



UNDER THE
MERLIN
SPELL

Margaret Mann

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by

Margaret Mann

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DEDICATION

To my children and their spouses,
without whom I could never have finished the book.

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checked the manuscript for me and gave some good
advice.

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ONE

A TERRIBLE STORM AND A BIRTHDAY PARTY

It was the worst hurricane in the British Isles in centuries. All over the country, trees were blown down in their hundreds. In Ireland, the rage of the storm was felt no less keenly. The beautiful old country park that Sam and Gilly loved so dearly was nothing less than a disaster area.

That night, the largest tree growing in the park, a 200 year-old giant beech, trembled with each new vicious gust until, with an almighty crack and shriek of uprooting, the grand old tree came crashing down to the ground.

The morning after this apocalyptic event, a still and sunny day dawned. Everyone came to gaze in horror and disbelief. Sam and Gilly's mother felt a strong desire to go to the park and have a special picnic by the massive wreck of their sadly missed tree. As it was Gilly's birthday, she invited Sam and Gilly's friends to join them. She hoped that Sam would not show off too much. Her younger brother Jonathan, who *would* have been a problem, was not well that day, so was left behind with an aunt.

Gilly's mother cooked sausages, tarts, cookies and a birthday cake for the picnic. The guests were to be brought by their parents to meet near the park entrance. As she waited to greet them, Gilly mused that next year she would be thirteen and no longer a child, a thought that made her half glad and half sad. Sam didn't mind being fifteen, she thought.

After the children finished their picnic and were tired of games and prizes, Sam and his best friend Tom decided to explore the huge tree. The fallen beech was now like a sprawling giant with one great arm half buried in the earth and split up the middle. A huge gash in its side showed the lighter brown sinews and the pink and white fibres inside the dead-weight trunk. Its branches were pointing crazily, helplessly, towards the sky. The thickets of twigs at the end of each branch had thousands of tightly closed buds on them – a glory that would never be.

Looking at the scene now, one could almost hear the sickening crash on the shuddering earth as this old tree fell down after centuries of living, drawing water and nourishment from the earth, giving shelter to other life and delighting the human eye.

Most of the group went to feed the ducks and swans on the lake with the remains of the picnic, but Sam and Tom stayed by the fallen beech tree and were now clambering along the trunk. It seemed quite high up when you were there and needed careful negotiation to get around the projecting branches. Soon Sam got stuck and retreated to where he could make a fairly successful leap through the tangled branches to the ground. Tom jeered, but soon followed suit!

Gilly and her friend Lucy were busy examining the knotted holes in the trunk and making wild guesses as to who or what had used them. Where the largest part of the tree had been wrenched away and the old roots – many of them rotten – lay upturned and twisted, one small part of the tree with roots intact was standing. Stark and spear-like it faced the

massive fallen trunk. Although it looked stricken, violets were still nestling in the moss covering the roots. The little elfin-garden in a recess occupying a shallow rift at the base of the trunk was the subject for heated debate between the girls.

While the four children were standing together and deciding whether to follow the others to the lake, they heard a very strange noise. At first Sam thought it was the hum of a distant plane and Gilly thought it sounded like some sort of electronic music she had once heard on the TV. It seemed to be circling around them and they could almost follow the sound with their eyes. I say “almost” because as they looked they began to think they could see a sort of spinning light... Yes! now they were sure they could. It was like a small feathery Catherine wheel, and it was gradually slowing down.

Sam uttered the first incredulous words: “Hey, what on earth is that?” He had hardly finished speaking when he got an answer.

A very peculiar sort of voice – not quite animal, human, or mechanical – spoke to them. It was a bit like the wind blowing through a small opening, but intermittently blocked by a shutter or something. Amazingly, the words that came across made sense to the children.

“On Earth, on Earth. Still on Earth! Yes, yes,” it said.

The light had now stopped in front of them and was pulsating and glimmering with shades of brightness. Then they thought they could see two feathery ears, but weren’t sure. The wing-like objects were filling out and showing up their colours, like a butterfly as it emerges from its chrysalis. The children could see a reflection of the once live and proudly standing beech tree in the centre of the “thing”, but this was crossed by a narrow band of little holes which seemed to vibrate as it spoke.

“Ideas have wings, you know, and thoughts are things, even in your world,” it went on.

There was silence for a while from the astonished children.

“Who are you and what do you want?” croaked Gilly, who was by now very frightened and was holding Lucy’s hand quite tightly.

“I cannot see,” came the answer. “But you must be human beings; I’ve heard about you. It’s my first birthday in your big world. I do not yet have a human name, so you won’t be able to recognise who I am. You will have to come up with a name for me – one that I’d like of course – quickly, quickly.”

“This is Gillian and it’s her twelfth birthday today,” ventured Lucy, recovering a little. “And this is her party”.

There was another awkward silence.

“Alright. How about Firework!” grunted Tom, breaking the uneasiness.

“Well, I won’t go up in smoke you know!” was the reply to that.

“A mini UFO!” called Sam.

“ET2,” shouted Lucy, not to be outdone.

“But I’m a part of your Earth,” came the disappointed response. “I am as real as you are.”

A longer silence followed. Gilly closed her eyes tightly, and then, having found her voice and after thinking of the reflection of the big tree, she cried, “I name you Spriggy! Spriggy Sprite.”

“That’s it! I like it. That’s me,” shrieked the excited little sprite, chuckling merrily and starting to whirl around again. “Thank you, I’ll take it. Watch this!”

The four children blinked and rubbed their eyes, for there in front of them on the grass was a little tree imp. At first a bit hazy, but soon coming into focus, it was quite distinguishable among the twigs and dead leaves. The sphere of light still surrounded it very faintly, but it looked a bit like a miniature beech tree with legs instead of roots and arms like branches. It had hollow bark knobbls as sort of ears and two little branches growing out of its head like horns. It was

now jiggling up and down and chanting, “I am free! I am free like the birds and the beasts. I can move about. I might find a new house and home, but, of course, I will never forget my mother tree.”

Its voice was more human now. Seeing the amazement on the children’s faces, he said: “Can’t you guess? I am a tree spirit. Have you never seen your bathroom or kitchen reflected in soap bubbles? Well, I’m like a soap bubble in your mind, and my world, once this tree, is reflected in it. It’s all quite natural because the world of your minds *is* the spirit world and sometimes you see us and sometimes you don’t, but we’re all still there. A spirit by any other name is just as real, but you don’t know where to look for it and what to look for if you haven’t got its proper name.”

“Are you a boy or a girl?” called out Lucy, who could contain herself no longer.

“I am neither,” was the reply. After a short pause Spriggy went on: “Spirits are woven out of the threads of your thoughts, and ours of course. There are many different types, orders and ranks.”

“What kind of species are you then?” asked Sam, still a bit unbelieving.

“Well, I’m lower down than you and the animals, but I’m higher up than the flowers and ferns and much higher than the grass and the old rocks. We can only be seen by a higher species – that’s you. We can feel and imagine the vegetation and animals and people, but we can’t see them. My eyes are not just covered in twigs – I haven’t got any!”

“But you can hear us,” said Sam.

“Yes, I pick up the vibrations through this band across the front part of my head and the knobs each side are a part of it somehow. I can ‘feel’ where you are and what your world is like with the help of these sort of twigs,” explained Spriggy, bending his head up and down, and then slowly turning it right round like an owl.

“It’s like a sort of radar apparatus,” exclaimed Tom rather sarcastically.

“I knew you were there long before I said ‘Hello’,” Spriggy went on. “Now you can see all my new parts that have been forming since my old world died and I was separated from the tree. I was forced out into your atmosphere – a new life after life! Now I can move about like the animals and birds. What freedom! What choice!”

“Why are you all on your own?” asked Sam politely.

“Well, why don’t you sit down for a while and I’ll tell you a bit of my story. If you would like me to, of course,” added Spriggy rather shyly.

“Oh yes, we would,” answered the four children, all agreeing for once. They arranged themselves gratefully on the mossy ground. The little creature was now leaning against a nearby branch and looked funnier than ever with its legs crossed. Gilly loved his little trousers made of beech bark. She was sure that she had seen a similar figure in a picture once – a half-forgotten childhood memory. She also decided to think of Spriggy as a “him” rather than an “it” because “it” was too demeaning.

“You see,” Spriggy began, clearing his little sound box, “we were all worried about our tree for a long time before yesterday’s storm. We knew the prophecies our ancestors had handed down to us about our tree world having to end one day as others had done. Also we knew what we should try to do after we were tree-dead. A spirit can never really die of course, and there were stories that some of us stronger ones could enter a higher order straight away. But most of my friends hoped to find new forms and homes in the little animals that used to tap and tease and scratch around the outside of our tree. They would have fled during that fateful last storm.

“How did you ever get to know them,” questioned Lucy unbelievably.

“Well, some of us used to be able to take the form of what you called a ‘mini UFO’ – the form that I first appeared to you in, remember? Then we would slip out at night and wake up the younger animals, birds and even plants from their sleep to play with them.”

After a pause and a change of position, the little sprite went on: “Yes, the plants would open a petal or two or uncurl a leaf to feel our wings and the animals would cock an ear to hear us better. They all got to know us. But the rocks were so ancient and the grass that covers them so old we could never wake them up, even to tease them. They knew we were there, though, and we sometimes met them in our dreams. They all loved our tree anyway.”

Spriggy began to walk up and down, grunting a little. “What is past is still here, you know: solid and immovable. Our tree is still standing and growing somewhere.”

The children began to fidget. Gillian became braver: “But you’re not telling us what happened to all the other tree-sprites.”

“No, and how do you speak our language so well?” interrupted Tom, becoming suspicious of his own senses!

“It just happens,” replied our tree-sprite with a shrug. “I just express my thoughts in my own way and they seem to come out just right for you. It’s wonderful equipment this. Of course, since my tree fell down, this whole episode has been brought to you and devised by a great Earth-spirit whom you will one day know as Merlin. He visits our planet and your realm every 200 years and can materialize dreams and legends – me for example. We were told about him during our tree-life.”

A twig-like finger pointed towards Spriggy’s head and Gilly noticed that there was a tiny beech leaf on a smaller twig sprouting from its wrist.

“If I were in France the words would come out French, I expect,” said Spriggy. “Anyway, here goes. I’ll do my best,

Samuel and Gillian, to answer your question. You see, I even know your proper names now! So listen carefully. My older friend told me that if the time came to leave our tree and I got out quickly I would not be able to go into other trees as they had their own spirits, but I could go into some animals if they'd let me. Or, and this is a big 'or', it had become known lately that at one time homeless and wandering tree-sprites had often been able to make their new homes in human beings. It was much more difficult though, I was warned, but some were beginning to do it again now. I didn't believe it at first."

"Nor do I," muttered Tom, half to himself.

"Oh shut up," said Sam.

"Well, life had been getting very difficult as water supplies dwindled and our little Earth enemies, or devils as we called them (you call them woodworms) began invading and eating into our life and leaving drafty holes or blocking our life-lines. We were used to the branches swaying in the wind, but yesterday the creaking and swaying got so bad that we all assembled in the mid-part of the trunk. When the whole tree started toppling, we were so shocked and became so dizzy that most of us fainted there and then. I just remember the deafening explosion and horrible thump before I lost consciousness."

"When did you get out then?" asked Lucy excitedly, for Spriggy was silent for a few moments and was holding his head in his hands.

"When I came to, I found I was at the base of a gaping split and your airy world was all around me. I recognized the strange feeling because of the few times I had been out on my little jaunts before. The others who were with me must have gone elsewhere and the ones left inside would probably stay there in a dead faint until the tree was cut up or burnt – some till it began to rot – then they would leave. Time is nothing to us. Only the spaces we inhabit are real. But, of

course,” Spriggy finished with a little flourish, “all space is full of Mind-Stuff, you know.”

“What do you mean,” groaned Sam. “I give up.”

“Well, one thing we seem to know that you don’t,” retorted this rather exasperated little tree-sprite, standing still with it’s arms folded, “is that every action that you Humans do and every original thought that you have, is recorded and has it’s own little place somewhere in space. It is never lost,” Spriggy continued, ignoring the children’s grunts of disbelief, “but is always available and as fresh as when it first happened – you could get it back one day. We were taught this when learning about that great Earth spirit we all looked up to as a sort of God.”

“What does ‘original’ really mean?” enquired Gilly, feeling very puzzled.

“Yes, and is space full of invisible micro-chips?” offered Sam.

“I’m afraid I don’t know about that,” Spriggy answered shaking his head. “But you may be on the right track, and I suppose the word ‘original’ means something new and happening for the first time – in this case a thought or event coming from a single individual of whom there’s only one in existence anywhere.”

A long pause followed during which a lot of new thoughts were happening!

Then Lucy jumped up. Feeling a little sorry for this strange little visitor, she asked, “So what will you do now?”

“Well,” said Spriggy, looking embarrassed, “I’d like to try for a human dwelling, just as a guest to start with. I’ve been acquainting myself with your kind. Older children used to come and carve their names on the bark of our tree. It took them ages and we could hear the scraping and feel their presence. We thought they were trying to annoy us perhaps, or injure us, but now I understand. They wanted to proclaim themselves to the world and they thought that the names

would last forever on that ever-so solid trunk. Poor things, their names will vanish now. There was sometimes a funny shape between the names...”

“That was a heart,” piped up Lucy, pleased with herself.

Spriggy went on: “Freedom is all very well for a time but I feel that too much of it would make me desperate. We can only enter a new home if we are invited in and are really welcome, so you can see how difficult it all is.”

It began to perform a sort of swaying dance and to sing in a windy sort of fashion.

“Oh, for goodness sake cut that out,” Tom shouted. “You don’t have to do that!”

The dancing stopped abruptly and Spriggy turned in Tom’s direction.

“Will someone invite me in then?” Spriggy was now jumping up and down excitedly.

“No fear. Not me anyway,” growled Tom turning away decidedly.

“I thought I had a chance then,” groaned Spriggy. He sat down dejectedly.

“What will you do if you are not let in anywhere?” asked Lucy again.

“I’ll just wander around your world and then try another one or perhaps even scout around the galaxy for a while – I might get quite a nuisance in the end. I’d be lonely for years and years and years in your time.”

He looked pathetic again and Gillian asked cautiously what would happen if she let him in.

“Nothing much at first – you would hardly notice it. I’d come in, say, with that robin’s song, and I’d enter the special part on the right side of your brain that is a guest-house for the likes of us. There we can come and go and meet many other old and new spirits. I’d learn some Earth memories and discover some future predictions.”

“Would I change at all?” asked Gilly.

“You’d probably begin to love trees more and enjoy their company. Later, if you let me stay, you may become an expert on trees. Anyway you’d notice them more than your friends and get strength and comfort from them. They may talk to you. That’s all really.”

“Oh all right,” said Gilly, “I don’t mind. I like trees anyway. You can be my little tree-angel!”

But before the bargain had been struck Tom intervened violently by trying to catch Spriggy in his hands.

“What’s happened to you? I can’t see you anymore!” he complained as he darted around. “I want to show you to my science teacher before you go.”

After a short and puzzled silence, the children heard a faraway piping little voice calling, “Look for me, look for me. Try the violets.”

Searching the ground around the base of the old tree and inside the earth-filled hollows in the fallen trunk, the children came across a clump of wild violets. One of them was distinctly excited and was waving and shaking on its little stem. They bent over it and heard a whisper: “Don’t worry, we know each other, the violet and I. It doesn’t mind hiding me from you, Tom.”

Tom stood up and looked rather sheepishly away.

“If you *had* touched me, which was unlikely,” went on the voice, “my Earth-suit image would have cracked, split and then disintegrated. It’s like an astronaut’s space suit, you see. I’d then have gone up in smoke like the Firework name you nearly gave me!”

“How can you possibly fit in there anyway?” shouted Tom, angrily.

“Where there’s life I can join it,” came the reply. “Earth body size has nothing to do with it.”

“Oh no!” said Tom. “I’m fed up with all this fairy stuff; listen to that aeroplane over head – that’s real.”

“I’m just as real as that, only more so,” came the voice

from below. “Aeroplanes and cars are as much a part of nature as I am, and this violet, my tree and you. Aeroplanes are just human extensions – dead matter that you’ve organized; and remember whatever you think or say makes a wave which moves other waves and—”

“Stop!” cried Gilly. “Come out here again. Don’t be frightened of silly old Tom. We believe in you. We all saw you anyway. Come back and we won’t dissect you, or inspect you, or anything.”

Spriggy reappeared and turned nervously in Gilly’s direction.

Sam was definitely a space-travel fan and was now quite fascinated with this uncanny little creature. He was also slightly fearful for his sister.

“What will you do when you get inside your new home?” asked Sam.

“I’ll dance and play with the other Earth-sprites in her mind. They may be asleep but I’ll wake them up,” replied Spriggy.

“Who are they?” asked Gilly, rather anxiously.

“They’ve always been with you, but they don’t dance and sing much nowadays, as they are hardly ever called up. Like Rip Van Winkle, King Arthur and the Unicorns, they’ve been dozing for hundreds of years. Their day will come again though and I’ll speed it up. Your friends will soon all want a tree-sprite to live with them!” joked Spriggy.

The children were looking at each other and Gilly suddenly seemed rather shy, which was unusual for her.

“Listen everyone,” whispered Lucy. “I can hear the others returning. We haven’t had the birthday cake yet and that’s what they’re coming back for – and to sing ‘Happy Birthday’ to Gilly.”

“Will your name be on it?” enquired the tree-sprite, very perky again now.

“I think so,” replied Gilly.

“Your name on the cake won’t vanish, you know,” Spriggy told her. “It will be enjoyed and shared by all your friends. It will provide energy and nourishment to every living part of your body, soon including me. I’ll be celebrating *my* birthday as I settle in my new abode. A world within a world. Don’t be frightened.”

“For goodness sake hurry up then,” said Tom, impatiently.

Little Spriggy was twirling again and as he spun around, the children could hear the word “yippee!” repeated in an excited and high-pitched voice.

The tree-sprite had vanished again, and they heard a robin singing above them.

TWO

SOME MODERN EARTH SPRITES

After finishing the birthday cake, the children were set the challenge of a Quiz Trail. They were each given a map of the forest-park and eight questions to go with it. The number of each question was also on the map, marking where the answer should be found.

They set off in pairs and Gilly and Lucy were together... Of course!

Their first location on the map (they all started from different points) was the little bridge over a stream joining the two lakes. They were studying their first question when Gilly began to sing a little rhyme.

*“Eighty logs,
before your chaps were capable
Of making this bridge.
And it’s natural!”*

“How many logs in the bridge? That’s our question,” said

Lucy, amazed at her friend. “You’ve got the answer. Where did that poem come from?”

“It must be Spriggy,” Gilly replied, feeling as surprised as Lucy. “It just came out. Let’s write the answer down anyway and get on to the next one.”

Following the map they soon came to a clearing among the trees. There was a tall, stone cross on a rocky bank that could be seen from the big house across the valley. The next question was: ‘Who and where are Hadji and Thora’. They read the inscriptions on the base of the cross, and finding no clues there, the girls peered into the gaps between the trees.

“Nothing from Spriggy?” piped up Lucy.

Gilly was staring at something – spell-bound.

“What are you looking at?” asked Lucy.

“One of the strangest creatures I’ve ever seen,” whispered Gillian. “I can’t really explain it.” She then burst into another rhyme:

*“Tons of wood and slate and stone
To make the house he loved and owned,
And it’s natural!”*

Gilly then made a big attempt to describe what she was seeing: “A funny little man holding a mask with a house painted on it over his face. He’s wearing a wide hat which looks like a roof. There’s a tiny cat at his heels and... Oh yes – a little pony following him.” She became silent, watching with fascination.

“I can’t see anything,” complained Lucy. “Point to them for me.”

“Spriggy thinks, and so do I, that if you close your eyes and then look again, and keep looking, you may be lucky,” answered Gilly excitedly. “Spriggy is telling me that some animals who know and love a person and who are loved in return, join up with them again after their Earth-death. Some

have been known to pine away and die, if they lose a master or mistress.”

After this our Gilly began to see more and more of these little hominoid figures coming into the clearing. They joined hands and danced in a circle.

Amazed, she noticed that they all had masks on and big hats. Some of the masks seemed quite fixed to their faces and depicted a variety of occupations and hobbies. The hats were all different shapes and sizes.

There were boat-fanciers, car and train fans, clothing and money freaks, jewellery-worshippers and computer buffs. There were society bigwigs, top-heavy with glittering badges, and even figures with furniture and sports gear hiding their faces. Outside the circle bookworms were crawling about under the weight of their books, and music-fans, with CDs for masks and trumpet-hats, were leaping over them.

All these little hominoids, male and female, were parading and dancing around with their various paraphernalia, disguising their heads.

Meanwhile Gilly, as though enchanted, was chanting again:

*“These are the newest little spirit-forms
Dryads and Naiads, the water-nymphs
Are rarely seen today.
But you’ll notice these techinoids more and more,
In airports, car parks, towns and stores
They’ll tease and play and co-exist.
Fauns and centaurs have gone away but...”*

Lucy interrupted her suddenly. “I can see something!” she shouted excitedly. “There’s a circle which is moving round and there are separate parts in it.” Lucy paused. “Oh goodness! Now I can make out two figures – one with bright blue stained overalls and a model car mask seeming to cover his head; the other one has a posh, white skirt that matches a

dream car painting which is covering her face. I can even see a little dog trotting up and down in the middle.” Lucy had had a dog once. “It’s all so small and hazy though. Whatever are they Gilly?”

But Gilly couldn’t answer yet. She was wondering whether her brother Sam might one day give rise to an image like this with a sort of jet-headed mask and winged hat. But she knew that Sam had many other passions as well as being an ardent aircraft fan.

While she pondered, who should appear in the centre of the circle but her new tree-sprite itself in its Earth-gear. He immediately started to hold forth to the girls in its quaint and husky little voice:

*“Fauns and centaurs are out of fashion
But the times have made these new creatures more
bold.*

*Tons of iron and silver and gold
Oil and wood and paper and cotton
To make and run these artefacts
To which you humans are so attached
They’re part of people and natural.”*

Spriggy shrugged, then bowed politely, performed a little jig, and disappeared.

“I saw our Spriggy again. But what does it all mean?” whined Lucy, who was really quite upset and very confused by now.

Gillian suddenly felt reassured and with an effort she turned to Lucy with sympathy: “We think,” she said, for Spriggy had already become a part of herself, and speaking very calmly and carefully. “We think that they are sort of ‘offshoot-sprites’ or energy-forms from human personalities who develop a life of their own. Usually they’re under stricter control and should be properly merged and set within their

modern hosts. I think our Spriggy, the little Dryad, has been rather mischievous. It seems to have met and heard about many entities and Earth-spirits since he joined me. I knew nothing of most of these before. It's only fun anyway and not frightening like Halloween."

"But Gilly, we haven't got the answer to our next question yet," retorted Lucy, still feeling a bit uneasy. When they looked back at the spectacle there was nothing there. It had all vanished and the grass was just itself again, greening the empty gap.

But there was a whispering in Gilly's mind and aloud she murmured: "We are to look on the ground somewhere behind us. Come on!"

After a short search in the undergrowth they found two graves – one very small and one bigger. They had been hidden by outcrops of rock. The headstones declared them to be in memory of Hadji the cat and Thora the pony, both well loved and long gone. The girls looked at each other with many thoughts in their minds until Gilly sprang into action again. "Let's write them down anyway and get cracking," she said, "or we'll lose any lead we may have."

"We've only been here three minutes," said Lucy, looking at her watch. "I noticed the time when we were reading the inscriptions on the cross."

It had seemed ages, but they were soon running to the next number on their map and were still making good time.

Their next question was: "How many birch trees around Little Heaven?" When they arrived at what they thought was the right place, they couldn't find anywhere called "Little Heaven".

"Is this the right spot, do you think?" questioned Lucy, looking around. "Come on Gilly, let's have some more rhymes from Spriggy!"

"Oh dear!" replied Gilly. "I'm looking at our map the wrong way round!" Laughing, she turned it up the right way

and they ran a bit further to the left, towards the west end of the park. They soon came upon an old stone seat. It had a built-up surround and the area around it was landscaped with care. This was where Aubrey De Vere used to meditate, they read, and where famous poets often joined him.

As they looked around at the grand collection of trees, Gilly was chanting again:

*“Sixteen birches surround this place
To guard ‘Little Heaven’.
You too, if you like, can here meditate.”*

Lucy was busy scribbling down the number they needed. When she looked up there was Gilly bent down and looking at the upside down world through her legs!

“What are you doing?” she called.

“Spriggy suggested I had a look to find out what new things I could see like this. Upside down is sometimes the right way round,” she proclaimed. “Oh Lucy! You’ll never guess what I can see.” Her voice was squeaky with excitement.

“Tell me, tell me,” implored Lucy, exasperated.

“I *knew* I’d seen Spriggy somewhere before – it’s all coming back to me now. I can see the book of fairy stories my mother is reading to me... I can see the open page with the picture of elves or sprites and leprechauns or something and Spriggy’s there with them! My mother looks much younger and I’m sitting beside her – the sky is blue and the sun is warm. The colours look different somehow,” she mused.

“Your voice sounds funny,” said Lucy. “Like a very little girl. And anyway, the sky is grey and dull.”

“But I’m there,” said Gilly. “I can even smell some roses nearby.”

“There are no roses out yet,” corrected Lucy again.

“It’s all there still, somewhere in my mind,” insisted our favoured Gilly.

“Let me try,” said Lucy. But at that moment four more of the children arrived at Little Heaven to answer their next question. They were working through the questions another way round.

“What the heck are you playing at?” laughed Sam, who was one of them. “That won’t help you.”

Lucy and Gill soon straightened up, and Lucy came to their own defence: “We’ve got three answers already,” she said. “Come on Gilly!”

The spell was broken and Gilly saw things in the present again. She felt suddenly a bit embarrassed. “We’ve come across some of the strangest things,” she explained. “It’s almost been like a treasure-hunt, really.”

“We’ve only done two,” scowled Tom, who was with Sam. “You must have a different map to be so quick.”

“Only an upside down one!” joked Gillian as she followed Lucy.

“They’ll be saying next that Spriggy helped them!” Tom muttered quietly to Sam. “I smell more hocus-pocus afoot.”

The girls, with Spriggy’s help, soon solved the rest of the questionnaire and then ran back to the big, fallen tree which was the finishing point. They were first back and no one else was there. Gilly’s mother had just taken some picnic things back to the car – not expecting anyone to finish so soon. They put their maps on the tree and decided to go back and meet the others, to find out how they were faring and who would be in next.

Two more girls came second. Later the rest of the children got a bit fed-up and decided to finish anyway. They were getting tired and it was starting to rain. Once again, mother was not at the tree, and Gilly had a sudden idea – perhaps from Spriggy. “Let’s shelter in the hedge and have a rest,” she called.

The hedge was really a thick border of old shrubs and squat trees, which extended all round the park. Inside there were two old, ivy-covered, stone gateposts, leading into the big house. They were quite hidden by overgrowth and long out of use. The children all dived in. They found a small clearing between the twisted and gnarled branches, and sat down.

After a few minutes huddled together, the silence and gloom of the place seemed to affect them in a strange sort of way. In fact they felt very cosy and relaxed and the best of friends; forgetting all their quarrels and differences. They each felt themselves to be a part of their surroundings. The winding and curling roots and the smell of the earth and leaves struck them as being familiar and comforting.

They had unwittingly entered a “G-field Earth-awareness” dimension and for a few moments they felt almost joined up with what one could only explain as a universal mind. They dared to think this to themselves because of the expanding and awesome feeling of love they were picking up. They started to hum some tunes that they all knew and to sway to the rhythms. They began to feel sleepy but still very happy. The remains of Gilly’s birthday cake inside each of them was having its effect.

How long they had been there no one knew, until Sam looked towards the opening through which they’d entered. Suddenly he shouted, “Hey, it’s getting dark outside. We’d better go – Mum will be frantic, and mad with us.”

It was almost the magic hour of twilight when they emerged from their hidey-hole, and straight away they heard voices calling them.

I’m afraid the consternation among the parents was very real. They’d driven their cars right into the park centre and one of the fathers had even threatened to call the police! Their poor Mother was beside herself with worry and had forgotten all about the prizes for the Quiz Trail.

In the car on the way home, having said goodbye to their friends, and after Sam and Gilly's mother had finished scolding them, they all calmed down. Then Gilly came out with her thoughts.

"I'm glad that dear old tree blew down, Mum. It was a very special one for me, you know. Something new is already working in my mind. When I grow up I'm going to help save more trees because of that one."

"Good, I'm glad to hear it, dear," said her mother. "I expect that's why you all stayed behind so long, when we were off feeding the ducks!"

Her mother had picked a few twigs from the outspread branches of the fallen giant. As soon as they got home, Sam and Gillian asked for them and a jar to put them in. They filled it with water and stood it on the windowsill, hoping that, against all the odds, leaves might still come out for their last spring.

After a few days Gilly moved them to the mantelpiece over the large, open fireplace. "Perhaps the warmth will help," she explained to her mother.

Still the buds kept tightly shut.

One evening, Sam and Gilly were sitting on the carpet in front of the coal and log fire. Gilly had washed her hair and was drying it and staring into the glowing embers below the flames. There the peeling bark of the burning wood and the dense bulk of the ancient coals were rearing up and hollowing out their fiery shapes.

"Look Sam, what does that remind you of?" She pointed to a spot in the slowly dying fire, and there they saw again the feathered and luminous wheel of their original tree-sprite before they gave him a proper name. For an instant the great tree was reflected inside the sphere.

"That's Spriggy!" said Sam.

No sooner had he uttered the word than the image seemed to disappear. Gilly got up and lifted the twigs down

from the mantelpiece. She looked intently at the hard, tight little buds.

“Why are you doing that?” said Sam. “They’re dead, you know.”

“I remembered how little Spriggy-Sprite looked when he danced for us after we named him, and how he leaned against the branch folding his arms and talked to us. Then I heard Spriggy speak to me again, from inside my head.”

“What did he say?” pressed Sam, intrigued again by now.

“I was told that the buds needed a last feel of the sun and air to coax them out of their longer than usual sleep. What’s more, I’m being told what magic plant essence to put in their water.”

“Like a sort of aspirin you mean?” queried Sam.

“Well, I’m to find some box leaves, periwinkles and, if possible, a four-leaved clover. But I must ask them all politely before I pick them so they’ll guess the importance of my mission. Then I must soak them in a little water before stirring with my finger. I must stand the buds in this elixir. A few drops of dew would help as well,” finished Gillian, thoughtfully.

“You’d have to be up very early for that,” smiled Sam. I could set my alarm clock for you. But you’ll never get all that done by yourself; I might help you,” yawned Sam.

Outside the house the next morning, when their mother went out to hang up the washing, she stopped in her tracks. She was looking in wonder and amazement at a vase of unfolding and opening beech leaves. They seemed almost transparent, a delicate, light green as they burst, newly born, from their brown and loosening sepals.

“A marvel,” she said to herself, for Sam and Gilly had gone back to bed, exhausted after their morning search.

The children's first quest for the revival of LIFE had been successful. They had rekindled the spark at the heart of Spriggy's twigs again.



THREE

A RECURRING NIGHTMARE EXPELLED

When Gillian and Sam, with Tom and Lucy, had been under Merlin's spell in the Irish Country Park and experienced the strange materialisation of Spriggy, they seemed to have grown up a bit. It was six weeks since the giant tree came crashing down, and Gillian, uncharacteristically, was being beset with disturbing dreams. These troubled her for a while, but then a much worse thing developed – she had a full-blown nightmare that made her wake up in a sweat.

At first she seemed to be back in the hidey-hole with her friends, huddled together in the thick border shrubbery around the Country Park. The place, you remember, where all had felt a wonderful feeling of togetherness between each other and even with the foliage and little branches of the bushes that surrounded them. There had been a sense of affection and belonging which Gilly had found exciting but slightly unsettling. However, in these new nightmares the place had taken on frightening features.

What Gilly was dreaming now was very different but very

real. She felt that the natural growth around her was no longer benevolent but was encroaching upon her, pulling her downwards, stifling her. She awoke spluttering, and fears of suffocation remained with her. Her mother and brother were sympathetic and very worried. They fixed a visit to their doctor, but to little avail.

After this, an unfortunate event had the effect of making things much worse. They were passing their local churchyard one day when they noticed a police van and a group of people round a grave which was being dug up. On making enquiries they learnt that the police were reinvestigating a local murder and needed to examine the body buried there. They hurried away and Gillian thought not much more about it, or so she imagined. But that night she had the first of a new and recurring nightmare. In these she stole back to the churchyard and looked into the empty grave. She was very shocked by what she saw: it was her own face looking up at her from within. She woke up with a scream. Her family were becoming desperately worried.

Then, at last, when Gilly dozed off one night through sheer exhaustion, she experienced yet another type of dream sequence. It changed everything. In this dream she saw what she guessed was the former Spriggy. But though he was skipping about in the same sort of way, he looked different. He had a very loose tunic over his knobbly body and his little arms and legs seemed much more spindly. His face took on changing expressions and instead of leafy twigs growing from his head he wore a jaunty hat which he kept doffing. He had stopped dancing and was giving a little bow.

“I’ve come to rescue you,” he squeaked. “Merlin gave me this funny body and dressed me up to enter your dream world. He’s worried about you and things are getting really uncomfortable in that special compartment of your brain where I now reside. Don’t go into the churchyard in your dream tonight, but sit down and listen to me.” So instead,

Gilly dreamed she saw a low section of wall beside the churchyard gate and sat down with relief. Spriggy then began.

“Phew! Am I glad to get away for a while from the disturbance and jostling going on in your brain – your subliminal self, as Merlin calls it. He says that for a girl of your age and sensitivity, this turmoil is quite natural and just a painful phase of growing up. But you need extra help.”

“I don’t want to grow up,” announced Gilly. She was pleased to find she could actually converse with this little creature.

“I didn’t want to be twelve at all,” she went on. “I’ll never be ready to make my own decisions in the sort of adult world I keep hearing about. I’ll feel like crying on the night of my thirteenth birthday.”

Spriggy had jumped over the wall and, sitting on a tombstone, appeared to be deep in thought or perhaps listening to its master.

“Merlin has decided,” Spriggy said, suddenly looking at Gilly, “that as you are growing up, you are getting a problem with the idea of death. And also with the ‘Mother Nature’ image. Both of these should be friendly and without fear. He says that everyone’s subconscious memories are full of many scary relics from your ancestral beliefs. They should have been superseded but you sometimes have to contend with their roots and tendrils which can clutch at civilised humans – especially in adolescence. That’s all I have to say today.”

“You can’t leave me here,” said Gilly, seeing Spriggy stand up and start to bow out. “You’ve not told me what to do.”

“I will be back in your dreams tomorrow night. I can’t remember much at a time, you see... But, ah! I forgot that Merlin said to tell you to ask Sam to lend you his book about the Greek Gods and Goddesses. He thinks you will then understand better what he’s talking about. Oh yes, and by the way, your dream-self played tricks on you, Gillian. You

forgot, didn't you, that when you first passed the churchyard and you witnessed the police exhumation that day, you also noticed a kitten playing near the grave. It crossed your mind that it could fall in and not get out when the place was empty later. Your subconscious didn't forget this detail. When you looked into the grave, in your nightmare, you withdrew so fast you didn't see the kitten that your double in the grave was clutching and which it had just rescued. If you look again now you will see the kitten leap out and race across the yard. Then you'll see your double's straining arms as it climbs out of the grave. I'm off now, these daft shoes are killing me!"

Gilly woke up next morning feeling much more settled and with a huge feeling of relief. She remembered to get the recommended book from Sam as soon as she could.

That day, being a Saturday, Gillian learned more about Greek and Roman mythology than ever before – she could see there were some connections. She found out that the month of June was named after Juno, chief goddess and wife and sister of Jupiter, King of heaven, and that she, the Queen, was concerned with all aspects of women's lives.

Their Greek names were Hera and Zeus, and Hera's daughter was the Goddess of Youth. Gilly liked that, but the discovery that the couple's parents, Rhea and Kronos, were two giant Titans, she did *not* like. These two ruled the world back in the mists of time and though Rhea was a fertility goddess, Kronos, her partner, was sometimes known to eat his children! Then she read that their parents, in turn, were Gaia, goddess of the Earth, who sprang from primordial chaos, and Uranus, the Sky-God, who was her son and partner and controlled the sun and rain.

When she stopped to think about this new knowledge, Gilly felt it was not really helping her much. But Sam encouraged her to read a bit more. She was glad she did, because the next bit about Demeter and her daughter, Persephone, rang a bell

for Gilly. Demeter, or Ceres, was the goddess of Agriculture, and a sister and consort of Zeus – another brother was Hades, or Pluto, God of the underworld. Gilly now remembered the story of how the beautiful Persephone was snatched by Pluto and carried down into his cavern under the Earth. Gilly shuddered, but went on to recall how Demeter had pleaded with her brother to release Persephone and had attained a compromise: Persephone would spend half the year with Pluto and the other half with her mother back on Earth, when it would be spring again. The thought of winter in the underworld made Gilly feel a bit frightened once more but she trusted Spriggy’s promise of help.

The next night Gilly’s little tree-sprite appeared again, sitting on the same gravestone, and she settled down in her place on the wall.

“Here we are then – I told you I’d be here,” Spriggy chanted in his thin, high-pitched little voice. “Merlin wants you to get out your King Arthur books tomorrow and read up again the story of Galahad’s adventure in the Abbey churchyard. You have to keep it carefully in your minds.”

“I expect he means the one where Galahad, one of Arthur’s bravest and noblest knights, was asked by some monks to rid them of highly disturbing noises coming from a particular tomb,” Gilly began. “When they took the top off, an evil spirit shot out. It would have attacked Galahad had it not seen angels surrounding him. I think it ended with the monks being told to remove the body, which must have belonged to a false Christian – perverted, or something like that – and bury it somewhere else. Anyway, they had no more trouble from their graveyard. Are you going to tell me now that Merlin wants us to make use of this episode?”

“You’ve got it! Clever you. Yes, it’ll take your mind off

some of your own bad dreams. I'm going to give you Merlin's 20th Century version of that same story." The squeaky voice sounded more normal now, but Spriggy complained, saying: "The Master fixes my voice, you know. I think he slips up sometimes though. Anyhow, as long as you can understand me, it's OK. Tomorrow you'll have to tell your brother to see that his father's Camcorder thing is in good working order, for you will be needing it soon. Now, Merlin will use my voice to tell you this new story – he's afraid I'll get it wrong or forget bits. I might have a little doze while he holds forth, but my lips will be moving. You will probably wake up before the story's finished and will also forget many details, but no matter – Merlin has arranged for an audio-tape to be made."

"Where on Earth could we find this tape, for heavens sake?" moaned Gilly.

"Calm down, for in my next and last dream visit I will tell you. Anyway it will finish up safe in your subconscious, where I hang out as well. By the way, you recalled that first adventure of Galahad so well, it must have taken root in your mind – but you *did* forget about his special shield.

"Before I relate the story to you, I need to remind you that ancient Gods had different names – Greek and Roman. So it is today – Merlin has given modern names to Arthurian characters from ancient Britain. So Sir Galahad is "Tayar", whose full name – I must get this right – is Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit and scientist who, so Merlin declares, united science and spirituality in a new and spectacular way in the 1950s.

"Well, one evening, just a few years ago, Galahad, now called Tayar of course, was asked to investigate and perhaps to exorcise some evil spirits in an old graveyard. People in a nearby village had been frightened and mentally distraught by strange noises coming from the location of a certain grave, covered by a large stone slab. The sounds reported were cries of battle, shouts of terrible rage and even loud curses. A few

villagers had seen fleeting apparitions of fearful figures seeming to be chased across the yard.

“Tayar agreed to visit the place with two hefty grave-diggers and a priest from the neighbouring church who was a colleague and an Arthurian scholar. Before the slab was lifted or the digging begun, this colleague had asked an assistant to operate a projector, which he had installed in the ruined Abbey nearby. The priest was so apprehensive about what would happen, having guessed the power of the evil there, that he had even persuaded Tayar, whom he greatly admired, to carry with him an imitation metal shield – now to be used as a screen for the projector. He explained, with a playful smile, that it would be a substitute for the famous shield that the legendary knight, Galahad, had been presented with by an ancient monk.

“The priest remembered the myth that the shield had come to Britain with Joseph of Arimathea (who had given his tomb to the crucified Christ) and the red cross had been made upon it as he lay dying. He had been bleeding profusely. He dipped his fingers in his blood and drew the cross, saying it would remain bright as ever and that only the best and the last of his lineage should own and use it. This was our Celtic inheritance, the priest thought – the intermingling of the Godhead with all the glories of the Earth. Now, he knew his friend Tayar to be a Man of God, a seer and a scientist who loved the world, so the priest gave him the shield. Fitted to the back of the shield was a leather strap and Tayar slipped it on his arm. He stood fearless over the grave.

“The diggers, having removed the last of the earth from the grave, were now loosening the screws on the coffin. Tayar asked his friend to stand well back and then he began to pray. He sought the co-operation of the Cosmic *Kristomega*.

“Suddenly the coffin lid began to shudder and bow upwards. The diggers scrambled out in horror just before the

lid burst open and all hell broke loose. With a shriek amid the loud rush of foul air, the evil force shot out. The stench of death was overwhelming. Looking up, watchers saw for a moment a distorted human face, with a look of sheer hatred in the terrible, fiery, half-opened eyes. The bared teeth glistened hideously.”

(Poor Gilly was tossing and turning in her bed as she dreamed these horrific events.)

“Though the priest had feared the worst, the shock was total and he covered his face, but he had been able to give the signal to his man with the projector. Tayar had raised his metal shield and the beam from the old abbey chapel fell on the shiny surface. The chosen scene showed up brightly. It was a waving mass of spring-like natural growth – unfurling ferns, branches of young, green leaves and the bright eyes of many creatures peering out between them. Then, the whole moving pattern seemed to arrange itself into an image of something, or someone, that caused the fiend with the evil face, hovering above, suddenly to disintegrate till it faded and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

“The priest who had designed the projected patterns, but not the last development, was sure that the evil spirit would have attacked Tayar if it had been able to see him. He now called back the gravediggers and they all advanced and peered into the coffin.

“Inside were two skeletons, and both of them had been armed. There were rotting belts round their waists and over their shoulders, where weapons had been attached. Two rusty daggers could be seen and a cutlass, or short sword, was wedged between the sets of bones.

“The priest read aloud the inscription on the tombstone which gave the date of the burial as 1690. It identified the occupier as an unknown soldier found in the field after the Battle of the Boyne.

“Tayar realised that a burial team must have mistakenly

assumed that these two both came from Limerick, or nearby, and took the badly disfigured bodies back to the village they thought was most likely.

“While the others were puzzling over the bodies, Tayar proposed an answer to the mystery. The burial party, he suggested with a slight smile, certainly did not mean to include a member of the enemy with the bodies of their own men. But in times of war mistakes are made and perhaps this was such a one.

“Putting it all together, he saw that the two in this grave were on opposite sides and had been fighting it out in the spirit world for over 300 years! The bossy, opposing, religious and political parties had built up to the awful hatred which you have just witnessed. As Tayar finished speaking he said a blessing over the coffin. The priest stood silent, his hands clasped in prayer, and the two gravediggers, having returned to look into the grave, were still staring, uncertain what to do. Tayar directed them to remove all accoutrements of war from the coffin, straighten out the tangled skeletons, and then replace the coffin lid and the soil over it.

“After this had been done, Tayar knelt and examined the rusted weapons beside the grave. He found a few seeds stuck in crevices of the thrown-out relics of brutal conflict. Standing up, he dropped the seeds into the hand of one of the men and with innate Gallic charm suggested the tiny bits of dormant life be planted in their gardens. It would be a surprise to see what would blossom from the long-delayed growth.

“Tayar now retrieved his shield and held it up. When he did so the projectionist turned on the power and a beam lit up the metal surface again. This time a new image showed up. There was the blue and brown globe of the Earth as seen from the moon and, superimposed upon it, a Grail-like chalice. Sliding up from inside and over the edge of this vessel was a serpent, which dropped to the ground and slithered away. Tayar lowered the shield.

“After the gravediggers had put back the stone slab, the party started to move away. Tayar assured them that they would have no more trouble from the graveyard. The trapped spirits lingering round the bones would now be free and at peace. He explained that once the evil possession had been banished, there would be time again for memories and feelings of love and warmth to surround the bones.”

This is the end of Merlin’s 20th century version of the old myth, as relayed by Spriggy to the sleeping Gillian.

FOUR

THE GRAVEYARD CHALLENGE

The next day Sam and Gilly discussed the implications of the latest dreams and the possibility of their enacting the Galahad story themselves. Gilly had little memory of Merlin's version, related by Spriggy, but she remembered that Tayar came into it, and also that she had been told there would be further instructions on where to find the tape recording of it and what to do next. All would be revealed, she hoped, that night.

While Gilly was showing Sam where she and Spriggy had sat in her dream she spied something on the ground of the Churchyard. It was an odd-shaped piece of beech mast, and when Gilly picked it up she gasped aloud, daring to believe it was Spriggy's discarded little shoe.

That night her dream was the clearest yet. Spriggy seemed to remember perfectly his instructions from his master and Gilly, surprisingly, recalled it all word for word when she awoke.

She told Sam later that it looked as though they had to do a bit of exorcism for themselves and that it would help other

young people as well. They had to find a map of the town of Limerick – the map she now knew to be hidden in the porch of their own church. It would show them where to go to find an ally of Merlin’s who lived in a side street and kept a small music and cassette store.

There they would be presented with the audio tape that Spriggy had promised Gilly during that second dream. She added that the excited little tree sprite had hinted mysteriously that there would also be other very important tapes for them there – *The Kristomega Files* – and these K Files would start them off on their new project.

When Gilly, in her dream, had asked Spriggy what these contained, he had been silent for a while. Then, feeling the girl’s frustration and having consulted the venerable wizard, Spriggy came out with this answer which Gilly now attempted to pass on to Sam. The tapes would contain some crucial pronouncements by Tayar, whom Spriggy now named as the modern day Galileo as well as Sir Galahad! These revelations would deal with the very death of death itself, and present a brand new viewpoint for the 21st Century – like seeing the Earth from space and Christianity from a strangely different angle.

Thankful that it was still holiday time, Sam and Gilly wasted no time starting on their hunt. In the church porch they found the map of Limerick’s back-alleys and streets hidden in a stone niche behind a large notice giving times of services. After studying the crumpled page they set off by bus to Limerick. Reaching their destination proved more difficult, even with all the map arrows, but eventually they arrived at a little store marked on the map with a big cross. It was named “The Music and Voice Studio” and in smaller letters underneath were the words, “The Wizard Collection”. On the door it said, “No recordings or exchanges without appointment”. The door was opened for them, however, and a distinguished-looking middle-aged man with a few white

hairs greeted them. He was tall but with a slight stoop and he introduced himself as Mr X. They were invited to sit down on some antique chairs placed beside rows of CDs and cassettes on the shelves. The youngsters felt an element of magic in the atmosphere around them, though Mr X was in normal clothes.

Their host now took a cassette from his store and handed it to Gilly, telling her it was the one Spriggy had promised her. It was labelled “The Unquiet Grave” and turning it over she noticed the name “Claude” on the cover in small print. He also gave her an envelope which, by the feel of it, contained two transparencies and a folded piece of paper.

Mr X sat opposite them and smiled. “I was expecting you of course, and I know your names – Gillian and your brother Samuel.”

“Are you one of Merlin’s special helpers?” asked Gilly, who was very impressed that he knew her name.

“You could say that. I used to give talks about your Tayar at conferences back in England in my past life. I’m supposed to have left that stage on Earth, but I can still assist Merlin at times in his secret dens.”

“Can you give us some help then, about how to use this tape?” asked Gilly.

“It is to inspire you both to get cracking on your own version with a camcorder. Merlin has suggested you get your young brother, Jonathan, to help you too.”

“He’d be no good,” said Sam, horrified. “He’s much too bent on mischief to concentrate and do what we want.”

“But he likes flying kites, I’ve heard,” said Mr X. “This could be useful!”

“He *is* a bit of a tearaway,” said Gilly. “But, yes, come to think of it, his gas balloons do have evil enough faces on them to mimic a devil!”

“There you are, you see. He would probably love to cooperate with you and enter into the spirit of your eerie tale.

Merlin also told me of a very old graveyard and Abbey ruins, not far from your home, which he thought would be a good setting for your film. I've another map for you."

"Where are those K Files that Gilly dreamt about?" asked Sam, eagerly.

"Ah! Those special videos inspired by the knight of the Grail Quest, the new Renaissance man, the breakthrough man. He left many words of hope that still wait for their time. In the files his meanings are linked to ways of rekindling the flame."

Then the mysterious Mr X rose to go to a small cupboard, which he opened. Inside were five brightly coloured CDs, and printed on white paper hanging from the top of the shelf was the title – *The Kristomega Files*. He took out number One and gave it to Sam. "Play this with your sister," he said, "and practise a few things suggested there before you start to make your own recorded production."

When the visitors left they knew that Mr X might not always be in residence. They'd been told that when they were ready for number 2 of the K Files, Gilly would be contacted again in her dream by Spriggy – minus one shoe perhaps!

FIVE

A STRANGE GAME AND PREPARATIONS

When Sam and Gilly arrived home from Limerick, the first thing they did, with their father's permission, was to load the interactive *Kristomega File* into his computer. Jonathan insisted on being in on it too. Although at first he called it "really cool", he gave up later when he found it was beyond him.

Jonathan, seven years younger than Sam, was almost like an only child – a bit spoilt!

It was, however, rather a lengthy and demanding session. So when it was over they pledged themselves to play it again later. They also played the tape Mr X had given them containing Merlin's version of the original Galahad adventure that Gilly had first seen in her dream, and agreed that the story of the two still battling skeletons would be an ideal theme for their coming attempt to make a video drama.

Jonathan enjoyed that story very much and seemed full of crazy and not so crazy proposals about the part he could play in their video. He was eager to start but Sam explained how

there was much to do first. They had to get, with the help of a parish priest, the permission of the police and the blessing of the keepers of the old Churchyard, fix transport back and forth by their father, and arrange the loan of his new camcorder. They would also surely need to hire some more equipment, including lighting and a slide projector. They would have to sort out some costumes for the characters and, of course, persuade a few friends to come out with them for the day.

Their parents were very generous with help and support, and when Sam and Gilly had digested the contents of the tape, they put their minds to their task for the next day.

Gilly reminded the others that Mr X had told them that before they started on the video drama, they must have completed Level One of *The Kristomega File*.

“Oh no,” whinged Jonathan. “Let’s just get on with the video!” Luckily for him, the others insisted they reboot the computer and carry on with the interactive CD. Merlin wanted Sam and Gilly to learn something about teamwork and what unlikely members can contribute before embarking on their all-important video project.

Sam, Gilly and Jonathan found their performing little puppets moving about in shady, virtual reality woodland. Spriggy materialised as in Gilly’s dream and walked down the path in front of them in his jaunty way. They noticed he now had both shoes fitting comfortably and guessed that Merlin must have listened to his complaints! These essential basic supports of Spriggy’s very twiggy legs were made from beech mast.

They followed this little figure through an archway of fine looking trees in full leaf that closed far up over their heads. They shortly came to a fine specimen of a tree set in a clearing. Spriggy stopped and pointed at it. Then, in his own strange voice he told them that this was a prime and ancient tree of his species and one Merlin called an archetypal object. He

explained that each of his kind had an inner image of this tree and most of them made regular visits to pay homage to it.

“That was where I met Merlin for the first time,” he disclosed in tones of awe.

The player’s interactive extensions were now gathered round the tree, admiring its huge, spreading branches.

“According to Merlin,” Spriggy carried on assuredly, “trees are very important in the lives of all humans and animals.” He ended up by announcing, with his arms outstretched, that the children, himself and the tree were all different parts of the same creation.

Spriggy now drew their attention to a deep rift at the base of the trunk of this tree where a leafy new sapling was covering a small entrance. He challenged the three players to see how far they could reach inside. The one who reached the furthest would find a key and a clue to their next move.

“When you successfully gain access to the second level of the game,” Spriggy went on, “you will realise that each successive level reveals a dramatically wider perspective of the previous subjects. The tree will, in fact, be revealed as an image inside a brain, and eventually you will find yourselves actually walking around the endless labyrinths of a human brain!”

There they would learn about the powerful role that subconscious dreams and stories can play. Drawing on stored memories and instincts, they affect waking behaviour.

“I know this,” he said, “as one of you players will happily admit, I hope, to being my willing host.” Spriggy smiled, and disappeared.

After some hesitation, Sam and Gilly attempted to take up Spriggy’s challenge. Brushing aside the new growth, they found they could manipulate the figures – a bit, anyway. When they tried to reach into the crevice though, they could not get very far in, even with an outstretched arm, which they found was moveable.

“Surely you can make these things lie down as well,” Jonathan called out to Sam. Fiddling with his joystick, he shouted, “Let me do it, big brother. I’ll show you.”

Next, probably by a lucky combination of moves, his little game figure fell flat on the ground, front downward, accompanied by whoops of joy from its player. Sam and Gilly were impressed and hurried to follow suit.

Meanwhile, Jonathan managed to manoeuvre the arms and legs of his computer figure to enable it to crawl forward and enter, beneath the leaves at the entrance, that rift in the trunk where it extended down towards the roots. Reaching out with one of its arms it struck a lever. This seemed to trigger off the next event. Something dropped down and stuck on its arm. When the figure was withdrawn and stood upright again the players saw that it had a metal key hanging from its arm.

At the same time a notice sprang out of the ground in front of the half-hidden entrance. It was labelled TRUNK NEWS, and told them that with the key they just found they would be able to unlock a door at the end of the same crevice. It would admit them down into the next game level. “Good luck with your quest” was written in large letters, and the poster ended with a mysterious question, in very small writing, asking them if they had learnt by now how to alter the sizes of their figures: “You could make them so small,” it read, “that you could even skip from flower to flower... once predicted by Merlin.”

When the players had read this, Sam, having discovered his grasping skill, picked up the key, and consulted Gilly on the next move. The notice was swiftly replaced with another one which displayed in bright capital letters some words of Jesus taken from the Christian Gospels:

Ask and it shall be given you

Seek and ye shall find

Knock and it shall be opened unto you.

In smaller writing below this, it said:

Congratulations! You can proceed to level 2.

But that seemed to be far enough for the time being for our three. Although Jonathan was tired of it, he wouldn't admit that it was too advanced for him. He asked why it was that they seemed to know Spriggy but he had not met him before. They reminded him that he wasn't at the birthday party where Spriggy had first appeared.

After they turned off the computer, Sam and Gilly rested back in their chairs.

Sam, in generous mood, said to Jonathan, "Well done Johnnie, you beat us to it that time, but the next bit is obviously more complicated."

When Jonathan asked if they really wanted him to help at all with their video, Sam told him that he had thought of lots of jobs for him, and tomorrow they would get cracking on the camcorder drama, "So please hang on with us now," he entreated him. Jonathan was soon persuaded and stopped sulking.

That night they all seemed to have the same sort of dreams. Jonathan woke up with a determined plan to go and see his school mate's father, a pigeon fancier who kept hundreds of birds.



SIX

THE CONTEMPORARY VERSION

Preparations were at last completed. A strong-beam slide projector had been hired and the transparencies that had been in the envelope given to them with Merlin's cassette were loaded in. Jonathan had persuaded the pigeon fancier to allow him to take some pigeons in a wicker basket on this important day out. He knew that when he released them they would fly straight home. Jonathan also remembered his gas balloon with the demonic face upon it. He had chosen it at a fairground near Limerick and was very proud of it. He also insisted on being allowed to take their dog Scruff, a border collie, with them.

Although these three young people were attending Protestant schools in Limerick, they fitted in happily with their Catholic neighbours and had many friends locally. Shaun and Nuala, two of their friends, managed to squeeze into the back of the car with them before they set off. Extra help would be useful. Though the family estate car was a big one, they had a job to get everything in: there was the hamper of food and

drink that Sam and Gilly's mother had prepared, and the dog with his water bowl. Finally they set out on their journey.

Sam, clutching his precious equipment, sat in front with his father and mother, and Gilly squeezed in the back with Jonathan, Shaun, Nuala and the dog.

Then Jonathan announced that he wanted to have a pee because, in his excitement, he'd forgotten before leaving. The car was stopped and the boy was extricated, to groans of annoyance. On his way back to the car, Jonathan passed some apple trees and, with lunch in mind, picked up a suspect windfall. Before getting in the car he checked out the pigeons in the half-open boot and retrieved his balloon from Sam.

When they arrived at the churchyard they found that the gravedigger, who they had booked to star in their video, was already waiting there. He had with him another man from the village who had offered his help. This new character happened to be from Londonderry and was on a visit to an old friend of his who had settled in the same village some time ago. This visitor had nothing to do that day and when he heard of the gravedigger's filming mission had volunteered, out of interest, to accompany him. Because the new man was a protestant, his help had not at first been too welcome, but was later reluctantly accepted.

The party soon unpacked the car, which then left for home. Another car arrived with the rather elderly local priest and his new curate, who he had brought along with him. One couldn't help discerning the hand of Merlin in these unexpected additions to the assembly. The young curate had been sent over from a catholic church in England to fill a gap in the local priesthood which made it hard to tackle the workload of the widespread parish. The curate was tall, with an arresting air about him.

He was a rather unusual priest. Actually, he reminded the youngsters of Father Clifford in the recent BBC TV series – "Ballykissangel". He was untraditional in his tolerance and

understanding of modern pressures and had actually read some books by Tayar, whom he greatly admired.

Sam and Gilly were delighted when, after some conversation, they learnt of all this and arranged for him to play the part of their modern Galahad. This was, of course, dependent on the agreement of the older priest. They were both in their long, belted cassocks with crosses suspended around their necks. No costume problem there for Sam.

This new Galahad figure had a marked sense of humour, as Jonathan soon discovered. They had been chatting together about the gas balloon when, glancing down at the damaged and discoloured apple in the boy's hand, the new priest smiled playfully. He told him that in the town of Ryde where he once lived, they often repeated a certain 'Limerick'.

"Perhaps you've heard it," he said. "It goes like this:

*"There was a young lady of Ryde
Who ate a green apple and died.
The apple fermented
Inside the lamented
And made cider inside her inside."*

Then, after a meaningful grin, the priest stooped down to stroke the dog. Jonathan never did eat that apple.

Scruff hadn't looked happy since they arrived at the churchyard. He had been slinking about with his tail between his legs. The regular priest suggested it was because of the bad atmosphere of the place, to which animals were sensitive. He'd had complaints from villagers of the strange "goings on" here.

Gilly now donned her hired nun's habit and veil and stood beside the two priests. She explained to them that she and Sam had decided to add a female member to the mainly male cast. She was taking the part of Sister Christine, who had been suggested to her in the dream.

The men were intrigued. The older priest began recounting some of the legends associated with the immediate district. It was a place of pilgrimage in the middle ages, he told them. St Patrick himself had given the people a special blessing from here and prophesied the arrival one day of a famous saint who would live nearby on an island in the middle of the river which flowed by below them, widening into the Shannon estuary. He finished by saying that this saint would later inspire many with hope for the future. Gilly remarked that perhaps a new saint would today become known to them.

Sam, having tried out his camcorder and set up the slide projector in the old Abbey ruins, now proudly took on his role of director. Jonathan was hidden in the ruins, to conceal his balloon, and had been given his instructions.

Though fireworks are not allowed in Ireland, the father of the three persuasive youngsters had managed to purchase some flares, smoke bombs and bangers from a theatre in town. These were placed around the grave. Jonathan had been told that when he saw the flares, just before the opening of the coffin lid, he must rush out with his balloon under his arm.

The two friends, Shaun and Nuala, wearing the charity shop clothes that Gilly had bought for them, were positioned outside the graveyard, pretending to be tourists gazing in. Later they had been assigned extra jobs.

The gravedigger and his helper had already removed the turf from over the selected grave and had found a stone slab underneath. There was a small beautifully engraved Celtic cross at the grave's head, which Sam had been focusing on, but there was no inscription on the cross. Sam started filming in earnest and gave the signal for the men to begin their struggle to lift the slab.

After the solid covering had been up-ended the serious digging began, and Sam got good shots from different angles. The three watchers looked on from the graveside and were

surprised when Sam shouted, “Cut!” and called a halt – just when the diggers had exposed the top of the old coffin. It was a break for lunch, Sam proclaimed as he re-packed his camcorder. The hamper was fetched.

Jonathan, who had been waiting in a state of great excitement, expecting his cue for action, was peeved. He walked out in a huff to join the others, while his friends nearby did the same but in more tolerant mood.

They all sat down around the grave to enjoy the sandwiches and the drinks. Gilly, still dressed as Sister Christine, poured out the thermos-hot tea into assorted cups. The digging partners had brought their own beer, and the parish priest had produced a bottle of wine from beneath the folds of his ample cloak! He had guessed there would be plenty of extra mugs around.

The contents of the hamper were soon disposed of, for though the accompanying men had brought some food, they had been offered surplus cake and other goodies from the hamper.

After finishing they all dispersed, temporarily, to get rid of the rubbish and for various other jobs. When they returned they were amazed to see flocks of birds – seagulls, wood-pigeons and doves – with tits fluttering in and out of the grave. They had pecked up every tiny crumb of food left behind from the party or dropped into the grave.

“That has cleaned it all up for us,” cried Gilly as they shoed the birds away and Sam prepared for the next tricky sequence. The pigeon basket had been placed strategically in position for Jonathan who knew the quickest release procedure. The projector had been left at the ready for Sean and a tape-recorder set up for Nuala. They had both been carefully instructed and rehearsed for the action. Jonathan had been given a long stick with a sharp pin glued to the end for piercing his balloon. This could not be rehearsed!

Now the serious action began and Sam had to shoot it two

or three times before he was satisfied. They had enough extra flares and smoke bombs to cope with this eventuality. Each time, Sam had stopped the action well before Jonathan's noble balloon act.

Now this was how the final enactment, planned by the young optimists, went: The two men in the grave worked to loosen, with great difficulty, the rusty screws on the coffin lid. Before finishing the last one they had to ignite the fuses first of the flares and smoke bombs, and then the bangers. They then loosened the final screw, wrenched open the lid and clambered out quick sharp. The older priest and Sister Christine stood well back, but the curate, as Tayar/Galahad, stayed put making the sign of the cross and lifting his metal shield – which the youngsters had found at a scrap-yard.

Jonathan stood by after the flares with his balloon. Then the smoke billowed up and swishing noises and booms of bangers filled the air. The idea was to portray havoc, as the evil spirit shot out of the grave. Jonathan then deftly freed the pigeons and took up his stand with the balloon. The projector beam was then turned on to the horrible grinning face on that infamous gas balloon emerging from the smoke. Next, the beam was re-directed on to the pigeons as they rose and flapped excitedly around the figure standing over the grave. Their brightly lit beating wings could be imagined as angel wings and Sam was shooting them with just that effect in mind. Next, the tape recorder, on full volume, came in. It was the recorded voice of Sam's father who utters these words in enraged tones:

“Where are you, my enemy? I'll get you, but I can't see you. I curse the beating wings. Angelic hosts be gone.”

The projector now turned its beam on to the metal shield and the picture of Mother Earth in all her living greenery. Now came the *coup-de-grâce* in the form of the unexplained presence that Merlin had described in his taped story: the human face of compassion that the evil spirit saw, picked out

in a sort of gentle radiance, merging with the trees and landscape.

Next came a hideous howl from the recorder (taped from a TV horror film) and Jonathan must sacrifice his cherished balloon and burst it. There was nothing left then but a puff of smoke and a limp fragment on the ground. After this the projector cast the other picture onto the shield – Merlin’s round orb of our planet with the shape of a chalice superimposed upon it. On the rim of this shining vessel, though, is a serpent, hanging over the edge and ready to be gone and slither away. The projector beam was turned off.

The young priest lowered his shield. He took a torch from his pocket and switched it on, pointing it into the grave. They all looked in. After this Sam would have to play it by ear because neither the priests nor the gravediggers knew about the contents of the grave and Sam didn’t know how they would react. Gilly, as Sister Christine, and Sam himself, knowing of Merlin’s psychic powers, had guessed there would probably be two skeletons in that grave.

Now the curate took over the proceedings and Sam began recording again. The smoke had cleared and the cast had seen, to their amazement, the two skeletons – one with a dagger, identified by the priest as English, sheathed in a rotting belt and still distinguishable. There was at first a short silence. Then their star actor said a blessing over the contents and directed the gravediggers to climb in once more (they were fed-up already with clambering in and out) to remove the dagger and belt.

When the men threw the dagger up onto the side of the grave, the curate knelt down to examine it. The older priest who had recognised it for what it was, reflected that perhaps the bodies had been mistaken, in the disarray, for fellow fallen soldiers after the battle of the Boyne.

Just as the onlookers around the grave were peering intently into the newly opened coffin, there was an interruption.

Scruff, who had been in the care of Nuala and Shaun and had been fascinated by the efforts of the diggers, suddenly made a dash for the grave, followed noisily by his two carers. The inquisitive dog jumped into the grave but immediately took fright and clambered out again. He then bolted, ears back, out of the churchyard with his tail between his legs.

Nuala and Shaun were left staring in horror down at the two skeletons and were told gently by Sam, as he waited to re-start the film, that it had been established that these two were a catholic and a protestant that had been on opposite sides at the Battle of the Boyne. The evil presence in the churchyard seemed to have been their hatred for each other – an evil that had now been exorcised.

The curate was given a tiny seed found in a crevice of the badly rusted hilt of the dagger. Later the curate gave it to the gravedigger, saying:

“Take this home, plant it in a sunny corner of your garden and see what happens – what kind of thing might grow from it.”

Both priests pronounced that the souls of these war-torn fighters would now be at peace with themselves. There would be no more trouble. Gilly, acting as Sister Christine, and having rehearsed her next words and recovered her composure, began to recite from a favourite psalm:

*Praise ye the Lord from the heavens, praise ye
him in the high places.*

*Praise ye him, all his angels, praise ye him, all
his hosts.*

*Praise ye him, O sun and moon, praise him, all
ye shining stars.*

“Jesus ‘the word become flesh’, would probably have known this by heart,” she said. “And I have a feeling that we will learn of a new poet and prophet today.”

The parish priest, not to be outdone, came up with his own appropriate psalm:

*He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth;
He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in
sunder;
He burneth the chariot in the fire.*

Next, the curate, being the youngsters' Galahad figure, finished by quoting some words from Tayar himself – remembered from the great man's writings:

*Evil is an inevitable by-product of the process of a
universe in evolution and not an alien element.*

“But,” added the curate, “Your Tayar says that: ‘Love is the spiritual blood of evolution’. And again he writes: ‘Love is the most universal, the most tremendous and the most mysterious of the cosmic forces.’”

“Then here’s a piece about death, that comes to mind: ‘All around us, one by one, like a continual exhalation, souls break away, carrying upward their incommunicable load of consciousness – one by one, yet not in isolation.’ That sounds good to me,” he said, “but harder to remember for you.”

When the young priest had finished his quotes, he burst out into a sort of tribute to Tayar.

“We are being told,” he said, “That death has nothing to do with dry bones and graveyards, but is part of life – just a natural change of being, to enable us to enter, in person, a higher unity converging upon his *Kristomega*. This comes from Tayar who held in his eyes a magnificent vision, and saw how the future could be if we could see it too. He is our twentieth century psalmist. I often think that his ideas, like ‘organic transformation’, allow us to view our own demise with natural awe instead of fear. This is no fairy tale.”

The inspired priest ended with a conjecture of his own, to this effect: “In the depth of winter we long for the spring. After physical death, in the next stage of our life, it will be spring for good. We will be able to go on growing into unknown fulfilments.”

There was a meaningful silence.

Sam stopped recording, and the party quietly began to pack up, soon to go their various ways. Sam thanked all his helpers, and especially the curate for his welcome contribution. They had a frantic search for Scruff. Just as Sam was wondering what to do, and as it was getting late, the dog was brought back by one of the villagers who knew what was happening at the old graveyard. The man had found Scruff wandering round the village still quivering, and had guessed the rest. The animal seemed to have an even more soulful look in its limpid eyes after they got him into the waiting car.

When the youngsters got home they were very tired, so they actually went to bed early. They woke up refreshed the next morning and Sam started to do some editing, not knowing that there was more drama to come.

It was almost dark when the gravedigger left the village pub later that evening. He remembered the seed the priest had given him, and which he had wrapped in his not-too-clean handkerchief. When he got home he could just see enough to plant it in a secluded patch of his back garden.

A few weeks later, the visitor from Londonderry, who was going home, came to say goodbye to his new acquaintance. Quite casually he asked the gravedigger, almost as a joke, if anything had become of the ancient seed. It had been forgotten about but they walked round to where it had been planted. To their great surprise they saw two fresh, green and healthy-looking leaves opened up to the sun. The two men looked at each other, and something wonderful happened. Their smiling eyes met as they shook hands and slapped each other on the back. When they said their goodbyes there was

a real warmth between them. The half-hidden hatred had fallen away, like Jonathan's balloon. Nationalist and Loyalist – so what!

The gravedigger then invited Sam to come to his house with his camcorder and record the miracle of the seed in his garden, still not knowing what kind of tree or shrub it would grow into.

Sam was now able to add it to the Merlin inspired drama, which he and Gilly had worked so hard to create. One day they hoped it might be accepted by some children's TV programme.

"I'm sure Spriggy will be very pleased with us," said Gilly happily.

This reminded them that they had better get down to reading a doubly-folded paper which came with Merlin's projector pictures. "We should," admitted Sam. "It was labelled 'To be opened only on completion of your graveyard video.' Well. OK, let's do it now."

The page began with words, presumably dictated by Merlin through Spriggy and the man in the mysterious little store in Limerick, explaining his recent activity. So reads the missive:

I may have the wisdom of ages, but without help from living people I have no power. For all my knowledge, I needed your group to make this video in the hope that it will be shown widely – hopefully on television – and its truths absorbed by young people today.

Through the experience gained during your creative efforts, you've tasted the evil of prejudice, hatred and ancient resentments. Next you must learn how to obtain the strength and motivation within yourselves to knock these things down when they rear their ugly heads, before they become monsters. They exist deep

down in the breasts of everyone. Tayar insists that:

“Necessary to the thinking Earth is a faith – and a great faith.”

Then he speaks of:

“The universal thing from which everything emerges and to which everything returns; the centre who spreads through all things”.

Tayar calls this OMEGA. It is essential to believe that there is more beyond death, and that there is no return to teeming disorder.

As the old hymn says of Christ, “risen from the tomb scattering grief and doom”. Jesus shows us a God, who is Love. So, you should know what is to be done... Now, my William will let you into a secret. Who is William, you ask? Why, the great English poet and mystic, William Blake, who wrote for me around two hundred years ago, and who said:

“Forgiveness of sins. This alone is the Gospel, and this is the life and immortality brought to light by Jesus... if you avenge, you murder the Divine Image and He cannot dwell among you.”

And again:

“The spirit of Jesus is the continual forgiveness of sin”.

So, my young apprentices, this is the key to progress towards unity and a common passion. After all... the very familiar “Lord’s prayer” strikes the same

deal – to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

I end with some more of my William’s brooding reflections. He asks himself why revenge should weave the future pattern with instruments of war “when forgiveness might it weave with wings of cherubim?”

I leave you now to your quest, but considering these sentiments I dare to suggest there are two options for you –forward towards *Kristomega* or backwards to nothingness.

I close my case. Think well upon it.

Signed: Your hopeful wizard.

On the back of Merlin’s piece of paper, Sam read this poem from William Blake:

*The owl that calls upon the night
Speaks the unbeliever’s fright.*

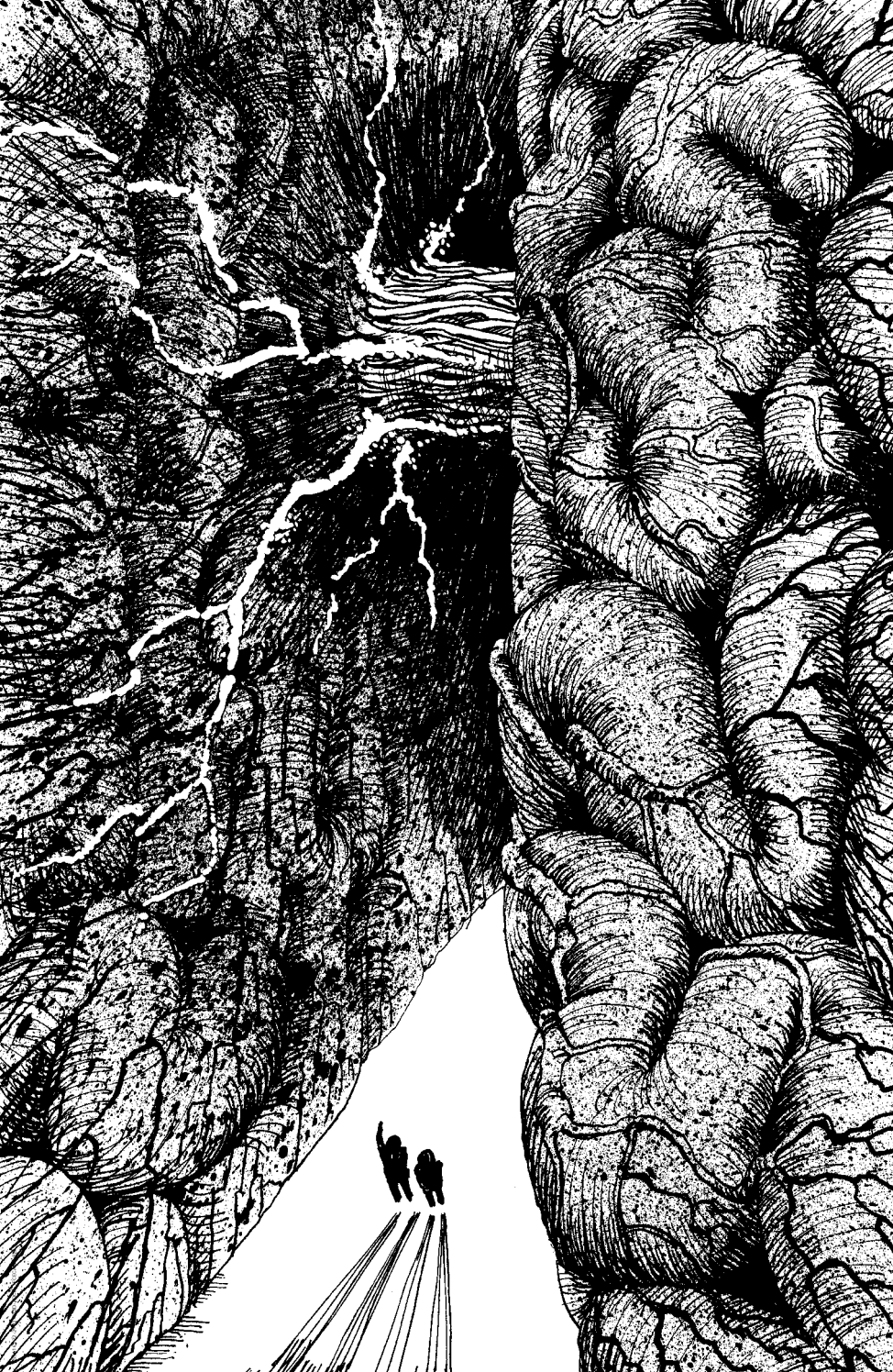
*He who shall teach the child to doubt.
The rotting grave shall n’eer get out.*

“Phew! That was a *tour de force*, I must say,” said Sam as they finished. “How it all fitted onto that small piece of folded paper, I can’t imagine.”

“Perhaps we should now return to *The Kristomega File* after all these fresh promptings,” proposed Gilly. “But not just yet. I feel we’ve had enough for the moment.”

“Yes, I agree,” said Sam. “Anyway, our school term starts in a few days, so there is a lot to do. It’ll all seem so ordinary though.”

“Don’t knock ordinariness!” said Gilly. “After the experiences I’ve had – nightmares, graveyards, fear and hostility – ordinary life seems very wonderful!”



SEVEN

REACHING WITHIN

Back at school, with the editing of the video completed and sent to the local TV station, Sam and Gilly seemed a bit at a loss. One Saturday, they decided to boot up their father's computer and try out the next level of *The Kristomega File Number One*. When they had played the first part with Jonathan, they realised that these K Files were too advanced for their young brother at his present age.

Jonathan was away and the two of them were on their own in the house. As they activated the CD once more to continue their game they found themselves immediately drawn into it. Being interactive and with a virtual reality background, it was totally absorbing. As they stood at the entrance to the crevice in the base of the big tree, they noticed that something was happening round the trunk of a smaller tree a little way behind it. A wide strip of paper was curling itself around the trunk. Moving his figure nearer to examine it, Sam saw the clearly readable words printed on it, very like those on the previous notices. Gilly moved her character to join him, and a voice began to read out loud the extracts from a poem

which was written there. It was called “Reaching Within” and she had to get her game figure to walk around the tree so she could read these words:

*Accept this door
Will open on a world
So full of new and glorious things...
Each leaf of history joined to each
Each space entwined with every space
Where universes bound by love
Proceed in dance across eternity.
So reach within,
And there accept the gift of love.
So reach within,
And live a multiplicity of lives.
And in the silent stroke of light
Begin to know as you are known.
Who dares to know and speak
Must offer more than words.
Let music come, let senses fade
For here within the future's made,
And death becomes a minor chance
Within the dance within the dance.*

Claude

Again Gilly spied the strange name, “Claude” in tiny letters printed in the bottom corner of the paper. He must be one of the helpers of Spriggy’s wizard, she thought. She had first seen it on the back of the recording of Merlin’s fantasy graveyard story which Mr X had given them. Perhaps this person is one of the Great Master’s contemporary chosen characters, she decided, and he must have written the poem.

“It’s to do with looking inside ourselves,” she guessed aloud.

After this, they heard the voice of Spriggy, calling to Sam. “Come on boy,” came the order. “You’ve got the key in your hand, so use it now. Get down and reach into that crevice again to unlock the little door right at the back. To make yourself smaller, use the zoom control on the top of your computer screen. You will find that you will both be able to proceed through it and down to level 2 where I will give you further instructions.”

Our couple did just this, and... Whoosh! They found themselves in a greatly extended space and looking at a large, dome-shaped edifice. ‘ENTER HERE’ read a notice over an open door, so the two walked their characters in.

They were amazed to see, laid out on the ground, a huge model of a vertical cross-section of the human brain. It was opened up slightly more over to the left-hand side, giving room for the central structure to be shown as one. The densely packed and intricate model, even more complicated than inside a computer, the players thought, was glowing with subdued light. Every detail was marked with a small coloured number and these were displayed on an outside screen, with their appropriate names and functions.

While the players stood in the entrance hall staring at the two roughly divided hemispheres of the brain spread out on either side of them like a maze, they realised that the tree outside, where they had been on level 1, was just an image in this brain. They were now on level 2.

They had been told once that each level of the K Files would show them a wider and more profound view of their mission. This first mock-up of the brain was going to be difficult, they feared. Spriggy began talking, and they realised they were being given their next briefing.

“Hello again,” came the words. “I’m here to guide you, but first, Merlin has asked me to explain to you why you are now experiencing the big change.

“You are no longer outside the computer operating your

game characters, but, as you can feel, you are patently yourselves standing here. Though it all seems somehow different, it is really you in cyber form who is moving, seeing, thinking and speaking in interaction with me. It's a bit of virtual wizardry and the technomagic of the future, which my master can operate now with ease," boasted Spriggy.

"Now playmates," came the first instruction. "Enter the opening labelled THE FISSURE OF SYLVIUS, and walk along this deep groove. Follow it to the end where it will open out from its narrow pathway into an extended space, which is the slightly bulbous insular lobe. There I will meet you."

Sam and Gilly did just this, but when they got to the rendezvous, there was no Spriggy – only a bright, flickering green light darting around them.

"I'm here! It's me, Spriggy – this is my present cerebral-style format. You wouldn't have seen me at all if Merlin had not equipped me with this micro audio capsule, and a voice. It is the only visible solid particle. You see, the right side of the human brain is completely silent. I have no power of speech without the help and tuition of the Master. Soon you must follow me and I'll lead you through some of the convolutions of this roughly split hemisphere with the help of the light from my micro-pod gear.

"As we came here," ventured Sam, "we passed a spot where there was a most peculiar smell. Can you explain this please?"

"Of course. You traversed the 'olfactory' region – to do with the workings of your sense of smell. An appendage which deals with all this is nearby and called, I'm told, the olfactory bulb. It's part of the lower, more primitive, brain functions. There may have been a slight leakage around this area! I'll try to properly describe some of the other features you will pass on your way to the exit."

"The ground is rather slippery," complained Gilly. "Will you be long?"

“Point taken,” came the reply. “You can sit down for a while, you know. The slippery substance underfoot is what the master calls cerebrospinal fluid, and it’s everywhere in the brain zone. Now, in the corner you’ll see a small pile of thick, indented square mats – use them to sit on. The rubber sandals or over-shoes beside them are for you to put on for the rest of your strange journey.”

The players picked up these grey mats and found that they felt firm but slightly spongy and were rough on one side. When the two were seated, Gilly said to Spriggy that she always accepted him as a friendly and helpful presence in the workings of her brain and that she trusted him.

“A nice thought, dear Gillian, my one time rescuer. I don’t know the affect I have, but I’m sure it’s a good one. Soon I’ll return home to the muted right hemisphere of my sweet hostess. The difference, roughly, between the two sides is that the left is more analytical and for numbers and language; it’s the chief action sector of the brain where big decision are made. But compare it to the right side which is more intuitive and better at spatial awareness and face recognition, for instance. From here can come extra child-like enthusiasms. Both hemispheres can sometimes work independently of each other, like two quite different personalities really.” Spriggy paused.

“You knew about my nightmares, didn’t you?” interjected Gilly. “Are dreams and old memories dealt with mostly in the right hemisphere as well?”

“Correct. As a female of the human species,” Spriggy continued, “you have an affinity with these things. Yes, I traced the source of your problem, for this is the territory where I usually hang out. I’ve been learning a bit about the different areas of reception and the myriad nerve pathways which carry the continuous flow of collected and processed information. I specially haunt the dream places and old memory banks – sources of mythology and emotional drives.

That's how I traced the route of your problem. The crisis was triggered by your experience in the shrubbery during your birthday party. Because of your special age it allowed a rogue fear to come to the surface and run riot for a while. At times people had been known to flee in horror when a presence of the great God Pan – half human, half animal – has been felt. They reported also hearing the distant sound of his pipes.”

“So that's where the word ‘panic’ comes from. Well you certainly snapped me out of mine, dear Spriggy,” sighed Gilly.

“Yes, electrical and chemical disruption can temporarily upset all the interconnections, even overpowering the regions of your superior brain functions. In your case—”

“Hey!” interrupted Sam. “I'm in this game as well, you know – you sound at the moment like one of my teachers at school!”

“Sorry,” he admitted. “I have strayed from my script a bit, with my mimicked Merlin type of language, but now I'll proceed with my commentary on some objects you'll be passing on your way.”

“However can you remember it all?” said Sam, now duly placated.

“Well, the names and purposes of the various organisms are recorded on the tiny diction/scanner chip in my accompanying capsule. This has also an exact layout of your route and detailed timing of each movement, so it can pinpoint your position and indicate the right comments. I just relay this to you at each stage. I do have difficulty pronouncing the words though.”

“It's all a Time and Motion set-up,” suggested Sam. “One second - one foot, sort of thing, picking up the ‘info’ from an inner map. I like that. I suppose that now it should be described in digital time and millimetres!”

“A clever attempt, Samuel, at summing up my Master's rather hurried account. Now, down to business. The narrow

track has many twists and turns and often branches off. The arrows on the floor are sometimes too hard to see, but you can follow my light to the exit. Then I will have to leave you, but Merlin will meet you there. So, on with your footwear.”

While listening to the accompanying voice of Spriggy, they passed by the convolution of hippocampus. This organ, they were told, was largely involved with laying down new memories and was part of the limbic system and the most important lobe of the lower instinctive brain. Next, they observed structures of loosely-knit grey-matter, each with its nucleus and tangle of nerves. These, they learnt, were the thalami-sensitive reception centres, including the optical layer. They were relay points for co-ordination and regulation of all parts of the brain.

After leaving behind the temporal and parietal lobes – one an auditory centre and the other a sensory map of the body and the sense of self – our two cybernauts saw more objects. Two strange, almond-shaped entities were lying each side of them. These were the *Amygdalae*. Spriggy had difficulty in pronouncing this, but with inner promptings, finally got it out. He then described them as dense clumps of neurones which make up what is sometimes called the social brain, it being associated with emotional behaviour. He explained how they received low level automatic computation from the eyes, nose and ears and also signals from the neo-cortex which carries out all top-level information processing and takes decisions on what to do with the endless input. “Stop and gaze, for you also have these same parts inside your own brains. These even recognise various facial expressions and—”

“Almost data magic,” interrupted Sam. “But there seem to be too many Latin words for you there Spriggy – actually, it’s getting a bit boring – too much like school! How can anyone find out about all this anyway?”

“That’s strange,” continued Spriggy, in a surprised way.

“Merlin must have known that one of you would ask that question, because here comes an answer. Researchers have experimented by showing a fully conscious volunteer some pictures of a terrified human face, and noticing the effects on the screen monitor. These same two organs of the brain showed conclusive responses.”

“It’s too technical for me as well,” agreed Gilly, sighing. “Let’s go on.”

“Stay awhile,” went on Spriggy. “If I continue the script, it seems to deal with these complaints: Soon you will find all these strange facts and names as familiar as those of the body – heart, lung, liver etc. – because in the twenty-first century there will be a surge of new interest in the human brain. Everything really starts from there.”

“OK,” submitted Sam. “Actually, I should have mentioned that I am myself learning Latin at school now, which helps me understand these complicated names. And I did read lately that they were teaching computers to detect emotion in human voices now – so count me in.”

“Now he tells me,” grumbled Spriggy. “So, I’ll continue then, with more help from you, I hope. Now – where was I when last diverted? Ah yes, I remember: Scientists have noted the way the evolution of the human brain is heading. The latest research indicates that these ... almond-shaped things we’re now looking at...”

“The *Amygdalae*,” prompted Sam.

“Thanks, my friend ...on each side of the brain stem, and which are inter-connected with the strange object you passed earlier, the hippo...”

“...campus,” finished Sam confidently.

“Thanks again. All of these we share with the mammals, run almost parallel to each other and are perfectly correlated, even though they deal with memories and emotions in different ways. And it has now been discovered that these parts of the brain’s equipment seem to be taking more and more

input from the neo-cortex, your verbalised, reasoning and thinking machine, and less and less from the instinctive, primitive behaviour regions.”

“I suppose,” said Sam, reflecting aloud, “that could mean, among other things, that an advanced sense of humour could produce the ability to rise above the turmoil of runaway, conflicting passions. Just by cracking a few good natured, witty but pointed jokes, it could diffuse dangerous outbreaks.”

“Don’t be silly, Sam,” burst out Gilly, who was feeling a bit miffed because of the extra attention Sam was now getting. “Some passions, you know, are really good and heroic. What about the love between Tristan and Isolde? I’m ready to move on anyway,” she declared, and turning impulsively she lost her balance and fell down on the slippery floor. Not hurting herself – for you just *don’t* in dreams or cyberspace – she got up quickly, feeling embarrassed, especially when she distinctly heard some giggling noises from Spriggy’s direction. But soon the voice turned serious:

“Dear Gillian, I’m sure Merlin will deal with passion management later,” Spriggy told her. “I’ve a special message for you, before I go on with the commentary. Do you remember, back in the country park, after my great tree had fallen down, that you invited me into your own cerebral compartment, now my new home. Since then I’ve frequently found myself hanging round a certain gateway here, making sure that all your natural affection and vivid memories of special trees are getting through properly to the other side. There they’ll be expressed in language and action. I hinted at all this when I first came in.”

“I remember,” replied Gilly in happier mood. “I was quite worried at the time, but you reassured me.” Then, surprising herself and Sam, she began to hum the tune of a favourite song. Its lyric, she soon recalled, began with these fitting words: “I think that I shall never see a thing so lovely as a tree.”

“Our next stop, in a minute,” said Spriggy, “will be by this important check-point and I’ll soon be boring you with a proper description and its Latin name, so stand by to move forward.”

As they proceeded in silence, these wonderful organs of efficiency hardly prepared them for the next encounter which turned out to be the *corpus callosum*. This was a thick bundle of nerve fibres which looked like miniature branches of wintry trees. This single centrepiece joined together the inside surfaces of the two cerebral hemispheres. The whole thing seemed to be emitting sparks as each connection glinted when it passed information from one side to the other and back again. Spriggy became very excited while recounting the importance of this special cerebral body and was nearly falling over his words – but he did manage to get out its name properly: *corpus callosum*. The script that Spriggy was reciting, explained how this made possible the co-ordination of the hemispheres, and, of course, the full integration of the whole brain.

Before they eventually came to their exit from the fissure of Rolando, they passed a few more smaller organs which they hardly noticed, for they had no commentary to give them meaning. They then found themselves amid the neo-cortex region. They were now told that this part contained the psychomotor neurones, agents of precision and balance, and also some of the prefrontal lobe.

“You’ll be alright here, Gillian,” teased Spriggy, off script, but then, returning to his guide job he confirmed that all this advanced complexity formed the frontal edge of this top fissure of the brain. Behind is the reflective and creative frontal lobe. Halting them at this position, Spriggy said his next words with easily detected awe in his strange little voice:

“This is the most expanded part of the human brain,” he began, clearing his throat, “with the maximum increase in

cerebral neurones. It must be kept in good order, for without it there could be no psychic life. Hence it must be studied as a priority, to combat brain disease, malfunction and criminal obsessions – also for the relief of pain of course. This part of the brain, alone, is made up of fourteen thousand million interconnected cells of which you only use a small portion, as yet. These can easily be damaged and will need repair.”

After this effort, Spriggy stopped for breath, but soon went on to add this postscript. “All this high level processing and its constant associations with past memories, is still subject to the will and reasoning power of the individual and his or her sense of self. Some movements and responses, though, are unconscious. End of commentary,” sighed Spriggy with relief.

The two then carried on following the light, when suddenly they noticed that it was not there any more. Spriggy had gone. However, they now saw an opening ahead of them and guessed they must now be at the crown of the skull in the fissure of Rolando which Spriggy had told them about.

As they emerged from the brain, they saw a welcoming wooden bench on which they sat with gratitude and removed their over-shoes.

EIGHT

MERLIN SPEAKS... AND A SAD GOODBYE

The voice of Merlin then came through in the deep and resonant tones that would become so familiar to Gillian.

“Well, my faithful Cybernauts,” he began. “That may have seemed a long and tedious session, but suffice it to say that you have seen just a fraction of the workings of the human brain in all its intricacy. Its an object thought to be the most complex in the universe – it contains a hundred thousand million neurons – roughly the same as the entire number of stars in our galaxy. How do you feel about brains, then?”

“Well, I suppose I’ve just taken my brain for granted before,” said Sam, and Gillian agreed with him.

“Perhaps you’ll now begin to realise the awesome fact that each of you has one of these miracle instruments, the crowning feat of evolution, for your very own, at your disposal, to use and do what you like with. And, in your cases, usually well-working bodies to go with them. Quite a responsibility, eh! And a big challenge,” ended Merlin.

“Put that way,” sighed Gilly, “It’s rather frightening actually.”

“It needn’t be, you know, but let me urge you to take a greater pride in it and not waste its power on negative pursuits, such as vandalism, nor impair its delicate functions with drug-taking. Don’t hang around for long, moping or sulking, so that you go after any random distraction through sheer boredom, and with no clear goal in view. You can now reflect upon the wonders of recalled memories as you view your world and the knowledge that each of you is a wholly unique reflection of the world in which you all live. Taste the beginnings within you of a developing sense of Self, triggered by the multi-million neurones of this incredible achievement of nature.”

“But Merlin, why make it all sound so grand?” asked Sam, standing up, hitching up his jeans and stretching a bit. “What about our weaker points – like catching too many colds and, in my case, losing patience with people, and sometimes my temper.”

“Yes,” agreed Gilly, fidgeting uncomfortably. “Like bad digestion, for instance, slowness and worrying too much about what others think of me. Anyway, I’m afraid I don’t really know what you mean by a sense of “Self” because what I think of myself changes at each different age!”

“Of course,” agreed Merlin. “But I’m talking about another self. First though, to put your minds at rest and value yourselves better, you can soon bypass those small drawbacks that you’ve both listed to me. When you’ve also truly located your strong points and developed them to reach a chosen goal you’ll outgrow your failures. Your subconscious resources will respond and deal with the bodily weaknesses. They may even be used to help you!”

“We’ve also noticed, on our trip just now, how easily communications can go wrong between the two hemispheres of the brain – quite small things destroying the balance,” persisted Sam.

“There *was* someone who, despite the problems, got it all dead right 2000 years ago!” parried Merlin.

“That was Jesus Christ I suppose,” capitulated Sam.

“Yes, that’s true – Jesus of Nazareth. But now, back to the “Self” problem. It’s when anyone first becomes conscious of his or her real image and identity, created through earlier memories and experiences, that the self is discovered. You then become aware of what you love and like or hate and avoid; when the truth dawns upon you of how you want to be and what you want to do.”

“I see,” said Gillian thoughtfully. “So this real self will never change, even after our physical death... I suppose.”

“Quite right. It’s not only your Earthly works and achievements that will be immortal, but your whole personality – warts and all. For your future happiness though, there are two more stages in finding the self. The first one is to find a partner to love and trust – so taking pleasure in the closeness of a shared and decentred life. The second important step is for both of you together to become centred on someone or something greater than both of you.”

Sam sat down again, a bit reluctantly. He was becoming impatient now.

“Why are you picking on us to explain all these advanced subjects?” asked Gillian. “We are really very ordinary. Spriggy, in my dream, hinted at the reason, but I still don’t understand.”

Merlin sounded a trifle amused. “It’s simple,” he said. “You, Gillian, because you remain open and receptive to new ideas and the future. And you never ignore the occasional glimpses of hidden or suspected depths behind certain feelings... the ones you experience when you are struck with some natural beauty, a special painting or a certain phrase in poetry or music. As my William puts it – you must learn to catch a joy as it flies past, and you are beginning to.”

“Why me, though?” asked Sam quickly.

“You, Samuel, because – like your Biblical namesake – you don’t block the persistent but subconscious calls that

often worry and perplex you. And lately I have noticed that you are developing a sort of calm acceptance of some rather special mission ahead of you – a mission, I can confirm, that would be ideal for your particular personality.”

Sam and Gilly were now sitting unusually still and subdued, but Merlin carried on enthusiastically with his discourse.

“Now, the optical nerve seems to be given a disproportionate amount of space in the brain, showing its importance. Each time your eye focuses upon an object it has to assess the image, process, allocate and interpret it, using individual and cultural past data. Finally it is verbalised. All this is done at lightning speed. Think about it.”

“Early the other morning,” said Gillian, brightening up, “I was watching a blackbird on the lawn outside my window. It was standing stock-still but looking about intently with its little round eyes. Suddenly it spied a movement and in an instant it was at that spot pulling out a worm! I pondered over the thought that though the eye had evolved in order for creatures to survive and catch their prey, now we use it for so much extra – to enrich our lives... to study, watch and preserve the birds themselves, for instance.”

“I use mine a lot in the supermarket,” quipped Sam, feeling himself again. “To pick out my favourite foods! Of course, some people still use their eyes for hunting, but it’s only for fun and not a necessity. Strange fun!”

“Yes, I know. But what Gillian was trying to say was that your eyes can bring more and more meaning and enlightenment to everything as you grow. A dog sees the same tree as you but it’s of no special significance, except perhaps, as somewhere to cock its leg! Your human eyes though are the eyes through which the Earth can see and know its own beauty. The knowledge that mankind has collected alters everything we look at. When the evolutionary leap was made across the reflective border, sight then changed from its simple beginnings to a great power. When you learn to see

by using the eyes as a window you can transform anything into the reality of thought.”

“I suppose the important thing,” concluded Gilly, “is the question of what you give full attention to. And that depends on how we are each programmed.”

“You’re both on the right tracks I see. Good thinking, my Cybernauts. Clothe happenings with good thoughts, all valid in *Kristomega* – The beginning and the End, Son of Man and best friend. I’ll do a bit of quoting at you now. Here are some lines from Wordsworth’s poem to The Daisy:

*Sweet silent creature!
Thou breath’st with me in sun and air.
Do thou, as thou art wont, repair
My heart with gladness, and a share
of thy meek nature.*

“Then in similar vein, Wordsworth goes on to celebrate the daffodils. In his famous poem, he shares his feelings when he recalls a sight of them:

*...Then my heart with pleasure fills.
And dances with the daffodils.
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.”*

“I learnt that at school,” said Gilly excitedly. “It was my favourite poem. It’s strange how simple rhyme and metre make words bond forever.”

“I do remember a phrase in one of his poems, I think,” joined in Sam. “It’s the bit that goes... ‘My heart leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky.’ My goodness though, this poet sure loves the word ‘heart’. He uses it everywhere. The word today goes more with transplants and by-passes.”

“The poems are outdated of course, Sam, but still works

of art, expressing a truth,” said Merlin in placating tones. “It all fits in with how you’re learning to see: with feeling – reshaping the intellect. I must finish, though, with one of my Blakean gems... ‘A little flower is the labour of ages.’ Isn’t that just what your Tayar, through me, has been trying to say?”

“Actually,” burst out Sam, as he looked around uneasily. “This is a very long game.”

“Yes,” chipped in Gilly with a new note of concern in her voice. “How do we know when it’s finished?” She looked at Sam.

“Ah! I was waiting for one of you to notice and ask that question. This game is no common or garden run of things – one day, interactive cyber-games will achieve the same sort of reality. It will finish when I want it to. Spriggy, who came out from the storm, must often have boasted of my magic as a master of Time and Space!” Merlin chuckled. “Don’t be worried, my dear young friends – you will soon become aware again of your own sitting-room chairs. All will be quite normal... except that during the next days you will probably mix up in your mind these two realities. As with many dreams, later you can’t always remember which incidents were dreamt by you and which really happened in everyday life. You are now in a waking dream, but before you emerge I have some more things of importance to say.”

“You haven’t really told us what you want us to do – even if we can,” said Gilly quietly, rallying her courage.

“You’re right. I was coming to that. It’s all quite simple if you trust your choice of direction and keep your faith in the future. Falling back upon your traditional Christian motivation, you could do far worse than to take the advice of one of your grand old Victorian hymns. If my memory serves me right, these are the words, roughly, of one of the verses:

*Oh dearly, dearly has he loved
And we should love him too,
And trust in his unfailing love
And try his works to do.”*

“That was on the BBC’s Songs of Praise programme last week,” noted Sam. “It starts, ‘There is a green hill, far away’, and is quite nostalgic – but it’s too ‘old hat’ now to get us excited. The name of Jesus is heard around in everyday life mostly as an exclamation of exasperation or horror!”

“That’s where you both come into the plan, my questing Cybernauts. Your Holy Grail, like Tayar and the legendary Galahad, is to see the divine humanity in everything around you – in nature and in the faces of other people. Also to newly recognize Him as the greater Cosmic Christ, whose presence you can detect, with God, His cosmic parent, in the organisation of your planet. This is where your strange voices came from, Sam. Much more exciting, eh!”

“You’re saying – a one-time Galilean, become universal, could also be closer than any friend, and the most real thing in our lives,” said Gilly doubtfully.

“However amazing it perhaps sounds at first, I can assure you that this is all completely true. As soon as reflective Homo Sapiens began to be conscious of a God or Gods outside of themselves, the spirit of Christ, the Evolver, has been working from within each developing mind.”

“What about those awful periods in history,” queried Gilly doubtfully, “when people did terrible things in the name of religion – and still do, actually.”

“Yes, we know. But still,” insisted Merlin, “even though wayward religious cultures may deflect in a revolting way, it is all part of Earth’s evolving spirituality. However distorting or excessive the rituals become – including sometimes corruption and intolerance – these perversities will give rise to strong reactions. The developing human brain, with greater

perception, will turn away from cruel enforcements and primitive passions. Eventually the God-search will come home to mankind itself and the creator will be found within each man and woman, where Jesus found his God.”

“But,” continued Gilly, after a pause, “archaeologists have discovered some very old religious structures which must have been staggeringly beautiful in their heyday – wonders of the world, in honour of the Gods and Goddesses.”

“Of course,” replied Merlin. “Like the cathedrals, mosques and temples we still see today, their builders put the greatest effort and most supreme art into the work they believed they were doing for their God or Goddess. These have all grown one out of another.”

“At the time of the Crusades, the Inquisition and the Hundred Years War, Christianity didn’t come out of it at all well, I remember,” commented Sam.

“All religions can sometimes mask God’s face or even become an enemy of God,” admitted Merlin. “That’s what some modern theologians tell us. My William completes the God-search like this:

*I am not a God afar off,
I am a brother and a friend.*

“When the man Jesus lived his familiar Earthly life, so soon cut off, a new phase of evolution was opened up. He was, for Christians, the first person wholly to embody the spirit of our creator and to acknowledge it. Since then all has changed. A real person with cosmic dimensions is now warmly accessible.”

Merlin paused respectfully after this outburst of belief. But breaking the silence, Sam asked if there was anyone else believed to be the Superstar.

“Yes. Great prophets, men and women, around the world and in different ages. But for you, my Cybernauts, Jesus

Christ is your best bet. Tayar did say that ‘everything that rises must converge’, but not yet I’m afraid.”

“Where now should we look for God the creator then,” questioned Gilly.

“Well, it was this Jesus who made a large window in the thick veil which hides God from us,” explained Merlin. “Saints and men of genius have struggled to widen it further. Look through this gap now to the future where pure Being is to be glimpsed. Remember, ‘God is Love’ Jesus said.”

“Goodness! What on Earth then can we do to forward any mission to rediscover this elusive God?” stammered Sam.

“A lot, indeed, when you realise that you are all in a partnership with this power to invent and build the future. Faith is a cosmic energy and an organic necessity for survival – the future depends on its re-awakening. You could begin a process of swimming against the tide! If more than half of young people today continue to follow the cult of ‘eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die’, your world will surely begin to die. So, my Cybernauts, it’s your camcorder and new computer skills to the rescue.”

“I suppose we could get our graveyard drama onto the internet or do another one,” muttered Sam, half to himself, but audible to Merlin. “We may be able to learn how to design some software programmes with new stories and special themes. We could even get on to TV ... but that’s all.”

“Perhaps we could have a website,” added Gilly helpfully.

“Those are the sort of things I had in mind, I concede, but the task ahead is daunting,” replied Merlin. “Yes, a website would be crucial to centre, sort out and sift all the data being collected. It could form deep links with other such centres and provide cyberspace for dedicating your efforts and sharing the world’s joys and sorrows – your worship and prayer, if you like. It would not have the solemnity and beauty of church architecture, but it could keep the same spirit. Belief in the future would be taken into Cyberland.”

“It would take ages to find a good name for it,” pondered Sam. “All the best ones have been taken and others are being snapped up every day.”

“Well, I can tell you that time for action is fast running out. The world is being pressed together at such a rate that we are now left with only two options – to unite or explode. You are already, unavoidably, sharing all your wars and your successes. Yet, unless tribal and personal hatreds can be disconnected and wilted, and others flourish in a passionate love of the soul of the Earth, whichever way it is identified – all is lost.”

Merlin then, feeling he had gone too far with his grim predictions, and observing the rather dejected looking figures on the bench, said gently, “There is still hope. My helper in Limerick drew my attention the other day to some words in a ‘Creation Spirituality’ magazine. I’ll quote them—”

“I know who that was,” interrupted Gilly. “It was the mysterious Mr X who is looking after your next three *K-files* – Claude, I guess.”

“Yes, you’ve got it right again! Spriggy will deal with them for you from now on.”

Merlin then proceeded with his attempt to render the chosen lines:

*Not only are our bodies the stuff of the Earth’s body,
but our minds are the consciousness of this being,
the Earth.
We are made of stardust.*

“Now, how does that grab you?”

Our young people were silent for a moment, then Sam got up to speak.

“I think you have your man, Merlin. I shall have a shot at it. A Tayar knight online! That new Creation story. It strikes a chord. I believe in hope.”

Gillian followed suit saying, with a whimsical smile, that she had always wanted to be a Grail Maiden anyway!

“Well, said, my protégés. We have the beginnings of a new Round Table already in place in Cyberspace. Soon, many fewer young souls will be left to languish in the fear that there really isn’t a purpose or meaning in the universe. No longer, as Shakespeare put it, is the world ‘full of sound and fury signifying nothing’. You can deal with all your ‘Dead End’ foes, for you’ll have Tayar/Galahad as a figurehead. And always remember these words of his – ‘Total death and reflective activity are (together) cosmically impossible’. I made a good choice with you two, but I still think it will be a while before you’re ready for *The Kristomega File Number 2*, where I could help you more.”

“We really have understood you *most* of the time,” coaxed Gilly, “and we seem to agree with the urgency of our tasks, so what’s holding us up?”

“I don’t think you’ve yet been able to grasp the scale of the revolutionary shift of thought which your Tayar has begun. Though not quite as startling as that of Copernicus, Galileo and Darwin, perhaps, it is, in its practical significance for the life of ordinary people, especially young ones, far more important. You will need much further reading and explanation before you take off in earnest. Tayar emerged from mainstream Catholicism and Jesus from traditional Judaism. Everything is preceded by something else, you see.”

“You mean that we should treat Tayar as the unsung prophet of our time and should strive to open a window onto his new landscape,” said Sam.

“In one of my dreams,” said Gilly, “Spriggy pointed out a beautiful tree, saying that you had told him that it served as a symbol of Tayar’s fresh image of the man from Nazareth. Nurtured from childhood with the love and care of His mother, Mary, and in the safe keeping of Joseph’s fatherhood. It’s

roots were deep in the Earth and its branches and leaves in our air, drawing life from the sun as from God.”

“Well, hey presto! We have already two budding Tayarites! I’ve underrated you both. Now, I shall soon be able to take my leave with confidence.”

“But where will you go?” said Gilly, “and what will happen to Spriggy?”

“No need to worry,” Merlin assured her, “That’s all taken care of. I have other important visits to make during my trip to your world at this changing period. Before I go though I must stress that your Tayar’s vision does not denigrate his traditions, but, as he put it, is Christianity squared.”

“I guess that means,” said Sam, “something multiplied by itself.”

“Well said, Samuel. You see, the Christian fact, among other biological realities, is truly amazing. It’s produced the greatest out-pouring of charitable love, around the globe, that the planet has ever known. Of course, its frequent abuse and distortion are always *fully* reported!”

Merlin paused, then went on to add an important saying of Tayar’s – “Union differentiates”.

“But what does he really mean by that?” enquired Gilly.

“True union,” explained Merlin, “distinguishes between the various faiths and cultures it brings together so that they can merge harmoniously. It does not stifle the elements nor lose them in one another so they duly enrich the whole unity.”

“But that could include terrorists and fanatics who would never blend in properly,” objected Sam to Tayar’s optimism. “There’s a hell of a shortage of evidence at the moment to support that theory.”

“Ah! Samuel,” came the reply. “But, you see, in the broad sweep and momentum of Tayar’s future the majority of the great faiths and cultures will have awoken to the surge of the rising sense of the spirit of the Earth, which already exists,

somewhere, inside every person. It will actualise. Then you will detect the first moves into another plane above the fever that the world is suffering from today. Also, you must remember that the special effect of personal love is, for instance, to strengthen the self-awareness of the beings it brings together.”

“How and where could one obtain all these Tayar discourses?” wondered Gilly aloud. They’re all quite new to me and so beautiful.”

“These words were roughly taken from two of his books, namely *The Activisation of Energy* and *Human Energy*, both of which you may one day be able to read when they are published again, along with his first book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, or, in his native French, *The Human Phenomenon*.”

“You told us once,” recalled Gilly, “that Tayar was loyal to his church.”

“Correct. Now thank you both for listening to me. As for Spriggy, I have work for him elsewhere on the planet. Gillian, thank you for taking him in as a refugee after that terrible storm. Spriggy says goodbye – he will miss you.”

“And I shall miss him, too” said Gilly, suddenly feeling a little tearful. “I’ve grown to love his funny little voice and comical antics.”

“Well, even though he will have gone,” comforted Merlin, “I’m sure you will be able to imagine what he would say as you go on life’s journey.”

“Yes, but it’s not the same!” protested Gilly.

“Don’t worry,” said Merlin, “I shall be sending Spriggy back to you in years to come to help with new puzzles and files. You’ll know by a little movement of a flower or a tree that he has returned to you... Now, off you go. Walk back down the side of the dome, to the door through which you entered. Press the bright green button at its side, and you’ll be back in your house. I will meet you again in Cyberland. Go with my blessing, my dear Cybernauts.”

After a few minutes of strange silence, Sam and Gilly, with much on their minds, left their seats and headed, a little sadly, back to the door marked EXIT.

THE END

POSTSCRIPT

After finishing this story at my home in Bath, I looked out of the window and observed the huge crane which had been set up just behind Bath Abbey. It is far taller than the abbey, and can move up and down and from side to side. It makes the Abbey look very static, but at night, I remember, the crane is invisible and the floodlit Abbey still gives hope and comfort to all around.

The crane is working on the new Spa project for Bath, so, I muse, we've come a full circle. From the time of the building of the first Baths in the Roman period to today in the 21st century. I hoped that these healing waters might act anew upon our present troubled times.

I've noticed that at weekends the building firm hoists its own flag to fly from the top of the crane. On high days and holy days the Abbey flies the red St George's Cross. When the days coincide though, the two flags, commercial and spiritual, flutter happily side by side over England's green and pleasant land.

M E Mann, September 2001.

UNDER THE MERLIN SPELL

When the worst hurricane for centuries sweeps through the British Isles, a 200-year-old giant beech tree in a country park in the county of Limerick in Ireland comes crashing to the ground, making Spriggy, a mischievous tree-sprite, homeless.

Spriggy takes up residence in Gilly's head, and under the guidance of the wizard Merlin, Master of Space and Time, the tree-sprite takes Gilly and her brothers Sam and Jonathan on many adventures of the mind.

Under the Merlin Spell is the prequel to Margaret Mann's much loved *The Merlin Set-Up*. It will be enjoyed by all who have followed Sam, Gilly, Tom and Lucy through their other adventures, and by everyone who loves a good story.

Written with humour and insight, this book will be an inspiration to all who yearn for a better world.

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