the trees in the centre of the Circus were much shorter and younger.

Our young travellers were fascinated with the clothes they were seeing – the ladies in tight-waisted bodices with draped sleeves and full stiffened skirts sweeping the ground; the men in their drain-pipe trousers, well tailored half-length coats with velvet collars, and top-hats. The women also wore bonnets with flowers and feathers, tied beneath the chin with a big bow. Their hair fell down in ringlets each side, and two had dark-coloured cloaks with long fringes over their ornate skirts.

“Wow!” said Sam. “It looks like the Museum of Costume has come to life.”

Leaning on the railings at the top of the basement steps of one of the houses there was a young housemaid in her cap and apron. She was laughing and flirting with a somewhat rough-looking fellow in labourer's clothes. The early afternoon sun lit up everything with a warm glow.

“We're not in a f-f-film,” stammered Gill, finding her voice. “We really are here in the past – let's go off to the Abbey before we snap back again.”

Their two friends, though still tongue-tied, followed Sam and Gill out of the Circus.

Sam thought he had knocked into a prim-looking nursemaid pushing a high, black pram as they hurried past, but she carried on, and appeared quite oblivious of any encounter. Lucy lost her footing as they trotted down Bartlett Street and she fell down. It didn't hurt a bit, and as she got up she couldn't feel the railing in the middle of the street. It was as though she was in a dream.

The shops they passed on the way up looked much the same except that the 'Victoriana' items in the windows were quite new. They were no longer antique shops and Sam remarked on the absence of the gramophones. Tom, now hugely impressed, recovered his speech and, after confirming with Gilly that the date was 1850, he announced that Edison was still a toddler in America right now so hadn't invented the phonograph yet. Thomas knew about these things and Gilly was glad she had pressed Spriggy for an exact date.

Crossing George Street was easy as there were only a few carriages

passing by now and then. They tried to avoid the horse droppings but Tom still managed to tread in one – or so he thought. “Damn!” he exclaimed, inspecting his shoe. But it appeared quite clean.

The buildings in Milsom Street also looked familiar, but smoke-grimed still and the road empty of cars. A few parked carriages were waiting for their occupants to emerge from the shops. A horse was champing and shaking its head impatiently, and a driver was snoozing on his lofty cab seat.

There was a horse and cart outside what is now Shires Yard, and the big animal was snuffling away in its nosebag. A covered van was drawn past them, having just stopped at a shop to deliver some goods.

Coming into Stall Street they were surprised to notice that some of the shop fronts looked very much the same as the new ones that had recently been put up in the 1990s. “Fashions really move in cycles!” said Gill.

“I wonder what the time is on the Abbey clock? It’s not a cosmic clock, I don’t think. Perhaps it’s stopped?” joked Tom.

“We’ll have a look on the way back,” said Gilly, but of course they forgot.

Before turning into the Abbey Churchyard they passed an old pub called The White Hart. It had a modelled stag over the door, and coming out at that moment was a distinguished looking man. He had dark wavy hair of moderate length, droopy moustache and untidy beard – a quite acceptable style for us today, really. He was middle-aged and dressed in black with a high-collared white shirt. He stopped outside to speak to someone, and a few yards away there was a group of women who were looking at him. The youngsters heard one of them saying that he was Charles Dickens and that she’d just read his new book called David Copperfield. “It’s a pity we can’t talk to him,” said Sam, staring at the scene with great interest.

Passing under the pillared entrance, our invisible travellers entered the Abbey Precincts. It all looked much the same as they remembered it; except for some museum-like shops and the iron railings which now encircled the Abbey. Binks Café had gone, but the Monks Coffee Shop was there, and Bath Chairs were standing empty outside the Pump Room. There were at least two beggars sitting in rags and appealing for alms.

Lucy noticed that there was again a lone figure preaching his Gospel, but clad in a longer coat and a small top hat. Outside the Abbey door was a fidgety bunch of people, dressed extravagantly in their Victorian finery. They were mostly women and children, and seemed to be waiting to go inside. There was now a strange disturb-

ance going on, with some raised voices and shocked gestures.

"It looks as if it's a special day today," suggested Gillian. "Perhaps it's All Saints' Day or Michaelmas Day. I know it couldn't be Sunday because, for one thing, the housemaid we saw would have been in her Sunday-best and down here as well!" Gilly had read about these habits.

They moved nearer to the arched doorway and were amazed to witness a scene which they thought showed extreme parental bullying.

There was obviously a service about to start and a mother was having trouble trying to make her two children, a boy and girl, come in with her. The father then joined them and started slapping the boy and reprimanding them both in no uncertain terms, threatening them with dire punishment from himself and God as well. The mother became hysterical. "What will people think?" she moaned at him. "We shan't be respectable any more."

It ended up with the boy, in his big white collar and best suit, breaking free and climbing over the railings. The father pursued him, but not going over the railings, and the mother dragged her sulking daughter into the Abbey.

"Hey! Look at that. I'm glad we're twentieth century people," exclaimed Sam. "It seems such a crime, just because he didn't want to go to church today!"

Some girls were talking nearby and one of them said, "I think that was the same boy who frightened us on All Hallows Eve with his clawed hands and Devil mask. Some queer newcomers are here since trains came from London!" Anyway, this young rebel was finally captured, cuffed and hauled sobbing into God's House. Our youngsters felt very sympathetic towards him.

Out in the street again they noticed men going in and out of the tavern of a large coaching inn called The Christopher. Gillian then heard a voice in her head again. It was in the deeper tones of Spriggy's friend, Merlin, and he was again chanting a rhyme from Blake:

*"Dear Mother, dear Mother the church is so cold
But the Ale-House is healthy and pleasant and warm."*

Lucy passed her and said, "Come on, dreamer, we're getting left behind."

They saw that the boys had stopped near a fruit and vegetable stall. Soon they were all watching a little vagabond boy as he drew a crumpled old bag from under his ragged coat. He opened it up and then, with incredible speed, he knocked items off the stall and into the

bag, turned and raced off. The woman vendor started shouting in anger and a nearby policeman gave chase in a rather half-hearted manner. He soon gave up when the boy took off down Cheap Street, running like the wind.

Merlin's adventurers decided to follow this young thief. So having seen the direction in which he went they soon caught him up and stayed with him.

He turned into Avon Street, an infamous place in those days, noted for crime and prostitution. But, adventurers though they were, the four were quite appalled by the poverty and squalid appearance of the district. The contrast between this and the glories of the Bath they had just left hit them. They didn't know either that there had been ninety deaths from cholera there the year before. Other diseases were common too because of river pollution. Though there were twenty-eight Anglican churches and thirty-three Christian chapels and Meeting Houses, there was still bad drunkenness and abuse. Two hundred alehouses had already given the new Church Temperance movement much to contend with, and puritanical messages preached from pulpits consigned lovers of worldly pleasures to eternal damnation. All fun events came under the lash. Bath's famous heyday was over.

Anyhow, our inquisitive teenagers, undaunted, entered an old building into which the boy disappeared. It was a bit like a rabbit warren inside and they heard the sound of grateful voices as the pilferer brought out his awaited food. Strangely, a dog near our four cringed and ran off, tail down.

"Good Lord! They live here?" said Sam. "That dog sensed us, didn't it?"

In this street near the river there had once been some quite elegant houses but now, run down or ruined, they were part of the poor quarter and used by what we would now call squatters. The voices they heard came from little cave-like recesses in the basement. This particular building used to be a large seventeenth century mansion.

"Let's go exploring," said Thomas invitingly.

At first, as they moved around the house, it all seemed magic and exciting. They tried to imagine the life that had gone on there once. Some of it now was open to the sky and there were little trees sprouting up through the cracks in the masonry. Ivy was creeping up the walls of the rooms.

"You can see the old doorways and gaps where the windows and ovens have been," called out Gilly. "Oh! Look at this." She had seen a blackened old archway and had realised that this must have been rather a grand sort of place.

“It looks as if it was burnt down in the end,” concluded Tom.

They were still quite captivated by the nooks and crannies, the passages and signs of ascending floor levels – busy imagining it all – when suddenly Lucy noticed it was getting dark, and they began to feel that they weren’t enjoying it any more. They felt uneasy and a bit shivery.

These rooms had been part of a living, cultured household once – yes, *living* – and then they saw it – a sad looking lady standing in one of the doorways. She wore a dress which was definitely not Victorian and certainly not of nineteenth century Avon Street quality.

It must have been nearly a century older, thought Gillian instinctively, for the dress had a low neckline and the voluminous, brocaded skirt was heavily padded out on both sides at hip level. The woman’s hair was soft and wavy – very different from the severe mid-parted Victorian style. She was fidgeting with a folded fan, passing it from hand to hand and looking lost and confused. Her necklace and earrings sparkled brightly.

They all stared in awe at this overwhelming sight and began to feel a chilling cold surrounding them. Then, the lady just disappeared as suddenly as she had come. Spooky enough for anyone!

“Whew! It was a ghost,” said Tom in a husky voice. “Let’s go.”

Lucy started to cry and Sam said: “Come on, we shouldn’t have come in here.” Gilly, taking Lucy’s hand, began to lead her away but the light was fading so fast that progress was slow.

The ground levels were uneven, the forgotten corners and passages were difficult to negotiate, and the youngsters kept falling. Although it didn’t hurt them, it was frightening.

Tom was trying to lead the way out, but he soon panicked and shouted at Gilly to “DO SOMETHING!” for they were now hearing bumping sounds and strange voices in the background.

Gilly, in desperation, pleaded out aloud: “Spriggy, for Heaven’s sake get us out of here... NOW!”

Immediately they were back in the bus and rattling over the bumpy old cobblestones of the Royal Crescent. Opening their eyes they saw that other passengers were looking at them. They heard the guide telling everyone that this was the first crescent of its kind ever to be built.

“God! Have I been dreaming?” exclaimed Tom shaking his head. “I must have been tired.” But the girls looked at each other knowingly, and poor Sam, after rubbing his eyes and looking around, blushed profusely.

On the way back to Aunt Sophie’s flat they were all deep in

thought. Gilly was talking silently to herself and Spriggy: “Thanks for getting us back so quickly. It was all very exciting, but we didn’t like the last part... it really frightened us.”

“Well,” answered her faithful tree-sprite, “I’ve asked Merlin about this. He says he’s been watching you four; he knows what happened and why that lady materialised and upset you so. He accuses one of the boys of having a secretly stolen piece of amber in his pocket. Because of two things, he says that was enough to affect this Time Trip.”

“I don’t understand,” bemoaned Gilly, feeling quite horrified. “I’m sure Sam wouldn’t steal anything... nor Tom... either.”

“Merlin thinks,” Spriggy chatted on, “that because of a slight guilt feeling, which has lowered this boy’s opinion of himself, and the presence of the stone, which has special properties, the mix-up happened. Amber, you see, has the power to break and alter spells fairly drastically. It absorbs negative energies, and sometimes it can have tiny skeletons trapped within it from millions of years ago. Merlin knows all these things. So this is why the periods began to change places and you experienced an earlier Time Warp”.

“I’ll get to the bottom of this before any more trips,” thought Gilly.

“Actually,” Spriggy piped up again, “to do justice to the boy, Merlin admits that the boy made a mistake that wasn’t really his fault. He meant only to take a citrine or carnelian from the open boxes by the door of that shop. These were all cheaper than the pieces of amber in a nearby glass cabinet, which were three times as much. But the principle was the same. The amber must, inadvertently, have got mixed up with the other stones.

“I’ll certainly find out about all this tonight,” Gilly assured Spriggy, “and if we get it cleared up, can we go on the next trip please?”

“I suppose so, even though you caught a taste of it before you were ready,” conceded the sprite. “But yes, if the others agree again, you’re on!”

“I’m game anyway,” declared Gilly. “And if anything gets too frightening, I always know that you and Merlin can come to the rescue.”

5

The Abbey and a Cock Fight

Next day the four of them made an early start for the town and eventually arrived at the Circus again. Tom had admitted to his sudden lapse of honesty in Arcania, and had promised to take the stone back that morning. “It was a very strange urge,” he had told them. “And I’d spent most of my money that day.”

Sophie had been a bit puzzled about the attraction her visitors felt for this part of the city. Secretly she suspected that something very special was going on. When she heard from Sam that they may go round the Museum of Costume and from Gill that she and Lucy were going to try to sketch some of the dresses, Sophie accepted their explanation.

They finally reached the Circus, again at about midday, and were uncertain as to what to do next. Tom had only tentatively agreed to return. He had taken his amber-coloured stone back to the shop and secretly dropped it into the little box from which he had taken it. He didn’t tell the others that he had also chosen two more stones from other boxes, and paid for them this time. One was a small, clear crystal sphere. The other was black obsidian, which he noticed was his birthstone – his sign was Scorpio.

A little New Age booklet giving thoughts about crystals and their respective properties had been at hand near the seductive array. Tom leafed through it and read that crystal spheres were symbols of hidden magic and wisdom, and that obsidian – well... it was connected with sexual energy, good for visions but reflecting and revealing flaws in a person’s nature. This had given Tom a lot to think about.

Afterwards, while the expectant and would-be Time Travellers were all strolling uneasily round the Circus, Tom kept feeling for the new stones nestling in his pocket. It was with a certain excitement that he found himself studying the Palladian stone frieze that circled the arena, the motifs featuring those different heraldic designs. Tom liked the swords and entwined snakes the best. But now, gazing up at the stone acorns on top of the houses, he was reminded of the coconut shies that he was always so good at knocking down at fairs.

Meanwhile Sam was peering over the iron railings and down into the ample basement yards where potted plants and little trees and shrubs were growing. Gillian and Lucy were now seated as before, under the whispering trees.

Suddenly a gust of wind caught the faded leaves of those mini-worlds of cycled energy, and there was a rustle from the falling and dying multitude. It was as if the great trunks and branches had shaken themselves after waking from a quiet doze. Then, fixing their attention again upon a fellow sprite from their own spirit world – Spriggy – they must have been in contact once more. Gilly went into what looked to Lucy like a sort of trance. But Lucy was getting used to these occurrences.

The boys had joined up with each other and Sam was telling Tom about a well-known ghost that was often seen around the Assembly Rooms. Sophie had told him about it. He was a man in a tall black hat who walked through windows and walls. Tom asked, in faked horror, who it was supposed to be and was told that it was Admiral Phillip who had taken the first convicts to Australia. “Perhaps he has a guilty conscience,” Tom had remarked, and Sam had reflected that if they were about to enter the mid-eighteenth century this man would then have been alive. Also, there would have been no Assembly Rooms. Sam had been reading Gill’s book about Bath history in the 1750s.

“Oh look!” said Tom, snapping them out of their musings. “The girls are beckoning us, and about time too! Two buses have already done the rounds and now another one.” Tom’s mood was grumpy but Gill was in no hurry, so when they reached her she told them they had to wait for a special bus this time – the one named after William Herschel. They had to remain aboard until the stop past the Abbey. “You see it’s stones this time that will do the trick – so Spriggy says – and it’s the Abbey ones specially.”

“That’s way out,” mocked Tom. “First trees, then stones! We’ve missed three buses anyway.”

Lucy agreed with Tom for once. “How can stones remember?” she said with slight exasperation. They all watched as a bus went by.

Gillian had been, you might say, in a kind of meditation, in which Spriggy had told her many new things learnt from Merlin, and explained why they would be transported in this way today. “The Circus was just not there,” Spriggy had said, “though they had started building it. But the Royal Crescent wasn’t even begun during this next trip of yours. It will be 1756.”

“So why the Abbey?” Gilly wondered to herself.

Spriggy then expanded upon his new knowledge, explaining about

the special Abbey stones. “They are almost as immortal as the Gods themselves, and bring out new meanings from those ancient rocks hewn from the old green hills around Bath. They are record keepers, Merlin says, and their molecules and crystals have encompassed many years in the evolution of the Earth and Mankind.” Spriggy finished in triumph.

“Phew! That was a feat for my little tree-sprite,” Gilly marvelled. Then, contemplating it all, she supposed that the stones did, in a way, display ghosts of the past. Spriggy could be proud of that speech.

“Yes... yes,” agreed Spriggy excitedly. “The Saxon Abbey *was* built with stones from the nearby Roman ruins. Their Sun-Gods and Earth-Goddesses were partially transferred. Now, we have a human figure on the West Front. And a great improvement, says Merlin.”

“He means the Christ in Majesty sculptured at the top,” thought Gilly. ‘Jesus Christ Superstar... Jesus Christ Superstar’, she sung to herself as she pictured the scene. There must be a whole history in stone down there in the Abbey, she suddenly realised. Milestones in our ways of living and beliefs – all there to see. “Eye-openers galore, Spriggy!”

“Merlin even showed me how the type of rock predetermined (that was a long word, wasn’t it?) the form of the sculptors’ work – its colour, textures and surfaces,” Spriggy pronounced boastfully before finally drying up. Anyway, Gilly was now acting quite normally again and the girls were ready to move. The boys of course, were raring to go by now.

When they came to the Assembly Rooms another bus was just arriving. It was the William Herschel one – I’m sure you guessed! “Come on Gilly,” said Sam after they had all settled down on top of the bus. “Get out your guidebook. Let’s hear about this Herschel fellow before we start.” The bus was waiting for more customers, they supposed.

“Well,” began Gillian, flicking over the pages. “Sophie took us to his old house in New King Street on our last visit. You can still see his reflector telescope there. I picked up a pamphlet as well... and here it is, still tucked in the book.” She started to read bits from it. “He was the best mirror maker in the world for telescopes, writes Patrick Moore, and his aim was to collect as much light as possible. He strove to gather it in and make it as bright as he could for his Review of the Heavens.” Gilly paused.

“Go on then!” said Tom quite impatiently.

“Alright, but there’s lots here,” answered Gilly, scanning the page. “It was in 1781 that he discovered the planet Uranus, which was

named 'The Georgian' until 1850. 'Minerva' and 'Herschel' were suggested as alternatives. George III, before his madness, showed real generosity with large grants for Herschel and his sister Caroline. She lived with Herschel and was also his assistant."

"Was he British?" broke in Tom again.

"No, German. But he was here in England in 1756 as a musician in his Regiment, The Hanoverian Guards, when he was only seventeen! They were helping to guard against a French invasion, as the 'Seven Year War' had just begun... Catholics v Protestants. It was then he learned English."

Gillian turned over the pamphlet. "But he didn't settle in Bath, it seems, until 1766. That's ten years after the period we'll be entering."

"You mean, we *may* be entering," corrected Tom, getting bored again. "Why didn't he come back for so long? I think I'd have been an army deserter!"

"His Regiment returned to Germany," went on Gill, ignoring Tom's interruption, "to fight with British troops under George II, the last British king to command his army in the field. They were defeated actually."

"It must have been when Herschel was appointed organist at the chapel in the then new Milsom Street that he came to Bath. I remember reading this. Nothing of that would have existed in 1756! Strange, and this war going on..."

"Oh, shush! Be quiet for goodness sake, you two – the Guide is looking at us," whispered Lucy. "And we're already in the Circus. The commentary is beginning. Can't you hear?"

The Guide looked away and continued the talk. "This is Brock Street," they were told as they left the Circus on their way to the Royal Crescent. "And this is where John Wesley met the elderly Beau Nash – great gamester and once Master of Ceremonies and fashion in Bath. He had even been dubbed 'The King of Bath'. Nash wouldn't step off the pavement for him, saying he didn't give way to fools, to which Mr Wesley retorted, while bowing and stepping off himself, that, on the contrary, he always did!" This made them all laugh and any annoyance with our four was forgotten.

They passed the house where a John Smith lived – friend and secretary of the great composer Handel; coming next to the big house on the corner, No.1. Here John Wood The Younger lived for a while as he directed its extension into the grand sweep of his stupendous work – The Royal Crescent – the finest in Europe, it is often said. It was the crowning of his father's dream of a new Rome built in our west country. Someone hummed a tune from the 'Messiah.'

Their Guide was now in full flow. "This house," they were told, "is an authentic Georgian abode of the late eighteenth century. It's been completely restored by the Bath Preservation Trust and the furnishing and layout conform to the style of the period with accuracy. They used only material available at the time, attending to each detail. They also restored the acorns on the Circus parapets!" the Guide said with a smile, before breaking into a nursery ditty:

*"The Grand Old Duke of York,
he had ten thousand men,
He marched them up to the top of the hill
And he marched them down again!"*

Composing himself (the Guide felt pleased, for his women colleagues thought him too solemn), he continued: "King George III's son, The Duke of York, rented this house in the 1790s. He was a very unsuccessful commander in the field, I imagine, though he was Commander-in-Chief of the army! Give this house a visit; you'll even see a spit-turning 'dog-wheel' in the kitchen, and a huge cauldron for heating water," he told them.

As they proceeded into Royal Crescent the driver prepared to halt for a while to give them time to admire the splendour and take photographs.

"It's all sentimental nostalgia," whispered Tom in Sam's ear. "Just to get money from tourists."

"I don't know," answered Sam thoughtfully. "Nostalgia for good things... successful things... is part of us all really. We will be part of someone's past one day! Actually, we are Time-Tourists ourselves."

"Bath is full of ghosts," said the Guide. "The two most famous and well authenticated are the Grey Lady down at the Theatre Royal's Garrick's Head Pub, and the short man with piercing blue eyes who haunts the very district where you boarded this bus! The first one hanged herself, I'm afraid."

Sam nudged Tom knowingly. The Guide then began to elaborate upon it all. "He wears a short cape and black hat, some say broadbrimmed and others say a top hat. He sometimes appears on the staircase of No.19 Bennett Street, where he lived. He politely makes way for ladies as they pass, they say! He is Admiral Philip who founded the Australian colony which later became Sydney. His ghost is better known than his memorial plaque in the Abbey!"

Sam had experienced a few strange and unexplained incidents himself during his life, but had been too embarrassed to talk about

them. He would, one day, be a man of action. For him, seeing anything meant doing something about it. He often felt he had a mission, but he dismissed these thoughts.

The Guide hadn't yet finished with his ghosts, however, and carried on about sobbing, chattering and fleeting ones. Pointing down over the expanse of lawn to Victoria Park, he told about the Dell where reckless young men used to settle their affairs of honour. It was hidden from spies and was in defiance of Beau Nash's ban on duelling. "Still," he assured them, "the sound of clashing swords can interrupt early morning walkers thereabouts!"

As the bus slowly cruised along the grand curve of the thirty large houses, built for the very wealthy, the Guide suddenly exclaimed: "If you see a coach and four horses trotting round here, I can tell you that it definitely is not part of a film in the making; nor is it one of the carriages that give trippers rides in the town – however real and solid it looks. You have seen a ghost!"

"What's the story behind this one?" asked a sceptical passenger.

"Well," the answer came, "early one morning in 1772 the beautiful daughter of the owner of No.11 eloped in a similar coach with a dashing young Irishman, Richard Sheridan, the playwright." Then the Guide pointed to No.21. "This house doesn't like women. Female owners have rarely been happy here."

Their knowledgeable escort gave his voice a well-earned rest on their way back to town and it was now that Gillian suddenly felt her heart begin to pound and she closed her eyes. Inside her head she heard again the deep resonant voice she had heard in the plane, the Baths and under the trees. She now knew Merlin's voice and though his words, not always understood, did excite her she felt a little frightened and overpowered. He was uttering some momentous lines, saying: "Everything that happens in this world is imprinted on the ether, or 'dark matter' as it's now called, and these records unfold like a never-ending motion picture." There was a pause and then the more homely voice of Spriggy interrupted again.

"I've told Merlin," it said, "that I'll repeat to you what he's saying, and perhaps make it sound a bit simpler... OK?"

"Yes, yes," thought Gilly. "I'd like that. It is rather heavy stuff but it must be something to do with ghosts, and of course, great truths."

"Here goes then," said Spriggy. "Everything we do, he says, returns to us sooner or later – so we create our own destiny. The next bit is difficult, but I'm trying." There was a longer, pregnant pause. Then, in a rather halting delivery, Gillian was told that Merlin had been resident in his Earth dimension, and as a helper, back in the fifteenth

century. He inhabited, very favourably, a living human being for a while. It was Thomas Malory, author of the Arthurian Romances and legends. “This,” Spriggy announced, finally, “had a great effect on the next few hundred years... especially the Holy Grail idea. He only assisted Malory, he says, and there were others and still are.”

Gilly took all this in, but still wondered about the original Merlin of Celtic tradition.

“Well,” drawled Spriggy, “Merlin agrees he did take his name from this mythical figure – the Welsh Wizard – but at that time he was experimenting! He did fall in love with the Lady Nimue whose enchantment worked on him. And he did end up entombed in the base of a tree which then became locked into an encircling cave. What a magic mess-up!” Spriggy gave a squeaky chuckle.

He soon carried on, sounding quite serious again. “During the period you are about to enter, the Mage thinks you’ll be interested to know that he was then preparing to join in the childhood of his next chosen host. Guess who! No? It was William Blake of course, he’s only now being understood you see.”

Merlin’s voice now took over again: “I know I’m not a bundle of fun just now,” he said, “but the exciting thing for you four is that I’m also to make other moves. I will then speak with different voices, hopefully preparing you for the new millennium. One of my future secret partners is among you now. I’ve made visits to many mortals, testing paths of development, but this one is ‘in the bag’, as you say! My other-worldly wisdom and magic are needed there.”

Gilly felt uneasy somehow, till she heard Spriggy’s reassuring voice say, “Don’t worry girl, he doesn’t mean any of you. You’re much too young and silly – I’m all you can manage! But he does want your help in some way.”

“Listen, my child,” Merlin began again in a warmer voice. “About these apparitions; you’ll soon all become familiar with new forms of speech, for instance, like this: ‘the past is pressed up against the future and potentially present everywhere’. Now think of what happens when you adjust the frequency of your radio circuit till it coincides with the transmitted waves picked up by the aerial – you are tuning in. Connect this with your own Time Travels. Now I leave you with a passage from those Prophetic Books:

*‘The Spectres of the dead cry out from beneath,
Upon the hills of Albion.’*”

The sombre voice faded, and Gilly realised they were just passing

the Abbey. Then in a flash it all happened again. They were back in the eighteenth century. Another country, but uncannily resembling their own – another time, but just connected.

They looked around unbelievably. The Churchyard was much smaller, and there was a row of medieval-looking houses built right up against the north wall of the Abbey. There were some tall, gabled buildings on one side, and on the other a row of shops with Georgian style bow windows. Marshal Wade's house was there, its amber stone already darkening with the grey chimney smoke.

"That's now the National Trust Shop," said Gilly at last. "*In real time – our time*, I mean. I recognise it – and seagulls were nesting in those top urns."

Sam had noticed straight away that there were no flying buttresses at the sides of the Abbey, no railings round it and no proper pinnacles on its top turrets. He was often very observant and seemed awed by the Abbey.

The old, recently extended Pump Room was now at the opposite end to the Abbey and there were steps leading up to the door. Outside were half a dozen or so Sedan Chairmen waiting to carry their hirers back to their homes. Some of them were sitting on the chair poles, their dogs playing nearby.

Lucy's attention was caught by yet another lone preacher, this time more formally dressed and with a book propped up on a sort of mobile desk. He had quite a gathering standing around him. What Lucy didn't know was that this was one of John Wesley's itinerant preachers, and he was staying in Bath at Wesley's permanent Meeting Room in the infamous Avon Street.

Though Wesley, often with his brother Charles (the writer of 6,500 hymns), visited Bath around 100 times – sometimes walking, but mostly on horseback – he was in Ireland in 1756. The Wesley brothers called Bath 'Satan's Throne' and 'The Sodom of our land', asking "Can the Gospel ever have place here?" They only had 35 members in the City at this time, and were accused of emotionalism.

Our four travellers were amazed at how fashionably dressed almost everyone seemed to be. The men's long, coloured waistcoats of wool, velvet or silk stood out, and ruffled cuffs and cravats showed off their tight breeches and white stockings, buckled shoes, three-quarter length padded coats and tricorne hats. The women were parading in their hooped skirts, low fitted bodices and ridiculously large hats adorned with ribbons and plumes. Men and women must have spent much money and time with their wigs, ponytails and powdered hairstyles. They seemed as though hell-bent on pleasure or on killing time.

On their right workmen were building over the newly demolished Prior's lodgings, but Tom was interested in a commotion coming from round the corner. The girls followed the boys in that direction, coming upon a rare sight. Splashing and bobbing about in The King's and Queen's Baths was a humorous rabble of men and women. Some were calling to each other and others were climbing in and out of the hot baths clothed only in their linen smocks and tunics. An assortment of viewers were leaning against the outer wall or sitting up in an arched building with an open veranda overlooking the Baths. There were show-off loafers, well-dressed residents, health and glamour seeking visitors and excited children dressed like little adults. Many people, also, were going into the noonday service in the Abbey Church nearby.

The Gentry and visiting notabilities had, of course, been brought down to bathe much earlier, when the water was cleaner, and had been taken back by sedan chair, right up into their rooms, to sweat it off in their beds.

"Good God!" said Tom. "I wouldn't get in with that lot however much I was paid." The other youngsters agreed with him. There were no inoculations or disinfectant at that time, they thought. But a testimony written that century reads thus:

"THE MOST SOVEREIGN RESTORATIVE BATH WATERS

Wonderful and most EXCELLENT against all diseases of the body... such as Rhumes, Agues, Lethargies, Apoplexies, The Scratch, Hectic flushes. The Fits, Pockes, Deafness, Forgetfulness, Shaking and Weakness of any Member.

APPROVED AND CONFIRMED BY AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE."

The more select Cross Bath up the road even claimed to cure infertility. Queen Mary of Madena became pregnant after bathing here and credited it to the Sacred Waters. She then had a tall centrepiece, with doves, cherubs and a cross, built for it; and duly gave birth to history's Bonny Prince Charlie.

To be fair to Bath, the Mineral Water Hospital had just been erected and was largely funded by Allen and Wood (prime movers), and public subscription.

"Let's go and see who's patronising Sally Lunn's today," suggested Gill, having tired of watching the bathing spectacle. So they started off across a patch of garden and into York Street. As they went they

heard the Abbey bells pealing. Passing a group of ladies who had just come from their stroll on the Grand Parade, they overheard them saying: “I wonder who they are ringing for today at the North Gate? Nothing less than a Lord I’ll be bound... it could be a Duke and Duchess – even a Prince and Princess!”

Bells were rung for arriving notabilities, for which they later would have to pay half a crown! Carriages were not allowed into the crowded streets of the City – the visitors were met with sedan chairs.

Our four passed the beautiful Town House of Ralph Allen which then had an uninterrupted view of ‘Sham Castle’ built specially for this purpose. From South Parade one could also view Prior Park, his superb Palladian mansion on the hill: “A noble seat which sees all Bath and was built, probably, for all Bath to see!”

Going through Lilliput Alley the youngsters noticed with surprise that two people were nearly knocked down by a running chair-man shouting the traditional ‘Have a Care!’ and forcing them to flatten against the wall.

Sally Lunn’s Refreshment House was booming. The fashionable residents and visitors were making it part of their daily round, Tom concluded as he peeped through the window. There he saw the London papers provided for the coffee-drinkers to peruse.

Lucy, looking too, saw that some ageing and portly individuals were sipping hot chocolate. “I should think that would undo all the good they had done by drinking the waters,” she said. “And just look at the butter on the buns! They should be eating Dr Oliver’s special biscuits that Sophie told us about... Bath Olivers, weren’t they?”

“Yes,” answered Sam, chuckling wickedly. “Especially as most of the old ladies are trying to look like eighteen year olds!”

There were quite a few little teashops and Reading Rooms nearby, and a favourite local paper seemed to be one called ‘Merryland’.

Some people were making their way down North Parade to the Horse-Ferry, which would take them across the river Avon to the Bathwick meadows, and the popular Spring Gardens. There they would picnic or walk to the little parish of Widcombe and climb the hills.

Sally Lunn herself was probably still around, but getting on in years and no longer the young and sprightly maid depicted in the rhyme printed on the tea-towels of the present day shop:

*‘Run, Run, Sweet Sally Lunn
Down to the river with basket and bun
Spring Gardens are filling, parading’s begun,
You must not be late and you’re missing the fun.’*

The charming, mob-capped, neat little figure with her covered trays of home-baked buns would have been very popular. Her secret recipe, which she brought from France, was much later discovered hidden behind the oven during excavations there.

Gilly was struck now by the long-aproned girls attending the customers. The likeness to the twentieth century waitress in exact period dress who had greeted her in the entrance to the Sally Lunn teashop when she visited with Aunt Sophie, was amazing. Gilly's sense of the current backward-induced time seemed for a moment to be one with *real* time.

Continuing along North Parade, past the Assembly Rooms with the Grand Ballroom and down the spacious Duke Street, they came out into South Parade, originally planned as a forum but never finished. At the end of the parade were railings and the river below. From here was a grand view of Ralph Allen's fine estate on the opposite hillside. Formal gardens stretched far round the house and running straight down beside it all was the special railway road which was the means of bringing down blocks of stone from his hill-top quarry. It was to this showplace that the poets Pope and Dryden made many visits as did Frederick Handel whose special friends, those famous actors Garrick and Quin, often accompanied him.

On the way back, these by now miracle-blasé kids, were suddenly seriously put out. It was a truly awful noise they now heard – high-pitched and prolonged squealing sounds rent the air. There was a note of raw fear and distress and Gilly spoke out unhappily.

"It must be pigs," she said in a horrified tone, for she had always had a soft spot for these sensitive animals.

A group of people standing outside a house were loudly commenting upon the noise. One of them said that there was a pork butcher's yard in Ham Gardens nearby, and that at this time every day a cart arrived there with pigs for slaughter. They seemed to anticipate their fate as they were being unloaded, she suggested.

"Hurry up," called Sam quickly. "We must look inside the Abbey while we are here – come on."

As they made their way there they passed quite a few people with spotty pockmarked faces. They shuddered, thinking of the smallpox scourge.

Passing Sally Lunn's house again they heard the waitress telling one of her customers that they couldn't sell Dr Oliver's biscuits in the shop, but he would prescribe her some for her indigestion at the new hospital.

Outside the Abbey were two rows of children from the Blue-coat Charity School making a path for the outcoming congregation. The

daily service had just finished and a collection had been made for the school and also for the Royal Mineral Water Hospital.

At the school the boys were now taught reading, writing and arithmetic as well as Latin and Greek. The girls were just taught reading, writing and needlework. The architect John Wood had attended this school.

The hospital was the pride of the City, and the stone carving in the Greek-style cornice high over the street entrance depicted, in fine relief, The Good Samaritan – a very popular subject at this time.

Inside the Abbey the youngsters were surprised and awed by the sight. Though the roof of the nave was not yet fan-vaulted, Sam noticed, there was a decorated plasterwork ceiling instead. There were no pews or chairs in the nave, only benches round the outer walls for the old and infirm. These gave rise, Tom imagined, to the saying: ‘The weakest go to the wall’.

An air of frivolity pervaded the place as though it was all part of the Social Round. There was a rich variety of people, including many very fine ladies and gentlemen. Even the more ordinary women wore wired caps and were fashionably dressed. People were strolling around, one lady with a parasol and a little dog on a lead. Sedan Chairmen were there; some with empty chairs calling to take their patrons home, and some collecting others who had been deposited up front in chairs for the whole service. A tall screen separated the choir from the nave and supported the many organ pipes. Three large, black oak figures surmounted the screen. They were imposingly carved and the highest central one was of a cloaked King David. He wore a crown over his shoulder-length hair, a breastplate over his tunic, and was playing a harp. The figures on each side, St Peter and St Paul, were traditionally robed, and one was looking up at King David.

Behind them one could just see the top part of the great East Window. It was still uniquely square-headed. Beyond the screen one could easily survey the 56 scenes from the life of Christ, and many characters from the New Testament. There was a difference though that Gilly noticed, for Aunt Sophie had once shown her this window. It had depicted the Arms of the Abbey and the Arms of the City of Bath in the two top circles she recalled, but now she saw a beautiful sun on one side and a moon on the other. “Christ is the Sun in everyone,” thought Gillian, surprising herself. “Merlin is here!”

The window had been destroyed during the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII, and then shattered by twentieth century war bombing. Between these it survived the billeting of Cromwell’s troops in the Abbey and the stabling of their horses. Gillian had picked

up the wonder of its existence. The pillars were covered with memorial plaques, about 200 of them. Details, quite boring before, seemed translucent now.

“I suppose,” suggested Tom, “that ill people, especially those with good money, came to Bath hoping to be cured, and it didn’t always work.” He was right of course. The Abbey bells tolled for their departure and their families paid for their memorials and burial. Under the Abbey floor were actually hundreds of lead-lined coffins for which at least £10 each had been paid; but the nearer they were to the high altar the more expensive they were. It was hoped by this means to enjoy more prompt and favourable treatment on the day of judgement. Members of the parish were charged less than visitors. “Snug lying in the Abbey,” says one of the characters in a play about Bath by Richard Sheridan, the Irish charmer, of elopement and duel-scarred fame. For over 400 years people’s best reward for a good life was to be buried here.

Tom seemed transfixed before the large tomb of Sir William and Lady Waller positioned in the south arm of this old cross-shaped Abbey church. It had been meant for them both, but he died later and was eventually buried in London. His armour-clad figure was looking down on his reposing wife and at each end was a small child sitting on a chair. The epitaph poem on one black panel, referring to his virtuous Lady, included the touching words: ‘In graces great, in stature small.’ The panel beside it was blank. Sir William’s face, above his pointed beard, was vandalised. Why was this? Tom wondered, but he didn’t know that General Waller’s Parliamentary troops had been billeted in the Abbey during the Battle of Lansdown period.

The famous diarist, Samuel Pepys, had also stood there and wondered, less than 100 years before. He had written these words during his visit: “To the church again to see it and look over the monuments, where among others... is a lady of Sir William Waller’s, he lying with his face broken.” The same Pepys recorded the great plague, the fire of London, and had witnessed the beheading of Charles I. Times were merging.

Sam had been looking with interest at the brass memorial for Sir George and Lady Ivy, with a fine figure in full armour and with heraldic devices of the family. They had had four sons and four daughters – two sons had been killed in battle and the epitaph read:

*‘Palmer, Second Sonne who was slayne in ye Venetian Warrs
in ye ile of Corffue, Robert ye fourth sonne who died in ye
Netherlands at ye seige of Bredan.’*

Another brass plate was in memory of the family of a local goldsmith whose shop in Stall Street backed onto the Abbey. It was engraved by himself and the inscription stated that near this place lay the bodies of Mary his wife and their four sons – each boy named and given his position in the family – and his mother and father. The verse below, decorated with a cleft skull on a winged hourglass, was as follows:

*'So that you see gaynft deaths all conquering hand
Nor sex nor age agaynft his force can stand
But ther's a tyme wherein our body's muft
Revive agayne though now turnd into duft.'*

Sam knew that the 'f' in old English is now our letter 's'. Reading out this poem seemed really to move him – such persistent faith had these people in their grief. Despite his youth and exuberance, the fact of death was often in his mind. He was confused now as to how he felt about Empire-building and the wars that went with it. Most of the Army and Navy men commemorated here had bravely faced disease and death thousands of miles from home; yet some would have ordered many killings too in certain beleaguered foreign fields – he actually felt in himself some of the heartache.

Sam had been intrigued in his younger days by the tales of King Arthur and his knights – especially the three who had eventually found the Holy Grail. His favourite hero had been Sir Lancelot of the Lake, the father of Galahad. The names were still connected in Sam's *real* time with great acts. They now rang out for him.

Anyway, while the boy pondered upon these things, the tune of a song came into his mind. It was Blake's 'Jerusalem', which promenaders sang at the Albert Hall on the last night of the concerts. It was then that Sam found himself saying some of those words to himself – like this verse:

*'I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land.'*

Perhaps, thought Sam, all past warlike horrors had themselves forged the rich symbolism that our imaginations could use to wage our mental battles. Yet... how could 'Jerusalem' stand for the ideal city when there was such hatred in the twentieth century between Arabs and Jews? Sam gave up and moved away.

The boys now joined the two girls, standing respectfully beside the tomb of Bishop Montague, the largest in the Abbey. The good Bishop had saved the building from slipping into decay when it had lain unfinished. He had roofed it, paved the body of the nave and much more. The great west doors were given later, in his memory, by his brother. His effigy was lying, with its crisp-looking neck-ruff tucked under a trim beard, and the badge of the Order of the Garter on the shoulder of its cloak. Sam saw the Red Cross in the centre and it reminded him of the design that had been on Galahad's shield. Tom was interested in the fact that the figure was supported on a slab of what he guessed was jasper. Being always fascinated with types of rock and stone, Tom knew it to be an opaque variety of quartz which, in natural surroundings, could change its form and colour.

Meanwhile, the girls were having a discussion. Lucy wondered doubtfully if any of the preachers outside would ever have memorials like these inside. She supposed that Beau Nash would (and he did of course) even though he had often ridiculed their preaching.

"Sometimes," she remarked philosophically, "the terrible certainty of some conventions and approved ranks and orders strike a sort of chill in my heart. They are as bad as the fundamentalists."

Gilly was surprised at her young friend's mature outburst. She tried to address her problem and suggested, falteringly: "Well I suppose that really, like the breakaway Wesley for instance, they're too theatrical and emotional for very orthodox types of people... and..."

But here Merlin again took over: "What is a wife and what is a harlot?" the voice in her head asked, and "What is a church and what is a theatre?" Gilly listened. "Are they two and not one? Can they exist separately?" Merlin's strange voice was reciting now... again from Blake who was to be born the following year – 1757:

*'He sent his two servants, Whitefield and Westley: were they Prophets,
Or were they idiots or mad-men? show us miracles!
Can you have greater miracles than these; men who devote
Their life's whole comfort to entire scorn and injury and death?'*

After this he added, in warmer and more friendly tones, that without tradition and the handing down of acquired skills and wisdom, we would not be human, have no imagination and no passages through time. "My William knew this," he said.

Gilly was still silent and Lucy, guessing the cause again, tackled her: "What is he saying? Is it Merlin or Spriggy? Come on, tell me."

"OK, but hang on... its rather complicated, you see," said Gilly,

pausing. "I think..." she attempted, "Merlin was saying that a church is a bit like a theatre and that things going on outside it can feel the living spirit of Jesus blowing through them as well. It can express itself and be found in ancient dogma and ritual and in new charismatic Christian enthusiasts." Gillian went quiet again for a moment and then finished with the assurance that for many centuries ahead, Merlin meant, habits of worship would still bring the past into the present and link the present to past loves – shaping the future.

"Thanks Gilly," said Lucy, feeling very impressed.

Gilly was embarrassed, but Sam who had been listening said he agreed with all she had said. He was sure that it was this Time Travel lark that triggered off all these philosophical ideas. "It's strange really, isn't it – not a bit like us! But actually, Gill, that was well said – about uniting the living and the dead."

As they made to leave the Abbey they had a last look at the tall wooden pulpit with the huge, finely carved canopy over it, and Lucy joked that it was there, perhaps, to protect the preacher if the roof leaked!

Tom was getting bored and said he wanted to watch the mixed bathers again.

Sam gave a quick look at the West window, which showed many scenes from the Old Testament. "Few of us notice these windows in our time," he remarked. "We have our TV's instead." But the idea of the relevance of the East window to the West one didn't escape him. How important they were to each other and how the New Testament fulfilled and grew out of the Old.

Outside they split up for a while. The girls suddenly had a desire to ride in a sedan chair. Asking the boys to meet them a little later in the churchyard, they looked around for a suitable match-up. Two ladies who were obviously friends or relatives were hiring sedan chairs to take them home, so the girls nipped in with them. The occupants wanted to go to the top of Gay Street and the chairmen were explaining to them that there would be double the usual sixpence to pay because their destination was outside the city walls and up a hill. As soon as the men had closed the top over the ladies' big hats and waited for them to adjust their voluminous skirts, they started off. The ladies in each of the chairs might have noticed a slight presence, but said nothing. The girls left Sam watching some open-air dramatics.

Passing into Orange Grove with a brisk jogging motion the girls noticed the little trees set along the roadsides. Then, skirting the central island, they emerged onto the Parade alongside the river and – surprise, surprise – no bridge! They could hardly believe their eyes.

After turning into the top of the crowded High Street they headed for the North Gate, and the chairmen kept calling out “By your leave” as they scattered or pushed past the pedestrians in their way. Through the gate at last, and starting up Broad Street, they themselves had to give way to a fine coach arriving from London. Gilly was entranced with the four black horses.

They continued along to the bottom of Gay Street as it led out from the fabulous Queen Square, and started up the hill. The women seemed a little uneasy, and the chairmen in their fitted overcoats were breathing heavily. When they stopped at last right at the top at No.18 on the right-hand side, the ladies got out. They thanked the men but were also complaining to them about their treatment of the Link Boys whom the chairmen used at night to run in front of them with a torch, for they were underpaid and overworked.

While the chairmen were resting the girls stood outside and were amazed as they surveyed the partially-built Circus. John Wood the Elder, the architect who had planned it, had died a few years before but had lived just long enough to see the first two houses built. His son was carrying on with the work, and the left-hand section was nearly complete. A well had been dug in the centre and there were scores of workmen around. On the ground were many blocks of stone being worked on by masons and sculptors all chipping away. Tall poles were being unloaded from carts and sitting on some of the other stones were overseers and surveyors dressed in fashionable style.

Thomas Gainsborough, the famous painter, would soon be living in No.17. He was already painting portraits of the wealthy at a guinea a time at his present home in Pierrepont Street.

Anyway, the chairmen were ready to move again and so the girls got into the same chair. On the way down they saw many more examples of those privileged gentry who were able to live in such houses. They had perhaps got their money from the lucrative American Colonies, and Bath developers were now building beautiful mansions for people, rather than temples to God. White cravats and long sleeve-lace, sweeping skirts and ample shawls all caught Lucy’s eye.

“Just imagine having the job of laundering that lot,” she said.

“Well, don’t worry,” laughed Gill. “It won’t be you.”

“Sophie once told me another well-known Bath ghost story and it was set in this street,” recalled Gill as they continued downhill.

“Come on then, what was it?”

“Actually, it was told about No.8... over there I think.” Gilly pointed it out. “And Dr Samuel Johnson is probably in there at this very moment! He was frequently entertained and given tea here by a lady

friend, but the story went that the house had a haunted drawing room. Voices were heard conversing, but whenever the door was opened, they ceased.”

Dr Johnson had published his famous dictionary a year before their present visit, and he always had enjoyed good conversation. There are other haunted houses in Gay Street, belying the original meaning of its name! It was actually called after a distinguished Bath surgeon.

When they came into the High Street the girls found that there was a busy market place, and people were buying and selling on the cobbled street. Men were moving goods about in wheelbarrows or horse-drawn carts. There were stables nearby and in the middle of the road was the arched and double gabled Guildhall. They knew what building it was because they heard their chairman shouting to the other one about it as they skirted round.

When they returned to the Churchyard and looked for the boys, they found Sam really enjoying himself, still watching the group of famous actors advertising their evening performance at the Theatre Royal in Orchard Street. It had only just acquired the ‘Royal’ title (the first outside London). Many actors were well known. Now, some of them, including the great Sarah Siddons, were enacting a scene from a Shakespeare play. The ‘Bard’ came to life for the small crowd.

Sam didn’t know that James Quin was doing his famous ‘Falstaff’ act and that David Garrick was there as well. In ten years time he would be busy composing the beautiful epitaph for Quin’s memorial in the Abbey. The grave would be in the centre aisle of the nave and would bear the words:

*‘The scene is changed, I am no more
Death’s the last act. Now all is o’er.’*

But now this popular character, his curly hair falling to his shoulders, was making the onlookers roar with laughter and clap their hands.

“Where’s Tom?” asked Gilly.

“Oh! He saw a notice about cockfights and bear-baiting at the timber yard in Sawclose up Westgate Street. He said he’d go and have a quick look – just for the experience. He promised he’d be back soon. He should be here.”

“We’d better go find him and fish him out straight away,” groaned Gilly.

“Fancy his wanting to watch such obscene spectacles.” Lucy was disgusted.

“I don’t understand him sometimes,” said Gilly, “but perhaps he

got lost.” Reluctantly they set off and sped in the direction of the cockpit and, they hoped, Tom. Finding they could move unnaturally fast sometimes, they soon came upon the excited crowd of shouting and cheering men. On the edge of this was Tom looking very agitated and staring at the ground. His friends called him and when he saw them he said guiltily, “I was just coming back because I’d had enough and was feeling sick, but I’ve lost my crystal.”

“However did you do that?” asked Lucy incredulously. “You took it back.”

“I thought I was holding it in my hand, but as I turned away, rather quickly, it dropped and then materialised. There’s no way I can pick it up.” There it was sparkling on the ground. “I did pay for this one,” Tom said.

Looking into the pit Sam saw the pitiful sight of one of the cocks on its last legs staggering about while the other one still attacked it. The deadly spurs attached to its clawed feet were scattering blood and clouds of loose feathers. Some voices were egging it on.

“We must go,” said Sam.

“But what about my crystal?” objected Tom.

As they spoke a rough-looking character saw it too and stooping down picked it up and showed it to his friend. But suddenly they all heard a distinct knocking sound and the man dropped the crystal and muttered in a frightened voice: “That’s the Cock-lane ghost, I’ll wager.” He then took to his heels and fled the scene. Some dogs nearby did the same thing with their tails between their legs. Other people ran off too; they knew the tale!

Our Time Travellers had had enough. “Hey! Spriggy... Merlin... Take us out!” Gilly cried. “And hurry... please.”

They now found themselves back on the tour bus at the Abbey stop. One of the other passengers left inside turned to them. “Whatever made you kids so tired? You all went off to sleep. I hope you’re not on drugs.”

As the youngsters got up, rubbing their eyes, what should they see on the floor of the bus but Tom’s bright crystal! He grabbed it delightedly.

On the way back to Aunt Sophie, Spriggy complained to Gilly about Tom. “We always seem to have trouble with him,” he squeaked, “I’m glad Merlin is taking over next time. That crystal-switch baffled me – poor me.”

“The next chance we will have to go on a trip is in the spring,” said Gilly. “How about you Tom... would you want to go again? Sophie would invite you both to Bath I’m sure. Will you come?” She looked at Tom for an answer.

“Yes, thanks... I’d certainly go again now. It was really cool, or as Lucy would say, quite groovy!” Sam smiled, but felt the same way too.

“Oh dear! We’ve got to do our packing tonight for the flight home.”

“I’d like to come again as well,” said Lucy. “The time’s gone so fast yet we’ve been back to two former ages. Brilliant! What about you Gilly?”

“I just wish I’d seen John Palmer’s Flying Machine (the Bath Mail Coach), but in 1756 we were thirty years too soon. God! I’m hungry... aren’t you?”

** *** **

As they rose above the rainy scene around Heathrow Airport they could still see the rows of London houses spread out below them. The M4 motorway with its heavy traffic was snaking its way westward in the direction from which they had just come by coach. Some roads looked like magnified arteries and veins with blood cells coursing through them.

Soon they burst out above the layer of grey cloud which, now dispersing, seemed to symbolise all of Gilly’s darker thoughts and feelings.

Though she could still hear the drone of engines which now drove them through the blue clearness, no movement could be seen any more. Gillian then made a connection with the inner power that drives us all onwards in our best and clearest moments – she saw how it was the joy of living that did it – and the wonder. She loved everyone and everything and wanted to say a big “thank you” to whatever it was in her that made her feel these things.

As Gilly savoured this uplifting experience, she again heard the deeper voice of Merlin inside her head. He told her about the poetic characters, Los and Enitharman, who were Blake’s male and female personifications of the human imagination, then how the sons or daughters of these two can surround and contain our feelings with a sort of security:

*‘Creating form and beauty around the dark regions of sorrow,
Giving to airy nothing a name and a habitation
Delightful, with bounds to the infinite, putting off the indefinite
Into most holy forms of thought; (such is the power of
inspiration.)’*

The voice ceased, and turning to Lucy sitting with her and then to

the boys behind them, she gave her best and happiest smile. Speaking in low tones to Lucy afterwards, she said how she felt that the four of them were really on a quest of exploration into the working of Time-Machines. “The forces that drive evolution onwards,” finished Spriggy in very important tones.

“Perhaps, during our next backward trip,” she said, “Merlin will work a two-way traffic. A meeting between us and one of those long-dead inhabitants whom we saw living again in their age. A single person could tell us things that are not in our history books! Perhaps nothing is ever lost.”

“Next you’ll be saying that everyone who ever lived and loved on Earth (and it means, I suppose, real love) is still alive somewhere else!” said Lucy.

“Yes. You’re right,” answered Gilly slowly. “Spriggy told me that long ago, I’m now being reminded by my same neglected sprite that it was in Wales and Ireland – dear Ireland – where the beginnings of Celtic Christianity were first seen.” She paused again. “Spriggy is saying that it brought with it the ‘Resurrection of the Dead.’”

“You didn’t think of that, did you?” squeaked Spriggy. Gilly’s resident Dryad was now chiding the girl.

“Well, alright, I’ve learnt about all that and how Christianity spread to some big English cities, like Bath in the west and Durham in the north, coming through Glastonbury and Iona. I didn’t grasp the resurrection key.”

“I get the feeling that Spriggy’s giving you a hard time!” grinned Lucy.

“Actually, Merlin hasn’t finished either. Here he is again,” shushed Gilly.

“In Blake’s Prophetic Books,” the Mage’s voice continued, “he spoke about Time, but few listened. You are, I think, listening?” Chanting then resumed:

*“But others of the sons of Los built moments and minutes and
hours,
– And every moment has a couch of gold for soft repose,
 (A moment equals a pulsation of an artery)
– And every minute has an azure tent with silken veils;
 And every hour has a bright golden Gate carved with skill.
– Each has its Guard, each moment, minute, hour, day, month
 and year:
All are the work of Fairy hands of the four elements.”*

“Yes, I quite liked that,” thought Gilly. “Bits of it struck a chord, but I can’t say I really understood it.” She gave a big sigh.

“But I left out some lines which I guessed would puzzle you,” explained Merlin. “You see, all the great events of time start forth and are conceived within such moments – mere pulsations of an artery. This is what he’s saying.”

The voice faded and the ride was becoming bumpy as they began the long descent towards the airport. They could see the wide estuary of the River Shannon, and the green fields surrounding the isolated white cottages began to give way to heathland.

Sam was holding forth to Tom about air pockets, wind-speeds and landing approach techniques. He was meaning to reassure his friend, but was not having the desired effect. Tom was still fidgeting and muttering. Sam was set on becoming a pilot one day. He built model aeroplanes for fun.

Back home the four split up, promising to join each other again for their next visit to Bath.

6

The House in the Circus

Time passes slowly when you are young, and it seemed an age before the secret Time Travellers found themselves back in Georgian Bath, looking down on the familiar view again – the city laid out in its beautiful symmetry. And from their balcony they could admire the foreground gardens in bloom.

“So you’re off to town again this afternoon, are you?” enquired Aunt Sophie after lunch. “You seem to prefer exploring on your own now that you know your way around. I shall have a quiet rest and read – but don’t be late for supper... please.”

They all agreed it was much better and more exciting to plan their own excursions. They set off in high spirits and with great anticipation.

Finishing up in the Circus again, Gilly and Lucy were sitting on the grass in the centre and leaning against the trunk of one of the huge plane trees. They were partly snuggled between the protruding roots, which favoured space they shared with some tiny plants in the crevice behind them. Around them was a mass of yellow crocuses in full flower. They formed a wide band of gold, enclosing them all in a sort of ‘golden glow’.

The boys were walking round the Circus houses and studying the stone motifs above each one. Tom’s favourites were the snakes and Sam’s the old armour pieces he saw there. They had been arguing about whether they both should go into the Museum of East Asian Art nearby, but had postponed it, though Sophie had given them money. Tom wanted to see the Jade Collection.

Suddenly, Lucy turned and stared at Gillian who had started chanting again. Gilly had done this for the first time back in their country park at home. Now she seemed to be reciting a poem:

*“This is a rune I have heard a tree say:
‘Love me. I cannot run away.’
This is a rune I have heard a lark cry:
‘So high! But I cannot reach the sky.’
This is a rune I have heard a dog bark:*

*'I see what is not even there in the dark.'
This is a rune I have heard a man say:
'Hold your head up and you see far away.'"*

"Is that Spriggy again?" broke in Lucy excitedly.

"I expect so," replied Gilly dreamily.

"What does 'rune' mean then?"

"Oh! A magic or mysterious saying, Spriggy says. Letters carved on stone or wood." Gillian paused and then remarked that she heard this poem at school once. "I don't know why it came out just now."

She got up and began to feel the bark of the old trunk behind her. Not finding anything unusual she sat down again next to the wondering Lucy and continued reciting:

*"Tree, lend me this root,
That I may sit here at your foot...
...Do you not feel me on your heel,
My bone against your bone?
Or are you in such slumber sunk,
Woodpeckers knocking at your trunk
Find you are not at home?
To winds you are not dumb;
Then tell me if you understand:
When your thick timber has been hewn..."*

Here there was a pause.

"And one day it *will* be, like my dear Irish beech tree," interjected Gilly.

*"Its boards in floors and fences sewn,
And you no more a tree,
Where will your dryad be?"*

"Part of another poem from school-days?" asked Lucy. "I think I remember that one." But before Gilly could answer, Spriggy, her own dryad, suddenly spoke out and could be heard by both girls.

"What put that into your head?" the voice asked. "I did of course!"

After a chuckle, Spriggy became serious and told them to listen hard for he had to give them some instructions from Merlin. But first, the voice asked: "Did you know the myth of Eve in the Garden of Eden and the broken off twig from which she'd plucked the famous apple? Well, I'll tell you anyway." Spriggy chatted on. "When Eve

threw it on the ground it took root and grew into the Tree of Life. Now this tree here will do something for you. Stand up you two and carefully break off four end-pieces from the thinner twigs of a low branch. Then hold them between your warm hands.”

As soon as the girls had done this they saw the boys rushing towards them shouting.

“The tour bus is here – come on, let’s get on it.”

“Not today!” Spriggy snapped. “Call them over and explain. It’s much more fun this time, you’ll see.” And further quick instructions were given.

When the girls had persuaded Sam and Tom to forget the bus, Gill handed them each a budding twig according to Spriggy’s plan of action. She told them to break them in half and put the pieces behind their ears.

“Whatever is this for?” joked Tom. Gilly, looking very calm and assured, told him to trust her and see, for they were going to Merlin’s house.

Surprisingly, Sam obeyed, saying, “I’ve seen people stick cigarettes behind their ears, but this is weird.” The girls already had their twigs in place and finally Tom followed suit, but still protesting.

“I’m not really into this sort of thing,” he grumbled.

However, the four young people soon began to feel a warm sense of high expectancy and readiness for anything. Also, to their astonishment, the twigs began to sprout with soft green leaves and their loosening brown calyxes felt sticky and pliant.

“Powerful things, trees,” the girls heard Spriggy say. “The growing points of these twigs can spark off new inspiration, you see, making you all ultra-sensitive and receptive.”

After this there was an awkward silence. And then, suddenly, they *all* now heard the squeaky voice coming from the direction of Gillian and saying: “It wasn’t only Nimue who shut up Merlin in his tree-tomb, it was all of you people who surrounded him in disbelief for the next five hundred years.”

“Who was Nimue?” asked Tom, hardly believing he was hearing right.

“One of the legendary ladies of Avalon, of course. She was connected with the Lady of the Lake who produced Excalibur from the water... did you really not know all this!” went on Spriggy disdainfully. “For goodness sake, boy.”

“Well I did know that Excalibur was Arthur’s sword.” Tom sounded subdued.

“But why did this happen to Merlin, with all his magic crafts to hand?” added Sam, genuinely puzzled. “He must have known.”

There was a strange pause and then Gilly, in her own soft voice, came up with the explanation. She started off by telling them that her sprite had opted out for the moment, and as she had read this story of Merlin quite recently, she would relate it. "Come on boys, let's sit down here for a minute under our tree and I'll begin." So they crouched around listening, somewhat impatiently, wanting to get on with their adventure. Gilly then held forth.

"Merlin," she said, "fell seriously in love with the Lady Nimue (some call her Vivien). Anyway, she encouraged him because she wanted to sweep him from his hold upon the world. Though wanting his power she had become irritated and frightened by him. One day as they walked together, she leading the way, they came to the magic forest of Broceliande and sat down under a tree. In some versions it was a giant hawthorn in full flower, in others an oak tree. With songs and kisses and playing on her Welsh harp Nimue flirted with the gentle Enchanter but refused his advances. When, eventually, he lay with his head upon her lap, the seductress begged him for the third time to trust her and tell her about a spell whereby a living person may be shut fast in rock or tree. 'You either trust me not at all or all in all', she kept saying, 'it will be a test of your love.' For a long time Merlin had refused this request, but now, overcome with tiredness he told her all and fell asleep."

Gillian stopped a moment, glancing at Tom to see if he looked bored; but Tom joined in with the others to urge her on again.

"Poor Merlin," cried Lucy. "Please hurry up and tell us the worst!"

"An old fool really, wasn't he?" ventured Tom.

"Well, Nimue then wove this great magic round him and the tree," said Gilly, proceeding quickly now, "and when he awoke he thought he was in a beautiful tower without a door. He rose as in a dream and went down a narrow stairway that opened up in the earth below him. He followed the tree roots, which led around a big rock and snaked their way into a small cave. Here he saw a slab of stone on which he laid himself down for his long sleep... till the time of his awakening and release. Nimue closed up the passage and darkness reigned."

Gilly sighed, and then Spriggy took over again, saying teasingly, as they all looked slightly bewitched at that moment, "Got you!"

The tree-sprite chuckled again and then, continuing in quite serious tones declared: "Yes, Merlin did know about his coming withdrawal from the 'Round Table' events – warning Arthur that he, his adviser, would have to leave him to stand on his own and show his worth (and what an unholy mess Arthur made of it, but he did try!). 'It is our fate,' Merlin had told the sad King."

Our 'Four' got to their feet and Sam looked at Gilly, enquiring of her: "You said we're going to Merlin's house, but how come? Where is he now?"

"Well," Spriggy began again, ignoring Sam's question, "after Merlin's return to his true dwelling place with other World Guardians – in a different dimension of course – and coming back to befriend Blake, he tried later to speak through others as well. He had a brief stay with Lord Tennyson when the poem 'Idylls of the King' was written. But the sentimental and straight-laced Victorian atmosphere didn't allow it to take off as hoped. Then, in the twentieth century comes a longer stay with the writer Charles Williams, whose poems of 'The Grail Quest' and Arthurian knighthood are definitely 'the goods', but are not popular (except with a few intellectuals, Merlin tells me), and too obscure. I'll bet that none of you young people have heard of him?" They all admitted that they never had.

"But you haven't answered Sam's question," insisted Lucy. "Where is he?"

"All in good time," teased Gilly's sprite tantalisingly. "Merlin told me once that it was Thomas Malory who started all this and first gave you these stories in English. Arthur's knights and their ladies, the attendant magician, the witches and villains all burst upon the British scene in about 1500 AD – that's where you're all going on one of your trips, by the way! Malory collected all the old legends from France and Wales and made something new out of them – a dream of a better society, Merlin said. But now is the time when you modern young things will again be coming under the spell of a new 'Round Table' Fellowship, and that's where you all come in."

"You've been talking about the work called 'Morte d'Arthur', I know," said Gilly presently and in her normal voice. "Written by our Welsh Malory".

"Caxton printed the book. It was one of the first books printed in England in 1485," said Sam in a very pleased sort of voice, for he loved history and remembered that date. But though history, and also science, were his favourite subjects, it still seemed that Sam was in a sort of trance. He started reeling off facts about the late Middle Ages in parrot-like fashion. It was his turn to hold forth.

"This period was full of tales of romance, faith in goodness, and triumph over evil, yet bloody beyond belief," declaimed Sam. "The age of chivalry and heroic knights, yet also of unimaginable cruelty, especially to witches, heretics and often women." Sam paused. "But the inquisition had been abandoned over 200 years back and the Renaissance from the Continent was affecting us. The wars of religion were

in full swing and Copernicus had not yet published his book to tell us that the sun didn't go round the Earth. Columbus had just discovered Trinidad and South America and Bath Abbey was being rebuilt."

"Oh! For God's sake shut up," interrupted Tom. "I want to hear about Merlin and the house where he hangs out. Who is Merlin... really?"

"He's the Spirit of Prophecy," pronounced Spriggy, coming back into voice. "A mover of the life-force in the direction of unity – a Master of Ceremonies who brings wisdom and sees it in others. I wouldn't mind being his slave."

Spriggy's voice seemed to go very hoarse and needed clearing. It sounded embarrassed but then changed to a brisk and businesslike tone: "So, right, let's get on with it. You other three follow Gillian now, as I tell her where to go. She'll know what to do, so listen very carefully to her."

Gilly made no move and Tom said: "It's a good job there's no one else around here today – the cars and coaches don't matter. Come on then."

But the queer voice continued, and to Tom's disgust, now recited a poem from Merlin's old friend:

*"Hear the voice of the Bard,
Who present, past, and future, sees;
Whose ears have heard
The Holy Word
That walk'd among the ancient trees."*

"So I'm leaving you now in the hands of the best of all the Magi," said the tree-sprite rather sorrowfully. "You needn't be afraid, for though he is Master of Space and Time he's got a mischievous sense of humour, and loves you all."

"Where are you going then?" asked Lucy. "Will you still be with Gilly?"

"I don't really want to say goodbye to you all, but yes, I shall stay with Gillian in my silent role," answered Spriggy. "You see, Merlin has shared all these secrets with me and put words into my mouth. I'm just an over ambitious dryad escaped from its natural sphere and wanting to better itself with human company. Now Merlin wants to make you into Time Travellers!"

"Why us?" enquired Sam apprehensively, but the now impatient Spriggy dismissed him. "He thinks it's time he got in touch with the youth of the nineties as the world approaches its coming of age in the twenty-first century. I must go now, but good luck! When you get into

the house descend to the basement (I forgot to tell Gillian this), then it's the first door on the left. Go for it."

"Your sprite should have said 'room' instead of 'house', really," corrected Tom, trying to hide his amazement. "The room of the Arch-Mage... Fancy!"

"What next," exclaimed Lucy excitedly. "Will Merlin take over now?"

Gillian was silent but started walking over the grass towards the nearest Circus buildings. The others followed her. Waiting for a circling bus to pass with its load of Western and Oriental tourists, they hurried over the road and looked up at the houses from the broad pavement.

"We've got to find a door with a lighthouse and a key over it," said Gilly, finding her voice again. "It's also got a cock on a trumpet sign on one side and a compass and divider on the other. We must look for these motifs."

The youngsters, now completely involved in the operation, ran this way and that until they had identified the door and walked up the railed and drawbridge-like approach to it. They looked down on the left-hand side and saw a little courtyard with pots of flowers, dwarf trees and two curtained windows. There were iron steps, with a gate at the top, leading down to it. There was also a small door almost hidden under the arch below them.

"That's the way we'll come out," predicted Gillian. Turning her eyes back to the front door of the house where they all stood expectantly, Gilly rang the bell, and suddenly Tom grasped the big lion's head knocker and gave it three bangs. There was an eerie silence before the door slowly opened, all by itself, and the four uneasy adventurers stepped in.

They were in a dim passage, quite wide and with a black and white chequered floor. At the other end they could see the handsome flight of stairs to the upper floors, and in a corner at their base they could just make out a smaller staircase leading downwards. The two doors at the side of the empty passage were firmly closed.

"Down we go," said Gilly. "This way is open."

The first thing they saw, as they pushed the half-open door at the foot of the stairs and went in, was a large crystal sphere. It was turning slowly and radiating rainbow colours from its many facets. As they gazed at it in awe the silence was broken. A deep voice came from somewhere in the room: "Look well, doubting Thomas," it began. All could hear it now and Gillian remembered it as her 'Merlin Voice'.

"It's like the smaller one that you have in your pocket, Tom," it went on, and though Tom was looking pale and ill at ease, he hastened to say that he had paid for this one.

“I know you have,” was the retort. “Crystals are power tools, boy.” Then Merlin, for he it was, launched into a long speech about the attributes of crystals, and Lucy, who had been rigid with her mouth open, soon relaxed.

“They are amplifiers and intensifiers,” the voice continued, “and also energy transmitters, showing up many sides of one truth. They can store information and arouse and control dormant energies. They can actually draw together and absorb negative emotions, changing them and reflecting them back to help or protect a person. They can even centre and re-focus knowledge, by bridging and balancing it between levels of awareness. I sometimes hide my soul in a crystal ball! But enough of this jargon... yet – your watch Gillian, has a crystal in it because it vibrates at such a precise frequency.”

“It’s all a bit much for us at the moment,” said Gilly in a confused voice. “Are you really Merlin, or just a friend from high places?”

“I’ve been known by many names, but you had best call me that because it means something to you. The Arthurian stories are part of your heritage.”

Meanwhile, Sam had been standing with his eyes shut, and though his lips were moving no sound came out.

“What’s the matter Sam?” asked his sister with concern. He was even blushing – a new sight for Gilly.

Merlin then answered for him: “He’s alright, but a bit traumatised because he has suddenly recognised my voice, as you did earlier. Only with Sam he has always repressed it. Anyway, welcome to you all.”

Sam now found his tongue and burst out in his half-broken voice: “It was you, wasn’t it? I worried and wondered about it a lot. You called my name three separate times and no one was there – and now I’ll ask you why?”

Merlin sounded gentler and not so alien this time when he replied.

“Yes it was me and no dream. Your mind was still open and untrammelled like your sister’s and, in a different way, Lucy’s. You have life before you. I had messages and a task for you. Now I shall open a door into the past and then into the future for the four of you.”

“How safe is the future?” asked Lucy in a small frightened voice.

“It will be as good as you make it,” replied Merlin. “As ever, it’s up to all of you, each and every one of you as to whether you will like it. It’s your dream.”

“Come in and close the door,” said Merlin, and they all advanced further into the room. It was large and extended right through from back to front as in all Georgian houses. They caught a glimpse of the garden at the back, but the front window curtains were still drawn across.

The crystal ball seemed to have a light shining out from within its depth and was filling the room with flickering magical colours.

The dark floor beneath them was thickly carpeted, bulging slightly in places, and the opposite wall was quite blank. Hiding the other wall were rails hung with costumes and oddities of many styles and periods. There were also hooks from which dangled what looked like equipment of some sort. The rest of the room was empty – not a sight of Merlin anywhere.

As they were looking round, the room darkened and they noticed a heavy black screen sliding across the garden windows, shutting out the daylight. Then, suddenly, there appeared a huge picture covering the whole of the wall opposite them. They were dazzled at first with its brightness. Yes, it was Bath Abbey, and all its surroundings – accurate to the last detail.

All around the Abbey everything was alive and active – the tourists in their droves, the buskers and even a string quartet. The breeze ruffled the flowers in the troughs on the windowsills of the Pump Room, and an Oxfam stall could be seen round the corner with its appeal posters.

All sounds were perfect. The distant drone of the buses, cars, commercial and business traffic up the High Street was heard as well as the crying gulls.

“Though inland far we be...” quoted Merlin. Then he stopped and added, “the sea-birds have invaded your city, using the buildings as rocks and towering cliffs. This reminds me of the eternal sea of our subconscious minds and the coastline of our conscious selves upon which the waves break.”

“We wanted to go back in time again as we did on the tour bus,” said Tom, fidgeting and looking disappointed.

“That was the idea of Gillian’s tree-sprite,” explained Merlin, and I backed it up, but that was only done through the Dream Medium. Now I shall be your Computer Wizard and do things properly – not from open-top buses!”

While they gazed at the scene, Merlin informed them that this was their *real time*. “But how real is reality?” he questioned. A silence followed.

“Are you real?” Lucy countered rather impertinently.

“Of course,” replied their Magician with a laugh. “I’ve made myself real to you young explorers. My magic is not the ordinary kind. My foreknowledge is allied to Time itself, which has become conscious of the future and prepared for it. By the way, Lucy, the future is more beautiful than all the pasts, you know. Now I shall talk about dinosaurs

and their invasion into our consciousness today. Be patient Tom, we're working up to your next adventure."

"We went to a dinosaur museum in Dublin," said Sam excitedly. "And I've still got the advertisement pamphlet in my pocket, I think."

"Good," said Merlin. "If so, take it out and read it to us."

After fishing around and finding it Sam began to read, a bit hesitantly: "Come and experience the reality of dinosaurs. Their incredible world comes alive in a new way. All visitors will love and enjoy a Monster Attraction!"

"I visited one too," interrupted Gillian, "at Dorchester last year with Sophie. But I didn't enjoy all of it. Some things were frightening."

"Yes, so huge and threatening," agreed Sam, "but fascinating as well. There were life-size models reconstructed from discovered bones and fossil knowledge. A total experience. There were interactive exhibits as well... remember? With computerized electronic displays."

"It sounds like a great show," said Merlin approvingly. "Now these weird creatures lived on your Earth over 60 million years ago and there were no human beings around at the time. But through scientific and painstaking effort by men and women, the millions of detailed facts about them now have been retrieved and learned. The latest genetic research and the decoding of their DNA has brought the dinosaurs forward into the awareness of the twentieth century."

"You're right," Gilly persisted. "They're around everywhere, in films, TV, books, and even as cuddly toys for children! You can see their motifs on T-shirts, plates and bags. You can collect cards with packets of tea-bags showing scores of different dinosaur types, and get free models."

"There you are," enthused Merlin, "such familiarity! Then there's great interest in the large dino-eggs and nests that have been found. All the time scientists and historians are probing into the past and digging out more and more information to pass into our swelling Datasphere. The more facts, however tiny, that can be collected, understood and brought back from oblivion, the more intricately we can connect with it. My art of conjuring and transforming is nothing like a vague, cloudy haze of fantasy or fuzziness. The splendour of creation comes from accuracy. My trick is being able to synchronize the times of chosen events and periods with the present; to snatch and hold them for a while with all the details in their originally ordered places, and connect up. A full replay, you could say!"

"That sounds too complicated by half," groaned Tom. "Come on!"

"But you have to dig deeply to recover the past," replied Merlin in a sterner voice. "For the key is often there. More data can be collected

from journals, diaries and literature of the time. So bear with me while I voice a fragment from the words of my eighteenth century host, writing at the end of his century two hundred years ago. Come and sit down you long-suffering lot.”

As Merlin gave them this invitation, four black, swivel chairs rose up from the floor in front of the screen. When seated, the youngsters found them to be particularly comfortable and they sank into them gratefully. The voice then continued, quoting lines from Blake such as:

“...Art and Science cannot exist but in minutely organised particulars,”

and...

“The Infinite alone resides in Definite and Determinate Identity.”

“This style may sound archaic to you young people, but it delivers the goods you see; knowing then, what I’m trying to explain to you now. So, in the mid-twentieth century my next host, who you’ll soon be getting very familiar with and who talks in modern language, puts it in a different way. He says that the true glory of God is in facts, and the way things are. Existence itself. At the end of this century a new host will be saying that everything, however small, is constantly affecting something else! – Wait for it.”

“What about supernatural happenings?” said Sam. “What facts are there?”

“The supernatural is only an extension of the natural,” Merlin assured him. “Every human event, or technological development, however new and amazing, is still natural. I can always work the ‘fast forward’ mechanism on it, and, Hey Presto, it is future normality! ‘What is now proved was once only imagined’, my William says. I know what you are going to ask now, Lucy – *am I natural?*” Lucy looked coy and nodded.

“Well, I’ll answer, my girl. I am natural to your Earth whenever I’m in the minds of my chosen ones. But I, like all prophets and seers, can have a two-way traffic with other worlds as well. I enter certain stages of the Earth’s growth when things are in crisis and humans are losing hope. You four will be exploring new frequencies that are not yet natural, as you see it, but can cause a new life awakening. Don’t be frightened. Your vehicle of travel will be natural but have the ability to detach life, for a while, from its chrysalis of imprisoned matter. It is Easter-time, after all!”

“Once, Sam and I went to an Easter service at the Abbey,” Gilly remembered out loud. “It was just after the West Front had been renovated and cleaned. At the end we all filed out into the Churchyard (the Abbey was full that day) and sang ‘Jesus Christ is risen today’ with the choir in their robes and tourists looking on. The Bishop, other clergy and trumpeters all appeared on an outside balcony high above the West door. It was great.”

After a short pause, which seemed much longer to the seated anticipants, the voice added some after-thoughts to Gill’s celebratory recountings: “Did you know,” it said, “that the word Easter comes from the Saxon word ‘Eostre’ which was the name of the Goddess of Spring? Also this is the time of the Celtic Beltane Festival for the Solar God, Bel – this name means ‘brightly shining’. Enough of all this. Now, I want you to go over to the rails of clothes by the wall behind you and in the light of my crystal ball choose some Medieval tunics and dresses. Then off with your jeans and on with your new togs. You boys can put on the long stockings, but none of you must put on any shoes or hats yet. Then come and sit down again.” This they did.

The screen then changed to what now seemed like a giant mirror reflecting everything, and they saw themselves looking back on each self in a very embarrassing sort of way. Their facial expressions looked quite strange and unexpected. They and the whole room were lit with abnormal and penetrating light, which showed up every detail of colour and movement. Tom fiddled with the laces on his tunic and Lucy adjusted the girdle round her waist and rearranged her long skirt. Sam and Gilly were looking down uneasily.

Merlin laughed – a merry and warm-hearted laugh.

“Don’t worry,” he said, “everyone has more inside his or her mind than was ever dreamt. It’s just a question of using it well. In some people whole chunks of it die long before they themselves do. That’s often the tragedy.

“Your second name, Gillian, is Mary, is it not? Both this name and Lucy’s relate to light – Mary, who was the mother of the bright preacher of life believed by millions to be the Light of the World; and Lucy, from the Latin *Lucia* meaning light. The goddess Lucina was the patroness of childbirth, and children born at dawn were often given that name. You boys, there. You haven’t missed the Biblical overtones of your names, I hope?”

The boys looked at each other uncertainly; Tom shrugged his shoulders. Then Sam suddenly laughed aloud at himself. “I look so sheepish and self-conscious,” he said, “but actually, the tunic’s almost up-to-date!”

“A laugh a day, like your Mars Bars, helps you work, rest and play,” teased the Mage. “It brings things into proportion.”

“Anyway, the human female is more attuned to the right side of the brain than the male, who regards its unvetted workings with suspicion. This silent partner with its mythical content and overshadowing archetypes confuses and worries him. He can’t do with its laxity and acceptance of contraries. Its raw experiences frighten him, so are dismissed. But the left side usually dominates and takes charge, for it’s the language and communication centre. That’s why the door to my room down here is on the left side; I have to allow in and use some mystical states of consciousness and time perception from the right side, by joining it with the know-how and logic of the left.”

Tom intervened. “That’s not very convincing – I’m still living up to my name now, but honestly, think of all the male inventors and then the many men of genius and spirituality. You are a male yourself, so what’s this great female advantage? I’m not into this mysterious archetypal stuff.”

“It’s just easier for women,” said Merlin soothingly. “In the right section of the brain, for instance, there are visions of immortality, but modern science was against this and forecast personality breakdown and soul death. All this is changing now and new breeds of researchers are finding that the observer affects the observed. An archetype is just a visual image common to all. Now, you lot, including you Tom, are you ready to play my game?”

Thankfully for them all, the screen display changed again and this time there was a startling close-up of the West Front of the Abbey Church. It looked very intimate and was glistening. People still could be clearly seen passing by in the foreground or looking up at the statues. A group of smart tourists, obviously American, was emerging from the door. “Gee, that’s some cathedral,” one of them said. Some young people with long fuzzy hair, nose-rings and ragged jeans had strange words printed on the backs or fronts of their T-shirts. Our watchers could read them. One such script read: ‘No good nor bad but how bad you want it!’ And another: ‘It’s not the pace of life that bothers me but its sudden end!’ Others had words such as ‘TRAUMA’ or ‘NIRVANA’ printed across them. An Asian student though, seemed isolated in her ‘BATH UNIVERSITY’ T-shirt and tidy appearance.

Merlin’s voice came over then like a commentator, speaking about the various features on the west facade, focusing on each in turn. He began: “It’s all about dreams again, you see. Those angels on the ladders, mistakenly taken for Jacob’s dream, were his spur to action and Bishop Oliver King’s dream, shown here – olive trees bearing

crowns – was his spur to build. This ‘Tree of Life’ theme at the bottom connects, by way of the ladder, with the Trinity Symbol at the top – the three-part Godhead. Over the door,” his voice went on, confident of attention, “you see a statue of the currently reigning earthly monarch – King Henry VII – in all his rich regalia, emphasising ‘the divine right of kings’. At the very top, over an angelic host, is the ultimate Omega figure. No one seems to know whether it’s meant to be God or Christ. This and other figures there illustrate the great ongoing story begun in the Bible. Science today is adding to its impact, interpreting it through new media. These are no dreams, but a search for meaning.”

“Then there was bad King John,” contributed Tom, surprisingly. “You forgot him. He had such an awful nightmare because of his guilty conscience, that he built a great monastery in Hampshire. Sam told me he had visited it and entered parts of it that are still intact. It’s haunted, he says.”

“I’m not surprised,” said Merlin, obviously amused at Tom’s outburst. “But seriously, the Abbey here is very important to you four, as would-be Time Travellers and aspiring cybernauts, for it can transport you in time. Just as Christians have tried here for 1600 years to bring heaven and earth together, and just as this building is still a centre of constancy and spiritual energy in the midst of a bustling city, so it can provide your impetus.”

At this moment a youth stopped in front of the Abbey and began to drink from a can of Coca-Cola. On his T-shirt was a macabre image surrounded by fiery colours. It showed a skull-like, inanelly grinning head attached to a skeleton. The whole thing was depicted as being in the throes of a frenzied dance. Our four stalwart adventurers looked away, shocked at such a crude contrast. After a while Merlin’s reassuring voice calmly resumed its comments: “What you see there isn’t evil, but more a cry of despair. As in some of the other slogans we’ve read they display a lack of hope and direction. Now I’m impelled to quote again, perhaps for the last time on this journey of yours, some passages from my beloved old Codger and ageless visionary. He offers us his ‘Cosmic Eggs’. They reveal many new story lines.”

There was a groan and some barely audible sighs from the four seats, but their Magician, having anticipated this, had laid on an accompaniment.

“To save you kids a possible ‘turn-off’, my magic screen will highlight Blake’s words with a series of events such as flashbacks to your last two Time-Trips and replays of some popular entertainment going on around the Abbey – a sort of preview of what it can do. You may remember some of the contents of my poems (even if they remain

solely in your subconscious minds). It will all be worthwhile... for as our poet says: 'Wisdom is sold in a desolate market where none come to buy'. So here goes!

"William Blake was addressing the self-righteousness, hypocrisy and pride of his period, but his words seem equally relevant to the troubles and vices of yours. People sin, not in spite of their aspirations and ambitions, but because they can't achieve them. They turn to drugs and illusions. So your once confident country falls into confusion. Few heroes, or goals. Every harlot, he says, was once a virgin and every criminal an infant love. This is his story then: The Giant Albion is the Eternal Man, the spiritual form of England, and country of the Britons. He falls into despair and self-pity. The call goes out: 'Awake, thou sleeper on the rock of eternity – Albion Awake!' But, 'Refusing all definite form, the abstract horror roofed, stoney hard.' Albion is sick and has turned his back against the Divine Vision. He flees through the gate of Los, the human imagination. Los asks Albion where he is going and Albion replies:

*'I die! I go to eternal death! The shades of death
hover within me and beneath, and spreading themselves outside
Like rocky clouds, build me a gloomy monument of woe...
God hath forsaken me and my friends are become a burden,
a weariness to me, and the human footstep is a terror to me.'*

This giant spectre, image of your country's soul, has the disease of despair, or loss of hope...

"My William writes on about Albion's long-winded moaning, some of which I will burden you with for a few moments – Albion, finding he is closed up from his children who have forsaken him, laments:

*'Doubt first assailed me. Then shame took possession of me.
Shame divides families. Shame hath divided Albion in sunder.
First fled my sons and then my daughters, then my wild animals,
My cattle next, last ev'n the dog of my gate; the forests fled,
The corn-fields and the breathing gardens outside separated.'*

"The daughters of Albion," relates Merlin in persistent mood, "became one with his false wife called Vala (the Goddess Virgin-Mother), 'who wove webs of war to involve all Albion's sons... and they (all) vote the death of Luvah, (who is love and passion) and they nailed him to Albion's tree in Bath.' So next," carries on Merlin, "the sons of Albion take vengeance on their father:

*'Planting these Oaken Groves, erecting these Dragon Temples?
Injury the Lord heals, but Vengeance cannot be healed.
As the sons of Albion have done to Luvah, so they have in him
done to the Divine Lord and Saviour, who suffers with them who
suffer;
For not one sparrow can suffer and the whole universe not
suffer also
In all its regions and its Father and Saviour not pity and weep.'*

“But now Albion’s children ‘know not why they love nor wherefore they sicken and die, calling that Holy Love which is envy, revenge and cruelty’, which he says ‘separated the stars from the mountains, the mountains from Man.’ My William now declares that Albion is sick to death, as say every valley; mournful hill and river. ‘He hath leagued himself with robbers! He hath studied the arts of unbelief!’ Now he lies outstretched on the ground in pain and tears and ‘The starry heavens have fled from his mighty limbs’. He has denied the Divine Humanity.”

Oblivious to his pupils’ fidgets, Merlin quotes on:

*'His children exil'd from his breast pass to and fro before him,
His birds are silent on his hills, flocks die beneath his branches,
His Giant beauty and perfection fallen into dust,
Till, from within his wither'd breast, grown narrow with his woes,
The corn is turn'd to thistles and the apples into poison.
The birds of song to murderous crows, his joys to bitter groans...
My hand trembles on the Rock of Ages'*

bemoans the bard, and he prays for Albion to awake from his cold, dark sleep and see again his true partner, ‘Jerusalem’, who wanders afar off and also his favourite daughter of the same name. These are both his ideal images of feminine inspiration, which he projects back into the past recalling his happiness:

*'Jerusalem was as lovely as a summer cloud upon my hills
When she was my heart's desire, in times of youth and love.'*

“In his solitude he has fallen from an original unity and, so our poet affirms, that ‘Rent from Eternal Brotherhood we die and are no more.’ Anyway, Albion’s dream, that used to flow from him, was a future Jerusalem and the building of an ideal city in this and other countries, well cemented by ‘heart in heart’. Blake’s Gospel is that to exercise

the God-given arts of the imagination, to labour at science and the gathering of knowledge, is to build up 'Jerusalem'. Imagination, he proclaims, is 'the real and eternal world... in which we shall live in our eternal or imaginative bodies when these vegetable mortal bodies are no more.' My prophet works at his task:

*'To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.'*

All this time music was playing softly to go with the pictures on the screen. There were choruses too from the 60s musical, 'Jesus Christ Superstar', which included Caiaphas's frantic refrain, 'This Jesus must die, must die, must die.' Among the songs were, to the surprise of our teenagers, some current Pop favourites and the latest 'tribalbeat' and tuneless hit numbers – all played as background to Merlin's words.

"Though this London sage sometimes despaired of the human race, writing that 'Cruelty has a human heart, and jealousy a human face; terror the human form divine, and secrecy the human dress', he mostly rejected this idea:

*'For Mercy has a human heart,
Pity, a human face,
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.'*

"Right, now, down to business. You've all been very restrained. In a few minutes you will be going from a world of open enquiry to the Medieval world of certainty. My advanced computer has already absorbed and stored all the necessary information needed for this new 'teleport' trip of yours. It will soon be collecting all your personal details as well." So Merlin's tone changed abruptly for them.

"I'm getting a bit frightened now," complained Lucy apologetically.

"You can trust me, girl, and all of you of course. I am Merlin, remember. You are all going into a sort of Video-Space from my Memory Palace. It is actually this room which is your launching pad, so to speak, for Cyberia. I will be your 'nerd' and you will be my 'newbies' for a short period.

"It's not a land like Siberia, I hope," said Tom, pretending to shiver at the thought of it. Or is it like Avalon, perhaps, where it is said that it never snows or freezes and where storms never rage?"

“You can stop your mock shivering my boy. Save all that bravado for your time in 1525 where you may need it!” responded Merlin. Then, calling his bluff, Merlin said, “Cyberia *is* a bit like your Avalon, Tom, only it doesn’t have any perfect days either, with blue sunlit skies. It’s neutral, weatherwise, because only people’s reaction and relation to things are recorded. So though they might speak of the weather or picture it to themselves from memory, so passing it on to you, the physical happening is absent. Any object or pattern made by humans and originating in a mind or minds will be there and affect the mental atmosphere.”

The voice paused as our ‘wizard’s apprentices’ struggled to take all this in. Then, as there were no more objections, it continued:

“Strong storylines motivated people. The Arthurian ballads, with their themes about Camelot and the Holy Grail, changed many habits during this period but it was still very crude and basic. Knightly virtues and adventures extolled in these works brought in the Age of Chivalry – and a Quest.”

Still obstinately awkward and not to be silenced so easily, Tom threw out his challenge again: “But it’s all just fiction and fantasy anyway. In a Don Quixote book its author debunks all that nonsense.”

“By then, 70 years on from this period, it needed taking off,” replied Merlin.

“Oh! Shut up Tom,” said Sam, glaring. “We want to get on with it.”

However, Merlin, in tolerant mood, humoured Sam, saying that Tom had a point that needed clarifying if they were to be Cybernauts.

“It’s not *just* fiction,” he explained. “For fiction can change the whole construction of fact. It cannot leave facts unchanged for it invades and displaces their defined frontiers. These facts are then transformed by another reality made of words and paper and the TV eye. Those legendary tales were very important, boy, so just wait and see. We make our reality.”

Gilly, catching on to the idea, said she had read of the huge pay-offs for the villages and houses used as locations for well-loved films, and how they had been changed afterwards to accommodate the thousands of tourists.

“On the way to the Circus today,” joined in Lucy, “we had to go round protected cavernous holes dug in the pavements of Great Pulteney Street. Many of the large, Georgian paving stones were stacked up at the side. In the wide road was a queue of traffic held up by the roadworks: rollers, heavy lorries and a monster road-surfacing machine. They were laying cable ducts, we were told, for another new television service!”

“There you are! You’ve noticed,” said Merlin. “These are solid facts, as the Abbey is one, born from the imagination and our appetite for stories of human interest. It’s the communication explosion bringing you all together. How will it end? What with these mobile phones, computers, internets...”

“Newspapers, motorways and VR,” finished Sam, wishing to hurry him.

“Thank you,” conceded the Mage, accepting the interruption, “but you must see it as the most important event of the century. With the exception of the Moon Landing of course and the view of Earth, your World, from outer space.”

“This is getting boring,” grumbled Tom, still sulking.

“Now, take the subject of sex,” began Merlin, while seeming to ignore this rude remark of Tom’s, “and the effect the Troubadours had on the age of our imminent destination... That made you all prick up your ears,” he chuckled. Embarrassed laughter ensued. Now having full attention, Merlin used it.

“The idea of courtly love as opposed to exclusively sexual union soon took on amongst the higher and more literate sections of society. This was the first time that love and romance had really been linked to sex. You all took this for granted until recently, when sex became paramount again. But in the Middle Ages sex among the merchants, mercenaries and lower orders was beastly and thoughtless. Even the younger members of the knighthood, who were supposed to have higher feelings, were primarily loyal to their Lords and put off marriage for too long; so when they finally took a bride in an arranged marriage, knowing nothing of how to deal with her, they were sometimes so rough and clumsy that she was spoilt for child-bearing. They then could be allowed, by Papal dispensation, another wife to try again with! The church later took over the love and sex idea and made it a sacrament.”

“So glad I’m living in the twentieth century! The sixteenth must have been awful for women.” Lucy spoke with a shocked voice and Gilly grunted her assent.

“Right, back to business, for the second time. Sorry, but you see I do enjoy talking to you,” Merlin admitted.

“We didn’t do much talking,” muttered Tom.

“Now,” their Wizard pronounced sternly, “though I know all the fastest routes from imagination to fact, I’m going to use my own method of Virtual Reality for this trip. Sam, you are sensible and careful, so this is what I want you to do. Fetch four floppy hats from the side rail – they will not look out of place in the 1525 world – then

gently pull them down over the heads of your companions. Press the tiny tubes, hanging each side of the hats, onto the twigs behind your ears. These are my umbilical cords. From the twigs I have instigated the growth of new tissue which is now ready to receive the tubes. Those bent, green sprigs are my transmitters and receptors.”

“Good God! I nearly pulled mine off when it was itching,” thought Tom.

Sam was looking very worried by now and was asking questions. Merlin said it would be easy to put on his own hat after practice with the others.

“Next, sort out the pointed shoes near the hats. You may take them to be magic, but they’re not Four-League Boots,” consoled Merlin. They have a connector built in to their soles with a specific ‘search and find’ implant. In this case it’s a day in 1525 it seeks, homing in on corresponding data. The floor here is a Data-bank you see. Bring these shoes for you all to put on.”

They fitted well over the youngsters’ legged feet, and the wearers then stood up.

“Soon I want you all to start walking about on my carpet with its hidden sensors, but I’ve got some important briefing to give you first. Sit down again for a few more minutes and Sam, my new assistant, will find four little bottles behind the crystal ball which he will bring you to drink from. They contain some of my fabulous elixir, which you will certainly like. It is not a drug. You don’t need that with VR. It is invigorating though.”

“Who made up this drink?” asked Gillian after having a first sip.

“I’ve taught my friend how to make it. Now you’ll ask me ‘who is that?’ Well, it’s a secret, but I can tell you that he owns this house and rents out the two top floors. They are accessed by way of an outside staircase from the back garden. My friend and his wife live away from here but often come to stay in the ground floor flat which is shut off from the two above.”

The voice went silent and finishing their mysterious nectar, they began whispering to each other about the house and what their next move would be.

7

Surprise Encounters

While Merlin was making sure that all the bottle-tops were replaced, and that Sam was returning them safely to their niche, he told his four waiting cyber-kids that their drink did contain spa water, but also other properties which sweetened the iron content in it and gave it its exotic flavour.

“Now listen carefully while I put you in the picture. It is very important. If you don’t know something of the background of this age you might make some unfortunate remarks. A bad faux pas could land you in trouble, or even in prison. You would risk being shunned or treated with dislike and, indeed, suspicion by some inhabitants who might take you as loony, bewitched or involved in witchcraft.”

“Might we be mobbed?” asked Sam on a very serious note.

“Not if you take in what I’m telling you now. Don’t speak of any twentieth century science or technology and, of course, no historical predictions!”

“They’d think, I suppose, that things like telephones and television would be matters of magic and enchantment,” said Lucy.

“And all of us get burned at the stake,” exclaimed Tom sarcastically.

“I’ll be around,” said Merlin. “Anyway, all you have to do in an emergency is to disconnect your umbilical cords. Just pull off your hats. The tubes will separate easily from the twigs behind your ears. Then you’ll be back.”

“OK, I think we’re all game now,” pronounced Gilly. “But tell us a bit more, please, about what to say to people.”

“Well, it’s the time of Renaissance, adventure and exploration. Your John Cabot and his three sons had sailed from Bristol less than 27 years ago, commissioned by the King to discover unknown lands. He was the first to reach the North American mainland but thought it was South East Asia! Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci were still alive and working at their great arts and Martin Luther was beginning the Protestant Reformation.” Merlin paused.

“Could we meet one of these famous people?” asked Lucy excitedly.

“And who was on our throne at the time?” gulped the incredulous Sam.

“It was Henry VIII,” answered Merlin. “And just fourteen years before he ransacked this Abbey and monastery. No Lucy, I’m afraid you won’t meet Michelangelo, who will be busy in Rome, but you may bump into old Oliver King, the then Bishop of Bath and Wells. He might be surveying the progress of his dream building. You know, I feel that you young people are now witnessing a new Renaissance in your real time and will be able to meet its own key figures soon. Though some are still ‘tilting at windmills and flocks of sheep’, and mistaking them for castles and knights. Don Quixote style, there *are* signals. Link the printing press to computers, fast clippers to space-ships and see.”

“I hope you’re right – I just see morale going fast downhill,” said Tom pessimistically. “We’ve no new story to identify a role for us.”

“That brings me to my last briefing to you all,” persisted Merlin, “and it’s about the greatest story ever told. When you speak to anyone you must bear in mind that the Latin Bible was not yet translated into English, so the majority of the population couldn’t read it. They only heard parts of it interpreted by the priests. Jesus had not yet been brought down for them from the stained glass windows of the churches. So be careful.”

Sam now burst into voice again, remembering another of his special dates from one particular history lesson. “Fancy!” he cried, “our Tyndale started to print his first English translation of the New Testament in Germany, and it was in 1525! He was strangled and burned as a heretic when he finished it.”

“Yes he, another William, was brutally killed for it – yet the seed was sown. Now you can buy it in cheap paperback, and there are millions sold worldwide and it’s translated into over 1500 languages. We digress again!”

“Will we understand all their Middle Age speech?” questioned Gilly.

“I’d thought of that,” Merlin confessed. “I’ve arranged for you all to connect up with a personality who once lived in this period and vicinity. I have activated and transferred her back to inhabit your dimension for this short time. She died of old age in 1574, but as you all should know, when you change your state after Earthly death and assume a new kind of body, it immediately takes the form of how you were at the peak of your consciousness. This is usually in the prime of life or when your personality achieves its greatest awareness around the ages of 25 to 40 years old. So you see Kirsty, for that’s her name, will look young again to you. She reached her ‘Being Optimum’ early

in life. I knew her as a vibrant, caring and gentle person who always saw the funny side of things. She won't mind entering her old but happy form again and will laugh with delight at some of your ways; but she'll protect, inform and explain things to you including certain older words and phrases you don't understand. Her speech is also Middle English but you will catch the drift of what she is saying quite easily."

"How will she find us and know who we are?" Gilly asked, still worried.

"I've told her all about you and the circumstances of your visit. She'll be well prepared and will meet you. Of course she too will take things like cars and planes as God-like or magic, but will accept them calmly from you. As Spriggy once told you, Gillian, the hopes and fears, longings, disappointments and passions of those who have attained a reflective consciousness in this world will never be lost. Your character is a deathless entity."

"That's not at all scientific – I just give up," said Tom in a resigned voice, wriggling in his seat. "Come on Magician, do your stuff – show us this Kirsty person."

"Good, now we can proceed," said Merlin, but before he could do so Sam spoke:

"What happens to it all then when your brain dies with your body?"

"A personality, once forged on Earth, Sam, is separate from a brain, so at death it forms the basis from which it will begin to experience life in the new dimensions. It leaves the old body husk but can know and be known in the next stage by those with whom it's connected by love. It grows with them."

"But what about those who die very young," asked Gillian with concern.

"I know you lost a little sister," replied Merlin softly, "and Sam did as well, but you needn't worry. She'll be well looked after by spirit Guardians like myself, one of whose jobs is to bring these infants and minors to their full personal growth in the new environment. They've just jumped a stage. Though on Earth their umbilical cords had been cut, some were still very much a part of their mother. They all had a definite character potential but were stopped from using it or developing it – hence the new chance. It will be easier for them of course, so they may end up helping others cross this borderline. They can still be their parents' future and affect them."

Sam then wanted to know how much Kirsty would have changed or moved on since 1574, and how had Merlin been able to find her again to bring her back. And Merlin told him that he'd always kept his eye on her progress anyway.

“Now Sam,” instructed the Wizard. “Will you please press all the hats, including your own, fairly hard down on the head. It won’t hurt and you will then hear a click, which will mean that you are all connected into my wrap-around room computations. The last thing you must now do is find the covered silver box beside the screen and open it. In it are some tightly packed thin rubber gloves. Peel off four pairs then shut the box quickly. Give them out carefully, they are skin-coloured and tight-fitting. Put them on. Then slip on the shoes. Now you can all stand up and walk towards the screen. My circuit ‘Mother-board’ floor will light up below you.”

Our four young people did just this as the screen lit up again with the familiar picture of the Abbey, which just as suddenly disappeared. Soon they felt their feet treading on a much rougher surface and they began to hear the strange noises of horses hooves, the shouts of stall holders and intermittent roars of approval from, as they later saw, groups of passers-by who had stopped to watch some acrobats and jugglers performing in the Abbey Precincts. Looking up they saw the Abbey itself, half-built and roofless, with the ruins of the old Norman Cathedral still partly in view. Strangely, the same angels were already climbing up and down the ladders, newly sculpted and with all their heads firmly in place! But there were now more of them, reaching right up to the dove at the top of the arched West window and hovering round the door. There was no God or Christ figure and no Church dignitaries in their stone niches, except for those on either side of the entrance. There were faint sounds of tapping and scraping coming from inside the Abbey, but no sign of workmen on the outer building.

Astonished and wide-eyed, Lucy was the first to speak: “Jesus,” she exclaimed, really meaning to address Him. “Whatever happened to your Church?”

“We’re back from the future, remember? Merlin’s put the clock back,” said Sam wisely, trying to comfort her.

They felt a little assured by the familiar tune of Greensleeves, which was being played upon a flute nearby.

“It’s a dream,” concluded Tom. “I’ll wake up soon.”

“But look at the people,” pointed out Gilly, “they’re really alive – with well-worn clothes and Medieval hair styles – this is no period mock-up.”

“Some could be mistaken, though, for a few of our New-Age types,” joked Sam, beginning to relax. “Look, there’s someone in the stocks over there!”

They all looked across to where the entrance to the Baths would be, and as they remembered it, and gaped at this unsavoury spectacle.

“There are no Baths!” gasped Lucy incredulously, and as they looked they became aware of a young woman coming towards them. She had on a low-necked, thinly woven, woollen blouse, and a long skirt which she held as she hurried along. Her hair was long and fair and she was smiling.

Coming right up to our four visitors, who were standing in a confused and nervous little group, this happy apparition greeted them with the words: “Ye be the four souls I wean whom Merlin told me of. He speaketh to me in dreams erstwhile but this time, forsooth, he so betook me with this mission, told me all so merrily, I was right glad to accord. I come to help.”

After a moment’s silence, Sam blurted out: “Yes, we are the Time Travellers whom Merlin transported here, but I don’t think we’ve got long, actually.”

“We were just wondering what’s happened to the Baths,” Gilly joined in soon.

Standing easily among them, Kirsty explained carefully to them about the Monastery Brothers, and their growing laxity and neglect of the Baths. “Ah! The King’s Bayne – the Monks have it and are become right lazy. The Bayne be not clean and the water only partly changed each night. Wit ye well I nold go in mysen. Its round the corner enclosed in a big wall. I’ve heard tell that the area round the spring itself in the Monastery grounds be also right bawdy. Dead cats, dogs and pigs, I warrant, be thrown into the water.”

“Can we see the Baths anyway, please?” said Gillian politely but firmly.

“Forsoothe, thou’d be daffish my lief to try that water. I be real careful about such things. Even lepers use it now, and many with other diseases. They be abuilding a new hospital right outside the city walls and it’s specially for lepers. The little church beside twill be dedicated to Mary Magdalen the Patron Saint of lepers. It be half way up the steep hill called Holy-way which leads from here to Glaston. Know you of this?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Gilly, “it’s still there. But I thought it was once called Haulaway when two extra horses were used to help pull carts up this hill.”

“Someone told me it was named after the last Prior!” said Sam.

Tom stood speechless with his mouth still open, and Lucy, awestruck, was holding Gilly’s hand. But Sam, persisting with his attempts at conversation, turned towards the Abbey and commented upon its sorry state.

“Yea, boy,” said Kirsty, “but whit ye well, twill be full many years

afore yonder roof were well on and e'en then the King's men will have it wrenched off again to plunder its lead. But when our Queen Bess visited this place in the year of my death (a right good age I were), she be full shamed, I trow, and wonderly wroth to see this church. In her dole she made avow to order a levy throughout the land for seven years, towards its repair."

"What about the attached Community of Brethren, didn't they help?"

"Well, Sam," answered Kirsty, smiling at him. "You see I know thy name. Ye monks still do ye Offices daily in Prior Byrd's Chantry Chapel within their new Abbey. Yonder small stede nys finished yet but shows full bounte. There be n'eer twenty-one Brothers left sythen ye plague. So they be halved, awhile ye loth unhap of ye Black Death. They now be sometime corrupt and oft disheartened I be told. Yet ye monks and nuns be here for seven centuries afore, I ween."

"Did you ever meet the Wife of Bath from The Canterbury Pilgrim Tales?" chirped up Lucy beginning to enjoy herself.

"Nay, my lief," replied their guide, laughing. "Bless thy soul, Chaucer did write of her 150 years ago. But her sayings be quoth oft and merrily, though some of them be passing lewd methinks!"

By now Tom was coming round and trying to enter into the reality of the whole thing. "Are you Kirsty?" he gulped, and then, "How did you know us?"

"Thou must be the doubting one," said Kirsty, studying him. "Merlin warned me to wayte on thee and n'eer be vexed by strange words, which be thy jests. I knew t'wer ye four, straightway, for thy clean and goodly weeds and thy hats. I warrant they all be right new. Young folks do sometimes wear ye same bunched-up and soft kind of hat, but mostly just artists, students or Royals! Ye same weeds that thou wearest now could come from ye court rooms in Loundon town or seem you be dressed up special. I think Lucy lost her hair!"

"Short hair for girls is in fashion, as well as long hair in our world now," said Tom in a subdued and serious voice. Lucy looked embarrassed again.

At this point they noticed a group of people staring at them in between moments of chuckling and whispering together, showing an amused interest.

"Come away," said Kirsty. "Ye Cybernauts, as Merlin do call ye, whatever it do mean. We must hurry so likely ye see more wonders. Merlin be telling me that my name meaneth 'church' in ye older language. Come Gillian, aside me."

On the way past the Abbey as the three followed the other two,

Kirsty told them about the monks' extensive living quarters they would soon pass and the large palace, once called the Bishop's Bower but now mostly empty. Then about the Mystery Plays she used to watch here as a girl and the memorable characters of Good and Evil. "The Good one always won," she laughed.

"Ye may see monks playing bowls on the green by Abbey Gate," she said.

But as they rounded the corner from the West Front, they heard the loud clatter of horses hooves and a strange jingling noise. They turned back to investigate this new event, sounding so close to the Churchyard itself. They were just in time to see the marvellous spectacle of two fully armoured knights on white horses coming in from the opposite corner. Emerging from the narrow passage-way between the rows of Tudor houses, they rode into the precinct. They were followed by a squire in a tabard or emblazoned jerkin, and riding a chestnut coloured horse. He was carrying their shields.

Losing all their reserve, our cybnernauts rushed back to the Abbey Yard. In their excitement, they knocked into a seated beggar, spilling the few coins from his dish – they had the head of Henry VIII upon them. The beggar swore, and as they approached the centre of the large clearing the knights had come to a halt. One knight was looking around and the other was talking to his restless horse. The squire had dismounted and was strapping the small shields to his horse's saddle. A crowd had formed a rough but wide circle round the knights and, though watching with fascination, did not go nearer. Our youngsters stopped in their tracks, allowing Kirsty to catch them up.

Though knights in their full regalia were still taken very seriously at this time, there were few around to be seen in this manner. The chivalrous and glorious custom of knights on horseback was still admired, and linked with the idea of the arrival of an irreproachable hero to save people from all present corruption. But in reality, except for their splendid ceremonies and sumptuous adornment, knights had already become extremely vulnerable in face of the crossbow, the pike and the first crude firearms. Yet in this somewhat sorry state they kept their heraldic image and fought their tournaments. Big shields were now awkward in battle but served a ceremonial use. They still lived in castles.

The squire, having handed the reins of his horse to one of the knights, walked out of the churchyard as the traders parted to let pass this comely figure. The peasants, up from the country to sell their produce, followed him with their eyes as he crossed Stall Street and entered the Three Tuns Inn. The trading booths as usual were spilled out on to this street.

The knights, in full plate armour fitted to the body, were conversing with each other. Their helmets caught the light and brightly-coloured streamers fluttered from the tops. In their hands were tall lances held aloft, with pennants flying. One was wearing a red cloak and the insignia on his pennant was a red cross. His eyes fell on our little group, and removing his helmet, he put it under his arm and smiled at them.

“Ye be in real good fortune this day,” said Kirsty to her silent group. “Come ye along of me and let we be talking with ye knights. Yonder folks be right assotted by such awesome appearances – let be, we shall take our luck.”

They all moved nearer to the horsemen and Kirsty, approaching the one in the cloak, greeted him quietly and with a little curtsy.

“Good morrow, Sir Knight,” she said, “wither be ye bound and what, prithe, be thy name?” Then, as he gave a soft laugh, she asked “Tarry ye here anon?”

“We go to Glaston,” he replied in a kindly manner and with an accented voice, “and my name be Teilo de Charon du Pont, but you may call me Pierre, as my friends do. My companion be called Sir Newbee von Tillicus from Saxony. I be naming him Pauli, mysen.” The two nodded at each other.

Sir Teilo then explained to Kirsty and the other four how he and his friend were going to join the newly formed Order of Sir Bors de Gannes at Glastonbury, and how they had heard that members had in their keeping the actual great shield of Sir Galahad which Bors brought back to Camelot. They believed that the true writings about the exploits and achievement of the three Grail knights and their holy quest were still hidden there, and that it *was* the old Avalon. He said they wouldn't be staying long in Bath.



“Methinks thy speech be strange though right debonair and passing haute withall,” remarked Kirsty, feeling very curious.

“I be an Auvergnaut from the land of Gaul,” he enlightened her. “We both be sojourning awhile in Loundon Town for we be not liked of late in our own countries. There we meet with Squire John of Woollit who be taking us to ye great Monastery at Glaston. He goes now to quench his thirst and bring water for our horses. He belongeth to yon new Order where we go.”

Suddenly our awe-stricken youngsters started all at once to question him. Lucy, surprising herself again, asked where the Round Table would be now? Sam asked how they would dismount to go for their refreshment, and Gilly if they knew that the Glastonbury monks claimed to have found the ancient tomb of King Arthur and Queen Guinevere in the Abbey grounds? Gilly added that she herself was doubtful.

“No matter,” answered Sir Teilo. “Skeletons speak not to me. We abide by yon story from thy most worthy Thomas Malory. I wean thy speech be passing debonair as thou sayest that mine do seem. I ken ye be strangers here too and right youthful travellers ye be. I answer thy questions as best I may.”

He then told them how John of Woollit had spoken of a new Round Table in a converted section of the crypt of Mary’s Chapel, which adjoined the main Abbey building. Steps led down from the chapel. “There are still some empty places at the Table,” he stated. Next, in a slightly amused tone of voice he admitted that they both had to wait until their squire returned again to hold the horses steady, and to ease dismounting. Then they would go gladly to the Monk’s kitchen where squire John had assured them they would find truly excellent mead and goodly victuals, as he called them.

All this time Thomas was transfixed by the finery of the horses’ rich trappings. The adornment of the saddlecloths and harnesses he found quite mind-boggling. The jewels that glinted on hilt and scabbard of Sir Teilo’s sword drew him very close to the horse. But Gilly was already stroking the muzzle of the magnificent creature. Its colour reminded her of her favourite show jumper called Milton. This horse was heavier and more powerful of course.

Sir Newbee then spoke up in a strong guttural voice. He was informing them of the amazing things he’d heard about the famous Glastonbury clock made by one of the monks, “another Peter” he commented, smiling at his companion. He told them that it was one of the first big clocks to be made, and that it had knights rushing round in tournament 24 hours a day as it struck the hours. “The decorated dial was meant,” he recounted, “to represent the universe in miniature,

with the Earth in the centre and the sun, moon and stars in their courses around it..."

"It be not just ye most well praised clock," interrupted Sir Teilo with a smile, "but a goodly model of creation and ye wondrous universe."

Tom, taking his eyes off the feast of colour for a moment, started to say that of course the Earth really circles round the sun, but Sam clapped his hand over Tom's mouth and cut him short.

Gilly wanted to say that she had seen the same clock at Wells Cathedral but, remembering Merlin's warning, she restrained herself.

Squire John had by now returned for the second time, having taken back the empty water buckets to the inn. He then took charge of the horses and the heavily-clad knights clambered to the ground. Before they left, Sir Teilo asked him if he would please explain to their young friends more about the newly formed order which they were on their way to join. Leaving him then to hold their horses and saying their goodbyes to our group, they clanked off across the Churchyard followed by some of the strangely silent crowd.

John of Woollit was glad to elaborate upon his Order. He began by saying that although some of the monks gave members a right royal welcome, those in authority were wary and uncertain of them and the Archbishop of Canterbury had not yet given them his blessing. They were allowed to use the new King's Lodgings built for secular priests and visiting nuns, and there was ample stabling for horses nearby. They were even allowed to use the Abbot's kitchen at times. Since Arthur's tomb had been discovered, he said, the Abbey attracted many pilgrims.

"Can women belong to this New Camelot and sit at The Table?" asked Gill.

"Ye'd surely be real welcome if ye truly be seeking a new quest," said Squire John, and he told about the four Chapters of his Order, one of which was for women and called after their icon, Elaine, the Grail Princess. They organised procedures and met in the room in which the Round Table was situated. They formed a basic group. His own, he described as the main Chapter, for it inspired the action and included an Arthur figure, Sir Oliver. It had also other high achievers in its ranks but, he said, being the return centre of Sir Bors, it awaited two new namesakes – a current Bors and a second Galahad. The other Chapters were the Lancelot and Percival groups, he said finally.

"What special distinctions have these?" asked Sam, feeling intrigued.

"Brave warriors," he said, "who do show mercy and be courteous to women, and ye mystics, poets and artists who do tell of us and do

point the way. All followers be meeting in Mary's Chapel, sometime called St Joseph's and in ye new Lady's Chapel that be lately dedicated by your Bishop of Bath."

One of the horses began champing at his bit, and Squire John attempted to quieten it with soothing words and tightening of the reins.

"Thank you," said Gilly. "It all sounds very exciting. I suppose the members of your Order all model themselves on the characters of their chosen heroes from the Arthurian adventures. No one chooses Mordred, I'll bet!" She smiled at him. "We'd like to go now and see where your knights have got to."

"Farewell," added Kirsty, shaking the squire's free hand, "per-adventure we shall meet again." They then left, watched by the curious bystanders.

On the way to the Monks' Kitchen, to which Kirsty had promised to escort them, she asked her companions if they knew that St Patrick was said to have been the first Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey and that St David was one of the hundreds of saints buried underneath Mary's Chapel.

The youngsters were surprised to hear this, but more surprised still to notice that they were coming to a halt outside the very place which they knew as Sally Lunn's! It was in a narrow street and they heard sounds of merriment coming from the eating-house. They could even smell the cooking, but they could not see the knights. The passageway was crowded.

Kirsty said they shouldn't go inside. But suggested that they could go to see the extent of the monks' orchards and their private mills down by the river – first though, they should stop and have a look at the cloisters.

As they started to walk back, Sam looked round for Tom, and Kirsty said: "Where be Thomas?" It was only then they realised he was not with them.

Feeling worried now, they were just passing the monastery's refectory when they saw and heard what could only be described as an uncontrolled rabble coming towards them. In front was Tom, running very fast. Just before he reached his horrified friends he turned and dived into a door leading to the monks' dormitories. The pursuing crowd were reluctant to follow him and stood around the other youngsters in an angry mood. Kirsty remonstrated with the mob, threatening to call out the Abbot. Meanwhile Sam whispered to Gilly that they couldn't leave Tom, but must stick it out till they found him. Lucy was very frightened.

Tom had gone back earlier, unnoticed by the others, to Squire John

and the horses. During the few moments that the Squire had been distracted by questions from some nearby onlookers, Tom had succumbed to temptation, not for the first time. Taking out the penknife he always carried, he had cut a tassel from the horse's saddlecloth and thrust it into his pocket. Although he was very quick, one of the men who had been helping Squire John with the horses saw him do it. This confirmed an opinion that some of the people already held, that these travellers were spies. Their suspicion now turned into conviction having heard of the theft, and they lunged towards Tom who then took off at high speed. Back in the monastery precincts our cybernauts suffered a very tense few minutes during which two men tried to lead Sam away.

"It be a shame and a pity what you do," Kirsty was shouting. But just then a monk, looking very red and flustered, came out of a nearby doorway. He told them that he had chased this boy through their dormitories and in and out of lavatories until, when he thought he'd really cornered him, the boy just disappeared!

The man let go of Sam in superstitious fear.

Joining the girls, Sam said: "Tom's disconnected and left. Come on, we'll get out as well." But when Sam turned to say goodbye to Kirsty he found that she'd gone too.

"Quickly girls," he gulped, "get the hats off!"

In a flash, they found themselves seated on their chairs in Merlin's room in the Circus. To their relief they saw that Tom was already there, but Sam upbraided him, describing the ordeal they'd suffered only because of his mad behaviour. Lucy asked Tom crossly whatever had he been up to.

"It was a scientific experiment – I wanted to prove that I wasn't dreaming," admitted Tom. "I wanted to bring back something to show people so that they would believe me." Tom then felt in his pocket, but found it empty.

"You always think you can get away with your unwise gambles," the voice of Merlin boomed out again. "You can't bring material things back with you – that's not the way time travel works. You have been very thoughtless Tom."

"But no one was hurt," grumbled Tom bemoaning his empty pocket.

"Only because they heard in time that you had already aborted," said Merlin. "Anyway, you've all met two of the champions and their worthy squire. Some of these men will become archetypal images, even in your own time."

"One was Sir Galahad," suggested Gill. "A red cross was on his pennant."

“I guessed you’d notice that my girl,” said Merlin, “and you’re right of course. The other knight was Sir Bors who was going to take over in my new Order. He represented the one who came back from the Quest and reported all their adventures to Arthur and his court. Galahad, the liberator and healer, who though drinking from the Grail and tasting its other-worldly ecstasy, as a drug, could not liberate his own sexual nature. It killed him. He sacrificed his life for it. Yet his name and the themes from the great myth still crop up today. Viewed as hero and rescuer he is invoked in times of stress and wishful longing; for he it was who drew the Sword of David from the stone.”

“Yes, with car trouble even, an RAC ‘Knight of the Road’ could be a Galahad,” offered Sam. “But the Galahad supply ship in the Falkland’s war was bombed.”

“True, though it was built to be a top class craft like its sister ship, the Sir Lancelot which survived,” commented Merlin, musing upon Sam’s words.

“Then there’s the Holy Grail symbol that scientists use when they have found a new breakthrough in one of their research projects,” contributed Tom, trying to redeem himself. “And, of course, there’s the Merlin engine.”

“Thank you! That’s correct boy,” he said. “But now I speak of Lancelot. He had a stony path to tread. As the father of Galahad, whom he was tricked into begetting with Elaine, the Grail Princess, he is still the champion of the old spirit of knighthood. He relies on himself and his strong right arm. Though he stands for the nobility in human nature he is humiliated and dejected when he is only allowed to see the Grail from a distance. He tries to go closer but is struck unconscious and a flame shoots through him. This is because of his adultery with the Queen, to whom he remained ever faithful.”

“But without him, Galahad would never have existed,” said Gilly. “Though this illustrious son was brought up in a convent, they loved each other.”

“You certainly know your Arthuriad well,” said Merlin approvingly.

“Only through reading my Penguin paperback,” Gilly disillusioned him.

There was a fidgety silence, but Gilly hadn’t finished yet. “A while back you referred to the Glastonbury Order as ‘your’ new Order. So is it? And why are the knights so titled? I’m puzzled now.”

“Yes, I see – these things need clearing up. When Malory died, I realised the power of the work of this Welsh storyteller. I saw that its importance lay not in its beginnings but in what it would become. I

was then instrumental in instigating the new Order, as I had done with the first Camelot.”

“Did you name our knights as well?” prompted Sam.

“Well – many new knights were coming from Wales, Ireland and Europe as the fame of the myth had already spread. As a prophet of Time, I prepared the space and place and I had foreknowledge of the special position which these two figures would hold in your own century. They were actual knights living at that time and on their way to Glastonbury. But I chose them as my special Questers who would re-vitalise my Order. I suggested these names to them in a dream while they were in London. They were expected at Mary’s Chapel. They had faith in the Father, Son and Holy Quest!”

“That is a bit clearer now,” said Tom. “But wasn’t there a great fire at this Abbey which burnt it and Mary’s Chapel to the ground?”

“Yes, but that was way back in 1184, and it completely destroyed the fabulous Library with its priceless books, some a thousand years old. They rebuilt it all in a larger, more lavish style. The walls of the new Mary Chapel now enclosed the ruins of the famous old one and it was joined to the Abbey by the Galilee Porch. In the arches of the chapel’s new north door were bands of Norman Sculptures. On one of the inner bands were depicted the three Magi bringing gifts to Mary and the infant Jesus. The one kneeling, and still to be seen intact today, is a carving of myself at the time of His human birth. In other loops of this band are men asleep in bed. Above them an angel or a hand is issuing from a cloud. This was the old way of depicting a vision.”

“I’ll go and look for it at Glastonbury,” said Gilly. “But it’s weird.”

“Please tell us more about the women and their Chapter,” pleaded Lucy.

Merlin was repentant. “Of course,” he said. “I’ve neglected them. At the time I set up my Order, a woman was often valued only as a womb. Her voice was seldom heard except in the courtroom complaining about abuse or neglect. She was just a widow, wife or maid. No knight was allowed a woman with him on the Quest. But I made them the base of my new Order. I shall now speak to you through the words of the mid-twentieth century poet with whom I resided: ‘Flesh knows what spirit knows, but spirit knows it knows. Women’s flesh lives the quest of the Grail... Blessed is she who gives herself to the journey. Flesh tells what spirit tells but spirit knows it tells.’”

“Good grief! Whatever does all that mean?” burst out Lucy in concern.

“You’ll understand I think, when you get a little older,” said Merlin gently. “For ‘Women’s travel holds in the natural the image of the

supernatural', and the poem ends with a call to 'Bring to a flash of seeing the women in the world's base.' You see, rhyme can treble the significance of anything. Listen now to what he sees through the magic branches of legendary Broceliande:

*'Though Camelot is built, though the King sit on the throne,
Yet the wood in the wild west of the shapes and the names
Probe everywhere through the frontier of head and hand;
everywhere the light through the great leaves is blown
on your substantial flesh, and everywhere your glory frames.'*

"These words end another poem of his called 'Bors to Elayne'. Any comments?"

"Mysteriously pungent, I admit," said Tom, "but how does your Christ fit in?"

"We'll discuss this after your next visit," said Merlin, firmly dismissing them.

8

Aquae Sulis

The next sortie for our four Time Travellers was during the summer holidays, when yet again they had asked to come to Bath.

After lunch on the second day of their visit they indicated to Aunt Sophie that they would like to be off to the Circus again. Strangely, Sophie didn't seem surprised. But she was always so busy anyway.

They soon found themselves at the door of the house in the Circus, or launch-pad, and after rapping the knocker, waited breathlessly. Gillian wondered who polished the brass lion's head. The door opened automatically again and, entering quickly, they descended the stairway and pushed open the door on the left side of the passage.

As they stepped into the room they stared momentarily at the huge crystal, and then seated themselves on the chairs placed ready for them.

"Welcome back my four Cybernauts," came the now familiar voice. "You will soon be quite experienced travellers in Time and Space. This is your last trip back into the past. Next time we'll be invading the future."

"Now you've met two of my special Arthurian namesakes – Galahad and Bors – but you'll be in touch with them again on your last excursion, and also with Lancelot and Percival. You'll be learning a lot from them soon. Legend and myth have exerted an incalculable impact on the progress of mankind. You will taste the effect of the Greek and Roman Deities now."

There was a short silence after which Lucy, being unable to wait, asked anxiously: "Where *are* we going next then? You didn't tell us. You asked us to come back again when we last said goodbye to you, but that was it."

"Goodness, child! I hadn't decided myself at that stage, though I knew it had to be somewhere near the beginnings of worship in your Bath area."

"Don't be impatient Lucy," criticised Tom with a surprising interjection.

"In the third century AD, before Bath Abbey was dreamed of," began Merlin, "there was a huge Temple Precinct there. Also a mag-

nificent layout of stone buildings housing the Baths, sporting, and social facilities, with all leisure comforts. Better than any of your modern sports centres! Under the present site of the Abbey was a beautiful Grecian Temple dedicated to a combined Celtic and Roman Goddess – Sulis Minerva. The rest of the Complex was built adjacent to this hallowed plot and now lies underneath the present Pump Room and Stall Street.”

“How did they worship in those days?” asked Gillian.

“People came to bathe in the hot Sacred Springs. Nature-based sites, such as Bath, were considered to be in reality the Gates to the Otherworld,” replied Merlin. “The steaming waters would have been thought of as being heated by the eternal fire, which renewed the vigour of the sun in winter. The sacred flame kept burning within the temple precincts was a visible sign of this.”

“But *who* did they worship?” said Sam.

“As I indicated before,” answered Merlin in a rather long-suffering way, “the Roman Minerva had become a symbol of discipline and now ruled over the wilder side of elemental nature. She was wisely linked up with a Celtic Goddess of similar attributes, St Bridget, who guarded perpetual fire and was a patroness of poetry, learning and prophesy. She was connected also with several ‘holy wells’ and exercised healing powers. Together, it forms a picture of One who mediates twixt powers of the Otherworld in a beneficial manner in war and peace. Both names mean Bright One.”

“They didn’t *really* believe in all those deities and their crazy goings-on, did they?” burst out Tom assertively.

“Oh yes, they certainly did,” said Merlin curtly. “And it coloured their whole lives...”

As he was speaking his voice seemed to fade away, and Sam and Gillian found themselves sitting on the steps of a Roman Temple.

They gasped as they glanced at the huge constructions around them. Turning to look behind them they saw the tall Corinthian columns of the Temple. They were foliated and plumed at the top and ended in the typical Greek apex, actually still seen in many classical buildings in Bath. But wonder of wonders, there in the very middle was the magnificent ‘Head’, now thought to be a Celtic Sun God. It was once called the Gorgon’s Head and was dug up from the ruins. Its surrounding setting and accompanying stone carvings were then reconstructed. Looking at it now Sam had no doubt that it depicted a Sun God, or even a Water God. He was completely overawed.

Gillian responded by whispering to Sam her amazement that their twentieth century Bath archaeologists had been able to put together

this original centrepiece with such accuracy that they could now instantly recognise it.

“Much of it is done with computers, I suppose,” said Sam very quietly. “For many of the smaller bits and pieces were quite separately uncovered.”

This was all so different though from looking at relics and calculated usages and positions of objects displayed in the modern Pump Room Museum. It enveloped them in an atmosphere of worship and an almost tangible faith and respect – as did indeed the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe in the Middle Ages, and still do to a certain extent. They could feel the power of the Roman and Celtic figures around them.

Turning to the spacious precincts and the grand entrance to the Baths, they noticed a few Roman soldiers walking in and out of the enclosed area. There were also some white-gowned men conferring together, whom our two watchers assumed to be priests. These men were standing beside a raised stone slab with ornamental carvings on its four sides that looked like a large altar.

Merchants and wealthy landowners in robes or togas appeared now and again. Quite a few peasants stood around the outer edges, admiring the spectacle before them. There were traders here too, offering their gaudy trinkets and replica deities to the visitors – as can be seen with the ever-present tourists and pilgrims in Sam and Gilly’s own real time!

They now noticed with slight apprehension that one of the soldiers, who Sam thought might be a centurion, was walking towards them. As they were both covered in the rough grey cloaks, which Merlin had instructed Sam to fetch prior to lift-off, they hoped that they would still be taken for beggars or suppliants. But the soldier came right up to them. He was dressed in a decorated tunic with a short, pleated skirt and was half armoured. He had long thinly-metalled boots with pointed toes, and a short sword hanging in a scabbard at his side. Round his head was a sort of laurel wreath. He carried no helmet and the youngsters noticed with great relief that he was smiling.

“You must be Merlin’s protégés,” he said in familiar English. “I was told that English now takes the place of Latin as an international language in your century. Merlin is talking through me, you see. I think I really should have had myself kitted out in sandals, plain tunic and cloak instead of this parade gear – you might not have been so shy!”

Our timid cybernauts pulled back the front folds of their precious head drapes so as to reveal the whole of their faces, and Sam greeted this very illustrious personage with a nod and a welcoming grin.

“Anyway,” said the soldier, “my name is Gaius, and in the year 335, by your reckoning, I was stationed at Caerleon. It is just over the estuary from here and I used often to come over by boat on my time-off, to visit the hot baths and the gymnasium.”

“But,” Sam interrupted him, “it must still be about that date now, so why are you speaking in the past tense? And excuse me, but how come you seem to know Merlin?”

“Well, it’s a long story,” answered Gaius as he sat down on the steps beside them. Making a strange clinking noise as he settled himself, he began telling them about his death and how he had later been contacted by Merlin.

“It was during one of your wretched, damp winters,” he complained. “And in that cold spell I succumbed to a fatal sickness. I was only 35 years old but never got used to your changeable weather.”

“I seem to remember Merlin mentioning 350 AD as his finally chosen date for this visit of ours,” whispered Gilly to Sam.

“So that was about ten years ago then, when you died,” said Sam, looking incredulously at Gaius. “But might not someone recognise you?”

“Very unlikely,” was the reply. “You see, many of the soldiers that I knew in my 2nd Legion, based at our new Cardiff Fort, have since been withdrawn or replaced. They’d all be ten years older than me, anyway!” he joked.

“We come from the last years of the twentieth century and you from the middle of the fourth... at the beginning of the Christian era...” began Sam.

“Yes, and yours is still a Christian culture I hear – in Europe anyway,” exclaimed Gaius.

“Well, only just,” remarked Gilly, joining in. “It’s alive, but changing.”

“You know,” said Gaius, turning his eyes upon her, “we heard many stories about the Christians. One of their faith – called Paul or Saul, I think – was a Roman citizen from Tarsus. He ascribed an old monument that he once saw in Athens to your own prophet, re-naming it Jesus Christ. I liked that, for the Roman edifice in question was inscribed – ‘To An Unknown God’!” He smiled.

“You thought,” went on Gillian, gaining courage, “that your Caesars and Emperors were Gods, didn’t you?”

“True,” answered the soldier, looking up behind him at the fiery head on the temple pediment. Then, pausing to adjust his position, he continued, “I once saw a tomb which had recently been repaired. It’s in the street not far from here. It had been vandalised by what they

called, in the inscription, ‘insolent hands’. They may well have been Christian hands!” he chuckled.

“Were they still not recognised officially?” asked Sam with surprise.

“Early Christians were persecuted because they refused to worship our Emperor. But in my youth, and during the reign of Constantine, their faith was made legal. He died in 337, so Merlin tells me. That’s just two years after I too left the scene. But, you know, we were losing faith in our traditional Graeco-Roman Gods and Goddesses and began using their names in cursing and swearing! We found little comfort in worshipping them.”

“Did you ever believe in a life after death, before you died?” asked Sam.

“Certainly not,” replied Gaius. “We soldiers were becoming interested in foreign Gods and mystery cults because they were more socially orientated and many promised a life hereafter. With the old Gods you worshipped individually those of your choice, presenting lonely offerings and requests.”

“Who was your chosen God among the old ones?” ventured Gilly shyly.

“Well,” said their companion, seeming a little embarrassed, “my personal favourite, actually, was Apollo the Sun God, but...”

Gilly broke in here excitedly: “Apollo was the name of our spacecraft which took the first men to the moon,” she blurted out.

“Shut up Gill, for goodness sake!” chided Sam in a very unbrotherly way.

“Can’t you see you’re confusing our friend? That’s a bit rude.”

“Sorry,” said Gilly contritely, surprised at Sam’s outburst.

Gaius laughed it off. “Oh, that’s alright! There are lots of things I’ll never understand about your era.” He then added: “I’ve never heard that strange story before though... I expect it’s a children’s fantasy tale.” He then dismissed the subject, except to say that he was horrified at what the worshippers of Diana, the moon Goddess, would think of it! “Or, worse still,” he said with a wink, “Luna herself.”

“What new religions did the army favour then?” said Sam.

“Well, Persian Mithraism was followed by many, for it had some moral doctrines and saw Mithras as Creator and Redeemer, standing for good against evil. It observed the 25th of December as the birthday of the sun and Sunday as its holy day. Even Baptism and Communion ceremonies, of a sort, were held. Mithras was a God of light and conqueror of darkness, but I was put off by the underground temples he favoured, and their gruesome altarpieces. These latter consisted of a carving of Mithras killing the Sacred Bull from whose blood all life

was thought to spring. The God was being helped in his task by the symbolic dog, snake and scorpion figures. Women were not allowed to join,” said Gaius disparagingly.

“I’m very glad you were put off,” commented Gilly, looking up at him with a wry smile.

“Actually,” he continued, responding to his charges’ disquiet, “Jupiter was officially worshipped in the army, but Mars, Mercury and Apollo found more enthusiastic devotees among us at one time, and of course, Minerva and Diana. There was also the Egyptian Isis cult, which boldly promised life after death to its members. And with Mithraism and Christianity these were now becoming new rivals for our hearts and attention.”

“You really seemed to have great freedom of worship,” said Sam with interest. “Yet Druidism, I read, was outlawed by Rome. Why was this?”

“We disapproved of its tradition of human sacrifice and it, like Judaism, threatened our government. So that priesthood was destroyed.”

Gaius stood up and paced back and forth savouring recalled memories, before resuming his seat beside them.

“When I was here in Bath I saw how we had come to terms with the native deities and spirits of the locality. But when I was a small boy my mother used often to tell me terrible things about the Emperor Diocletian. His treatment of Christians in his British province was well known. He blamed them, among others, for the decline of order and many were put to death. These included two Christian martyrs from around Caerleon, our old fort. We called this place Isca, and our 2nd Legion had been stationed there since 75 AD.”

“Do you remember the names of the two men who were killed?” asked Gill, following it up with a puzzled enquiry as to why his Legion had left Isca.

Gaius seemed thoughtful, and then in a somewhat reverent tone of voice answered, “Yes, their names were Aaron and Julius. Merlin knows them well and has often spoken to me about them. As for my stationing in Cardiff it was because of the Irish menace,” he said, giving them a cheeky look. “You see, it was because of all these foreign raiders that many new forts had to be built at that time. The defences in Wales were strengthened and Cardiff was one of ‘The Saxon Shore’ types guarding the coasts. They all had great concrete bastions for heavy stone-throwing artillery to repel invaders.”

“There are some remains of that Cardiff fort still to be seen in our own time,” Gilly informed the nostalgic young Roman.

Looking around the Temple Precincts he then suggested that in

Bath his government had excelled itself – bringing together Roman and Celtic Gods in such splendour. “My grandfather,” he said, “another Gaius, was a centurion of this region and used to supervise the military workforce which was stone quarrying up on the Downs outside the City when all this was being built. He even erected an altar here.” After a pause he remarked that the tombs of many soldiers and officials who had retired here, proved its popularity. “They mostly lined the roadsides out of the City, for Bath was situated on a junction of the great Fosse Way. Over the river and beside the road leading up the hill is a large tomb which was very special to me.”

“Our Aunt lives up Bathwick Hill, which may have been that very road!” conjectured Sam with doubly aroused curiosity.

“If that was the hill,” said Gaius kindly, “I knew a Christian woman who had been a slave to a wealthy Roman citizen in a grand villa on top of this hill which overlooked Aquae Sulis. But he freed her and eventually made her his wife, whereupon her name was changed from Mary to Eresta. When he died she erected this tomb in his honour. I helped her with the plans. Sadly she too died soon afterwards, but before me. I knew her well, and also her husband, because he was the father of one of my officers – the Legion’s Standard-bearer – and we often visited them. We sat in their garden and had long talks about your prophet Jesus.”

“If you had a tomb, I wonder where it is?” questioned Gilly with awe.

“Yes, my colleagues raised one for me,” he answered, “and it recorded that I came from southern Gaul – France to you. But don’t look for it now.”

“Did many local people have villas then?” asked Sam.

“Oh, yes!” confirmed Gaius quickly. “There were many rich merchants and public servants who were able to build villas and farmsteads around Bath. Some had formal gardens and coloured mosaics. One of these, showing sea-horses and dolphins, I actually saw in the town; it was true Roman style.”

Gillian then stood up, pointing purposefully ahead.

“What is the altar used for?” she enquired somewhat suspiciously.

“I’m afraid they still make animal sacrifices there,” admitted Gaius.

“But note the eternal flame burning on top,” he said, changing the subject.

“It never dies down and is perpetually re-lit from rocky lumps. It doesn’t whiten to ash and is seen as a symbol of the undying sun rising up daily.”

“It’s like the Olympic torch that’s lit during our Games... revived from Greek times,” remembered Sam. “But, come on... What about the sacrifices?”

“Well, you can see that the place is filling up with curious on-lookers, and I heard the sounds of lowing and bleating a while ago, so you may not like it here much longer. I’ve noticed a couple of priests nearby and have just seen the Haruspex in his mask. It’s still the same old Lucius.”

“Whoever is he?” brother and sister both exclaimed in unison, trying to pick this person out.

“He’s the priest who pronounces the fitness of the animals to be sacrificed, and afterwards examines their livers to gain information and learn if the Gods were pleased or angry with the actions of their worshippers. He is also an Auger, which means he interprets signs and omens, such as thunder and flight patterns of certain birds, to foretell events.” Gaius paused.

Feeling suddenly frightened, Gilly asked nervously if he knew where their two friends were. “We haven’t seen them since we arrived,” she said.

“Don’t worry,” replied their companion. “They are exploring the Hot Spring and Baths complex. Merlin told me he was sending Eresta, the Celtic woman I was telling you about, to show them around. He knows her too.”

“Can we go and meet then now?” requested Gilly appealingly.

“I think it better if you wait for a while,” said Gaius, looking towards the gathering crowd. As the two travellers followed his gaze they saw the entrance to the precincts filled with a large ox, being pulled and pushed through it. Then a sheep and goat were driven in, and bringing up the rear was a man carrying live chickens. They were following the robed priests to the altar. The Haruspex was in front, holding a cage of fluttering doves.

“Ugh! How awful,” cried Gillian with a shiver. “Come on, Sam. Let’s get out,” and holding her head in one hand she felt under her hood with the other.

“Not before we find the others,” countered her brother. “We’ll skirt around the gruesome crowd by the altar and get to the entrance to the Baths over there. We can then try to contact Lucy and Tom.”

“They won’t let you in with those clothes on,” cautioned Gaius. “But your fellow Time Travellers should be on their way out by now and will be glad indeed to see you. Give Eresta my greetings. My mission is now completed,” he finished. Still smiling, he turned, walked into the crowd and was lost.

Meanwhile, Thomas and Lucy had found themselves in the centre of the Temple Precincts and close to a large stone altar. Their friends, huddled on the Temple steps, hadn't noticed them. In the simple white tunics that Merlin had provided for Tom and Lucy they looked like all the others. But there were Roman residents in togas and cloaks as well; also some soldiers in breeches, and local peasantry or tradespeople in rough, woollen tunics.

No one seemed to pay any attention to the youngsters, so gazing in awe at a corner sculpture on the side of the altar Tom spoke in half whispers: "That must be Hercules, because of the lion's pelt he's wearing. God! Lucy, look at how the paws are knotted across his chest." But Lucy was looking at the other corner and wondering who the figure was with an eagle at his feet. She then cast a quick glance at Tom's discovery – and grimaced.

Walking round to the other side of the ornate and heavy-looking altar, they studied one of the other sculptures. It depicted a male God with a squatting panther and a female Deity pouring liquid from an upturned jug.

"Why, that's like the stone figure outside Bath Abbey," said Lucy quietly to Tom. "Only that one was put up by the Temperance Society." Tom grinned.

"Huh! I'll bet it's not water she's got there – her partner looks like Bacchus, the God of wine," he quipped.

"Well anyway," said Lucy as they looked at the last corner, "this is the only altar sculpture that I've not seen in the Roman Baths Museum. I heard that it turned up as part of the walls of a village church outside Bath!"

"It's beautiful," whispered Tom, shushing Lucy. "It looks like Apollo, the Sun God, playing a lyre – and, wow – a naked Mercury! I never went round the museum in Bath," he admitted. "I thought it would be boring."

Moving from the altar to the north side of the Precinct they were forcefully struck by a very grand edifice. It had six fluted columns with an ornamental wall behind. This was decorated with four square panels, each with a winged Cupid holding the attributes of its special season – flowers, corn, fruit and a bill-hook for cutting firewood in winter.

"Oh! Tom," gasped Lucy, full of wonder. "Do you see that carved head in the triangle on top? It must be the Moon Goddess, Luna, who rides the night sky. She has the reins of her horses in one hand and a crop in the other."

Thomas gave another stifled guffaw. "That's not like Gilly's riding crop," he laughed. "It's a thong."

"Well, it's used for the same thing," said Lucy dismissively. "There's a crescent moon beside her? And I suppose that..."

"It could be Diana, the Huntress, actually," interrupted Tom. "What about the big hound looking up at her. Anyway we'd better go now; there are two strange characters looking at us. Probably priests of some sort. Let's go over to the tall porch opposite. It must be the way into the Baths."

"Where are Sam and Gilly?" complained Lucy. "They'd love all this."

"Don't worry," said Tom, in a surprisingly kind tone of voice. "They are probably in there already. Come on Luce, let's go." Then, feeling big brotherly for once, he took her hand. He knew she'd rather be with Gilly.

As they moved across the Precinct, noticing of course the great Temple that presided over all, they didn't inspect the Temple steps. If they had, they'd have seen two small figures sitting there hunched under their hoods and cloaks looking like beggars. In any case, there were many people about.

On each side, flanking the entrance to the Baths, was an arched, stone structure facing inwards. Over the main porch was a roundel, showing on it in fiery fashion the head of, what looked like, another Sun God. Radiating from it were many bright lines and beneath it a supporting throng of angels.

As they stopped in front of it, suddenly they were conscious of someone standing behind them. Looking round they saw a middle-aged woman with a three-quarter-length dress of soft material, girdled at the waist. She had a circlet on her head and long brown hair, secured at the back but falling amply over her neck drapes. She was of fairish complexion.

This person was looking at them expectantly and then, having obviously reached the right conclusion, relaxed and greeted them.

"I'm Eresta. I've come to help and inform you," she said, in a pronounced Celtic accent. "Merlin approached me in my other state of consciousness where I'd existed for some years, and sent me back here for a few hours of your present visit."

Luckily, with a little effort, our pair mostly understood her speech because they had both learnt Gaelic at school in Ireland. This helped, as Merlin knew it would. For Eresta, English was easier for her to voice that way.

"Had you died then?" queried Tom unbelievably.

“Well, yes, I suppose you’d call it that. But I’m still very busy and happy in my changed state and still learning and growing in understanding. I used to live here fifteen years ago. I remember it well.” She looked at Tom. But he was embarrassed, and eyeing the solar image above him, he bided his time.

“We were going into the Baths to find our friends,” he said at last.

“I see you are looking at good old Sol, the midday sun, as he faces the Goddess across the altar,” said Eresta. “One of a set of opposites, you see. Any questions now, before we go in?”

Regaining confidence, Tom asked about the priest-like figures walking around, and Lucy joined in with another question: “What is the altar God with an eagle at his feet?” she wanted to know.

“Oh! That’s Jupiter, the Father of the Gods. He is like the Greek Zeus and the eagle is his symbol... alright?” Eresta smiled at Lucy, and then turning to Tom she told him that the Temple priests were preparing for an animal sacrifice. “But not yet,” she assured them after seeing Lucy turn pale.

“Let’s go in,” their new acquaintance suggested. “It’s huge inside.”

They followed her in shyly. Then, walking past the first circular bath, which was a cold plunge, two naked men climbed out, only to jump back in again very quickly. Eresta was explaining that there used to be mixed bathing in the time of Nero and Flavius, but the prudish Hadrian had decreed that there must be separate set times for the men and the women.

There were many compartments of various sizes, shapes and usages. One led into another and their guide seemed familiar with the different procedures and locations. When they came to the rest room she pointed to some marble seats and suggested they all sat down.

“We can talk better here,” she said. “This building is one of the wonders of Britain – it has everything. I have great admiration for it.”

“What’s it all for, other than bathing?” enquired Tom, doubting her words.

“Bless you, boy! There are undressing rooms, exercise rooms, tepid, warm or hot baths, Turkish or intense dry-heat rooms and finally the Great Bath.”

“That’s for swimming, isn’t it?” enthused Lucy, looking very impressed. “I expect the dry-heat chambers are the same as our saunas at home.”

“I don’t know,” answered Eresta, “but they make one pour with sweat. There are other rooms here where bathers are massaged, oiled and scraped and then there are games and refreshment rooms... plus a library and small theatre.”

As they sat chatting, slaves and servants were running around attending to their masters. There was even a juggler who wandered in and out.

“Goodness me,” exclaimed Eresta, “I nearly forgot to include the most important site of all in my previous list – The Sacred Spring itself. But I’ll take you there later.”

“The ‘Four Seasons’ monument outside,” remarked Lucy. “It’s fabulous.”

“Yes, that’s Luna’s facade to the north of the altar. She fits in well with the water deities, for she controls the tides. She is Goddess of the horses, you know. But Minerva is the main figure here, presiding over the Temple and Baths. She has another statue beside the Great Bath.”

Tom had become fidgety, but now, unexpectedly, he burst into speech.

“Tell us more about her, please,” he demanded, quite putting them out.

They fell into a short silence during which they could hear shouts and greetings of bathers and faint background noises coming from the gymnasium. Tom thought it sounded just like a modern Leisure Centre in his Real Time. Eresta now began her ‘Minerva run-down’ for them, in true lyrical fashion.

“She’s the Roman equivalent of the Greek Goddess Athena,” she told them. “She directs and guides the development of human culture and evolution and is the patron of cities in war and peace. But specially, she helps individual warriors who act bravely. She has favourite heroes to whom she gives gifts. She also advises them and provides opportunities to prove themselves. Sometimes they even become gods in their own right.” Eresta paused again.

“Is that it then?” queried Tom, suddenly impatient to be off.

“Almost,” she continued. “Except... Minerva was said to have invented numbers and wind instruments, and also to be the source of life and death energy, and of healing and restoration...” But Tom had now gone, and looking around she spied him standing near the door. He seemed to be deep in thought and was gazing at one of the statues that adorned the room – a beautiful female sculpture. It was, perhaps, a Minerva figure, though without her helmet and breastplate and certainly with no owl in attendance to denote her wisdom.

Tom was newly appreciating the impact of Rome’s civilised order – also the difference between the classical realism of the Roman forms and the intricate and stylised design of the Celtic ones. It was also becoming clear to him that he would dearly love to have been one of Minerva’s heroes. There flashed through his mind heroes of his own

time – film and football stars, explorers and astronauts – he wondered who encouraged them. Minerva’s name, he recalled, was still used in Bath, on tour buses and as the names of a café. For a moment he felt a strange sense of worship.

“Shall we fetch him back?” said Eresta, obviously worried.

“Oh, he’s alright,” piped up Lucy. “He’s just got a crush on Minerva. He’s a Scorpio, you know, and is always unpredictable.”

“I expect he possesses the worst and best within himself,” added Eresta wisely, “and has much to cope with.”

“I see,” rejoined Lucy thoughtfully. “I was born under the sign of Cancer and have always been fascinated by the moon. When the first men landed on the moon, my mother told me that the whole world was at one with them and with each other while they watched it together. Strange, wasn’t it?”

“I’d say unbelievable!” responded her companion, with a smile. “Merlin never told me about that. I imagine it would have changed everything. I can’t follow you here.”

“It should have done,” commented Lucy. They sat quietly for a minute.

“My friend, Gillian, is a Gemini character. We’re like twins sometimes. Sam is Libra and keeps us from quarrelling. He brings the best out of us all. I do hope they’re both alright. Anyway, please tell me more about yourself and when you were here. You don’t seem like a Roman lady at all.”

“Merlin will look after them,” Eresta assured her before speaking of her life in Aquae Sulis. “You’re right of course,” she went on. “I was a native Briton and my name was Bridget, after the Celtic Goddess of the wells and rivers. When I embraced the new Christianity, my name was changed to Rachel. My Roman master was secretly intrigued by the figures of Jesus and St Paul so he chose me from other slaves. He had been told of my convictions but he still changed my name, finally, to Eresta. He lived in a beautiful villa on a hill overlooking the town. I sometimes sat on the patio, watching our white doves fly around. My excuse was pea-shelling or something!”

“Where did the peas come from?” asked Lucy, “Was there a market?”

“Yes, down the hill, but we had an extra garden outside for growing our own produce and some to sell as well. Did you know that the Romans first introduced nearly 400 new plants, vegetables and fruit into Britain. These included peas, carrots, lettuces and marrows.”

“You mean we’d not known about them before?” asked Lucy in surprise.

“It’s true, dear. We’d never had apple, pear or cherry trees here until the Romans planted them. My master used to have Italian olives and lemons delivered from the seaports as well,” replied Eresta.

Tom, meanwhile, had returned and had sat down for a while. But he soon became bored and wandered off again towards the sounds coming from the Baths.

“He’ll be back,” said Lucy, and she and her friend went on talking.

“We had a lovely dog for protection – a bit like Diana’s hound, only ours was black. I really loved him and he me.” Eresta looked tearful as she spoke.

For an instant Lucy saw this dog sitting at their feet. She rubbed her eyes and it was gone, but she knew it was still around.

“We had an aviary with blackbirds in it, which sang beautifully. There were brightly coloured finches and a raven which often talked back at us.”

“How long were you a slave?” ventured Lucy next.

“Not very long,” came the answer. “My master’s wife died of pneumonia. She never took to our climate and was often ill. Soon after that I was freed and later married to him. We were very happy and had two children.”

“I expect they played in the garden, but what was it like?” asked Lucy.

“Well, you would think it very formal probably, for everything was in neat rows with clipped box hedges and little cypress trees at the corners. There were ivy and acanthus climbing round the pillars with a few marble statues in between. There were small fountains and pools, bronze Cupids...”

“What is acanthus?” interrupted Lucy, whose mother was a keen gardener.

“Oh! It was everywhere and its leaves were modelled on all the friezes among ornamental fruit and flowers. It is a herbaceous plant with handsome lobed leaves. Look! You can see its shape carved over the door there.”

Lucy stood up and went nearer to the pattern which Eresta had pointed out. When she sat down again, she told her that her mother often used to read her stories from the old Greek myths. “They’re now living again for me,” she said.

“My husband still ascribed honour to the old Gods. The children did too, but it was becoming half-hearted. There was a little shrine to Venus in the patio, for as well as being the Goddess of Love, she was custodian of gardens and all growing things. Then, of course, there was the house shrine where daily prayers should be said to Vesta –

Goddess of the Hearth. We mostly skipped those, but inside were figures of spirits that were supposed to guard the family and home, and our little ones loved these. They chatted to them.” Eresta looked pensive.

“How did you match up your Christian beliefs with all this?” said Lucy.

“I often shared my experience of Christ, and said my own prayers. My husband was very tolerant and, after I died, Merlin told me, he became a good Christian. Now I shall tell you about the slaves and their lives with us.”

“Having slaves seems awful to us,” chided Lucy. “But I suppose the benefits and results of ‘Pax Romana’ in Britain were good in the long run.”

“Our slaves, anyway, were very well looked after and seemed happy. They did all the gardening and used, sometimes, to cut the box hedges into the shapes of letters, often spelling their own names. They tended the flowers lovingly, enclosing them in square patches.”

“What kind of flowers, I wonder?” said Lucy. “New Roman species I guess!”

“Well...” Eresta smiled. “As well as the herb garden, the plants of which I used for cooking, we had roses, violets and lilies. Many were sweetly scented. Yes, most of these species, including lavender, were brought from Italy, and some were medicinal. The dog rose, for instance, was introduced into this country because, they say, it cures hydrophobia. Hence, ‘dog’ rose.”

“That’s funny, because it’s my favourite wild flower. I wish I could see this lovely garden, but we may not have time. I should probably think that it was just one of our Theme Parks anyway. Do you have gardens in your new after-life existence?” queried Lucy, looking very serious.

“We can if we want to,” came the reply. “Those memories are so good. There was always the sound of water; the children fed the goldfish and played with their hoops along the broad walks. Our white marbled bedroom looked out over the garden where a peacock strutted. The bird didn’t get on too well with the dog. It made us smile, till it flew away! But this is enough of my reminiscing – one forgets the bad bits, you see. But the happiest feelings and all the loving has been kept. Come on, let’s go and find Tom and make our visit to the Sacred Spring.”

They picked up Tom as he was coming away from the Great Bath area. He was grumbling that he hadn’t been allowed near the Bath itself. “The wrong togs,” he told them, as they walked on. But he had

much more on his mind.

“Do you remember showing me those picture postcards, Lucy?” he asked. “They showed the twentieth century Roman Bath, called the King’s Bath, and also the overflow arch with the hot water gushing out.” Lucy nodded. “Well, I’ve seen them both today in the original,” Tom remarked triumphantly.

“Tell us about the change,” coaxed Eresta. “It must be unrecognisable.”

“The amazing thing is that the shape of the Great Bath in the postcard was the same – with the pillars and paved surround.” Tom paused. “The roof had gone of course. There were Victorian statues of Roman figures instead, on the balustrades. The overflow looks just the same though – 1700 years on!”

“You’ll have to explain ‘Victorian’ to me later,” said Eresta, “but it all sounds incredible. What else did you see just now? You’ve been gone ages.”

“Well, there were a few people lounging around in the outer alcoves and spaces between the pillars, talking and sipping wine – some with only a sort of towelling flung over them.” Tom informed her, as they came to the Spring.

“Now we’ll be able to have a look at the very source of all this,” she said as she joined other visitors looking through a wide, latticed grid. Beckoning Tom and Lucy, who were hanging back, she squeezed them in beside her. They then had a good stare inside. “Here is the beginning,” she whispered to them with reverence. But Tom was thinking, ‘she feels real enough.’

The steaming, bubbling water was encompassed by cleverly made containing walls and terrace. There were three lone pillars, between which, beside the pool, stood two mysterious forms just discernible through a dim haze. They were sculptured Water Deities. Eresta, with her early Celtic memories of the ‘Waters of the Gap’, which were the entrance and outlet of the underworld, crossed herself. It was as if in Christian penance for the old feelings that rose in her heart, she remembered the old Gods, demanding human sacrifice, and the Earth-Mother images with their magic and crudeness. She turned to her charges and led them gently away from the Spring, but not before she’d pointed out to them how one could see straight through from the Spring to the altar out in the precinct.

“There’s a lot of movement going on out there,” she said. “It will soon be time for us to part company, but first I have some more things to say to you. Let’s go to that empty seat in the alcove.”

As they settled themselves down, Tom commented on the heat of

the water by repeating some facts he'd once read about it. "The water we have just seen," he pronounced, "is ancient rain which fell about 10,000 years ago. It penetrated deep into the earth. There, it was warmed by the natural heat of the earth's core, then found its way back through faults in the limestone."

"Well remembered Tom," said Lucy. "But you missed out about the water oozing out of the spring at a quarter of a million gallons a day!"

"Interesting discoveries," responded Eresta politely. "We used to believe it was the magic cauldron of the underworld, always red-hot, which heated the water. It also renewed the energy of Bel, our Sun-God, when he sunk there each night, making him ready for sun-rise in the morning. You know, there are hundreds of coins at the bottom of this Spring and also many pewter curses. The scribes, sitting near the entrance to the Precinct, were paid by people with a grudge to write on pieces of metal the full details of their grievance. These curses bore names of suspects, and asked for the punishment of the culprits, which included impotence or death."

"In our museum, where they keep and show off any Roman finds that are dug up, I saw an ivory block carved with what looked like a woman's breasts. And in the gift shop they sold 'Minerva soap' and 'Aequae Sulis' Bath Essence," commented Lucy, showing her interest.

"Can't imagine what those would be like," Eresta commented with a lilting laugh. "But as regards the portion of body you saw depicted on the stone from the Spring – it would have been either a request or a thank you to the Goddess for healing. This would relate to full immersion in the Great Bath."

"Did you look at the fearsome Sun-Head on the Temple pediment, when you were outside?" she then asked them.

"We saw it, but didn't get near," answered Lucy. "We are quite familiar with this 'Head', you see, because it was unearthed during building work in the Abbey precinct – I think it was in 1790, or thereabouts. And now its reproductions and pictures are seen everywhere round Bath. In the museum some broken bits of its surrounding design, which were located near it, were pieced roughly together."

"They found a bronze head of Minerva some time before that, when workmen were constructing a new sewer under Stall Street," added Tom. "This head must have belonged to her life-sized statue inside the Temple. But tell me, Eresta, who does that face on the Temple pediment really belong to?"

"As I see it," she began, "there are three connections. First, because this centrepiece is upheld by two Roman winged victory figures, it

could be associated with the hero Perseus who slew the Gorgon. Secondly, it could be the victorious Sun itself in Celtic guise – Bel, our Apollo. Or, my last suggestion is a favourite of mine, because we Celts loved our old stories.”

“Come on then, out with it!” pressed Tom eagerly.

Eresta cleared her throat and asked if they’d noticed the two wings and big ears half hidden among the head-locks; then, the ring of oak leaves. They both admitted that they hadn’t, so she went on to tell them her story.

“Your Bath, once called *Caer Bladim*, was an original cult centre of the Celtic Otherworld, and was under the power of a Mother Goddess – *Sulis*. This word means a hole, whirlpool or eye, and the word ‘*Bladhm*’ in Gaelic, is ‘flame’. This Goddess was seen as a water deity, having links with *Sul*, another ancient Sun-God. She was a seer and educator and watched over the spring, for it was a point of contact between humans and the Otherworld. Another clue to my story is the oak leaves, which are a symbol of kingship. Then there’s the suggestion of a warrior’s torque with entwined snakes on the lower part of the ‘Head’ – this is a Celtic neck ornament with magic power.”

“About the snakes,” burst in Tom. “What do they indicate?”

“Oh yes... They symbolise union with the elemental forces of nature and increase of fertility. Serpents were creatures of the Underworld, hiding in rocky clefts and close to the secrets of the Deities. There are six uncrested heads of female serpents and two crested males, knotted together under the chin. You like snakes I think!” said Eresta, looking at Tom.

“Please let her get on with the story, Tom,” pleaded Lucy impatiently.

“Right. Now *Bladud* was one of our heroes, and was a King-Priest in the Druid style, but becoming deified. He was the son of an early British king and spent years in Athens where he studied philosophy and mathematics. When he returned home he realised he’d contracted leprosy and so banished himself from his father’s court to become a swineherd. You know what followed.”

“Pigs, who love beech mast, led him to a cliff near Bath where lots of beech trees grew.” Lucy carried on the story. “It’s still called *Beechen Cliff* and overlooks the town. They replanted the trees last century.”

“Good, and thank you Lucy,” commented Eresta. “Did you know, I wonder, that pigs were thought to be magical creatures from the underworld? Another of our heroes, we believed, brought some back

with him for our benefit, after his daring raid into the underworld. Anyway, these animals guided Bladud down to a spring in the marshy area below where they wallowed in the warm waters. Bladud, seeing that they were thus cured of skin complaints, followed their example. After many daily bathes he was cured and went home, soon to become king. He worked many marvels, being a master of magic, alchemy and astrology. He also wrote books. He founded Bath around the spring he'd discovered, built Baths and a University there and was famous for his great deeds."

"A bit like Merlin," suggested Tom, "with his miracles and sciences."

"Merlin is a much more advanced spirit and is infinitely wiser," said Eresta, responding very seriously to Tom's words. "Our poor Bladud became rash and overstretched himself. He made the wings that enabled him to fly through the air, but also ended his life. He actually crashed to his death on the Temple of Apollo in Athens." She was silent for a minute.

"It's like the Greek myth of Bellerophon, my mother read to me. He was a hero who had killed a three-headed monster and was given a super winged horse, Pegasus, by Minerva. He aspired too high as well, and tried to ride into the upper realms of the Gods. But Zeus sent a gadfly to sting his horse and Bellerophon was unseated and fell, becoming lame and blind."

"Yes, Lucy, but the heroes, who conquered the monsters and ancient fears within our minds were trying to form a bridge between Deities and Mankind."

"So you think our famous Bath 'Head' depicts none other than the face of good old Bladud?" guessed Tom quite excitedly.

"Of course," confirmed Eresta with an indulgent smile. You've just got to look again at that hairy watcher with the flaming, wavy locks and staring eyes and you'll agree. Celtic warriors often had moustaches that covered their mouths. He could have been a Guardian. But, you see, Christianity swept away the old superstitions and fears connected with fierce and warlike old Gods. And we embraced it surprisingly easily... because it was sunlit."

"I don't see what you mean," complained Lucy with a frown.

"Well, Merlin put it best when he explained it in these words: 'Christ is the sun, the human imagination in everyone'," she quoted. "And as the sun rises each day from seeming death, so our Christ will always rise above death and darkness and light up all with new life and show up the good things. The Christ within us."

"I get it," spoke up Lucy. "When the sun is out everything looks

more beautiful – like the blossoms in spring, so bright against a blue sky. They don't give much joy though on a grey and drizzly day. I'm reminded of an oldie wartime song of ours (yes, we had two terrible wars) which went like this: 'You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,' and Lucy hummed a bar.

"You've understood, Lucy," asserted Eresta, sounding very impressed.

"But this song was about love," Tom interjected.

"Well, God is Love, the gospels tell us. Though Bladud built a temple to Minerva here, and called it Belissima, everything is different now and the veils of all the temples were torn away. The glory of it is that now it's a human being like ourselves, the Son of Man, who first recognised God as a loving father, and who is now our shining link with the Creator." Eresta finished with conviction.

"Thinking about the Sun-Gods," pondered Tom, "the sun actually is the source of our life on earth, isn't it? Nature sustains us. By the way, your quote was from Blake."

"You're right, young man," replied their unusual friend, "but just think how Mother Nature has excelled herself and reached the apex of creation by producing a wonder in the form of Jesus, whose strong, loving personality and resulting words and actions can alter the world, for He's the Christ, Lord of the Universe."

"A stunning way of putting it," conceded Tom, "but I'm afraid we're being watched. The man who looks like some sort of official is suspicious of us."

"Yes, it's time you joined up with your friends," said Eresta quickly.

"Merlin has a lot to answer for," she joked, "putting all these words into my head – but they are my thoughts as well. Fancy Aquae Sulis being called Bath in the twentieth century! When he told me this I was so surprised. Anyway you'll soon want to go back there when you see what's happening outside. I'm told you can abort this visit whenever you like. I must leave you in the porch."

"Is it a special solar ritual or something?" asked Tom, a bit too keenly.

"It's the time of the Beltane festival," answered Eresta, "when they make many animal sacrifices. It's to celebrate the end of winter and to greet the sun as it returns to its brightness. You'll have no stomach for it." And suddenly Lucy was frightened and spoke nostalgically about her real time.

"With us at home it's just past our Whitsun holiday; so it's summer."

“Merlin told me this, but explained that he’d worked it so that his Time Exchange would be activated here a month earlier than the time of your June departure. He felt you should all experience the crudities at the roots of our fledgling religions. They all start, he says, by the urge or strong desire to worship someone greater than oneself... Yes, we must go. Come on, my dears.” Eresta finished with a warm smile.

They all got up and walked hurriedly towards the entrance and the large porch. When they entered it they saw, to their relief, that Sam and Gilly were already there. After greeting them happily, Lucy turned to introduce Eresta, but she had gone. They were disappointed, but full of questions.

“We had such a nice lady to explain everything and look after us,” said Lucy. “We’ll have lots to tell you about the Baths. Where have you been?”

Then Sam told them about the Centurion on the steps, describing him to them enthusiastically, not knowing that Eresta had been Gaius’s wife.

“He probably looked like the Roman Centurion figure that looks down on the open remains of the Baths at home,” commented Tom, admiringly.

“Yes, he did actually,” said Sam, “but he told us we should leave now.”

“Where is he? I want to see him. Can’t we stay a little longer?”

They then looked out onto the Precinct again and were truly horrified at what they saw, and now heard.

Through a gap in the crowd could be seen two robed priests holding to their mouths long, narrow trumpets. The sound of strange, high-pitched notes filled the air when they blew them. Another priest was pouring out a libation or offering over a smaller altar nearby decked with flowers. The liquid looked like blood. When he’d done this there was a low ripple of voices in exclamation and awe.

As our unwilling youngsters were pushed nearer the altar by people now coming out of the Baths, they could see the glint of a knife in the hands of a brutish-looking man. He wore a short tunic, a rough band round his head and a cloth draped over his shoulders. He was crouching behind the priest, and beside them the Eternal Flame still burned steadily.

A patient, unsuspecting ox, which was being led forward, peered curiously at the flame and then at the priest. Some sheep, uneasy and restless, looked around for a way of escape. Pigeons fluttered in their cages, and the pig, suspicious of everyone, was struggling with its handlers. Finally, it gave out the most ear-splitting squeals, for it knew

the score.

Gillian, now white and shaky, looked at Tom who was staring at the scene with a sort of fascination, then at Sam, appealing for him to take over.

“We want out; are you ready Tom?” said Sam firmly. “You must come with us, and straight away. We’ve had enough. The girls look sick. Come on, let’s go back to the porch first. I see it’s empty again now so we won’t be noticed.” They all, then, squeezed their way back and quickly tore off their headgear.

Back in their Circus room the four travellers found themselves sitting once more in the special chairs, which were now swivelled round. They were facing the sparkling colours of the giant crystal ball.

“Welcome again, my brave adventurers,” boomed the voice of their Master Magician. “You’ve listened, looked and learned your lessons well. You’ve certainly had enough for one day. I think you should have a quiet period now, to adjust yourselves to your present lives after your disturbing brush with Time. You’ll find it has shaken and altered many of your attitudes.

“Aren’t we coming back soon, for our trip to the future?” ventured Gilly.

“Of course you are,” replied Merlin. “I always keep my word, but it will be nearly Autumn again before you are all ready. I suggest you try telling your Aunt more about these strange, ‘future-natural’ episodes. You’ll be surprised how much she understands, and she’ll not make fun of you or tell anyone. She must have suspected something. I know her, you see, and gave her many hints of my plans for you. She’s under a trusting Gemini sign. She is ever looking for her twin. Off you go now, but please come back when summer’s over.”

“Yes, we will,” agreed Lucy. “My parents and Gilly’s are friends together. They call themselves agnostics, or something, and often come over here on the ferry for humanist conferences in London. They bring us too, and leave us with Gilly’s Aunt. We all like Bath since our first trip, when we flew over.”

“My parents were killed in a car crash,” added Tom brusquely.

“I know,” said Merlin.

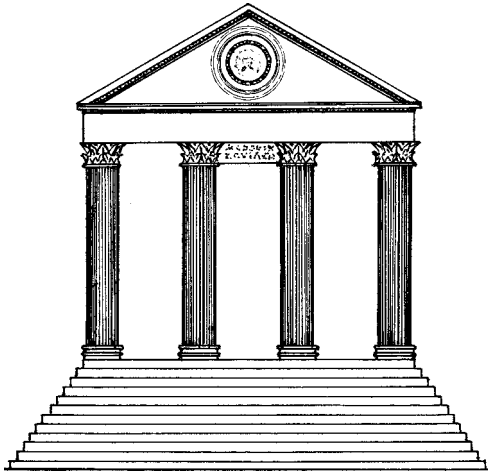
After this there was silence, but the crystal ball kept turning slowly.

“Come on you lot, he’s gone,” Sam confirmed loudly. “You all look hypnotised! It must be time for either tea or supper by now. It’s nice that Aunt Sophie can be told of our Time Trips. Cheer up Tom, life looks good again.”

The youthful explorers stood up and left the house, emerging into the hot, sunny afternoon. Lucy felt that the sun would never mean the

same to her after their Temple visit. Summer-clad people were lying on the Circus grass – sun-worshipping perhaps! Gilly took Lucy’s arm and they both smiled.

“Hey boys,” Gilly called. “Let’s go swimming tomorrow.”



9

At the Court of King Arthur

The summer had passed and it was autumn again in the Circus.

Our four young adventurers were taking their places in the four chairs that had been standing ready for them. They all felt eager and excited – even more so than this time a year ago. They were not disappointed.

The voice of Merlin broke the silence, causing a spine-tingling shiver.

“Good! All present, I see,” he began jovially. Then, more seriously, he told them that he, being ‘Time’s Metre’, opened a gate into eternity every 200 years or so and, he continued, “I shall complete my twentieth century visitation by identifying to you these current archetypal manifestations before we slide into the next millennium. The twenty-first century should see humanity coming of age and putting away childish things. But now, my chosen characters have re-embodied and re-enacted the deeds, for your age, of those mythical heroes of the great Arthurian cycle.”

“I suppose it fulfils another legend too... in a way,” braved Gilly in a hesitant voice. “Arthur and his men were supposed to be sleeping in some hidden cave until the time when Britain needed them again, weren’t they?”

“Yes, I woke them alright,” laughed Merlin.

“It all sounds marvellous,” commented Sam, “but so far all this has not done much good – things seem to be getting worse, not better. No-one is listening.”

“It is all to do with the birth-pangs of a new Renaissance,” Merlin assured the boy. “Though these examples of high achievement are now dead, their influence and copious writings will come to full blossom in the next century. You’ll witness this yourself, and sooner than you think! Lohengrin, the Swan Prince, was the son of Percivale and Blanchfleur, the Grail Maiden. Gillian will remember this, I’m sure. He carries on the flame as well, into the new millennium. I have already thrown my enchanted mantle around him.”

Tom now burst out in exasperation: “Come on! Let’s have names then. I can hardly wait. But I’ve probably not heard of any of them, if they’re dead.”

Merlin reproached him. “I wonder when you will learn a little patience Tom. The workings of spiritual evolution are as slow as the planetary sort, of which it’s a part. It’s very, very, *very* slow! Great men and women are the signposts and lodestars of humanity. With their aid we keep moving and can steer our course. The list I’m giving you includes the chief members of my latest team. They were personally very well loved and admired during their time here (and after) and led a highly energetic and fruitful life. They all possessed endless patience, and a huge hope for the future. Hope is always rewarded in the end, and you four will be able to verify this yourselves very soon now.”

“Faith, hope and love – the three things which pull the world forward towards unity,” commented Lucy in a quiet voice, surprising them all. “It was what my favourite R.E. teacher was always saying,” Lucy explained, “and she often quoted the text: ‘Faith is the substance of things hoped for’. I never understood it before, but now I do. It makes things happen.”

“For goodness sake Lucy, let’s get on,” grumbled Tom, but was out voiced.

“You are growing up quickly my girl,” boomed Merlin approvingly. “So... now. You can all take careful note of my seven Lords. They were, of course, ably backed up with other good knights with whom I won’t confuse you now.”

“Who is King Arthur then?” persisted Tom relentlessly. “He’s first.”

“Sir Oliver Lodge FRS,” announced Merlin, “stands in for him with style. As a pioneer of radiography and a revered University Principal, he fits in.”

“He seems well qualified for the position,” admitted Sam. “But what else did he do, and why isn’t he still famous and taught about in schools?”

Merlin answered his questions in full. “Well,” he began, “to start with he was once Physics Professor at Liverpool University and made Hon.DSc. at the University of Manchester where, incidentally, one of the first computers was set up 50 years ago. Also he was a member of Philosophical, Psychical and Arts Societies as well and President of the Radio Society. So you see he had a good background for his passionate struggle to bring together science and the Christian religion, which was his true aim. Like other members of his fellowship of courtly warriors, he too had felt the sense of a presence in nature and recognised it as benign. But then came the Great War – a horrific

one in which millions of young men were slaughtered, including his own son and much of the flower of European youth. Though he was still trying desperately to communicate with the young in the decades before by writing popular books about the romance of science, he gave up this naive approach. Seeing the madness that took its hold between the two world wars he then neglected his war-torn sciences and was succeeded by Einstein. He died in 1940 at the beginning of another hell in which millions more were killed.”

“I’m afraid I’d never heard of him either,” lamented Gilly.

“Quite understandable, though his thoughts at the turn of the century inspired many later followers, some of whom may be familiar. They went beyond him, but in the same direction. This would have pleased him, as he was a great communicator and was concerned at one point with developing the early wireless receivers. You’ll all think it unlikely – what I’m going to tell you next – but he also spent much time, together with other experts, attempting to make contact with deceased persons in the after-life. Yes, this same man who was the first to detect and identify radio waves from the sun and the other celestial bodies, was dabbling seriously in spiritualism and the paranormal.”

“Did he succeed in talking to anyone?” asked Gill with great interest.

“Yes, often, but such was the scepticism of that time that no-one took much notice. But this was only the beginning of a communications explosion.”

“Surely he also released many knights from Camelot (the twentieth century version) to search for the Holy Grail, and three of them found it. One came back to report on their adventures and discoveries and how the mysterious vessel had withdrawn from Earth for a season.” Gilly warmed to her theme.

“Thank you Gillian, I was coming round to that. So now all that remains for me is to repeat to you all some extracts from a small book he wrote in 1907, and which was re-published in a ‘shilling’ edition in 1915. He says: ‘The humanity of God and divinity of Man is the essence of the Christian revelation.’ He also suggested that the concept of God should be, in the first place, ‘a God not apart from the universe, not outside it or distinct from it, but imminent (immersed) in it... and the nature of God is displayed, in part, by everything, to those who have eyes to see.’ He quoted two lines from the poet Browning, ‘Earth’s crammed with Heaven, and every common bush afire with God.’ Later he gives us part of this verse from Coleridge:

*'Tis the sublime of man,
Our noontide majesty, to know ourselves
Part and proportion of one wondrous whole.'*

“He ends the book with the words:

*'Life of a far higher kind than any we know is attainable by
the human race on this planet. It rests... with ourselves. The
outlook was never brighter than it is today... the heralds are
already tuning their songs for a reign of brotherly love... and
a new perception of the value of life.'*

“This he could write at the beginning of the century.”

There was a short silence, then Lucy piped up again shrilly. She said, “I’ll bet he didn’t write many more words like that after the war!”

“Well,” answered Merlin, “he did continue some such writing in two small books written in 1925 and published in The People’s Library and The Broadcast Library series that was edited by the young Lord Reith, who was an early chairman of your BBC. Our King Arthur man was still hoping that the world would pick itself up and see its goal anew. He insisted that we, as part of the universe, which is a part of God, must also be sons and daughters and co-workers with God.”

“He must then have asked the question,” suggested Sam, “as to whether, in the face of the slow, laborious progress of evolution, will the outcome be worth it all?”

“You’re quite right Sam, he even asked if Mankind would ever be worthy of the ‘magnificent scene... and majestic pageant in which his lot had been cast.’ He ended by rallying his readers to renewal of commitment, pleading:

*'Shall we... sting each other here in the dust and die? Or
shall we realise that we are the heir of all the ages, that...
humanity has a future, a potential one, beyond our wildest
dreams!'*

“What think you of that, my cybernauts?”

“I think that this Holy Vessel, which broke up The Round Table, and then when found disappeared from the Earth, must have come back now!” said Tom with a mischievous chuckle. “Newspapers are still describing the latest sporting achievements and scientific discoveries as ‘the finding of their Holy Grail.’ Only last week I read this about a major milestone in neurobiology’s quest for the ‘Holy

Grail of spinal cord regeneration’. Weird! Each new breakthrough – a sighting.”

“It’s no joke Tom,” responded Merlin. “One must feel rewarded for great efforts and it demonstrates the power of legends – that this still seems the obvious way of expressing it all. An accolade of success. Anyway, I must now get on to the next item in my ‘naming ceremony’ – the identification of Sir Lancelot, Arthur’s chief knight and the best. You will remember perhaps, Gillian, how Sir Hector describes him in one of the stories.” Gilly nodded.

“Well, I’ll repeat it for the others,” the magic voice continued, “and refresh your memory with these few words from Malory, describing Arthur’s champion:

*‘Thou were the most courteous knight that ever bore shield,
...the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode a horse and
the kindest man that ever struck with sword.’*

“This was addressed to Lancelot after his showing of courtesy towards someone who had injured him.”

“Yes... but,” broke in Sam again, “in spite of being the noblest lord, I read once that he’d committed the unforgivable sin of the medieval lover, namely, infidelity to his mistress. And his mistress was the King’s wife!”

“It’s not as simple as you think, my boy. Lancelot was faithful to his Guinevere (the Queen about whom we hear little more) to the end. He was the great lover but, though so bold and serene, was troubled by this indulged passion. The ensuing episode of mistaken identity, with its loss of honour and personal meaning, nearly destroyed him though. I was sad, but with Time’s foreknowledge I knew this must be embedded in the story. I then prepared for its happening. My last Earthly host, whom I told you about, puts it this way:

*‘Lancelot, ridden on a merciful errand, came
that night to the house: there, drugged and blurred
by the medicated drink of Brisen, Merlin’s sister,
he lay with the princess Helayne, supposed Guinevere.’*

“On waking in the remote castle where he had been led the night before he saw it was Elayne lying next to him. In the morning light, the magically contrived likeness to Guinevere had gone and he realised the deception. As he flung open the window and the enchantment faded he knew he had done amiss and was ashamed. He leapt out, clad

only in his shirt, fell into a bed of roses, sprang up scratched and bleeding and ran off into a wild wood. There, in his madness and remorse, he wandered for many months living like an animal, his mind overthrown. It was terrible to see.”

“And poor Elayne,” sympathised Lucy. “Was she in love with Lancelot?”

“Yes. It had been love at first sight for her, and she tried hard to explain and ask forgiveness before he left. But Lancelot only ever had eyes for the Queen to whom he felt he’d been untrue. Elayne disappears from the story until the sad, final meeting. Sir Bors goes in search of Lancelot and finds himself in the wasteland from where he comes to the mysterious Grail Castle. When he enters he finds the same Elayne, daughter of the wounded King Pelles, the Grail Keeper. She is cradling a baby in her arms that she claims to be Lancelot’s son and who is named Galahad. She is still grieving though for her long lost knight.”

“How on earth could Lancelot have remained hidden or unidentified all that time and still have survived?” Gilly asked.

“Well, this is legend, you see, but he did have the appearance of a wild man – only half-human. However, next morning Bors rode out, and on into the darkened woods. There, during his search, he joined more knights from Camelot where all had been asking what had become of Lancelot. Eventually he was found asleep by a well, and was recognised. He was taken, still sleeping, back to the house of the Grail. Then by miracle and by virtue of being in close proximity to the Holy Vessel, he was healed and recovered. He was often tended by Elayne herself, to whom he showed his former courtesy. He then, with Percivale, returned to court – a man again. It’s the last we hear of Elayne... unless, as the Lady of Shallot! Her Galahad was brought up in a convent.”

“I expect she suffered a broken heart?” bemoaned Lucy.

“Lancelot couldn’t pretend to love her – could he? Anyway, later he unknowingly knighted their son, and bid him arise as ‘Sir’ Galahad.”

“However could this happen?” challenged Sam.

“Easily,” countered Merlin. “Lancelot consented to follow a messenger who came for him on behalf of King Pelles. He was taken to the same nunnery where he was presented with this comely youth whose desire it was to be dubbed by his father. Lancelot had no idea who Galahad was at that time.”

“You’ve been side-tracked again,” complained Tom. “Who is our Lancelot?”

“I agree with you Tom. I’ll continue straight away with my

‘naming’ task. My new man for Lancelot is Havelock Ellis, called H.E. by his friends during his lifetime. He was a humanist par excellence; agnostic, but leaning towards Christ-like ideals. He was a great investigator, a writer and individualist, but loyal to his friends. He had the precision of a psychologist and the vision of a seer. He stayed faithful to his wife until her death, even though he had great provocations. He never stopped loving her, even after she died. He was a courageous adventurer in matters of Eros – and a spiritual pioneer. How’s that, then, do you think, for a good fit?”

“But did he have an affair, though?” asked Sam, half in jest.

“Yes... actually, a very short one, but his notoriously wayward wife was so jealous when he admitted his feelings that his poor admirer, who had been helping in his wife’s absence, fled the scene never to return. Their brief attraction had involved only a kiss or two! He had great faith in women and he never stopped growing.”

“But there again, he’s quite unfamiliar to us,” said Gilly, sounding disappointed. “Our parents might know of him I suppose.”

“But you see, my girl,” came the reply, “these early century heroes may be lost for a time, but they will be found again after many decades, to be treasured for ever. It takes at least fifty years for their kind of writings to reach the masses. They’ll be more up-to-date again and you’ll catch up on them. I can guarantee that in spite of death the fruit of human labour is so valuable that it is irreversible... cannot be lost. I know this. H.E.’s works were said ‘to smell of the earth and partake of the salt of the sea’.”

“I had heard of him,” volunteered Tom, “but only for something he wrote about sex. It’s a huge manual in seven volumes and a sort of dictionary or index for students – Studies in the Psychology of Sex, I think it’s called.”

“Yes... that’s a reason why he became a Doctor of Medicine, to give himself a solid background to tackle this daunting task. He decided he was the one to do it and that because of the attitudes and repressive secrecy of Victorian sex, it badly needed doing. Many of his friends felt he could have ill-afforded the thirty years it took him to finish it. Perhaps few people need it now, but it’s there in the library – in case.”

“Do you think it had anything to do with the throwing out of so many moral taboos in the sixties – all that Flower Power and New Age stuff?” asked Sam, feeling embarrassed for being a bit ignorant in these things.

“Well, it did have a big effect and perhaps culminated in the sixties with the explosion of freedom and openness. The trouble was that the young people tried to have it all without the deeper and more positive

sides of relationships with each other, the world and the universe. You can't have one without the other. What's freedom for, when you have it? I ask you."

"I remember an aunt telling me once," said Tom, "that, in the swinging sixties they used to quote lines from Blake such as: 'Damn braces, bless relaxes', and 'abstinence throws sand all over the ruddy limbs and flaming hair...' So what about that? Just for starters anyway!"

"Yes I know, and the last bit ends with the words: 'But desire gratified plants fruits of life and beauty there.' My William said some potentially outrageous things, but he was only trying, like H.E., to release and correct the Christian fear of, and aversion to, sex. William said once: 'If moral virtue were Christianity, Christ's pretensions were all vanity... I'm sure this sort of Jesus will not do! Ours showed love, kindness and forgiveness.'

"So, pardon my quoting again, but here he condemns those who pervert and spoil:

*'Love's temple that God dwelleth in,
And hide in secret hidden shrine
The naked human form divine,
And render that a lawless thing,
On which the soul expands its wings.'*"

"I saw some lines of Blake on the wall at Waterstone's last week," remarked Gilly. "They were hung over a new Blake biography: 'Love seeks not itself to please... but for another gives its ease, and builds a heaven in hell's despair.' This stayed in my mind for days."

"And I learnt at school his famous verse... you know! It goes, 'To see a world in a grain of sand, and a heaven in a wild flower...'" began Lucy.

"Alright, we know the rest," interrupted Tom. "I also remember a few of his sayings... such as: 'One thought fills immensity', and 'A robin redbreast in a cage, puts all heaven in a rage.' His phrases, once heard, seem to stick."

"I too have some favourites," joined in Sam, "like 'The soldier, arm'd with sword and gun, palsied strikes the summer's sun.' Or 'A skylark wounded in the wing, a cherubim does cease to sing.' Good stuff I think."

"Yes, and this: 'The Game cock clip't and arm'd for fight, does the rising sun affright.' Remember your horror at the old Westgate timberyard my Cybernauts? So there you are!" exulted the Mage. "You all brought to mind these words again so easily. Dear William – he too planted many seeds. Now back to H.E. Today you must have noticed

that the leaves were beginning to fall again from those giant trees outside – well in one of his essays he writes thus: ‘The random leaves are scattered to the winds. As they flutter to earth, one or another may be caught by an idle passer-by and perhaps seem worthy of contemplation. No two leaves are alike even when they fall from the same tree.’ Many will catch this man’s thoughts for he was fearless with words. A fitting end to my character sketch would be H.E.’s comments on Jesus.”

“But I thought you said he was not a proper Christian,” objected Lucy.

“No, but he could still write that it was ‘the peculiar virtue of the personality of Jesus that all the highest inspirations and insights from an innumerable company of men and women could adhere to it – then be drawn together into a congruous whole.’ As H.E. turned over with reverent joy the leaves of the Gospels, he felt ‘there was enshrined the greatest achievement of human art – a creation to which nothing could be added and nothing taken away.’ You see Lucy, he understood the power of the Christ Figure – so ‘tremulously tender in its loving-kindness’. Surely, nearly a Christian!”

“Yet the original Lancelot never achieved the Grail,” said Gilly. “Nor was H.E. a Grail Knight, even though he rescued sex from guilt. That’s sad.”

“Well, in a way Galahad’s triumph is even sadder. But I shall come to the three Grail Knights in a minute. But H.E., ‘Bird of Dawn’, gave a waking cry.”

“Why was he called a ‘bird of dawn’?” spoke up Lucy again.

“When we are unable to face the present or believe in the future, then we should look to one who with such vigilance has kept watch for us. We should say of H.E., as he once said of the cock: ‘At the hour when human vitality is at its lowest ebb... then it is that the watchman of the earth raises his voice and the cock crows: All is well with the world.’ This was the quotation with which H.E.’s biographer ended the book about him called ‘An Artist of Life’. Can you hear a song in the background? I can.”



“It’s called Imagine. John Lennon wrote it,” Sam said listening.

“But this H.E. – was he handsome?” asked Lucy.

“Yes, *very*,” asserted Merlin with a light-hearted little cough. “I think you’d have been quite in love with him!” The voice, serious again, went on: “I’ll now set out to you the three names of my twentieth century Grail Knights:

“Sir Percivale – Charles Williams – died Whit-Sunday 1945;

“Sir Galahad – Teilhard de Chardin – died Easter Sunday 1955;

“Sir Bors – Paul Tillich – died Michaelmas Day 1965.

“Then there’s Sir Gareth. He was the squire you met on your middle age Time Trip when you also met Sir Galahad and Sir Bors (the newer versions). Sir Percivale, the philosophical knight, was back at Glastonbury with the Round Table Company at the time.”

“What was this Gareth knight known for then in the original story?” asked Tom in a dull and slightly bored tone of voice.

“Gareth, according to Malory, was the knight who, though a Prince (son of King Lot of Orkney), insisted on working incognito in Arthur’s kitchen for a year and was often humiliated; especially by a certain Lady Linnet! One day, from a doorway, he saw Galahad and recognised him at once for his strength of purpose. Here’s how Charles Williams describes it:

*‘The King’s poet had gone from the Palace Hall and was walking
the lower corridors between maids and squires,
past the offices and fires of the king’s kitchens,
till he came by a door cleft in a smooth wall
into the outer yard, the skied hall of the guards,
grooms and scullions... He stood, looking up...;
he touched his harp, low-chanting a nursery rhyme:
A youth came up in the dark, the king’s scavenger...’*

“Was it Gareth?” Lucy cried, unable to contain herself.

“Yes, it was,” confirmed Merlin, unruffled by the interruption. “And he asked the harpist to tell him more about the new knight he’d last seen:

*‘Gareth said: ‘Lord, before the meal,
when he washed his hands, the water became phosphorescent;
did you not see?’ and he: ‘Sanctity
common and crescent! I have seen it flushed anew
in each motion and mode of the princess Blanchefleur;
who walked dropping light, as all our beloved do...’*

“The word ‘crescent’ here means, I guess, ‘increasing’, not new moon shaped! You notice I’ve retained in my mind most of C.W.’s poems,” Merlin finished.

“They are good, but parts are, at first, a bit difficult to latch on to,” commented Gill, “and you haven’t told the others much about Blanchefleur.”

“True, I stand corrected, but you see this leads me on to my first Grail knight – Sir Percivale of Wales. But first I must tell you who is our new Sir Gareth. I name John Robinson, the Bishop of Woolwich, for this post. He fought manfully to make known two new Grail knights and popularise the new thinking in a Church whose very foundations were already being shaken. He wrote many challenging books – the pen being mightier than the sword – and these included ‘Honest to God’, which made that salutary stir-up. He died prematurely, as Gareth did in the Arthurian legend, and was a brave man.”

“My mother told me, when he died,” said Sam, “that in Ireland especially they were ashamed to be seen with that heretical book and often hid it!”

“Well, he tried recasting the Church’s mould. He called it a reluctant revolution and talked about worldly holiness etc. He questioned the whole religious framework, though he himself was a great New Testament scholar.”

“Wherever is that noise coming from?” demanded Tom suddenly. “It sounds just like horses pounding down a woodland path.” The other three also were now looking apprehensively round the dimly lit room.

“Don’t worry,” Merlin assured them. “That’s what it is! But it’s only my way of preparing a little show for you about the early life of Percivale.” The huge screen then burst into life and the youngsters who had been sitting so patiently felt that they were inside thick, high-vaulted woodland. Shafts of sunlight fell through the leaves to the ground, and paths crossed each other. There was a swarthy youth, dressed in a skin garment, and standing motionless in a small clearing.

“That is the young Percivale,” Merlin informed them. “He was brought up in the wild forests of North Wales, living only with his mother for fifteen years! She, having lost her husband during one of Arthur’s confrontations, was determined to keep her son away from it all. Percivale is here listening to a new sound in the woods. Then he saw the five ‘knights in shining armour’, as the saying goes today, riding towards him. He heard the armour jingling and the bridles of the horses ringing like silver bells, which is what you can all hear now. This set Percivale’s heart a-leaping.”

The voice was silent then while the life-like display took over.

Our Cybernauts watched enthralled as the first knight reined in his horse and smiled down at Percivale. "Greetings fair youth," he said in a deep voice. "You seem struck with amazement, surely you've seen our like before?"

"Never," stammered the boy. "I know not what you are unless you be angels such as my mother speaks of. Do you serve the King of Heaven?" he asked. The four watchers then heard the good-natured laughter of the other men but the speaker crossed himself and answered: "Him do we serve indeed, but on Earth we serve The Noble King Arthur. He made us Knights, which we are, and he would do the same for you if you but prove yourself worthy of the honour."

"How can I do that?" asked Percivale in his excited Welsh accent.

"Be ready to rescue the distressed, challenge the tyrant and yet strive for peace – all to the glory of God," came the answer.

"Wherever would I start?" lamented the youth, bowing his head.

"Go to Arthur's Court at Camelot and tell him that I, Sir Lancelot of the Lake (for that was who he was), have sent you thither."

With that the man gave a little bow and rode on. He was followed by the other four knights as soon as they could lift their horses' heads from cropping the side grass. The sound of their hooves faded and the screen went blank. There were expressions of protest from the youngsters.

"We were really enjoying that," said Sam in a slightly resentful tone.

"I know, but that's nothing compared to what you will all be able to conjure up at the end of your next trip in year 2050. I will finish the story myself to save time as we're behind schedule. Our last Time-Travel sequence is the most difficult. We may have to leave it for tomorrow now." There were groans of disappointment from the floor and the inevitable comment from Tom admonishing Merlin. "Please get on with it then!" he said.

"Well, to tell you more about Blanchefleur, I'll come as quickly as I can to Percivale's first encounter with her, so bear with me. When his mother learned of her son's new resolve to become a knight, she wept and tried to dissuade him. Then, knowing she now must lose him, gave him his way but told him he must always remember these three things: if dame or damsel ask his aid, give it freely and ask no reward (he may kiss the maiden but no more unless it be exchange of rings); to choose carefully with whom he travels on quests; and, lastly, to pray to God that He may be with him in all his deeds, never passing a church or chapel without pausing there in His honour. Percivale kissed his mother goodbye and set out."

“Foolhardy, I’d say! He had no weapons or equipment,” scoffed Tom.

“He had his dart, which he was brilliant at using,” pointed out Gilly.

“Anyway,” Merlin continued undaunted. “When it came to evening he came across a small pavilion beside a stream and, thinking it might be a chapel, he went in. There he saw a damsel asleep on a silken couch – one white arm stretched out and her hair lighting up the pillow like sunshine. Gently Percivale bent down over her and took from her finger the ring she wore – a gold band set with a red ruby. He replaced it with his own, one that his mother had given him and which shone with a white diamond. Then, without waking her he kissed her lightly on the lips and stole away, his heart singing with a new wonder.”

“I would certainly have woken up,” exclaimed Lucy in disbelief.

“This is legend, girl – for goodness sake! It’s dream stuff, but a damn good story. It tells us about this youth’s character – impetuous, compulsive and uncomplicated. Now let me get on with it. He slept that night among the roots of a great oak tree. Next day he reached Caerleon and later Camelot. This was the start of adventures, acts of courage and finally knighthood.”

“Who was this maiden?” questioned Sam, “and does he meet her again?”

Tom broke in here, looking more interested now. “Good God!” he said. “I’d certainly think so with those fabulous rings involved.”

“Of course. This maiden was Blanche fleur,” continued Merlin, “whom he eventually marries. He met her once more before the final meeting and his recognition of her as the Grail Maiden and Guardian. The second time was when, as a lone knight, he came upon a strange, dark castle surrounded by wasteland. The walls were shattered, the towers cracked down the sides, yet no weeds grew among the stones or cobbles. Being Percivale, he entered through the portcullis, tied his horse to a ring in the wall and started to explore. There was a light in the deserted Great Hall, a fire burning and dinner set. On a small side table was a chessboard and its pieces moved magically each time our knight made a move. Three times he lost the game, which made him so furious that he drew his sword to crush the board. With that, a damsel rushed in and warned him of the dire results of such an action. As he asked for her identity and she was giving her name he noticed, in the candlelight, that she was wearing his ring. With a gasp of joy he knew her for the maiden in the pavilion. She then recognised hers on his finger also. Percivale then told her his name and asked her pardon for what he had done that day by the river – but she admitted that she had since seen him in her dreams and her heart had gone out to him.”

“Surely, that clinched it all – he would never leave her again now,” said Lucy, standing up and clasping her hands at the happy outcome.

“Well he did, and I’ll tell you why in a minute. You can all get up and walk around my crystal when I’ve finished this episode.” Merlin cleared his voice and went on: “After Blanchefleur had invited Percivale to sit down to supper, and settled herself next to him, he asked her to marry him. She said the time was not yet, and as she touched him, a roar of thunder shook the castle, the Hall door flew open and he witnessed the Grail Procession going by. There were three veiled women. The first held up a great chalice, half covered – but a light, too bright to gaze at, shone from within it. The second bore a golden platter, and the third carried a spear with a point of white light from which dripped blood that vanished before it touched the ground.”

“Ugh!” said Lucy.

“That’s not the feeling it left behind,” Gilly assured her. “It all meant something of great impact to those knights, you’ll see. Blanchefleur’s seat was empty.”

“Thanks,” said Merlin. “I have to skip things. You can read it up later, so on I go. As this marvel passed him, Percivale sank to his knees, his head in his hands. The whole room seemed filled with sweet scents as of roses and spices. The vision left him with a feeling of utter peace of heart and a great happiness. Blanchefleur tried to explain that he would see it again when the time was ripe and Galahad came to Camelot and sat in the empty seat at the Round Table. Then all will seek the Grail, but only the most worthy will find it. But Percivale could not wait for this and told her he would go on quest for it now and try his luck. Rising, head bowed, he turned and ran down the Hall, not heeding Blanchefleur’s cry, leapt upon his waiting horse and galloped into a forest. Next morning the madness had left him, but when he tried to ride back to the mysterious castle again he could find no trace of it – nor the desolate land that surrounded it. He grieved deeply for his lost love and always looked out for her and hoped they’d be reunited.”

Then, at Merlin’s suggestion, the four of them left their seats and wandered over to the crystal ball, circling it a few times, dreamily. After a while, and one by one, they thought they could discern something in the centre of the turning globe. It was the shape of a simple drinking goblet, but it reflected all the colours of the rainbow in its polished surface. The young adventurers then experienced a most wonderful feeling and when they looked at one another they each thought that the face of the other looked more beautiful than they’d ever seen it before.

Breaking into their reverie, Merlin's voice quietly advised them to look towards the curtained window for some refreshment. There they saw a table they hadn't noticed before, and on it were four well-filled plates of food.

"Take them back to your seats," was the next instruction, "and set to." In silence and awe our Cybnauts returned to their chairs and sitting down without a word studied the meal each had chosen. Though the plates and utensils were only plastic they found that the eatables consisted of the very things that each young person liked best of all. It tasted really super as well.

"You've all experienced a little of what happened to the knights when this holy spectacle appeared before them," said Merlin. "Collect the plates Sam." After returning the empty plates, Sam settled back in listening mood.

"Now," the voice began, "I quickly come to our twentieth century Percivale in the form of the King's Poet – Charles Williams. In the legend, this knight goes on to show his mettle in struggles with fiends, witches and temptresses; once with a bewitched black horse, big and strong, which bolted with him. He has to cure his pride though before he can achieve the Grail. So, like Percivale, our stand-in is a man of action and also a philosopher, even a mystic where love is concerned. He was an indefatigable worker with words, had a wife and son and, like H.E., had a romantic affair (never consummated). He gathered together the joys and fears of our company in songs and lyrical poems, thereby doubling and deepening their significance."

"That's a bit like many of the themes in the Beatles' songs during the Sixties," suggested Gillian. "My Aunt Sophie loved them as she said they were about everyday things given new importance. I've heard some of them... 'Paperback Writer', 'Eleanor Rigby', 'With a Little Help From My Friends' ... I guess she is right. Today's songs have no tune, lots of drum and the wilder, the more primitive, the better. The words are often about doom, casual sex or crude fantasy and they are repeated over and over again. Many boys think of love only in terms of sex. It can all be exciting but it leaves me feeling depressed."

"I saw a Voodoo kit advertised recently with intricate instructions on how to use it," said Tom. "There are sex shops and sex videos (some really nasty) and I'd say, surprising myself, that its all gone too far."

"I think we now need someone to rescue sex from abuse and stupid trivialities," called out Sam with some feeling.

"You are all quite right. I'm pleased you say these things. My Cybnauts are awake! I see your country is going through a crisis of identity. It's having a sort of nervous breakdown! There is a cult of

ugliness, self-hating and violence, even sadism, triggered off by your sicker artists, film directors and writers. In the vacuum youth has nothing to head for. The old conventional church has been wounded and its growing edge dormant for too long. I know... I'll play one of your Beatle songs which puts it all quite well." At once the original recording of 'Nowhere Man' filled the room on high volume: – 'Doesn't have a point of view, Don't know where he's going to, sitting in his Nowhere Land making plans for nobody... like me and you?'"

Our teenagers listened, intrigued, to this golden oldie, and when the sound faded out Merlin continued with his summary of the situation.

"I see that young people still have nowhere to go, so they revert to earlier and alien cultures or join the many exotic movements springing up which have a rapid growth to begin with, but, like the Bible parable, become lank and often burn up in the sun because their earth is shallow. Some young Christians now take refuge in a wave of American Fundamentalism, seeing only one literal meaning in the Bible. They ignore the hard-won progress of scientific knowledge wrung from the evolving Earth and turn the clock back. In its exclusiveness it may be a dead end for such desperate enthusiasts."

"What's for us then?" piped up Lucy. "I remember our teacher quoting some writer who said: 'If God's not everywhere, he's nowhere'! Is this true?"

"Absolutely," replied Merlin. "That teacher had a big effect on you, Lucy. What's for you indeed – I'll tell you. First there will be a re-enchantment of the Earth and a new story. This will be about a Christified Earth, which is your personal story as well, and it will emerge from the grass roots. It will bring in Third Millennium Cosmic Christianity – rejuvenated."

"Phew!" said Tom. "That's a tall order."

"Of course it is." Merlin took up the challenge. "Now I will show you the ways my twentieth century Grail knights will help to do it. I'm going to give you a taste of some of the poems written by C.W. in a book called 'The Region of the Summer Stars.' It was published a year before he died and was not received very well at the time. First I must explain about some names he uses in the new country he talks about. Arthur's legendary land is called 'Logres'; its meaning has something to do with 'words' and it's the place he and his knights inhabit. 'Carbonek' is just a small part of it and is where the Grail Castle is found, surrounded by the wasteland and with the ailing old King inside. He is waiting for Galahad to come galloping up, leaping the yawning gap between them, entering the Castle and healing him of his wound."

“And that’s where the Holy Grail is based, isn’t it?” added Gilly.

“Yes my friend, I was coming to that... When Galahad, followed by the other two knights, completed the Quest and drank from the Grail, only Bors returned to set up my new Christian Company. Percivale and Blanchefleur took charge of Carbonek and, though its wasteland was green again, they’ve trained other eyes to see a golden glow from everyday things in Logres. ‘The eye sees more than the heart knows’, my William said. Now we come to the lines from those poems. C.W. spoke of ‘Hope as by night the first of the summer stars in the universal sky high hung.’ He then goes on to map out his vision of these new lands of the soul – here I give you my chosen fragments:

*‘Done was the day; the antipodean sun
cast Earth’s coned shadow into space;
it exposed the summer stars; as they rose
the light of Taliesin’s native land
shone in a visible glory over him sleeping...
The cone’s shadow of Earth fell into space,
and into (other than space) the third heaven.
In the third heaven are the living unriven truths
...in the third heaven
the stones of the waste glimmered like summer stars.’*

“I forgot to tell you about Taliesin, who was a famous Welsh bard. In this poem I would like you, in your minds, to substitute Percivale in his place.”

“Do you live in this special country as well?” asked Lucy in awed tones.

“Yes it’s my true region. You’ll see that C.W. brings me often into his poems. They are lit with a light that seems to shine from behind the sun. Can you see what I mean? I hope you felt some magic in this metred rhyme.”

“Yes,” said Tom, unexpectedly. “But you’ve still got Bors and Galahad to deal with, so can we have more of that brilliant Wall Display?”

“Since you ask, Tom, I can tell you I’d already planned a little surprise for you all in a minute – of the sort you suggested actually. Bear with me for a few minutes. Our new Percivale saw God in nature and in the ordinary running of our natural lives... in the city as well as the country. He said that nature was not opposed to grace but was the nature of grace. He showed that all our efforts were worthwhile so long as the show of summer stars was thereby heightened. My spells

worked in Camelot, he wrote, and in each episode of time, then for my new company.” Merlin paused momentarily. “So...

‘it may be from this gathering of souls, that the King’s poet’s household shall follow in Logres and Britain the spiritual roads that the son of Elayne shall trace westward through the trees of Broceliande; they who shall be called and thrilled by Taliesin’s purchase and their own will from many a suburb, many a waste; say that they are a wonder whose origin is unknown.’

“You remember Broceliande, the enchanted wood that little Spriggy told you about, where I fell under a spell myself, putting me out of action for once though I was a Master of Space and Time! I still am, as you see.”

“Can we please have the old Beatles’ song, ‘Penny Lane’, played to us very loud, as you did before,” said Lucy feeling a bit out of her depth. The request had no sooner left her mouth than her song rang out.

“You all love a good tune and a storyline,” shouted Merlin over the noise. And when the music eventually subsided into the background he spoke again.

“Like C.W.’s poems, music and all true art bring ideas from our subconscious minds into our normal awareness. They help to make up the important stories by which you all live. Now I’ll describe to you all my next trick. I’m going to indulge in a bit of Techno Wizardry here and play about with the displacement of time. This could become commonplace in the future. Just as space is shrinking for you now with mobile phones, long distance calls by satellite and air travel, so will the immediate present often be replaced by other moments in time. Today you’ll see yourselves, and the three knights you encountered on your medieval trip, exactly as it was. It’s all been recorded and you can re-live this sequence all over again.”

“Will we be back in the Middle Ages again?” asked Sam, very uncertainly.

“No, boy. For good measure and dramatic effect I’ve exchanged the original setting of the Abbey and near surroundings for the same location spot as it is today. I’ve transposed part of the one upon the other.”

“But won’t people be frightened by these apparitions?” said Gill.

“Ah! I’ve cheated a bit here. So as not to startle these tourists and locals with sudden appearances, the knights on horseback will emerge

from that old archway between the old Empire Hotel and the Guildhall. You must have seen it. Inside there is a large yard and down a slope are various dark openings, some with cars in. The trio will cross the busy road skirting the roundabout, and the traffic will stop for them. Drivers will think that the men are part of a Pageant or an historical re-enactment. Their horses will clatter round the side of the Abbey as you heard them before.”

“What about us?” persisted Gill, still dissatisfied. “And Kirsty as well?”

“It’s all arranged, Gill. You all will appear on the Abbey’s other side, coming out of the entrance to the Heritage Vaults. Anyone would think you’d been kitted out down there for your parts. I will prepare a space in the centre of the Churchyard for the group of knights, and a pathway for you five as you join them; not forgetting a similar path for the busy squire.

“He presents a small problem, for he leaves our scene twice, coming back the first time with a bucket of water and a stool. If I clear an adequate space for him, between the groups of sightseers and shoppers, to take him out into Stall Street, that’s a start. The old Three Tuns Inn used to be there. Now he can walk up Bath Street, then disappear into the disused Cross Bath. He will be forgotten in the Churchyard excitement. When he appears again with his water and stool, the word going round will suggest that he brought them from the Cross Bath. He can take them back the same way. That should work.”

The wall screen then lit up and to their amazement the youngsters saw themselves and Kirsty, in their original, Middle-Ages gear. They were turning back towards the Churchyard after hearing the sound of horses hooves and then starting to run, leaving Kirsty behind. The Knights in all their fine regalia had halted their horses in Merlin’s space and their squire, in his bright tunic, was dismounting. The four runners stopped in their path just outside the Techno-magic ring and like the people around were staring with awe at the figures, as large as life, in front of them. Some people were staring at the five strangely dressed newcomers as well! As Kirsty caught them up, said a few words to them and approached the knights, Tom called out from his viewing seat. The others, hating the distraction, tried to shush him.

“What about the beggar we knocked into as we ran,” he said. “Where is he?”

“Good thinking, Tom. I had to blank him out for I’d not time to cope with him I’m afraid. You’ll be asking me next, I guess, why no one else from the present day scene steps into my created spaces. They would love to touch and talk to these fabled characters and stroke the

horses as you could. But, you see, I have ways of inhibiting them. They won't knock into you either!" Merlin's voice sounded a bit eerie then and focussing again on the screen they watched Kirsty talking to Sir Teilo de Charon and heard her Old English dialect as they drew nearer to the horses. They saw again how he smiled at them and then heard his kindly words. They saw Gilly gazing lovingly at his horse and Tom at the sparkling gems on the hilt of his sword. It wasn't like Arthur's Excalibur and not the one, Gill thought, that Galahad pulled out of the floating stone. They heard Sir Newbee von Tillicus speak in his German accent and watched Squire John of Woollit watering the horses. Our Cybernauts had their memories refreshed with the first-hand information about Glastonbury – given them by one who knew and two who sought its glories.

Suddenly the screen was blank. Merlin told them that they would not be able to see the end piece of extra action which he'd added on because he'd not yet sorted it. "You would have to imagine horses and riders crossing Orange Grove again, not straying across the central grass and flowerbeds. There it would soon have been noticed that they left no hoof prints before reaching the archway. As for you, you could be seen retracing your steps, passing what was formerly the main cloister, and back down into the Heritage Vaults. In both cases I would stop anyone following to the bitter end."

"Dead Spooky! What if a car or bus, or even any person accidentally bumped into the horses, would they just go through them?" Tom's tone was urgent.

"Yes, they would. And no, it won't happen. This episode is worked through my dream technique, as will your Future Time Trip for which I've insufficient physical data. No flesh and blood involved much but sound and sight perfect – and some manual feeling too."

"As well as seeing ourselves actually talking to the knights, the looks on the faces of the present-day folk were really something," said Lucy, still swaying with delight. "The turned heads of the sightseers queuing outside the Baths made me laugh. And the busker who stood so silent with his mouth open, I remember, for his dog was barking and playing up."

"Everyone was looking around for film cameras," said Sam.

"Or waiting for a fake jousting match," added Tom. "It was great stuff."

"I had a strange feeling," said Gilly, joining in. "Almost as if Time was being telescoped into one crowded whole. For a moment life seemed to be just a single compressed event; sort of punctuated and forming a rich pattern."

“You’ve experienced a full-blown blast, my girl,” confirmed Merlin, “from your Number Two self... a Day-Dream par excellence. Let me clarify this happening a bit further, for I know that Sam too gets these occasional jolts.”

“Yes, they worry me,” Sam responded, uneasily.

“Well, another of the century’s hero figures was John Dunne. His great admirer, J.B. Priestley, talked about him in his own weighty book ‘Man and Time’. Here he explains Dunne’s theory about each person’s three selves, treating them as observers. It was Observer Two that you, Gillian, were affected by when that mystic moment expanded in your mind. He also suggests that there are three varieties of time. Time Two has another dimension added and takes in past, present and future. It can combine them into one. In the afterlife you will be able to blend and build with all the elements from Time One; rather like artists or composers. Time Two is akin to the medium in which I operate. It’s a mode of being which allows for dreams, angels and revelations. I will now finish the verse of Blake’s poem, Lucy, which you began to quote: ‘To ...hold infinity in the palm of your hand, And Eternity in an hour.’ No clocks needed!”

“Was this new character a knight of yours?” asked the ever-curious Lucy.

“Indeed he was. John William Dunne took the place of Sir Hector, friend of Sir Lancelot, and a worthy knight. Dunne did this very well, for before writing his books about experiments in Time he’d had a scientific training. With his logical and penetrating mind he became a mathematician and aircraft designer. So you see he had no truck with mumbo-jumbo cults, fanatics or such-like. At the end of his life he became more religious and in 1938 to 1940 wrote two more books, ‘The New Immortality’ and ‘Nothing Dies’. So you see, he soldiered on like the army man he once was.”

“Was he a Christian, I wonder?” mused Sam aloud. “He seemed so very sure that human personality survives death.”

“He was, I suppose, what you’d call a nominal Christian. He certainly was not an atheist, but presumed that somewhere, outside Time, there was an all-wise, unimaginable, omnipotent and ultimate observer – another name for God – who was also ‘educating’ us. This again leads on easily to Sir Bors, the second Grail Knight who went home and helped to change the old order.”

“I expect he was more than just a ‘nominal’ Christian,” insisted Lucy.

“Well, you could say that his faith was Christ-centred.” Merlin gave a soft laugh. “But he was radically different. I’ll start with a saying of

his which addresses one of the confusions of your young minds. He warns that the escape from your emptiness through fun can make joy impossible. Also that it is often easier to unite pain and joy than fun and joy. As my William says:

*‘Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine;
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.’*”

“I think I know what he means,” commented Gilly. “Life is so unexpected.”

“Right. Now more about Paul Tillich, for he is my Sir Bors for your time. He was not too worried about the state of the churches, for he thought that Christianity was more than a religion. We must not give undue weight, he insisted, to negative opinions, aspects of convention and tradition. He was leading his new Company of knights into the twenty-first century. It’s one way among many.”

“Who exactly was he then, and what was his rallying cry?” queried Gilly.

“He was a Lutheran Doctor of Divinity and lectured to students. He left Hitler’s Germany and sought refuge in America. There he taught and wrote about his theology, of which, Gillian, I can only give you a brief outline.”

“You can skip it, as far as I’m concerned,” grumbled Tom in a low voice.

“Can’t you see, boy, that all of you, my chosen four, must learn something about these knights if you want to stay in my world of enchantment.” The Mage sounded a bit peeved but soon warmed to his subject again. “Our Paul, who was a family man like Bors, warned that, unless you have your faith at the centre of your lives instead of on the fringes, it’s worse than useless – just filling in gaps. He talks about the depth of your being where God is found – not in the shallows, nor above the clouds, but within. It’s this you must make your ultimate concern, must take seriously without reservation. And lastly, he celebrates the New Creation in Jesus who is called the Christ.”

“Could anyone, if he’d been alive then with a camera, have photographed Jesus?” asked Tom, feeling rather contrite, “or even video-recorded events.”

“Yes, it could have been done, but this photographic figure would now be almost unknown to you. That sort of record never existed although the object of the photograph did. We only know Him now

by our faith portrait and His teaching, which survived. That's all you need to know, says Paul, to live."

"What about the flesh and blood existence of the Biblical Jesus? Surely that's most important," said Sam.

"Of course, but you see the early writers only began to save data about Him when He was received as the Christ and Messiah. Until then the records were very hazy."

"But think of the impact this man had upon the world," exclaimed Gilly.

"This is the truth to hold on to, my girl; the religious picture which has resulted from Him proved to be the power of transforming existence and building up a civilisation. All these things my new Grail knight told of. He assured us that nothing can destroy this because with it the Word, which had always existed, became history; a touchable individual in one unique moment of time and space. The Biblical Jesus will always be related to this man."

"On most days during the season, you can see Americans or Japanese visitors photographing each other in front of the Abbey," Lucy informed Merlin. "So one can gaze at and photograph the results of that unphotographed Man."

"You've got it Lucy! A personal life that created a Universal Community. Now you needn't have to receive all the Biblical stories as literal facts, for their legendary and symbolic meanings are real and just as important."

Lucy had still more to say. "I saw a car sticker in Bath yesterday," she announced. "It said JESUS IS LORD in bright colours."

"Well spotted, and He's Lord of the universe as well. He is being recognised. One day, my Cybernauts, you too may be grasped by the 'New Being' that was in Jesus, and in whom no separation ever overcame his union with God. So all creation is reconciled, proclaims this Paul, and rites and customs of a Church which celebrates this will often change or restate it's new growth."

"It's rather strange," observed Gillian, "that the Abbey is dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, and another City Church to St Michael and St Paul. I get the feeling that ideas from your new Paul echo some from the old one."

"Right again, and here's another oddity – my next knight, the Grail knight himself, is named Peter. What do you think of that? Another fact on which to ponder is that both of these stand-in Grail knights were army chaplains in World War One and on opposite sides. Peter was also a stretcher-bearer.

10

Galahad

After a moment's silence, during which Merlin must have noticed the signs of growing loss of attention, such as fidgeting etc., his tone became urgent:

“So at last I shall present to you my twentieth century Sir Galahad who is, of course, this Peter (in French, Pierre) – Teilhard de Chardin. He's our man.”

“All I remember about the Arthurian Galahad's character was his reputation for being pure of heart. What specially links him to this Frenchman, besides being pure, I suppose?” enquired Tom rather cynically.

“I guess from the manner of your speaking, Tom, that you ascribe a commonly corrupted meaning to the word ‘pure’. If you looked it up in your dictionary you would find that it's real meaning is ‘something which is not mixed with anything else’. In this case Galahad's only purpose was to achieve his goal, the Holy Grail. Teilhard, as a modern knight Errant, strove to discover a new bridge between science and religion, spirit and matter, nature and the works of man. Starting with the study of rocks he became a pilgrim of the future. He aspired to be the herald and poet of the Universal Christ, tasting some success with the love and acclaim of his friends. Though a Jesuit, his many writings were not accepted by his superiors. He spent his last days in exile and shadows, dying in isolation almost unknown to the world. Yet he had found God in the workings of evolution, traced Him through to the spiritual outburst of the Christosphere and beyond. This was an impassioned quest – mind and matter, together to be.”

“I really think,” said Gillian, pausing a second, “that we'd like to hear more about this Galahad. We're sorely in need of heroes today.”

Sam agreed.

“Let's have some big screen stuff then,” complied Tom, echoed by Lucy.

“All in good time. First I'll set the scene with more lines from C.W. – ‘Percivale at Carbonek’ (he recorded this act of Galahad):

*'In the rent saffron sun hovered the Grail.
Galahad stood in the arch of Carbonek;
the people of Pelles ran to meet him.
His eyes were sad; he sighed for Lancelot's pardon.
Joy remembered joylessness; joy kneeled
under the arch where Lancelot ran in frenzy.
The astonished angels of the spirit heard him moan:
Pardon, Lord; pardon and bless me, father..
The passage through Carbonek was short to the house of the Grail;
the wounded king waited for health; motionless
the subdued glory implored the kingdom
to pardon it's power and the double misery of Logres.'*

“So, next in the poem,” continued Merlin, “Galahad asked Bors, the cousin of Lancelot, to deliver a pardon to hallowed Carbonek from the lost and fallen Camelot. Then the High Prince remounted and following the others in was met by the angelic household. Carbonek was entered. Now watch it happen again.”

On the screen the youthful audience did see three knights on horseback emerging from a thick, dead forest. They rode in single file, but as they left the narrow path they spread out and walked abreast of each other across a grey and deserted landscape where nothing grew – not even a blade of grass. As our four watched this intently, the scene suddenly changed and they were seeing now some modern groups coming out from the trees. The first ones were enveloped in spacesuits and rode in jeep-type vehicles, the second ones were rigged out as racing drivers and roared out in their cars. The last lot, each one encased in deep-sea diving gear, glided across the barren land in their protective underwater cages. All wore helmets and were equipped to inhabit another medium or break a record – to explore and discover new facts and marvels of the Earth and of the Universe.

“These are your modern men of action, making things happen,” said Merlin.

“Still no women,” commented Lucy.

“No, girl, I'm afraid most are still kept busy picking up the pieces; but take comfort – women can now attain top jobs in politics, business and religion.”

The screen scene then changed again, back to the three mounted knights whose horses were walking wearily towards a long outcrop of jagged rocks. Some scattered stones of the wasteland still glimmered with an inner light. Percivale was leading the way now as he began to recognise things from his previous visit to the strange, elusive

castle. Suddenly he espied the narrow pass in the grey rock and galloped towards it, the others following. As they came out on the other side and the camera followed them through, the house of the Grail burst into view. The scene then froze and soft music took over.

Gilly gave a little gasp and whispered to Sam, “What does it remind you of?”

Sam answered, “Of course... it’s like the tall stark Gothic-type building we saw when we visited Auschwitz two years ago. It was bang up against the camp wall, on the outside, and the Polish guide said it was still a convent.”

“Yes,” added Gilly, “and the Pope was coming to de-consecrate it – this defensive, castle-like structure.”

“I thought it might jog your memories,” remarked the Mage. “Though this gaunt edifice has towers instead of turrets and slits instead of windows... the impact is reminiscent. They both symbolise the ravaged beauty and damaged unity of the Christian Church. Now I will start my film commentary.”

The on-screen movement and sound came to life again. Merlin then began by saying, “I expect you noticed that Galahad bent over from his horse and gently stroked the stone round the gap as he passed through. He joyed to feel the energy from it, for energy can become a presence, as he knew. Now we see the knights reining in their horses with surprise, for Percivale had not seen before, nor heard about, the wide moat which now surrounded the dark castle. There’s no draw-bridge and it’s evening time. You see them wandering sadly over to the bank. Now Galahad tries to coax his horse into the water but the animal rears and backs away. It is no ford. As he dismounts and hands the reins to Bors, Percivale is asking what they are going to do... Now, Galahad wades into the water, feeling for a hidden causeway and PRESTO! – as soon as the water covers his feet, the moat, you’ll notice my Cybernauts, has magically disappeared and they can all ride over on dry land.”

“It seems to be getting darker,” broke in Lucy, “and there are no lights from the castle. They’ll have to hurry.”

“Yes, it’s late in the day, but don’t worry for they are expected.” The music in the background swells to the sound of Wagner’s ‘Prelude’ to the opera *Lohengrin* as the knights approach the arch in the outer wall of the castle. It then dies down as Galahad kneels at the arch as in the poem. Then they continue unchallenged through the broken down courtyard, but hidden voices can be heard welcoming them. Leaving their tethered horses the men can be seen entering the Great Hall through a door that opened unaided by them. Light streams out. Once

inside our young watchers see that the entire company stands up as the newcomers walk past and ascend the steps to the dais. Beside the high table King Pelles lies stretched on his couch and near him stands a very old priest. The silent company then reseats themselves at the long tables and Merlin takes over the commentary again.

“The old hermit is now telling the knights their wanderings are over, and that this night all shall be accomplished. He is Naciens, priest of the Grail, and he cannot die till he’s done penance for, and been absolved from, a sin he once committed. The King is suffering from the result of Balyn’s dolorous stroke which will not heal.

When the visiting trio return to the main hall and take their seats at the feast, Merlin identifies six other knights who have just joined the company, seekers from Ireland, Denmark and the Scottish Isles. He also points out that the Grail knights are refusing all rich food and strong wine and only accepting bread and water.

“Come on,” interrupted Tom suddenly. “We’ve not all read the Legends as Gilly has, so how about telling us about Naciens’ sin and the dastardly blow that caused the wound?” So, as the banquet proceeded, Merlin did just that.

“Naciens had been with Joseph of Arimathea soon after he had brought the Grail to Britain,” said Merlin. “This was the goblet used at the Last Supper in which drops of Christ’s blood had been collected. Naciens was a converted Druid and, unknown to Joseph he had introduced an old Druid rite into the new faith. This particular rite was, unlike most Druid customs, quite alien to Christian worship. That was the sin under the spell of which he will stay until the good knight releases him. Now the reason for the King’s plight will take longer to tell, but I’ll try to shorten it.”

“It was all the fault of a knight called Garlon,” began Merlin. “This mysterious person had the power to move about invisibly, slaying or injuring whoever he pleased without being detected. Balyn, one of Arthur’s bravest knights, went out on a quest to find and avenge the wrongs of that elusive wrecker of lives. He was told that this man would be found at the Grail Castle itself where a banquet was being held. Though being disarmed at the entrance to the Hall, Balyn concealed a dagger under the robe he was given to wear. Having had Garlon pointed out, he picked a quarrel with him and finally stabbed him through the heart. King Pelles was furious, because Garlon had been his guest. He snatched a great sword from the wall and struck at Balyn, so breaking the knight’s dagger to pieces. Balyn fled from the Hall, with Pelles behind him, along passages, up spiral stairs and through room after room until he came to the tower. This part of the

castle had been empty for centuries, but up and up he went until he came to a closed door. Here he got a sudden feeling of awesome fear, but hearing Pelles hurrying up the steps behind him, he forced open the door and sprang into the room. It was the actual Chapel of the Holy Grail and the Chalice upon the table was so bright he could not bear to look at it. He was trembling and felt like kneeling, but seeing a strange spear which hovered unsupported over the table, point downwards, he seized it. In his madness, though he heard warning voices and though Pelles had dropped his weapon, Balyn attacked him with the spear. He struck the disastrous blow as Pelles stood in the doorway of the Chapel, wounding him deeply in the thigh. The castle shook violently and lights were extinguished. A great wind, howling in, whirled everyone to the ground senseless. There was chaos." Merlin was silent and the youngsters became restless.

"I suppose that was when parts of the Castle were ruined," remarked Sam in a subdued voice. "But why was Pelles so keen to avenge Garlon's death?"

"And what happened to Balyn?" called out Lucy.

"I'm afraid evil things befell him and he ended up in mortal combat with his own brother. Neither recognised the other. They both died. Now Sam, it's your question. I'd say Pelles knew well that the old Celtic Religion had some dangerous hidden presences as well as the good ones. There were the Irish Banshees and certain mischievous fairies – restless spirits who were often malevolent, but seeking relief. Ignorant superstitions had their roots in the fear of dark Earth forces unredeemed by the Christian belief that you must put yourself in the skin of the prehistoric dragon, enter its lair and still find Christ there. You can get a taste of these sentiments from John Bunyan's hymn about a Pilgrim who is undeterred by dismal stories but, indeed, 'his strength the more is!' I'll quote some lines for you:

*'Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit'.*

"We often sang that at school," Lucy assured the Mage, but he was too preoccupied to reply to this and carried on with his answer to Sam.

"Now Pelles knew," Merlin said, "that if you cleansed and freed the Church from all such contrary spirits you would be 'throwing away the baby with the bath water,' so to speak. You would lose the power and the glory of the earthy Celtic imagination with its aware-

ness and awe. It's a way of seeing which is at the heart of all poetry and religion – a vision uniting Heaven and Earth and the dark region beneath the Earth. All is bathed in a light that seems to go below the surface and to penetrate the shapes and colours of things. Behind the commonplace then, the eye glimpses the edge of other worlds. So, Pelles would not accept this loss – the angels would go with the demons.”

“Thanks,” said Sam, “I think I get the idea.”

“All these ideas have become dead fashionable again today anyway,” said Tom. “New Age devotees, ecology fanatics advocating Red Indian earth wisdom.”

“Only our twentieth century Galahad – Teilhard of the Auvergne, prophet of the Universe – can give us back the true grandeur of this heritage. Only he can restore the homeliness of the cold, lonely and meaningless cosmos. Just like Columbus, he discovers a new world and opens our imaginations to this reborn design, bringing together mind and matter and the infinite and the personal. With St. John and St. Paul he sees Christ as inherent in the stuff of the universe – it's driving force. Teilhard had freed himself from the seductive lure of the Earth-Mother cults and the doom and disaster freaks.”

“To reconcile all this with the findings of science was surely a gargantuan feat,” agreed Gilly. “Bath has many churches... but, actually, its biggest church, after the Abbey, is St John's. It has a really beautiful spire.”

“What, exactly, was Teilhard's special scientific subject?” asked Sam.

“Palaeontology,” came the answer. “It is a part of geology and means the study of ancient life – its environment and evolution revealed by the rock fossils. On his way back from journeys made in the past, Teilhard composed his gospel of the future. His name, Pierre, means a rock. Let's get on now.”

While they'd been talking, the feast in the Great Hall had been continuing on the screen, but in silence. Now music from Elgar's 'Cello Concerto' and sounds of movement could be heard. Suddenly the door burst open and the Grail Procession came through. It was to be the last time. To the amazement of the company, Galahad rose from his seat on the dais, where the three knights had now been invited to sit, and holding up his sword cried: 'In the name of God, stay a moment.'

The procession paused and there was a gasp of wonder from the company. Three bright, ghost-like damsels were carrying the silver dish, the candlestick and the bleeding spear which had pierced the side of Jesus. Then came the Grail Maiden herself, no ghost, carrying the

Holy Grail. Percivale recognised her immediately as Blanchefleur, his lost love, and was visibly shaken.

Slowly, Galahad went down and took his place in front of the procession. He held the sword before him by the blade so that it resembled a cross and walking as though in a dream he went on down the Hall. Behind him followed the Grail Procession. Next, after a sign from Naciens, Percivale and Bors lifted up King Pelles on his couch and took their places behind the Grail Maiden. Naciens brought up the rear and the viewers could follow their progress as they negotiated the passages and stairways of the castle. The light from the sacred vessel lit up the dark corners and the steps up which poor Balyn had been chased. It seemed a long time before they reached the top chapel.

Meanwhile, the voice of Merlin came in again. He explained that the cross need no longer be symbolic of the righting of a world's initial miscarriage and catastrophe. It can now mean fulfilment and the fire of achievement, for here Christ takes the weight of man's painful, Godwards, struggle.

"The sword that Galahad holds up," he said, "cuts away all decaying matter. Then, aided by angelic spirits, companions more real, mark you, than ordinary human beings, he will finish his impassioned quest. The Easter sun shines again from behind the old Celtic cross."

"Who would have thought," mused Sam aloud, "that in this computer age the interest in angels and cosmic presences would return to our consciousness."

All talking stopped now as the music rose in their ears and they saw that the procession had entered the Chapel. Everything was placed on the altar and the bleeding spear above it all still dripped blood which vanished as it met the ground. The two knights carrying Pelles set him down and knelt below the altar steps. Galahad knelt on the first step and Blanchefleur placed the Grail in the centre of the Altar. Then Naciens came, and after picking up the Grail itself he lifted off the rich silk cover and brought it to Galahad. The good knight of Logres was then able to look directly into the cup. The old legend does not tell us what he saw.

Merlin now spoke again, telling how Naciens was imparting words of joy to Galahad and saying how his own duty was ended. Now he was putting the Grail into the hands of Sir Galahad.

After this the Grail knight drank slowly from the chalice, rose and replaced it on the Table. A close-up of his face showed it to be shining – and then he kissed Naciens on the forehead. With a happy smile the old priest lay down and expired, thankfully. As a final duty Galahad took the bleeding spear and went to King Pelles who raised himself

on his elbow. Merlin here adds voice to the story repeating the words uttered by the old king whose lifeblood and that of his country has been draining away for so long:

“Sir Galahad, my grandson, you are right welcome, and long have I desired your coming. Now I trust to God that the end of my pain and suffering is at hand.” Merlin was silent again and the lifelike drama proceeded.

Galahad held the spear so that the drops of blood fell into the wound of the maimed king. At once it could be seen that Pelles was cured for the cameras zoomed in onto his bare thigh. The flesh was whole and unscarred.

Later it seemed that this so holy land of Carbonek and its Castle were no longer a mystery nor set apart from the rest of the land of Britain.

As Galahad knelt down again, Blanchefleur came forward and handed Percivale parts of a sword broken into three pieces. As soon as he had fitted them together they joined themselves up, and Blanchefleur was well satisfied. “She told him,” said our commentator, “that only he should be the first king of freed Carbonek. Percivale asked her to marry him and, as you can see, took her in his arms and kissed her. Upon this, Galahad rose to bless them and make them man and wife.”

Sir Percivale and the Lady Blanchefleur are kneeling before the altar with Sir Bors beside them, and now the Grail knight comes and gives them to drink out of the holy vessel – a sacrament revealing Christ in the Universe. Galahad, replacing the Grail, kneels to pray – sadly then to collapse and die.

Suddenly, to the youngsters’ surprise, the picture on the screen was cut to a modern scene. It was obviously a shot of New York with its towering skyscrapers and bustling streets. The scene then changed to the inside of a flat. One could tell it was springtime because there were vases of daffodils in the room. The sun was streaming in through a window, lighting up the fresh flowers on its sill. Some middle-aged women were having tea and inviting a tall dark-suited and aging figure to join them in this almost ritual event. The man turned to place some papers on this same windowsill and then went to take his tea. As his hostess handed him his cup and saucer he toppled over like a falling tree, as if struck from behind. On the ground his distraught friends attended to him where he lay but he died before a doctor could save him or a priest could be found to reach him. Everyone had gone away for Easter.

Once again the scene changed abruptly – this time to a big field

where some young men were playing football in the rain. There was a large building in the background and now Merlin took up again his commentary on events.

“These youthful males,” he explained, “training to be Catholic priests, are residents at this seminary near the Hudson river. It is close to the desolate and boulder-strewn Jesuit cemetery with its rank upon rank of similar tombstones. As we now follow the footballers back to their college, we see them disappear into the changing-room – emerging again in high spirits. Settling at last in their classroom they listen to a priest who is telling them about a coffin. It had lain for several days in the seminary vaults, he informs them, because before, the ground had been too hard for grave digging. But today, he announces, it being warmer, Father Teilhard de Chardin was finally buried. Merlin then draws attention to some students sitting in a back row and whispering to each other. I’ll enlighten you as to the content of their conversation. It goes like this:

“The soil must have been very wet as well.”

“Yes, it’s been raining all day.”

“Do you know who this Jesuit was? I’d never heard of him before.”

“No, we don’t, but we think he was French.”

After repeating these words Merlin finished by saying that it was a bitter turn of events when the earth, which this man so revered and loved, was at first too hard to receive his body. He was a man of God and a man of the Earth – an Earth which he had re-enchanted. Only a handful of mourners witnessed the final committal and there had been no singing or address at his funeral. His coffin bore a single wreath from an old friend – a sculptress.

“Perhaps nature itself was in a temporary state of mourning as well,” suggested Gilly, “and that was why the ground was nearly frozen.”

“Who knows, who knows,” muttered the Mage.

The scene changed yet again and now they were looking at another street in New York. The cameras entered the vestibule of an apartment-hotel and focussed upon a waiting lift. The liftboy was seen to be in tears. In another part of the hall a woman cleaner was seated on a bench with her bucket and mop on the floor beside her. She was dabbing her eyes, which were swollen with crying. It seemed both people had received some tragic news.

“Where is this?” called out Lucy, sounding quite distressed.

“It was the temporary residence of Teilhard while the St Ignatius Rectory was being remodelled. He had a rather drab and dark bedroom on the sixth floor and with no view. The woman you saw used to look after it.”

When Merlin finished speaking, there was another location on the screen. It was the entrance to a park and a teenage girl was coaxing a fox terrier along by pulling on its lead. The dog had its head down and its tail between its legs. "Teilhard had taken many walks with these two in City Central Park." And as Merlin's voice came over clearly again, the screen went blank. He went on: "The girl had once, inadvertently, knocked him over in the street as she ran with her dog 'Champ'. After that they met here twice a week, for nearly a year, exploring the park together. They discovered hidden wonders and the girl grew to love these encounters. Her elderly man's whimsical or enthusiastic remarks about every little thing they saw made her feel he was really in love with it all. Two days after he died she waited and waited at their meeting place. It was only years later that she discovered who he was and why he never came that day. Champ knew why, but she only did when she saw his face on the cover of his book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, and recognised him. She'd learnt enough from him to change her life and is a well-known writer. All this was going on when Teilhard, prophet and mystic, had so recently been suffering the agony of a sort of psychological crucifixion. His church had denounced his works as dangerous and forbade him to teach or discuss his ideas. An older relationship with the woman he loved had been hopelessly soured."

"You hinted earlier that Teilhard sacrificed his life, in the end, for his celibacy vows... Perhaps prematurely?" questioned Gillian.

"Yes, he had increasing bouts of nervous depression and frustration and felt that no-one loved him – thinking he'd failed to put across his vision. He had fits of uncontrollable weeping which he could not understand. But he did not account for the emotional deprivation caused by his inbred attitude and sub-conscious conditioning by the Church in relation to sex.

He could not give his beloved the physical assurances of his affections for which she craved. She felt he looked beyond her, treating her as secondary to some ideal of spiritual achievement. Women can still feel used in this way."

"I read somewhere," said Tom helpfully, "that when outward expressions of certain emotions are stifled year after year on end, the emotion seems to die away like a fire deprived of oxygen."

"I'd say that the sexual embrace or kiss cannot be expressed in words but only through experience," offered Sam in serious tone.

"Surely, some wee gestures of body warmth would have been enough for her, however shy and green he felt about them. She would have understood the awkwardness," bemoaned Gilly. "It's really sad." She then murmured lines from Blake:

*'O Rose, thou art sick:
The invisible worm
That flies in the night
In the howling storm.'*

"I can't remember any more."

"I'll finish," said Merlin:

*'Has found out thy bed
Of crimson Joy,
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.'*

"It was well said my girl," agreed the Mage. "Seeing good as evil is often tragic. But hold it, you're all talking at once. This subject certainly wakes you up. Now I'll deal with your points. You boys are right and Teilhard himself writes somewhere that abstract knowledge is a faded reality – a shadow, and knowledge is not enough. To understand the world, he says, one must feel, see and live in its presence. He knew love as the spiritual blood of evolution and saw sex as the driving force of the universe as it passes through each of you. Yet the old taboos of his Order still loomed over him."

"Why didn't he just leave the church and marry the one he loved," said Lucy, "and write lots of books, explaining it all? Did he write love-letters? I'll bet she loved him dearly as he loved her and replied to them eagerly."

"Yes Lucy, they wrote many letters to each other and Lucille kept all his. They've now been published and I can give you a few examples from them. In one letter he says, 'I know what is born between us will live for ever – it is bigger than any war or change.' In another, 'Precious Lucille, always be my light.' He told her as well that she gave him more life and that the place she had filled in his life had taken hold of him completely. He ended his missives with phrases like 'Deeply yours', 'Ever Yours' and 'Your Pierre'. He was still in the realm of the Romantic love that the French Troubadours began and which inspired the Arthurian Legends. The Church tried to hijack all this and control it with its stern marriage vows and Priestly celibacy. Teilhard wouldn't leave his church, in spite of its irrelevancies and pride, for he loved it and wanted to change and revitalise it from the inside. But you're right Lucy – his friends and Lucille exhorted him to abandon a church which would not listen to him. He still kept loyal to it though to the end."

“What was she like, this Lucille?” asked Lucy, still not satisfied.

“She was an artist and sculptress – very genuine and full of life. Being a seeker after Truth, she greatly admired Teilhard’s fight for a Trans-Christian faith and accepted him as a modern Evangelist with a reborn Gospel. She had an affectionate nature.”

“I suppose he wanted to modernise his church to ensure its healthy existence in a future era,” proposed Sam. “But what sort of changes could he have made to a church which regarded sex as a necessary indulgence for the continuance of the race? He needed the lifting power of an Apollo rocket.”

“You’ve got it Sam! Good lad. The tragedy was that Teilhard, champion of the belief that God should be loved through the world, had to miss out like this. The orgasm of joy, by becoming one in love with another human being, is the beginning of the expanding creation of larger and larger units – family, chosen group, nation, and finally the whole planet. The initial energy of this process must begin on an individual level though. So holiness should lie, not in separation, but in consenting coalescence. ‘To unite is to create,’ said Teilhard, yet his own well-being was destroyed by the break-up with Lucille. He had to find a path for his church between the two faces of love without rejecting either one – to transform and refine the raw animal lusts and use them to the furthering of God’s purposes. He was not given the time.”

“In Dante’s *Divine Comedy* his figure of Beatrice inspires him to attain entry into paradise.” Tom spoke out, surprising his friends. “No, I haven’t read the poem,” he admitted, “but we were told about the story in class once. I suggest Teilhard was treating Lucille a bit like Dante’s Beatrice.”

“Strangely, Tom, he suspected this and wept at the memory of all the reproachful Beatrices he knew he had, unwittingly, hurt during his lifetime. He had always been susceptible to the influence of the feminine.”

“He was dreaming of a new sort of love,” concluded Gillian, “and neither he nor the world were ready for it. Fancy his dying on Easter Day though.”

“He had told his nephew a month before that this was the day, the day of his Lord’s resurrection, that he’d like to die. It was a heart attack.”

“How does this all tie up in your mind, Oh Master Magician, with the old Galahad – his act of healing and then his drinking from the Holy Grail?” said Tom.

“On Easter morning, Teilhard was alone in his room and was giving himself his special mass from a portable altar and chalice borrowed

from a colleague. He looked into the cup and saw a round world within it, translucent, and as the astronauts were to see it in 14 years time from the moon – one beautiful whole. Then he saw the stars and galaxies around it, and looking at all this he actually perceived a Being taking shape in the likeness of Jesus. There was someone there at the heart of creation linking it organically to Love.” He saw that Christ was to spirit as the sun was to natural growth. He saw the beauty of spirit as it rises up adorned with the riches of Earth, and he longed to be an evangelist of Christ in the universe – a Christ loved as a person but compelling love as a world. Teilhard basked in the ultrahuman.

“But hadn’t he drunk anything from it before this?” objected Gillian.

“No, but when he drank from the cup the wine tasted bitter and he felt it burning through his body. Then came chilling doubts – would he be buried with his vision? Also, while he was keeper of this chalice, a symbol of his weakened church, would he be able to wield a healing power felt within himself? He thought... was he the dupe of a mirage seen from his own mind and, in fact, was there really no personal God, no Christosphere, no guiding spirit, and in the end no Omega point? For a sick moment...”

“What’s Omega Point?” broke in Tom, “and where does the healing come in?”

“Your patience has gone again, boy, but I’m coming to all that. As for Omega point, it’s a focus of convergence, a sort of meeting place ahead in time, indestructible and opening onto a greater existence.”

“Would all of us still be our own special selves, and would we know each other?” said Lucy who, by now, was unaccountably frightened.

“Of course,” replied Merlin in gentler tone. “Never fear. Though Omega is an end destination, Christ, Omega is also present now, a magnetic attraction of love for all beings, processing from personal to super-personal.”

“Omega-Point could be some cosmic spiritual centre,” enjoined Sam, feeling suddenly inspired. “One where all separate consciousnesses can converge.”

“Yes, and within which they may love each other and unite,” finished Merlin.

“Did ‘Tayar’ feel sad all day, even though it was Easter?” asked Lucy.

“Well, no, he certainly didn’t, because when he later attended High Mass at St Patrick’s Cathedral in Fifth Avenue he felt quite different. You see after the first draft of Eucharist wine that morning he had asked himself again a question that had been dogging him recently – how was it that as he looked around him, dazzled by what he had seen,

he found he was the only one to have seen it, even though it had transfigured everything for him? How, in spite of this glorious vision, he wondered, he still found himself so little better a man, so little at peace and incapable of expressing in his actions and communicating to others the wonderful unity he felt encompassing him?"

"But he must have hoped his books would later be published," said Gill.

"True. Though he felt alone he had many close friends around the world who were beginning to understand and to develop an appetite for his privately circulated manuscripts and countless papers. They loved him for his boyish enthusiasm and the sense of discovery and adventure in his writing. The seed was sown and that healing – Tom, was about to begin. Back in China, where he had worked for so long in exile, his local colleagues had often referred to him as 'the smiling scientist', and their Chinese name for him was, in English translation, Father Daybreak Virtue! How about that, Tom?"

"I suppose his church, like King Pelles, needed a saving jab," he replied.

"Anyway, as Teilhard walked through the sunlit park that afternoon, still fresh from the Mass, and a subsequent concert, his faith in the world was renewed. He knew it again to be trustworthy and inherently good. He had studied and gazed at the face of nature for so long that he could read her heart. Now he told himself that once his new synthesis had happened in one human mind it would one day explode into life as chain reactions round the world. Mankind would be seen as the ascending arrow of an evolution which was now looking at itself and being directed through mankind. He had come down from his 'mountain' and seen the Promised Land. His work, he prayed, would be gathered up into Omega. He was in high spirits when he went to his friend's flat."

"That was to be his last tea-party, wasn't it?" said Lucy. "I'm inventing a name for his great new ideas – 'Tayarvision' I think, and I'll watch for it in the future. Someone ought to shout it out in the Abbey Churchyard."

"Yet he was a very human man, Lucy, and loved being with friends even if they had quite different ideas and lifestyles. He was open to discussion on all subjects and a great listener. He said that friends should be stars to each other and that nothing is as precious as that part of you which is in other people and the part of others in you. Here's how C.W.'s poem says it:

*'...this abides –
that the everlasting house the soul discovers
is always another's; we must lose our own ends;
we must always live in the habitation of our lovers,
my friend's shelter for me, mine for him'.*"

Merlin was silent while his Cybernauts listened to the music, which was playing Lloyd-Webber's song 'Love changes everything.'

"He sounded very tolerant and young-hearted," commented Gilly warmly.

"You've said it, girl, and I can vouch for his sense of humour. Auvergnauts have a Celtic background and love to laugh. He said that Christianity made for an enduring youthfulness. It meant to be hopeful, exuberant, enterprising and always straining forward. He linked God with the future, which should be built by everyone and not travelled into, for God meets you in your work, which can be worship. So, throw yourselves into tomorrow's world. It's not closed up ahead anymore."

"Why did he have to die so soon?" lamented Lucy. "And when was he born?"

"Well, he did just survive the trace of poison in his chalice and accepted the presence of a negative wastage in evolution. This included limitations, separations and despair; also renouncement of the sweetness of love. He died just weeks off his 74th May-Day birthday. Taurus is an Earth sign."

Gilly then asked if Galahad, back in the legend, had been buried at the Grail Castle beside the old hermit, for that's what it said in her book.

"There are many versions of this besides Mallory's. Some say the three knights entered an enchanted ship waiting for them. It then sailed away to a far country where Galahad died. They took with them the body of Dintrane, Percivale's sister who had given blood to save the life of another woman and so lost hers. This ship had the Grail on board – the vessel never to be seen again in Arthur's Britain. I shall now give you my own version. I see Percival and Bors bearing a coffin across the newly-transformed wasteland and then burying Galahad in the warm and welcoming earth. Each new blade of grass and budding tree was saying 'breathe freely now, you're not closed in.'

"My book," said Gilly with an embarrassed cough, "says that you were rumoured to have been buried on Bardsey Island – across those wild and dreaded straits."

"I know," chuckled Merlin. "There were also twenty thousand saints said to be buried there. Anyway that was after my Arthurian visit

to your dimension. I believe there was an older legend that talked about a fabulous revolving castle made of glass on this Welsh island. Bardsey could just be seen from the Grail Castle and from the wakened land I've been describing. Beyond the coastline and a narrow sea channel its humpback shape was discernible. The top of its tall lighthouse stood out at one end. Ah! My Isle of the Bards. So now I leave new Carbonek, safe with its rulers, Percivale and Blanche fleur."

"If that's the end of the Galahad saga, can we go now?" said Tom.

"In a minute, I'm sure you've had enough for one day. There are some other brave knights I must mention but I'll leave it to your last visit. I will give you, though, two questions to dwell on during your winter months. Questions were very important in Celtic mythology and the Arthurian Cycle. Percivale, for instance, was much delayed on his quest because he failed to ask a needed question when he first saw the Grail. Youth must develop quick responses to the world's wonders. Well, here are your own questions: One – how can each of you fit yourself into a position where you can make some small contribution to your planet's positive growth? And, two – how do rock formations affect the life forms developing around them and the soil composition? The thoughts that come, perhaps, will encourage a sense of the Earth in you."

"I hate winter's short, dark days," sighed Lucy, "except for Christmas."

"Yes, when the Son of Man showed himself as a natural baby, who was to grow to maturity in your world. But, you know, this time of the year is named Samhain in the Celtic calendar. The sun is low and outside dazzles the eyes, but under the snow in the silence the secret seeds await the spring. It's a period for cutting back dead growth and praying for those who are stuck in the past and have grown stale. Warmth can be felt – by a fireside and round a laden dining table with family or guests – but it's a time for remembrance, first of all. You should give a thought to your heritage, to the hopes and fears of your ancestors, whose culture and dreams are within you."

"After my parents were killed, my grandparents sent me off to boarding school, quicksharp. They never told me much at all about the past," said Tom.

"You, my boy, will have to dig down deep inside you to find your hidden treasure. Like the knights of old you must put on a breastplate of wisdom for protection, and yours should be set with the nine Celtic jewels; for these are made from precious metals dug from the Earth's heart. Right, I've finished now, so off you go my Cybernauts. I'll see you in the spring."

11

Into The Future

Of course they were there – in the Circus room. The voice gave welcome.

“Hello again, my loyal young explorers. This will be your last visit, but I trust you will always remain hopeful and in love with your world. As you came through the Circus today I expect you noticed that once again there is a circle of golden crocuses around the great, bare trees. If you happened to glance down Gay Street you would have seen that on the other side of the valley, in which the town lies, Beechen Cliff rises directly opposite. There, its line of trees stands out against the sky – still leafless as well. Teilhard says that laboriously and thankfully, through the activity of mankind, the new Earth is being formed... It's not like the cut flowers that make up a bouquet, but like the leaves and buds of a great tree on which everything appears at its proper time and place – as required and determined by the good of the whole. Now before our Future Lift-off I have this unfinished business with Arthur's knights, to clear up.”

“I wanted to ask,” said Gilly, “why you haven't mentioned Sir Gawain before? He was almost as famous as Lancelot to begin with.”

“Yes, you're right, and he and Lancelot were close friends and rode out together in search of the Grail. In fact they were the second ones to find it and Gawain actually asked the right question and saw the chalice uncovered. He did not drink from it though and Pelles was not healed, but the evil spell which had Carbonek in its grip was partially lifted. He rushed to the aid of Lancelot who never entered the chapel, having fainted at the door. The picture at Camelot changed tragically later and Gawain turned against him. Actually, the breaking up of the Round Table started with Lancelot's involvement with Guinevere. After Bors had told his story to the diminished Company still at Camelot, many knights felt sad because they had not achieved the Grail. Only those who were ready for it, though, ever came so near to it. Lancelot, even after the message delivered to him from his son, still dwelt upon his love for Guinevere: ‘Lancelot's gaze at the Host,’ says

C.W. ‘sees only a ghost of the Queen.’ Eventually came jealousy, intrigue and power-seeking. Gawain took sides with Mordred, the bastard son of Arthur and one who had a huge chip upon his shoulder. You can read the details of this in Gillian’s little book, but Gawain was angry for another reason as well.”

“Yes,” Gilly volunteered. “I remember, Gawain had lost his two much loved brothers at the hand of Lancelot. They were killed accidentally while Lancelot was rescuing Guinevere from death by fire.”

“That’s right, and one of the brothers was Sir Gaharis, who I’ve substituted with Pastor Bonhoeffer in this century. He was almost the only Churchman to stand up to Hitler in Germany. He, like his friend John Robinson of Woolwich, died early, and Bonhoeffer preached a religionless Christianity. I had at first linked Gawain with DH Lawrence who, with Havelock Ellis, had striven to present sex in a new and positive light, but later Lawrence changed direction and I lost him. Wars now began between Lancelot’s and Mordred’s followers. Arthur was in the middle.”

“It was Morgause – the king of Orkney’s wife and Arthur’s sister – who was the real culprit, wasn’t it?” burst out Gilly. “*She* seduced the young Arthur.”

“Well, she practised evil arts and tricked her brother. They grew up apart and Arthur fell into her trap. The results, in the end, spelt disaster:

*‘The child lies unborn in the queen’s womb;
unformed in his brain is the web of all our doom,
lies the image of the split Table and of surreptitious swords.’*

“Here my C.W. is trying to suggest that in all great ideals and the very best of Camelots there lurks a Mordred in their dark wombs.”

“But Arthur’s reign did so much good and lasted so long,” protested Sam.

“Of course; even though Arthur and Mordred killed each other in their last battle, the legend of men who walked for a while in the sun, before the darkness descended again, lives on. All true history is worthwhile too, for it teaches and illustrates how and how not to act to gain real progress. ‘The Round Table Fellowship was an image of the mighty world. The Company saw beyond Camelot and Carbonek to a land where there was separateness without separation, reality without rift... The Company thrive by love, by increase of peace, by the shyness of saving and being saved in others.’ C.W.’s poem again. The knights are a part of you ... Oh dear! I nearly forgot Sir Lionel.”

“Not another one,” groaned Tom.

“Just a quick mention, boy, then we’ve finished with them. He was a half brother of Lancelot and rode with him and Gawain on the Quest. When they finally reached the Grail Chapel they heard a strange voice telling Lionel that he may not come to the Holy Grail because of his lack of belief and habit of not following the Light. Lionel then returned sadly to Camelot. He comes out now as our contemporary Sir Julian Huxley, a great scientist and evolutionary humanist with a cosmic sense. He much admired Teilhard, and befriended him, but stuck to his own idea of religion without revelation.”

“That would soon have put paid to your angels, messengers and visions, wouldn’t it?” said Tom playfully.

Merlin, ignoring his remark, then said, “I well knew who my new Mordred was, but I will not name him because he was not alone among other well-respected scientists who voiced the same sort of abuse and ridicule of our new Galahad. The vitality of Teilhard’s thought challenged the hard-earned positions in their old disciplines. They then preferred to chew on the ‘dry biscuits’ of their old pre-conceptions rather than trying to swallow and digest the new ones, which did not often fit in. Others used some of Teilhard’s ideas, but then belittled and dismissed him.”

“They were probably disturbed, and reacted illogically,” said Sam.

“Yet they quite ignored him later. Anyhow, it coincided with the way Britain was going after her two wars. The upheavals, cynicism and decline that gradually settled on your country was deadly. It is culminating now in the ‘end of the century’ anxiety and pessimism – approving of nothing which belongs to existing order. The lonely world of art sadly reflects the same mood in its obsession with bodies and decay... solitary figures in blank spaces crying out for contact. Music and poetry have gone the same way.”

“My grandfather calls modern art lewd, rude and dingy,” muttered Tom.

“With that we’ll prepare to leave this century for a while and see what is in store for you. You must agree, though – it’s been a wonderful century in some ways. All those fabulous motorcars, then motorways stretched across your country bringing people together physically as never before. Then the soaring new bridges and long Channel Tunnel have shrunk distances; jet travel has made the world seem smaller. TV showing specially selected portions of landscape has shared many experiences. You should celebrate these things.”

“You don’t mention the huge cost,” interjected Gillian, “and the downside of all these. This surprises me. What, in the end, are we communicating?”

“That’s now up to each one of you, and though I detected a cynical note, my dear girl, in your words, it’s your sort of Cybernauts who must make the cost worthwhile. There’ll soon be fewer cars. Evolution adjusts – you’ll see. Remember that in you evolution is conscious of itself. You are nature too.”

After some silence, Lucy said, “I just wanted to make a suggestion before we leave the present – how about Princess Diana being our Grail Princess?”

There was a pause and then an indulgent sigh. “I’d never thought of that but, actually, why not?” conceded the Mage, who then began on his new theme.

“Future travel is different from trips into the past, because we can’t get much detailed information. I have fairly accurate foreknowledge of how things will go, especially in just 50 years time, but I often get surprises and sometimes shocks. Anyhow, I’m taking you lot with me this time around, ensconced in my own dimension. You will look, sound and feel exactly the same – can touch and be touched – but I’m afraid you will not be able to eat or drink.”

Tom groaned. “That will be awkward,” he said, disappointed. “Why is that?”

“All your digestive systems and so on, will be in suspended animation for this period, which will be just a few seconds in your real time – as in dreams.”

“How can we go into Waterstone’s bookshop, say, and not order anything in the coffee shop upstairs?” asked Lucy.

“Well I shall work it so that you get a table for four to yourselves, and receive some flapjacks at the counter. I have acquaintances there.”

“What about paying for it?” insisted Tom, still very dubious.

“This couple, who were working in the place for many years during your present time, but who will by then be quite old, will assist me. They can be seen quite often, sitting having coffee in the old Georgian room and having a look around. Today one of them will be helping out at the counter, because of a staff shortage. She will say ‘it’s on the house’! They will both be extremely pleased to recognise you as you all were when they were young too. They had decided that very day to indulge in a bit of ‘Virtual Travel’ into the past and you may meet them later in Bath. They’d still be old though.”

Lucy was still far from satisfied. “What will we do with the flapjacks, when we are sitting at the table? And... Do you eat anything?”

“I have access to a different kind of nourishment, which you would not yet understand, my girl – now, as to your fuss about the flapjacks, all you’ll have to do is, when each of you has collected some napkins,

slyly wrap them around these tempting items – perhaps on your laps. Your touch will be OK. Anyway, no one will be watching you, except, perhaps, my chosen couple. Everyone will be eating, talking or reading and will not give you a second look, but you will be easy to see.”

“How normal will our clothes appear then?” queried Tom.

“At that time the youth will be wearing a huge variety of clothes and period fashions – anything will go. There will be a lot of nostalgia too, for people will not yet have decided on their preferred new images. They will only recently have experienced the long consolidation period during which all the mistakes and excesses of the twentieth century were worked through. As soon as the space and computer age gets underway though, dress will change.”

“I’m taking off my school blazer anyway,” pronounced Tom.

“The Japanese are already forecasting orbiting hotels and sight-seeing spaceships by 2020, designing reusable launch vehicles and space-cruisers,” broke in Sam. “And then they’ll be advertising ‘Adventure holidays in space’.”

“You’ve been reading ‘Wired’ and ‘Connected’ magazines,” said Gill. “You make it sound as if they’ll be as common as the tourist coaches we see in town with the words lit up in front – ‘Salisbury, Stonehenge and Bath’.”

“Yes, the space tours will orbit Earth every four minutes and the views of home will be fantastic, but so will be the cost of the fare,” added Tom.

“And you’ll only be able to see the Earth as a blue marble, from the moon.”

“Now, I want you all to keep quite still and quiet for a few moments,” said Merlin firmly. “My wrap-around equipment will record some further data so that I can take you along with me more easily. While you are still, I’ll remind you of some facts, which you, Tom, probably already know. Here they are: each human brain contains 100,000 million nerve cells connected at 100 million million junctions. The word ‘bit’ in computer language means the smallest amount of information it can store; it is a binary digit or place. Tom will explain this more fully later, I hope. Anyhow, 8 bits make one ‘byte’ and you already have machines that can code nearly as many ‘bits’ as compared to the storage capacity of the brain. Tom will know how many. You can move now.”

“Yes, OK... I’ll put them right sometime on those points,” Tom agreed.

“I think Tom is becoming a nerd,” complained Sam, “and will soon meet his friends only on websites. He will think we are all very un-

hip and treat us like wide-eyed oafs. In fact he may one day be what's called an Alpha-Geek!"

"He's alright," said Merlin. "He'll help people make ideas into reality."

"I was half joking," admitted Sam, "and not really worried." He smiled at his friend and then went on. "How different, would you say, Merlin, will the technology be, in a room such as yours, in thirty year's time?"

"Very different, boy... I can't yet acquire the new microchips, but there will be means, by then, of automatically detecting your location, position and posture, facial expressions and direction of gaze. The walls around you will be made aware of you and will learn to respond. Now Tom, tell them how the term 'Teraflops' comes into all this. I'm sure you can.

"Well," began Tom, clearing his throat, "a flop indicates the speed of information processing. The letters stand for something about a floating point operation per second, I think, and... 2-teraflop computers, called ultracomputers, have a speed of 2 trillion flops. Brain speed is about 10 teraflops."

"So you see, by 2030, computer power will change everything," said Merlin.

"So, what next – can we really visit the future from this present Cyberspace room with its 1990's set-up?" queried Thomas.

"Just be quiet a minute, Tom. Concentrate on my screen with the others." And as the youngsters gazed at the large screen, with a close-up of the West Front of the Abbey, they suddenly realised that something was now different. There was a Pay-Booth outside the entrance and notices about the special features to be looked for inside – as though the Abbey was a museum. There were also other notices with directions to the Vaults around the corner and listing regular services and spiritual events. The next thing they became aware of was that they could feel the new ground under their feet and could move around on location. They guessed they had arrived in year 2050.

At first they thought Merlin must have slipped up because although he had already hinted as much, many people appeared still to be in a late twentieth century mode – but when they watched more closely they saw the differences. A girl, they noticed, was wearing a long flared skirt and boots, but the very materials from which these were made looked strangely new. They then spotted tunics of all kinds, some very short, men in tights or trews – but no jeans! A few were in Space-age type suits and some foreigners in national dress.

Talking excitedly to each other, our four travellers held hands and

began to walk away from the Abbey. There seemed to be even more tourists than they remembered in their own time. Breaking politely through the queue, now longer than ever, for the Roman Baths, they stopped and looked up at the familiar buildings around, which looked in excellent condition they thought. Then they spied the balloons. Outside the main entrance to the churchyard was a line of tethered gas balloons. They were much bigger than the play-objects which were common once for children, and beside each was a brightly painted stall. Standing outside one of these was someone dressed as an 18th Century Sedan-Chair man and another was helping people into small attached baskets.

“Come on folks, lets have a go,” said Tom gleefully, hurrying towards them with the others following behind. Approaching one of the stalls, an operator who was smiling at them in a rather conspiratorial way, asked them if they were the special ‘Magic 90s Four’, because an old lady had paid him for them earlier. They all nodded eagerly, and while they were waiting for their turn they were surprised to see many notices pointing to Bath Street and advertising a large new complex of Hot-Spring Public Baths with every Spa-type luxury imaginable. Next, they were all seated in separate baskets with legs straddling the central stem round which was the control panel. Above, a fine network of barely visible glass fibre strands now spanned most of the Bath area. These, connected to the balloons, linked up in all directions. There was also an intercom, extending from the panel, on which the occupants could communicate with other passengers or with base, and could switch, as well, to a commentary on their flight. After all these things had been explained to them, they felt themselves beginning to rise and Gilly called out, “Let’s head for the Circus.” So, having pressed the appropriate button, they began to enjoy the smooth and silent ride. Tom was taken up by trying out some small headphones which spoke in any language. Gilly and Lucy were enchanted by all they saw below. Familiar parts of Bath were laid out in their well-defined patterns, but there was a newly-experienced feeling about it all.

“It’s like a Theme Park!” commented Gilly, calling over to Sam.

“Yes, and look,” Sam answered. “There’s a new wall round it, enclosing the well-preserved parts and leaving some of the old city to fall into ruin.”

As they passed over the Podium, the description from their electronic guide waxed quite lyrical and informed them about it in these proud words: “Here is our highly-advanced shopping Mall with novelties from all the periods in Bath’s history – also, top-class restaurants with international cuisines. The Public Library is the centre for the ‘Bath

Saga' Organisation. Though dealing mostly now in electronic items, it has a unique book collection including the best of twentieth century literature, also the very latest types to be borrowed. Below is the only Superstore still functioning in the city and a haven for the elderly who have time to browse, compare and feel the various products. Most residents, living in their ultra-modern houses or estates and Sports Clubs on the hills around Bath, can see and order everything by TV and computer; delivery is speedy."

The balloons seemed to have halted progress for a few moments over this site, and the commentary paused, but just as they thought it had finished it continued in a subdued tone. "Just beside the base of the escalator is a large booth dedicated to the world famous prophet and seer, Teilhard de Chardin. This is a 'must' to visit before you leave. It has many exciting new models, all interactive, of our evolving planet, plus video shows, and changing still pictures on the walls. Also demonstrations of cosmic import to watch." As they felt themselves moving again, the voice of Lucy could be heard announcing loudly, over the laid-on commentary, her unmistakable delight:

"That's our Tayar," she said, "who was Galahad. Merlin knew about this."

Their commentator's voice had finished by saying that this 'Tayar' had made the breakthrough to a European Renaissance with faith in the future and they could find his shrine on the Internet (World Wide Web) giving its references. It then went on to describe the vastly enlarged Postal Museum, over which they were passing, and the beginning here of the National Postage Service. It recommended the purchase of a new stamp marking this event.

As they came down to a steady landing and waited to be released, they were told that the houses there were occupied by the hundreds of people working for 'Bath Saga' either on maintenance and repair work or looking after the many gardens, parks and lawns. They offered Bed and Breakfast for tourists and holiday short stays in the luxury rooms of the Royal Crescent or the Circus. The landing pad was in a cleared space just off Brock Street, and when our travellers had been helped out they walked towards the Circus.

"Oh dear!" groaned Gilly. "There are only two trees left and three stumps beside them. I hope those two still give enough shade from the summer sun."

"They used to say this was the first ever roundabout," said Tom as they saw two or three cars rounding it. The cars looked weird; they seemed to be made from softer, pliable stuff and were queer shapes. They were silent too.

They passed a parked air-car and Tom stopped to inspect it. It was a dual-purpose vehicle capable of flight or traction. Nearby was a sign pointing to the Royal Crescent and announcing an exhibition of new types of such cars on the lawns below, with house-hops over the Crescent – certain balloon journeys being suspended – but, AirCar Flight, it stated, was banned over Bath.

“Come on Tom,” called Sam. “Let’s see if Merlin has got his new Virtual Reality room yet, and ask his advice on where to go next.”

They headed to the familiar door and rang the bell. It didn’t open on its own, so they waited. An elderly woman answered the door and surveyed them suspiciously. The youngsters looked awkward and embarrassed.

“Can we visit a friend in the basement please,” Gilly asked politely.

“There’s been no-one down there for as long as I can remember,” she said, staring blankly at them. “It’s just storerooms.” Then, seeing the silent protest and disbelief in their eyes as they stood their ground, she became irritated and told them that if they were part of a University Rag event there was nothing for them there. She then shut the door.

Turning away they ran on to the central grass. Lucy admitted grumpily that she wouldn’t have been surprised if there’d been a queue outside their house and the four overhead symbols lit up, even though Merlin wasn’t there.

“Don’t be silly Luce,” said Sam. “Merlin would never have allowed that.”

“No,” agreed Gilly, “it was all very secret. Cheer up Lucy. Look, there are still some crocuses flowering here after all the years – yellow and mauve.”

“I get the feeling that we should now walk down to Waterstone’s and see if that’s as Merlin forecast. Come on, let’s hurry.”

As they walked down Gay Street they found that it still had many professional offices, but mostly linked to Park affairs. They saw two old iron torch snuffers, used by the 18th Century Link-boys, still in place. The house, that before was the headquarters of the hot air balloons of the late twentieth century, had been expanded to include the one next door. It was the busy centre now for the new mini-balloons. When they got to Milsom Street they discovered it was pedestrianised with seats down the middle.

Just before they reached Waterstone’s Gilly stopped dead in her tracks, and after an uncertain moment sat down in silence on one of the period design seats. Lucy, studying her uneasily, settled beside her and asked if, perhaps, Merlin was talking to her again. The others gathered round, waiting.

Suddenly, a girl's voice which was not Gilly's, came from Gilly's lips:

"I am Sara Joy, your presumed dead sister," it announced in clear, youthful tones. I have been growing towards my full potential in the spirit world that I entered when two and a half years old in your Earth-Time. I've been helped by many others here and am now no longer a small child. Merlin visited me, arranged this meeting, so I could join you, by voice only, on your last trip. He couldn't fix a full manifestation, as with Eresta, because when I departed I was very young. I'd be quite unrecognisable now and your Merlin would not have the data. He's arranged with his 'Coffee-shop buddies' – the old couple – for you to obtain an old-style mobile phone from the store behind you to take in to Waterstone's. I'll come with you, and aided by this we can have a longer chat."

As she finished Gilly got up and smiled at the boys, asking in her own voice why they looked so worried. "I'm OK," she said. But Sam told her about Sara's voice and the phone they must rent and use to talk to their sister in the teashop. Gilly, quite normal now, was surprised.

The frontage of the bookshop was a bit different, but they were so glad to see it that they entered straight away and headed for the stairs. Through the entrance hall Lucy had spied a glass case with a padlock on it and an important looking notice on top. She called to the others to come and look. It was a collection of first editions of Teilhard's most important books. The notice read: "CHRISTIANITY – multiplied by itself and surpassed. The OLD, never enfeebled or detracted from, but lovingly transformed and brought forward into the 21st Century. The present good news is highly charged and irrepensible."

"It sounds as if it's talking about a Mark III Cosmic model," said Tom.

"But to think that back in our time," commented Gilly, "there was not one of his books to be had or ordered here. They were not being published."

Upstairs in the Coffee Shop, everything was as Merlin had told them, and they settled themselves down at the vacant table by the window. They could hear from the talk that most of the customers were visitors to the 'Park', and not come for a day's shopping as before. Having dealt with their flapjacks, and smiled at their server, now at a corner table, they admired a carefully restored Georgian decor. Then broke in the extra voice of Gilly and Sam's sister, who Tom and Lucy had never known. She spoke, through the handset, which Gillian was holding, and talked of a younger brother who had always been left behind in Ireland when they came on these trips to

England. Sara was quite close to him and often in touch. His name was Jonathan and he had been already in his mother's womb before Sara changed her state and crossed over. She remembered her mother's joyful anticipation of the new baby and how she, Sara, had helped to put things aside for it. But now, she said that she wanted to communicate with them all one by one. They could hear her faintly even now. She asked to be called Joy, not Sara, which she never took to. Gilly passed the phone to Tom, saying "you first". He listened:

"You know Tom, I'm not lost – just gone on before you all," Joy began. "You are studying physics, so I've been told. I've chosen to learn about science lately and its link with mysticism, so perhaps I can use some of its jargon with you. Don't groan – it's quite simple really. It's been shown, has it not, that quantum entities which have once been part of a whole are for ever connected, no matter how far they are later separated across the universe?"

"Ok, so far. I've heard of that... It's called Quantum Locality, I think."

"Right, the same seems to apply to human relationships. Family histories can also entwine us. Even our pets, familiar surroundings and favourite things, according to how we react to them, remain part of us after the cross-over." After a pause the voice went on:

"Families seem linked, but are most strongly entwined when love is present."

"Sadly, that's not always there," sighed Tom. Joy agreed, but said that he needn't protect himself by being cynical. After more silence, Sam took the set.

"Hello Sam," came the greeting. "I know that you and Gillian have special gifts of extra-sensory perception (you call it ESP), and that you have often heard inner voices exhorting you to find a path that's been chosen for you. Well, I can tell you now, this will soon be shown up very clearly for you."

"Our parents seemed to lose hold of their faith after you died and they were really proud about being agnostic," mourned Sam.

"I know," answered Joy. "And the mental injury still hurts. But take comfort, for lately I feel I am getting through to them by means of the garden, which they both love. Their bitterness will go and a layer of new understanding will grow over the wound. At the age when I left I was still a part of my mother, and that powerful and lasting bond between mother and child was at its strongest."

"Perhaps you've warmed up the next world for all of us," suggested Sam. Then it was Lucy's turn. As Sam positioned the set for her, Joy began again:

“Your ‘Tayar’, Lucy,” she confirmed, “is with us over here and much loved. He has many followers, and some become messengers patrolling the Earth.”

“I would call them angels,” responded Lucy happily.

“I won’t quarrel with that,” said Joy, laughing softly. “Do you remember all those preachers you noticed outside the Abbey? Well if Teilhard had been there he would have honoured and admired the beautiful building, but would have expressed great feelings of thankfulness that Christ is released from the confines of cathedrals and abbeys and is now free to span the universe or enter any hearts. I’m helping an aunt to write about this by suggesting thoughts to her subconscious mind.” Lucy was very impressed, but as Gilly was looking at her impatiently, Lucy now transferred the set to her.

“I feel a bit guilty about my young brother,” began Gilly hastily. “He is very inquisitive and quite naughty... I often lose patience with him because I feel he’s spoilt, like an only child.”

“I know you love him,” consoled Joy. “After all, there’s nearly a ten year difference between you. As the big sister, you over reacted, but don’t worry, he will one day do very important things. I understand your artistic aspirations, and deeply respect this gift you inherited from our parents, but over in my world we are horrified at the present state of contemporary art. It is disenchanting, downbeat, and full of weird oddities. Pictures depicting deformed and sadistic fantasies, spattered brains or smeared blood seemed quite popular with artists and exhibitors. You are asked to see beauty in rage and pain, or else to scream, inwardly I fancy.”

“But surely,” parried Gilly, “areas of blackness, for instance, or distortions can portray, say, aimless living or real fears... Anyway, our mother says everyone’s idea of beauty is different, and our art must reflect the times.”

“Yes, but such emphasis and repetition boosts and encourages the ugliness and despair. There is a discordant hum rising up from humanity.”

“Well, I admit there’s a big temptation to lose heart, but I don’t think that, on the whole, we are irreligious or uncaring. I myself wonder if Britain ever really recovered from the nightmare of the two world wars. From what I’ve heard, terrible things happened, and afterwards music became inharmonious and tuneless, poetry barely understandable and rhymeless and literature over-sexy and violent. You must know about our films!”

“Goodness, Gillian, that was some speech, and I think you’ve identified the crisis. I have detected signs of the new life-sap which is

now surging back, and you four are going to be a part of the recovery. Merlin told me to ask you to look out for a verse from his William, on your way out. Now... I'm afraid I must go again. It's been great... please think of me sometimes."

Gilly said: "Au revoir, Joy," and put the handset down on the table. They all looked at one another and Tom said, "we mustn't forget to return it now."

As they left, they saw that the old couple had gone from their corner seats. In a room next to the Coffee Shop was a shelf stacked with recordings of poetry read by actors. These included some of Blake's Prophetic books. At the side was an extract from the end of his poem, Jerusalem. Gilly read it out:

*"Then Jesus appeared standing by Albion as the Good Shepherd
By the lost Sheep that he had found, and Albion knew that it
Was the Lord, the Universal Humanity; and Albion saw his Form
A Man, and they conversed as Man with Man in Ages of Eternity.
And the Divine Appearance was the likeness and similitude of Los."*

When Gilly had finished she heard her special voice again and stood still. It was Merlin reminding her that Los portrayed Man's God-like imagination. He added Blake's lines – "Friendship and Brotherhood: without it, MAN IS NOT:"

On hearing the poetry, a small group of curious customers had stopped to listen and were watching the youngsters who began to feel awkward.

"Come on, lets go," said Sam.

After they had all hurried down the stairs it was agreed that they would go to the river and see if the old bridge had stood the test of time. Tom took the handset back and was relieved that there was nothing to pay.

On the way to the bridge they were glad to find that trainers had at last gone out of fashion for teenage footwear. Shoes were quite smart now. Arriving at the Grand Parade, they found the bridge intact. Walking over it they recognised a novelty gift shop, which was still selling old-fashioned T-shirts with pictures of the bridge and the Abbey on them. Further along they looked into the window of the old coin shop and to their surprise saw that beside the Roman and middle-age coins were some of their own familiar ones which obviously were deemed fairly antique. Ecu-money was now used. Over on the other side, as well as the same sort of advertisements for river boat trips along the Avon, there was a large board saying: 'Book now for a

weekend in The Space Hotel, which includes Space Walks and other thrills.' Nearby in the former Sports Shop a host of Astro luxuries were being sold. They left Tom shop-gazing as they inspected the grand new fountain in Laura Place. Tom was bewailing the fact that there was no time for space travel on a day trip into the future.

"I don't know how much time we have left," said Gilly, as they walked back over the bridge. "But we should investigate those mysterious vaults we saw sign-posted outside the Abbey. That's where all the action is, it seems."

No one disagreed, so they set off. As they passed the massive old Empire Hotel which was still looking in great shape after its clean up and conversion into posh flats, Sam said: "It's flourishing. Yet Aunt Sophie once said it should be pulled down!" Then at the Abbey they met the old couple again who smiled at them warmly.

"Hello!" said Lucy. "I thought you were going on a Virtual Trip today."

"We were," the man said. "But we've just been to the Heritage Centre to postpone it. We wanted to see you again today and thought you'd be here."

"We'll look out for you too when we return to Real Time," replied Lucy.

"Before we go into the vaults," asked Tom, "should we take a balloon trip down to the station do you think?"

"Well," they advised, you will pass over some rather dull, new development areas, mostly storehouses, amusement halls and one very modern health centre, and when you get to the station you'll see an old inter-city diesel engine standing there, but it never moves – it's a permanent feature. You see, the new super-highway and high-speed trains from the Channel Tunnel through to the West Country and Wales, miss out Bath. There's an ultra-modern station up the line with new forms of electrical transport to nearby towns, and fast links to top cross-country routes. But your castellated station walls survive."

"I see," said Tom. "Perhaps, then, we'd better go to the vaults next."

"Yes," he was told. "You'll find it an extraordinary place and very exciting. Real cool – as we used to say in our young days."

The youngsters started to go, but the couple wanted to talk more, saying they were quite nostalgic about the 1990s, and seeing those four just as they were then made them realise that there was a lot they now missed.

"But," consoled Lucy, "they've done wonders for Bath as a Heritage City. There are refreshment booths, gardens and flowers everywhere."

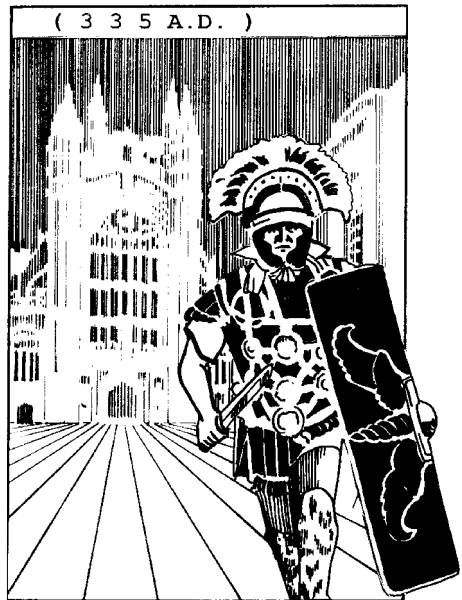
“You’re right,” admitted the couple. “And if you have time, you should return to the back garden of No.4 The Circus, which has been replanted and maintained as an authentic eighteenth century formal town garden. It’s got the tightly clipped box edging to the beds and paths, and a central honeysuckle pole with miniature trees around it. You’d really love it. Most shops down here though sell only souvenirs or historical model kits, with emphasis on Empire and high culture.”

“I’m afraid we must go now,” said Gilly. “But thanks for all your help.”

“Goodbye, fellow Time Travellers,” they answered sadly. “Good Tripping!”

When our four finally reached the entrance to the vaults and had descended the stone steps, they found themselves in what used to be the Heritage Museum. It was still like a sort of subterranean journey through Time. It showed actual layers of excavated discoveries – the real stones and grit of former places of worship on this site from the first Greek and Roman temples. It told how the ground had been used continuously for Christian prayer and celebration since Saxon times. It had also recorded Millennium events there for year 2000 when the 500th anniversary of the Abbey was marked with festivities. An unveiling ceremony showed the results of a great Abbey clean up.

There was an addition in the form of a counter selling tourist attractions: the old-type T-shirts, with Dolphin motifs and Planet Earth as first seen from the moon – others with HERITAGE CITY printed on them in huge letters. Walking through this first section of the Vaults they then came to a door which looked very firmly shut. They stopped and a series of lights flashed across them soon after which the door opened up onto a huge area extending far under the Abbey. It was composed of scores of alcoves, booths and cubicles, each padded and dimly lit; later these were



found to be wired up to multiple built-in equipment for communication and information.

There was a large and brightly lit space in the middle ending in a huge wall-to-wall TV screen. Groups of people – all ages, but mostly young – stood around waiting their turns in the VR (virtual reality) rooms. Some were discussing together their projects, experiences and adventures. They too wore a variety of clothes – many in tunics, but none with nose-rings or bare feet.

The four young Time Travellers were recognised and accepted for what they were, and after a few smiles of welcome the company carried on, talking excitedly. So, as they waited, a tall man came up to them with a warm greeting. He was wearing a long, electric blue habit belted round the waist, but no dog collar. His hair was shoulder length and he was quite old though possessed of a straight bearing and movements that were almost sprightly.

“You won’t recognise me,” he said, “because you only saw me once, but I remember you. You all came into the Abbey one day with a very jolly-looking woman and I was sitting at the reception desk just inside the entrance. My father, the verger, was ill that day and, as I had just left school and was at a loose end, had asked me to be there for the tourists.”

“I remember you now,” blurted out Lucy after studying him carefully. You gave us a wrong pamphlet... didn’t you? When we gave our offering to the Abbey. You then hastily changed it, saying we wouldn’t have noticed anyway!”

“Yes,” said Sam. “I remember your big smile as well. Actually, neither did we recognise, at first, some old acquaintances we just met in a coffee shop.”

“Of course, it all comes back to me now,” Gilly recalled, and how her Aunt Sophie had whispered a joke afterwards. “I’m afraid she’ll have died by now.”

“Only in the old sense,” said the man. “She will still be moving on. Yes, I fancied myself as being very trendy in those days. Anyway, my name is Paul and I’m now what they call a Server here. I tell newcomers where to find things that they want and how to set about implementing their desires. Here everyone’s very friendly and you could make new contacts – given time!”

“What are they planning?” asked Tom, pointing to one group in deep conversation. “And why do they refer, at times, to their personal mini-handsets?”

“They are trying to arrange a big link-up which can then be expressed communally on the wall screen. As you can see, it is at the

moment displaying the faces and expressions of individuals as they put forward or respond to ideas. Some are in touch, intermittently with their communicators, on the World Information Highway – the Internet. That group booked time for today.”

“I still don’t understand what all the fuss is about,” questioned Tom.

“Well,” replied Paul tolerantly, “the excitement is caused by a new visionary experience glimpsed by four separate ‘Questers’ during their own private VR immersion sessions. These visions have been recognised as very similar to each other and they want to try the details out on the screen and see how it looks when so represented. It could then be used for meditation.”

“Have all these people a broadly Christian faith?” asked Gilly.

“Yes, mostly,” answered Paul, “because as a rule, only those in a Christian tradition want to come here. It’s inter-denominational of course, and there’s something for everyone. There’s a kind of Christic research going on and the finding of new ways of worship and prayer – discovering the true spirit of Christ operating through history, and from many different angles.”

“But what about all the other world religions?” asked Tom reservedly.

“They will, one day, all come together under a new banner – The Good Earth; our shared evolving world – so precious, yet so vulnerable. ‘All that rises converges,’ says Teilhard and all the world’s great religions, including our own, can be transformed by a central figure – The God-seeded Son of Man who becomes the Cosmic Christ. A union would follow which would differentiate and preserve separate values, yet love and cherish the planet as one.”

“Does that mean promoting its health and fighting cruelty?” said Gilly.

“It certainly does,” confirmed Paul in a quick response.

“Good Heavens! – It just won’t work,” challenged Tom. “We’re all too proud. Think of the reaction of Islam to some of this!”

“Everything can change if it’s alive,” countered Paul. “Just remember our Christian past during the Crusades and Inquisition. How far we’ve grown since then! Now, I’ll take you lot on a tour of our Cyberspace Temple. It’s a launch-pad, you’ll see, for dreams of future progress, but still incorporates many older gems from Christianity down the ages. It also has some new ones.”

“Where do they have the services we saw listed outside?” asked Lucy.

“In the Worship Centre – we’ll go there later,” said Paul, leading the way through the bystanders towards the mysteriously humming booths.

“First I’ll show you the Time Tent, as they call it. There will be individuals sitting in there at various interactive, holistic screen displays, so I’ll talk to you about it after you’ve seen it all.”

The youngsters were duly intrigued with what they saw. They wished they could have participated themselves in the many ways of playing with Time and learning about it that were offered there. The idea of duration, as an essential factor in describing things, was illustrated in terms of millions of years rather than mere thousands. There was much to be explained though. So when they emerged Paul had a go at it, saying he’d try to put it simply:

“Most of what you’ve seen was really attempting to show the difference between two sorts of time – Chronos and Kairos. Chronos is formal and temporal time shown by our clocks. It’s the physical measurement of time with dates and order of events. Now Kairos, according to Paul Tillich, Merlin’s Sir Bors, means something which is at the *right* time – a moment rich in content and significance which is creative. It’s a form-making process and each great turning-point in history can be called a Kairos – an outstanding moment in temporal time. The appearance of Jesus as the Christ was one such event that changed us.”

“But, say the tag of meaning bestowed upon these moments in time was an illusion and just a flash in the pan, how would one know?” Sam felt mixed up.

“The message of the Kairos is never wrong, for when it is prophetically proclaimed it is already present and has grasped those who proclaim it. It has created a crisis in the depth of human existence, shaking and transforming it. An idea whose time has come, is more powerful than anything.”

“I suppose... really,” commented Tom, “that Darwin’s theory of evolution caused the discovery of Time in this new sense?”

“Well said, that is true. It’s now impossible to conceive of a thing in Time without something before it. Everything has emerged attached to chains or threads of elements running back to the beginning of Time. Its links can never be exchanged with each other. Now, who saw the queer old clock photo?”

“I did,” said Lucy. “Reading about Hiroshima, I felt that the Abbey clock should have stopped, at the time, in sympathy. Perhaps it actually faltered!”

“We’ll not know, will we? But that photo was taken of a clock found among the devastation left after the first atomic bomb had been dropped. Like all their other clocks it showed the exact time of the explosion. For the people of that city, Time seemed to have stopped.

We only knew what we were told at the time, but that was another Kairos – a turning point in the history of the world. The outstanding moment was when the atom was split.”

“I have an alarm clock at home,” boasted Tom, “which is accurate to within one second in a million years. It was a prize I won in a competition.” Paul just smiled and nodded.

“I was going to quote some Blake to you,” said Gilly, “on the subject of Time, but now I’m wondering if it’s a bit controversial – it was this line: ‘Eternity is in love with the productions of Time’. I remember hearing it on a quiz programme once and I pondered over it.”

“Blake would have abhorred the making of the bomb and the inventing of other deadly weapons... But, he also wrote that we can never know what is enough unless we know what is more than enough. He said that if others had not been foolish, we should be so! We must try everything we can in order to progress, and the horror is the price we pay for learning about its evil and regressive side. We try here to heighten awareness of a sixth sense.”

“How did you know about us?” asked Sam. “You seemed to be expecting us.”

“Yes, I was... because we’ve developed a very advanced faculty of ESP. We experiment often with this – it gives us a great sense of awe as well.”

“Did you hear an inner voice?” persisted Sam.

“In a way, I suppose. Merlin is one of our prophetic spirits, and during my morning meditation I picked up things about his Arthurian Pantheon and about the movements of you, his protégés.”

“What does ‘Pantheon’ mean?” asked Lucy impatiently.

“The deities of a certain people – collectively. I’m sorry to be obscure but really, I’m talking about your Merlin’s role models for the twentieth century and I learnt more about them at the same time. At the next booth you can discover new things about magic, the paranormal, visitations and telepathy.”

“Lead the way,” said Sam with renewed enthusiasm.

“First, I must explain something to you. Perhaps you didn’t know, but we rarely have to visit our doctors now because we have on-line communication with them from our homes, which are often our offices as well. The house-call consists of a ‘touch-screen’ based system, linking anyone to a medical HQ via computers. There are multi-function patient monitors and you can have a complete check-up, prescription and advice without leaving the room. For instance – I’m recommended exercises. I now do my stuff at a Sports Centre!”

“That’s why you look so slim,” remarked Lucy with a smile.

“Thanks,” said Paul. “So... in the Psychic Rescue Sanctuary we are coming to next, you can get the same sort of treatment, but for psychological and emotional problems. You can join an on-line group for a chat on your chosen discussion or opt for questions and answers with Christian experts. They open the door to new states of consciousness, without drugs and alcohol, to mend hearts. They understand the traumas of marriage break-ups, sexual relationships or bereavements and connect up with the spirit of Christ and lost loved ones.”

Unfortunately, when they finally entered this highly recommended booth, they didn’t stay as long as was wished because of one of the occupants. She was in tears while sitting at one of the computer terminals located round the sides, obviously in very close contact with her Internet Samaritan. Also there were others in tense dialogues, so our newcomers quietly withdrew. Paul quickly led them on to another booth that he wanted them to see. It was the one dedicated to Science and Religion, and all their different disciplines, to the Arts and Literature and to bringing them into closer communication with each other. It is a sort of all-station-junction.

“We call this ‘Clap‘um Junction’, suggested by we older ones with a hint of nostalgia for old London. As you see it’s bigger than the others.”

Inside it was like a magic world of wonder and participating action. At one console someone had opted for a simulated moon-drive in a robot and lunar buggy. He was sitting in a simulator and rigged out in a helmeted space-suit. There was a small queue of young people waiting for their turn.

“That’s the popular Moon Experience,” explained Paul. “A miniaturised version of one that Theme Parks operated at the beginning of this century. You can see and feel everything that the ‘Rover’ encounters on the moon, and it’s a real journey starting from the Apollo 11 landing site. Images are sent back via satellite and your senses are transported to the moon.”

“I suppose, again, you have to book earlier,” lamented the envious Tom.

“I’m afraid so, but there are many other interactive games, puzzles and mazes for you to try out here. Look around – you can find some Voice Recognition PC’s, mind-reading computers, which allow people to operate them using thought-power alone, screenings of data-vision, body mapping and DNA stuff.”

“But what has all this to do with Christianity,” said Tom, now intrigued.

“A great deal. Technology leads on to the opening of new realms of knowledge and new versions of our place in the Universe of which we are a part. Teilhard said that as man’s power to explain the natural world increases, so does his knowledge of God. And many scientists have now experienced the same feeling that Teilhard once had in a Sussex woodland – of a presence forming within the natural surroundings. No one fits into it better than Christ. His influence had spread through nature in all of its movements. We all can now see how the cosmos is held together by spirit, not by matter and that life and consciousness are the very stuff of the Universe.”

After this the youngsters, except for Gillian, went off to explore the site, but Gilly had things on her mind, and she confided in Paul.

“I worry and am sometimes horrified at the idea of genetic engineering, cloning, brain-scans and research on animals and unborn babies. Is it good?”

“We must have faith in ourselves and that the best of our aspirations, such as the reducing of human suffering, will win in the end.”

“Will the pain and obvious upsets of the animal kingdom and our natural environment also lessen?”

“That’s happened already – we’re aware of a closer mutual affinity now between all these. We have come of age, remember, and are out of our playpen! Our biological advances have led to an ability to predict, avoid or perhaps cure innumerable growth-stunting diseases. It must be a force to be tried out – for the good. All knowledge can be abused. Should we suppress it though, because of this? What about fire and gas, for instance?”

“I remember my father once praising a ‘Genome’ Project,” admitted Gilly.

“Yes, it’s long been completed and now they can identify and define the function of each of the 100,000 or so genes found in every cell of a human being. And each set has a unique variation! But come, I’ve said enough.”

Gilly felt somewhat comforted. After the others had returned and they were on their way to the Worship Centre, the talk was about the amazing things that had been seen in Clap ‘um Junction. They asked questions as well.

“What are the Noosphere and the Christosphere?” queried Tom, having heard the words on a commentary to screen diagrams. “I know about the biosphere.”

“It’s Teilhard’s name for a sphere of thinking girdling the Earth – one gigantic network grafted once and for all upon the biosphere. ‘Noos’ means mind, and this domain is an organic reality. It is like an

almost imperceptible skin of interwoven consciousnesses round the world. The Christosphere is a future Christ-centred world grafted on to that.”

“Phew!” exclaimed Tom. “You sure know your stuff.”

“Actually,” said Sam, “when I was in that booth I got this new idea of a sort of common brain – a brain of brains. I’ve often felt, while watching TV, listening to radio or sampling the internet, that I’m enjoying and thinking about exactly the same things as millions of other people. It’s so strange.”

“It’s not a bit strange,” said Paul with great assurance. “It is becoming more and more impossible for us to act and think other than collectively. We understand, judge and accept things according to current opinion and knowledge. It’s also true that group minds, working together, can achieve results which no one member of the group could achieve alone. Clear vision and super ideas are born, which all come, in the first place, from one single unit or mind which is itself an autonomous centre of reflection – the human individual. A team of scientists working towards a common objective feel deeply bonded. Each one finds his personal potential actualised on a collective level.”

“Will it all be sucked up, willy-nilly, into the noosphere?” quipped Tom.

“Not quite like that.” Paul smiled in a good-natured way. “Somehow it’ll be collected up according to how successful it proves for furthering the good growth of our Planet and we with it, towards Omega Point. We are already in a new sort of Time. Spirit is no longer independent of matter, nor opposed to it. There’s no distinction between natural or artificial things, physical or mental decisions or now between science and mysticism – all is supremely organic and vital in so far as it is contributing to the building up of the Earth. Mythology, legends and prophecies are stored as well in the noosphere, but negative, doom-laden ones will wither, for love’s the main force.”

“You mean,” broke in Sam light-heartedly, “no Space-Invaders, no Terminators and no crazy psychopaths ruling us?” Paul shook his head playfully.

“At the end of the story of Arthur’s dream of excellence, it’s predicted by Merlin that a new hero, arising in this century, will link Teilhard’s noosphere to modern research. He’ll show how all nature, including us, resonates to another sphere and informing spirit outside itself. I’ve met this man.”

“I know who he is!” cried Lucy. “I watched a play on children’s TV last week and it was about the German legend of Lohengrin. Elsa, the

King's lovely daughter is in deep trouble, but she has a dream of a knight, fully armed and leaning on a sword. She feels he's been sent as her champion. One day she spies, on the river, a boat drawn by swans and in it stands her knight. He lands nearby, bidding loving farewells to the swans, and then offering himself as her rescuer. He makes one single demand though – she must never ask his name or he'd have to go. She agrees, so he stays with her and puts to right unjust charges and distress she'd suffered. But then, through outside treachery, Elsa's curiosity overcomes her and his name is revealed. So after the forbidden question had been asked he'd left at once and poor Elsa died broken-hearted. His name, actually, was Lohengrin, son of Percivale and Blanche fleur, the Grail knight and maiden. There now! So I don't expect that you, Paul, will tell us who is the new Swan Prince and spoil the magic of..."

"For goodness sake stop talking Luce," interrupted Gilly. "I'm sure that Paul knew the story, and so did we."

"I didn't," said Sam, noting Lucy's crest-fallen expression.

"Anyway," Gilly went on, "as I look at this fabulous place, so full of light, colour and adventure, I can't help linking it with part of our Roman trip. Eresta told us about the city of Bath being once the original cult centre of the Celtic Otherworld. She said it was under the power of a Celtic Mother Goddess, Sulis, who watched over the spring. It was, she told us, a point of contact between humans and the Otherworld and Sulis meant a whirlpool or eye in the old language. Down here it's full of tingling mystery also."

"Now *you're* talking too much," countered Lucy.

"Actually," concluded Paul, "*it has* all come full circle and it's a world under the old Abbey, opening up to a new view and dimension. Blake would say it was 'translucent all within'. Now, let's go into the Worship Centre."

This place was situated at the end of the Great Hall and was at right angles to the wall screen. It was entered through a glazed double door, decorated with the sort of rainbow colours the Celts would have loved. Inside it was ultra-modern in theatrical style and with just the bare necessities – altar, font and lectern (doubling as pulpit) – for the rites of passage and practice of ritual. The young people looked around with slight surprise.

"You may think it's all a bit disappointing," said Paul, "but not when I tell you its performance and its many possibilities." He pulled back a curtain to reveal a very large area covered with instruments and labelled diagrams. "You only have to press some buttons and throw a few levers here and you'd be in a church, chapel or cathedral of your choice in ten minutes."

“Could this place turn into Coventry Cathedral, for instance?” asked Sam.

“I think you’re half mocking me, but, yes it could, but it would only be a certain part of it which you would have requested. It has to be a fairly well known actual place so that all the data will have been collected.”

“What about a favourite village church or meeting house in which one felt specially ‘at home’, or even a central Hall?” said Gill with great awe.

“As long as it was a specific place of worship, functioning at the time and on the list – yes, why not, there’s a large choice and it’s being added to all the time. Clergy or officiators dress in appropriate attire beforehand.”

“I’d like to see again exactly how the building on this site looked in Saxon and Norman times,” said Lucy, surprisingly. “We never saw those two.”

“That’s also possible. In another part of the Vaults you can recreate an ancient structure or layout as a virtual reality image, looking just as it did in its heyday. There were records and pictures of the ruins... Happy?”

“Anyway, groups can choose in advance whatever environment or proceedings they want for their service.”

“Can we try it out now?” urged Tom.

“I’m afraid not,” said Paul looking at his wristwatch videophone, which was making a strange little noise. Tom could see it, and as it was lifted to ear position he noticed the clear face of a caller, on the tiny screen.

“My colleague is reminding me that this Centre has been booked for a service soon. Also, we must not be much longer here because I’ve arranged a time for you four to occupy two VR rooms for an hour soon. It will seem longer, being Merlin-Time! You must choose your partners. I want first to explain to you about the Wall Galleries.”

“Yes, I have noticed some familiar names on one wall,” remarked Sam. “But it’s strange that Merlin never showed us those photograph portraits of his Arthurian stand-ins before this.”

“He knew you’d see them here, I expect! Now, you must be tired, so why not sit down on these retractable chairs while I talk.” They gladly complied.

“Well, on one wall of fame are depicted the pathfinders, prophets and mystics of your century. They are like those Celtic heroes who braved the Underworld and its unmarked territory, to bring to light new ways forward. Under each one are illuminated words chosen

from familiar sayings of theirs. For instance, under Charles Williams, Sir Percivale, it reads: 'Man sins, not in spite of his aspirations but because of them.' I'm forever amazed at how scientists are turning back to nature to produce new techniques in designing software etc. This fits in with recognition of Christ as a dynamic force in the cosmic movement – and therefore in us. Below Tillich, Sir Bors, are words about broken symbols."

"The three Grail Knights are encircled in a golden glow," murmured Gill.

"Of course! Under Teilhard, Sir Galahad, are words of his, crucial to world Unity: 'Love alone can unite living beings so as to complete and fulfil themselves for it alone joins them by what is deepest in themselves.' Do you agree?"

"Ideally, yes, I suppose," conceded Tom. "But you can't make yourself love someone. There are some boys at my school who I could never love."

"Not now, perhaps, yet in all things there is a secret desire for union. And if you could join in some common project for love of our growing Earth you would soon find you were beginning to feel different. You see, this man has told us that the age of nations has passed and that unless we wish to perish we must shake off old prejudices and build the Earth. This means we will unite more by special functions rather than countries. Here we have global access for new bondings. Teilhard had friends in all walks of life and had travelled the world."

"What's 'Complexity Consciousness'?" asked Lucy, frowning after having just read it on the wall. "I'll be ages learning all my Tayar-Vision."

"Take heart, its quite simple really. It just means that the more complex and organised a thing is, the more it gains in consciousness. In other words, every synthesised whole is much more than just a sum of its parts."

"How about this wall over here with its row of blank spaces?" called Sam from the other side. "Is it a wall-in-waiting? A part is glowing red."

"That's because a new twenty-first century prophet will soon be acclaimed, and then the rest will begin to fill up – from mid-century onwards. Come now, it's time I settled you in your VR booths and showed you the ropes."

Our Cybnauts had already decided that brother and sister (Sam and Gilly) should go together in one booth and Tom and Lucy in the other.

They were all taken, first, into a sort of annexe cubicle to practise on interactive video displays and advanced computer games to get used to the medium. Paul asked both couples to try and work out roughly their own story line for the happening which they would soon be able to actualise. “VR is an instrument for inner exploration,” he told them, “and as a reality machine it could transport you to new worlds of experience. The user can be hero or heroine, and anyone can be made an epic character. Anything is possible. After all,” he concluded, “most of our present realities are partly artificial anyway. When you finish your VR session it will have been recorded and you will be able to re-live it again whenever you like.”

Gilly and Sam decided to invent a mythical episode about crossing a broken bridge over a petrified stretch of Badlands. It would involve Sir Galahad and a young boy – actually, their kid brother back in Ireland. The other two were going to develop the love story of Tristan and Iseult, which they felt Merlin had left out and which they’d both read about at school.

“So far, at home,” confided Tom, “I’ve only really been paddling in the Wold Wide Web. I’ve not even got to browsing the Internet, but now I feel in touch with the whole world. All this makes me feel I’m in an Aladdin’s cave and this little computer mouse summons my genie.”

“But now it’s new lamps we’re after, isn’t it? Not old ones. We’re offering laser-beams for torches! We may soon have intelligent computers to work with too. Mythology plays an essential role in our subconscious motivation,” added Paul.

“I feel like Alice,” said Lucy, “but instead of stepping through a looking glass, I’m going right through a window on the world – my TV set!”

“In a minute you will enter a new dimension where everything you dream of is potentially possible – if you desire it enough. You could create a real landscape, building or happening in Cyberspace and walk around or touch things. It’s not necessarily the pearly gate to a Cyber-heaven but it will be something that might change your life.”

After Paul had helped them to strap on their small helmets and goggles in the VR room, he patted their shoulders kindly and left them. He had already shown them how to click away with track balls and button controls for the 3D data. There they sat surrounded by the humming electrical equipment for what must have been an hour in real time but seemed years in what we called Kairos time. When they’d almost finished their respective flights of fancy and exploration, all suddenly went blank. Taking off their helmets they were amazed to find themselves back in Merlin’s room in the Circus.

“Surprise, surprise!” came the familiar voice. “Hello again, and finally, my redoubtable time-travellers. You’ve been enthusiastic cybernauts and I’m grateful to you. VR, of course, is natural-living in a new dimension of real time. It’s just electrical impulses converted into a computer programme. Did you know that the word ‘information’ means patterns in Greek? Stories trace mind patterns allowing things to be seen from different angles. Fiction can become reality. All your lives are rich material out of which to make new stories. It’s an extension of natural phenomena, which, carried beyond themselves, enter the future-natural. Its a new stage of evolution, so welcome it. Poems, stories and music treble the significance of time – words get wings.”

“Wow!” complained Tom. “We’re too dazed, still, to take all this in, but does it mean our stories may change the shape of this noosphere around us?”

“Yes, ever so slightly, they could. Think of your Arthurian legend and its beginnings. ‘Art’ meant ‘to plough’ in the Welsh language and ‘Hu’ was the name of their Sun God – hence Arthur. The origin of the Grail was a Celtic dish of plenty, becoming a source of life-giving nourishment and even immortality.”

“It seems a long time since little Spriggy prepared the way for you to come upon the scene,” said Gilly, coming to life somewhat. “Do you remember?”

“Of course, I’m in touch with many tree, plant and animal spirits and derive much fun and happiness from them. I encouraged Spriggy, as you call him, to make itself more actual and voluble for a while according to my purpose, but it will not trouble you again in this way, though you will always be especially close to and aware of trees. I hope that all of you will keep that childhood spirit of wonder for the miracle of life. Remember your mission. I must leave you now and this room will revert to an ordinary room. Your Aunt Sophie will be getting worried as it’s been a long day, but I’ll be watching you and willing you to succeed. Last words now from my William:

*‘Go, tell them that the worship of God is honouring his gifts
In other men and loving the greatest men best, each according
to his Genius which is the Holy Ghost in Man; there is no other
God than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity’.*”

After this the voice was gone so the youngsters looked round, uncomfortably. Suddenly the big screen lit up again and they saw these words upon it:

*'Well has Merlin spoken the last spell
worked the last image, gone to his own:
the moon waxes and wanes in the perilous chair,
where time's foster-child sits, Lancelot's son.'* By C.W.
*With Merlin's departure our Court Music Master will play
you out. FAREWELL.'*

When the screen went dark again the Four got up to go and, standing in the doorway, they saw the large crystal was still turning and radiating its brightness. As they mounted the steps to the Circus, Tom sneaked back for a moment to the room. It was in pitch-blackness and the music had stopped.

On their way home they skirted the roundabout in front of the Gothic-Victorian church standing at the bottom of the hill. It struck them that modern life was now in constant movement. In the busy traffic rounding the island, branching off or waiting to enter the circle, they recognised order and organisation. This makes a city function, in spite of overloading with buses, cars and lorries and, as Tom often complained – ‘stinking fumes!’ A city is all about exchange, or give and take, thought Gilly as they walked up the hill. Bath Council must have planted the hundreds of blue and yellow pansies with their smiling faces she had seen on that centre island, and also had arranged the whole in patterns. Gilly dwelt approvingly upon this. Lucy remembered, as cars passed them, how she'd noticed while looking out of one of Aunt Sophie's back windows, that all the faces of passing drivers were lit brightly as they drove up into the sun – a sight for mornings only as the broad road mounted eastwards. It went on up to a modern top-class University. Arriving at Sophie's place they passed again the myriads of shining yellow heads in the gardens and outside the flats – daffodils in full bloom.

Later, as they were sipping their bedtime drinks, Aunt Sophie announced that she was coming back to Ireland with them for a holiday. She went on: “Then you can tell me all about your adventures and I can write it all down, including your VR stories. These will make great sequels to your travelogue through Time. Would you like that?”

“Yes please,” they answered in unison. Bed now, for our tired youngsters. Gilly couldn't sleep though. Quietly letting herself on to the balcony she saw that the Abbey was still floodlit. The Lantern of the West, she remembered it used to be called. Then she pondered on how this building defined the whole landscape of the city. With its gold-ringed tower clock it kept its citizens always informed of the real time. At midnight the floodlights were switched off and Gilly felt

almost as if there was a black hole right in the middle of Bath. That evening there had been a wonderful sunset, with fiery streaks behind the Abbey; sunsets like this, in line with where she stood, happen only in springtime and autumn. The old edifice had shown up in a dramatically exaggerated way and the spires (St Michael's and St John's on either side) had been seen highlighted against the trans-figured sky. Certainly Bath was Queen of the West.

Just then the glass door behind her opened and Aunt Sophie, looking very worried, asked her if she was all right and wasn't she getting cold? Gill assured her that the dressing gown she was wearing was a warm one and that she would soon come in. It was understood and accepted and Gill was alone again. Now she remembered how on one evening, during their first autumn visit, there had been a grand firework display in the recreation grounds below them and the rockets had burst into twinkling colours over the balcony.

Now, she thought, everyone was about to celebrate Easter. Pondering again on how, in the daytime, this Georgian city looked 'all of a piece', seeming to be the mirror of an ideal city, she now knew that really there shouldn't be such lines of demarcation between Abbey and secular city. All churches should be more immersed in the ordinary life around them. She recalled their Roman trip and the Temple with its sacred precincts, which once stood under the Abbey and what the word 'profane' meant – namely, outside the Temple!

Gilly sat down on the cane chair out there and felt confused. Inside, on the coffee table, was a book of her Aunt's about a new interpretation of the findings from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Gillian had dipped into it and had been disturbed at some of the revelations about the life of Christ and the times in which he lived. On the mantelpiece was an early Easter card and the words on it were 'Jesus is alive' then came 'This Jesus God raised up.' It was from Acts 2:32. Thinking of this made Gilly remember how, two days ago, they'd peeped into the church of St John the Evangelist, but had then stayed longer admiring the brilliant stained glass windows around the chancel. They were fascinated by one showing Christ in glory, supported by very young and humanoid angels, looking as if He'd been shot from the roots of a huge tree. In another, He was rising from a tomb surrounded by spring flowers. Gilly now looked out on Bath, at the stars and the moon low over Beechen Cliff. She could now believe in the historical figure whom God loved as a son. It was JESUS – the Christ whose influence God extended through Time and Space in, what Gilly saw as, the frightening, unknown realms of the teeming universe. But he's taken part of our Earthly home with Him, she told herself, and has entered our subconscious World-Mind.

Was this the Noosphere, Gilly wondered? Then she remembered Teilhard's words about the universe being a personalising one. That would mean, she realised joyfully, that Christ, as the unique and precious man we know as Jesus, will always be accessible to her, here, now and for always. This goes for all who desire it and the Bible explains it all in the easiest way for us to understand – through stories, concluded Gillian, and she went back to bed, happy. She dreamt of Sir Galahad, smiling down at her from his white horse.

The next day, Easter Day, Aunt Sophie took them to Matins at the Abbey. As the awesome pomp of the occasion sank in, Gilly felt her spine tingling. The great organ and beautiful singing of the Easter hymns worked their magic. She heard that it was being recorded and later ones televised. Gazing up at the fan vaulting she saw the Abbey's shield – a sword between two keys.

As they all filed out into the Churchyard, the choir singing a processional hymn with many Alleluias, Lucy guessed how Tayar would have liked it. It was his Christ, spreading out from stone buildings into the everywhere.

Sam had noticed the many grey and balding heads in the tightly packed congregation. There was hardly any sign of guys and girls of his own age, so he was certain then of his mission – to be a link between this, now fading glory and a new TayarVision, as Lucy called it. "It's a new look," he said to himself, "I can visualise it becoming really hip... Easter 1999, I'll be here, and then Easter 2000!"

Tom, reflecting upon a real miracle – the power that one man still holds over the minds of people after 2000 years – remembered Paul's words to him. Tom decided he would try out this Christ-centred thing after all. He would give it a bash. "Why not?" he thought, "bodily death could seem irrelevant!"

The Abbey interior had been meticulously cleaned ready for Millennium celebrations, and the pillars were gleaming white again. During this irksome task a surprise bonus had been revealed above the choir-stalls. It was the brightly patterned, diamond-shaped insets between the roof vaulting, which Victorian restorers had covered up. One of these showed the Abbey coat-of-arms on a red shield. Its gold and silver sword and keys so clearly seen, reminds us of the Abbey's two patron Saints, both of whom were martyred.

PART TWO

SEQUEL ONE – SAM AND GILLIAN

1

CROSSING THE BRIDGE

We're back in the VR booths in the Heritage Vaults (year 2050) and our four Time Travellers have not yet entered into Cyberspace to start their first adventure in Virtual Reality. Merlin was speaking to them again and, to be honest, they were very relieved to hear his voice. It was audible simultaneously in both their booths.

"Well, here we are again, my Cybernauts," Merlin greeted them. "Paul didn't tell you much about the VR environment, did he? And nothing about polygons?"

"No," answered Lucy in a small and anxious voice. "I've not even heard of polygons before, and Tom says I'm being stupid 'cos it's just Geometry."

"Well... they're really the basic building blocks of computer graphics. The word comes from the Latin 'gonos' which means 'angled', and 'poly', of course, means 'many'. In geometry, Lucy, it's a two-dimensional figure with three or more sides – like a triangle, for example. The more you have of these the more power you need and the more real the result. The number of polygons delivered per second can be nearly 50 million... The magic, you see, is in the speed and amount of the calculations. Though the real world is made of atoms and molecules, so a virtual world is made of polygons."

"We'll really be very glad of your help now, Merlin, for though Paul did his best to explain what we had to do to start things up... now we're shut in here we're over-awed. All these buttons and all the possibilities seem suddenly daunting." Gilly was addressing the Mage with marked politeness.

"Yes, and how can we find our way around the VR landscape?" came Lucy's voice from the other booth. "Or make a familiar setting for our stories? Tom is telling me that we could get trapped in there... in the future too!"

“I can see that I must tell you more about Cyberspace to put your minds at rest and send you on your ways. To begin with, computer technology details are often better than local knowledge of an area and signs will be clear once you have a plan of action. You can only explore a computer-generated world by actually being in it. It’s a mind amplifier – a physical reality with extra features. You can invent a future which can use media input from around the world. This could consist of material from films, print, plays, and radio and TV transmissions of course. You can dip into the collective knowledge from human thought and experience recorded in the World Wide Web.”

“This sounds a bit like Tayar’s noosphere,” commented Sam, “but does that mean one could activate any of the bad and wicked thoughts as well and use them for evil purposes?” he added with alarm.

“I myself only deal with the most positive projects and happenings, but of course there are always the Mordreds of this world who try to negate the progress towards Omega. They are clever and spread despair and disruption instead of hope and unity. It slows things down and creates a crisis for a while, but evolution always bounces back on course again.”

The four tensed-up teenagers, sitting in their respective VR booths, were picturing a queue soon forming outside for others waiting their turn. Our cybernauts knew they only had one hour and felt they should be into it all. Merlin, sensing this, reminded them that he was in control of Time anyway, and he now needed to make sure that his protégés did not treat VR as a new toy.

“‘I give you the end of a golden string, only wind it up and it will lead you in...’ states William Blake. So, like Ariadne in the Greek myth, you’ll have to unwind another string as you go in, so you can retrace your steps and follow it out.” Then with a chuckle and a clearing of the throat Merlin relented and became more serious. He was teasing, he told them, just as Tom had been teasing Lucy before. “You’ll both get on well together once you get started,” he assured them, “and you’ll be back on your Circus launch-pad and in your real time, Lucy, very soon now.”

“Will it change the way we look at things?” said Sam.

“I hope so!” answered Merlin. “It will break the frame of everyday life and you will identify very strongly with a new person you may glimpse, perhaps, within yourselves. You may also feel a great affinity with or even a revulsion towards one of the characters you conjure up. It’s not just entertainment but, unlike TV, instead of just observing you are actually there and experiencing and interacting with events yourself.”

“But when I’m watching my favourite ‘soaps’ on TV,” objected Lucy coyly, “I too feel part of the scene. I get lost in it and am quite out of myself.”

“I know, this can become addictive. Think of the idols of Pop music – I’m sure that you are not a ‘teeny-bopper’ Lucy – they really need something better to scream about! But their intense and crazy ardour is only the reflection of a far greater love they should feel one day for a deeper union. It’s always excitement and fast movement you crave. Nothing is so dull in life as doing things just for yourself... to do anything, though, for one you love or for a chosen cause is exhilarating. Boredom is deadly. Nothing can stand up to this – not even evolution. It’s public enemy No.1, and as your Tayar says: ‘despite all appearances, mankind is bored. Perhaps this is the underlying cause of all our troubles.’ Idleness he saw as the mother of all vices.”

“Do you mean,” conjectured Sam, with dawning wonderment, “that instead of a wand we can operate a sort of computer-based joystick which can direct and guide our flights of fancy? And when we return to our normal life we’ll find it more rewarding than it was before and not mundane in contrast?”

“Certainly I do. I’ll tell you more about wands and joysticks later. You must see that VR is a new form of reality that opens up a new continent of explorable mental terrain. Don’t be afraid to set foot on its shores, for it is surely a new stage of evolution. You’ll know yourself better afterwards.”

“If you’re saying that technology can now achieve our dreams,” countered Gillian, “we should really have many favourite ideas, expectancies or imaginings of our own to work on – releasing pent-up energies at the same time. So I hope that Sam and I have chosen the best theme for this session.”

“I have great faith in the powerful Arthurian epic as it evolves into the next century. I’ve introduced you to some twentieth century mythology, and now I shall start you all upon your attempts to add to the stories yourselves. You can invent your own versions and you’ll need no drugs to stimulate that fertile inner space which is inside each of you. Use it. In the process you will learn where to look for answers to your questions. This will create new attitudes towards your existence and fresh motivation.”

“Do you approve, then, of our theme?” persisted Gilly, guessing that Merlin would have known telepathically what they had chosen.

“Yes, I gathered, for example, that you and Samuel had decided, during your preparation period, upon a twentieth century bridge-crossing episode. You’ve opted to be onlookers and settled for your

young brother to accompany Galahad – for that’s who it will be – up to the top.”

“We’ve had to leave him behind in Ireland before as he’s only eight and goes to another school,” said Sam. “We’d like to include him in our exploits.”

“That’s fine... but this bridge over the wasteland, mended now with such great sacrifice, and joining up so many contraries, is the direct opposite of Bath’s Pulteney Bridge over which people and traffic pass constantly and which even has shops on it! This other bridge was a narrow and elevated structure which spanned a soured, mist-covered tract of land where, barren and disfigured with stagnant puddles, nothing grew. It was broken at the top, but this couldn’t be seen from the ground. It was always hidden by a cloud.”

“We didn’t imagine it quite like that,” admitted Gilly ruefully.

“Don’t worry. As this is your first VR trip I shall provide the background setting for you this time. It’s a tradition, you know, in the computing world for an expert to decide sometimes *who* can enter certain programs and who not. In the jargon they call him a wizard or tinker. He administers systems, helps to extend mental images – to view them as objective realities. Now, here’s *my* plan... You are starting from a school classroom, aren’t you?”

“So, we hear voices that no-one else seems to hear,” said Sam.

“Are you fixing Tom and Lucy’s VR story at the same time?” asked Gilly.

“Of course! But we’ll stick to yours just now. Yes... it is a very warm afternoon and the lesson is boring. You ask permission to leave the room on the pretext of feeling unwell, which indeed you both do. You follow in the direction of the voices and make your way through woodland to a wide, green clearing. Here I’ll be waiting. I don’t often have to don the traditional wizard’s gear, nor wave a wand, but today you’ll find me in a flowing robe and wearing a three-cornered pyramid-hat with moon and stars upon it. My wand will have been freshly cut from a hazel tree. They have special divining powers. I have introduced more people into your scene, to witness and applaud this event. They are modern pilgrims on a march from Glastonbury to Coventry Cathedral via Bath. They’ve stopped here for rest and refreshment before a night in this enchanted city. Even Wordsworth had a house here!”

“Last week the year’s Music Festival ended,” remarked Gilly, “but there are still some banners hanging in the streets. This year’s theme was resurrection and awakening and the chief logo was a cock perched on a trumpet!”

“Yes, and we recognised it as one of the carved motifs over the houses in the Circus,” added Sam. “It was one of those near your house Merlin.”

“They played Richard Strauss’s ‘Death and Transfiguration’, in the Forum that week,” enjoined Tom in a subdued voice. “Sam’s Aunt went to the concert and was gob-smacked.” Tom was becoming interested in classical music.

“The word ‘transfiguration’ is a powerful one – this music did it justice. Your twentieth century Galahad saw Christ transfigured for the second time.”

There was an uneasy silence while the four youngsters attempted to log in to their computers, but having forgotten the password that Paul had told them, they appealed to the mage once more.

“I wonder if you realise, my cybernauts, that having the password would mean that through these Internet nodes you’d be connected with very high speed data communication channels. Thousands of computers would be available to you all over the world. No... You’ll be operating a simpler sort of program this time, but still with access to all you need for living out your story. Humans are narrative creatures – they make meaning out of connected events by giving them order, beginnings and ends. It fixes them in the mind.”

“Because each person probably has a different story to tell, how do we know which is best for us all?” queried Gilly with shrinking confidence.

“Certain myths and sagas you will find easy to connect up with if they reflect your own experiences, ideals and scales of importance. You can adopt these as guides. Actually, personal journeys can have universal affects.”

“Does it need a Christian background for it to work best?” said Sam.

“No, but if you’re brought up in a Christian culture it helps a lot and Spiritual yearning is the lynch-pin for all important works of art. The hope of life after death is the motivation for building the grandest edifices. Bath Abbey was the last of the great medieval piles to be built in Britain, but there are many admirable modern churches. It’s as your Tayar-cum-Galahad tells you – that for those who see nothing at the end of the world which is higher than themselves, daily life’s only filled with pettiness.”

“Why are you saying all this, while we’re waiting next door in the hot seat?” appealed Lucy. “It’s all too complicated – hardly worth the effort.”

“Fair comment. I’m getting carried away and forgetting my youthful audience, but I can assure you the project will have rich rewards.

Just as words and paper transformed old realities into new ones so will VR do the same.”

“As the written Gospels were ‘God-spells’ – changing things,” granted Tom.

“Of course. But now down to the business of story telling. You are all in an on-line position but anxious about the interfacing of your fingertip instructions and complex visual tasks ahead. Now relax and enjoy it. I’m here.”

“We’re wondering how we can best bring in our brother,” said Sam.

“Oh well, I shall be dealing with that to begin with. I have to get him to join you here – from twentieth century Ireland over to twenty-first century VR-land! So I have special plans for him. You’ll be able to meet him, in your VR story, well before your bridge sequence and from then it will be all your own invention. You four are now about to operate a slightly old-fashioned VR system, by 2050 standards, but you were placed in these special booths because I knew it would just about fit your late twentieth century capabilities.”

“You mean these sets do not yet include a ‘feely’ technology,” joked Sam.

“Right on cue... but your young brother, Jonathan, will have a chance, when he grows older, to experience your fantasy using a multi-user dimension system called a ‘MUD’, and it’s a form of telepresence. One day the boy will be able to operate the simulated physical sensations himself. With the help of force-reflecting joy-sticks, which return information and tactile feedback to the user, he could jump right into the graphics of your story – VR systems would, by then, have solved these monstrous computational problems.”

“Would he really be able to have the sensations of touching and feeling people, creatures and objects?” marvelled Sam with partial disbelief.

“Yes – and it will be future natural for people to use complete remote control at a distance. However for your show, knowing your brother well, you can gauge how he’ll react to things. Your horse – an exact electronic version of a real one – will have to manage today with mechanical wings... evolution is so slow! Jonathan will be wearing a full-immersion style, lightweight body suit to feel virtual objects, a half helmet and well-fitting gloves for grasping the future joy-stick I mentioned. This was necessary if he was going to link your first epic to umbilical cords of those Haptic actuators.”

“I suppose he’ll know us and greet us alright,” said Gilly, “but how will he respond to our symbolic linkup of Tayar, the bridge-mender, and Galahad?”

“I’ve been able to alert Teilhard and get his help. I visited Jonathan in a dream showing him where to go in his town to find a computer centre. He entered it and took in the set-up. It was a journey in what was once called the astral body. When he woke he remembered every detail, so the next day he managed to get to the same centre during his school lunch break and met my agent there. He was then connected up to your bridge-crossing VR session.”

“As we won’t be on the bridge with him and Galahad,” objected Sam, “how will we know all that’s said to him and exactly what happened at the top?”

“He’ll have a tiny tape-recorder strapped to his belt, so when he comes back you can replay the conversation. Jonathan will gladly relate the rest.”

“Right, I’ll leave you to it now,” said Merlin, giving all four their final instructions for ‘off’ – and the youngsters found themselves on-line for starting their first VR adventure. All, of course, had their separate PC’s.

Here we’ll now relate the sequence of Sam and Gilly’s story as reproduced from their recordings, which were integrated by Merlin.

** *** **

After having excused themselves from their classroom and then walked down a leafy lane, they found themselves, as Merlin had foretold, in a woodland clearing. They soon realised that this session had actually been pre-programmed by their wizard – but they were still keen to follow it out and learn from it as they met up with each other in VR land.

Merlin, robed as expected was talking to the seated pilgrims on the subject of trees. His words came across clearly and he was pointing to his firmly-held wand. “This is freshly cut hazel wood,” he proclaimed, “for it has powerful mystic properties attached to it, such as revealing what is hidden. St Patrick banished snakes from Ireland with his Ash-stick, they say! The oak, of course, is King of the trees and the beech is the Queen. Did you know that Jason’s legendary ship, the Argo, was made of beech-wood and that the famous Helen of Troy carved names of her lovers on beech trunks?”

The speaker paused and waving his hands in the direction of the city he continued to address his audience. “You will soon be viewing one of the hills around Bath,” he told them, “which is called Beechen Cliff and still has many beech trees upon it. It’s a very good place for meditating and Thomas Hardy wrote a poem there once. You see,

slices of beech bark were used as a medium on which some very early written words were formed. The prepared surface was called 'buche' (German for beech) and now in English it's 'book'. Beech groves were seen as magic places."

One of the pilgrims called out: "How about the Dead Sea Scrolls?"

"Stone, papyrus and skins were of course earlier materials for preserving stories and ideas in writing," answered Merlin. "The discovery, dating and deciphering of these scrolls was crucial. From mid-century on each fragment has been pored over and now new truths have emerged from the old caves."

Merlin now turned and greeted Sam and Gilly with a wave and then a sort of beckoning gesture. As they approached he asked if they had any questions for him. Sam stopped. He was near to Merlin but looked very thoughtful now.

"I think it must be Friday today," Sam said, "because one teacher always reads to us on a Friday afternoon. She'd been regaling us earlier with the subject of Norse mythology and had read about a wonderful sacred tree which grew up through nine countries – the tree of life with a funny name. She also said that Friday was called after a Norse Goddess. What about this then?"

"You're right, my boy, Friday comes from 'Frigg's day'. She was the wife of Odin, king and father of their Gods, and she of course was Queen-mother. The tree you speak of, Yggdrasil, was a giant ash tree with three long roots. Yes, Sam, trees are very important and old Norse legends entered your subconscious as well as did Arthurian ones and affected languages. Your William Blake, my one-time host, used the figure of Thor, a son of Odin, for a prototype of Los in his prophetic Books. Los portrayed the human imagination. Your Thursday began as Thor's day you see. More of this in my coming game."

"Whatever is that thing lying on the grass mound over there?" asked Gilly. "And what are those children doing?" she said, pointing to where some of the pilgrims' offspring were struggling playfully to fit really old garments and scraps of discarded clothing on to a sort of human-like model.

"That's my Toy-Man. It's a sort of ramshackle, out-of-date image of clothed humanity. I found this disused metal dummy in an artist's studio and had it teleported here. It was just a wired up replica of some tramped-up member of your race. All those odds and ends with which the children were dressing it up were lent to them by their parents, and friends. These articles, mostly, had been stained or torn during their first journey to Glastonbury. This scarecrow is beginning to look quite a unisex affair. You'll see its role later. But now for your game."

THE NORSLAND INTERLUDE

Merlin took our couple aside and then out of a satchel hanging from his waistband he drew a thin paperback book. It contained some brightly coloured illustrations dealing with Norse mythology. He folded it back so that the first main picture was on top showing the huge world tree, Sam's Yggdrasil. Its roots were extended through each legendary country which they actually supported. He told Sam and Gilly to hold this page up in front of them while he explained the set-up.

The youngsters sat down on the grass and propped the picture against a convenient shrub, which supported it successfully, while they gazed at it.

"Right in the topmost branches lived the Eagle and the Falcon," began the Mage, "and that's where the last pair of human-beings fled, at the end of the mythical world, for refuge when all others had killed or been killed. The tree survived and the two, hiding in the leaves, climbed down to re-populate the Earth with a new breed of mankind – a fresh green Earth having emerged. I'm diverting a minute here to show you how very much alike seem all Man's subconscious images. This archetypal scenario is reflected in your modern doom-mongers who forecast apocalyptic horror and world destruction."

"Perhaps," countered Gilly, "this idea of the end of our world really symbolises the end of that Industrial Revolutionised world where humans seemed separated from nature... till now, when a new state is being born."

"Yes Gillian, you're right, birth pangs are always painful and the times chaotic. Anyway, to continue with the picture, you see that one root plunges into the Well of Urd located in Asgard, the home of the Gods and the topmost country. It is tended by three wise old Goddesses who see into future time and spin destinies."

"They must be the Norns," said Sam. "This teacher told us about them."

"You've actually remembered as well. I didn't want to worry you with too many funny names, but here are some more! Another root ends in the Fountain of Mirmir which is in Midgard (Earth), the world of humans. Its water was the source of all wisdom, so was guarded by a special God who, in the end, carried on pronouncing words of sagacity with only his head left! Like one of your modern Sci-fi stories – eh?" Merlin paused, smiled at Sam and then went on:

"The longest root plunges into another Spring. This one is guarded

by Nidhogg, a vile dragon who is gnawing at the root trying to destroy it. This is in the bottom world, the Land of the Dead ruled over by Hel, its gruesome queen. She is a grotesque figure, for her top half is a beautiful woman but below the waist she is like a corpse. You don't see her in this picture."

"Ugh! I don't want to hear any more," cried Gilly with distaste.

"Well, hold on. See now, stretched between Asgard and Midgard, the rainbow Bridge called Bifrost which links the two. It's a bridge of learning and the God, Heimdall, always nearby, will warn of the approach of strangers with his special horn. He can hear the grass grow and see for a hundred miles. He needs very little sleep and owns a stallion called Gulltop who has a golden mane and can fly through the air at great speed. How's that for romance? You'll be hearing soon, from your brother, about another flying horse today."

"Is Midgard only for humans?" asked Sam, studying the page carefully.

"No, giants live in the mountains, elves in woods and dwarfs underground. The dwarfs were skilled craftsmen and hoarded gold and precious jewels in their caves. It was said that they couldn't stand the daylight and if caught outside at dawn were turned to stone. Thus the scattered rocks in valleys!"

"When can we play our game?" urged Gilly with slight impatience.

"Well, as half of the episodes feature the God Thor, I thought that I'd better tell you a bit more about him first. You see, although he was a son of Odin his mother was one of Odin's lovers who was a giantess. Her name was Jorth... Its Norse meaning is 'Earth'. Thor was huge, even for a God, and also incredibly strong. He was boisterous, had wild hair and beard and a temper to match. He was forgiving though and never angry for long. His symbol was the oak tree and he was the defender of Asgard and protected homes and farms in Midgard. He had a famous magic hammer which had been made for him by the dwarfs and which always found its target and returned to his iron-gauntleted hand – better than a cruise missile! When he threw down his hammer it caused a thunderbolt. He was called the Thunderer because as he raced across the sky in his chariot, drawn by two great goats, it thundered on Earth. The goats were called Toothgnasher and Toothgrinder!"

"Wow! Such animals and birds were really admired, weren't they?" said Sam, smiling at the names. "Like Odin's two ravens who perched on his shoulders."

"Yes, but people now still seek to emulate respected animals. I see they are calling the new robot assistant for keyhole surgery, Black

Falcon! Think also of the campaign to save the tiger from possible extinction – all due to demand for some of its body parts for Chinese medicine and aphrodisiacs.”

“‘Tiger, Tiger, burning bright’,” quoted Sam. “One of your William’s poems.”

“Indeed. But now back to Thor. He was a favourite God and many brooches and pendants showing his image have been unearthed to prove it.”

“The contrast between him and Jesus is shattering,” mused Gilly aloud.

“True enough. His home in Asgard had a hall, Valhalla, for your dead war heroes and that’s why I’m relaying a few bars of Wagner’s ‘Ride of The Valkyries’ for you to feel the atmosphere of Norse legends. There is another side to the stories though. Odin was always searching for more wisdom. He sacrificed an eye so that he could drink of the Mead of Poetry from the Fountain of Mimir. He also hung for a sacrificial nine days from a branch of Yggdrasil with a spear in his side. After he died and learnt the secrets of the Dead he came back to life and used his new knowledge for the good of Mankind.”

The music stopped and there was a strange silence. The picture which the youngsters had been looking at disappeared. In its place was a small computer terminal, keyboard and all. At this they now stared in amazement.

“I don’t believe it,” gasped Gilly “A computer within a computer!”

“Always glad to oblige,” quipped the Mage, now in quite jocular mood. You can activate my four episodes by just pressing in turn the keys 1, 2, 3, & 4, or up to 7 if you like. So go for it.” And the screen obediently sprang to life.

Interspersed by Merlin’s intelligent accompaniment and background music, the first story unfolded. The watchers saw a resplendent group of big, warrior-like figures seated round a table and holding grim consultation. The viewers were told that these Gods had been warned by the Norns that an evil giantess could bring disaster upon them, so they must act soon.

The next scene showed a violent raid by the Gods upon the hall of this giantess and the seizure of her monstrous brood. Odin grabbed the serpent, Jormungand, and struggled out with him. They changed scene again – and *there* was the island of Midgard with the ocean around it and into which Odin threw the monster. It then thrashed up the water, circled the Land and terrorised the seas. The half-woman, Hel, was banished to the lower regions.

The giant wolf, Fenrir, had seemed harmless, so the commentary told them, so they'd allowed him to wander free in Asgard. He became so fierce though, that the Gods feared for Odin's life. They decided that because Fenrir was so powerful they must chain him up by trickery. They could not pollute the sacred ground of Asgard by killing him.

The next scene showed them pretending to test his strength a few times by putting an iron chain round him, but each time he snapped it without any effort. So a servant was sent off to the dwarfs with offers of a huge reward, to ask them to make a magic restraint for Fenrir.

They next saw the servant return with a strange, ribbon-like tether, but Fenrir was suspicious and refused to be tied in it.

At last he agreed, but only if the Gods promise to free him if it proved to be too strong. Also that one of them puts a hand in his mouth as a sign of good faith.

A God called Tyr came forward. He was the bravest of the Gods and, like Thor, was a God of Law and Order. He too, was another son of Odin from a mixed liaison. With great courage he put a hand in the wolf's mouth and then they bound up Fenrir. Soon finding, though, that however much he strained, the bonds got tighter and the Gods were not going to free him, Fenrir clashed his jaws shut biting off Tyr's hand. Fenrir was dragged underground and the players were told that he was tied to a rock out of harm's way!

The screen went blank. The youngsters blinked and rubbed their eyes.

"That's why Tyr was called the one-handed God," said Gilly, recalling one of the stories read to them in class. "Poor Tyr!" she added.

Pressing the next button they now saw the squirrel, Ratatosk, running up and down the trunk of Yggdrasil carrying insults and gossip between Nidhogg in the lowest level and the eagle who lived at the top. As Ratatosk neared the eagle, perched on a branch, he squeaked out his obscene messages – while keeping a safe distance of course. He then raced back down bearing the angry responses. Slipping past the ghastly dog with the bloodstained breast, who guarded the gate, and then through flames, the squirrel entered a land of ice and snow and gloomy twilight. Leaping to where Nidhogg crouched gnawing at the roots of the World Tree, Ratatosk now came to a stop, his tail still in the air. He then sat up on his little hind legs and delivered the answering offences to the dragon who began to writhe in fury. The lithe and mischievous little creature retraced his route up the tree again having avoided the fire, snorted out with the replies he had received from below.

In quick succession the players keyed in for the next story while still having a good laugh over Ratatosk's escapades. The one now coming up was about Thor going fishing. He was in human disguise but wearing his own special helmet with its long Viking horns. He was in a large boat with a giant who had just caught a whale and was now looking very pleased with himself. This giant, so their commentator explained, was married to Tyr's mother but didn't like the other Gods. He had been grumpy and uncooperative earlier because this stranger had eaten so much and had asked to borrow his large cauldron. Thor had wanted it for a great quantity of best ale that had been brewed for the Gods.

When Thor cast his line, baited with an ox-head, there was a good deal more thrashing about in the water. Then Jormungand himself rose up and snatched the bait. Thor struggled with the serpent, the boat nearly capsizing, but he managed to strike it on the head with his hammer. Well stunned, the horror sank below the waves and Thor's companion seemed very impressed. So, our youngsters guess, Thor got his cauldron in the end.

"That was dead good," enthused Sam. "That hammer is really something!"

"Well, you'll hear more about it in the last clip to come up," said Merlin.

They were then given the introduction to this new story. It started with an account of two fantastic horses – one owned by a giant, Hungnir, and the other by Odin who had come looking for adventure in Midgard. Seeing Odin's wonderful horse, Hungnir challenged him to a race. During this they finished up, by mistake, in Asgard – having, in their enjoyment, ignored its walls. There was trouble among the Gods. So finally Thor agreed to a dual with the giant.

On the screen this fight could now be seen. Sam and Gilly watched Thor hurl his hammer at Hungnir who held up a huge whetstone as a shield. The hammer shattered it, but one of the sharp, flying chips which shot around entered Thor's head and he fell wounded. The hammer, though, had met its mark and killed the giant who fell on top of Thor. When the Gods came to pull Thor from under his opponent, they could not shift him.

"What a mess-up!" declared Sam somewhat squeamishly.

In the next sequence, however, Thor is seen to be shouting to his servant again who then leaves the scene, soon to reappear with a strapping young lad of about three years old.

The commentator informs them here that this was Thor's son, Magni, by the giantess who was an ally of the Gods and the boy

already had the combined strength of his parents. Magni now frees his father with ease and Thor is so delighted, he gives him Hungnir's horse, Gullfaxi as a thankyou gift. Odin, who had fancied the horse for himself, sulks and stamps out – offended.

“From then on, the chip in Thor's head gave him terrible headaches.” So Merlin finished their computer game and the screen fell idle – but he now suggested that they each had a go at inventing a new story, using these same Norse characters, and displaying it as a personal programme on screen.

“You see,” he told them a bit regretfully, “I'm afraid I've rather hijacked your original Bridge Story by switching your brother to twenty-first century capabilities. Then I added further complications for you by contacting Teilhard himself and inviting him to play the part you had given him and to accompany it with words which you would not have been able to supply. But take comfort, my Cybernauts, for you thought up, in the first place, the whole Bridge theme, and brought your brother into the plot. This gave me my present idea, and how to implement it in this way for your further education. In the future you'll have many more chances, I hope, of creating your own episodes.”

“We'll forgive you,” they conceded.

“But afterwards we want to go over to that strange Toy Man of yours,” said Sam, “and supply something of our own.”

“And can we please be put in the picture as regards this thing?” added Gilly. “We didn't have it in our original scheme.”

“Of course, so while you are both busy with your individually conceived legendry, I'll go and supervise the children's efforts with that mysterious 'Thing' and wait for you.” Merlin left them to their game and moved away.

When our youngsters finally grew tired of their cartoon stories they noticed that the children had finished clothing Merlin's Homo-sapiens model, which now looked more like a unisex scarecrow than ever.

“Let's go and study it,” decided the curious Gillian, “and ask Merlin again to give us some ideas for *our* part in these queer goings-on.”

As they ran across to the Mage they saw him fumbling beneath his voluminous, green cloak. He then pulled out two soft bags which, he told them, were full of seeds and handed them to the two newcomers.

“I want you to push these seeds up the lapels of the old coat on this prostrate model and under the collar. Then fill its pockets with all the rest. Will you do this for me now?” The response was instant and work began.

As soon as they'd stuffed all these openings as full as they could, Sam and Gilly looked up at Merlin who then nodded his approval. As they stood up, however, they looked over to where he pointed, and there was Jonathan. In the same position that they'd occupied earlier they saw, to their delight, a small figure standing and looking around. Though unfamiliar in his twenty-first century gear, they guessed it was their brother. The computer had vanished of course. The boy waved as they approached him and started out to meet them.

When the greetings were over, Jonathan pointed up to a wonderful bridge, which no one had noticed before. The other two stared in amazement.

"Hadn't you seen it?" he said, with disbelief. "Don't you think it's fabulous though? All those other people are looking now as well. Who are they?"

"They are pilgrims," answered Sam, "and they are as surprised as us to see this mysterious bridge which may have been there all the time!"

Merlin was telling them all that this was like so many other things in their lives – they never noticed them or only, perhaps, when it was too late. "But those who know where to look and have the eyes to see and ears to hear can be aware of amazing things – like this bridge and twentieth century angels!"

The bridge they were looking at rose up on their near side from a patch of sour looking scrub with weeds and nettles ending in bogland. It descended on the other side into a verdant meadow by a small river. The middle part of the top expanse was enveloped in a dark, swirling cloud hiding it from sight. The whole structure resembled a Chinese willow pattern bridge with carved, alabaster sides, but a wooden ramp led up to and continued across it. The gradient was quite steep each end but flattened out along the higher reach.

Merlin now addressed the pilgrims who were still gazing with awe at the bridge. He invited any one of them to have a go at crossing it and surprisingly a few young men came forward to attempt the feat.

"The trouble with this bridge," the Mage told them, "is that it is incomplete. You see, within that low-hanging, persistent cloud... there is a gap. For someone who's learnt such secrets and has the courage, there is a way over. Each must try for himself... so yes, one by one they will go for it now."

Consecutive volunteers then ran resolutely up the bridge's side slope; but on approaching the dimly-lit hidden gap, foul and clinging smog seemed to choke them. They lay down and peered momentarily over the side but were further overcome by a horrible feeling of black

nothingness. The encounter hit them so sharply that it made them gasp and vomit. So, creeping away with broken spirits they slunk quietly back down. Yet the continued efforts of others who made further sorties, even after witnessing the sickness of their predecessors, was heroic. All experienced the same ordeal, and subsequently Merlin forbade any more attempts for the emptiness attracted much evil up there.

One has to love the human spirit which is God-like in its aspirations. The failed enthusiasts didn't know about the cursed existence of such gaps.

After these youthful adventurers had rejoined their friends and families Merlin praised and comforted them.

"It was a necessary exercise," he said, "in order to highlight what is soon to come. Our world is frequently drawn ahead by the 'curiosity of some dreamers and idlers' as the good Teilhard says, and I think you lot are mostly unemployed at the moment."

Now, turning to our three Cybernauts the Mage invited them to come again to his old scarecrow and he summoned all the other children as well.

When they looked again at the figure on the grassy mound they were amazed to see the transformation. They had all been so intent on watching the events on the bridge that they hadn't noticed what was happening.

The whole ramshackle image of clothed humanity was covered in fresh, green growth while still retaining its rough shape. There were even some flower buds beginning to open round its hat and a few woody strands twisting down the dummy's arms had ripening fruit upon them.

"Now, listen carefully," said Merlin. "I want all you young people to be the life of this poor thing – to do some extra living today. You've all got an excess of energy so start picking now from this miraculous growth."

"What shall we do with it all?" asked Gilly, circling it in confusion.

Merlin signalled to the children to wait a minute. He walked to a small outcrop of trees which stood nearby, with the woodland behind it, and from a folded pile of sacks, hidden there, he picked out an armful. Then he found a pair of heavier objects, like saddlebags, and brought them to the mound.

"How did *they* get there?" asked one of the children.

"He's a wizard," exclaimed Sam. "He can teleport anything from one place to another. I expect he did it earlier."

"Thank you, my Cybernaut," said Merlin. "But now you've all got

much to do. First pick as many as you can of the leaves, buds and fruits and fill these bags. You will find that these strange growths will break off very easily and afterwards will soon sprout forth again. You may eat some of the fruit and it will have a sweet but very unusual taste. Then, I suggest you sit down with your personal gatherings and try to weave stalks and leaves into shapes; it will prove easier than you think. You will soon be delighted and surprised with the wonderful and wholly new types of objects you have created. The enchanted vegetation will fall easily into any new shape you can conjure up.”

After this Merlin left them, all busily occupied with this special task, and fell into a seeming reverie. He looked often towards the west as if he were expecting someone from the direction of the woods. Gilly then heard him chanting words to the effect that one was coming who could close all gaps and who would cross the bridge – one who, like Orpheus with his music, would charm the blighting sickness.

Then it happened – Merlin’s awaited event. Out of the trees rode a tall and fully armoured knight. He was on a white horse and was carrying a lance, and a shield with a red cross on it. In fact he looked exactly like the Sir Galahad that our four Time Travellers had met back in the Middle Ages.

As he trotted briskly up towards the Mage the pilgrims parted to make a passage for him as they stared with unbelieving eyes. Merlin greeted him with arms outstretched. This surely *was* Galahad himself. He now came to a halt and took off his feathered helmet. Putting it under one arm he handed his lance to Merlin and dropped his shield carefully onto the grass.

“I’ve brought all this equipment,” said the knight to Merlin, “because I think I shall need them for my bridge job.” He then waved at the children and spying the three Cybernauts with the spaced-up Jonathan in the middle, asked if this was the boy Merlin had chosen. The two men conferred together and then, smiling at the wide-eyed children, the awesome figure announced that he was taking a lad with him to help with his tasks – he supposed a lass would do as well but Merlin had chosen a candidate specially suited to the event.

Jonathan had seen he was being looked at, and although he was usually game for any adventure and raring to go, now he hung back.

“Tell him Mage,” said Galahad, noticing the hesitation, “that he can trust me fully and he’ll come to no harm – we’ll tackle it together. He can do it.”

After this Jonathan’s hand went up and he obeyed the beckonings and encouraging words from Sam and Gilly – also from pilgrims and

fellow children. Merlin had a preliminary job for him, though. He had to fill two saddlebags with an assortment of live produce springing from Merlin's re-earthed scarecrow.

"When you've done this I'll attach them to Starlight's saddle, for you'll be needing all this on your trip."

As Jonathan finished his task he noticed that some of the Victorian statues, in an old graveyard nearby, had also been covered with greenery, like the Toy-Man, and had even been clipped into new shapes.

There were many willing hands to help Jonathan into the saddle in front of Galahad, whose arm went around the boy's waist as they started, at a comfortable canter, towards the bridge.

As they clattered slowly up the side slope they were watched until, eventually, they approached the menacing cloud. It was approvingly noted that Galahad had been bending and talking to the boy most of the way up, for it was a very tall structure, and Jonathan had been asking questions and been reassured. When the pair had disappeared into the smog Merlin turned to his audience again.

"The boy has his recorder," he told them, "so you too will be able to hear their conversation – but later. Now, while we wait... I'll make their time pass more quickly for you – I want to tell you more about that horse of Galahad's."

"He's a Time Lord, you see," interjected Sam, addressing the pilgrims.

Smiling to himself, Merlin carried on with his subject, telling them that though Galahad called his steed Starlight, he, himself had named the horse officially.

"I call him Wordster 2," said Merlin. "You must see that words are intensely important for your lives and are imbued with magic. I quote from your Bible: 'In the beginning was the word... and the word was made Man.' So Jesus came. The Gospels changed Western civilisation and stories haunt our subconscious minds."

"Who was the first Wordster then?" asked Gilly. "An even more beautiful horse?"

"Galahad's Wordster 1 was, I'm afraid, confined for too long in the stables and grounds of the Vatican and has only recently been set more free. This present steed has already travelled afar, with less restriction, taking Galahad and his liberating Gospel astride him. My William puts it well in a poem about the English language which served and supported Galahad – he wrote that 'Los (the imagination) built the stubborn structure of the language acting against Albion's melancholy, who must else have been in dumb despair'. He gave it purpose, hoping that in all its exchanges it may build a Holy City, 'heart in heart

and hand in hand’.

“You humans are a breed of legend-makers. You love stories and learn by them. In the end you make your own lives and your spiritual faith into a story by which you live. The big story we tell and believe about your own planet needs revising and, in the end, renewing. Your attitude to the Earth and the whole Cosmos is changing dramatically so you need new words and themes to describe it. Recently a journalist wrote in the media that nothing becomes real to humans until it has been described in words and pictures. This is what Galahad is doing for the present and future state of spiritual evolution. He’s fast-linking it to physical evolution. He will now be crossing the awful gap between Science and Religion, material and spiritual things and natural and artificial life – this last includes all man-made artefacts and future-natural inventions.”

“Even with our awkward brother in tow?” exclaimed Gilly, incredulously.

“Especially so... he needs plenty of youthful eagerness and excitement to help with the sort of mental and physical equipment which can be understood and be in popular taste. Galahad finds this often difficult, you see, but he stands for the same character in whom ‘the soul of your Century burns most intensely’.”

“What’s it like on the other side of the bridge?” asked Sam in awed tone.

“Life should be sweeter and happier there. For one thing, bird songs will be listened to with affection and joy. There were no birds, of course, in the wasteland area below the gap, and on the pre-bridged side they were hardly noticed any more. Your Jesus will be nearer to being installed as the twenty-first century Cosmic Christ who is co-extensive with the Universe and yet intimately alive in each one of you. The Grail Knight has made Him warmly accessible. There is hope abroad.”

“How about all the present violence and pornography?” Tom persisted.

“It will begin to wither away when boredom and lovelessness are reversed. Only in so far as anything contains within itself a principle of interconnectedness and a power of ascension, will it survive. There will be new leaders and new stories told.”

“Can stories become real?” said Gilly. “And can the people in them really live?”

“Not often in your world,” answered Merlin with a smile. “But they lead to a greater reality beyond what you perceive with your five senses. You’ll need new words.”

Some of the pilgrims were listening to these conversations with interest, and now Merlin turned to them all and announced that he would be introducing everyone to some further Arthurian characters. "They will be, first, Sir Bors who went back to Camelot to tell them about the end of the drama of the Grail Quest and to help them to face the future. The other one will be Sir Percivale who is the dreamer. He now represents what my William calls 'the poetic genius in Man', and all artists, writers and musicians. These two are the other two Grail Knights."

Soon after this, following his gaze, they saw the two knights on horseback emerging from the woods. They were not in full armour nor had they weapons or shields, but were clad in heraldic attire. On approach they mingled with the crowd.

While they were all talking to and admiring the new arrivals, the bridge was being crossed and strange noises were heard from time to time.

Then came the final excitement – Merlin's ultimate display of the magical enchantment he had woven round this fantasy bridge – Jonathan appeared above them riding Starlight. The horse had grown wings, like Pegasus, and glided down to land perfectly on the nearby grass. The elated boy waved and shouted out.

"Come on you gawping boys and girls, don't be afraid. I can give you some rides if you like. I see that Merlin has conjured up an extra 'Feely' suit like mine, to offer anyone who dares a ride."

The two knights went round the stunned children till they came to a girl who actually agreed to be fitted out and lifted up into the saddle behind Jonathan. They then set off for a circular flight over the admiring crowd. After this there were many more eager applicants for rides and many boisterous shouts of delight, but all could not go.

When the last of these joy-rides had been successfully completed and the pillion riders had been stripped of their special next century equipment, Jonathan dismounted and fondled his wonder horse. It still had distended nostrils and gently pumping sides, but after the boy stood back to admire it further it just disappeared into thin air. The bridge with background had vanished too, he saw. Jonathan, slightly deflated, rejoined the others.

The knights were nowhere to be seen, but there were two new twentieth century characters in the act of climbing into a couple of vehicles. One man resembled a vaguely familiar 'state of the Arts' personality and he seated himself beside a woman driver who was probably his producer, for it was a TV studio car. The other one, obviously a parson with a dog collar, got into a jeep-type motor with

a female member of the ministry who was driving it. The Mage explained to the pilgrims that as it was now time to move on, and they should follow these present leaders who had now shown themselves, and trust them to get them to Coventry.

“They know the best way to get there and will go on ahead sometimes but return very soon to bring you refreshment and to confirm or alter your route. At Coventry, as they hoped, they would find the beginnings of Christian renewal for the next Century within the Cathedral – the Phoenix which rose from the flames of war.”

The pilgrims soon gathered up their things and followed the slowly-moving vehicles towards the now much widened, modern road which led through the old woodland. Later, a campsite will await them.

When they had gone Sam and Gilly sat down on the grass. Jonathan took off his helmet and unstrapped his tiny tape-recorder, which he handed to Merlin. He then sat down with his brother and sister and poured out his story to them. This boyish nine-year old’s description of the Crossing of the Bridge, and his own participation in it, will also be recorded and played back to you in the next chapter.

After this they said goodbye to Jonathan, who had to be reactivated by Merlin from his dream dimension back into his normal reality in Ireland where he must hurry off for his afternoon’s school.

Sam and Gilly shut their eyes and found themselves back in Bath in the house in the Circus where Merlin was waiting for them. He had done all the necessary shutdown procedures himself and transferred them back from the booths in the twenty-first century Abbey Vaults in Bath. Lucy and Tom were there as well and you will be able to hear a recording of their own VR trip in my next sequel.

Merlin then played them the tape, which Jonathan had had round his waist during his trip to the top of the bridge and across the gap.

They all listened to it with due respect and attention before they were dismissed and made their way back to the flat on Bathwick Hill where they were staying.

** *** **

I will now play to you – THE READER – this same tape. You will notice that our Galahad has a distinctively French accent.

TAPE NOW ON:

“How do you like my horse then?”

“Very much, Sir – a really super creature. Why do you call him Starlight?”

“Merlin tells me that in England now they have some very good new hymns, and he quoted one to me about Jesus. A line specially caught my imagination. It was this:

*‘Hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered’.*”

“So you said to yourself – ‘my horse will be named Starlight’!”

“Right, boy – you’ve hit the nail right on the head, as you say in your country.”

“I like singing those sort of hymns. They have up-to-date words and good tunes.”

“One day, I expect, you too will be going to Bath with your older brother and sister. Merlin has told me all about you and also about the adventures which they have had, with their friends there – his Cybernauts, or Time Travellers, he calls them. He used, for them, his special techniques. You’d have loved it!”

“Well, *I’m* having this adventure now and I can tell *them* about it this time.”

“Certainly you can. Merlin’s a very powerful spirit, you know – his present visit to Earth, in the second half of your twentieth century, is important. He seems to know everything. He even told me there was a house in a famous street in Bath where a group used to study my works. There is a plaque outside this house, he says, which states that it was there in 1799 that William Smith, the father of English geology, dictated ‘The Order of The Strata’. That was strange, for he must have been a kindred spirit. I’m afraid the group has long been disbanded... so Merlin informs me.”

“That’s a shame! When I go there I’ll look it up and one day restart it.”

“I’m very touched, Jonathan. You see the image of Christ today desperately needs expanding... to be brought into line with modern scientific understanding of the Earth... and the Universe. If you remember, the garish clothing that the Toy-Man of Merlin’s was rigged up in back there, had to disappear under its natural new growth.”

“Greening, we would call it. But why do we need an altered Jesus Christ?”

“Not a changed figure, but only your way of looking at Him. Though becoming ever greater he’s the same Jesus who, as in the Gospels, is at home on Earth, and an intimate presence to be felt – but He also ascended to become your Cosmic Christ. So I put Him squarely in the forefront of human progress. I wrote in my day that

many of you are tempted to find the world of nature, of life, and of Mankind greater, closer and more mysterious than Jesus and the God of the Scriptures. Religion should be seen in a more organic way.”

“Well, I get a bit bored with hearing the same old stories and quotations over and over again. But what, actually, do you mean by ‘organic’? Would it bring back life and excitement to them all again, do you think?”

“I’m sure of this... Yes, let me see – how to explain ‘organic’ to you. If I remember aright, I also wrote that matter was no longer seen as a lower element of spirit but is joined to it... and that the future of the Earth was linked *organically* (meaning biologically) to the speed in which we can turn the forces of evil into the forces of love. If you can see the new Christos image as the very *motor* of evolution and worship Him, and even God, *through* the Earth and the changing world – that will be an organic way!”

“I’m afraid I can’t understand all that, but perhaps I’ll think about it again one day when I grow up. To me Jesus was just a very special man who we were told was the Son of God. Can we pray to the new Jesus?”

“Of course... Oh dear! I did get carried away, didn’t I? All these Universal mind-stuff ideas! I apologise. Jesus, as a person, is ever warm and accessible. Here’s something I’m sure you learnt – that God is Love. So I’d like to be able to warn the nations: ‘Love one another, as Jesus taught, or perish’. This is the message I’d give the world now, as it stands at a crossroads.”

“Talking about love, did you hear about Princess Diana? She used to say that what was wrong with the world was that so many people feel unloved, and she tried to do something about it. She was great – and now, suddenly, she’s dead! She always looked good and made everyone else feel good.”

“She still does – her personality lives on among you all as the Queen of Hearts, as you called her. Yes, Merlin told me how you felt that a bright light had gone out, but he assures me she’s still a big influence in your world. He’s allocated to her the position of Grail Maiden in his new twentieth century mythology. Did you know that myth and legend become the nearest thing to inner truth that can be expressed in words?”

“But Sir... How did *you* get here then? Gilly said you had died on Easter Day in 1955.”

“When I was invited by the Mage to take part in this experiment, by coming back for a brief period to your Space-Time, he promised I’d be given just the time I needed for this demonstration. We are in a

timeless dimension after Earth death, but we remember things that matter, from our old life, and build on them. I always did love a good story and travelling the world.”

“Come to think of it, we seem to have been a very long time riding up this side of the bridge and talking like this. It didn’t look *that* big!”

“I told you, Merlin can do anything – make Time seem as long or as short to you as he wants. He plans it all meticulously.”

“It’s getting dark now, isn’t it? Ugh! Starlight doesn’t like it either.”

“Yes, we’re entering the cloud. We shall now dismount and you can sit on the bridge awhile as I calm the horse. We will take off the saddlebags and see what our wizard has provided for your cheer – and for the horse as well. I shall then lay my lance and shield on the ground, unbuckle my sword and remove the saddle from our mount. We’ll need all these things soon.”

Noises of a different sort are sounding on the tape. Instead of the clatter of horse’s hooves there are now clangings, bumpings and foot-steps, followed by rummaging and snuffling sounds and finally – yes – munching noises!

“This stuff tastes really scrummy and Starlight’s dead-chuffed with his nosebag.”

“Merlin’s magically-grown products will keep your courage alive, but you realise that you don’t need bodily nourishment in Virtual Reality, but only rely on data and words to sustain your presence and action. The know-how that the Mage is using allows you to taste, smell and feel things in your mouth – a good sensation! When you’ve finished with all this strange food, spit it out and it will disintegrate in the air – then I’ve got some jobs for you, but first I’ll venture to the edge of the rift to review our position.”

“How is it, Sir, that you seem to know so much about modern and future technology when you left us half way through this century?”

“I foresaw the direction in which things were going, but Merlin filled in the details for me today. Long ago I predicted the use of the word ‘Cyber’ in regard to the computer/human territory now called Cyberspace, and made up from pure information. This inter-connecting centre I later called The Noosphere. Don’t worry boy, I know what I’m doing. Never fear – we’ll make it across.”

“How on earth could this stupid gap have been left for so long? Was it a tornado or just someone’s bad temper that broke it up? I don’t understand.”

“This ‘stupid gap’, as you call it, was and is caused by unchecked fumes coming up from the wasteland below. They are from the copious and indiscriminate sale of deadly armaments and the subsequent wars

and killings that follow. This rotted the wood on the deck and railings and soon broke down the rest of the middle span. These putrid fumes are thick with imprisoned frustration, anger and perversion. Freedom and happiness never come through force – only violence is born.”

“Why couldn’t Christians all over the world stop this happening?”

“Well, as you saw, Christianity doesn’t seem to clothe the modern soul these days – not properly anyway. Though it is a religion of action, many people still worship a ‘God of the gaps’ and are held back by their own gap caused by the separation of science from religion, matter from spirit, and past from future. The absence of deck and railings on the small top part of our bridge today gives them no protection from falling into the abyss.”

“Was it the stink that made the brave pilgrims give up? I hate bad smells!”

“So do I, Jonathan, but good old Merlin has seen to all that. Knowing that the promise of success is near and having seen the proximity of a very special manifestation floating above the enveloping clouds, he has worked his spell. He’s diverted the offending stench. We’ll smell spring flowers as we work.”

“Where will he divert it to, I wonder? Shall we really be able to mend the bridge with nothing but your knightly equipment and ourselves?”

“When the gap is closed all these negative and hate-filled emissions, which caused the keen young men that enfeebling sickness, will gradually thin out. It will disperse in the upper atmosphere. The land on the other side of our bridge will be clear. Christians will see where they’re heading. Don’t be too awed, my boy, with your part in all this. We can do it together, but when you return to your normal school life in Ireland, you’ll probably forget all this for a time. It will be planted though in your subconscious mind like a seed. I believe it will grow and that once a single young person is able to see the world as centred anew in Christ, it will spread like wildfire. In the next century the Christos will be the Arrowhead of evolution.”

“The only times I really think about the whole world is when my mother tells how she felt when she first saw the well-known photo of the Earth taken from the space capsule Apollo 10 as it emerged from behind the moon. Then there were the shots from the moon itself after the ‘Eagle’ had landed from Apollo 11. You’d have been thrilled to bits with all that if only you hadn’t just missed it. It makes me feel a real love for the world and then I worry a little about its future and I can now guess at what you have been saying – something has gone badly wrong and things must be done. Anyway, when you come back

Sir, I'll be ready for action and raring to go.”

These were the last words on Jonathan's tape, because after this he remembered every detail of his adventure and related it all to Sam and Gilly after he returned and which you'll hear repeated in the next chapter.

2

THE BOY'S STORY

“Come on Johnnie... Out with it. Let’s hear it all,” said Sam.

“Well, it *was* smashing,” began Jonathan, hugging his bent knees as he sat beside his brother and sister, “but I just don’t know where to start.”

“Begin from when you are sitting on the bridge and chewing those magic fruits. Merlin is going to play back to us the tape of your conversation with Galahad on the way up, so we’ll hear that later,” explained Gilly.

“Good. I’d forgotten that, and I’m quite relieved because many of the things Galahad told me then I found difficult to understand and still do. I don’t think I could remember them either. The rest is very exciting.”

Jonathan took a deep breath.

“When he came back to me after surveying the gap, he stroked Starlight and then leaned against him, fixing me with his eyes. He next asked me to feel to the bottom of the still-bulging saddlebag and bring out what I found there, laying it all carefully on the bridge.”

“What sort of things did you find? Tell us.” Sam was impatient.

“There was a torch, a sort of smog-mask, some earplugs in a box and rolls of strong vegetable twine stuff. Crikey! What else, I thought?”

“What was the horse doing all this time?” wondered Gilly aloud.

“Oh! He was fine, still munching happily in his nosebag of grain and special fruits that Merlin had provided in the other saddlebag. He felt free as well since Galahad had taken off his saddle and removed his halter, reins and body trappings. They lay on the ground mixed with all my other finds.”

“It must have been difficult for you both getting off that big horse,” said Sam, imagining the drop for Jonathan and the heavy armour of Galahad.

“Not really. He lowered me gently to the ground and then asked me to unhook a contraption attached to the saddle, which turned out

to be a holding socket for his lance. I directed his feet while he slithered down backwards. Reaching the ground he steadied himself with a hand put lightly on my shoulder. He'd already dropped the lance, and the shield, which had been on his back."

"Did he tell you now what all those things around you were really for?"

His listeners were now dying to know – but first there was more to relate.

"I remember how next he drew out his sword, and holding it high called it 'The Word of God'. He then explained how it had gained its shining light and told me, with a twinkle in his eye, how he'd pulled it from the stone. Then he placed it on the ground. All this time Starlight had kept still and quite calm even when we'd dismounted. Anyway Galahad now started to take off his armour and one by one added each section of it to my ground collection. As he did so he chanted a strange sort of verse, which went a bit like this:

'Here they go and here they lie – all our beliefs and hopes of past years – here on the ground, side by side. Breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation and lastly, the protective shield of faith – how magnificent she is! Listen how true she rings as I tap her and place her in the centre'."

"Goodness! How well you remembered all that Johnnie. I think Merlin must have been helping you there," said an impressed Sam.

"Well, after that I think that the last thing he mentioned was his belt which he'd thrown down earlier. He picked it up saying it was this belt of truth which had been lying beside the jewelled scabbard of grace – for that's what he called them."

"Where was his helmet as you rode up and while he dismounted?" queried Tom.

"Oh! He had the helmet slung behind at first, then twisted it round his shoulder. That big saddle? He sat on it to talk. You are a stickler for detail."

"Sorry, but these things bug me," admitted Tom. "Carry on."

"Anyway, he then told me about the coming use of all the items spread out around us. The masks to cover our mouths, because, although we would not be exposed to the acrid fumes for more than a few minutes, there were other dangers – we ought not to swallow any of the small, brittle fragments of dead matter from the wasteland below. The earplugs were to cut out some sounds coming up which could disturb and then distract me. The torch, which he now asked me

to hold, would help him, he said, to see better in the half-light. I told him I was already worried by strange hissing noises I could hear.”

“What did he say about that?” coaxed Gilly sympathetically.

“He said they would all go when the gap was closed. The choking density will subside, no longer being attracted through the gap, and will soon disperse below. I asked him would it still belch out *any* smog and where did it all come from. He *did* explain but I’ve forgotten some of it now.”

“Please try hard to remember for us Jonathan,” begged his sister.

“Well... it was like a funnel,” he said, “spouting out from a weak patch in the ground below, and came from a much lower level still. Some of the stuff had also seeped out and spread over the surrounding land, blighting all new growth. It had come, I think he said, from stagnant pools of untreated energy or something like that.”

“Made up perhaps from things like fear, greed and envy?”

“Yes, that’s right Gilly, you’ve got it. And he said our new Earth Story hadn’t reached down to that level yet. Mending the bridge would allow more healing rays to get underground, but had also capped the outlet. Now I must get on with the exciting bit, so don’t interrupt me anymore.”

Jonathan was silent for a moment, gathering his thoughts.

“I told him about a queer dream I’d had... I was out with friends and I saw in front of me a strange, rainbow-coloured bridge. There was no river below it but I started to walk up the side, which seemed quite steep. Half way up I turned and beckoned to my friends below – but none of them would follow me. They turned off into another path and I woke up.”

“Galahad told me that one day my friends *will* join me, and he went on to say that Merlin had vouched for my bravery and that I’d soon be shown what I was expected to do. It sounded a bit scary, but Galahad smiled at me and I felt I’d do anything for him...”

Jonathan paused here, but went on: “He then got up and, lifting the saddle, laid it carefully between the lance and the sword, together with the shield. He looked now more like a gentle monk with his tunic, minus chain-mail, and corded round the waist. He then set about working with incredible speed and cleverness as he tackled this intricate job. First he worked on Starlight’s reins to make them much longer. He used the twine I’d brought out from the bag. Then he started on his armour and equipment and proceeded to lash all these things together. As he crouched beside me he managed to secure them in such a way as to make a kind of bumpy stretcher affair. I was flabbergasted! All those different-shaped things bound into one single object.”

“After this he went over to Starlight and, removing his nosebag. He threw a halter (pulled from the outside of the bag) over his head and fixed the reins to it. He’d already found some blinkers for him. Now, reminding me to fix my mask, and tying on his own so that only his eyes were showing, he stooped to pick up his cloak on which I’d been sitting. He threw it over his shoulders again and told me to take hold of Starlight’s reins, close to the halter, and to wait until he called me. Then I was to lead the nervous horse to the edge of the gap where I would be given my next instructions.”

“I’ll bet you felt a bit frightened then,” said Sam, forgetting a promise about not interrupting. But ignoring this, Jonathan went on:

“Then he bent down, and with superhuman strength lifted his queer handmade contraption and staggered with it towards the gap. In the swirling mist and with his flapping cloak he reminded me of Batman. Next, I heard a loud thud and guessed it was when he dropped the ramp across that yawning gap and made the first rough join.” The boy stopped – choosing his words.

“When I heard him calling me I led Starlight towards the top, where already the cloud seemed to be breaking up, and saw Galahad standing on the edge. I could see the ground at my feet, but I had to coax Starlight along due to his slightly drugged condition. Galahad greeted me and pointed to the bumpy, unsteady ramp. Then he gave me the details of how the horse and I should cross it. I’ll tell you now how we did it:

“Galahad knelt down on the near edge, at one end of that crazy, precarious ramp. Stretching his arms slowly and dangerously forward across its uneven surface, his body following, he then clutched the other side of the deck and worked himself into position, so forming a sort of human bridge – easier by far to cross than the ramp by itself. He now shouted to me to approach. So, after ordering the horse to stand still but keeping a tight hold of the end of its long rein, I crawled onto the ‘Body Bridge’, screening my gaze from the scene below. Having placed my full weight onto Galahad’s warm body I worked myself carefully along. Then, quite easily I got across the horrid gap and pulled myself up thankfully on to the other side. Then I looked down through a rift in the cloud and saw lights flickering and I was mazed to hear a recording of a favourite song in the background – the Boyzone hit, ‘Candle on the Water’.”

“Merlin laid it on for you,” guessed Sam, failing to contain himself.

Gilly couldn’t now resist the query, “What about Starlight?”

“I knew you’d ask me that, and wouldn’t wait, but I had to tell you about this first. Now I’m coming to it. It was hard to hold the reins

and I had to brace myself against their shaking, for Starlight was now tossing his head. I hung on like grim death till I heard Galahad tell me to call him over. His voice was almost a groan for he couldn't stay much longer like that – stiff and aching, as he told me later. But Starlight wouldn't come. In the end Galahad gave a word of command to the highly-trained, but whinnying horse and I stopped jerking the reins and allowed him to move back a bit before takeoff. We were both calling his name and encouraging him. I then shut my eyes. I had removed my earplugs and mask but now, suddenly, I heard a scream of fear and shock as the great horse leapt across. Galahad explained afterwards what happened, but I ran along the bridge a little way with poor Starlight and then managed to calm the trembling and sweating animal.

We soon turned back to see how Galahad was faring and were just in time to see him tighten his grasp on two protruding pieces of solid beam ends from my side of the bridge and haul himself up to the deck, ending up bent almost double after such a feat. I held out my hand, which he took, and he slowly straightened up. 'Good boy,' he said, smiling again, and I'd never felt so happy before."

"But why the scream?" burst out Gilly. "Was it from Starlight and why?"

"All in good time, Sis. Now, while that near-to-fainting knight leaned against the secure rail, he looked across at Starlight with a great sadness and then sprang across to comfort and examine the animal, which was still shivering. He stroked his fingers gently over its ankles and legs and I saw tears in his eyes before he hid his face for a moment against its hot shoulder. He muttered something about Merlin having told him that it had to happen this way – then looked at me and told of his grief that animals must so often suffer for the protection of Man. Starlight had felt some of the pain. He started to massage the pulled ligaments."

"I expect Galahad was referring, for one thing, to animal experiments," exclaimed Gilly, "and the sacrifice they make for us."

"Perhaps. But meanwhile I looked back at the top part of the bridge and to my amazement it now looked completely renewed and safe. The thick, reeking cloud of angry vapours retreating lower and lower had left it clear, and I could see that the ramp had merged into the rest of the structure. It was now smooth and passable. Fixed in the railings on each side were two big horseshoes placed upside down!"

"Now Galahad turned to explain. This other jet stream he blamed for doing the unshoeing trick, was different from the main one. It came from the Wasteland itself and some antiquated, die-hard beliefs

of the old church. He said something about fixed-images and the separation of natural creation (which must not be tampered with) and man-made objects, which were inferior. Such believers felt... 'confronted', I think he said, when this gap was closed."

"We can make great improvements on nature, can't we?" commented Sam.

"So they obviously didn't see God in the evolving world which Merlin told us about," said Gilly. "And religion evolves as well, he taught us."

"That's right. Galahad explained all that, and he praised human imagination, which fuses together raw material and makes new natural things. Anyway, this resentful blast sucked the metal shoes off the horse and rebounded back to its source leaving nails scattered around Galahad as he lay there."

"How did the horseshoes get on to the bridge again then?" said Sam.

"Well, evidently, these strongly crafted shapes couldn't be dissolved nor broken up at all so were rejected, returned and dropped – clank – onto the bridge where Merlin used them to good advantage. Shaped like the Holy Grail, Galahad suggested that, reversed, they pour healing balm over any spite left below!"

"Starlight now seemed quite himself again, and as we hadn't a blanket to throw over him I ran him back and forth over the top of the bridge. When we stopped next to Galahad again he told me a surprising thing about this same creature. It had been his brother's war-horse during the First World War, and had been killed with his master who had loved him very much. Merlin had got many details from Galahad's brother, and then collected the rest of the data he needed to bring back the special animal... It had formed a permanent bond, you see, with this human being, and so could share in the man's new life..."

"Let me see – what happened next? Oh! I know. Galahad was inspecting the horse again and I looked down to the land below from our side of the bridge and it seemed to me that everything was bathed in light. It all shimmered as though covered in gold dust. As I looked I heard the familiar flutter and whirr of wings, and there at my feet was my favourite pigeon, which I'd named Angee. I feed it at home in the park where I go in breaktime from school. I save bits from my lunch-pack for these birds with round, brown eyes. This one was special for it explored odd places and often roamed on its own, but when I took out my scraps it always seemed to appear from nowhere to perch on my shoulder. It would feed from my hand when its turn

came round. Now here it was! I could admire again its white feathers which had streaks of grey and light brown on its wings and tail, plus a mauve-sheened neck. I suddenly remembered a little satchel full of seeds that Merlin had hung from my belt before I was lifted aloft onto Starlight. I fed my pigeon, and these seeds were pecked up with the usual eagerness. It's the feel and smell of the food which makes the bird feel good now, Galahad told me, and the fact that I myself was feeding it. Galahad guessed at a special relationship. Angee then stayed with me till the end of my trip.

"Galahad was now leaning back on the railings again and looking at Starlight. I followed his gaze and was astonished to see two lumps forming near the shoulders of the horse. Also the rough halter had disappeared and been replaced by a bridle as before. Seeing my puzzled expression, Galahad beckoned to me, and after taking my hand he asked me, in a teasing sort of way, if I'd ever ridden a flying horse before."

"Oh Jonathan! What *did* you say then?" gasped Gilly in disbelief.

"I was speechless for a while – unusual for me! My open mouth and dumbness made Galahad laugh. While I was staring he said that our Merlin is a very powerful spirit and can move between the two worlds. Then he quoted two of some favourite lines he'd heard Merlin repeating once. Many of these sayings – short and pithy he called them – should be learnt by heart, Galahad said. I was too mesmerized to take them in, but I remember one was about the Wasteland and poison and the other – something about the different way people see things."

"'Expect poison from standing water' and 'A fool sees not the same tree as a wise man sees,'" guessed Gilly, remembering some of her wizard's sayings.

"Thanks, but they seemed a bit off the subject at the time, for in front of my eyes Starlight was being transformed."

(Interrupting the boy's story for a moment, it must be said that Jonathan had always marvelled at and gloried in stories of Space adventures, pictures of flying fish, long-necked giraffes, elephants being transported through the skies and Mynah birds talking in shops. So now, with his trust in the good Sir Galahad, instead of panic his one ambition would be to get on this fabulous horse and fly. Youth can quickly accept novelty when it has happened.)

"Now I saw," continued Jonathan, "that the things that pushed up so vigorously through Starlight's satined coat *were* wings. Though the rows of overlapping feathers, beautifully dovetailed, were still in their downy stage in some places, others were already crisp and strong.

They were magnificent – perfection itself. The horse was shaking its head and pawing the ground with its lighter and – yes – already feathered hooves. As I gazed and expressed my delight, Galahad remarked that he'd thought I'd like my fairytale horse, which was the first of its kind – a modernized Pegasus.

Encouraged by Galahad I approached Starlight and was able to stroke his silky neck. Doing this, I saw and felt that the shortened reins were indeed the very same ones that I had held so recently. I'm good at remembering details and I just knew this. But everything had a magical look in its new setting.

Having found my voice again I begged Galahad to get me up into the saddle, and found the short delay unbearable. Galahad was gathering up the reins and parting the horse's thick mane. Then he stooped, and cupping his hands, while adding further instructions, gave me a splendid leg-up right on to the back of the famous steed. I could tell it was our same previous saddle as well."

"How did you know what to do?" said Gilly, "and where to go on takeoff?"

"Galahad assured me I needn't worry about getting lost as he'd already told Starlight the way back. I found it quite easy to settle between the wings and cling to his mane while holding the reins in the other hand. I looked around to say goodbye to Galahad and was amazed to see a bright image over his head. It looked to me just as I'd always pictured the Holy Grail. Galahad reached up and grasped it. Then, smiling at me, he gave orders for lift-off. Starlight, spreading and flapping his wings, seemed to bend his back legs slightly and then reared a little. Galahad shouted 'steady there now' and the next thing... trotting a few paces forward, my horse suddenly got the idea. Springing upwards it skimmed gently over the rail and rose steeply into the air, which was now blue and translucent overhead. I could scarcely contain my glee, and a crazy smile settled, immovable, on my face. Turning to wave to Galahad I was puzzled and disappointed to see there was no one on the bridge. Angee, though, was flying beside me. The bird must have been dreaming as well.

We were sailing over the tops of the clouds, but soon Starlight headed downwards towards the place where the people waited. We skirted the worst of the pockets of still-billowing fog and came out into the clear again where I saw before me the sight of my life. The sun was low in the sky and bright, red streaks were lit up by its rays. A high-flying plane must have crossed this western sky recently, for its smoke trail was lit up in the same way. I remembered what Galahad had said about the works of Man being natural and as

worthy of admiration... when contributing, I supposed, to more life than death.

“As we approached the ground I saw the pilgrims looking up at us with disbelief, and the children were jumping up and down in excitement. I tried to wipe the grin off my face, because I wanted to look a bit blasé and sort of heroic – but I had no success. When we landed and Starlight came to a halt the children clamoured round me and I felt wonderful.

“You’ve both seen what happened next and how I was able to give some of them rides in the fading light... Goodness, my voice feels really tired and I must say goodbye for now. I can hear Merlin calling me too so I’d better not keep him waiting any longer. I’ll see you back in Ireland and in the twentieth century again. Our Time Lord promised me this. I hope I haven’t gate-crashed your VR trip for too long.”

3

COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

Before the pilgrims were sent on their way to their first prepared encampment in a woodland clearing, Merlin had recited to them some lines from Blake. All the fantasy scenes had disappeared, plus Jonathan, and the long dusk was setting in, but Merlin had got more words with which to send them off.

Many were still gathering up their things, others waiting respectfully behind their new leaders. They still had in mind the picture of Jonathan giving the rides on Starlight and the boy's loud tongue clickings to get the horse off the ground – then the children's delight at the *feel* of it. They decided they had all been under a spell!

The poem Merlin had quoted from was 'The voice of the Ancient Bard':

*"Youth of delight, come hither,
And see the opening morn,
Image of truth reborn..."*

Merlin now leaves the scene, but takes over this recording and finishes it with a celebration of a very special cathedral, and its impact upon the pilgrims, before returning them to Glastonbury.

At Coventry he will try to kindle in them, once more, the spirit of the Earth and a sense of a common soul of humanity.

Most of the pilgrims now moved away. Having waved goodbye to their kindly wizard they were still a bit puzzled though by his last bardic utterance – was he referring to the boy on Starlight, they wondered, and some future brand of Christianity perhaps? They continued to discuss it as they went.

These pilgrims were real people and, as always through history, had set out to travel to a place associated with someone for whom they felt great love and reverence. It was an inner and spiritual journey as well as an outer and physical one. They had come to Glastonbury

because of its mystical connections and the legend of a visit by ‘Jesus’. They longed for a new age of revival and a new language of faith and hope. Many had brought their children with them.

Merlin had found and chosen this group of genuine seekers while he was moving round this town in the guise of a local magician or sage who can foretell the future. These sort of characters, both male and female, popped up here from every nook and cranny. Ensnconced between the shops, they advertised their services. This was a weird and wonderful place with its ruined Abbey and fabled Tor. It still held its air of mystery even when it was not Festival or Solstice time. It beckoned to a great variety of cults and dreamers.

Merlin had persuaded these pilgrims to enter his ultra-advanced, twenty-first century hideout, and to partake in this momentous episode about which you are now reading. His Virtual Reality techniques take all natural objects and experiences, and transform them into a new and permanent medium. He had programmed this special trip to open up the pilgrims’ senses to a feeling of wonder for the evolving Earth and the Universe of which they are a part. These participants will be able to hear voices in their minds from stones, trees and seeds – they will also be reminded of old myths and stories as they pass by. The dogs who accompany some of them will be able to communicate unifying secrets to their owners. In fact there will be a spotlight of radiant energy on everything so that the true meaning behind what is seen with the natural eye can shine out – just as our own William Blake tells us – we must see not with but through the eye, for it is the window of the soul.

Those most affected by all this were the young ones. Later on you’ll notice that it was mostly the adventurers who’d had rides on Starlight with Jonathan, who would be asking the questions on arrival at Coventry.

It was still a few days walking before the pilgrims got their first sight of the magnificent edifice towards which they were heading, but they took joy in the journey and their two guides kept them well organised and in good humour. At one of their stops Percivale, in chatty mood, sat down beside a small group of children. He joked with them about the tendency of some Christians to denigrate the works of Man to a lower status than the productions of nature by itself. “Think of the difference between an untended wilderness and a garden,” he remarked, “and think of your clothes – how would your teachers take it if you arrived naked at school, just as God made you?” This produced prolonged giggles, but afterwards Percivale pointed out how strange it was that these Christians gave so little importance to the

continuous creations of human effort. They insisted that it was wrong to meddle with God's natural works, of which we are all composed. Percivale thought all inventions were natural.

These two Grail Knights who are guiding them, Sir Percivale and Sir Bors, are substitute characters for those earlier ones who had been so bravely represented in their Arthurian counterparts. Our present Percivale figure, you recall, represents the arts, plus actors, writers and producers – all those whose creations become so much a part of life today that these things seem larger and more real than routine, everyday existence. Often, flesh and blood acquaintances vie with fictitious ones. Percivale operates in a Word and Picture Media which can dramatically transform the humdrum.

The Bors figure is focused towards a New Millennium Christianity with its rejuvenated Churches and flavour of the mid-twentieth century visionaries.

Our guides related back to two of the three legendary Grail knights who sought for the Holy Vessel with the greatest fervour. They eventually found it. Sadly, though Sir Galahad was the first to drink from it – the one who held it later for the others to drink from – he did not himself survive it.

Sir Bors, on his return to Camelot and the telling of his Grail story, hoped to rescue the Round Table from its coming disintegration. He failed in the end and returned to his family, but, we suggest, struggled to reform an ailing Church. Sir Percivale, of course, married the Grail Maiden and they become king and queen of a new country. Perhaps these Newlands could be called Christartia.

Now, in up-to-date gear, the two men have much to do. Their friends and colleagues who had brought them to the scene would soon be leaving them and these guides would be on their own. They both accepted the Galahad figure as their model and inspiration. They honoured him for crossing that bridge between science and religion and opening it up. They knew about Merlin's feat, spiriting Teilhard himself to Earth to partake in this VR trip. It was the same Teilhard whom the Cybernauts and Time-hoppers of the Mage had begun to call Tayar, and Lucy had talked of TayarVision.

These young adventurers had been sorry to hear from Merlin how this mid-century Arthurian stand-in of his had been weakened, in the end, by two great sadnesses. Though often tortured by them he still enjoyed music and walks in the city parks. Weeks before he died he was able to communicate his joy in nature to a teenage girl who joined him with her dog as he set out for his walk. She enjoyed every minute of it for he made her feel important and talked to her as a valued

friend. Later, she told her mother that he seemed to know and love every stone, tree, and insect. Happily she shared his wonder – could sniff with him the secret riches carried by the wind, and could laugh with him. She didn't then know who he was, until much later when she came across his great book.

The guides regarded this man as the one who would lead them now into the next century. To them, he had retold the story of creation and of the universe. He had reassured the world with his newly discovered Kristos, who can be seen working through evolution. They treated him like the mythical Orpheus – that Greek God who played sweet music while sitting in the prow of the ship (Argo), charming the crew as they braved unknown waters; the God who, when he played his lyre, made animals gather round and trees stretch their branches towards him; the God for whom warring tribes began to work together.

Soon Bors would be pointing out the Galahad connections, when both men escorted their group around the Cathedral with its many spectacular features. This would conjure up imaginary signposts showing possible new directions for the twenty-first century – introducing it, perhaps, into the shared consciousness of the Glastonbury pilgrims. The Coventry miracle has more surprises in store.

It was a few more days' walk for these determined people, but at last they arrived at their destination. The foundation stone of this replacement Cathedral was laid by the Queen in 1956 – nearly a year after Galahad II had died. It rose like a Phoenix beside the war-torn and burnt-out ruin of the old one. It was a symbol of rebirth and hope in the future.

As the pilgrims followed their guides up the steps into St Michael's passageway, Bors pointed to an outside circular building. This was the Chapel of Christ the Servant, he told them, and dedicated to the town's industry. They all stopped to look across at it.

"Specially cars, I expect," piped up one of the boys. "They make thousands of them here."

"Yes, of course," agreed Bors. "Young apprentices made the aluminium cross inside, which you can see clearly from the road. This is because the whole chapel is a 'see through' place and you can gaze out to the town from inside as well. Its ceiling is covered in gold leaf and is floodlit at night. Our knight of the Bridge, who I shall now rename TayGal, once said that men should be able to give themselves to any of their tasks with the clear vision that their work, however elementary, will be received and put to good use by a centre of the universe. When this happens there will be little to separate church life from life in the world."

The children, being impatient, had gone on past Bors and had reached the dramatic sculpture of St Michael subduing the devil. It was fixed to the Cathedral wall near the steps up to the main entrance, and the young pilgrims were fascinated.

When the others caught up with them these youngsters had many things to ask Bors, who was quite taken aback with their eager questions.

“Do angels often carry spears? And who is this one? Where did he find the devil? Might the devil escape again?”

In an attempt to answer them, he said that the spear was just a symbol of power, like Galahad’s Sword of the Word. St Michael, shown here, as Guardian Angel, to whom the Cathedral is dedicated, challenges evil. Back at Glastonbury, the tower standing on top at the enchanted Tor was the remains of St Michael’s Church. Here he was installed to guard against the darker spirits left behind from the old religion, he told them.

As they walked on through the passage between the old and new Cathedrals, which had always been a right of way for the public, Bors kept talking. The large canopy of the new porch on one side reached out over the ruined medieval walls on the other. Their guide was remarking on how the intricate Gothic design of the tall still-standing spire of the old building contrasted with the simple slab-like bulk of the new. He suggested that the notion of a spire pointing to the skies, a bit like a space rocket, had been replaced by a more solid, down-to-earth, and permanent feeling in the new building.

“It’s like what you said about the Christ who can be found hidden in the natural world and in ourselves,” spoke out one of the pilgrims, and Bors acknowledged this comment with a grateful smile.

“Sometimes our churches’ ideas and creations, however beautiful, mask the face of God,” he said.

Now Percivale took over as leader and announced that he was going to take them into the Chapel of Unity before they entered the Cathedral. The chapel was round with concrete and slate fins jutting out. It was joined to the main building by a passage and was dedicated to the unification of the Christian church and also of Mankind. It was star-shaped.

Percivale promised them a surprise. They entered and looked round. There was a large table with chairs in the centre, and on a small part of the circular walls were some pictures and press cuttings of Diana, Princess of Wales being involved in charities and missions of mercy.

Percivale explained the reason why they probably felt her spirit was very close to them in this place. In her life, he reminded them, she had

radiated an aura of love, which had reached those who had needed it most. And in her death she had brought together this nation, especially its youth, for many days in their grief.

Princess Diana had been our twentieth century stand-in for Blanchefleur, the Grail Maiden. She had carried the covered chalice in all the mysterious processions witnessed by Arthur's knights in the legend. Before Galahad died he had joined Percivale and Blanchefleur together in marriage and then given them a drink from the Grail. They both had tasted the contents for the first time.

"The opposite to unity is things falling apart, you see," continued their guide, "and it's the evil in life which breaks everything up. It's time for the world to unite under a common passion or we'll go backwards."

Set out on a table against the wall was a simple snack-like meal which had been arranged beforehand for the pilgrims by Bors. Delighted to see it, the hungry travellers approached the table and began to help themselves. They soon noticed, though, that a boy had stayed behind looking at a picture. He had come on the journey with a school friend and the friend's family, but he lived in an orphanage. The colour photo, which had caught his attention, was one of Diana hugging a disabled African child. Our young pilgrim who was wearing the supporter's shirt of his football team had once shaken hands with their best player – but this was quite different. He'd never before felt such a warm and enveloping feeling as now as he stared at the picture. When his friend called him, saying he was missing out on his snack, he snapped out of his temporary trance and joined him.

A strange thing was happening as the pilgrims began to eat the food. They all felt, as they tasted these very ordinary items on offer, that they were very special. Each person was sure that he or she was enjoying a favourite food and the scrumptious smell confirmed this.

After they left the Chapel some of the pilgrims insisted that they had seen, for a moment, a radiant shape on the wall behind the table. It was a chalice, they said, and believed it was the Holy Grail.

Though this phenomenon might have been caused by the shifting light from the windows – who knows what they saw? The long, slit-like windows that lit the chapel were located at the outer edge of the protruding fins of the building, and the glass in some was coloured and in others was clear.

The pilgrims also agreed that they had all felt an unusually strong feeling of affection for each other as they had conversed during the meal.

“Merlin’s William always said that all things exist in the human imagination anyway,” commented Percivale, nodding his approval at these confessions. “He also said that a face should give out light to become a star, and this links up with something Galahad said: ‘friends should be stars to each other’. Nothing is so precious, he asserted, as the part of you which is in other people and that part of others which is in you.”

When our party had climbed the steps to the entrance to the Cathedral and entered through the huge glass screen, they turned round to look up at it. One of the children asked who the many figures engraved there were, and was told that they depicted unidentified angels and saints. Bors, who had taken over, added with a smile that they should have installed Galahad up there – the unsung hero and prophet of this tumultuous century – a Saint indeed. He thought Galahad should be one of the flying ones!

“They say the sun often shines through the screen on to the marble floor,” their guide said.

Turning to their right they were confronted with the huge, breathtaking Baptistry window. At the top, rectangles of deep blue and purple-coloured glass led down to a sunburst of gold in the centre. At the base are earth colours of green and red.

As the pilgrims and their children gazed in wonder at this warm and glowing spectacle they were aware of a once popular song they were hearing in the background. When they’d been in the Chapel of Unity they had also heard another song being sung, though quite faintly. That first one they had recognised as a recent winner of the European Song Contest – ‘Love shine a light’ – and now this one was an oldie. It was Bob Dylan’s ‘The Times they are a changing’. The words in one of the lines had a special impact on a certain young boy, ‘You’d better start swimming or you’ll sink like a stone.’ He, a ‘Starlight’ rider, will soon be plucking up courage to ask questions.

Below the window stood the font reflected in the polished floor around it. This was an actual boulder brought specially from the Holy Land. It had stood quite close to the River Jordan, and Jesus could well have passed by it as he trod our same Earth and breathed our same air. The Christening water was poured into a hollow, carved in the stone in the shape of a scallop shell.

Bors pointed all this out to the pilgrims and then shared his own deep feelings with them as they circled the font.

“Shells once housed living creatures,” he said, “and this shell holds a symbol of faith in the living Christ. The water is sweetened by the belief that He is present in all things. Jesus of Nazareth – look what

he has become! From a scrap of humanity to Universal Being. He has personalised our whole idea of evolution and the future. There is now an open road ahead and no blind alley. This will change the world for the second time.”

The pilgrims seemed a little taken aback and overawed, but as Bors turned to leave the Baptistry a shrill question rang out. Freddie (for that was the name of the orphan boy), had found his voice.

“If I were baptised,” he asked, “would I still enjoy shouting for my football team and watching sci-fi films and TV sports, d’you think?”

“Of course,” replied Bors, a bit surprised. “You’d enjoy them even more. God awaits us in all our positive activities. After the first shock of realising who and what you really are – co-creators with God to build the future – you would take everything more seriously!”

“Phew! But you couldn’t call football and cinema thrillers at all religious.”

“Galahad often said that he longed to be more widely human and earthly in his ambitions, and that God should always be at the tip of your pen, brush, spade and needle (even your football boots), helping you to do your best. He’s in the computer and on researchers’ drawing boards. He’s right ahead with the scientists – those miracle-men who can ‘fling a vehicle, the size of Coventry Cathedral, into space.’ That’s magic.”

“But I’d have to grow up for years and years and learn reams and reams of things to be able to do that sort of work. I’m bored at school anyway.”

There followed some groans and grunts, from his friend, in agreement.

“But you would soon learn if you really wanted to,” persisted Bors. “Galahad once said that to be young means to be hopeful, energetic, smiling and clear-sighted. He also asserted that to discover Christ-Omega shows everyone how to remain young, happy, enthusiastic and full of enterprise. But to return to your problem, my boy – don’t you feel really good when you’ve done something to help your father or mother, and they are grateful and tell you so?”

“He lives in a Children’s Home,” piped up his friend. “His parents died.”

“Forgive me,” pleaded Bors to Freddie, “but there still must be someone who cares and who you like, or even love, who would respond to your help and initiative. When you do things for Christ’s sake, it’s similar – fantastic!”

Bors turned again to leave the Baptistry, and smiling at Freddie, who now looked decidedly confused, he led his flock into the broad

nave of the cathedral. The children spread out, dodging quietly round the slender pillars and glancing with awe at the huge tapestry behind the altar. The strange thing was that wherever they positioned themselves the eyes of the Christ seemed to be looking straight at them. Freddie was quite affected by this.

Walking up the side aisle Bors commented on the solid 'tablets of the Word'. They had roughly-inscribed quotations from the New Testament upon them and fitted in so well against the wall. Some of them were splashed with the slanting beams of bright colour from the nave windows.

"The Gospels," said Bors, "were like symphonies, and if anyone tried to break them up they would just flow back together again like the atoms of a molecule that had been prised apart."

The actual tablet they were now passing had a text from St Matthew on it:

*Ask and it will be given to you;
Seek and you will find;
Knock and the door will be opened to you.*

Streaks of coloured light were striking across the words as Freddie came up to it, and he got left behind for the second time that day.

Another tablet, with a crudely sketched sun engraved on it, read thus:

*I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE.
HE THAT HATH SEEN ME HATH SEEN THE FATHER.*

These Words of Jesus struck anew, so some of the pilgrims paused in front of them and questioned Bors about the true meaning behind this statement. There were stone benches beneath these tablets, but the sturdy pilgrims kept walking while they listened to their guides – Percivale had now joined in.

When Freddie finally caught up with them all, they were admiring the lectern eagle. The boy had been lost in thought in front of that first tablet with the words quoted above, and had read them many times.

The eagle in question was dramatic. Cast in bronze by a well-known English sculptress, it has a wing span of 3ft 9ins, and supports a Bible which was presented by the King Henry VIII school in Coventry.

Now they had reached a position not far from the simple, concrete high altar with its beautiful pottery candlesticks and crooked cross.

The great tapestry towered in front of them, but Bors told them first about the cross:

“It incorporates a cross made of Medieval nails brought from the ruins next door,” he said. “It was also inspired by the cross still standing in the old cathedral, and which is composed of fallen pieces of wood from the burnt-out roof. That one is charred, but this one shines with burnished gold.”

After this, the pilgrims stood for quite a while gazing at the Christ figure in the tapestry and the four creatures surrounding it, and also at the very gruesome crucifix at its base. All these were reflected in the marble floor. The figure of a man, looking so small between the giant feet of Christ, was, in fact, life-size. The whole thing made people feel they had shrunk.

Bors guided them to some seats where they could rest now and still study the Tapestry. He then filled in some details for them.

“The whole thing,” he began, “was woven in France, for we didn’t have a loom in this country large enough to accommodate so magnificent a work. You’ve noticed three beasts around the Christ (the fourth figure is humanoid or angelic)? Well, aren’t they wonderfully presented? The calf has those brilliant crimson wings which seem to vibrate against the green background – do you see?” Percivale then voiced a tribute to the calf as well.

“It makes me think of those poor calves taken across the Channel to be made into veal,” interrupted one of the girls listening to them.

“I know,” agreed Bors – “animals on the way to slaughter, and not always in the most humane way, either.”

“This figure suggests that we should be grateful and in sympathy with all animals, and the bovine species especially – they help to feed us and our children at the expense of their own offspring.”

The calf is a symbol of St Luke’s Gospel and he was a doctor.” So Bors informed them. “On the opposite side St Mark’s lion shows off its superior life-force with a roar.”

“That reminds me of Blake’s poem – ‘Tiger, Tiger, burning bright’,” said one of the pilgrims, so making Percivale nod and smile with pleasure. “Such great beauty and agility we should surely respect,” he added.

“Then, the eagle above it (symbol of St John’s Gospel), has the fiery eyes and proud stance,” continued Bors. “It sees afar and soars on high as does this Gospel writer – in the realms of mysticism and inspiration.”

“I think my friend has forgotten to point out the chalice between the feet of Christ and the crucifix,” claimed Percivale. “It’s the chalice

of His blood in which the serpent of evil is being drowned. There are rays spreading from it, and perhaps the artist had the Holy Grail in mind.”

“Thank you – yes,” Bors admitted, but now we come to the The Christ Himself – well, what can I say? It’s certainly powerful.”

“I can’t make out whether He’s sitting or standing,” said one of the boys who’d ridden on Starlight, “or if He’s blessing us, or just shocked.”

Bors explained that Christ was probably sitting on a throne to depict kingship and majesty, but he asked them to study His face – so compassionate and human. He then quoted lines from the poetry of Merlin’s William:

*‘The Divine Humanity who’s the only general and universal form,
To which all lineaments tend and seek with love and sympathy’.*”

“He also wrote that we live as one man and we call Him Jesus the Christ – He in us and we in Him,” said Percivale, filling in for Bors. “And there was the medieval mystic who proposed, all that time ago, that we needed a universal Christ who transcends fashion, culture and religion itself.”

“Well remembered,” accepted Bors. “We know too what Galahad would have said about this Tapestry. As the hero who crossed the bridge he would have referred to this figure as the Cosmic Christ who gathers all good things together and breathes through the whole of creation. Galahad liked to think of himself as The Evangelist of Christ in the Universe.”

“ChristOmega, it shall be,” proclaimed Percivale.

“I’m still wondering what the word ‘lineaments’ means,” spoke up the irrepressible Freddie. There was a short silence.

“It just means distinctive features, or characteristics of the face as a rule,” replied Bors, a little bit impatiently. “Now we must press on,” he said.

When the pilgrims rose to go and instinctively looked back down the expansive nave, they realised something – one could only view the five pairs of stained glass windows properly, and all together, from up near the altar.

“The theme of the first pair,” related Percivale, seeing them pausing in admiration, “with its green glass – represents youth. The next ones, in reds, are about passion – middle life is multi-coloured and old age and wisdom is deep blue and purple. The altar ones (a golden glow), represent the Afterlife.”

“Well – there’s one more place I want you to see,” said Bors.

“We’ve only just time now to have a quick look into the Chapel of Christ in Gethsemane before we hurry away to get settled in your rooms for the night... Come on.”

Through an encircling crown of thorns the pilgrims then saw a lovely sculpture relief of an angel holding out a chalice. This was studded with mosaic, mirrors, broken glass and crystal. It stood against a radiant background in three different colours of gold leaf. The angel’s wings seem to be growing ferns from their inside surfaces.

“This must be an Earth-friendly angel,” remarked Bors as they looked into the chapel. “This place is here for prayer and meditation and is called Gethsemane. It’s named after the garden where Jesus had the same vision, as He prayed in agony for the cup of suffering to be taken from Him.”

“And His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood,” quoted Percivale.

“Eventually of course,” continued Bors, “He accepted the thorny passage to come. When, however, he returned to His disciples and found them asleep, He felt bitterly alone... Notice the mural here of the sleeping disciples.”

As they turned away from the chapel and started slowly down the aisle, one of the young pilgrims asked Bors about Galahad and the Holy Grail and why Galahad had to die. Bors immediately burst into words again.

“Galahad accepted his isolation when he drank from the Grail and tasted of the secrets of creation. It overwhelmed Him. The Holy Grail, I guess, is still a symbol of reconciliation and renewal – the past reflected in a mirror of the present to foreshadow the future... and harmonise divisions?”

The party walked on down the Cathedral and gathered in front of the glass screen. Before they left, however, Percivale expounded an extraordinary theory which few understood. His ideas, though, are repeated below:

“I’ve learnt,” he said, “of some astronomers who seek the Holy Grail of modern physics. They say that empty space *must* be filled by some other force – that this missing mass may be an invisible form of energy pervading space. I predict that this energy vacuum will be recognised and explored by our son, the Swan Prince, as we enter the new century and beyond. He’s already begun to share his findings, and others are on the same track.”

While the pilgrims looked at each other, seeming a bit confused and embarrassed, Percivale spoke again in a different mood and a changed voice.

“My sweet Blanchefleur,” he told them, “who now lives with me in the Newlands country, was also summoned here today. Merlin activated the whole trip of course, and helped her prepare the Grail food in the Chapel of Unity.” Now, while he spoke, the organ began playing Bach’s ‘Jesu Joy of Man’s desiring’.

On the way down the steps outside, Freddie remarked to his friend, as they came again to St Michael and the devil: “it looks as if old Nick is making that face because of the smell from the Archangel’s feet!” They both laughed and their guides, who were nearby, smiled at this. Then, however, they were wholly surprised when they heard Freddie say to the other boy that when he got home he was going to ask to be baptised; his reason was that though he was a fan and supporter of his football team, he now wanted even more to be supporter of HIM who he’d met in this building – for this would be forever and he wanted to join His club.”

“This is the youngest person I know,” Bors confided to Percivale as they went ahead, “who has chosen for himself the one thing needful and seen it as his ultimate concern. It cannot be taken from him.”

“He learnt a truth today,” said Percivale, “that where love is, God is.”

Looking over at the ruins, Bors spoke to the pilgrims again: “This place has been shaken to its foundations, but out of death and disintegration has been born a new order. The old has been outstripped – you can be new beings.”

Percivale ended this parting speech by reminding them it was Galahad who showed how all religions would wither and die like flowers out of water without the sap of humanity, which came from roots deeply buried in the natural world. Then seeing that the pilgrims looked tired, he said no more; but Bors said: “In a moment you’ll find yourselves back in Glastonbury for the night.”

SEQUEL TWO – TOM AND LUCY

1

TRISTAN AND ISEULT

As Tom and Lucy sat at their separate computer terminals in a booth deep in the 2050 Heritage Vaults and beneath Bath Abbey, they were apprehensive.

The mechanisms looked quite different from the ones they'd been used to in their real life. They tried to remember all the instructions to set off, and then, with great relief, they heard the familiar voice of Merlin saying:

“This is the very latest ‘state of the art’ equipment. The whole room in which you are sitting is involved in connecting you both up, gathering information, and awaiting instructions. Your twin-terminals are locked together for the purpose of your interactive experience. You will find this type of computer good on the subject of myth and legend – it can connect up your personal imaginations to humanity’s communal subconscious sphere.”

“Do you approve of our choice of the tragic Tristan and Iseult story?” asked Tom uncertainly. “We both know it so well, you see.”

“I do, of course – it began back in the mists of Celtic storytelling and has been retold again and again by the minstrels, plus Middle Age and Victorian writers. Some details of the story are slightly altered during each new period of history. For you cybernauts I recommend the beautifully told version by one of my favourite writers for the youth of today.¹ It retains all the magic of the old Welsh, English, French and German literary works on the subject. I shall quote from this twentieth century version occasionally.”

“Will we be able to cast the characters of Tristan and Iseult in up-to-date versions as we did with Arthur’s knights?” asked Lucy.

“You will. And how about you and Tom yourselves portraying the type of new candidates, for a start?” There was a moment’s silence before an answer came.

“We’ll have to do some acting with no lines to learn first,” complained Tom. “And this is a passionate story.”

“You can rule me out,” burst out Lucy. “He’d have to kiss me and pretend to make love – no way!”

“Not necessarily,” responded Merlin with an amused chuckle. “The love-making may not be specified in the series of short sequences which are to be presented to you shortly – it can easily be guessed that such things have happened. You may yourselves be creating a slightly new version for your own times!”

“I shall definitely alter the ending if I can,” vowed Lucy.

“That would defeat the whole point of the story,” Tom retorted.

After this Merlin adopted a more serious tone of voice and began to explain further procedures to them, and how he would help them.

“Do you remember when you came to me in my room in that house in the Circus?” he asked them. “I showed the four of you those totally realistic scenes on my special screen?”

“Yes, of course,” spoke up Lucy. “We felt we were there, inside a picture.”

“It was during our visits to Bath and, actually, we’re now, also, in the middle of one such visit from your Time-Travel launch pad,” remembered Tom.

“Good boy, You’re on the ball today (as you sometimes put it), and ready for this. Well, anyway, I’m going to show you both five of these same type of scenes, but now, episodes from the Tristan and Iseult story in their medieval settings. As one of your poets said: ‘History is a pattern of timeless moments’.”

“When do we start this interaction set-up then?” interjected Tom.

“Impatient as ever, boy – but you must wait for my final instructions... After you’ve watched all the separately chosen sequences from the Tristan and Iseult story, the first one will then be shown again in a still version. This will remain there for a longer time and you must study it very carefully. Then take a few minutes to suggest to each other the sort of modern equivalent happening which would fit in, roughly, to that scenario.”

“Good Lord!” exclaimed Tom, “That’s a tall order – in only a few minutes?”

“I know,” piped up Lucy in quick time. “How about the Irish troubles?”

“Well...” began Tom, a bit reluctantly and after a pause, “I suppose that might be OK, in Northern Ireland of course. Yes, I agree, we could try it Luce.”

“Good, that’s decided then. Next you’ll have to log on and press

the appropriate button which you'll be able to specify on the new menu and, hey-presto, all the pictures will be reactivated and changed to a late twentieth century environment – with contemporary costume and authentic simulated actions.”

“We've sure got some awesome image-generators here,” commented Tom with undisguised admiration.

“Of course, for this is half-way through your next century. So, all you will have to do now is to take another few minutes to think out roughly the sort of things you would say under like circumstances. Then the interactive phase can begin. The connecting cables between you and your computers can be activated and the nerve impulse detectors can begin to pass signals to and from your own brains. Just select an offered programme, stating story and purpose and you could be off.”

“What if I press the wrong button or a different one from Tom,” bemoaned Lucy, suddenly feeling very unsure of herself.

“Don't worry, child. Your computers are so linked to each other they will easily sort all that out for you, and I will give help when necessary... but first, anyway, you'll be watching all the single-scene, active parts of the story. There will be no sound but I will give some commentary. It's after...”

“I think we've chosen a rather difficult theme,” cut in Lucy. “And by the way, I'm not a child any more. I still find the idea of *love* very confusing. During the last decade of our own century, the one we know most about, things seem to have gone back to the pre-Arthurian days and it's mostly sex first and love after, if at all. Love is rarely lasting and the romance has gone.”

“I agree you have both chosen an ambitious theme, young lady (apologies), and I know you can tackle it together. Do you remember discussing this subject with me back in my Circus room? You all enjoyed it... had lots to say.”

“Yes, I do,” said Tom, “and you quoted from the Grail Knights. Today we saw one of these quotes in the Worship Centre outside here. It was on the Wall of Fame underneath Galahad's portrait, wasn't it?”

“Right again Tom, and here it is: 'Love alone can unite living beings so as to complete and fulfil themselves, for it alone joins them by what is deepest in themselves.' Full marks for bringing this to mind. I shall also be suggesting, on-line, things to help you both, so have courage Lucy! I must say that I'm very pleased that you both were able, so easily, to choose this same story. Imagined history, myth and legend have such an important position in your subconscious minds, but every person is so different. Each of you latches on to certain

chosen ones that fit in with your own deepest beliefs, tendencies, memories and longings – let alone fears. But both of you seem to have been sparked off by this same story.”

“It certainly grabbed me,” agreed Tom, “and I’m sure Luce was hooked as well. So can we now switch on the power button, Merlin?”

“If you’re ready too, Lucy? Yes, go ahead, and good tripping.”

2

THE HEALING ROOM

When the display screens on the computers of our Cybernauts burst into action they showed the stunningly real proportions of a sixth century room – the living quarters of the Princess Iseult, daughter of the king of Ireland, and her handmaiden. It comprised two brightly burning hearth fires, heavy wooden tables and chairs, a few small alcoves and a large bed. The walls were covered with richly-coloured hangings, timbers were stained and the floor strewn with fresh rushes, where a hound lay dozing. Here was a warm atmosphere, enhanced by the variously dyed dresses of the women. Our onlookers could even smell the heady aroma of stored herbs – especially from ones such as caraway, chamomile, fennel and lavender. Iseult was famous throughout all Ireland, and beyond, for her beauty and knowledge of herbs and their healing powers. She was now using infusions and balms to treat the sick man lying on the bed. These chosen ones had been made from dried leaves, flowers and roots that she and Branguin, her maid, had gathered. They included marigold and comfrey for his wounds. Branguin stood, just visible, in one of the alcoves mixing another potion. Merlin here starts his commentary:

“Iseult is now seen parting the wet, dark hair from the bruised forehead of Tristan, for it is he, and then looking into his unconscious face. Afterwards Tristan opens his eyes and sees Iseult for the first time. She is bending over him and because of her red hair he thinks he has found the subject of his quest and feels for the pendant round his neck.”

“That’s where he keeps the Swallow’s Hair,” burst in Lucy’s voice.

“Hold on, girl, I was just going to give you two quotes from one of the story’s latest versions (my favourite) explaining this strange reaction. I guess, from Tom’s puzzled expression, that he needs a vivid reminder! So, here is the first one:

*'...he [the King] looked up and saw two swallows quarrelling over something... At last they dropped it, and as it drifted down, he saw that it was like a thread of gossamer, yet not silver like gossamer, but red, where the sun caught it, as hot copper... it was a long hair from a woman's head... It was of such a colour as he had never seen before, so darkly red in the shade that it was almost purple, the colour of bramble stems when the sap rises in the spring, yet shining out when the sun caught it, bright as flame. Surely, thought the King, there can be only one woman in the world with hair this colour.'*²

"Do you remember the rest now, Tom?"

"Of course," Tom hastened to assure Merlin and Lucy, "It was Tristan's Uncle, King Marc of Cornwall, and when this hair fell into his hand he took it for a sign and said he would only marry the woman to whom it belonged. It was Tristan who offered to seek this woman, if she lived, and bring her back to him. A ship was soon loaded with provisions and rich gifts for an unknown bride, yet with room for many warriors. It all comes back to me now."

"The same hair is in the pendant Tristan's still wearing," added Lucy.

"Alright, Memory Ace, don't rub it in," complained Tom. "Actually, I recall, Tristan didn't mean to come to Ireland at all, did he Merlin?"

"No, you're right. Cornwall was still at war with Ireland, but the ship was driven on to the Irish coast by a great storm. Then, of course, Tristan suffered the wounds from his epic fight with the monster who was devastating the countryside and terrifying the people."

"Yes, but first, Tristan and his crew all pretended to be merchants from Brittany, didn't they?" continued Tom, still anxious to redeem himself. "And Tristan bribed the Irish marshal with a gold cup so he would let them stay on the beach and repair their ship."

"I can't understand why he had to fight that monster – at such a cost. He had just been ship-wrecked, and was in a strange land," lamented Lucy.

"He heard bells tolling, and when the reason was told, he, being Tristan, immediately took up the challenge, even though many others had been killed and mutilated in the confrontation – together with their horses. Anyway, he thought a victory for him might put him in such favour that his party would be allowed to stay longer and be helped to float their ship again."

“I wonder what’s in the silver bowl that Iseult has just fetched? It seems to be lit up by a ray of sunshine,” said Lucy, eagerly studying the moving scene before her. “But ugh! Whatever is that sudden awful stench?”

“Ah! I’m glad you’re bringing us to order, Lucy. I haven’t yet dealt with the dragon’s tongue, have I? I’m surprised you hadn’t noticed. Anyway you can see now that Iseult is taking off the lid and showing to Tristan the fork-tipped tongue which he had cut off. She had found it stowed in the breast of his mail shirt.”

“Even I remember that,” remarked Tom, rather smugly.

“Right – no gloating. You must realise that Tristan has just opened his eyes after first becoming aware of a light above him, soft voices and hands that touched him, and has suddenly remembered his gruesome fight. Now I am going to give you my second promised quote. I shall continue to substitute my own voice for the original dialogue. Iseult has now told Tristan that the tongue is quite safe as well as his pendant. So here goes:

Tristan was so weak that his voice would barely come. But he managed to answer her. “It is well for me that you found and kept that wicked thing, for it is my only proof that it was I who slew the dragon.”

*“It was for that reason,” said the Princess, “that I kept it with such care – for my own sake. My father, the King, has promised me in marriage to whoever can free Ireland of the monster, and his steward is claiming to be the dragon-slayer.”*³

Then, knowing what she had said, she flushed – ‘as deeply as a foxglove’ – so the book says, and looked away... Our Iseult hates the steward,” ended the Mage, with mischievous glee.

Resuming his commentary, he starts off: “Tristan was feeling very tired by this time and when he’d drunk all the broth that Iseult held to his lips he slipped into a healing sleep. The last thing he saw – just as it had been the first thing he saw a while ago – was the face of the woman who would be the great love of his life.”

“She and Branguin have taken Tristan’s armour and weapons away to an alcove to clean them,” broke in Lucy, “and they’ll now find out the secret.”

“Yes, keep your eyes on Iseult now. While Branguin is burnishing Tristan’s helmet, the Princess takes his sword from its sheath and

looks at it intently. She then goes to a chest in the corner of the room and brings back from it something small and wrapped in silk. You'll guess what it is."

"It's the tiny piece of metal she once took from the skull of the Irish champion, Morholt," obliged Tom.

"Alright," confirmed their friendly wizard. "I knew you'd remember, and also, that when Tristan was in Cornwall he had fought and mortally wounded this man in a fair fight. This warrior, of course, was the brother of the King of Ireland who was holding his Cornish subjects to ransom."

"Iseult finds the piece fits perfectly into the jagged gap in Tristan's sword and now, oh no! – she looks really angry," groaned Lucy.

"Yes. A sudden, terrible change has come over Iseult – her eyes glittering like fire in ice, so the book says. She's indulging in a fit of nationalism and family pride. She can think of nothing else and is furious. Dark-haired Branguin, on the other hand, being of a gentler nature, and a little older, is horrified at Iseult's change of mood, fearing for Tristan's fate."

"She could easily have finished him off with poison or just by telling her father who he was, without the dragon bit," added Lucy with feeling.

"Of course, but it was Branguin, wasn't it, who reminded her that it was Morholt who challenged Tristan to the fight in Cornwall, and that if Tristan were executed Iseult would have to marry the Steward. So, as you see, after a while Iseult relented, realising she would rather die than do this."

There was a sigh of relief from Lucy, even though she had known how the story went. After this Iseult returned to Tristan's side, looking again into his face. Next, we see her leave the room on her way to report to the king on Tristan's claim to have killed the monster and to call the steward a liar and a cheat. She takes with her the silver bowl with its contents.

"Now I'll leave you in silence for a short period, so you can gather together your ideas for transforming this scene into a like episode – but with the background of the last quarter of the twentieth century; you know that best."

"It's going to be difficult to find characters like Tristan and Iseult now," mused Tom. "Though, strangely enough, one or two possibilities come to mind. There do appear to be few specific hero-types who stand out in the way that the mid-century giants did, but we'll come up with a few."

You mean like the Grail Knights?" said Lucy. "Galahad was our

special champion, wasn't he, and now, as Tayar, he's pointing the way ahead."

"I suppose he *is* a voice in the spiritual wilderness," admitted Tom.

"There are new prophets there somewhere in your period," confirmed Merlin, "but they will only be identified during the next century. Go for it now, you two."

3

BIRTH OF A PASSION

“Before I release the next scene,” said Merlin, “I want to say a few things to you. We are still on-line, so all this will be recorded, including of course your last deliberations about the Healing Room exercise. So don’t think you’ll forget when it comes to the use of your new imagineering tools.

“I have chosen this particular historical setting for these scenes, my Cybernauts, because it fits in with my special twentieth century retelling. It takes the story back to the original versions sung by Celtic harpists and bards 1500 years ago – at the time of the real King Arthur who I then knew. The first written edition of ‘Tristan and Iseult’ came out in 1150. But the songs which told the story before that were still works of creative art and served to raise the myth into the realm of a collective subconsciousness.”

“What about the Medieval Troubadours?” asked Tom with surprise.

“Yes, their versions further enriched the texts, with added colour and romance, but the older stories are darker and fiercer. My William writes about the divine arts of the imagination, saying that the imagination is the real and eternal world in which we will live forever.”

“I think I can understand quite well what you are saying,” said Lucy, speaking slowly. “When I was younger I remember seeing a carpet of bluebells in a wood. It was the first time I’d ever really noticed its beauty, and the feeling it gave me was a warm glow of wonder – a sort of joy, I suppose. When I set out the other day in search of bluebells though, and hoping to get the same feeling again, I was disappointed. When, eventually I’d found some, the wide-open flowers were past their prime and the sky was overcast. I felt no great pleasure... till later, actually...” Lucy paused, afraid of being boring.

“Come on Luce – we’re listening,” said Tom, to the girl’s surprise.

“Well, that evening I caught a glimpse of some bluebells on a television nature programme – it was a close-up shot, the flowers were gently moving in the breeze, the angle and light, seemed perfect and I

got this same surge of delight again. I suppose this shot was a work of art on the photographer's part, but I knew then that my first bluebell buzz had been trapped for always in some fabulous place. I've recognised the same feeling sometimes when looking at landscape paintings or flower studies. It can't die."

"Great stuff," enthused Tom, "I feel a bit the same too, with certain perfumes, odd smells and some special tunes. Also, when I see the lilac in bloom each year, it's beauty is enhanced for me as I hum to myself the oldie song my grandmother used to love – 'We'll gather lilacs in the spring again'."

"Well done, both of you... You've put a finger on exactly the things I was trying to convey just now. Actually, I still feel slightly remiss, you know, about not concentrating more upon the few women characters in the Arthurian cycle stories. Anyway, I'm hoping to bring in the figure of Dindrane later, during your interactive Virtual Reality adventures – only if it's helpful to you, though, in order to fill a place in a difficult plot. She was the sister of Percivale, the Grail knight, you remember, and she was the nun who sacrificed her life to save the life of a Lady in a castle who was dying. Dindrane gave so much of her own blood that *she* died. Otherwise she also would have achieved the Holy Grail with the other three. I know a twentieth century poem of hers, which is very relevant to Lucy's discovery. It's called 'Joy', and starts off by asking, 'What is this thing called Joy?' The second verse goes like this:

*'What is the source of the bliss
Bubbling up from under the ground
Clear and cool as a spring?
What is the name?
Where is it found –
This beautiful thing?'*

"Thanks," sighed Lucy, "I like it. Some bird songs hit me with a joy, also."

"Good, I'm glad you and Tom remember these feelings so well. In this trip you are about to explore an instance of the heady and incomparable experience of falling in love. Although this feeling is sparked off, enjoyed and agonized over by individuals in this life, it too, will be stored in a collective memory sphere which is independent of the brain yet has all the data."

"Will all these phantom extensions be joined up in a sort of common pool of identities?" asked Tom with distaste.

“Certainly not, for each personality is precious and unique and has its own space, though remaining a part of the whole – and ‘phantom’, Tom, is the wrong word to use as you did just now. This realm of universal consciousness is as real, or more real, than our everyday mortal existence. Now, we really must pass on to the preparation for our next sequence. I’m afraid I might have to bore you for a moment because I must give a brief resume of what happened between the trial in Ireland and the landing on the Welsh beach. You see, although you know the story, others, reading this transcript, may not.

“So, you’ll have to be patient and use this to revive your memories and enter more fully into this wonderful old story. It will make it easier for you when you come to living it out in your own century.”

“Can I just say,” faltered Lucy, “that I’ve been thinking about what you said earlier and it struck me that perhaps we re-invent for ourselves the things we see by applying to them our special associations.”

“Yes,” said Tom, “And I remember a journalist telling me once that many world events hadn’t happened, in reality, until they’d been written about.”

“Hmmm... true in a certain way, I agree, my questing Cybernauts. Now you have identified things that can transport you briefly into this timeless realm – discover its name. Our poet, Sir Percivale, calls it ‘The Country of the Summer Stars’, and Sir Galahad calls it ‘The Christosphere’ where the brightest star of all, LOVE, outshines all the rest.”

“Is that why we can hear music playing in the background?” Tom asked.

“Well, partly, because music and poetry have always trebled the impact of the feelings we’ve been talking about. But mainly, I’m setting the atmosphere for our next sequence.”

4

THE PASSION

“The Trial,” began Merlin, “set to take place in three day’s time in the Great Hall to hear the opposing claims, had been resolved. Tristan had recovered just enough to speak for himself and the steward had been laughed out of court. It had been decided that Tristan was the dragon-slayer.”

“It was the missing tongue that clinched the matter,” added Tom with relish. “They’d wheeled in the dragon’s severed head, which had been well guarded, then forced open its jaws to reveal the black stump of the tongue in the bloody cavern of its mouth, and as Tristan had the tip bit...”

“Alright,” pleaded Lucy, “that’s enough description for me thank you – and, Merlin, you forgot to say about Tristan’s companions who had been waiting by the ship thinking Tristan was dead but were persuaded to stay on by his close friend, Gorvenal. But they finally got a message from Tristan, didn’t they, and were all invited to the trial!”

“Yes, thanks, my trusty prompter, even magicians can slip up sometimes. Anyway, Tristan had now disclosed his true identity and also the circumstances of his quest and accidental arrival in Ireland. After which, and following a tense silence, the King had agreed to count the dragon’s death as full payment for his brother’s lethal defeat at the hands of Tristan – though it came hard for a man of his race and times to turn his back on a blood feud and a slain kinsman. He saw it also as a new peace between Ireland and Cornwall. It could be sealed by a marriage, but first the King had to make it clear about what this really meant; our book puts it this way:

‘So then,’ said the King, when he had done, ‘if I give you the Princess Iseult, you will take her, not to be your lady, but to be Queen of Cornwall.’⁴

“After Tristan had confirmed this, and it had been accepted, Iseult

knew that her father would always honour his word and fathers must be obeyed.”

“Though Tristan looked at her, she never once looked at him,” finished Lucy, proud of her role as prompter. “Iseult never spoke a word all the time.”

“Right... So, after sad farewells, the two boats set off for Cornwall (the Princess and her maids in a larger, finer vessel) but were overtaken by rising wind and angry seas. The women were sea-sick and panic-stricken. Iseult sat in silent misery staring ahead – torn from home, off to a strange country to marry a stranger, this was too much. Tristan, sailing with them, asked the shipmaster to take shelter in a Welsh cove. Now we come to our next sequence.”

As Merlin finished speaking, the background setting of the new sequence was projected onto the youngsters’ computer screens. It was a pastoral, almost Elysian kind of scene – a cove where a little river came down from the hills through a steep valley. There were many small trees and shrubs, and on one side stretched a low, sheltering headland of dunes, yellow gorse and soft grasses. Off the beach the ship lay rocking gently with furled sails.

“Now, players,” came in Merlin, “are you ready to start the action?”

“Yes,” spoke up Tom for them both, “but I’ve been meaning to ask you whether we can stop or repeat any section of the sequence if we want to?”

“Of course, you can do what you like with it and have the whole thing shown over again as often as you need it. Come... let’s be off.”

When our two had found and used the right commands the action began and Merlin continued with his commentary.

“You now see some sailors springing overboard into the shallows to carry the maidens ashore – the women have come up from below and are looking with eager eyes towards the shore. Tristan holds out his arms to Iseult, as she comes to the side of the boat, to offer his services. She accepts. When, later, he steps onto the white sands, not even her shoes were damp. Now, I’m resorting once more to a recording of my favourite version of what happens next. This is a longer quote because it is so important to the story:

‘...as he set her down, their hands came together as though they did not want it to be so quickly over. And standing hand in hand, they looked at each other, and for the first time Tristan saw that the Princess’s eyes were deeply blue, the colour of wild wood-columbines; and she saw that his were as grey as the restless water out beyond the headland. And they were so

close that each saw their own reflection standing in the other one's eyes; and in that moment it was as though something of Iseult entered into Tristan and something of Tristan into Iseult, that could never be called back for as long as they lived'."⁵

"No one, except Branguin, noticed anything unusual, I suppose," said Lucy.

"It's a funny thing," commented Tom, "but the woman's voice in those book quotations sounds vaguely familiar to me. Who is she?"

"You should remember, and Lucy too. It's the voice of your host during those holidays you spent in Bath – Sam and Gilly's Aunt Sophie. I got her to record these passages for me. You notice that I stopped the action on your picture while she was reading and afterwards while we talked so that you could take in what was being said; but now we continue and you see Tristan and his companions building a little branch-woven hut for the Princess – the elder and hazel boughs still having their blossoms upon them."

"The hut for Iseult (and Brangian, I presume) is away up the valley where that bubbly river flows past. Another one is being built for the maidens much lower down – why so far apart, I wonder, and what are they bringing now?"

"They're fetching rugs and cushions from the ship," observed Tom, "to make things more comfortable, of course. The men will sleep on the shore I expect, beside the ship. Good Lord! It's getting dark... now the stars are out."

"Yes, they are all asleep except Tristan who lies awake all night, watching the glimmer of light from the cabin higher up the side of the stream."

Next morning the sun is shining, and although it is sheltered in the cove, out beyond the sea still looks rough and flecked with white crests. Tristan tells the ship-master that they must wait another day and in his heart, Tristan is glad. The gorse is honey-scented, the sand is warm and Iseult is nearby. Merlin takes up his commentary again.

"Tristan has wandered off on his own and now he lies down among the dunes and pink restharrow buds. He trickles the sand through his fingers. Though there's no sound on this recording, a lark would probably have been singing high above – there were many more around in those days."

"I can't see any pink flowers," said Lucy, gazing intently at the screen. "I've never heard of restharrow before."

"It's a creeping plant with tiny flowers and grows in this sort of environment. Even though you can't see it at the moment – it's there

alright. Every detail of this background has been faithfully retrieved, and if you took time to magnify that section you would see it... Now we can see Iseult herself coming over the dunes, seeking for Tristan. Her hair is loose and blowing in the sea-breeze. Finding him she is gently admonishing him for not speaking to her or looking her way since he carried her ashore, while Tristan, quickly standing up to face Iseult, seems to be looking beyond her out to sea. He feels that his company has not seemed pleasant to her since the trial, but remembers, of course, how they felt on the beach the day before.”

“Neither is saying what is really in their hearts,” complained Lucy, “and they look awfully embarrassed.”

“They were fencing with words,” agreed Tom. “But look, Iseult has brought something to show Tristan. She’s unwrapping it – I can guess what it is.”

“Yes, it’s the jagged fragment of steel from her uncle’s skull. Iseult is now asking Tristan to unsheathe his sword and then she fits the fragment into the missing notch. Looking then at each other, Tristan slowly comes to understand the full meaning of this – Iseult had known all the time who he really was, even before the trial, and when he was at her mercy.”

“She’s now thrown that bit of sword far into the dunes. It makes no difference to her now, I suppose,” reported Tom, showing some surprise.

“Well, as she turns and walks away she tells Tristan, in answer to his question, that she wants nothing from him. This, you will know, is not true.”

The light fades and through the dark the moon rises. The Shipmaster is approaching a restless Tristan, back on the beach, to tell him the wind has changed and the sea is calmer. Tomorrow would be a good sailing day. Sending Perenis to warn the maidens to be ready to leave on the morning tide, Tristan decides to go himself to inform Iseult. On the way up he half turns back and knows he should leave the job to Perenis – but he goes on.

“A cloak had been hung over the doorway to the little hut, but tonight it is thrown back because it is warm. You can just see Iseult and Brangian sitting on cushions near the entrance. They are combing their hair by the light of a honey-wax candle. Tristan can see it anyway, and as he comes to the doorway Brangian slips out. Iseult welcomes him, saying she’d hoped he would come because there were things she’d wanted to say earlier on. But Tristan draws back telling her that he only came to warn her that they will sail next morning. When he goes on to say that they’d be in Cornwall in two days time,

Iseult wrings her hands and declares her wish that the seas would never calm so she might never come to Cornwall. She is saying that it's the last day she will be happy and the moon is already up. As she makes room for him on the cushions, Tristan comes to sit down beside her, feeling the same."

"And he's still giving her this man-talk," said Tom, "about his debt to King Marc. All these professions of loyalty obviously mean nothing to her."

"But his heart is being torn apart," groaned Lucy. "It's only love that matters to Iseult and having told him about her's for him, we can see now he finally has to admit he loves her, though it could mean death for them both."

After that utterance – wrung out of him – Tristan springs up and turns to the doorway, but Iseult blocks his way. She begs him to stay a while before they lose each other. So Tristan relents and takes her in his arms.

"Wow!" exclaimed Tom, "I'd call that one fierce embrace, for sure."

"Yes, Tom, and she is clinging to him. They are together – 'as honeysuckle clinging to a hazel tree' – so the book ends its chapter. And I want to end this sequence with another recorded quote from this book, in order to fill in a few gaps for you. Although Tristan had assured Iseult that King Marc would be a kind and loving husband to her, she was still desolate. This passage comes in answer to Tristan's question as to why, when she was so expert in the use of healing drugs, did Iseult not avenge her kinsman with drugs that kill? Here is her explanation:

*'It was because I loved you,' said the Princess. 'I was not knowing it then. I was not knowing why it was like a sword turning in my heart when you stood before my father and claimed me for the King of Cornwall when I had thought to hear you claim me for yourself. I was not knowing until you lifted me in your arms to carry me ashore in this place. Tristan, whoever takes me for his wife, whether you will or no, and God help me, whether I will or no, you are my lord as long as I live.'*⁶

"When that night was over, they *did* sail with the morning tide," ended Merlin, "but their personalities had changed. Love totalises all levels of a person's consciousness and centralises them. Everything then pulls together and intensifies. As my twentieth century Percivale writes: 'The wealth of the self is the health of the self exchanged'. But this couple have massive problems ahead."

5

RETRIBUTION & DELIVERANCE

“Before you are shown the next sequence I must, with your help, get everyone up to date with all the gruesome and momentous events which lead up to it. This is for the sake of people who do not know the story – unbelievable, I admit, but there are many similarly deprived souls about, I can assure you,” finished Merlin with a mischievous chuckle.

“Not at our school,” protested Tom.

“Our English teacher was the tops,” added Lucy, “we always remembered her lessons and you could hear a pin drop when she read to us.”

“Good! Well let’s see how well you recall things so far... After the marriage of King Marc of Cornwall and the princess Iseult, Tristan observed that his uncle really loved Iseult and treated her well. Therefore Tristan kept away. For what seemed a long time, Tristan never looked Iseult’s way, nor she his.”

“Till the next spring when Tristan came across Iseult in her little rock garden below the castle,” recalled Lucy, “and she was looking out to sea towards Ireland and crying.”

“And then, of course, his love for her, which he had pushed deep down inside himself, came rushing up again,” added Tom, “so he put his arm around her and kissed her – but horror of horrors, someone happened to see this incident and afterwards spied on them continually.”

“Yes,” joined in Lucy again, “it was another nephew of the King who had always been jealous of Tristan and eventually told Marc of his suspicions.”

“A nasty bit of work, this fellow was – I think his name was Andrett.”

“Well done! you two, you’ve got it right... but Marc would not believe it at first, would he? He loved and trusted them both. But eventually, though Iseult had assured him that it was brotherly love

between Tristan and herself and he was a friend whose life she had saved, Marc was becoming uneasy. That's why he asked Tristan to leave his court."

"So Tristan and his friend Gorvenal found lodgings with an old swordsmith," filled in Tom. "It was in a small inland town, I think, not far off."

"Correct... but came high summer the lovers were already devising means to see each other again so, according to Iseult, they would not die of longing to be together. Messages were sent secretly. Can you recall the plan?"

Lucy obliged with a quick answer. "Tristan told Iseult to keep a watch on a certain stream at twilight," she began. "You see the Queen had some lodgings of her own down by this stream, to keep cool in the summer while Marc was away on his hunting trips."

"Tristan was going to float a branch down the stream to prepare Iseult," continued Tom, "and then follow it by a piece of bark carved in the shape of a star. This was a sign that it was safe to meet and Tristan would wait under a pear tree for Iseult to come."

"Yes, this meeting place was used many times, and meanwhile King Marc was still being bothered with Andrett's hints and aspersions surrounding Tristan. He swore he would not believe in any unfaithfulness unless he saw it with his own eyes. Andrett was determined to bring about such occasions. Now this is where the court dwarf, who knew of such goings on, comes in."

"He was one of those scary types who could mesmerise people, wasn't he?" groaned Lucy. "He could see secret things that were out of sight."

"A bit like me?" quipped Merlin.

"Oh no!" Lucy hastened to assure him, "you could never be ugly."

"Though we've not seen you," said Tom, wanting to back Lucy up. "From the sound of your voice, we imagine you more as a gentle giant than a dwarf."

"Flattered, I'm sure, my kindly young Cybernauts... Now, to be serious again, do you remember how Andrett coaxed the news out of this character, that Tristan and Iseult were meeting at this place, and informed Marc?"

"Yes, and his plot was rumbled – but I can't remember how," admitted Tom.

"I can," piped Lucy happily. "Now, after being persuaded to go with the dwarf and hide in a tree overlooking this spot, Marc and his guide then just waited. It was the twilight period and Tristan came – but he was too alert for the watchers. Thinking he heard a new rustle

in the tree above the pool beside which his pear tree grew, Tristan sensed danger but pretended he was ignorant of this and didn't look up but sat down on a log as usual. When Iseult arrived she was surprised, at first, that he didn't get up and come to greet her. Then, very cleverly I think, and just in time, she understood a well disguised sign from Tristan about the presence overhead."

"Full marks Lucy. And this was how they once more fooled the king... They spoke of the sorrow that both Tristan and the King himself felt about being deprived of each other's company, and parted without a kiss. Later Iseult told the King of this conversation and he relented, allowing Tristan back to court. The dwarf had long since fled, fearing for his life. The lovers tried hard to reform, but the good intentions, by the very nature of such passion, could not last long. Finally, due to Andrett's scheming, they were caught in each other's arms again."

"This was the last straw, of course, for King Marc I guess," concluded Tom, "and he finally snapped. He would take no excuses. His rage was terrible and they were condemned to die – broken over a wheel and burnt at the stake."

"I can't believe that anyone could order such horrendous deaths, even in those days," moaned Lucy. "His favourite nephew and his loved wife too."

"You must remember that in Medieval times people's faith in the indisputable Judgement of the Church was absolute. The law was seen as God's law and not Man's. In Gospel times women caught in adultery were stoned. Though Jesus saved one by inviting a man without sin to throw the first stone, Jesus still told her to go and sin no more, didn't He?"

"And the man who seduced her got away with it," commented Lucy.

"I expect they thought he couldn't help himself," suggested Tom rather wickedly.

"And King Arthur sent his Guinevere to the stake after finding out her love affair with Lancelot, who then rescued her at the great expense of the lives of other worthy knights."

"But Arthur was supposed to be a Christian monarch with a company of knights committed to acts of courtesy and mercy," said Tom, "and who aided the weaker sex. They even sought enlightenment from the Holy Grail."

"Of course, but he couldn't cope with the affront of the fact that his chief knight was a love rival. It was such a blow to his ego that when the sex aspect was gone he seemed to have nothing else. It all disintegrated into feelings of jealousy, possessiveness, loss of status and hurt pride. Today these feelings are often recognised in the torture of

political prisoners and territorial aggression. It's always relationships going wrong that trigger off conflict. Love descends to bitter anger and frustration."

"When I lived with my Grandmother," began Tom, "she was always playing her collection of oldies on her record-player. I got to know them a bit. There was Nat King Cole singing 'Never say goodbye my love... even when I die my Love', and Elvis proclaiming 'I love you and I always will' – so please, he crooned, 'all my dreams fulfil'. Then there were songs like, 'When I fall in love it will be for ever', sung, I think, by Sinatra, and one ending with the words 'I've found my world in you'. There was even one of John Lennon's last songs from the late 70s which I really liked. They were very romantic."

"When I was sitting with *my* grandmother at home one day," recalled Lucy, "we were watching a play on TV when she turned to me and said 'whatever does that word 'orgasm' mean, Lucy? I pretended I didn't know and later I told my mother about it. She explained to me that poor Grandma had probably never had one and didn't know that she'd missed one of the greatest pleasures of life. My grandma always seemed to me rather nervy and restless."

"She had not been fully woken by her Prince Charming, I'm afraid – one should have both the romance and the physical experience. To become addicted to one without the other can seriously damage your health – and your spirit as well. But you never forget the rapture of falling in love."

"Yet," persisted Lucy, "physical attraction can so often die. I read something once about a marriage break-up where the writer compared the couple's former love to a dead and drooping sunflower with an unpleasant smell. How can the fabulous warmth and energy feeling of being in love be so lost?"

"As God can only be known and felt through love, He is always struggling to get through to people. In the 60s it all somehow went wrong again. The new sexual freedom went over the top. In spite of love's travesties though, we seek the same thing – a taste of heavenly bliss. Remember, I myself was beguiled, robbed of my powers and sent into a long sleep by the beautiful Nimue – with the skills I taught her! I'd grown foolish with love."

"I suppose," suggested Lucy, "one way to keep this love alive would be to expand the feeling to include our home planet – for partners to join each other in falling in love anew, and together, with the EARTH. Is that silly...?"

"I know what you mean, Luce," broke in Tom. "At school we had to learn a poem by Dylan Thomas. This one: 'The force that through

the green fuse drives the flower, / Drives my green age', etc – I always loved these lines, but the poem goes on in a rather depressing tone – brought on, so the master told us, by the fact that Dylan, at the time he wrote it, thought he had TB. He was the same age I am now, and seemed already to have grasped the intimate links between the moods and functioning of our own bodies and the breathing Earth. Yet we are mostly unaware of these life sustaining forces working in us."

"Well spoken Tom, and... No, you're not silly at all, Lucy. Our twentieth century Galahad would warmly agree with you both. Losing oneself in another person, he said, could be enhanced or surpassed by mutual love of an evolving Earth. Conversing with people of like minds can rekindle love's ardour. In this atmosphere, he told us, 'smaller units would converge with the Christ spirit, a cosmic force that drives nature Godward. Humanity is sleeping,' he bemoaned, 'imprisoned in the narrow joys of its little closed loves' – no dawn yet!"

"I *can* just about understand that," mused Tom, "How about you Luce? I do remember, Merlin, what you told us one day in your Circus room in Bath. It was about Galahad's closeness to the Earth and deep feeling for the value of matter. That really stuck in my mind."

"Yes, here lay the roots of his simultaneous love of God and the world. But to revert to these Love problems... If, as Galahad saw it, love between a man and woman is the fire of evolution as it passes through Human Beings, it surely should have more respect and even awe. No wonder many get burnt!"

"Good grief!" exclaimed Lucy, "and we're *so* casual and abusive sometimes about it all. I'm beginning to understand how it could end in violence."

"Surprisingly though, more couples than you think adjust to the change and stick together, through sentiment or habit. Some stay friends, even after separation. So you see, my Cybernauts, there is hope for human love. I'll now end this lengthy conversation with a verse from a poem by my dear William. You perhaps know it, but no matter. It's about a sunflower and reads thus:

*'Ah, Sun-flower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done.'*

"I think we should now concentrate on the next grim events. Don't you?"

6

THE RESCUE

You must remember that Merlin is also a Time Lord. Though you might be thinking that this recording is much too long to have fitted into the two hours allotted to each couple in their twenty-first century booths, you'd be wrong. Merlin can easily fix all that. So now we move on to the amazing escape of Tristan from his captors and then the fearless and audacious rescue plan.

Iseult was tied to the stake and the faggots piled high around her. Only the Chief Steward had the courage to plead for their lives, but Marc seemed turned to stone and would not listen. The crowds gathered, mostly in sadness for their Champion and their Queen. Meanwhile Tristan was being taken by the guards to his place of execution outside the Palace grounds. Now Merlin takes over the story again, with a little help from his friends.

“On the way they passed a small chapel, the inside of which everyone knew very well – especially Tristan,” came in the wizard’s voice.

“There was one little window high up above the altar,” recalled Tom.

“But when Tristan’s request to say some last prayers on his own in the chapel had been granted, he quietly bolted the door. Then, supreme athlete as he was, he sprang for the windowsill. Now Tom, can you supply the next bit?”

“Of course,” complied Tom. “I pictured this feat very clearly in my mind... Yes, he hung there with his fingers and working his way up like a mountain climber, he pulled himself aloft. He got his head and shoulders through the small opening – then one knee. He looked out on to the jagged cliffs and the sea far, far below. Then he reached for a stone, I think, that gave a handhold above the window. Squeezing further out, he drew his other leg under him...”

“Well told boy, so far – but I’m now going to quote from our special version where the details are even sharper. Listen to this:

‘The gulls wove their white curves of flight across the face of the cliffs below him; the jump would have been death to any other man, but Tristan had learned well from his masters in his Lothian boyhood, and had not forgotten how to make the Hero Leap. He filled himself with air until he felt as light as the wheeling seabirds, and drew himself together and sprang out and down... He took the sea like a down-flung javelin...’⁷

“Coming up from the deep and flung shoreward, he clung to a rock, and...”

“He climbed ashore,” spoke up Lucy, taking the cue, “and keeping well out of sight gained a cliff path where, luckily, he met Gorvenal. His friend was hurrying away from Tintagel and was carrying Tristan’s sword and harp. When he got over the shock of seeing what at first looked like a drenched ghost, he was overjoyed, and urged Tristan to flee with him. But of course, Tristan had set himself to rescue Iseult, so Gorvenal turned around and started back with him. The sword was back with its owner by now.”

“On the way,” carried on Tom, “they met this grisly band of lepers coming down the track from the woods behind them. They were shaking their clappers and were amazed when, suddenly, Tristan approached them and asked for their help! They were not used to this.”

“But Tristan had thought of a plan,” said Tom, “which, after giving their leader a gold piece, was agreed upon – it was Gorvenal’s money actually.”

“And for a disguise, Tristan even swapped his wet cloak for the leper’s ragged one,” added a horrified Lucy. “He pulled the smelly, infected hood over his face. Ugh! But it turned out to be a blessing and solution in the end.”

“Right... so Tristan now leads the band onwards towards Iseult’s pyre, leaving Gorvenal and the lepers’ leader in the bushes. The band passes easily through the mostly sad gathering crowd. It parted fearfully before them as all heard the cries, ‘unclean, unclean’, and swiftly they found themselves let through even to where the King was sitting with his stony expression.”

“Tristan then,” continued Tom, “making his voice sound cracked, addressed the King – ‘a boon, a boon,’ he croaked and his followers repeated the cry... they shouted ‘give, give, give us the Queen to live with us’.

“Well, Marc’s frozen face suddenly broke into a sort of agony. He gave orders for Iseult to be cut down and given to ‘these creatures’, he called them. Iseult had seen all this and guessed the deal. She began

to struggle. When Tristan climbed the pile of faggots to seize her, she was even clinging to the stake and the crowd were shouting angry protests, but dared no more.”

“Though she fought like a wild thing at first,” slipped in Lucy excitedly, “as she pushed Tristan away she caught a glimpse of his tunic under his foul cloak. Their eyes met and she heard him whisper. After that, though she still screamed (but not so much), she stopped fighting, as though in despair, and allowed herself to be dragged down and taken, in the midst of the lepers away back up the track. The people parted again to let them through.”

“Later, in the woods, searchers found only a sea-wet cloak lying under a hawthorn tree. The lepers told them that a fearsome warrior had sprung on them out of some bushes and carried the Queen away. The couple had vanished into thin air – only Tristan’s hound knew the direction they’d taken.”

“I remember...” Lucy filled in for Merlin. “It was called Bran and, wandering about on the cliff-tops, I guess... it had picked up the scent of its master. It caught up with the three fugitives the next day and they were glad, for Tristan loved that dog and they would be needing it.”

“Thank you Lucy... So, they travelled eastward for three days, resting in hidden places at night, and the men taking it in turns to carry Iseult when she felt faint. They finally came to a lost valley where a stream meandered down from the moors above. There was an ancient forest with a clearing and a small pool. Here they stopped and Iseult proclaimed in a soft voice that it reminded her of the Welsh haven where she had once known happiness... So, it’s time now to move on to the next sequence. Be prepared for new ideas.”

7

SANCTUARY & BANISHMENT

Our players now saw a new scene brighten up their screens. It showed a secluded valley, not far from the sea, for seagulls were flying around. It was a lush setting seen under sunlight and shade. There was a log hut with a seat outside on which sat a woman with red hair and wearing a man's tunic. She was looking down at a reed basket full of wild plant stalks, roots, leaves and berries. Many were spilled around. On her other side was a pile of logs and a large bow was leaning against the wall. A man in animal skin clothing was sitting nearby playing upon a harp.

This valley was an ideal hideout for the lovers because King Marc and his company had not hunted so far afield for many years.

Tristan had become less and less interested in killing animals and left it mostly to Gorvenal, for they had to eat. But his friend was an expert huntsman, making quick kills with minimal suffering. Tristan fished in the stream and Iseult found and gathered the herbs and other things she knew to be good to eat. She delighted too in pressing her favourite flowers. Tristan discovered new wonders of nature, composed new songs to sing and often enjoyed playing with Bran. Tristan and Iseult were happy. Come in Merlin now.

"Well, I'm afraid those were their last years together. Towards the end of the third year King Marc complained that he was weary of his old hunting grounds and his chief huntsman suggested they tried the moors eastward, beyond the Tamar River, to where they'd never ventured before. Now my young stalwarts press your buttons for the action to begin and I'll proceed."

"Iseult is already beginning to look uneasy," noted Lucy. "Isn't she?"

"Yes, she's had that sudden feeling of fear. It will soon be dusk and I expect you've noticed by the trees that it's early autumn. Twice before the trio had seen 'the hawthorn trees rusted with berries and the hazelnuts falling into the stream', as our chosen book puts it; but now, no more."

“Gorvenal has gone off on a solitary hunting trip,” explained Tom, “and taken Bran with him. Now poor Iseult has moved nearer to Tristan and is looking up the valley. I expect it’s because she’s heard that baying sound.”

“You’re right. It’s Marc’s lost hound, but Tristan suggests it’s a wolf and comforts Iseult. He’s now building up and lighting the protective fire outside the hut. Soon they’ll be going inside to sleep.”

“And someone from the nearby Tintagel party will find them,” sighed Lucy.

“Hang on Lucy, you’ve forgotten who found them, haven’t you?” admonishes Tom, “and how he did it, and why.”

Lucy looked crestfallen.

“After the days hunt, Marc’s chief huntsman finds that one of the hounds is missing,” carried on Tom, “and it was a good one. So he sets out on his horse to find it – you must remember this. He searches nearly all night.”

“Points to you this time, Tom! Yes, it was the dark hour just before dawn when the tired huntsman spied the gleam of Tristan’s fire and decided to investigate. You now see this figure, having tethered his horse, enter your screen on the right of picture. I’ll now hand over again to another beautiful quote from our usual source and read by my good friend:”

*“So he came to the fire, his feet silent on the stream-side grass, and found that it burned before the doorway of a hut, and peering in, he saw by the dying firelight a man and a woman asleep on the piled bracken of the bedplace. Their faces were in shadow, but the flame-light struck answering flame from the red of the woman’s outflung hair; and the man’s sword, lying ready to his hand, had a small piece broken out of the blade.”*⁸

“That was very well read,” commented Lucy with admiration. “I did notice while we watched, that the doorway of the hut was big enough for him to see the sleeping couple, who must have been lying near it.”

“Yes they were, for it was a warm night. Now you see the figure turn and move silently away and exit through his point of entry. He will mount his horse and ride back to camp, finding his strayed hound, Gelert, on the way.”

“Then he will wake the King and tell him what he’s seen,” said Lucy, anxious to redeem herself, “and the King will send for his own horse and go back with the huntsman... Look, it’s nearly daybreak.”

“Now Marc enters your scene, leaving his huntsman out of picture to hold the horses, and crosses towards the fast dying fire. In the grey dawn light you can see he has his sword in his hand as he reaches the hut.”

“He’s a long time looking in,” said Tom. “He could easily kill them now.”

“Of course – but he cannot do it because now they are completely at his mercy. The wonder is that his love and compassion at last return, and fearing they might wake he acts quickly and quietly. He’s now swapping his own sword for Tristan’s and laying one of his hunting gloves gently on Iseult’s breast before he retreats and leaves the scene.”

“I’ll bet Iseult stirred in her sleep,” remarked Tom.

“Well, only when they wake later do they realise they’ve been discovered and been left a strongly symbolic message. Now you see them sitting outside and obviously grappling with the problem of what to do.”

“Now Iseult is looking fearfully up the valley again,” broke in Lucy.

“Perhaps she hears another hound baying,” offers Tom as explanation.

“It’s only Bran this time as he draws near the clearing with Gorvenal. They are returning from their hunting trip, Tristan guesses. He’s lovingly pointing out to Iseult that if they flee again, as she wants, they’d then never hear a dog howling in the night without fearing the hunt was on their trail. So, as they now greet Gorvenal, and Bran stops jumping up to lick Tristan’s hand, they’ve already made up their minds – Iseult tearfully.”

“You can see that Gorvenal agrees with them after hearing about the dramatic events,” says Tom. “And they’re already beginning to pack up.”

“Now, sadly, they leave the valley to give themselves up, and our screen is blank again. Now before you get down to committing your notes on to disc, I must quickly go through the substance of the King’s final verdict and the sworn promises of the parting couple. It sets the scene for the next part.”

“I wonder that Iseult could ever live with Marc again anyway,” mused Lucy aloud. “After all that!”

“She had no choice really, I think. In due course she and Tristan were brought to the King to hear his judgement. The King sat in his high seat, but in an empty hall. When the lovers walked up and stood before him, there was a long and heavy silence.”

“I remember,” came in Lucy, “that it says in the book that a dog at the King’s feet started to whimper. Animals can smell grief and anger, I’m sure, and even love and hate sometimes.”

“Of course they can... So finally Tristan said to Marc that they’d read his message and come back to be at his mercy. The king then spoke saying that it was well that they had done so and he would take the Queen back, but as for Tristan... well, you’ll remember his fate – the man he’d loved so dearly must leave the country. The King gave him till next morning to gather his things and be gone from Tintagel, and three days to be out of Cornwall, never to come back.”

“But he granted them a few minutes alone together, didn’t he?” said Tom, “so they could say goodbye. That’s when Tristan made that fateful promise.”

“Yes, the cause of much trouble. Iseult wanted to feel she still had the power to call him back and asked him to swear that if anything was asked of him in her name, he would do it, however strange or perilous. Tristan agreed readily, but found it difficult to speak. He was devastated.”

“He managed to tell Iseult, though...” pressed Lucy, “that he would be leaving his beloved Bran with her – ‘love him for my sake’, he’d said.”

“He had, and Iseult soon assured him that Bran would be dearer to her than anything else in Cornwall. Then she pulled from her finger a heavy gold ring formed of curiously twined serpents. This had come with her from Ireland and now she told Tristan that if ever he was in sore need of her, then he must send it back to her and she would come to him however far away he was – even though it be the death of both of them.”

“Tristan took it, kissed it, and stowed it away, the story said,” remembered Tom, “and he wore it round his neck for the rest of his life.”

“Until the end. He never used it until he lay dying.”

8

A FREAK MISFORTUNE

So Tristan and Gorvenal, after wandering from country to country, came finally to Brittany. They were in a part of the country which, like the Arthurian Wasteland, looked deserted. Unlike the Arthurian model though, its fields and roofless houses were overgrown with docks and brambles. Seeing at last a small fire burning, the men approached it and found an old hermit sitting outside his cell beside a little chapel. They then learnt how the halls and other dwelling places had been laid waste by a marauding king and his rebel war-host. Even now, they were told, the last sturdy stronghold of King Hoel was being besieged at the nearby Castle Carhaix. The hermit said the reason for this turn of events was the refusal of the King to give his beautiful daughter to a vassal of his who had sought her hand in marriage. The King's pride was blamed for the situation, but some said his daughter was the cause of it all, for she was unwilling to marry this man.

After they left the hermit, Tristan decided to make contact with King Hoel, even though Gorvenal tried to dissuade him, saying, 'not more dragons! Remember what happened last time'. But Tristan, in his sadness, was adamant and finally they were let into the besieged castle through a secret door.

As well as the King, Tristan met the King's son, Karherdin, who was to be his friend for life.

When a challenge came for single combat with the rebel king, Tristan, of course, took it up, and after a bitter fight had the victory and lifted the siege. When food came in at last, they prepared a celebration meal, but first the prince took Tristan to the women's quarters to have a wound in his arm tended – it was also to introduce him to his sister, Princess Iseult. "This is our champion," he told her.

Tom and Lucy, I know, remember most of the story but all this is to refresh your minds and to prepare others for what is coming. Now comes another quote from our excellent book, on the subject of

Tristan's first proper sight of Iseult of the White Hands – afterwards always so-called.

*'She had brown hair that fell forward on either side of her face so that he could not see at first what like she was. But he saw her hands against the crimson stuff of her gown, and they were white and almost transparent as the point-petalled windflowers of the woods.'*⁹

Now, that night, as they sat at table in the great hall and the Princess and her maidens were keeping the wine cups filled, the old king turned to Tristan. He told him why he wouldn't give his daughter to a husband he deemed unworthy – but now that the hearth-stones in the houses of his people could be warm again, he was glad. Then, to Tristan's immense surprise and embarrassment, the King offered his daughter in marriage to Tristan, who was worthy, and because of the part he had played in bringing all this about.

At first Tristan was horrified and at a loss for words, but... We'll let our book help us out once more in this long connecting sequence:

*'Tristan saw the Princess Iseult standing before him with a great wine cup in her hands; and this time her face was not hidden by her hair for the thick brown braids were bound back under goldwork for a festival; and he saw the colour flood into her cheeks... and her eyes bright and soft; and he knew that her heart was towards him.'*¹⁰

So Tristan thought this must be his fate and as his own Iseult was lost to him, here was another Iseult who would be shamed if he refused her. There could be some happiness for them both, even though he knew his wings would be clipped, as it were. So he said that if the Princess would have it so then he'd accept gladly, and putting his hands over hers on the great wine cup he bent his head and drank. Soon after they were married.

Now your commentator comes back, bringing you on to your next scene.

“Well, what a shock – Tristan in wedlock, but not with his Iseult! Now, after a year or so we come to the new disaster in the name of love.

“I'll skip through the build-up to our next episode. Suffice it to say that Karherdin noticed all was not well with Tristan; though he was kind and affectionate to his sister, this did not include the sort of love a man should show his wife. Tristan had left that behind in Cornwall,

so he told the Prince that his heart was there. Karherdin, having himself once had a similar experience of separation, agreed to help Tristan and to go with him to Cornwall on the pretext of adding to his stables by acquiring one or two of King Marc's finely bred horses."

"Tristan swore that he'd come back again after he'd seen Iseult once more," filled out Tom. "And that he'd perhaps make a better husband, when his heart had been eased."

"The book says," added Lucy, "that the longing which had been dragging at Tristan was getting worse, so that he feared he might go mad."

"Right – both of you. So then, with Gorvenal and a trusted armour bearer, they took ship and sailed for Cornwall. There they made their way to Tristan's old friend Dynas, the High Steward."

"It was in his house that they made the plan of action, I remember," blurted out Tom getting quite excited. "Dynas must see Iseult alone, and..."

"Stop there, Tom – for now I must introduce our new computed screen sequence which is quite different from the previous three. It's a map, and now you see it before you."

"It's like one of those very old fashioned maps," gulped Tom, "with pictures of little boats on the sea and double-lined roads and lanes and, what in God's name are all those match-stick men and horses doing there?"

"You'll see in a minute, when the movement begins."

"I like all those brief brightly coloured sentences scattered around," remarked Lucy, reciting them delightedly – 'HERE BE MONSTERS' and 'HERE BE DRAGONS'. But I can guess the sad meaning of the two bottom ones."

"Yes... 'HERE BE MY LOVER', and on the opposite side, 'HERE BE MY TORMENTER'. These sum up the disastrous result of this whole venture. So watch the screen carefully while I talk you through the sequence. You can halt it any time according to the lengths of my commentary. Now start off the action... Now you see Dynas, who they had planned would alert the Queen. He's riding to Tintagel with Tristan's ring and suggested plan. Iseult trusted Dynas."

"Brilliant!" exclaimed Tom. "I see a matchstick horseman leaving what must be the house of Dynas and following the arrows down the riband of the road to the Channel coast."

"The ringed-castle sign where he stops means Tintagel," concluded Lucy.

"Good! You've got the idea my Cyberland Questers. Now we must outline the plan for those unfamiliar with our story... So now, Dynas

returns to tell of Iseult's 'go ahead' message – the arrows now showing in an opposite direction. The next afternoon Tristan and Karherdin set out down that same road, but, as you see by the arrows, they stop short of Tintagel at the spot where some bushes are pictured inside a little ring. It's here Tristan will hide.

"You can delay the action for a while now, while we reveal the initial working out of the plan. Do you remember it Tom, and could you repeat it?"

"I think so... roughly," hesitated Tom. "The Queen was to arrange two days' hunting in a district called the White Valley which was full of hawthorn bushes. They were to take the valley track and..."

"She must have had a great influence on the King to ensure all that," broke in Lucy. "I wonder she could do it so quickly."

"Oh! Shut up, Luce. You are breaking my train of thought," complained Tom crossly. "Anyway – a twelve-point stag had been seen there recently... Well, when the hunting party came by, Tristan, then hidden in his thicket, would flick a green reed into the mane of Iseult's horse as she passed, as a sign."

"It was an old trick of his and Iseult would remember it," said Lucy, not wanting to be bullied. "She was at the end of the line of servants laden with tents and provisions and the huntsmen with hounds. The ageing King and his nobles were in front. Tristan had put himself in a good position, up-wind, so that the hounds would not get scent of him. Bran was there as well running beside Iseult's horse. I'd better let you finish, Tom."

"Well, you've jumped ahead a bit now," said Tom rather peevishly, "but the idea was that Iseult should contrive to stop the whole party then and persuade them to set up camp there for the night."

"Thank you, Tom... And when Tristan, watching between the tangled thorn branches, first saw Iseult again it was 'as though another sun had risen and dawn was in the sky as well as sunset' – that's another quote of course. Anyhow, when Tristan's reed went skimming like a dart into her horses mane, the Princess stopped and dismounted, feigning extreme tiredness. She sent Perenis ahead to request the King to return to this spot, and then sat on a log till the camp was being set up and her own tent was erected."

"But she took great care to keep Bran close at her side," added Lucy.

"Yes, but meanwhile, Tristan had slipped further away up the hillside, hadn't he?" carried on Tom, "and had joined Karherdin who was waiting there for him. Gorvenal must have come and taken the horses back, I guess."

“Now, cutting it short, when the camp below was quiet Tristan clambered silently down towards the glimmer of light from the Queen’s tent. Finding the cloak over the door drawn aside, he went in, and – by way of greeting – there was only the sound of a dog’s joyful whine, which you can’t hear!”

“I’m glad no one else in the camp heard it either,” quipped Tom. “It’s strange, but that ring on the map showing the spot where Iseult’s tent is pitched, looks larger and different somehow. I thought I saw a man’s shape just now outside a real tent, but it was dark save for the raised torch.”

“You’re right, boy – the ring you are looking at between the two opposing sentences that Lucy pointed out, is alive... It’s specially programmed and you can even enlarge and zoom in on the outside of the tent when you want.”

“When morning comes,” asked Lucy excitedly, can we see them both come out and sadly take leave of each other?”

“If you press your movement button now I’ll send it into fast-forward and, there you are – the couple out together in the very early autumn morning with a slight mist. Iseult is making sure that Tristan still has her ring – and is being shown it hanging round his neck. She is asking him what his new wife thinks of it – they must have talked that night about Iseult of the White Hands. When Tristan answers that his wife has the wisdom not to ask about it, Iseult admits she must have more wisdom than herself.”

“Oh dear! Now they are saying goodbye and that is the last kiss they will ever, ever have. I’m stopping the action there for a while.”

“Well, alright. Tristan now walks unhappily on through the sleeping camp and up to join Karherdin again, and they both start out on their long walk to a new meeting point near a ford. You see a fresh route now on your map.”

“Yes, they’d arranged for Gorvenal and the armour-bearer to take the horses from the High Steward’s house,” said Tom, “and for them all to join up again at another place so as not to bring trouble upon Tristan’s friend, but this decision triggered the coming mishap.”

“Right – now start up your movement and I’ll try to keep up with you as you watch the comings and goings on the roads before you. You can put it all in slow motion, if you like.”

“There – I see the two matchstick horses and riders starting out with their extra horses behind them,” announced Lucy.

“And have you noticed two other riders coming up towards them from the opposite direction? They are moving in a parallel line, but on the moors and off the road. Well if you stop the action for a

moment, I'll remind you of the approaching fated event. By ill chance one of Marc's nobles was coming late to join the hunt. As he, with a companion, passed them by he caught a glimpse of the two other riders with the lead horses. The man, whose name was Beri, recognised Gorvenal and presumed that the other person with him was Tristan."

"Actually Bryn, the armour-bearer, was dark and had the same build as Tristan, which didn't help," said Lucy, "and, oh dear, Beri *was* a sort of friend of the Queen – but rather a foolish one."

"So now he calls to them to halt, wanting to talk, but Gorvenal, knowing nothing of Tristan's pact with Iseult, tells Bran to flee, for it could mean trouble for Tristan. They break into a gallop."

"Wow! Look at the figures now," called out Tom. "One group of riders and horses has left the track and is following a wide circle on the outer space while being chased by the other... Ah! Beri's given up – he's turned back."

"Yes, but he'd been shouting, actually, for the one he thought was Tristan to stop in the name of the Queen. This he told Iseult later."

"When the four from Brittany finally met up," continued Lucy, "to prepare for their Journey home, Gorvenal told Tristan what had happened to them on their way to meet him. When Tristan heard all the details and how Beri must have mistaken Bryn for himself and how they had spurred their horses away, Tristan was horrified... I remember, in our school book, it said that hearing this, Tristan could have thrown up his head and howled like a dog, remembering his promise to Iseult. He knew the harm that, unwittingly, had been done."

"Yes, that was, of course, the same book that we've adopted now, and there's another quote coming from there in a minute. You see, Gorvenal had to admit that Beri had invoked the name of the Queen and Tristan's love for her, as well as his honour. So, when Beri spilt the beans, as you say, the result was catastrophic. Here it's well described:

*'As she listened, the anger rose hot and most bitter within Iseult, and she remembered the promise that Tristan had made again to her only that morning. He has broken faith with me, she thought. And never could he have done that while he still loved me. All his promises are false, and it is Iseult of the White Hands who holds his heart now.'*¹¹

"As my William wrote: 'It is easier to forgive an enemy than a friend'. I see you've switched off the movement again, but now come

all the back and forth journeys which we will number as they appear, so let's go."

"Number one, I guess," noted Tom, "is Perenis on track to catch up with Tristan at the meeting place that Tristan had told him about. He's been sent by Iseult to deliver her sour message. He goes with a heavy heart."

"I think the actual message was that Tristan had better forget all that had been between them," prompted Lucy, "because of a quickly broken promise."

"But Tristan had anticipated and feared such a self-aggrieved response and sent Perenis back with explanations and assurances of love and fidelity. Though Perenis is not sure if she'll believe him, for anger makes her past clear thought, he'll do his best and Tristan will wait for his return."

"So there goes trip number two, and that route has had to widen up," verified Tom. "Look – Perenis has now arrived at the tent. Let's zoom in."

"Iseult's come out of the tent. She's listening to him," reported Lucy.

"Goodness! She actually looks ugly," said Tom incredulously.

"Perenis has never seen her face like this before," Lucy lamented.

"She's turned that cold face aside. She actually accused him of taking a bribe for giving her Tristan's story, didn't she?" checked Tom. "Then sent him back, even after his shocked denial, to tell Tristan that she does not believe it and to brand him a faith-breaker. Perenis pleaded to no avail."

"Now start up trip number three. Though Perenis has a fresh horse, he is very weary. When he arrives at the ford it is dark and cold. Tristan and his friends sit wrapped in their cloaks, with their horses tethered nearby. When they heard what Perenis had to say, Tristan bent his head and groaned."

"Karherdin advised they should start for home at first light, as there was nothing more Tristan could do," said Lucy with a note of reluctance. "Also he suggested to Tristan that though his sister was not as beautiful as the Queen of Cornwall, she was kinder."

"Well remembered Lucy, but our hero will not have it, will he? He cannot leave Iseult holding this seeming betrayal against him. So he tells them to depart without him, for he will go back. Gorvenal says it would be madness so to throw his life away, but Tristan sees no life in his present state."

"Of course the others won't desert him," asserts Tom, "so Tristan decides to let Perenis go home and get some sleep and to ask the

others to wait for him while he prepares. We can see trip number four now on the map, but can we please stop the action again Luce, so I can describe how, next day, Tristan made his disguise... First he whipped an old, grey-hooded cloak of his, with thorn branches. Then he beat it with stones till it looked really ragged. He rubbed wood-ash into it from the fire and from... something else he found.”

“It was tree lichen I think,” said Lucy, “but fancy your recalling all that so well. It must have really interested you,” she commented in surprise.

“Yes, it did – and then, with a dagger, he made himself a leper’s clapper from odd bits of wood. This disguise had worked before for him.”

“Yes, but not this time, Tom, we now know. See, he’s alone now on that much-travelled route. It branches off at the end because the tent has gone and the party are already on their way home. When, later, Tristan comes to stagger back to his friends on a last journey along that road, they’ll conclude the worst by his condition. They’ll ask no questions, head south to the coast and take ship. Before we tackle the next tragic event, I have something to say.”

“I hope it will help us to understand Iseult’s cruelty,” said Lucy.

“Perhaps, a bit. But we must remember she was seeing everything in just black and white. Her grand passion, turned to jealousy, had taken her over completely. Her great love, taking all reason with it, had fled into limbo only to return when it was already too late. Her remorse was terrible.”

“Right, let’s get it over,” said Tom impatiently. So, Tristan came out on the track ahead of the party, and standing beside the way he was given pitying and fearful glances as they heard his leper’s clapper. When the Queen and her maids came by he thrust forward but was barred by people guarding her. Over the sound of curses he shouted out something...”

“He said he’d had a dream that if the Queen just looked at his face, he would be cured of his disease,” helped out Lucy with the story.

“Yes, now we come to it – Branguin thrust her horse between Iseult and the imagined threat, but, strangely enough, Iseult was touched with a sudden sympathy for the sad figure and gesturing Branguin away she urged her horse towards him. Now carry on, one of you, if you can.”

“Then...” hesitated Lucy, “as Tristan stood by her stirrup and looked up, his face hidden by the hood from all but her, she bent and looked into it. Bran began to whimper and wag his tail, but again, horror of horrors, when she recognised him her face changed and she swerved her horse aside.”

“She even called out for him to be driven away,” finished Tom, “and her voice, said our book, was as cold as a glass bell. He was pelted with stones.”

“Yes, but he didn’t hear the shouts nor feel the stones. All he heard was Iseult’s high, cruel laughter, and long after he seemed to hear it in every birdcall. On his return his friends tried to comfort him in his misery.”

“One good thing came out of it all,” Lucy remembered. “When they arrived back in Brittany and Iseult of the White Hands came out to meet them at the castle gate, Tristan dismounts. Then he put his arms round her and kissed her as he’d never done before.”

9

THE KILLER LIE

As the months went by, Iseult of Cornwall began bitterly to regret that she had driven Tristan from her in that way. She grew to wish more than anything in the world that he would come back. Whenever she saw a man in a hooded cloak her heart leapt at the thought that it might be Tristan; if a stranger came near, she hoped he might bring her the ring. As the years went by she grew weary with waiting, and her crown, according to our book, sat heavily upon her head.

Meanwhile, Tristan gradually settled down to a sort of married life. During these years he was forced to return to his native home in Lothian for a while. His father had died, and when Tristan had dealt with warring nobles and set his kingdom to rights, he returned to Brittany, leaving Gorvenal to rule the land for him. He then found that King Hoel had died as well and Kaherdin was now king. He and Tristan were still close friends and though the tall, sandy-haired man was quite ugly to look at, he had a huge sense of humour and fun. He was also a powerful and determined character.

One day, when the two were out hawking, Tristan had suggested that Kaherdin should get married – as Tristan had suggested to King Marc so long ago with such sad results. Anyway Kaherdin admitted to him that his heart also was still held by a one-time unfulfilled romance. Unhappily they had been parted by time and circumstance and she'd been forced to marry a rebel lord – Bedenis. Kaherdin still had a duplicate key to this castle and he asked Tristan to come with him, as he had gone with Tristan to Cornwall, on this new adventure. The request was granted. A sad decision.

A few days later, when Bedenis was out hunting at his usual time, our two foolhardy adventurers rode across the enemy drawbridge. The wind caught at the honeysuckle garland which Kaherdin was wearing on his head, and blew it into the moat. At the gate the excited women persuaded the guards to let the old key be used and the two men entered the castle. They were welcomed delightedly. Though Tristan

saw that his friend's lost love was little and with a face like a flower that could be easily crushed, he was surprised that she was so loved. She held out her hands to Kaherdin and then, as our special book puts it: *'Tristan wondered how such little foolish hands could hold this strong and valiant heart; but then he saw the faces of both of them as they drew together, and he wondered no more.'*

While the two were closeted in her room for an intimate conversation – for they had much to say to each other – Tristan was well fed and regaled by her bored maidens. Seeking to entertain them, Tristan first played on a harp which he'd found and then practiced his unique feat of flicking reeds very accurately at certain objects. Two of them stuck on the wall tapestry and he forgot to remove them. At last they took their leave and Kaherdin also forgot about his garland floating among the water lilies.

When they left the castle they were feeling happy and carefree and had fooled around, light-heartedly chasing anything they saw, just for fun, but tiring the horses. They were oblivious to the discovery of the forgotten clues they'd left behind, but Bedenis had come back early, had noticed and suspected. He'd cruelly forced the truth from his wife and given chase.

Tristan and Kaherdin heard the hoof beats behind them, which were getting closer. Angry Bedenis had called for fresh horses and Tristan knew they couldn't out ride them; so he suggested they stopped and faced their pursuers. Kaherdin agreed and they chose a place where there was a rocky ridge as cover for their backs, and dismounted. They slapped and shouted at their horses to gallop off, supposing they'd know their way home. Then the two men turned, sword in hand, to face the death hunt, as Kaherdin called it. It was twenty against two.

As our cybernauts began to get slightly impatient, their screens lit up again with the last scene. The voice of Merlin resounded from within it:

"This is Tristan's own room in the castle. He's lying on the bed, badly wounded. The other figure in the picture is Iseult of the White Hands."

"The whole story is so tragic," said Lucy, sighing deeply as she looked. "When the two friends were hawking, before all this, Kaherdin had said to Tristan – *'I too see a woman's face always between me and the sun.'* I remember clearly this being read to us at school. Those words spelt their doom."

"That's right," continued Tom, "and other bits of dialogue from the book still stand out in my mind. When Tristan says just before the

coming clash that they'll make this last fight one for harpers to make into a song, Kaherdin *laughs!* He then replies that it would be a bad joke if he dies with a jealous husband's sword in his throat and Tristan quips that it would still be enough for a short song! Words to that effect anyway. Now the young king is dead and Tristan soon will be."

"The lookouts recognised the two riderless horses which were wandering in a confused and restless way outside the castle the next morning," said Lucy, "and raised the alarm. Did Tristan and Kaherdin go down fighting?"

"Yes they fought to the end before they were overcome by the avenging warriors. When the searchers from the city found them – one dead and the other unconscious – they brought them back on roughly-made hurdles. The body of the king now lies in the church with candles burning at head and feet. He will later be buried with solemn pomp and great mourning."

"Let's have some action now," said Tom with sudden urgency.

"Well... There you see poor Iseult of the White Hands walking back and forth with small bowls of water in those same administering hands. As she sits beside Tristan bathing his wound or trying to staunch the slow bleeding, she knows he is dying and her tears are visible."

"Those separate figures," commented Lucy, "who keep coming in – one after another – examining Tristan and then going out, who are they I wonder?"

"Physicians from all around summoned by Iseult but, as you see, shaking their heads – for Tristan has a horrible wound."

"They know it's gone wrong and won't heal, don't they?" said Tom.

"Yes. He's growing weaker each day – but now... It's Bryn, the King's armour-bearer, who comes in, treading quietly over the reed-strewn floor. He has been sent for by Tristan, who is so ill he knows that only Iseult of Cornwall can save him. He longs, anyway, to see her face again before he dies."

"Already," reports Tom, "he is taking the ring from its thong round his neck and his hands are trembling. He's giving it to Bryn. What's he saying?"

"These words are instructions to Bryn: 'Take this ring to the Queen of Cornwall and tell her my plight. Beg her to come quickly, or I must die. When you return, if she is with you, cause the ship you're in to show white sails; but if she will not come, then let the sails be black, for you can then put on mourning for me...' Now you should stop the action again while I relate what now transpires. The next bit takes place in another room, over the sea."

“OK, fire away then,” said Tom resignedly, “but we should know most of it anyway.”

“Well, you remember that Bryn, in the guise of a merchant, came to Tintagel and gained access to the Queen’s apartments. When they were alone except for Branguin, he was asked to show his wares if he had anything worth looking at. I have this,” he said, holding out the gold ring she’d given Tristan so long ago. Here’s how our book records her reaction:

‘The queen looked down at it in silence, and the blood drained from her face, leaving her white as snow, and then flooded back so that her cheeks blazed like fire, and her eyes were brilliant as a falcon’s. “What message comes with this ring?” she said at last.’¹²

“When Bryn told her that his lord begged her to come to him for he was sorely wounded and must die, Iseult became very white again and asked how all this had happened. She was told the whole story by armour-bearer, Bryn.”

“Iseult was immediately propelled into action, wasn’t she?” remembered Lucy, “and told Bryn to wait while she gathered the things she needed. She gave instructions to have her horse ready and a fresh one for Bryn... but she told poor Branguin she shouldn’t come with her for she, her mistress, might never return to Cornwall.”

“And after the supposed merchant was given food and drink, Iseult set off secretly with him to ride south without a backward glance. She’d left her husband, country, crown and honour, taking with her only a little carved box containing the herbs and salves of her healing craft.”

“And it was not till the king and court gathered for the evening meal in the big hall,” added Tom, “that they knew she’d gone. Her seat was empty!”

“Now, we can go back to the scene in Tristan’s room,” directed Merlin. “It’s above the city on the coast of Brittany where we left our hero lying as if dead with Iseult of the White Hands still sitting by his bed.”

“She’s crying,” said Lucy, “for she really loves him and has been his faithful wife for nearly five years. He’s feverish, but when, briefly, he opened his eyes he didn’t even look at her.”

“Yes, she’s obviously distraught. She gets up knowing that the ring has gone from around his neck,” observes Tom, “and now she’s wringing her hands as she paces back and forth. I’m really sorry for her.”

“The only thought inside Tristan now, as the fever rages, is whether the sails on the ship he awaits will be black or white. During the long night Iseult has heard him, in a waking dream, calling the name of Iseult and she knows it is not for herself he calls.”

“As she tends him,” explains Lucy, “she wonders how he could turn now to the other Iseult, who had broken his heart, and not to herself.”

“Of course. It’s unimaginably hurtful for her... But now you should skip the next couple of days and bring the scene forward to the time when the boat from Cornwall is due back. Tristan’s bed, positioned near that long, narrow window, is bathed in early morning sunshine. Tristan is kept alive only by hoping for his ‘Love’ to come. All has been delayed, first by storms and then flat calms. This window looks out to sea, so now, as you see Iseult rise from her night watch and go to the window for air, she makes a sharp sound as she peers out.”

“She sees a ship rounding the headland from the direction of Cornwall,” states Tom dramatically. “And the sails are as white as a gull’s breast.”

“Yes – but now we can see a stirring movement in the bed and when Iseult goes over to him she hears him ask her in a faint whisper what she had seen out of the window. Iseult tells him, but says it was too far out to see much detail.”

“Now she’s turning away and wiping tears from her eyes... I think,” said Tom, “and she seems filled with a sort of war within her.”

“It’s a mixture of joy and grief, I expect,” commented Lucy, “but look what’s happening now... in that agonizing effort, Tristan has fought his way up on to one elbow.”

“Yes, and Iseult turns round and sees the fear and longing in his eyes. Then comes that final request – for Iseult to look again and tell him what colour the sail is. I now hand over to our book for the great debacle:

‘And the cruel jealousy burst up in her, and for that one moment she was filled with rage against him. And the words were spoken before she knew it, ‘I have no need to look again. The sail is black.’¹³

“It was a form of madness... She sees the light go out of his eyes and now, as you watch, he falls back on the pillow and turns his face to the wall. As Iseult runs to bend over him, she hears him whisper these words: ‘Iseult, why did you not come?’ And again she knows to whom he calls.”

“She’s putting her arms round him – why doesn’t she tell him now that the sail was white?”

“It’s too late. That last great shudder you see was the end, and though she’s still clinging to him, she knows he is dead.”

“I expect she cried out quite loudly,” guessed Tom, “for it’s brought all those people running in, gathering around the bed and looking so shocked.”

“Yes she did, and soon you will see them preparing his body for burial. When they bear him slowly out on a bier hung with white silk, your picture will fade out and your screen will go blank until you complete and gather all your notes together for computerization.”

“I suppose they’ll take Tristan to the church and he will lie where his friend lay not long ago,” lamented Lucy.

“I feel your sadness, believe me, my dear Cybernauts, but you must try to convert it all into a new contemporary myth. I will leave the narrator to finish this Celtic tragedy for those who, strangely, don’t know the story!”

Because of the offshore wind the ship from Cornwall couldn’t enter the city’s harbour till much later that day. The first sound that Queen Iseult heard was the tolling of a bell. She knew in her heart for whom the bell tolled, but she asked as she stepped ashore. When told that Tristan’s bier lay before the altar in the great church she went forward alone, waving Bryn back. With her head held high, she walked up through the silent crowds that lined the street and looking straight ahead, followed the sound of the bells. When she came to the church door she saw clergy and nobles beside the bier and a woman with her hair loose and bending over the coffin.

When Iseult of Cornwall reached the bier she stood facing another Iseult across Tristan’s body. Then, in a clear voice she asked Tristan’s wife to stand further off, for it was herself who loved and mourned for him the most. Murmurs of surprise filled the church and Iseult of the White Hands gave her back look for look and answered that she doubted that. But eventually she had to admit that Tristan did love the Cornish queen more than herself, and she stood back. Now comes a quote from our book, as Merlin instructed...

‘Iseult of Cornwall stooped and drew aside the embroidered pall. Looking long into Tristan’s face, ‘Love, you sent for me and I came,’ she said. ‘I’m too late to bring you back, but I can go with you, so we’ll be parted no more.

‘And she lay down on the bier, close beside him, and put her arms about him and kissed him long and sweetly on the

*mouth. And with the kiss, her heart broke, and her spirit left her to go after his. And there were two bodies on the bier, where there had been one.’*¹⁴

“So,” said Merlin, summing up his recruits first session. “You’ve seen the deadly power of unchecked jealousy. But Iseult of the White Hands was torn with grief for her one moment of blind jealousy – and Tristan and his true love were buried together in a beautiful tomb.”

When King Marc heard of the two deaths, he too was consumed with deep regret and took ship to Brittany to bring back their bodies to Cornwall – with the Princess’ permission, of course. The Lovers were laid again side by side in one grave and, as the legend goes, out of Tristan’s heart there grew a hazel tree and out of Iseult’s a honeysuckle. These then arched together and intertwined so that they could never be separated again.”



SEQUEL THREE:
INTO THE VIRTUAL CYBERLANDS

1

PREAMBLE & PREPARATION

Having worked out a rough plan of action and chosen their accompanying characters, Tom and Lucy relaxed – both remarking how strange it was that they felt neither tired nor hungry.

They had both decided they would try and copy Merlin's former practice of choosing special twentieth century personalities as stand-ins for their Arthurian equivalents. Tom and Lucy would, of course, take the parts of Tristan and Iseult, but both chose modern role-models for the characters though. Tom nominated a former Provost of Coventry Cathedral who had once come to his school in Ireland to talk to them. This man had resigned his position, presumed Tom, through frustration or impatience with the system. He'd then gone to live in Cornwall attempting to help his uncle who had a large parish and who presided over many county-based religious bodies. This Cornish church dignitary was a reactionary dogmatist with a somewhat closed mind, but he would sometimes listen to his favourite nephew, Tom had heard. It was decided they would fit well into the modern images of Tristan and King Marc in Tom's act.

Tom was reminded of the Arthurian knight, Sir Dinadan, when he thought of Tristan's trusty friend, Gorvenal. Dinadan had been a worthy knight, who could give a good account of himself in battle when he had to, but he deplored the way Tristan and other knights seemed to seize every opportunity for a fight. He found Tristan a bit mad but loved and helped him just the same.

The sword was a symbol of the knight's will. When he chose to enter untried and dangerous confrontations and places, it was, perhaps, in order to find his true and higher self.

Tom's twentieth century stand-in for Gorvenal was now a physics professor at a London College who'd come to Tom's school, in the

company of the former Provost, as they had travelled on a peace mission together. The professor had then read some of his poetry to them and spoken of Teilhard – Merlin’s Galahad.

Two other characters in the story, Kaherdin and Bryn, were depicted. One, as the son of a parson in the Channel Islands (the place of Tristan’s final banishment), and the other as a church secretary there.

Lucy had more difficulty finding herself suitable and familiar substitutes for her characters. The fair Iseult in her original form was a legendary Irish beauty, and instinctively Lucy thought of the old Celtic tales, which she herself, when younger, had been familiar with in Ireland. Later Lucy had spent a period in Bath with her friends, Gill and Sam. Their parents had gone on a foreign mission at one time, leaving Lucy with eccentric Aunt Sophie.

But now Lucy remembered her earlier school and the Irish teacher who’d made a big impression upon her. Lucy then made her choice. Her model for a new Iseult, whose role she was taking, would be her favourite teacher, who had also been very nice looking. She was, as well, the daughter of a prominent Republican figure living on the north-south border of the island. Just right, decided Lucy, hoping Tom would agree – which he did, eventually.

Now we come to Branguin, Iseult’s servant and close friend. Lucy had, from the beginning, connected her with the Arthurian figure of Percivale’s sister, Dindrane. Lucy felt she hadn’t been given enough attention during their earlier discourses with Merlin, so she would plan on presenting her now. It would work, because Lucy then chose a one-time nun to be her up-to-date stand-in for Branguin. This person was charitable, sensitive and a passionate advocate for peace – a poet too, like Percivale. Lucy had referred to her computer archives to reawaken in her the memory of the Dindrane story and it confirmed her guess that the former Sister Christine and the Arthurian character were very similar and would both fit in with the personality and role of Branguin. She had to convince Tom of this for, after all, she had agreed to *his* ideas in their emerging plot.

The figure of Iseult’s cupbearer, Perenis, came over as a loyal and willing retainer in the new version, who served his mistress with great credit.

Lastly, Lucy insisted, the other Iseult could be seen as the Jersey parson’s daughter. So, a new scene is nearing its set-up. Merlin takes over again:

“I wonder if you realise,” our wizard begins, “that in a few minutes you will both be full-blown cybernauts wholly alive in Cyberspace and therefore by-passing physical death. You will have a sort of

Earthly immortality. You will be on call, contacted, displayed on screen or shown in interactive virtual reality programmes. In real life, have you watched yourselves on a TV video monitor in the vestibule of a shopping precinct and imagined it's you in another sphere? Well it is."

"But we were scanned by you before," Tom reminded Merlin, "in preparation for our Time-travel adventures in Bath, weren't we?"

"I know, but I couldn't then easily acquire some of the Third Millennium equipment, which you have now around you, to complete it all."

"I suppose," said Tom in a specially thoughtful mood, "that whenever anyone had been filmed, was on TV or even photographed, he could still be partly in Cyberspace... but with not enough data collected to recreate the full personality."

"True... but of course there is one difference. Cyber people will always stay in the same stage of their development as when they were scanned. You will not grow any older in body or mind."

"A sort of Peter Pan syndrome," intervened Lucy. "But won't we be able to grow in another way?"

"Only by learning some new tricks, meeting other Cyber characters in Virtual Country and comparing notes. Your true self, or 'soul', as it's often called, can only progress during a real Earth life with its sorrows and compensating joys. There, beliefs are formed, finding out your true desires. For there, as my William wrote – 'Joy and woe are woven fine, a clothing for the soul divine.' Humans blossom in love's warmth but often learn in pain."

"What will happen then, after our death?" questioned Lucy.

"Well, St Paul says you will have a spiritual body. Your new phase of existence will still be close to Earth. You could still influence those you've left behind, given the presence of strong enough emotions. Your special pattern, or soul, and forms of activities which you've brought to birth through your life in the body, will express itself through your living mind. It takes time for many to adjust to this new stage and to move on. It depends upon the amount of conscious awareness each has achieved and how prepared they are – in other words, how well they used their creative abilities. As you'll guess, I have my William on my mind today, so here again I repeat his words when he proclaims that, 'The human imagination is an eternal world ever expanding into the bosom of God'."

Lucy hesitated. "Will old people still be old there?" she persisted.

"Probably not... most people reach their fullest consciousness at around the prime of their bodily life. So that's the form in which you

will exist in your life after life. All defects and losses will be made up and any missing parts replaced, making your image in the new dimension a whole one.”

“I know what happens,” said Lucy, “when infants die – like Gilly’s sister.”

“Yes, children will be helped, after death, to grow to their unique maturity. Each person is a separate point of growth in complexity and consciousness, adding to the surge of the world towards its fulfilment. At the risk of boring you, here’s a last, irresistible gem from William’s works of genius. They seem to light up my words. He writes – ‘All that lives is holy; for the source of life descends to be a human babe’, then goes on to say: ‘There is no limit of expansion, no limit of transcendence in the bosom of Man.’ And of course, woman as well, Lucy! There’s a potential for success in everyone.”

“Wow!” exploded Tom. “Listening to all this, I’m feeling already that I, for one, will exist in limbo for a long time when I die. Even after overlooking the corny, bosom references, I must still ask though, how being Christian helps?”

“It should do, but for you youngsters in the twenty-first century, even though Christ was in Jesus, it would be best to focus on Christ’s other nature – his Cosmic role. Also his entry into the human collective subconscious mind as ‘The Force’ – like in the contemporary space legend. Perhaps the universe is made of mind stuff, as some scientists suggest, so Galahad has now added the idea of a God who makes Himself Cosmic and an evolution which makes itself personal in the form of a loving presence whom you know and trust. He longs to be admitted into your hearts to inspire and encourage you to greater efforts to achieve your positive aims. It’s a matter of motivation, you see. Now, my narrator will read some more quotes – this time from our Galahad:”

‘Learn to observe the world by the light of this new star, which throws into astonishing relief the great ensemble of everyday phenomena with which we have always lived without perceiving their reality, their immediacy or their vastness... He who dares to believe reaches a sphere of created reality in which things, while retaining their habitual texture, seem to be made out of a different substance... Through the workings of faith Christ appears – Christ is born, without any violation of nature’s laws, in the heart of the world.’

“But, I’m told,” Tom broke in, “that drugs can sometimes have a

similar effect upon the senses, but don't seem to add meaning or value to life."

"You're right, Tom, but these drug-induced experiences and their after-effects cannot be handled by many. The euphoria and cascades of enhanced beauty from an over stimulated brain can run riot, and when the participants revert to proper life again they neglect and lose interest in normal activities. Their drive and enthusiasm is missing – true opportunities are lost. These overwhelming and sometimes frightening 'trips' can become addictive. The brain can be hood-winked and this affects the body as well."

"Yes, that does seem to happen," admitted Tom. "But in the old mythology a hero who was brave enough to enter the Classical or Celtic other-world was revered. He brought back with him new knowledge and power... And the hero who confronted and killed a monster was replacing an evil embodiment of chaos and darkness with a new period of order and direction. The empty void is most to be feared... Can't we benefit from these ventures?"

"Only if it strengthens hope for the future and your own role in it. Only if it enables people to love someone greater than themselves... and nothing less than a person will do. An obvious candidate for the hidden component in today's future vision, concentrated on natural and organic priorities, is belief in The Divine Humanity. It's the Christic universal form which connects life to its creator. Faith is a strong growth factor."

"Why then," objected Tom, "if Jesus Christ fits the bill so well, and could lead us out of today's deserts, is attendance at church in decline?"

"Because His glorified form is still growing and you all have a part in it, but many of His churches are split and are not growing with Him. Christianity must change or risk a slow death."

"A frightening thought," commented Lucy, uneasily, "but you have, I'm sure, been voicing good old Tayar's messages of hope and his rallying calls to us, haven't you? And could we please hear more about his 'noosphere', and if we can connect it with this new computerised scene."

"Certainly, for it's all coming together more quickly than he dared to hope. To go back for a minute to Tom's mythology stories... Of course I've often told you how important they are, but they reveal a strange twist. You see, much of what is taken to be reality is really myth. Actually you are computing your senses all the time. You never experience things directly. The brain is decoding, processing and giving meaning to everything. So, we can compare a brain to an electrical device, a computer, and the mind of an individual human,

plus the memories stored in the neurons, to the software and programming of a computer. Now all data can be collected, sorted and stored for reference, quickly swelling the layer of thought, or noosphere, around the world.

You're both looking a bit nonplussed, so I'll give you an example of how initial thoughts in a single mind can evolve into a process which can then affect the pattern and movement of the noosphere and your lives. I've been told that one of your astronomers said that this informed, thinking zone may one day form a 'universal structure of software co-incidental with God' – the God of the ahead... but I digress. Now, one instigator of a very big idea..."

"Do we know who this person is?" interrupted Lucy.

"Well, he's an English physicist with an Oxford degree – someone I'd been following with interest. He's little known to the public and that's how he wants it to stay. His parents were computer programmers and he loved computers. At the particle physics lab in Switzerland, where he went as a software engineer, he started to devise a program to link up all his computer files. This was just to help him with his erratic memory. Later he expanded it to link with other scientists working there – a more complicated system, but it worked and was the birth of the World Wide Web. He was oblivious of its import, and when he left this floppy disc lay about and was then thrown away.

"The idea lived on though and our man continued to develop his initial hunch. Working on a coding system, he began to create a universal language where everything can be read by everyone – this led to precise addresses located through fingerprint accuracy and allowed all documents to link fluidly to each other. The World Wide Web was created. He had a vision that information would flow around us like the air we breath, according to a journalist with whom I'm in touch. He thought too, that a display screen should be the centre of family life in the home but was surprised at his success, insisting it was just a beginning. Now he's the director of this new Web he has spun in the last decade of your century – a modest man indeed."

"Now millions of teenagers log-on daily," remarked Tom excitedly, "I read that it was the fastest growing territory in all history with a thousand new websites being created each day. But we have to be more choosy, somehow, before entering some of the sites which may make us suspicious of the motives behind the desire to acquire them – a hate group perhaps. It's open to all."

"Yes," agreed Lucy. "It's awful how such wonderful inventions can be used so casually, or for abuse or just junk. I had a big shock once, online."

“I too find it sad and very strange how, so far, people have little of real import to communicate to each other,” agreed Tom. “Given their access to the Internet and mobile phones, it’s disappointing – but never lose hope. Before we leave this discussion though and start on our own virtual trip, I’d like to sound you out on something else... What are your thoughts about the amazing idea that one day in the far future we could all be resurrected for good into a computer-generated world?”

“Yes, I know the sort of ‘buzz’ that you’ve heard, and in one sense I’d say ‘why not?’ By then, perfect simulation and retrieval techniques will be possible. The human personality, forged through life, starting from its given genetic and physical attributes, is surely indestructible. It’s the apex, so far, of the struggle of millions of years of evolution. It may go on to form units of integrated groups, but each personality will stay intact. So, if the data of this precious part had been preserved, when retrieved by computer it would carry back within itself all its built-in Earthly surroundings and natural environment which it had absorbed and admitted into its imagination. All plants and creatures to which attention had been given, and of course love, would come with it, making a sort of new Heaven and Earth.”

“My teacher in Ireland told us once,” remembered Lucy, “to think of an astronaut in outer space, and then to see him, or her, as a microcosm of our planet and its history. She explained how he was a whole part of our evolved world, and it was a bit like what you are saying now, Merlin.”

“Good... I like the sound of your teacher. I must look her up one day! I wonder if she mentioned St Paul’s writing on the same subject. Anyway, taking that passage about all creation groaning as it awaits its freedom, I like to think that St Paul meant that the lower orders of nature and especially animals, one step below us, long for admittance into a higher realm where the saving love of Christ had taken human form and banished death.”

“I’m afraid they’d be in for some nasty shocks – like Lucy’s,” commented Tom wryly. “Where does all this fit into the Christian scene now though?”

“You sound puzzled and dissatisfied, Tom, like many others of your age. I will now give you both some hope and more clues. You all have two selves now: namely, a physical self and a Cyber self. As your Tayar believed, and my dear William as well, your physical self is the true one – undivided, but it bears scars of set-backs which computers would probably not pick up. Many affairs of the heart would be missed, but not missed by the Christ/Omega presence. Preserved

somewhere in the dark matter of space nothing is lost. It will all be gathered in by the unifying, thinking Zone, the noosphere. Within this is a collective movement towards a final unit – a personality or personalities. This is the Christosphere. Embedded in it are souls heading Godwards. Deep at heart most people tend towards some sort of Christ-like ideals and hopes. And because of Teilhard's revolution in the way that Christians see themselves – because of this quantum leap, there's a new hope. He's shown that now you really are evolution become conscious of itself.

One day, perhaps beyond your time, your two selves will meet and join forces. I'll finish up now by quoting some snippets from the writings of my William who says it all much better than me. He's your own English-speaking prophet and seer of whom you should be proud. I'll read them myself:

'All things enacted on Earth are seen in the bright halls of the imagination.'

'What nature will you honour if you honour not the human?'

'He who adores an impersonal God, has none; and without guide or rudder, launches on an immense abyss.'

'We shall not die! We shall be unified in Jesus... But Jesus, breaking through the central zones of death and hell, opens eternity in time and space.'

'All things exist in the human imagination.'

'Wonder seiz'd all in eternity, to behold the Divine Vision open the Centre, and the Centre rolled out into an expanse.'

'There is an outside spread without and an outside spread within.'

'All animals and vegetations, the Earth and Heaven are contained in the all glorious imagination.'

'Not lost nor vanished and every little act, word, work and wish that has existed, all remaining still – shadowy to those who dwell not in them, mere possibilities. But to those who enter into them they seem the only substances, for everything exists and not one sigh nor smile nor tear... can pass away.'

“Good grief! I suppose I asked for that,” said Tom. “But thanks, anyway.”

2

THE HEALING ROOM

“Well, here we are nearly ready for you to enter into your latest and best experience – Cyberscape. Here you can interact with happenings and other characters in your story at will. You must look upon the computer as a mere extension of your brain just as machines are extensions of the limbs of your body. Treat this as an exploration into some aspects of your inner self – like the old Greek dramas. You can add to the shared research on the World Wide Web sites and cross old boundaries. Here you can start things that have never been tried before, any whims or dreams can join up with the reasoning power of the computer, co-existing with it and making new forms bloom. God forgive me though for not forecasting, also, the birth-pangs it’ll cause in the real (physical) world – for, at first, there will be riots and disruption as peoples are thrown together. Anyway, lets get going with your relatively elementary ventures into Cyberland.”

“You will help us still, won’t you?” requested Lucy. “I’m a bit lost now.”

“You’ll take to it, my Cybernaut, like a duck to water. It’s not going to be very difficult to transport your sequences into the late twentieth century. Remember how your BBC brought the dinosaurs to life after 100 million years on their programme *Walking With Dinosaurs*? They were able to put flesh onto the old bones with the aid of laser beams, archaeology and palaeontology. Now, muscles and skin can be built onto skulls, even faces, and posture and ways of walking ascertained from bones... So, when you key in the appropriate instructions for your contemporary scene and chosen characters, it will all happen for you.”

“Can we fill you in now with the new version of the story that Lucy and I have at last agreed upon... before we forget any of it?” ventured Tom.

“Right away, boy. You’ve both been very patient. Now, if you’ll confirm, roughly, the transposed events leading up to your first

sequence, I will fill in the details and pass it all over to my narrator who'll do the job. I've presumed that you possessed, between you, a mobile phone and a pocket computer of sorts. Next ... you must relax in your chairs, anticipating the time-switch and the new identities of your altered characters in the story."

They had decided to name the one time Cathedral Provost, Aitchen, or 'H.N.', and his friend, the physics professor, Claudel. That dealt with the stand-ins for Tristan and Gorvenal. Then, Lucy's choice of name for Princess Iseult would be Eleila, and her carer would go by the name of Christine for the character of Branguin in the original story. Iseult's father would be called Brendon and her cupbearer, now a family retainer, be called Conor. So after revealing their developing story to Merlin, the youngsters saw the first new sequence light up on their screens. It was a still picture of The Healing Room, twentieth century style, and it awaited their entry.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Tom. "That's brilliant. Here we come."

"Pause once more to adjust your head-gear, check your procedure to activate the changeover and rehearse in your minds the sort of things you will say in your new virtual mode. All sound and movement will be recorded by me, and while you're doing these last chores our narrator will chronicle the previous events of your new version, so far."

At this time Aitchen and his colleague, Claudel had appointments in Belfast, at a conference where they'd been invited to give some suggestions on the subject of the 'Troubles'; to offer ways of counteracting the venom and hatred between communities that was still terrorising the Province.

On the way over there blew up a fierce storm again and the ferry was forced off-course and obliged to transfer its docking to Dublin. The men decided to drive north straight away, but found themselves only at the border by nightfall. Being tired, they took the car off the highway and parked it in an overgrown side-lane. Having settled down to sleep as best they could, they were wakened at about midnight by the sound of raised voices coming from further down the lane. Then, hearing the rattle of heavy objects being moved about they got out to investigate, but with a rustle of leaves from behind, a figure appeared. It was only Conor, and in a low voice he challenged them. He was from the nearby house belonging to Eleila's father, a strong Republican sympathiser. The retainer was on his guard against a possible assassination attempt or bomb set-up, after he'd been warned by a friend. He wanted it to be kept from his master who was currently very depressed. Brendon's land agent, Brian, was also out on

bodyguard duties, but tonight he had fallen asleep at his post. It was a moonlit night, so after the two English motorists had been accosted and then accepted as innocent travellers by Conor, the three men discoursed in whispers about plans of action concerning a white van further up the lane. Silhouetted in the headlights they could see four hooded men.

Not long after, the protestant terrorists (for that's who these hooded men were) discovered the car and Aitchen confronted them but was shot in the thigh. Claudel drove off, as planned, and Conor fled. Aitchen had dropped his mobile and his attackers had picked it up, not knowing then that it was the only one and that its battery was dead. Meanwhile, from his fallen position on the ground, Aitchen produced a torch from his pocket and pointing it, handle first and still lightly wrapped, at the group, he told them they'd better beat a hasty retreat. He warned them, pretending that the police had been called and that his friend would be back with help. The ruse worked and Aitchen was left alone as he drifted into unconsciousness.

Conor had reasons for not notifying the police, but he related all to Eleila and Christine who were then insistent on going back with him early next morning to look for the wounded traveller. When they found him, still collapsed, Conor fetched the car and they brought him back to Eleila's own suite where he was laid on a bed. This brings us up to Sequence No.1.

Merlin tells me that before you two players begin your action, and I know you are raring to go, I ought to make known to you something that Tom will be referring to during his conversation with Eleila in this Sequence. Merlin says that once, when Tom was visiting Bath, his friend's Aunt had told them this story about an ordeal which Aitchen had had while at Coventry and which, she thought, was the real reason why he left there. Here's the story.

There had been a bomb scare in the city but it had been rumbled by the police and two of the IRA perpetrators had been caught red-handed. Before they could be arrested they'd fled, brandishing guns, and had sought refuge in the Cathedral. With police hot-foot in pursuit they had found their way down to the crypt where some church staff were meeting in a side room. The terrorists burst in, lowered their guns, locked the door and asked for sanctuary. One of them was wounded in the shoulder and sat down, looking pale and exhausted – some blood was seeping out. Though the police were banging on the door, the Provost listened to the plea of the hunted men for a respite from the chase. He advised a colleague to call off the police for half an hour while he attended to the seated man and staunched the

bleeding. The men were even given a drink of tea. Then the other man turned nasty and was suddenly desperate to escape. Taking out his gun, he told everyone to sit on the floor and shouted to the police that he was holding everyone hostage. He then grew impatient and commanding the wounded man to follow him, he grabbed a terrified canon and dragged him to the door. With a gun pressed to the head of his hostage, he gave his terms for releasing him alive – they must be given freedom to leave the city. As he fiddled with the key and tried to open the door, his friend slumped to the ground. The Provost saw his opportunity and tackled the hostage-taker. As the three burst through the door all hell broke loose. There was a gun battle with the waiting police and the IRA man was killed. The Provost deeply regretted the way he'd handled the whole operation. Over to you again, Merlin.

“Well, now, my Cybernauts, you are at last cleared to start. Good luck!”

3

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Aitchen is lying unconscious on the bed. He is half-covered with blankets. Eleila is wearing tailored trousers and a loose, white linen smock, open over her blouse. She is administering to her patient with great care. Her own maid, Christine, is mixing a potion in a side alcove. She is dressed in long, plain clothes, looking more old-fashioned but almost like a contemporary nun. They exchange hushed items of conversation while preparing their swabs and poultices, choosing the herbal remedies, but using modern practices now as well.

MOVEMENT IS HALTED HERE – to fill in a gap in the narrative.

Merlin had inserted into our teenagers' computer storylines details of these smaller role-models with their backgrounds, and also with suggestions for likely discussions arising during their virtual enactment. Dialogue between the two main characters, though, would be spontaneous, coming from the acting participants. In his report to the narrator he'd omitted to explain Tom's clever substitution of an envelope, attached to Aitchen's keys hanging round his neck, in place of Tristan's pendant containing the copper-coloured hair. In this small envelope was his uncle's description of the young woman Raymond had met when she'd accompanied her father to the Peace Conference in Truro. Raymond had been so impressed with some of her sentiments – her longing for an end to the troubles and her willingness to cooperate in the hope of unity, that he'd asked Aitchen to look out for her at the Belfast Conference. Tom had been anxious to explain about the contents of the envelope. Merlin has asked for this information to be duly included... Now the enactment resumes.

Aitchen opens his eyes and sees Eleila for the first time as she leans over him to part the dark hair from his damp brow. His speech is faltering.

AITCHEN: Where am I?

ELEILA: You are safe with us. You suffered a bullet wound when you became involved with the terrorist plot aimed at us. They've gone now.

Aitchen feels for the envelope on his chest for he detects a familiar likeness in Eleila's face and striking hair from Marc's description there.

ELEILA: Yes, your envelope is safe and I've something to show you.

Eleila fetches a polished wooden fruit bowl in which is laid a black mask.

ELEILA: My groom, Conor, tells me that when you had the first confrontation with one of the gang you grabbed the mask off his face, but fell on top of it after you'd been shot. When Conor later lifted you into our car, he saw it on the ground. He picked it up and gave it to me as proof of your courage... You see, my fiancé, who is our land agent, is claiming it was he who frightened off the terrorists. I'm disgusted, but now I've a good excuse for breaking with him. Marriage would only be to please my father anyway.

Aitchen is intrigued with Eleila's blushes, and is relieved to see the mask. But feeling very tired he drinks the soup he's offered and falls asleep. So the women pick up his discarded, muddied jacket from the floor; taking it to the side alcove to be cleaned. As Christine is brushing it his wallet falls to the ground and the contents spill out. Eleila retrieves his passport. She stares at it and goes to a chest of drawers nearby from which she takes a paper, and compares them.

For a few seconds there appears on screen this magnified sheet. It's next to a close-up view of the passport. Names and details are the same.

ELEILA: It was he who was responsible for the death of my cousin.

She blurts this out to the horrified Christine, and looking very angry. Eleila grabs jacket and brush from Christine. Dropping the jacket, she then starts pacing around her large bedroom. This room is in a wing of the family home but has been fairly well refurnished in modern

style. Now Eleila bangs the brush down on her polished dressing-table. Returning to the alcove she begins to pack away her precious herbs. National pride has taken over.

CHRISTINE: (*soothingly*) – But remember, madam, it all happened in a threatened English city, so there was much provocation – and it *was* an accident. Doesn't our Lord's Prayer, common to all Christians, say that we should forgive those who sin against us? We have sinned also. Anyway, if it weren't for he who lies there we might have been dead, or... you would have had to marry the feckless Brian!"

Eleila notes a twinkle in her maid's eye and quickly relents. She then takes out her herb preparations again. Seeing that Aitchen has woken due to the disturbance, and is half sitting up, she goes over to him and adjusts the pillows.

AITCHEN: I feel so bad that it was a Protestant Terror faction that was planning such a diabolical deed. I am for peace but they are for war.

ELEILA: (*sitting on the bed*) – Bitter hatreds which have been bequeathed to us by unhealed wounds of the past have ravaged our country in a truly monstrous way.

Merlin extends this period of bedside conversation, for he knows it will take more time than the encounter in the original sequence, and that Lucy is anxious to get in a piece from Teilhard during her present interaction.

ELEILA: (*looks at Aitchen's bandaged thigh*) – Your wound is healing nicely anyway – our own doctor took out the bullet. You know, I will admit that our Church does seem to retreat very often from honest enquiry and to slip back to traditional doctrines. Yet there's still hope. After all, 'if the love of God was extinguished in the hearts of believers, all the rites and edifices of the Church would crumble into the dust from which they came' – a quotation from a priest, Father Teilhard, whose book I read.

AITCHEN: (*looking pleased*) – What a happy coincidence that you should know about him. He was our Galahad figure at Coventry and we were hoping that his fresh

and dramatic Christology would bring Christians together in a new dimension – a real quantum leap. He said we should try all and think all to the very end, and believed we were at a great moment in our history.

ELEILA: *(getting up and laying him down in the bed)* – Men and women have two natures – the idealistic and the base. Progress towards unity involves hard work and effort. Now, you must rest and I shall go to see my father, show him the mask and explain about the deceit of his favourite employee.

Eleila walks briskly to the door and disappears. Christine goes to sit beside Aitchan.

The screen becomes blank again.

5

THE PASSION

After the interview with Eleila's father and advisers and when Aitchen had been vindicated and his agent disgraced, Brendon had briefly accepted the possibility of having another protestant as a family friend. He was grateful to Aitchen and glad for him to stay and reach a full recovery. Days later he'd even agreed to sanction his daughter's wish to go to Cornwall with Aitchen and to stay with his uncle – Brendon's old friend.

Claudel had been to the conference in Belfast after borrowing a mobile phone and getting in touch with Conor at Eleila's family home. Conor had told Claudel earlier where he worked, and also the name of his boss, so Claudel had then known that his friend was OK. He now arrives to join Aitchen, with the car and they book tickets on the ferry to Fishguard.

Next day, after many fond farewells, the four of them (Christine is going with Eleila), drive south and board the Ferry. Once more, the sea turns unexpectedly rough and a gale blows up. As they are approaching the Welsh coast the Ferry Captain becomes very uneasy and orders a lifeboat to be lowered. After announcing that anyone who wanted to could go ashore at a small sheltered cove north of Fishguard, Eleila begs Aitchen and Claudel to accompany Christine and herself in the boat. They are sick and very miserable. A few other people vote to go with them. So the two sailors, struggling at the oars, rowed them towards the cove. Their captain feared there might have been long delays for the ferry limping into the harbour at Fishguard.

** *** **

Tom and Lucy were relaxing at their computers, having barely composed themselves after their first action, when Merlin urged them to press on. He told them they should look up their notes for the next

sequence without delay. Feeling rather lost, they fumbled for the right programme – finally remembering and getting it right.

Up on their screens comes the new scene – a still picture of a beautiful little seaside cove with a grassy headland on one side and a rocky promontory on the other. There's a wooden jetty with a few small boats left high and dry beside it. A bigger boat full of people can be seen offshore.

After studying it carefully and referring to their plot again, our two cybernauts re-enter their virtual reality story. Action begins.

** *** **

The offshore boat, tossing gently, now comes in and is beached. Soon the sailors start to carry the women ashore. Aitchen leaps into the shallows and holds up his arms for Eleila. As he carries her to the dry sand and sets her down, it is then that the great passion first surfaces, as their eyes meet and hands are held. They stand together for a moment to feel this warmth and then they look around at the scene before them.

There are a few more small boats lying on the beach and the ferry-boat men are already fetching more things from their grounded craft. On one side of the cove a small river, coming down from the hills, spreads out into little channels. On the other side, along a grassy bank, is a prettily-painted café. It was for holiday-makers, but now they see the other passengers from their boat being welcomed into it, and being offered, what our couple hopes, is lots and lots of strong tea. As they make their way there, they notice a pottery shop just up the road.

Over the anxious drone of voices, Aitchen gathers that most have been offered a night's rest inside – some to be put up on mattresses and others on the carpeted floor. He learns that the Ferrymen hope to take their boat into Fishguard on the next day's tide – weather permitting. They would be in touch with their captain through mobile phone and would take any passengers to join the ferry and repossess their cars – all being well.

AITCHEN: (cornering Eleila and Christine) – I'm going up the road to the village with Claudel to look for some rooms. You stay here for now.

Returning an hour later the two men have news of success.

AITCHEN: (*finding Eleila*) – We’ve booked two double rooms up there. It will be better than sleeping rough here. We’ll decide in the morning what course to take.

Next day, after being in touch with the café people and learning the latest plans, Aitchen wanders off alone. He’s told Claudel to keep Eleila and Christine informed. Half way along the promontory he lies down in the sand dunes and gazes up at the blue sky. Eleila comes looking for him.

ELEILA: (*finding him and bursting out*) – You are avoiding me. Anyway, the sea is calmer so Christine and Claudel have decided to go with the boat to Fishguard this afternoon and come back here with the car tomorrow. So, we can stay on another night.

AITCHEN: (*standing up but lowering his eyes*) – I can’t let my uncle down, for I promised him I’d try and find you. He thinks a lot of you.

ELEILA: (*dismissing his words*) – I’m not interested in all this man-talk and debts of loyalty, but I’ve got something to show you.

They sit down together and Aitchen reads the paper she gives him, which has details of himself listed there.

AITCHEN: (*half jokingly*) – So you knew who I was, all the time you could have left me to die!

ELEILA: (*snatching the paper and throwing it in the wind*) – You think it funny, but I was furious. It was only Christine who put me wise to my true feelings. Later, when I realised you wanted me to come to Cornwall for your uncle’s sake and not yours, I was upset. I didn’t know why, but now I do.

AITCHEN: (*looking down and after a minute’s silence*) – I know about the dangers and penalties for Catholic/Protestant marriages in your Province. I’ve even heard of horrific murders of lovers, and their children as well.

ELEILA: (*looking at the scenery and then at nearby plants*) – Though I’m a bit homesick, I see that Wales is almost as lovely as Ireland. Natural beauty has no national boundaries, has it?

AITCHEN: (*trickling the sand through his fingers*) – Eleila, you’re so right. I’m minded now of a verse written by William Blake and often quoted by my English mentor. I can hear him now – I’ll try to remember it all.

Merlin helps Tom here, and the lines come out word perfect.

‘To see the world in a grain of sand,
Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.’

ELEILA: (*looking at him in surprise*) – I’m very impressed, but still confused as regards your attitude to an awesome thing that has happened between us. I know what my church calls mortal sin, but what could be worse than the act of shooting a policeman in the head? Terrorists who feel no remorse are still accepted as Catholic or Protestant – but love builds the bridges.

AITCHEN: (*clasping his head*) – If only it were that simple!

Eleila gets up quickly and walks away. Aitchen returns to the beach later and watches his friends take off with the others in the lifeboat.

On the way back to his room, Aitchen passes the stark old chapel – the one-time centre of this Pembrokeshire village. He stops and looks at it. He is wondering what the devout, almost prudish worshippers would then have thought of today’s ruined young lives through drug or drink addiction. He didn’t know that missionaries from such places once spread over the world.

Aitchen goes to knock on Eleila’s door. It’s opened immediately and he is welcomed and invited in.

AITCHEN: (*half entering the room*) – I’ve come to talk.

ELEILA: (*holding the door*) – You know I love you – Do you love me?

AITCHEN: (*moves in, embraces her*) – Of course I do, but we’ll suffer.

** *** **

The screen goes blank again and the sequence is finished. Lucy is very relieved that Merlin has kept his promise and she'd not even had to kiss Tom before that door was shut! But this was the stuff of which legends are made.

Merlin explains to them now how passion is the raw material of love, and the shadow of that which moves all nature. Love is founded on hope, he adds.

6

ELYSIUM

Claudel had come back alone from Fishguard to pick up his friends. Christine had stayed behind and taken the Ferry back to Ireland. These two had earlier had a heartfelt talk about her troubled Province and how violence divided it more and more. She had told Claudel of her grave concern over the escalating relationship between Aitchen and Eleila. She felt there was nothing she could do and that Eleila would be better without her. Claudel understood her misgivings and had seen how deeply she cared. Eleila had been sad, but in a way relieved at her departure. Soon after her return home Christine re-entered a convent but she never got over the trauma she'd suffered. We move on now to the lead-up to sequence number three.

** *** **

Back in Cornwall, when Aitchen and Eleila had first come to stay, they'd both renewed their relationship quite happily with Raymond, Aitchen's uncle. Eleila was treated with great favour and respect. The two guests did not look at each other more than they could help. They joined in all the peace events and meetings that Raymond, as a Rural Dean, organised, and they helped in the parish.

One day Aitchen came across Eleila sitting on a rocky outcrop of the beach and looking out to sea. He saw she was crying, and thinking she must be homesick he tried to comfort her. Then all his repressed emotions came flooding back and he put his arms around her and kissed her tenderly. This was witnessed by a passing colleague, who had long been jealous of the position of Aitchen with his uncle. Raymond was told, and from then on his unease began to grow. Thinking Eleila must be a virgin, and with his strict moral code, his fears of an affair with Aitchen took root. Reluctantly, he decided Aitchen should go, with Claudel, and stay in a nearby village. This was duly implemented.

The lovers, though, could not be kept apart for long. They found a rendezvous. When suspected, they managed to convince Raymond that they were behaving in a seemly way and that their love was like a brother and sister's affection. Aitchen came back, but rumours spread and one day Raymond caught the pair in each other's arms. This was the last straw and, feeling he'd been fooled, Raymond just cracked. In his paranoia he ordered Aitchen to leave for good and cruelly vilified him. Eleila was isolated in her room and afraid to go anywhere. Despite this ridiculous over-reaction of his uncle, Aitchen, with Eleila, contrived to effect an old-fashioned elopement. A car was waiting and, driven by Claudel, they fled, without knowing where they should go.

That evening, having reached the far borders of Devon, they stopped to look at their map. They were in a beautiful part of the Exe valley and very close to Exmoor. They saw green meadows beside the river and an abundance of trees surrounding them. Just down the road was an old farmhouse with a B&B sign outside. They got out of the car.

** *** **

Tom and Lucy now see this scene on their screens and after activating it, they find themselves walking with Claudel across these meadows.

ELEILA: *(looking towards the farmhouse)* – I like it here. We're very tired so let's book up at that place over there.

AITCHEN: *(studying the scene)* – Why not? It's isolated enough and when we passed that small hamlet a while back I noticed there was a village store.

CLAUDEL: I'll go and check out the rooms and ask a few questions. I agree, we should settle here... a good job we drew out that money.

Their lodgings proved to be good. There was a little garden in front of the house where the lovers could sit. Claudel could fish in the river.

After the first week they settled into a sort of routine. Claudel went off alone each day, leaving the couple together. He saw them as lost in each other and spent his time either down by the river or shopping at the store. Aitchen and Eleila went on long walks together along the Exe valley.

One day, Claudel was in the meadow, meditating upon the wonders of those first signs of spring – the strong, green shoots from the little

bulbs of the wild daffodils and how they knew when to thrust them up from the dark, each year. He visualised their coming glory and wrote a poem. He'd always had a fondness for poetry. He's now gone to join the others in the garden and is presently sitting on the seat beside them. It is evening time.

CLAUDEL: I've been thinking about the everyday miracles which go on all the time in nature. I'd like to read you some of my poem.

AITCHEN: I too am learning new things about the countryside each day here. Yes, of course, carry on and read it out – we're all ears.

Merlin knows the real Claudel and his poem, and repeats it here for him.

'From earth, from sun, from water and from air
the change of season starts.
The Earth's new spring is century's long,
but catch the opening breath of living gold across
the fields;
let the smile of blessings sing before the greyness lifts
and softening light unwraps the beating heart of
Planet Earth.'

ELEILA: That was beautiful Claudel. You've been listening to the birds and sounds of the river as we have – touching the grass, watching the clouds and the gently waving tree-tops. I can really catch on to your theme.

Claudel nods and smiles at them. Then he rises and goes into the house.

ELEILA: *(as she looks lovingly at Aitchen)* – In spite of all that's happened and the fact that we've no more church work to do, I'm happy just being with you. I'm learning new things about myself, and who I really am.

AITCHEN: That's because you feel complete. Actually I know, at this moment, that with the feeling we have for each other I would be happy to give myself up totally to you. I would not experience power but true love. I'm already learning more about a Creator/God, and my male arrogance has softened. This is the sort of knowledge that can't be fed into a computer at present.

ELEILA: (*with a smile of contentment*) – I understand what you say, and the other good thing is that it's the very same Jesus Christ for both of us – Catholic or Protestant – who gives us assurance.

AITCHEN: Yes, you must believe in someone in order to get the low-down on what love and faith is all about.

ELEILA: (*as she stands up and saunters around the seat*) – I must admit, though, that since coming to England I've been shocked at some of the outrageous captions and suggestions linked with sex. They're seen all the time on cards and magazine covers in shops. Christmas was even renamed as Sexmas in one window. It's crude – almost savage. A cheap copy of the real thing.

AITCHEN: I'm afraid this bogus cult has taken over in our country. It's a post-sixties, revolution gone mad. I went to look for a Valentine's card a few weeks ago and was gob-smacked at the array that met me on the shelves. It could have been describing the sort of Roman Bacchus orgies that we were taught about at school. I'm not a prude, but this was over the top and just aping the pleasures leading up to life's crowning rapture. Anyway, Tayar said that an offspring of sex was true love – could it also be hate?"

ELEILA: (*as she looks towards the house*) – I smell our dinner cooking. We are getting too serious, and look, Claudel's back with our tomorrow's luncheon picnic. By the way, I never got that Valentine's card!

** *** **

The following year, when it was coming up to spring again, the inevitable happened – the trio were discovered. Raymond, our Rural Dean back in Cornwall, had grown stale and restless. He decided to attend a peace conference in Exeter. He and his chauffeur planned to drive over Exmoor and down the Exe valley on the way. Raymond had brought his beloved dog, Ben, with him, and on the first evening, when they stopped for the night, they lost him. While they had dinner at an inn Ben wandered off downstream. They were in a picturesque village where the river could still be crossed by ford, and it was not

far from the place where Aitchen and Eleila were staying. After dinner Raymond's chauffeur offered to go and look for Ben.

Eventually the searcher arrived at Claudel's frequently-visited village store, which was still open. He enquired within about a lost dog. He was told that reports had come in about the people staying at the B&B up the road – they had found a stray dog, was the news, and the couple seemed to know it and had taken it in for the night. When Raymond's man called to fetch it, he recognised its rescuers but quickly left with Ben – being embarrassed.

Now I'll explain how this happened... Claudel was sitting by the river in his favourite spot when he heard a whimpering noise and looking up saw a collie dog zig-zagging about the meadow. When the dog got nearer to him it suddenly ran up and greeted him with great excitement. Claudel then saw that it was the Reverend Raymond's dog from his Rectory. Wondering how on earth it had come to be there he took it back to their lodgings where his friends were in the garden. When Ben saw them it raced to jump up at them with more joyful sounds.

Aitchen and Eleila, knowing it to be Raymond's dog, viewed the whole episode with great trepidation. If its master was near they would be discovered very soon. However they kept Ben in their room. When he was claimed and taken away later that evening they expected the worst.

Next day, however, nothing further happened. So they decided to give themselves up anyway and ask Raymond's forgiveness on their return. After they'd packed up and driven off, this sequence finished, but the story goes on – the results being this... Aitchen promised to leave the mainland and go to the Channel Isles where he had a friend, and Eleila resumed her Peace missions with Raymond. Claudel returned to his family and University in London.

** *** **

Merlin now ends this session with words from Teilhard... his Galahad: "Yes, my Cybnauts... after a very admirable love-dialogue between you two, I want to remind you of some of Teilhard's more biological references to the sort of feelings you experienced. I quote from his *Phenomenon of Man*:

'Driven by the forces of love the fragments of the world seek each other so that the world may come to being... the reverse or shadow of that which really moves nature... At what moment do lovers come into the most complete possession of themselves if not when they say they are lost in each other?'

“The words from an old song, ‘The Music Makers’, comes to mind:

*‘A song of the truth in the heart of youth,
a song for the joy of the singing...’*”

7

BANISHMENT

Over in the Channel Isles, Aitchen was introduced to an over-worked parson who'd lost his wife the year before, and needed some help. Aitchen joined him and took up residence at the vicarage in the small coastal town.

Aitchen became very friendly with the son, Stephen, but the daughter Helen, though an attractive woman, was highly strung and confused, especially since her mother's death. After her time at university she had become agnostic, no longer joining in any worship or her father's church affairs. Aitchen tried to help her and they had long talks. Later, when Helen fell in love with him, he decided to marry her – for, after all, he thought, he would never see his Eleila again. He told Helen many stories about his time as Provost of Coventry Cathedral and how they'd tried to unite Christianity and make its message more appealing to young people. She'd seemed interested.

One day, when Aitchen was out walking with Stephen, he'd confided in him how he longed to see Eleila once more and how, though he felt affection for Helen and was always kind to her, he could not yet give her what she really needed in physical terms. Aitchen told Stephen that if he could just see Eleila for a last goodbye, he'd be able to ease her out of his mind and transfer his feelings to Helen. So the friends planned a visit to Cornwall together, on a false pretext. They decided also, to take with them the young Church secretary called John – he was in love with an attractive female curate in another parish and understood how Aitchen felt.

Having taken ship and arrived at a place near Raymond's vicarage, the other two waited while Aitchen arranged and carried out his secret visit.

After promising Eleila that if ever she called for him he would come, no matter how difficult it was, he went on his way, but then occurred a gross misunderstanding. Secretary John happened to look

very like Aitchen in build and hair colour, and before Aitchen arrived back a friend of Eleila, who had also known Aitchen, mistook John for Aitchen. It happened in this way:

That morning Stephen and John had decided to take a hire-car into the nearby town to do some delayed shopping. They had planned to be back at their lodgings to meet Aitchen on time and catch the boat back to Jersey. They'd been told of a group of drug users in town who'd been mugging people for money, even stopping cars at times. After stocking up, Stephen and John got back a bit late to the car park. They had just got into the car when a man knocked on the window. Stephen, in a panic, put foot to accelerator and drove off. The man followed in a car for a while and John said he heard him shout, with his head out of the window, the strange words – 'Stop and talk to me, for Eleila's sake,' but they drove on. When later, Eleila was told by this same man about the incident, she flew into one of the rages of obsessive hurt pride to which she was prone. Aitchen had told her about Helen, but Eleila now imagined Aitchen more keen to get home than to keep his promise to her.

When Aitchen heard from Stephen what had happened he guessed who this friend was, from the description of his unusual attire, and also how Eleila would react. He drove straight back to explain, but was not given a chance.

Though friends from both sides made many desperate attempts to gain access and patch things up, she wouldn't listen – remaining obdurate.

So the three went sadly home, leaving Eleila unforgiving. But after that, Helen found life with Aitchen much better and they settled down together.

8

THE WHITE FLAG

The following year Aitchen and Stephen embarked on a private crusade against a vicious and highly organised drugs-ring which was known to be operating on the Islands, targeting young people. Our two friends had become dangerously involved in infiltrating it and identifying the leaders. They had some success, but one day they were betrayed by a few frightened locals and there was a confrontation during which they were shot and fatally wounded. Stephen died on the spot and Aitchen was taken by some passing acquaintances to the vicarage overlooking the harbour and laid on his own bed.

Doctors were called but found Aitchen too ill to be moved. Helen was devastated. She proceeded to nurse him as well as she could, but there was not much she was able to do. She sat beside him and listened to his groans and delirious mutterings in which he often mentioned the name *Eleila*. Helen had heard how Eleila had sent him away on his last visit and she felt deeply offended. Also, during the next period of consciousness Aitchen sent for John, and giving him Eleila's ring from his finger, had asked him to hasten to Cornwall and bring Eleila back with him. Before passing out again he'd added the request that when John returned he should fix a white flag up in the front of the boat if Eleila was with him, but a black one if she had not come. Aitchen knew he was dying and the only one who could perhaps save him was Eleila. All this upset Helen even more but from now on the only thing which kept Aitchen clinging to life was his passionate longing to see his lost love again. Helen's resentment grew but John boarded the newest and fastest catamaran out of port, bound for the mainland.

Meanwhile, back at Raymond's rectory, and unknown to him, two men from Ireland were staying, with the gardener's consent, in one of the outhouses. They were republican activists recently released from prison and now doing some harmless spying for Eleila's father. They had witnessed the sorrow of Brendon at the thought of his beloved

daughter becoming the wife or lover of Protestants and had offered to report to him on developments. They happened to have known Raymond's gardener. Now, on this sad day word had gone round that Aitchen had been mortally wounded and then, by way of Eleila's maid and the gardener, the men heard that someone had come to take Eleila back to Jersey to administer her noted healing powers to the dying Aitchen. This would not do, they thought, so they plotted to ride their motorbikes to the port, stow away in the return boat and later to hijack it.

When John arrived at the rectory Raymond was out, but Eleila received him with eagerness – John having no need to appeal. Eleila had sorely regretted her cruel treatment of Aitchen and for years after had hoped and prayed that every stranger she saw would turn out to be Aitchen in disguise, come back to visit her again. When she saw the ring and heard the news, she quickly gathered her remaining herbs and special healing drugs and left with John, omitting to tell anyone except her maid.

The Jersey catamaran set out that day with two terrorists on board.

9

TRAGEDY

The scene now showing up on the youngster's screen is again of a large old-fashioned bedroom, furnished in mid-twentieth century style. It has tall windows overlooking a headland at the entrance to the small port. Aitchen is once more lying prostrate on the bed.

Lucy has agreed to play a double part and now, as Helen, she is dressed differently and Merlin has substituted her voice with one of a different style and tenor from Eleila's. The movement and sound are now activated.

HELEN: *(as she sits by Aitchen)* – My Love, I know that your ring has gone with John to Cornwall with a message about your condition, but he has a long way to go. You haven't seen Eleila since she rejected you and I am here, as usual, to help and comfort you... Please look at me dear."

AITCHEN: *(still with eyes half closed)* – She'll come. You'll see.
Next day as Helen stands at the window she utters a note of surprise.

HELEN: My God... What's that?

AITCHEN: *(as he struggles up onto his elbow)* – What do you see?

HELEN: A boat rounding the headland... I think it's a catamaran.

AITCHEN: *(urgently)* – Can you see a white flag?

HELEN: *(overwhelmed by a sudden surge of blinding jealousy)*
– No, it looks black to me.

Aitchen drops back and turns to the wall giving up his fight for life.

HELEN: *(as she rushes to him and puts her arms around him)*
 – Oh my Love – I may be mistaken. I'll look again.

It was too late though. Aitchen was dead and Helen's tears of remorse flowed freely. She'd known, only a week ago, that she was carrying his child.

When the Catamaran finally docked that evening no one was allowed to go ashore till the next morning when the police had finished their investigations. They had searched the boat but been unable to find the hijackers. The two men had broken out earlier from their locked room, swum ashore and disappeared into the night. They'd succeeded in forcing the captain to change course and then close down his engines while the boat drifted.

John had bravely fought with them as they tried to pull down the white flag, which he had sought permission to fix up. He'd managed, just before the fight, to pick up their guns and throw them into the sea. Finally, with help from the crew, the men were overpowered and shut in a room below deck. The journey was continued but they came very late to port.

In the morning John was brought off the boat on a stretcher, having been injured in the fight. Next, the passengers began to disembark. When Eleila stepped ashore she heard a bell tolling, saw the flag on the town church tower flying at half-mast, and guessed she was too late. Enquiring of one of the crowd she learned that Stephen's funeral had been the day before and that now his friend's coffin was lying in the church.

Eleila walked proudly past the onlookers towards the church. When she arrived and went in she saw Helen standing weeping beside the coffin. Taking her stand on the other side Eleila leaned over it, telling Helen that it was herself whom Aitchen most loved. Helen knew this and withdrew. Eleila's next words were: 'You sent for me, Love, and I came. Now I'll be with you always'. Then, as thoughts of her loss hit home, her heart raced as though to burst; her breathing became irregular and she slipped, almost willingly, into unconsciousness. Releasing her sad embrace, Eleila breathed her last.

The two bodies were taken back to Cornwall at the request of Raymond, now distraught at the death of those he had once loved. A hazel tree and honeysuckle, again, were planted on the grave. An entwining result happened in twentieth century fashion. The legend was repeated.

** *** **

So ends the last session of the recordings of our cybernauts virtual adventures during their forward trip to year 2050. Merlin had played them all back to his four apprentices in his Circus room during their summer holidays. Now he tells them that he must leave the City of Bath to its destiny and them to their own devices. He will, however, return at the end of the next century to see how things are and what differences his protégés have made.

Lastly he thanks them again for their attention and ends with a quote from a poet whose name he's temporarily forgotten!

*'The tidal wave of deeper souls
into our inmost being rolls
And lifts us unawares
Out of all meaner cares.'*

So, he tells them to remember whose shoulders we all stand upon. Then he wishes them well and bids them goodbye.

EPILOGUE

It was the last Christmas of the Millennium and these same four youngsters had opted to come to Bath to welcome in the new century together.

On the afternoon of the day before New Year's Eve the four of them had, in curious mood, visited the house in the Circus again – just for fun. This time the bell was answered by a woman who looked at them strangely. When Sam asked if the basement room was empty, she said it had just been sold by the person who had once rented it. She then looked at Lucy and asked her name. After this she took an envelope from the hall table and handed it to her saying that it just appeared in her letter-box that morning. She then bid them good-day and closed the door. Written on the envelope were the words: 'BY SPECIAL DELIVERY. To Lucy, my youngest Cybernaut. To be opened in the company of her three friends on the morning of January the first 2000.'

Later on the same day, after doing some shopping, they were waiting outside the Abbey for the bus back to Aunt Sophie's flat. Lucy was excited but Gillian was in a pensive mood. As she watched the people and traffic milling round the Abbey, each on their everyday activities or business projects, she had a fleeting vision. She imagined the many different generations who had been doing this for half a millennium. Today, she guessed, they were all quite oblivious of the all-pervading Christian faith that had motivated and gone into the building of this majestic medieval pile. The luxurious coaches which now replaced the old horses and carriages, were held up in the heavy traffic and Gilly could see their guides pointing things out to the passengers – highlights, she thought, of past periods of Bath's history. As she savoured all this she noticed that men were actually working on new scaffolding erected on part of the Abbey to complete its celebratory clean-up. It was then that she began to ask herself the question, "How do we now picture Christ, to whom this great edifice was built?" And an answer came from within her head. It was the familiar voice of Merlin again and the words went something like this:

“Yes we need a new image of Christ. Writings of my old friend come to mind. I remember those about the Divine Vision being ‘darken’d’. He complains to someone, saying ‘The vision you see is my vision’s greatest enemy’! William’s Jesus was a life which ‘breaks through death and opens eternity in Time and Space, triumphant in mercy.’ Again, he wrote that ‘He who wishes to see a vision a perfect whole, must see it in its minute particulars... Every particular is a person, a member of the Divine Humanity’ – a Blakean name for Jesus.

“My William wrote down these sentiments in London exactly 200 years ago when England was in a spiritual black hole, such as we see today. Even then he was anticipating the new gospel of Galahad in this, now passing, century – namely, the man who talks of the Cosmic Christ at the heart of the universe.”

Gilly snapped out of her reverie. Then there flashed through her mind the memory of an exhibition they’d seen in London before coming to Bath. It was a collection of pictures from different periods, showing how artists had depicted the figure of Christ since His resurrection. She had reacted badly to some of them, but had seen the conviction and passion there, and how Christianity was evolving.

Came the night of New Year’s Eve and Merlin’s four apprentices decided to join the main city revellers who were congregating in the Abbey Churchyard to see in the twenty-first century. Just before the magic hour of midnight, the robed Church dignitaries came out onto the West Front of the Abbey, as they do on Easter Sundays. They started to address the crowd, but unfortunately there was such a noisy commotion down below – with shouting and singing and a few fireworks, that not a lot from the Abbey could be heard! When the big Abbey clock struck twelve times there were more cheers and embraces and the crowd dispersed to continue their merrymaking elsewhere.

Our youngsters found a coffee-house still open and sat down at an empty table. Tom remarked on how irrelevant Christianity seemed to have become for young people and voiced his disgust at what had happened at the Abbey.

Sam added that probably Aunt Sophie had experienced the same anti-climax when watching the BBC’s coverage of the ceremony in the Millennium Dome at ten minutes before midnight. The short religious slot, insisted upon by the churches, may also have fallen upon deaf ears. “It’s pathetic... but perhaps our old God must die, or be re-programmed or something.”

“The ‘Songs of Praise’ programme seems to be the most popular

one now and actually put out at peak time!” observed Tom. “It cheers everyone up.”

“Nowadays many of my friends prefer to revert to Pagan religions such as Witchcraft, and to read books about Wicca rituals – or else they join some exotic New-Age cult. Anyway... Come on Lucy, open up your envelope right now, for I can see you can’t wait any longer,” finished Sam.

“Thank you,” said Lucy with relief, “but first I want to say that if our Tayar had been given a chance at this momentous time I’m convinced that all would have been very different. Now for it, playmates!”

With trembling hands Lucy opens the paper she has been clutching all evening and starts to read it out. I now repeat below the full contents.

“From your very persistent wizard. Here are some rare thoughts from your Tayar, chosen specially for you young hopefuls, and given often in my own words so that I can put a friendly spell on his new gospel (good news). He is the Galahad who drank from the Holy Grail and he’s our man. You could be future Tayarites! We’ll start with some of his affirmations:

‘The universe is an evolution. The trend of evolution is set towards spirit. Spirit, in the human, is completed in the personal. The supreme personal is the Universal Christ. Spirit is the higher state of matter. Evolution becomes conscious of itself in the mind of mankind. Jesus comes to us clothed in the glory of the world’

Next, I repeat some longer portions from the last of his many books – *The Heart of Matter*.

‘The life of Christ mingles with the life-blood of evolution’ ... in a fully organic process, yet the Christic presence is loving and accessible within you too. ‘There exists at the upper term of cosmic convergence a transcendent centre of unification – OMEGA POINT.’ These later writings were put to paper in America from 1950 to 1955, the year of his death. I’ll end with this:

‘Like a bud from which the casing has fallen off – Christ will again be to spirit as the sun is to natural growth... Who is this God to whom your generation looks so eagerly? Who but Jesus, who represents Him and brings Him to us.’ Teilhard once said he would like to be the Evangelist of Christ in the universe. It would be *his* Christ, the Evolver, giving shape and direction to everything and, as the ever-greater one, to be loved as a person but recognised as part of a world in the making.

These are a few examples from the huge body of work that our newest prophet left behind, teeming with hidden treasure to shine out

in the coming Christic revolution. So get in there – as soon as his books get into print again, which will be very soon, and stick at it. Though difficult at first, it will be like digging for gems which when brought to light and loyally polished with your dawning understanding, will reflect the colours of a newly perceived world. This was first seen with the inner eye of a certain ‘Father Day-break Virtue,’ which is a translation of the name given to Teilhard by the locals, when he was working in China. He was also known as the smiling scientist. Anyway, later on you can tell your friends about your studies in your own words, in the way I’ve tried to get across to you, my dear listeners. Remember, his vision is still consistent with modern, scientific world views.

I end with the second verse of Claudel’s poem, written during the time of banishment for Aitchen and Eleila and the idyll of the Exe Valley:

*‘Beneath the rising sun the Grail hangs shining
in the saffron light.
Stretch out to make the wastelands green,
To sow the unity within,
To set the power of spirit free.
Stretch out to sweep the mists away and see
the bright new day begin.’*

“This man had seen the same vision that was shared by Teilhard and my William – the warm, welcoming features of the risen Jesus suffused through your world and the universe around you... God bless.”

*Courtesy of a friend’s computer and now signing off –
MERLIN.*

Our four teenagers walked home in silence but with a spring in their step.

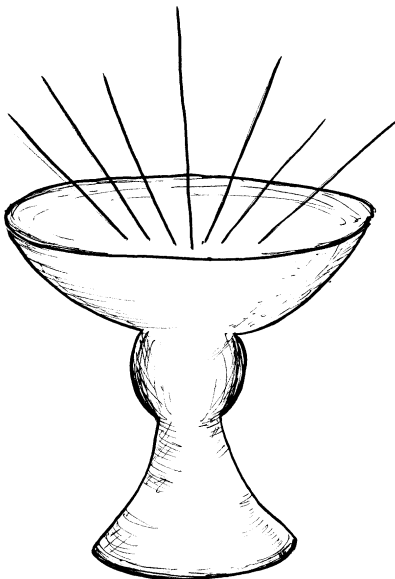
The End.

M E Mann
March 2000

END-PIECE

*'Fellow Labourers! The Great Vintage and Harvest is
now upon Earth.
The whole extent of the Globe is explored. Every
scatter'd Atom
Of Human Intellect now is flocking to the sound of the
Trumpet.
All the Wisdom which was hidden in caves and dens
from ancient
Time is now sought out from Animal and Vegetable
and Mineral.
The awakener is come outstretch'd over Europe: the
Vision of God is fulfilled.'*

From William Blake's *Milton*, Book the First.



END NOTES

1 – The version referred to here is *Tristan and Iseult* by Rosemary Sutcliff, published in Puffin Books, 1974.

2 – *ibid.* p.32

3 – *ibid.* p.47

4 – *ibid.* p.58

5 – *ibid.* p.63

6 – *ibid.* p.67

7 – *ibid.* p.82

8 – *ibid.* p.92

9 – *ibid.* p.105

10 – *ibid.* p.108

11 – *ibid.* p.119

12 – *ibid.* p.134

13 – *ibid.* p.136

14 – *ibid.* p.138

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