

The Phoenix Experiment

a short story by Eric Brown

Foreword

"The Phoenix Experiment" is a companion piece to my short story [The Disciples of Apollo](#). It follows some of the same themes and concerns of that story, loneliness and redemption, though in an overtly science-fictional setting. It is a mood piece, the description of the time in the life of a recognisably human character, perhaps one hundred years hence.

It was published in the small press magazine *The Lyre* #1, in the summer of '91.

The Phoenix Experiment

One month after the death of his daughter, Jonathon Fuller decided to leave the city. The life and energy of the place was too stark a contrast to the isolation he had imposed upon himself, too harsh a reminder of his daughter's passing. He needed the tranquillity of the countryside, where his desire to be alone would not be seen as perverse, to come to terms with his guilt and eventually, perhaps, to persuade himself to return. He shelved all his projects and told his agent that he was going away for a long holiday.

Early that Summer he drove from the city and toured the southern coastline in search of a suitable retreat, somewhere isolated and idyllic, untouched by the technologies of contemporary life. Within a week he discovered a lonely village overlooking the Channel, and made enquiries at a local property office. He was told that there were no houses for rent in the village itself - but there were chalets available in the Canterbury Rehabilitation Community, half a mile away.

He'd heard about the Community, but, far from being deterred by the nature of the place, it occurred to him that there he might be allowed the privacy he desired. When he arrived at the enclosed estate later that afternoon he was met by an invalid in a carriage, who called himself the Captain and showed Fuller to one of a dozen identical A-frames that occupied a greensward overlooking the ocean. The view of the seascape, and the chalet's relative isolation, cheered him. He thought back to his depressive state in the city and told himself that this was exactly what he had been seeking.

That first night, as darkness fell and the stars appeared, he took a bottle of scotch onto the balcony, drank and stared at the constellations. The Captain had told him that he would be made welcome by the rest of the patients - at this stage of their rehabilitation, he had said, they rarely had contact with outsiders. Fuller had been unable to bring himself to tell the Captain that he would not be requiring company for some time.

In one of the other A-frames on the gently sloping greensward, a party was in progress: the patients, he thought, doing their best to forget the present. Dark shapes passed across the lighted squares of windows like figures in an Indonesian shadow play, and laughter drifted to him on the warm night air.

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