

Chairbeing's Address

"Do robots have wheels?"

– Roseanna Pendlebury, *W-Chairbeing*

TWO SCORE AND NINE YEARS AGO some guys brought forth in this university a new society, conceived in boredom and dedicated to the proposition that, well, science fiction is pretty cool. Next year we celebrate our glorious 50th anniversary.

New we may no longer be, but vigorous we remain! Courting wit, humour, repartee, and other words that mean more or less the same thing, not a one among us would declare that our weekly repast was anything but the highlight of those dreary Sunday evenings. East the sun will rise; ten years hence, the members of CUSFS will continue to uphold the ideals¹ that have made this society great.

Friends, CUSFSites, a word for my noble predecessor and esteemed editor. Accusations of the foulest nature have been flung against him and his contributors. I have seen the evidence, and I can assure you: it is by no means non-existent!² But I do not believe it, for Frederic is an honourable man. So are they all, all honourable men and women! Did we not thrice offer him the title of Chairbeing, and thrice did he- oh, bugger, he didn't, did he. Um.³

In some seriousness, we have a great deal to look forward to. The last year has been a stunning success (with the possible exception of our dismal failure to recruit any freshers at all), and we have more to look forward to next year, including *even more* terrible films, *even more* manly lunches, and the Great 50th Anniversary Something.

I have now successfully spent forty-five minutes procrastinating by writing this address, and alas it is time I return to my r*****. For those of you who have exams,⁴ as a biologist I can only offer the following solace: at least you don't have to give birth through your clitoris.

Filip Drnovsek Zorko
CUSFS Chairbeing 2012-3



Editorial

IT IS WITH GREAT SADNESS I receive the news that my illustrious predecessor, Dragneto, has been charged with conspiracy to pervert the course of *X-Men: First Class*. His time as editor may have been brief but it was eventful, and I have tried to carry on in his spirit. Nonetheless, I feel that circumstances force me to clarify a number of things.

Firstly, I do not remember compiling this edition of TTBA, nor receiving any emails I may have been sent about it. I understand there have been rumours that entries to the drabble contest may have been obtained illegally through bribery and deception. I must stress that these decisions were taken by a single rogue reporter (Hannah Wray) and not at a management level; indeed, there is evidence that she participated in a quite fiendish cover-up, or a quite fiendish cover at any rate. Critics have pointed to several stories of dubious provenance in this paper, though I have been quick to point out that the sources - Cara Donnelly and Michael Donaghy - are well documented, and these stories were definitely not obtained by intercepting voicemails on mine or Dragneto's watch. Similarly unfounded are the severe accusations that our comic strip was obtained by making improper payments to an officer of the law in the course of his work - though of course if someone has been passing backhanders to Captain CUSFS, it is entirely the fault of the flame-haired Roseanna Pendlebury and absolutely nothing to do with me.

In conclusion: you can't pin anything on me, not that there is anything to pin on me, and anyway I had my fingers crossed the whole time so none of it counts.

-Frederic Heath-Renn
TTBA Editor
and ex-Chairbeing

1 Mostly bad puns.

2 By which I mean it is non-existent.

3 Yes, that's right. In this metaphor Frederic assassinates himself earlier on in the play.

4 For those of you who don't: [insert ironic threat here]

TORCH TAKEN BY ALIENS

TTBA Volume *p* Issue 1
(that's a thorn, of course)

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CUSFS Committee, 2012-2013 (and what they want as a post-exam treat)

Chairbeing	Filip Hajdar Drnovšek Zorko (Pointless trophy)
Secretary	James Robson (More LARP armour)
Treasurer	Imogen Gold (Jeremy Paxman's head on a plate)
Membership Secretary	Fraser McNair (Time portal to early mediæval France)
Librarian	Christine Lee (Lifesize plushie of Tom Hiddleston)
TTBA Editor	Frederic Heath-Renn (Trifle)

The Brief Committee of 26th February 2012

Chairbeing	Frederic Heath-Renn
Secretary	James Robson
Treasurer	Imogen Gold
Membership Secretary	Fraser McNair
Librarian	Christine Lee
TTBA Editor	Dragneto

They'll Get Here By Tomorrow

"Welcome, welcome!" my guide calls through the void, thons tentacles rippling along the rippleway in haste as thon approached to meet me. "I am !ouK; please call me Pook."

"It is a need and a pleasure to meet you," I intone, my voice echoing slightly off the nearest gantries as I exit my hyperhopper. Pook (my species cannot pronounce cepho clicks) came to rest in front of me, respiring slightly more rapidly than usual.

"How is the array construction?"

"It's *finished!*" Pook slapped thons suckers against the metal floor. "We caught up to schedule!"

I blink. "Ah, excellent. Of course, the testing -"

"Already done!"

I pause at the second surprise. My tone became deuterium-poor. "Why was the funding council not informed?"

Pook spat flecks of ink from thons tertiary tentacles. "You were. It was an oblique but technically complete communication, from one of our technicians to one of your sentient resource managers."

The conversation paused, and I became aware that my metabolism was detectably rising. The failure of this project was to have displaced the head of the Communications Funding Council, idiot that thon is. Success had not been anticipated.

Pook's voice dropped and thon said, gently, "Our collective opinion was that our work was to be interrupted for political reasons. No offence is intended. All construction and testing has been completed and reported in technical completeness, and you have arrived precisely as we begin full operations."

The far-off gantries begin to glow iron-green, one by one in sequence. I marvel briefly, and then hiss. This array is 80,000 light years across and took an entire galaxy of material to construct. This sequence of activation has been prepared - and hidden from the CFC - for at least two cycles. The iron-green modulates as the passage of cosmic rays make them swirl; green is mixed with vortical traces of yellow.

I inhale, deeply (Pook scuttles back as I do so).

"Any more surprises, *engineer?*"

"Just one, honourable dysbursar." Pook turns to thons controls and crushes out a sequence of commands. "Regard this video, recorded not twenty microcycles ago. A local recording of the emitters."

The video showed a cross-section of the glowing gantries; two layers, one inside of the other, both glowing green.

"This is the inner layer, and this the outer layer,

and the video has been greatly slowed down," explained Pook, indicating with thons first tentacle. "Watch."

The inner green melted away to be replaced by purple; green returned swiftly. Purple, green, purple, green, the colours matched by identical (if slightly delayed) bursts on the outer shell.

"We've had a coherent detection *already!*" Pook slapped thons tertiary, then all thons tentacles against the controls. "We'll have to update our Drake parameters by orders of magnitude - these neutrinos are sentient-produced!"

I ask "Was the opposing point on the array activated early enough to catch the entry point? More measurements could enable us to locate their modern Empire more quickly."

Pook clicked and spat six bursts of ink. "Empire? Entry point?"

My core temperature had risen again; I was fit to fuse.

"*Empire*. Sentient species destroy their previous cultural markers and form galactic *Empires*. Slightly *less* sentient species get incorporated to stronger Empires."

Pook was still spitting bursts of ink, ignoring my insults.

"Dysbursar," said thon, "This array detects neutrinos above a certain energy threshold; that, together with their periodicity, is how we deduce that they are artificial. What you saw - the inner detector being triggered, then the outer - *was* the entry point because these neutrinos *haven't been emitted yet.*"

My core ceased convecting.

"Time travellers? A species which is still too young to have forbidden time travel? But they would - "

"- barely have left their home planet, yes." Pook clicked again. "Of course, as soon as we detected this we launched a ship to follow the beam to its source. Not having access to hyperhoppers, we will simply have to be patient - perhaps wait ten, twenty of your cycles - to reach whatever sub-galactic civilisation we have found. By pleasing coincidence, we expect that we will arrive shortly after the beam has been emitted."

I start convecting again, my bands shearing out in their anticipation. A nascent civilisation, pre-Diaspora! What a find!

"Pook, I demand that you immediately turn over all data and -"

"No."

I briefly go turbulent near my south pole. Thon continues.

"Neither this data nor this facility will be turned over to the Empire. This is a cepho find, and the cepho will exploit it."

My bands start forming rolls between them as I gather my wits. I boom:

"Our ships will -"

"Your ships do not know where the civilisation is. By the time you construct another array - and then were you to detect another such transmission - we will have found, studied and made contact with ours. Our understanding of sentient psychology will advance at such a pace that our military will be able to outclass yours even with our technological deficit."

Their analysis was flawless - orthodox, even. Pook continued:

"Jovic subjugation of cepho ends now. We have been preparing for this eventuality; if you attempt to destroy us our reserve fleet will dedicate itself to destroying you in your entirety. You will accept our subjugation, primacy and cultural mores peacefully. You will deliver this information to your people."

!ouK flicked thons tertiary tentacles thoughtfully for a second, and added "It couldn't hurt if you learned to click, either. Now get off my array."

Cara Donnelly

Sword Hunt

The king's guard came to take away the sword hanging over Harran's fireplace, since peasants couldn't own swords. Harran knew he had no use for the sword, after all, so when he took it down from the wall, it was the first time he'd held it. Still, it reminded him of his grandfather, and now he'd never learn what the words down the blade said...

The words glowed. He'd never seen that before. He stepped outside his hut to hand over the sword.

No one saw Harran again. The other villagers had buried the guards before the next patrol turned up.

Alex Guttenplan

The CUSFS Drabble Contest

In Lent 2012, the Bard and the TTBA Editor declared that a meeting would be used for the writing of drabbles, 100-word pieces of fiction that could be exchanged for chocolatey goodies. Several are arrayed around this issue.

The Problem with *Harry Potter*

“Well,” said Mrs Woodbarrow with an air of ironic understatement, after the smoke had cleared, the books reshelfed themselves, the potted plant lost the ability to sing and the room generally returned to an approximation of what it had looked like before the sudden advent in it of wild and tempestuous magic, “that was quite something.”

Laurence leaned forward and signed his admissions form.

Three years later, the unremarkable Tom O'Malley – who, it was commonly known, had barely managed to make a paperclip twitch in his interview – faced down the greatest dark wizard of the age while Laurence, with some sense of how unfair the entire situation was, huddled in the cold of a disused Tube tunnel.

Filip Drnovsk Zorko

Going Back into the Cave

TX-31 walked his fifth Form into the vast room.

Inside were endless rows of containers. Upon closer inspection, he could see living shapes inside of them, and what he saw disgusted him.

Another Form approached him.

“TX-31, this area is restricted!”

“What is this place? What are these repulsive creatures?”

“Since you have form here, I will tell you for your protection. Follow this form.”

TX-97 led him down one of the rows, explaining as he walked. “In these tanks are our glorious ancestors.” TX-97 stopped and gestured to one of them. The fleshy being turned. “This one is you.”

Robert Gowers

“Look, no hands!” The Chosen One rode past, grinning like an idiot.

The Chosen One had always been a bit full of himself, thought Merlin sourly. He'd hardly let his farm-boy origins hold him back from making a loud fool of himself at court, and it was only Merlin's careful diplomatic smoothing that had saved him from exile (or worse). That, and the knowledge he was the kingdom's only hope – the last in a great line of dragon tamers. So the horoscope said: one boy in a generation. Merlin had made sure of it himself.

The wild dragon was a surprise, so early in the boy's training. “Don't worry. I can handle it,” said the Chosen One.

“Delicious,” said the dragon.

Maybe we read the horoscope the wrong way up?

Hannah Wray

Friction

"Frank? Frank? Frank!" Impatience took over and Beryl kicked the door to his room open. The floor was thick with ferns; in the corner a Velociraptor was ripping apart a filing cabinet, and hovering in the middle of the room was a large, glowing disc, from which a Triceratops looked out briefly before pulling back and disappearing. Beryl clenched her fist and stomped over to the portal; she darted her hand in and pulled out Frank. "Jesus, Frank, why don't you ever damn well tidy up after swanning off like this?" Frank looked meekly at the ground and said nothing.

Frederic Heath-Renn

“And The Sea Shall Give Up Its Dead...”

The Titanic entered New York Harbor to a colossal media fanfare, which the passengers expected. The

Bismarck sailed into Kiel to an atmosphere of awkwardness and embarrassment. Major airports struggled to deal with everything from biplanes to

Airbuses, all landing at once with passengers demanding that their heirs give their property back. Joshua Slocum took one look at the first land he saw and turned his ship back around again. And somewhere in the Atlantic, an island reappeared, where priest-kings ordered their secret police to find out who bragged to that Greek, and strange golden ships set sail on voyages of rediscovery.

Alex Guttenplan

The Future's So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades

Review: *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndham

There have been lords of life before, you know. Did you ever hear of the great lizards?

Tolkien was frantic to point out that *The Lord of the Rings* was not an allegory for the Second World War but the work bears indelible imprints of it all the same. And so too do the novels of John Wyndham, with pastoral English life suddenly and violently disrupted by malevolent outsiders from the sky. But *The Chrysalids*, unlike the more well-known *The Day of the Triffids* or *The Kraken Wakes*, takes place well after the catastrophe; the Tribulation, a nuclear war that reduced cities to ash and rendered the world uninhabitable (save the Canadian province of Newfoundland & Labrador), was long ago. Here, the connection to the 1940s is the terrifying obsession with racial purity that pervades the world of the book, and especially its immediate setting of Waknuk. Religious dogmatism means the destruction of any person born 'different' because of the fallout: for the first part of the book, the threat is no longer external and alien, but all too human vices like intolerance, paranoia, fear.

It is in many ways a shame then that this chilling atmosphere is squandered in the second half, which leaves Waknuk and devolves quickly into a moribund chase sequence, and a chase sequence that is mostly out of the hands of the protagonists at that. Admittedly Wyndham's main characters never have that much agency, but in previous works they at least struggled for themselves rather than sitting inert while things happen around them as the children do here.

Also irritating is the sudden and glib reversal of one of the book's major themes, the folly of one segment of humanity setting itself up as purer and better than another – and then some New Zealanders arrive and start going on about how they're superior to the rest of the humans, and aside from a few mentions of how up themselves they are the book largely seems to agree with them. Given that Wyndham wrote so well elsewhere about how humanity would cope versus an obviously superior opponent – cf *The Kraken Wakes*, *The Midwich Cuckoos* – for a bunch of telepathic Kiwis to roll up and mouth off about how rubbish everyone who's not them is leaves something of a bad taste in the mouth.

Still, Wyndham's prose is as ever brilliant, and even if the second half's action and derring-do is

mostly reported he manages it well. But *The Chrysalids* frustratingly fails to deliver on the *The Monsters are Due on Maple Street* chills of its first half, and it ends up feeling disappointingly superficial. *The Kraken Wakes*, *Trouble with Lichen*, *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Midwich Cuckoos* are far superior.

Frederic Heath-Renn

Laughing in a menacing baritone, the Evil Baron Harculf levelled the laser pistol at the Space Emperor. "Ha ha! My cunning subduing of your butler allows me to use this pistol to end your miserable life!" Suddenly the butler appeared! "Pathetic schemer! You will be imprisoned for murdering the emperor, and I will have the throne!" Out of nowhere came the janitor. "Fools all! With the buckets of blood my evil plan will spill, there shall be millions available to be added to the mop budget!"

They stared at him. He stared at them. "What?"

Fraser McNair

When the end came, it didn't come for us. We looked down on Earth from our perch in orbit and saw the bombs fall, little puffs of light. The world was like a dandelion clock all of a sudden. It was beautiful.

What could we do? We watched. They kept falling for perhaps half an hour. Long enough to know we would never be going home. The light was sometimes bright enough to hurt.

We discussed options. Pills, asphyxiation? The station would keep going for years, if we let it. Someone mentioned the hydroponic garden.

Do we have a chance?

Hannah Wray

Honeymoon

As soon as they got out of the car in that sleepy little town, Anna announced to John that something felt wrong about the place.

"What, you don't like the hotel? We can pick another one," John told her. "It's our honeymoon, we can spend a bit more than we planned. You only get one, after all."

"No, it's not that. The whole place, the whole town, feels wrong." Anna's face was paler than usual, her voice serious.

"You mean - *that* kind of feeling?" he asked. She nodded. *That* kind of feeling meant she was picking up some kind of bad thoughts. Someone nearby was dangerous. Anna could read minds. Not 'read minds' as in, interpret body language well. Not just anticipate what you're going to say before you say it. She could literally read a person's mind like an open book, if she chose.

Anna had explained it to him when he asked her out, saying she would understand if he wanted to change his mind about dating her. It tended to freak people out, she said, even though she tried not to read anyone without their permission. No-one knew how it had happened, it was the result of some as-yet unguessed at mutation. She tried not to let it affect her life too much. Anna's gift had some advantages, of course. In dangerous situations it let her pick up on what was wrong before something bad happened. Once, she had saved their lives. John had taken her to the theatre, a birthday present, and outside afterwards walking to the car a man with a gun had tried to mug them. Anna made him fire the gun into the air, emptying it, and they had run away.

Afterwards, she had been angry about it. "I should have made him stick around, so the police could get him. He's going to hurt some other poor people." John knew that she could only make people do things when she was really worked up. "We can leave in the morning," said John, "But it's late now, and we're nearly out of fuel - do you think it'll be all right to stay the night, or should I try to get us to the next town?"

Anna frowned in concentration. "I - think we'll be OK. No one seems to feel like hurting strangers. They're all angry - sort of angry - at someone, but it's not us. I just don't like the way it makes me feel. When you're in a soup like this, it sort of rubs off on you."

"OK. OK, we can go as soon as we get up in the morning, I promise. But if you think it's safe - "

"It is. Just uncomfortable," Anna said.

"Let's just get something to eat now and go to bed."

The lady on the desk at the bed and breakfast place seemed nice enough, in a small-town nosy sort of way. She was delighted to hear that they were a newlywed couple - "Why, that'll bring me good luck for a whole year! I hope you both enjoy your stay." She had pointed them toward a little café that was still open serving dinner.

In the café, Anna didn't eat much. She was a little pale, and kept looking over at a man in the corner - a pompous looking fellow (the local Mayor, the waitress informed them proudly) who was treating a much younger woman to a large meal. "Anna, do you feel all right?" asked John, more than once when she didn't respond.

"I don't like that man," she said finally. "I can't read him. He doesn't feel right, something doesn't feel right about this whole place. Everyone's hiding something - "

Her words were cut off when a man burst into the room, wielding a hunting rifle. "Don't you get her, you bastard!" he shouted, and fired wildly in the direction of the Mayor. John pushed Anna down from her chair and tried to hide them both under the table. Whatever the hell this was, they should have left when they had the chance. He wished he'd listened to her.

"Dianna, you're coming home with me!" The gun-toting man beckoned, and the young woman who had been sitting with the Mayor stood up, trembling.

"Sit down, Dianna," said the Mayor, casually. Something about his voice was wrong.

"You can't take my wife from me! She don't want to go with you!"

"Put the gun down, Sam, you'll do yourself an injury," said the Mayor. The gunman dropped his weapon, reluctantly. "Now Sam, how did you manage to sneak up on me like that?"

"Drank myself nearly to sleep, didn't think about much 'til I got in here." The man was swaying on his feet, now.

"I see. Well, I'm sorry, but it's just not acceptable. What do you think you were doing? Someone could have gotten hurt!" The other people in the diner shook their heads in disapproval. No-one else seemed worried about the situation - in fact, no-one aside from John and Anna had moved since the gunman came in.

"I just came to get Dianna," said the man stubbornly. "I know what you're going to do with her - make her your pet, your slave! Well, she's not your property!" He sounded angry enough to kill, but he made no move to pick up the gun again.

"You know that's not true, Sam, if you search

yourself. You're just jealous of what Dianna and I have together. She never really loved you, you know." The Mayor shook his head, sadly. "We both know I can make her so much happier."

"So - much happier - " echoed the gunman.

"I'm afraid you just won't be able to go on without her, will you? I should have thought of this before. Well, I'm sorry to drag it out needlessly. It'd be better for everyone, don't you think, if you got rid of the only real problem here? Pick up your gun."

The man slowly, reluctantly, reached toward the floor. He fumbled with the weapon, almost dropping it. "Please - " he gasped, trembling fingers pointing it toward his own head.

"Better do it outside," said the Mayor. "Don't want a lot of mess for Mary to clean up in here." The waitress smiled at him gratefully. The gunman walked outside, and before John could really grasp what was going to happen, shot himself in the head. The wet splatter against the windowpane beside them was sickening.

The woman in question, Dianna, was just staring blankly at her food now. A single tear rolled down her cheek. The Mayor turned to her again. "Eat up, Dianna! C'mon, give me a smile." And she did. She did smile, with her eyes as well as her mouth, and she lifted a forkful of spaghetti from her plate as if the previous few minutes had never happened.

Anna led John out of there, him being too dazed to think straight. She didn't ask for the bill, she just laid some cash on the table and walked right out. Back at the room, Anna ran into the bathroom and was sick in the toilet. When she could speak again, she told John what was going on. "The whole town. The Mayor - that's what I felt was wrong here. He's controlling them, everyone - he's in their minds the whole time, squashing down the anger, the hate. Making them love him. Making them do what he wants."

John was still in shock from what he'd seen at the diner. He'd never seen a man shot dead before. He'd never seen a murder, and make no mistake it was murder, not suicide. "Why didn't you stop it? Why couldn't you stop him?"

Anna looked tired, and scared. "John, it's the *whole town*. If I tried anything, he'd use them on us. He could do anything he wanted with us. We can't save them. We can only run and save ourselves. I don't think he noticed me, he was too distracted, and I tried to hide us, I made you look like someone local, in your surface mind."

"I can't believe this is happening. How could anyone do that? *You* would never do that!" John swallowed bile. "I want to kill him, I want to shoot him like that poor man never got the chance to."

"You can't. He'd kill us, worse, he'd make you his slave. John, we have to leave, we have to just go, now!"

Finally, he nodded, and they started to pack away the few things they'd unpacked. "Hurry, hurry," said Anna, "I think he's started to notice me. I felt him brush against me." John bundled her into her coat and they ran downstairs. On the ground floor they ran into the landlady, in her dressing gown with a torch. "Goodness, what are you two doing running round the house at this hour? Can I do you for anything?"

John didn't waste breath on a reply, just pushed past her and through the door. He was unlocking the car when Anna gasped, "Shit!" and his fingers suddenly couldn't work the lock any more. He scrabbled at the key, but he couldn't get any purchase, and then he looked up to see the Mayor and some townsmen walking toward them.

"Leaving so soon?" said the Mayor. "I haven't even had a chance to talk with you yet. So sorry about that unpleasant scene earlier."

"Just let us go," said Anna, quietly. "We won't bother your little scheme here, just let us leave."

"I can't let you go without at least a little talk! How often is it that one mind reader meets another? It's like meeting another real person at last, instead of another one of the cattle. Do you know I can't read you? Not a thing."

"Let us go."

"I don't think I can do that. I think you're going to have to stay here. I can't have anyone getting away who I don't control. Word might get out that something strange is happening here, and I like my little town. I don't want meddlers."

"Stop it. Stop trying to push into my mind and make me, you know it won't work."

"You are powerful, you know. And what a strong shield you have over this one, too. Your own little pet, I suppose?"

"He's my husband." Anna squeezed John's shoulder, and he was able to drop the key and feel his fingers again.

"How sweet." He addressed himself to John, smiling. "You know she's using you, of course? She made you love her, just like she made you marry her. The genius of our gift is that we can make you cattle think it's all your own idea. I have several wives myself. They don't mind sharing, of course - why should they, there's more than enough to go around!" The Mayor laughed at his own joke, and the men behind him joined in.

"Don't you dare bring John into this. Let us go, or I'll hurt you. I mean it." Anna's face was pale and sweat stood out on her brow. The Mayor was trembling a little now, hands clenched in fists at

his sides.

"No, too powerful. I can't let there be any rivals for my kingdom. One day I'm going to have an empire, and there mustn't be anyone who can take it away from me. You'll die today." The Mayor gestured, and the men behind him started forward. "They're just to distract you, of course, but you can't stop them and fight me at the same time."

"Sleep!" said Anna, fiercely. She sucked in a breath, and all of the men fell down, unconscious. Then both she and the Mayor collapsed, like marionettes with their strings cut.

Finally, John could speak again, released from whatever strange spell he'd been under. "Anna?" He shook her shoulder, but she didn't wake. Her eyes flickered under their lids, and her fists were clenched tightly enough that she was drawing blood from herself with her nails. "Anna!" Something happened just then and her eyes opened, glaring with absolute hatred at something he couldn't see. "No!" she shrieked, and the Mayor's body thrashed once and fell still again. It had ended.

When she could move, he helped her up and they went over to look at him, picking their way over the waking, dazed sleepers. A little trickle of blood came from the corner of the Mayor's mouth, and his eyes were open, staring at nothing. "He's dead," said Anna, certainly. John held her in his arms. They drove away from that town at once, not stopping to receive the thanks and tears of the people they had freed. It took days before the feeling of dirt had died away, before they felt almost normal again.

"There are layers," Anna had explained to him once. "It's not just one set of thoughts, there are a whole - it's like the sea. When I read people accidentally, or I'm walking through a crowd of people touching me, I only tend to get the surface stuff, unless someone's projecting very strongly. You know - hunger, and impatience, and boredom and lust, and all those fluctuating little quick impulses you don't even really notice. Deeper down, that's where the true intentions lie."

They found a new place, a new hotel, and spent a week or so just drifting, doing the crossword together in the local paper, making love at night, finding their way back to some kind of centre. But John couldn't stop thinking about what the Mayor had said, before he died. That Anna had made him love her, moulded him, made him a puppet. It couldn't be true and yet it felt true. It felt truer than he could dare to admit to himself. Hadn't

they fallen in love rather suddenly, after all? Hadn't he swept her off her feet, proposed after only a few months? What if it wasn't love, what if it was all a fake? John made Anna promise not to read his thoughts, and she said of course she'd obey. She'd never read him if he didn't want to be read. John wanted to trust her, but how could you trust someone you were so naked, so vulnerable to? What if she was reading him still? How would he ever know? The internal questioning drove him mad.

Anna stroked his back. "What's wrong, honey? You've been feeling agitated all day - "

"I thought you said you weren't going to read me. I asked you not to!"

"Only surface thoughts, I promise. I can't help picking them up, sometimes - why are you so angry?"

John finally said what was on his mind. It burst out of him. "What if it's all a lie? What if you've been controlling me, making me love you, like he controlled them?"

"How could I ever prove otherwise?" Anna's voice was sad. "You can't see inside my head, no matter how I want you to."

"That's the point, isn't it? I can't trust you when you can see me and I can't see you."

"But it's always been like this!"

"I could trust you before. Now, I don't know what to believe."

Anna started crying, a little. Part of John wanted to comfort her, but part of him was wondering how much of what he felt was real, and how much was a fiction. That bastard had made women love him, after all - made them marry him, made more than one of them marry him and be happy with it. Anna wasn't like that - was she? He didn't think she was. But he couldn't trust himself to think clearly about her. John didn't know who she was any more, what she really thought about anything.

"Anna, I think we need to - I think I need - we have to take a break. I need to be on my own."

"If you leave, you won't want to come back." Anna spoke with such certainty, he knew she had read him. "You're just going to get more worked up about this. Don't, please! I promise I haven't done anything to you. I haven't done anything! I love you - "

"I can't. I can't stay, I just have to go - " John got up and blindly made his way toward the door. When he got outside the building, he paused a moment, standing beside the car. What was he going to do? Where was he going to go? John thought of the crying woman he'd left inside, like a coward, running away. What had she ever done to hurt

him? It was plain Anna had never done anything like that, had never controlled him. This was just a seed the Mayor had planted in his mind, watered by his own doubts and fears. He couldn't leave her. He loved her. Just the thought of how much pain he must have caused - "Anna!" he shouted, running back up the stairs. "Anna, I'm sorry," he said, outside the closed door of their room. In his rush to leave, he'd forgotten the key, and she'd locked it shut behind him. "Let me in, forgive me. I need you."

There was a moment of silence, then the sound of movement inside. Anna opened the door, her eyes swollen red with tears. Tenderly, he took her face in his hands and wiped them away. Then he came inside.

He woke in the morning curled around Anna, her small body warm against him. Something was wrong, he realised. He could feel her crying again. Little sobs shook her body, trembling. "Ssh," John stroked her arm, her face. "What's wrong? Ssh, it's OK. It's all OK now."

"No, it's not. Oh, I'm so sorry," Anna whispered. "You don't have anything to be sorry for. It was me in the wrong, and I've gotten better. I feel different about it now, I realised I was just being stupid, throwing away the best thing I ever had... Let's drive to the ocean today. How about it? Want to see the beach today?"

Anna half twisted away from him, sat up. She wore the saddest expression of any human face he'd ever seen, and suddenly John felt cold and afraid. "I made you," she said simply. "I made you feel different."

"What?"

"I was so scared you were leaving me forever so I made you feel like you didn't want to. I brought you up here and raped you and it's not OK just because you thought you wanted it. I'm not OK. I'm just as bad as him, now. Just as bad."

"But I felt - it was real - " John's mind was in turmoil. It was as if he was surfacing from a comfortable fog, and could look at what happened more clearly. He certainly had changed his mind abruptly. "Oh. Shit."

"I can switch people on and off like lightbulbs, but I never did with you. Not before today, and I know you won't believe me now, not ever, but it's true. You just came to me of yourself, and I loved you so much for it."

"You just made me forgive you. You made me - " John still couldn't get angry at her, not really. He felt confused, hurt, numb. "I can't believe it was a lie. I don't care. I - can't I stay anyway?"

Anna got up, disentangling herself from him

completely. "No." She started putting on her clothes, then sagged down onto a chair. "I should leave you, but I can't. I can't make myself. You'll have to leave me." She was crying again, tears streaming down her face.

John suddenly did feel angry again. He didn't clearly recall the next few moments, putting on his clothes, storming about gathering his few belongings. Just as he got to the door, the anger ceased.

"That was you again, wasn't it." It wasn't a question, really.

Anna just looked at him, silently. He wanted to go to her, comfort her -

"Get out!" she shrieked. "Leave while you still can! Leave while I can bear it - I can't bear it - if you stay now, I'll never let you go - "

"Anna - "

"Get out!" She held her head in her hands, as she had done when trying to block out invading minds. "Please. Get out."

John left. He didn't come back this time.

Hannah Wray

At the bottom of the staircase leading up the great belltower of St. Botolph's College lay Professor Martin Alveras, dead. No knife in his back, no broken bones, nothing that suggested he should be dead; indeed, when the medics examined him, he was the very picture of good health, save the not breathing and lack of pulse. One of his colleagues mentioned that he'd been spending long hours out at the radio telescope - sure enough, in his office the detectives found thirty pages of strange, unearthly script. The case was discreetly closed; this was a matter for the MoD.

Frederic Heath-Renn

Customer Service with Time Travel

The Time Correction Ministry had another complaint today. "My son was stabbed! How can this happen? You are using taxpayers' money to stab my son!" The minister replied coolly, "Everything in history has been corrected in the best interests of everyone in the United European Kingdom." The woman was undeterred. "Well, it's not *my* best interests, nor my son's. It's a disgrace." The minister sighed and turned to his assistant. "Wilkins, could you *correct* this for Mrs Browson?" Wilkins nodded, and the woman was no longer there. "Well, that was *one* way of solving the problem." "What problem?" said Wilkins.

Robert Gowers

At eight twenty-eight like clockwork the transports touched down, but this time the slaves disobeyed, refused to get on. All programmers were conditioned from birth to be loyal to the State; their minds, and hence the system's, could not conceive of rebellion. So if no one got on the ships, this must mean there was no one to get on the ships, and so the life support modules were automatically ordered to take off from the planet and prepare for redeployment elsewhere. No slave lasted for over twelve minutes; seven thousand died and the Secretary for Labour had to resign.

Frederic Heath-Renn

Facts About Cats

The spindizzy drive hit the ground first, splintering into a thousand glittering shards. Moments later the craft it had been attached to followed, upside down but graceful, suspended by a parachute. The pilot exited, sprawled out onto an alien floor, looking up into an alien sky. From the bushes behind him emerged an undraped figure, covered in short brown fur. It had a long tail but was otherwise shaped like a human female, yet somehow infinitely more alluring... "Christ, not these again," sighed the pilot into his ansible. "Pick me up & then nuke this rock. It's useless to us."

Frederic Heath-Renn

The Bottle

"Her?"

"No."

"Her?"

"Hmm. Nope."

"Her?"

"Please. Too old."

"Tsch, you shouldn't say that about a lady." Dalia stepped to the right to let the woman past.

"And what would you know about that?"

Suddenly, she span to look straight at me. "Ralph. What the fuck are we doing?"

I sighed. "Call it my quarter-life crisis."

She snorted. "Aren't you a little old for that? Or rather, a lot young."

I grunted and kept walking. Dalia opted to walk backwards, hands clasped behind her back.

"Her, now she's alright. Course, I could probably manage her myself."

Dalia giggled viciously. "As if you could bear to leave me alone that long."

"Y'know, when I said I'd always keep you company, I didn't mean all the time. Couldn't I get you a nice database dump or something?"

"Oh, Ralph, you're so sweet when you think I'm cockblocking."

I tried to laugh, but it felt hollow. Dalia knew as well as me - better, probably - that I haven't been with anyone since her, and she's smart enough to figure I wasn't exactly Casanova beforehand.

Dalia must've sensed my mood. "Come on, cheer up. It's the famous Patriarch's Pond, aren't you happy to finally see it?" I wasn't sure whether she was mocking me - but then, I never am with Dalia. And it was good to see it; not exactly like I'd imagined from the novel, but a interesting space, part old Moscow and part new. "Come on, I'll buy you an ice cream."

I frowned at that. Dalia had an account in her name, but neither of us liked her using it much. I should have been happy that she cared so much for me, but there was no such thing as a free lunch from her. "I'll get my own," I said, and she had the grace not to push it.

We galloped across the steppe, the mountains reaching up to embrace the sky ahead. This was real Arabian Nights territory - and my djinni rode at my side.

The guide had looked askance when I said two horses, but my money was as good as anyone's; if the foreign idiot tourist wanted to pay for extra that was his business. It was an indulgence, but having Dalia beside me was worth it - and it's not

like I didn't have the money. She could probably have kept up on foot - she can run like a world champion when she wants to - but it would've made conversation hard, and I don't think she'd've stooped to sharing a saddle with me. I turned to her against the rushing wind. "Beautiful, isn't it?" "What?"

"Never mind."

"What?"

I gave up and shook my head, turning back to face the front. We were heading down a slope now, entering some sort of canyon, the horses bunching closer together as we funnelled in. I sat upright in the saddle and glanced towards one of the rock formations.

A snap in the distance, then a few more; the horses tried to veer right, but there was only so far they could go. It took me a moment to realise those sounds had been gunshots. I saw one of the tribesmen looking anxiously back and leaning over to the side, but trying to turn a horse around was futile under the circumstances. Our other two guides seemed calm, though I couldn't say the same for the rest of the tour group. I watched the younger tribesman gently unsling an assault rifle. More gunshots, now, and I saw a frown cross the lead guide's face as he spotted a pile of boulders across the way, diverting us into a gully. To my right one of the horses stumbled, and an American clutched his camera close. I told myself I would be happy just to survive, but in truth I had no more idea than he what to do. Jumping from my horse seemed possible, if risky, but being abandoned in this territory would be a death sentence. Not to mention that I didn't know how many enemies there were, or even what they wanted. So, back to trusting the guides then. I guess this was what we paid them for.

The gully narrowed ahead, and seeing this the horses finally began to slow. Our rearguard managed to wheel his around, but found himself facing two similar-looking tribesmen, weapons hanging loosely in front of them. He backed his horse uncertainly, sticking with the group without losing sight of them. Up front three more men had emerged; I'm sure the tribes were as different as Norse and Celts, but they all looked the same to me.

"Well, well, this is a nice Mexican standoff, isn't it?" I felt it unwise to correct the leader of these... bandits seemed like a reasonable conclusion. He continued in some rapid-fire... foreign, looking excitedly at our lead guide's face. Shortly the latter turned to face us.

"He says not to worry, you will all be safe and happy. He says this is stick-up. He says you give

him all your dollars and iPhones, and then he ride away into the sunset." Comprehending or not, the bandit leader nodded approvingly.

I didn't even see what happened next. The next I looked there was just a plume of smoke ahead of us, and my ears were ringing from some enormous boom. I heard what might be galloping hooves behind, but on turning around all I could see was more smoke.

"Got the sucker," announced Dalia triumphantly, reappearing beside me. She was smiling sweetly; I tried to figure out how best to reply.

"Are you sure that was the best way?" I asked eventually. "We didn't seem to be in any real danger."

"Hah. Shows what you know. Of course they tell you you're going to be OK, but do you know the death rate from this kind of robbery?" Her eyes were sharp, begging me to disagree.

"Well then, thank you kindly."

Abruptly her face changed; I would swear I even saw her blushing slightly, and I'm pretty sure that's impossible. "Idiot. Be more careful from now on. I said this was a bad idea, didn't I? Do you even know how hard it was to steal that predator drone? Geez."

Today was probably the closest I'd ever come to dying. But I couldn't help grinning like a fool.

It's the other side of the world, but Shanghai felt like coming home. Forests of tower blocks, even in the suburbs; gardens through the streets, and everywhere a vibrancy, a youthful energy. We sipped our cocktails on the balcony.

"I could almost imagine living here, you know."

Dalia smiled and turned, the sunset catching on her cheek. She'd been weird all through China; kind of spaced-out. But she seemed fine, and I'd long since given up trying to understand her moods.

"Why not? You could afford it easily enough, if you wanted to." She rested her hand over my shoulder.

"I didn't mean it. It's nice and all, but it's not home. And the government... I mean, I know I could... I just feel."

She laughed. "I know. Poor old Ralphie thinks he should be out there saving the world."

"That's not..." I struggled. She poked her finger in my face; not exactly a pleasant experience, but one that had a certain cuteness to it all the same.

"It's all right. I think it's fine to take things slowly. You're not a bad person, Ralph. You just don't want to make mistakes."

"Would you be any different?"

"Me..." She turned back to face the sunset. "You know I'm not made that way. But if I could... I

don't want people to die. Or to suffer, either. And I'd probably go too far and end up causing more trouble than we started with. But even so, I couldn't help but try."

Now it was my turn to feel embarrassed. "You're a better person than me."

"Oh, stop it. There's nothing wrong with having a little fun. Speaking of which, how about another round?"

I woke in bliss; sunlight streaming in the window, the soft warmth of the huge bed, Dalia's breath on the back of my neck...

Dalia's breath. I flinched like it was ice water, entirely awake now. Dalia stirred as I sat up. The sheets rustled as she did so. Either we'd come up with an algorithmic enhancement that would be the death of Hollywood, or...

"When did I let you have nanotech?"

She pouted, crumpling her ears forward, and started crawling towards me on the bed.

"Don't be like that. I've done some wonderful things with it. Are you really going to put me back in the bottle nyaow?"

Her fingers - warm, human fingers - stroked across my belly. I reached towards the curtain

Michael Donaghy

Email to all students of Hawking College Cambridge, March 15th 2300

- Students are reminded that they must remove all belongings from their rooms for the vacation. Storage is limited, except in the case of interplanetary students.
- The AI Rights Solidarity Group will meet on Monday at 7.30 in the Berners-Lee Room. Speaker: 13Ja6b9-Arbalest, a veteran of the Oberon War. All welcome.
- Auditions are now open for the performers at the 250th Anniversary Ball. We are especially looking for 21st-century period pieces. Email js713.
- A message from the Bar Staff: Drinks to be consumed on the zero-g dance floor must be carried in appropriate containers.
- Exam term welfare – Applications for the Uplifted Feline Loan Scheme are now open.

Alex Guttenplan

Bob: sanitised this article for your investigation
– DL

The Eye of God

The Eye of God is a section of the [Mandelbrot set](#) known to cause intense, persistent religious paranoia and suicidal ideation in those who view it.^[1] It has been used as a recruitment tool by the terrorist organisation [Bringers of the Dark](#).^[2] There is evidence that it was broadcast during the season finale of [Doctor Who](#) on the [5th of May 2014](#).

This *terrorism*-related article is a *stub*. You can help Wikipedia by *expanding it*.

Jenny Woods

Austerity hit us hard; it soon became clear that 31 colleges was too many. The more obvious mergers happened first - Pemmanuel, Jesus Christ's, Churchilliam College in the northwest - but after that things got more difficult: simple geography meant Homergirton failed to function well, and Trinity Clare Hall and Clare Trinity Hall proved difficult to distinguish. But the university muddled through, the only important thing in the Chancellor's mind that we would not give up the collegiate system until both Oxford and London had. By the time PeterhouseIwyn was formed, however, we had to admit the game was up.

Frederic Heath-Renn



