



MOVING ON

WITH THE MERLIPAUTS

Margaret Mann

MOVING ON WITH THE MERLINAUTS

The Merlin Series

The Merlin Set-Up
Under the Merlin Spell
Merlin's Island
Merlin in Cyberland
Moving On with the Merlinauts

MOVING ON WITH THE MERLINAUTS

Margaret Mann

Published by
Tayar Books

Copyright © 2008 Margaret Mann

Margaret Mann has asserted her right under the Copyright,
Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the Author of
this work

First published in 2008 by
Tayar Books, Bath, UK

This ebook edition published 2011 by
Tayar Books, Bath, UK

Cover illustration by Jennifer Baker
Illustrations by Jennifer Baker

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, nor be otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

ISBN of paperback edition 978-0-9538685-6-8

Designed and typeset by
Mushroom Publishing, Bath, UK
mail@mushroompublishing.com

To the future generation
of cyberspace teenagers.

Contents

1	PROGRESS REPORT	1
2	ONE EXTRAORDINARY DAY IN THE WOODS	17
3	WHERE IN THE WORLD	31
4	UNPUBLISHED MATTER	47
5	HOME VISIT	57
6	THE LAST DREAM	69
7	THE COUNTRY PARK	73
8	BACK TO THE BEGINNING	83
	POSTSCRIPT	

PROGRESS REPORT

It was Easter, and around the old trees in the centre of the buildings which formed the circle of the famous Bath 'Circus' was a golden ring of yellow crocus blooms in full flower.

The four Merlinauts were together again in the wizard's basement room in the same Circus house which was owned by the strange lady who let it out, but only on the condition that the basement was firmly closed to tenants at all times.

Sam had been given the key to their den after he'd been shown in a dream where to call for it. It had been left at a particular place in the old city and he dreamt that he went to the Guildhall office and enquired how he could gain access to this certain house in the Circus. He was answered, surprisingly, very quickly and was told to go to a named estate agent in the next street — he then woke up.

Later in the morning he found the place, but it turned out to be small and very elusive — he'd never noticed it there before. When he entered he knew he'd been expected for he was greeted by his name. Sam duly emerged with the key in his pocket.

Now, these teenagers met at the house twice a year during their visits to stay with Aunt Sophie while their parents in Ireland were involved with work overseas. The Merlinauts came at Easter and then in late summer to compare notes and to share new experiences.

The room was very different now. It was set-up as a typical clubhouse, loved by the English, with comfy chairs and ample facilities for tea-making — small tables too for enjoying their shared 'cuppa'. On the wall was a framed enlargement of the well-known portrait of Teilhard de Chardin, taken in America during his last years. Merlin, of course, was not there anymore — his Earth visit having terminated.

The original teenage group had begun to split up a bit. Sam had just finished his gap-year travels and Gillian had started a part-time job in her nearest town. Lucy and Jonathan were still at school but in different classes.

Sam had ended up by visiting Teilhard's old Sarcenet home in the Puy-de-Dome district of mid-France, namely, the Auvergne. After this he had gone to see the cave paintings at Lascaux in the Dordogne where he'd marvelled at the early example of the magical awakening of the human imagination.

This year they had a lot to talk about — Gilly's part-time job in a trendy, teenage dress shop and her current course in journalism, Lucy's passion for saving her favourite trees and Jonathan's pre-occupation with computer games and all the latest on-line techniques — and, of course, Sam's looming college prospects.

Sam had put on the table a roughly shaped piece of rock which he'd picked up in the garden of that historic Teilhardian chateau and which glittered with micro-points of light when moved. He'd also reminded the others about the great man's love for stones of all shapes and sizes or any other piece of the solid, enduring crust of his beloved Planet Earth.

This had started the Merlinauts talking again, but this time on the subject of the rapid development of the world by the astonishing power of art and thought, resulting in such complete

transfiguration. They dwelt on the wondrous buildings and statues hewn and shaped from the virgin rocks.

“On my expedition,” Sam told them, “I learnt to break out, with the others, from the stifling atmosphere of nihilism, and with our new evolutionary creed, look forward to what must come about. We should begin to feel ourselves as a part of evolution and recognise its workings within our own bodies.”

“But at the moment it’s not looking as if evolution’s going the right way!” interrupted Jonathan. “Unity seems to be falling backwards at great speed.”

“Ah Johnnie, you’ve forgotten that the task of constructing our future world lies with each and every one of us. Despair is not the answer — we have to ‘move on’! Only those who can find a spirit of expectancy and hope will join the march forward and Godward — it must be us,” said Sam.

“Thinking about evolution,” sighed Gillian, “it’s often difficult to remain hopeful all the time. Some of the evolving process seems so cruel and merciless that it’s hard to keep sight of the positive life forces and the continuing new discoveries being made in spite of everything.”

“Strangely enough, I raised this problem with the leader of our group on this last trip and he told me in his own words what he thought Tayar would have said in answer to this.” Sam paused and gathered his thoughts.

“It was something like this,” he began, addressing his dubious-looking friends. “The eternal presence finds and loves the hidden ‘Soul Stuff’ in our evolving world. Everything, he said, has an inner and outer aspect but the ‘within’ is the kernel of psychic consciousness which, however tiny the amount, exists in every part of pure matter. It contains the power of affinity — attraction and repulsion.”

“But the cruel bits are still a large part of unreflective life,” said Jonathan, “and some people prefer to focus their attention on the primitive side — especially these days! It would include Gilly’s cruelty and uncaring aspect, and ugly things like crocodiles and creepy crawlies, creatures playing with their doomed victims, and jealous lions mauling their rival’s cubs. Can we keep loving the whole planet?”

“Just think, though, what Love drew forth from Earth’s jumbled history,” said Lucy, speaking very slowly and surprising everyone. “I mostly

love furry, cuddly animals, ponies which I ride and birds in the garden — you have your favourites too, but think of those truly beautiful human beings who show up throughout history, when responding to the spirit of Love and its power of uniting all it touches... I'm thinking of one respondent, in particular — our own Galahad!”

“Thanks, Lucy, for that. I'm impressed — but we've talked enough,” said Jonathan. “We need some action now.”

In thoughtful mood the others got up to deal with some second cups of tea and Gilly praised Lucy for her helpful words while she filled her cup. They reminded her, she said, of words that Aunt Sophie quoted from Teilhard once, but Jonathan, already sitting at the special Merlin-room computer, again broke in on her.

“Hold your horses, Gilly. I'm trying to sort out a new, interactive difficulty connected with the access code Merlin left us. It's had a small change... and we have other questions to ask and plans to make.”

“But this *is* related to Lucy's answer and a follow-up,” said Gillian. “You can catch up later Johnny — don't look so peeved, for this is Merlin's Galahad who was talking through Aunt Sophie in

real-life Bath, and I actually remember the gist of what she was reading.”

“OK then, go ahead, but make it snappy,” said Jonathan, joining the others.

“Well,” started Gillian, speaking in rather a hesitant manner, “the main thing was that all fundamental energy is *psychic*, not physical. This gives it more value and direction. It made me understand that the coming of life and reflection are not just accidental afterthoughts, but advanced realities of evolution.”

“This is quite the opposite of what we were brought up to believe,” said Lucy.

“It will take ages for anyone to understand this while the world is still talking in terms of the supernatural as regards these crucial leaps of growth.”

“They were just factors unknown to science,” added Sam. “Or purely spirit, according to the Church. You’re right Lucy, the link to organic fact sounds exciting — are we, like others, lazy and fearful of these momentous propositions?”

“I’m still confused,” admitted Gillian, “about the inner and outer aspects of evolutionary growth — those horrific survival strategies and the complexity of systems and systems of systems — but

I've solved one problem during the course that I'm now studying. I'll try to explain it to you."

Now came groans from Jonathan as he spied biscuits, but his sister carried on.

"I was reading about the differences in meaning or implications, often carried by the same word. For example 'He *saw* the tree', or 'He *saw* that the tree was beautiful'. I then realized that the first usage expressed the 'without' of things in our human world and the second indicated the 'within' of everything."

There were moments of uneasy silence, even from the lid of the biscuit tin.

Then, all this ultra-serious exchange of thoughts ended in a short period of relaxation and soul-searching as they finished their tea and noted favourite designs on cups and plates which always comforted them — perhaps the pleasures or repulsions of our designs reflect the earlier choices and decisions of evolution.

On his pilgrimage to Teilhard's birth place, Sam had met like-minded fans who'd kept faith in their hero during decades of neglect or side-tracking by the intellectual establishment. Sam had felt the re-emerging of confidence from the people around him and the huge importance of our man — comparable to Darwin, he had told himself.

Sam had also met Teilhard's nephew, who had been able to confirm to Sam some valued attributes ascribed to the uncle who's now our Galahad.

First, that this man's whole body had always kept its wonderful poise, and second, that he was more nostalgic for the future than for the past — and was always looking forward to a future 'more beautiful than all the pasts'.

Last, that he, Galahad, always listened to and respected other folk's ideas — especially hopeful ones!

Gillian had taken in Sam's reports and comments. Now she broke the silence: "Most of the girls who come into the shop where I work would never think about these sort of things," she mused aloud. "Their minds are wholly fixed on efforts to keep up with fashion and fit properly into their reigning culture. Their boyfriends are just as bad, but spend less time on it."

"Ireland is changing," agreed Lucy, "and priorities now are often non-religious, but we're OK and enjoy ourselves, until something goes wrong — then we have so little to fall back on. A girl at school never got over the death of her brother. She had to leave and didn't come back."

"In England and much of Europe," agreed

Sam, “I read that there are now a record number of suicides among young people — where’s the comfort?”

“No ‘everlasting arms’ to fall back into,” echoed Jonathan, in sceptical tones. “We believed they were, somehow, always there.”

“But we’re usually happy at school,” piped up Lucy after thinking about all this. “We’ve got plenty on our minds at the moment, since I, and my friend Rebecca, started the campaign to save an old woodland area from encroachment by the builders. Bramley Woods are in danger! We’ve persuaded others in our class to join us. I’m hoping to enlist the rest of you as well!”

“Yes, we’ve promised to do our bit, Lucy,” confessed Gillian, “but I have a problem... I’ve started having worrying dreams about a remembered event and it recurs nightly. When I once asked Merlin about Lohengrin, son of Percival, the Mage said he knew about a *new* Lohengrin and we too must find him out.”

She then reminded the others of this legend and the secret involved. Later, she joked about how inquisitive they all should be about this — especially Jonathan, who was already rifling through a special copy of *King Arthur and his Knights*.

“Anyway,” she said. “Merlin did not give the name of this important person, but said that we would all know the secret early in the twenty-first century. He then talked of a question that was more vital to *us* than the forbidden one in that story. It was *far* bigger and one which we must now urgently ask ourselves. These worries come into my dream every time and though they’re always linked to the old story it’s now becoming part of my real life. Who is he?”

The idea of the unasked question comes from the ‘Arthurian Cycle’ — where it was Percival who never asked the right question, even though he had plenty of opportunities. That was why it took him so long to find the Grail. So Gillian suddenly felt that it was up to her to help the other Merlinauts by making greater efforts to work it all out.

Actually, Merlin knew it would take a few years for his apprentices to get wind of the big question and find the answer — so he had entrusted Spriggy, Gillian’s tree-sprite, with the task of putting it all in proportion.

So, here’s the Lohengrin story — outlined for the rest of you... and in case *some* of you may not even have heard it before!

A princess of some far country had been robbed of her inheritance, but one day while sitting disconsolately beside the river she had a great surprise. Coming along and stopping beside her was the Swan Prince in a boat pulled by two swans.

It was Lohengrin who stepped ashore and explained to her that he'd come to rescue her and restore her to her rightful position — but he didn't tell her who he was or where he'd come from and made it a condition that she would never ask. Their life together was happy and successful for he was loved by the people.

But they all kept asking her who he was and one fateful day her curiosity got the better of her and she asked the awful question — though in a roundabout way. Her misery and downfall was immediate, for he left her, never to return.

“So we won’t keep worrying you, Gilly, and upsetting Spriggy by asking you if you’ve found any clues!” quipped Sam.

“But if she comes with us next week,” added Lucy, “I dare to think she might get a bit nearer to her mission. We find the trees are a real inspiration.”

“When I come with you to Bramley Woods I’ll bring all my transcribing and recording equipment, so I can deal with this tree therapy,” said Jonathan in a rather ‘down-to-earth’ tone of voice. “But I must say that you, Lucy, have been in great form — so have the others actually, and I’ve learnt a lot.”

“I happened to get up early today,” Lucy explained, accounting for her good day, “and I looked out of the window, for there was a strange light in the room. There I saw the most wonderful sunrise. Bath was suffused with a warm, rose-pink glow, bathing the honey-coloured buildings in its magical light. It struck me as a sign of how a city could be if the Grail is seen on Earth again.”

Lucy then showed them a rather disappointing photo she had rushed to take of the scene and apologised to the others for not waking them to see it all — it was over so quickly. They then discussed its imagined significance and Sam reminded

them of their last trip to Cyberland, organised by Merlin, when they had risen up the trunks of the Circus trees.

Some laughed at this, in a warm and nostalgic way, but suddenly... their dreaming was rudely interrupted by Jonathan: “What about those thugs, morons and killers who’re abroad today?” he said. “And also there are all those cruelties we see every night on our tellies. I ask myself — where are civil humanities hiding? We don’t see much of them.”

Then, breaking through the ensuing silence, they heard a high-pitched little voice — like that of a five-year-old, ringing out and they cried out in unison—

“Spriggy!” and their depleted confidence rose unmistakably.

“Yes, it’s me again — come to the rescue. So cheer up, my playmates. I’ve been assured that a big change is coming very soon now. More and more people will become aware of the core of ‘soul-stuff’, however tiny, that’s in everyone, and they will stop smothering it. I well remember our visit to Cyberland and how you all had happy glimpses of a possible future world and the parts that each of you could be playing in it. It’s all to do with that big question that Gilly is worried about.”

Spriggy paused and Gillian, the tree-sprite's hostess, sat with the others, calmly watching a bright green light which was darting around the room — it was the sign of Spriggy's presence outside his new home with Gillian.

"I'm afraid that I don't know the answers to this brainteaser either," continued the sprite in a slightly resentful tone of voice. "Merlin said I couldn't keep secrets — but I have lots of clues for you. We'll soon be together again in Lucy's woodland and we'll look for some 'organic realities', as Merlin used to call them."

The green light went out and the Merlinauts' session was ended by Sam.

It was the last day of April and when the Merlinauts emerged from their Merlin room and out into the Circus, they crossed the road and stood on the grass under the five giant plane trees at the centre.

"I can just see a bit of sky through the branches and the multitude of twigs at the top of the trees," said Sam, looking upwards.

Some light was still filtering down to them through the delicate young leaves with their pale green enchantment, and the grass beneath them was bright with its new spring growth.

"With all these natural re-awakenings around

us,” commented Gillian, “I really should be able to find the clues to that something we still seem to be missing, and an answer — an answer to a question we’ve not yet asked!”

“Well, I’d like to find out much more about what goes on underneath all these trees,” said Lucy as she bent down to look into a big crevice at the base of the nearest trunk. “The great roots must reach deep into the earth to provide such water and nourishment to keep all that magnificence alive, while each leaf seeks out its bit of sunlight. It makes me think of the close contact between the Earth and Sun, our planet and the cosmos, and Mother Earth and Father Sky.”

“You’re dead right, Lucy,” concluded Jonathan in tones of mocked authority. “It’s also about all our past history and the evolving Earth from the stirrings of first life up to the existing human brain. But things still move on and with my computer I shall concentrate on redefining some of our old realities with new words.”

When they left the Circus that day they were wondering what they would have to report back to each other after their summer in Ireland, and when they met here again in the autumn. What progress would they have made towards their goal?

2

ONE EXTRAORDINARY DAY IN THE WOODS

At weekends and on summer evenings, Lucy, Rebecca and other friends in their class at school had made a habit of visiting Bramley Woods and making their presence truly known — especially to those who really mattered.

A building firm had bought a small patch of land backing straight on to the very perimeter of the well-loved woodland. The first house of the batch which they planned to build there was almost completed and they had even walled off a substantial extra space which actually encroached into the woods — two trees, both very old, had been cut down to make room for the new garden.

Now, near the end of the summer holidays, Lucy and Co. were determined to discourage this outrageous plan before it was too late. They

followed a special routine each time they came and stuck to it through thick and thin.

Lucy's plan was to create as much nuisance as possible so as to discourage prospective buyers, making the houses hard to sell. They were working together to give the impression that the surrounding area was a regular and traditional meeting and fun-making place for the local schoolchildren, of all ages! In holiday time, much harmless banter, teasing and joke exchanges wasted the time of the building workers, and the boys, meanwhile, took apart the new wall — brick by brick.

The firm's bosses had ordered the redirection of the original path into the woods so that it would not run so close to their new houses, but each time the youngsters came they messed up the new path and relentlessly re-trod the old one.

This particular day the participating youths from the village came earlier than usual, as it was a beautiful day, and had been allowed to bring a picnic tea with them. Lucy had always honoured parental rules, and the 'Guardians of the Woods' team would never enter the interior with less than four of them together — today there were seven.

The workmen were still there around the house and when the young visitors had finished with their

distractions and boisterous goings-on, they took the old path into the woods. They had all promised to be home at the agreed time, but there were plenty of hours left in this long summer's day.

It was one of those still and scented late-June afternoons, and when they first entered Bramley Woods not a leaf was stirring and their usual feelings of mystery and excitement were especially strong.

They had been taught at school all the scientific explanations of the seemingly miraculous procedures involved in the trees' programme — all the long words used for the intricacies of those biological and chemical interchanges and successful choices. What the Merlinauts now really wanted to know was *how and why did nature do it like this — what was the unknown impetus behind it all?*

This, the unanswered question, was what gave them a sense of divinity when they were among the trees and triggered a half-recognised and ancient symbolism. Sometimes Lucy and others experienced a taste of what's called 'mysterium-tremendum' which had always sprung from the human heart in times of great wonderment. The word 'tremendum' comes from the Latin 'tremor',

meaning a shaking or quivering. Therefore, it was a feeling of exaltation to be trembled at! With these youngsters it just meant adventure and a desire to explore.

Today, they had all spread out to follow their whims and revisit their favourite spots, and one group began to suspect that things were going to be, somehow, very different on this trip.

The stillness was progressively broken by unusually loud sounds of disturbance among the leaves and bending boughs. Two girls reported seeing strange animals jumping from tree to tree and one swore she glimpsed the figure of a witch-like person moving in the shadows.

They all noticed extra movement around them, although they were used to the occasional light disturbances caused by what they thought were red squirrels inhabiting the woods. Actually, there were real squirrels there quite recently, but lately, for some reason, they'd disappeared.

There was always the presence of bird life though. Unexplained sightings of other animals had also been discussed, but dismissed as foxes or escaped pets from houses or farms around. Now, however, these new happenings were considered scary. Some younger children suggested with a

slight shiver that perhaps there were bad spirits stalking them.

In due course, the divided groups joined up together again and began to talk about their uneasiness. Luckily Sam had come with them that day and was able to calm them down.

“I think the woods are haunted and someone out there doesn’t like our being here,” said one of the boys as they drew nearer to each other.

“Not at all,” replied Gillian. “Trees give out a rich, benevolent atmosphere as they give out oxygen for us to breathe. These ghosts are just in your brain.”

“Perhaps we’re all participants in the game of a psycho-freak who hates children,” joked Jonathan rather wickedly, thinking of his worst computer games.

“Shut up, Johnnie, you’re not helping!” scolded Sam. “It’s all probably just a very simple case of animals in the wrong place or even some future-natural events — things no one yet knows about. Nature is unbelievably clever and we’ve always, mistakenly, attributed these sort of happenings to the Gods, cosmic forces or bad spirits... I shall now start to investigate properly — I’m good at climbing trees!”

“Let’s have our picnic tea first,” said Gillian hopefully, “and when we’ve found a convenient spot we can relax — a time to stop talking a while and put our minds onto other things, including food and drink.”

“We’ll have to guard the sandwiches though!” said Jonathan.

Undaunted, the party soon settled themselves, sitting around on a few old logs and suitable clearings of undergrowth. They put out their tea-time offerings including small bottles of drinks which were doubly welcome today and were soon emptied — but before they could attack the food, there was a big surprise.

Darting around them and in and out of the surrounding trees was the bright green light of Twiggy, who spoke thus to the Merlinauts: “I’m the only supernatural appearance you’ll see today, and only you can hear me. I’ve distracted the former creaturely outburst, for the time being, so you can all eat,” said the self-assured little sprite. “I know what’s upsetting them.”

“Blast it!” swore Jonathan. “If we are the only ones who can hear him, I can’t record any of his words for reference.”

The green light was now in a stationary position

overhead and the other members of the party were still looking at it with disbelief and fear.

“There are things about this place I’d like to have shared with all of you,” continued Spriggy, “and so far Merlin has only been able to extend the hearing and viewing powers of you, the first few. But it will spread — I know it will spread.”

“Hang on, Sprig... and keep talking. I’ll explain about you and us and then repeat all you say to the others later.” said Sam.

“Why was my computer power not extended at the same time,” grumbled Jonathan as he turned off his recorder to listen to Spriggy. “But I’ve got a good sequence here from that earlier episode.”

“Thank you Sam. We tree-sprites have always enjoyed the company of humans, they were like Gods to us, but we couldn’t understand why they didn’t notice us more — but that’s changing. In the quiet wood you will soon feel that soothing and enabling quality of peace which comes from trees. They were the first living things to grow on the dry land, they live much longer than you and are so much bigger and taller; you really should listen to them. Like Merlin’s magic forest of Broceliande, this wood could make new things happen.”

Spriggy paused and Sam scribbled down

some words in a notebook he had fished out from his pocket.

“To start with,” carried on the funny voice, “you are all sitting quite near to the oldest tree in your woods. I know of older ones as well — olive or cypress.”

They all watched as the green light moved across and settled itself among the bent branches of a large tree with a very thick trunk.

“I heard,” broke in Gillian excitedly, “that there’s a lime tree in a certain arboretum which was alive when Jesus walked the Earth. What changes since then!”

“Of course,” said Spriggy with renewed gusto. “Think on it, ‘mine hostess’ — how close to nature those Celtic Christians were and how they saw a deeper reality in every tree. There’s another clue for you. Merlin even suggested once that cuttings could be taken from such trees so that new ones would remember this and help the world to unite. He kept saying that trees had a presence — whatever that means!”

“I think I know,” said Lucy, surprising the Merlinauts again, and everyone else who was watching the green light. “The other night I had a very strange dream. It seemed to me that a large

part of myself had suddenly swollen and extended right outside my brain and body and was walking about in the countryside. I saw this tree and it felt to me that I was viewing its grand image for the very first time. It was so real, I felt its direct and immediate presence.”

After a rather awed silence, Sam explained to the friends of Lucy, who were looking at her in rather a queer way, that their one-time guru, called Merlin, had often taught them some especially new ideas by way of dreams.

“Anyway, good on you Lucy,” exclaimed Jonathan. “I’ve recorded all that — it’s hot stuff and I can use it in a new game called ‘Outside the Brain!’”

“Oh, put a sock in it, Jonathan!” called out Sam. “You’re becoming more and more ‘nerdish’ every day. Let’s get on with our food and when we’ve cleared up and pocketed all the rubbish, we’ll get down to business and tackle our problem.”

“We can leave some crumbs,” added Gillian. “But it’s very funny that today there don’t seem to be any birds around, not even wood pigeons looking for titbits. They’re strangely absent.”

Meanwhile, Spriggy had disappeared and the party had begun to hear more worrying noises again. Sam led the way back towards the initial

disturbance. All were feeling distinctly uneasy. Once there, most wanted to leave straight away.

“It’s time I climbed that tree,” said Sam bravely as he watched it shaking. Then, as soon as he’d managed to get half way up, there was a loud, piercing yowl and out of the tree dropped a scrawny-looking half-grown kitten. This creature seemed terrified and after circling aimlessly, emitting prolonged mewing sounds, it clawed its way back up the tree, past Sam, and was greeted by a fierce, but obviously feline, sort of face. Joined by other retreating creatures — one with a black tail — they both took off. There was hissing, spitting and violent movement in the branches.

“Wild cats!” shouted Sam. “There are many of them living in the trees. Goodness knows where they’ve come from and how they’ve kept so secret.”

In order for you to understand these strange goings-on, I need to explain something. On the other side of the woods was an old fashioned little house made of oak-wood. In it lived a certain Miss Amstry — a solitary person who kept herself to herself and never socialized. She occasionally went shopping in the village, but never talked to anyone except the shopkeeper. The children had heard of her, but never met her nor been near her house.

There were many rumours about her, mainly among the grown-ups. It was said that she'd had a wartime lover who'd been killed abroad, and that after this she'd had a very late and, possibly, bungled abortion. The people concerned would not talk about it nor answer many questions except to say it had been a baby girl.

Miss Amstry never got over this and her deranged mind imagined that somewhere her daughter was still alive. The brain can play terrible tricks and wreak havoc on a personality when it gets wrongly fixed onto a falsehood. This lady became locked into herself.

To continue the story... After Sam had expressed his surprise discovery to the others who were all watching him intently, he began to speculate.

“Do you remember,” he asked, “hearing about Miss Amstry who lives at the far end of this woodland? Well, I've heard that she had some queer habits. For instance, she often visited a nearby dogs and cats home and, it was said, donated regular payments towards its upkeep. The strange thing is, she doesn't seem to own a cat. Some said she'd so smothered her pets with excessive attention and fuss that they'd all left her. Cats are very independent creatures.”

“She’d have to resort to collar and chain,” smirked Jonathan, “to keep those poor cats with her now! I’ll bet they escaped into the woods.”

“Yes, I’d thought of that as well,” agreed Sam. “But first, lets hear more about the spooky figure that someone saw moving between the trees.”

After listening to the response from his audience, Sam began to voice his suspicions as to the causes of the violent outburst and to connect everything together. He’d just told them about the local man who, while walking his dog at night, reported often hearing a voice from within the woods calling a name. He was about to suggest what frightened the cats, when there was a sudden interruption... There, standing in full view of everyone was Miss Amstry herself.

Dressed in long, out-fashioned clothes and holding a bottle of what looked like water (there was a little brook nearby) she stood motionless. Seeing the amazement on all the faces, she only stayed long enough to approach Sam, whisper in his ear, then disappear into the trees.

“What did she say to you?” said all voices and Sam was hard-pressed to explain things — but he soon found his tongue again.

“Well, she wants me to ask you all a question...

‘Have any of you ever seen a strange child wandering in these woods?’ If so, would you put up your hand.”

There was no response.

“I feel really sorry for this poor soul,” said Gillian after they’d all talked together again. “I remember some words from the Bible — Revelations, I think — which say ‘the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations,’ but I’m afraid they haven’t helped with the healing of this sadly damaged spirit.”

“No,” agreed Sam. “I guess that these feral cats had once felt the presence of her insanity and left her. I think that two of us should go and call on her tomorrow and talk to her. Today though, Gilly, won’t have helped *you* much with your questions and answers! It’s time to go home, anyway.”

Bramley Woods then returned to the usual harmony it extended to its visitors.

*The tree which moves some to tears of joy
is in the eyes of others only a green
thing which stands in the way.*

William Blake

3

WHERE IN THE WORLD

Jonathan had been given a laptop computer for his sixteenth birthday. He'd been promised one by his parents for ages as he spent so much time on the ones in the library or school, when they were available.

He also looked forward each year to the short time he was allowed with the special Merlin-room model on which he could play some very unusual types of computer games.

Now it was late evening on his birthday and he had been putting the laptop through its paces all day.

"You'd better pack up now, Johnny," said Gillian as she passed his room on her way to bed. "You'll never be up tomorrow in time for school!"

"I just want to experiment with one more thing before I sleep," answered her brother with a

disarming smile but promising to make it quick.

Jonathan had long fancied himself as the one who, in time, would be able to help Gillian with her disturbing dreams by getting his computer onto the subject.

When, during his short space trip (see *Merlin in Cyberland*), he'd been given a secret means of connection to Merlin's cyber-room, he'd thought it would be dead easy to work out.

Later, though, while trying to share his knowledge with the other Merlinauts, he'd realized that it was partly symbolic, and soon found that sitting and holding the ball of one's foot, as then suggested, could lead to something else. While feeling round it with a finger and remembering it was here that his body touched the earth, it seemed as if the skin became the surface of a screen with a reference code — MR2.HWH — that he would later inscribe on the Merlin Room computer. This presented him with the picture of a page which looked like a half-filled list of colleagues — with Merlin's own identification details. He'd got no further — yet! Today, though, he was in for a big surprise.

“Well I'm jiggered,” he exclaimed. “How on Earth did that get there? Gilly! Come back here a minute.”

“Look at this strange website, which seems to be mine, but which I’ve certainly not put in today,” said Jonathan after the hasty entrance of his flustered sister. “And look at the new presentation of the Merlin Room — showing it so different.”

“All I can say,” Gilly commented, after they’d both stared at it with fascination, “is that I can only think of one possibility. Yesterday, when you were out, an unexpected stranger called on Dad just while he was showing us your new computer. The man said he was a business associate from England who was visiting Ireland and wanted to strengthen the links between the two countries.” Gillian paused.

“We explained to him about your present and how we were hoping it was the right model. We were surprised when he said he was expert at these things and would try it out, which he did, and pronounced it a very good buy. For some reason his face seemed familiar to me and when he smiled on the way out I knew I’d seen him before.”

“Do, please, try to remember where,” begged Jonathan, greatly intrigued.

Gillian sat on the bed and struggled to recall the circumstances of their meeting. Finally, she succeeded and got up to tell her brother, but he’d

fallen asleep at his computer — he'd been up so early that day. Gillian woke him, turned things off, and got him to bed without attempting to tell him her conclusions.

Some time ago Sam and Gillian had been sent by Merlin to a little CD and DVD shop in town which would have been hard to find without some guidance, and which they'd never noticed before. It was called 'The Wizard Collection' and it had many special music selections on CDs and other very 'way-out' recordings.

It was here that the pair had been given their five K Files (computer games) and told to study them. The receptionist had been a very kind but dynamic sort of man called Claude. He had given them their tapes and it was he who, Gillian now recalled, was the one she had seen the day before Jonathan's birthday. It must have been Claude, one of Merlin's helpers, who did it, she thought.

When Gillian finally lay down on her bed she started to think about it all, and pictured again the detailed model of the Merlin Room included in the website.

"That was a future version of M's Cyberland Room," she told herself. "The one he called his half-way house and which we visited on our last

magic trip. But it had some differences which I must remember now before I go to sleep!”

The clearly marked Merlin Room model that the two of them had been gazing at unbelievably had two big changes. First, they saw that there was a new place-mat right in the centre of the Round Table — and with the name of Lohengrin on it.

The second change was that the list of colleagues was now filled up and all identity details included. Gillian remembered Merlin showing Sam the way he could obtain this information — they had all gone through the process — and Sam had obviously been able to fill them in at some future time.

“I really must try harder to find out about Lohengrin and who he now is,” she castigated herself. “Perhaps I would then learn the right sort of questions to ask.”

Soon after this Gillian also fell fast asleep and was to have the best night for weeks, but Jonathan, meanwhile, was having a very long and vivid dream. It seemed so real that the next day and ever after he would never accept that it had only been a dream.

He remembered Lucy’s similar dream and wondered... Did they actually happen? Where do dreams come from, anyway!



DREAMS

In his dream, Jonathan finds himself in Merlin's Half-way House which is set between basic human life and where the flesh is made word again in cyberspace, the place outside the individual brain.

He's sitting on a chair in front of the very extensive TV screen on the right-hand wall. There is a beautiful landscape on view with a busy highway in the background. He could now try out the new fingertip technology, so being drawn to a specially attractive tree in the centre of the scene, he singled it out and fixed his attention on it.

His strong intention was, somehow, to photograph it for storage in his new computer. It would be the best photo he'd ever taken.

After he'd pressed his finger on the tree he began to realise that he was actually present in this magic location and the tree he was looking at was realer than real. There was a small wooden seat under the tree and, laid open upon it, a book. On the upmost page two lines were clearly underlined. Jonathan read these words:

The extended mind enables us to take seriously the evidence for the seventh sense in people and in animals... the 7th sense is part of our biological nature.

While he was still standing, Jonathan, trying hard to take in this new idea, decided to pick up the book and find out who the writer was so that he could tell Gilly about it and help her to find the present Lohengrin.

Bending for the book he saw with surprise that it was not there anymore! Then, looking round with confusion he saw a familiar green light and smiled in relief.

“Ah! Spriggy,” he called. “I thought you must be around. Am I glad to see you! Where am I? I didn’t quite find out from that book, and why was it taken away?”

Though Jonathan thought he had called out to Spriggy, in fact no sound had come from his lips — no voices were needed in this place, as he’d soon understand.

The response was immediate and the questioner knew exactly what the sprite was telling him — that they were in a separate portion of the

natural mind which Jonathan had never recognised or greeted before.

“I hang out here most of the time,” Spriggy was telling him, and explained how that all-important *attention*, and then the special *intention* (taking the photo of the tree) had got Jonathan here, by means of his seventh sense.

While Jonathan was still listening in his mind he noticed that the landscape was beginning to change, and when a small group of young people passed by on a nearby path and waved to him, some of them seemed very familiar, just as the new landscape was also well-known to him. He commented on this with renewed surprise and Spriggy came up with some lively answers:

“You see, stupid, you’ve been here many times before, but mostly surrounded by different backgrounds. Characters you saw included special friends you’d made — for instance, at your camera or computer club. Wake up, you Merlinaut nerd! You’re actually in part of cyberspace, by means of a seventh sense, which is a form of *instinct*. I admit, however, it is a ‘Merlin-room setup’. Notice your tree’s the same, and will not change. Normally, though, each transfer to this state will have different backgrounds and you’ll meet new people... but you’re all part of Planet

Earth. Incidentally, the two girls from your lot are also here today. I've been very busy."

"Ah, that's why you hid the book. You knew as well that Merlin had wanted to keep the name of the new Lohengrin secret, so that Gilly'd keep trying for the right questions to lead us forward. It was too soon to find out, I guess."

"Dead on, my friend," answered the well-pleased tree sprite. "My master used to say that this new knowledge will liberate you all. I remember his telling me that you'd no longer be imprisoned inside your skulls nor your minds be separated from each other, your surroundings, other species or your own bodies. You'd all be interconnected — some more than others!"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Jonathan as he slowly surveyed the scene around him. "But this place would not suit the enjoyers of violence. I've not seen any of those sort of people here."

"Well, it's a matter, again, of attention and intention," continued Spriggy confidently. "Merlin was always on about *stories*. You could say that you now have become conscious of your favourite mental habitat which is a place where you can actually experience being infolded by your own special story.

“Merlin thought that everyone had to choose a story to live by and believe in because, he insisted, humans know next to nothing about the force behind creation, nor can they begin to understand its nature. That’s the reason, he said, why you all had to try to see an answer in an adopted story, and immerse your lives in it.

“While you’re here though, still as part of the same world, you’re really in a collective consciousness. It’s a change from the confusing buzz of activity and choices on the internet which I visited once with Merlin, but never again. Here I can relax and enjoy myself.”

“I’m now wondering if this is the same land that Merlin often spoke to us about and which he called Logartia — the place where the WORD was made into ever-living Art. There could be graphic, musical or written art-forms there and also the fruits of inventiveness, the likes of which I once reminded our wizard about! As for ‘stories’ — I realise now that he is training us by means of the Arthurian legends.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” exclaimed Spriggy. “I think my master would have been very pleased today with his youngest apprentice. I must go now — so start exploring.”

Jonathan, now surveying a very varied landscape, noticed that the busy highway was still there in the background, so decided to head for it. On the way, he indulged himself in the warmth of the bonding process which came into play whenever he conversed with others he met. He felt happy with himself and knew instinctively that it was his true self.

Thinking back on the origin of certain memories which each type of district triggered off, he saw a pattern of emotions and preferences. He'd been set in this direction all his life, he concluded, and it was a question of how you really saw yourself — when did you learn to like the image or not?

It wasn't long before he met the girls, who were delighted to see him, and suggested they all sat down on a seat, which then appeared as part of a country park, and they began to share their experiences.

They discussed Merlin's 'story' theory and decided that their best chosen story was the one told by the four Gospels about Love and the man Jesus — who Merlin calls the Divine Humanity. In the present place they see that hatred and cruelty are non-existent.

After an agreement they set off towards the

road and what looked like some wayside notices which they hoped would be directions to exciting places. On the way, Jonathan and his sister noticed for the first time that some of the closest members of their family were sitting on a fallen log and smiling at them.

Soon after this, Jonathan woke up and felt very disappointed — vowing to himself that he'd try to find a way back.

He now knew, at last, how to contact the wizard's new inter-dimensional texting system and how to get to Merlin's 'Room Number 2'. The feet, it turns out, hold the knowledge of many things and he remembered the secret code location Merlin had given him during his recent Cyberland trip into space.

During this long holiday period Sam arranged to spend some time in Bath with Aunt Sophie. While he was there he decided to visit the city's grand edifice — The Circus — and drop in on their secret Merlin Room. He wanted to prove that it was still the same and awaiting their late summer appointment.

When he next let himself into the special basement room and looked around, it all seemed

just as they'd left it on their previous Easter visit. Feeling a welcoming surge of emotion, Sam sat down on one of the chairs, and while sniffing at a strange but pleasant odour which was now filling the room, he dropped off to sleep.

Merlin's well-trained tree sprite had been active in all the recent spate of vivid dreams affecting the Merlinauts and the one that Sam now experienced was no exception. He was able to recount it to me in great detail.

He dreamt that he saw a beautiful bowl on the table full of fresh primroses, and on the floor in front of the small window, a vase of sun-lit daffodils, with their shiny, spear-like leaves. The perfectly formed shapes of the blossoms on the table, with their well-marked, dark yellow centres, seemed to be smiling at him, and the daffodils were throwing up their outer petals as though to greet him. He then told himself that the strange owner of this house must have put the flowers there on one of her rare visits to Bath.

While Sam was still looking and savouring that curious 'countryside' odour, he heard the familiar tinkle of cup meeting saucer meeting spoon and his eyes moved to the tea cups which

Gilly had put back on the shelf. Something was happening to them. The Merlinaut's favourite floral designs, which artfully decorated the china set, were dissolving inwards leaving just plain tea-things in place. These were reflected in a screen behind them.

Sam then saw that the same flowers, leaves and patterned structures were coming back to life again and growing round the deprived cups and saucers — the plants were rooting themselves in the grass and the earth which had duly presented itself beneath them.

Sam told me that he specially noticed the soft, delicate appearance of the new, gently-blown petals and the rough vibrancy of the live, tongue-shaped leaves... He saw the transparency of other leaves.

A voice suggested that all this was, somehow, depicting the true glory of the natural originals of the artists' talented work which copied lovingly every curve and regularity. I was obviously discerning here, fruits of the spirit, fixed in the decorations adorning the Merlinauts' tea-set. The voice sounded strangely familiar.

As soon as Sam had woken from his dream he made up his mind that he would go straight back

to Aunt Sophie's and tell her everything, so they could discuss it all — he felt sure that the others, still over in Ireland, would approve.

She didn't seem very surprised!

Back with his Aunt and after a long talk during which they'd tried to sort out the meaning of Sam's mysterious dream, his Aunt brought to their help two separate lines of poetry she'd remembered from William Blake: 'Eternity is in love with the productions of time,' and 'He who sees the infinite in all things, sees God.'

When Sam heard this he became very excited and struggled to get his words out quickly enough: "That's amazing," he said. "Did you know before I told you that William Blake was linked to our special teacher and friend... the wizard Merlin?"

"Well, I *had* guessed from things you'd all said," she answered with a smile.

This was a happy conclusion to a memorable day. Sam had learnt of new directions for them to follow and now they'd have Aunt Sophie on their side too.

4

UNPUBLISHED MATTER

Gillian had just finished a day's work in her friend's exclusive little dress shop which Mary's father, who was in the trade, had bought for her.

Gillian, our eighteen-year-old Merlinaut, had dealt with her last and most frequent customer, who insisted on trying on everything that caught her wandering eye, although she'd never, so far, bought a thing!

Gillian had suggested to her that she should try quite a new line of clothes. The girl left after this, muttering about bad sizes and a small stock. Jeans and skirts were also sold in the boutique, which was popular with teenagers.

It was Friday evening and Gillian was looking forward to a lunch date she had the next day with someone she really liked.

The woman who owned the shop was the

half-sister of John, this new friend of Gillian's — a young fellow in his early twenties, who she'd met at the local college. They were both doing a course in journalism and often studied together.

John lodged in a neighbouring apartment and once invited Gillian in to show her some books. She had been worried but intrigued by what she had seen. Obviously, he didn't look after himself at all well. His pile of printed work was by the computer and his discarded manuscripts were scattered around the table. The rest of the room was in a state of disorder... to put it mildly! He'd probably not cooked anything for days — Gillian had soon figured this out.

The usually rather secretive young man had then told her, enthusiastically, about his writing ambitions. He wanted to carry on with a theme that his father had been working on before his life had been cut short. This subject, John was told by his mother, had been very close to his father's heart and needed finishing.

“What was the nature, exactly, of this important material?” Gillian had asked.

“Well,” John had explained, “his life interest was the study of and research into the surviving literature referring to the Arthurian cycle — the

legendary characters and deeds of the Knights of the Round Table, and their Ladies. My father had always wanted to attempt an enlarged version of the end story of Lohengrin, which always seemed so short and cut off from the rest of the epic saga. He'd hoped to present a more convincing completion to the mythological history and foundation of Camelot — he'd felt something big was missing at the finish."

Now, as we speak, John, who'd left college before Gillian, had got a job with a well-known publisher in town. They still met from time to time. This rather lonely young man never said much, but what he did say was always important.

He had introduced Gillian to his sister, Mary, who later invited her to come and work in the shop and also offered her new friend the use of a small bedsit, next to her own, above the shop — Gillian's former rooms had been what John had termed decidedly dingy. She'd eaten out quite often, and still did, but some days she shared a meal with Mary and they had good talks afterwards.

Today their conversation focused on Mary's brother, John, about whom the whole story unfolds. It started before his mother had met and married Mary's father — another John — and was

still a school teacher. She'd had a fairly intense relationship with an Englishman who was in Ireland on a teaching assignment at Mary's school. This brought them together often — and they fell in love.

It was a big shock when, after a short visit home to England, he never returned. My mother heard afterwards that, while coming back from a country walk and probably deep in thought, he was run down by a drunken driver and never recovered, dying soon after.

"It's like the story of poor Miss Amstry," Gillian reminded herself — but this mother was more fortunate, for after John No.2 was born, along came love again.

"Your father didn't mind about the Englishman's baby?" questioned Gillian.

"No, he was marvellous and happily took them both on, treating her child as his own. John Junior was accepted as family and my sister and I both love him."

That weekend, when Gill and friend, John, had finished their lunch, which had included some wine, they sat on for a while to talk and enjoy each other's company. It was a friendly restaurant well-known to them and not very busy.

“I’m learning more about my contemporaries,” said Gillian as she lifted her glass to finish the wine, “by over-hearing bits of conversation between the girls who come into the shop. It’s mostly about pop music, boys, or the right clothes to wear, but when it’s about items from their latest TV diet or magazine choice, I get really worried. It seems as if some people have been working out the very worst things humans can do and say to each other and then they dramatise it all on television or video.”

“I’m afraid it’s all a matter of high sales and TV viewing numbers,” answered her companion. “Money, in other words. We feel we need to make our ordinary lives more exciting, to catch the attention of the media.”

“I’ve been trying out my journalistic skills,” complained Gillian, “but have had no success so far. Publishers aren’t interested in the subject matter, I guess. I’ve been looking for some good news and positive projects to report on, but it’s hard to popularise this — especially pieces with no violence in them.”

John was in full agreement with this and had some good suggestions up his sleeve. He got on very well with his boss, who understood him and

helped him further his Arthurian ambitions — taking into account that none of this English and Welsh legendry was taught in Irish schools.

“I would be happy to read your efforts,” proposed John to Gillian, as they rose to leave. “I might show them to our publisher to get his advice — he is very broad-minded and encouraging. Why don’t you call at the office on Monday?”

After walking around for a while and sitting in the park, enjoying odd bits of conversation, they decided to finish up in one of Gillian’s favourite tea-shops.

It was there she was given her final surprise of the day. While she was telling John about the Merlinauts and how Merlin had talked to them in his basement room in the Circus house in Bath, suddenly her companion broke into her sentence in an excited tone of voice, unusual for him, and burst into a surge of passionate speech.

“Recently,” he said, the words tumbling from him in a free-fall manner, “I’ve become more and more convinced that Merlin, that ancient spirit from our early history and hidden in the landscape of Britain, is living today. His powerful identity in our subconscious minds is very real and his presence occasionally expresses itself in human terms



when he's on a rescue mission — during a crisis period in the moral and spiritual development of the western world... like now!”

There was a moment's silence, during which the stunned Merlinaut tried to think of a suitable reply. Meanwhile, having returned to his quiet and contained self, John apologised for his outburst and for interrupting Gillian.

“I just couldn't believe in such a happy coincidence,” he said.

“Well, it's all true,” said Gillian, recovering herself. “With his unfailing and extraordinary wizardry our special Guru sent us on exciting trips to fantastic, dream-like places which we still consider real. He taught us new ways of looking at our lives. He was our very own Time-Lord and Master of Space. He's left us at the end of his present visit, but has commissioned his adopted tree sprite, Spriggy, to be near us when we need him.”

They then shared further information on the subject of this eminent Merlin Mystery. After leaving the tea-rooms and looking at the time, they were surprised.

“Time to go home,” said John, “but we must get together on this new subject and work something out.”

They parted sadly and started on their separate ways.

“Give my love to Mary,” John called out after his friend.

5

HOME VISIT

During one of their regular meetings, Gillian invited John to come with her on the next weekend visit she made to her country home. He seemed pleased with the suggestion, and quickly accepted.

So it was that the two of them on the following Friday boarded a bus bound for Gillian's village, and were sharing the delights of the Irish landscape.

Arriving at the house — it was a slightly enlarged, but typically Irish building — they were given a warm welcome from her mother, brother and friend.

There was also an ecstatic welcome from Scuff, the family dog who had always been especially attached to her, and the dog was very interested in John as well, who was a great animal lover.

They were shown round the large and well-kept garden, ringed by trees and bordering onto a field where cows were grazing — the house was on the outskirts of the village. The trip ended up in the orchard where Gillian used to keep her pony. It was now bright with summer's wild flowers, and friend, Lucy, was talking away.

“We had such adventures in those days,” she was telling them happily.

That evening Jonathan showed John-junior his precious computer and explained what he was trying to achieve for the Merlinauts and to help with Gilly's special problem.

After an excellent meal, mother and friend left the room to wash up and the visitors were left with Jonathan who invited them up to his room again.

Gillian's father was away to represent the Irish presence at an international conference for an EU peace project. Her mother often went with him on similar kinds of visits — this was when they sent the children to Aunt Sophie in Bath.

On the floor of Johnnie's bedroom was a large pile of plain, white T-shirts which his sister asked him about with amused curiosity.

“What on earth are you going to do with all those?” she exclaimed.

“Well, they are a part of my new, home-made computer game, you see. To begin playing it you have to choose your own favoured expression, statement or fact of life, from a long list of suggestions, to be printed on *your* T-shirt,” explained Jonathan. “The father of my school friend has a shop where they put words, in any way and size, onto sweat-shirts — and he does it very cheaply,” continued the boy, smiling in a conspiratorial manner.

“May I ask you then about the large words on your own shirt?” said John, reading it out — “The Merlinauts say YES.”

“Oh, that’s just about the present school decision — whether to allow some of our summer lessons to be held outdoors,” replied Jonathan.

“What happens after we’ve chosen our own special words?” asked Gillian in good humour and with genuine interest.

By the time Jonathan had finished trying to describe the outline of the proposed game he was developing, both John and Gillian were hard-pressed to keep awake...

The development of Jonathan’s own game was carried out mostly on the special computer he’d been able to use in Merlin’s basement den in Bath — the room where the Merlinauts still met.

The game was not finished, but after Jonathan was given his new laptop at home in Ireland he had been able to upload most of it for his present use. He'd finish the game off in his own room.

Since Merlin had told the boy that special secret, which happened during that trip into Space, Jonathan had found it easy to transfer himself and his new game-players back into Merlin Room Number Two where the Merlinauts had been once before — the place where the wizardry happens.

Now, at the start of this game the players find themselves in the 'ARRIVAL and DEPARTURE' Centre. It's the entry into Cyberspace. First of all their attention is grabbed by a big display of changing and colourful subjects illustrating all the different shirt-texts.

These are featured on the large wall screen that fills one side of the room. It shows a series of exotic and bewitching patterns, and strangely stylised letters of the alphabet, interspersed with enchanted objects such as sunflowers and trees — at times these are replaced with foregrounds of seascapes, landscapes or even night skies bright with the latest pyrotechnics or laser affects — each scene specially coded.

Beside this spectacle is a peculiar-looking TV

set showing a list of various categories into which each chosen anecdote, assertion or statement is placed. All samples are described as either witty, frothy, silly, funny, rude, boastful, or positive and hopeful — some to be accepted and others to be confronted.

Anyway, they all lead to healthy curiosity and dialogue and each of the fun choices has now been numbered, coded and saved. Next to this list is another one which copies the list of sayings that Jonathan first showed the players. These included samples such as: ‘Gaia,’ ‘New York,’ ‘Live to Love,’ ‘I’m Grumpy,’ and ‘Blow Bubbles not Bombs.’ There could also be a player’s own name spread across the shirt. All these had been seen in the district lately.

Below the lists was a panel with a small slot and the words ‘Speak your number’.

This done, two flashing arrows move up the lists and stop, one at the chosen shirt wording and one at its proper category. With this the bright wall displays come to rest on the very scene or object referring to the type and attitude of the choice.

Out of the slot comes the player’s personal logo in the form of a tiny token — bendy and rounded — with the same picture on it as that shown on the

wall. Most of the players will be surprised at the image given to their own choice of words.

But what do they do with them, the players then ask themselves?

At this point the voice of Spriggy is heard again and it suggests that they stick their new identification tags inside one of their shoes. This could be as good a place as any, they are told. None of the players had seen themselves in this new way before — it was quite a revelation to them.

On the other side of the room is a girl sitting at the computer and she looks really happy. When the players, mostly local young people, notice this person they recognise her as the girl who once came to their school and whose brother, who had been very close to her, had died in an accident. They remember her misery and how she left the school. They also remember her isolation and how they had been embarrassed and avoided talking to her. They feel guilty about this and wonder if they should begin to question their priorities and motives more deeply.

“You are beginning to know yourselves better already!” comes the voice of Spriggy again, “but you won’t be complete as persons until you have met someone you are happy to be with, and

could join in a life together as a strengthened and extended unit.”

This girl still sitting there was trying out Merlin’s inter-dimensional texting project which he had instigated before he withdrew from Earth again — leaving his tree-sprite, Spriggy, in charge of the Merlinauts.

She had actually received a return text from her brother coming from somewhere deep in the computer’s untapped inner workings. He’d got her message, re the Wi-Fi system, was still the same person and thought about her as well. She was comforted for the first time.

By now the players will be realizing that they didn’t know themselves nearly as well as they’d originally thought and when the Merlin-room location gradually fades from the computer screen they will be quite relieved to find themselves back in front of Jonathan’s laptop and being told to take a break.

This is the end of Part One of the game which Jonathan had already tried out on his school friends and which they could only play on his laptop, but now he wants to present them with Part Two which he had just finished making barely a week ago.

He prepares his long-suffering friends to be

ready for a virtual reality 'Second Life' mode of entering the game. The players must choose an image for their cyberspace identities and follow them through the action. Then he sets it up and leaves it to them, hoping they will understand the instructions.

Here then is the general outline of the Merlinaut Game — finding themselves in front of a Town Hall type of building, the players are told to proceed to the main entrance and wait. A voice will ask them to show their special identity discs to camera before they can enter.

They are then presented with a large room and a crowd of bright, youngish-looking people all moving around or chatting to each other — at the same time enjoying the refreshments taken from a well-laden central table. This table looks, somehow, very familiar to the players.

The participants then help themselves to food and drink, which appear real to their senses when handled and swallowed. This is because of the much heightened intensity of the advanced recall mechanism used by Jonathan. As soon as they begin to mingle with the others, the lights become dimmer so that the eyes of the person they are talking to seem full of meaning.

The green light of Spriggy is still circling around. His funny little voice tells them that their job is to find their most suitable partners — ones who they could identify with and really love. The first ones really to succeed, he says, will win a special prize.

After this, with the lights on again, there is a lengthy surge of eager movement between the many groups until a lightning flash suddenly transforms the Round Table and lights everyone up... someone has found his or her true partner!

The table has returned to its former appearance — the names of certain well-known knights on the place mats, with others blank, around the table. Now, as the players look, some mats have gone and on the chairs facing them appear shadowy figures in modern-day clothes — the first two places are empty.

The name of Lohengrin has left the centre of the Table and is on the back of the second empty chair which is quickly filled by a new character, previously unknown and in normal attire — he has undefined features. In the first chair is now an iconic, mysteriously-lit figure of a man bent forward with a crown on his head. The chairs with only backs in view are empty and some place-mats have female names upon them!

Spriggy returns and explains that a new ending is at last being written as a closing story and a fitting offering to the great Arthurian cycle — now a proper end.

“Do you remember the old story which ends with Lohengrin, the Swan Prince, having to leave his Princess and her country to their fate — all because she’d been overcome with curiosity and asked a forbidden question?” asks the sprite. “Well, in the new story he changes his mind after talking to his father, Percival, and consulting the Grail knight, Galahad.” Spriggy paused and reminded them that they could see the three Grail Knights in front of them at the present Round Table and sitting next to Lohengrin, each with a red cross bright upon his tunic.

“Lohengrin now decides to return to his Princess,” concludes Spriggy, “and to carry on, with her, to develop and reform her country, if they accept him back. It turns out that she greets him as she did the first time while sitting by the river — love at first sight! So, although earlier people had resented his new rules and often disagreed with him, they had promised the Princess’s father never to harm her and now their country is in such a bad way, many are glad to see him back.”

This is now the beginning of a move towards joining up with the Grail Country which is still ruled over by Lohengrin's father, Percival and his wife, the Grail princess. Lohengrin is still trying to discover his true self at this time.

The details of all this and the reasons for the former rivalry between these two countries, about which Lohengrin had been so wary and confused before, are much too complicated for Spriggy to understand so the sprite ends the game at this point, and then with his high-pitched little voice announces the prize and ends with a triumphant Merlin quotation:

*Jesus Christ, Superstar — MAN,
but not the God they say you are.*

This he repeated a few times, hoping the Merlinauts would take it up.

“The prize, then, will be,” he said, “a copy of the book to be written which tells all lovers of Camelot and the Round Table the full content of this end story.”

Spriggy admits that Merlin gave him a much longer version, the details of which can now be found in a notebook in Merlin's basement room

in the City of Bath. He promises to show its hiding place to the Merlinauts on their next visit to the Merlin-room and they will then tell the others.

That evening, before they retired to their bedrooms, Gillian and her guest were discussing Jonathan's computer game.

"Your brother reminds me a bit of that other well-known boy wizard!" remarked John-junior in a jokey sort of way. "Harry Potter!"

"Well, if so," replied Gillian, "it's just because he's a Merlinaut!" Then she gave him a knowing smile.

"But he's having a go, in this game, at sorting out your true self and your problems about the way ahead — and then, among other things, suggestions for the theme of my new story." John now reflected in silence for a minute and then, during an awe-struck look at his friend, finished his comment by exclaiming: "Sheer Magic! I would say."

"By the way," added Gillian. "Did you mind when he called you Johnny?"

"No, not at all, it gives me a family feeling."

"Well, I might follow his lead on that. He always calls me Gilly as well."

6

THE LAST DREAM

That night Gillian had an extraordinary dream. She imagined she was in some future time and a strange voice — certainly *not* Spriggy's — was telling her that evolution had started going backwards. And that she had become a tiny entity herself in the whole process of evolution.

Her eyes were working in the normal human way and so were her ears, but she seemed to be able to look outwards from the heart of any of its natural creations, and this included everything she could think about — the subjects spanned from humans and animals and birds, to trees, flowers and rock formations.

At first she imagines she is complaining from the very centre of a little flower — she is deeply flushed with its colour and steeped in its perfume. Her complaint is that, though she didn't mind

being gently picked to adorn some human's table or window sill, to be admired and loved, she and her male friends greatly resent being grabbed roughly to make a garland for a Goddess or crushed for the festooning of that strange thing. She wants to be venerated just for herself or as one of the natural miracles of evolution.

Next, she is a tree — a fine specimen in full leaf — a well loved beech tree. She feels the strength of the trunk and the gentle rustle of leaves and is proud of the way they are sheltering other life forms, large and small, beneath them. She's sure that those long roots are not only drawing up water all the time, but also the secrets of the Earth's history and ancient stories about the presence of Merlin — hidden in the countryside around.

“Was this like being on a trip to a subconscious dreamland of that Seventh Sense he was telling them about?” she wondered.

Looking out to other trees around her she sees they are lit with the same all-defining light — as though the sun is setting behind them. All is now bathed in a summer evening glow. She is in touch with many other tree sprites who remind her of a very special one — Spriggy — in his early days.

They're all a bit worried about something that's going on outside. It's shaking their confidence.

Next time she finds herself singing and thinks she is a bird. She's glorying in her wings, gliding over hills and vales, flying over towns and expanses of water.

Now she was less happy for she was a mother goat and had seen her small kid disappear, and not come back. A very old member of her flock had told her that strange Goddesses with weird faces and wild robes had been in the area. Your little goat was too young for their food-chain, he'd reasoned, but could have been killed as an offering to an 'Earth-mother' figure.

The shock of this horrific suggestion tears her away prematurely from the animal world and she despairs of her own species.

Gillian now finds herself back in the body of her human existence and is comforting herself by thinking that surely a living sacrifice has not been carried out for centuries — a long time further back. She supposed that some nature lovers could not believe that evolution had been so clever without the help of higher, supernatural beings.

She feels again in herself, though, the instinctively close connections with evolving matter

— attracters and repulsers, repetitive habits, retention of specific memories and copy patterns — the similarities were all there.

While she was thinking all these things, she is suddenly transported to another scene. She was now among many other young people and was busy informing herself that she was a member of a pagan cult and a White-Witch. She was trying to join wholeheartedly into a celebration of one of the early Anglo-Saxon nature Goddesses.

She was dancing with the others around the strange and scary image of something that was half human, half tree-like, and with a cartoon face.

Then she follows the others to a bubbly stretch of a nearby stream and they all start to bow down to a long-robed figure rising from the water.

Suddenly Gillian's dream-self gasps in horror and flees the scene swearing never to return. She wakes in a cold sweat and a feeling of dismay.

When her Mother came in to wake her, guessing that her daughter had overslept, she was surprised to see that Gillian looked alarmed.

"You wanted to start early this morning, to take John to the park," she said.

"I know, Mother," was the reply. "But I've had a bad dream."

THE COUNTRY PARK

When Gilly's mother returned after taking Jonathan to school she offered to take her two visitors to the local 'Forest Park' and drop them off there to wander around — coming to fetch them again in a couple of hours.

Breakfast being satisfactorily over, Gilly was looking forward to showing Johnny around — she was, in fact, strangely excited.

The old house, still showing much of its past grandeur — except for the loss of its roof — stood in a raised position overlooking its ample grounds which included a lake, a small river and a large patch of woodland. The house, surrounded by green and well-cut lawns, often used to be visited in its heyday by well-known poets, artists and writers from England.

As the two young explorers walked about,

talking and enjoying the special verdancy around them, they came to a wooden bridge which crossed one arm of the lake, and there they paused. They looked over the side and watched the ducks, then surveyed the scene around, feeling it time for a short muse.

“Would I be able to join the Merlinauts, d’you think?” asked Johnny suddenly.

“Of course,” came the answer. “It’s for all the young in heart — those who still have hope for the future.”

“Well, I think I’ll be applying for membership very soon!”

“It’s not all plain sailing, you know. We’re often resented, made fun of, insulted and openly opposed — sometimes physically. I was attacked quite recently.”

“Tell me about it, Gilly.”

The two started walking again along the path towards the woods and Gilly recalled her painful experience which happened back in Bath — along the usually unfrequented road which led from the Circus buildings to the city museum.

“We were on our way back to Aunt Sophie’s,” began Gilly, “having just come from a session with Merlin in his basement room in the Circus.

Jonathan had gone on ahead with Lucy and Sam was a short way in front of me listening to a recording of some of our wizard's words which we hadn't quite understood. I was deep in thought and a way behind him."

"Did you not notice anyone else nearby?" questioned Johnny.

"There was a group of youngsters laughing together, but it didn't worry me."

"Nor Sam either, I presume."

"No. The first thing he heard above the recording was my shout for him. He was back in a flash, but by then I was on the ground being kicked and punched."

"Gilly, how awful! What did Sam do at that point? What could he do?"

"He was fearless and I was proud of him. He went for the main attacker like a tiger, hurling him away. The gang soon scattered in alarm. We got a taxi back."

As the couple entered the wooded area, they followed a track which took them to a clearing from where there was a fine view of the big house through the trees. There was a convenient seat which looked very inviting, and while they sat resting, Gilly continued on the subject of her assault

and the aftermath of this ‘punch-up’. Johnny had already reminded her that had it been in London and knives had been used, Sam’s strong rescue bid wouldn’t have stood a chance.

“When I’d recovered from my bruises, black eye and shock,” said Gilly, “I began to wonder if I’d really been asking myself the right questions and listening properly to Galahad’s great hope for the future and Merlin’s deep wisdom. My assailant knew we were supposed to be a new-style Christic group and as he knocked me down I heard him say ‘where’s your Merlin now?’”

“People are always down on anything new or different — don’t let it worry you.”

“But this morning, Johnny, at breakfast, I noticed that two of the four beautiful sunflowers, which we admired the day before, had drooped very sadly. When we first saw them on the little table by the window, they were all facing the direction from which the sunlight was entering the room and were fully open. It made me think how little time and energy we all have to get things right and stay in focus; was I always looking the right way, while I could?”

Johnny then quoted a verse of poetry. It resounded in the quiet woodland glade:

*Ah, sunflower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveller's journey is done.*

“Goodo!” exclaimed Gilly. “You know your Blake. He was Merlin’s ‘William’, whom he often quoted. Anyway, after my bad dream last night, I’m worried.”

After watching a red squirrel as it darted in front of them looking for food, and then performing acrobatics in the branches above them, Johnny began to talk again:

“I’m afraid all natural things, including ourselves, have to die — but you can take heart, my Merlinaut friend. Do you remember telling me that your Galahad figure held Christ to be the driving force of evolution and, in the writings of Teilhard, whom this knight stood for, claimed to have found spirit at the heart of matter — also in the future of all life after physical death? A good lead for you!”

“You’re right, but lately I’ve been so wrapped up with the heady feeling of the new freedom from church rituals and routines — putting the return to nature craze and the evolving planet studies before

everything else. This often meant the throwing away of many important things. I was forgetting what Teilhard had told us about evolution and how one thing must always grow out of the thing before it. I was imagining the wrong questions and answers.”

“I understand, Gilly. Many of us today are ignoring the 2000 year growth of evolving Christian traditions and the real chance of a greater future outgrowth.”

“Well said, indeed. And going back to the sunflowers of Blake’s poem, I am reminded of his saying that ‘Christ is the sun, the human imagination in everyone.’ Blake died singing the hymns he had learnt in his childhood,” Gilly recalled.

“The sun makes everything look so different. We all need such visions to believe in. You showed me how Teilhard thought this to be an organic necessity!”

Gilly suddenly felt a warm rush of togetherness filling her heart, and turning to Johnny, their eyes met. A spark had been struck at that moment.

“I think we should start back,” she said.

As they wandered back towards the house, Gilly choosing a different way, Johnny started

to share with her some of his former secret ambitions.

“I too have had a bit of an eye-opener during this visit,” he said. “Since I read my father’s journals, which he left in the care of my mother before he went on his fateful visit to England, I’ve kept his ideas to myself. I was often drawn to follow them through in my own life. My mother never talked about them.”

“Were they so revolutionary then?”

“Well, he had identified himself with the legendary character of Sir Percival, one of the three Arthurian knights who found the Holy Grail. Unlike Sir Bors, though, who had returned to Camelot to tell them about his resulting discoveries, he went off with Blanchefleur to rule the Grail country. My father’s ambition was to be part of a secret society working underground to oppose the practices and, as he thought, disconnections of established churches.”

After walking in silence for a minute or two, Gilly risked a suggestion: “Did you sometimes connect yourself with their son, Lohengrin?” she asked. “And why did they call him the Swan Prince, I always wondered?”

“You’ve guessed right, Gilly, and I’m

impressed. About the swan connection — perhaps Percival had a special love of swans, and imagined them flying off with their oversized wings towards a new country, after he'd experienced the Grail vision... Don't take me seriously on this, though," Johnny smiled at her.

"Percival never did ask the right question, did he?"

"No, and I'm beginning to think that I too should start to ask myself the right question — 'who does the Grail serve?' I've found that since reading some writings of your Teilhard, which you gave me once, I've realized how many important Christian disciplines and habits were among those my father threw away, including the one thing needful — the true Christ who Galahad rescued for us all. Having done biochemistry at the Uni, it's made it all easier for me to understand and I admire his world-view."

"How strange that we should both have had the same changes in mind."

Johnny laughed softly, and putting his hand gently on Gilly's shoulder, admitted that he had never talked of these things with anyone else before.

"I think I really should join the Merlinauts," he said with a chuckle.

“Be assured, we’d all welcome you at any time,” asserted Gilly.

“There’s one thing I’m a bit uncertain about,” said the thoughtful young man beside her, after a moment’s silence. “I don’t really understand who this Spriggy character is and whether I could ever get in touch with him.”

“Don’t worry, Johnny, I can soon put your mind at rest about that.”

As they reached the spot where they were to meet for their lift back, Gilly looked at her watch and saw that they had arrived early.

She exclaimed: “There’s one more place I want to show you and we’ve got time to go there now. I can explain how Spriggy happened to us when we get there.”

8

BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Still in the Irish Country Park, Gillian and her friend, John Junior, had reached a patch of grass which was a lighter green and slightly muddy in appearance. It was on a corner beside the path. Gilly went over to look at a darker piece of ground, with a mound in the centre.

She turned to Johnny and explained: “This is where a great beech tree — very old we guessed — was blown down and torn up by its roots, during that terrible storm we had. A day or so later happened to be my twelfth birthday and we went to the park for a picnic. We sat on the huge trunk of the fallen tree and played around on its branches and stared at its upturned roots. Sam and I were especially affected that day.”

“Was it because you had both loved the tree so much, beforehand?” he asked.



“We did, of course, but the strange thing is that the two of us, and also Lucy, who was with us, happened to have had a few paranormal experiences before and counted ourselves as mildly clairvoyant — so we were especially sensitive.”

“I suppose you mean that you can sometimes see things beyond the sensory perception of most people — a sort of seventh sense. I wish I had it too.”

“Well... Tom, Sam’s friend, had it as well but sadly he had to leave us. Anyway, after our tea and when the four of us were alone, we were looking with great sympathy at a huge split down the middle of the lower trunk. We imagined the ebbing out of the last of that powerful spirit over the land around us.”

“This is an excellent start for your story,” encouraged Johnny.

Gilly smiled and continued with added confidence. “We then saw, or thought we saw — remember our belief that ‘thoughts are things’ — a very small creature, green but strangely human in form, jump out, and, as we watched, run about one way and another — completely lost. After a moment, though, it seemed to see us and stopped dead in its tracks, staring our way. It was Sam who made the

first connection — calling out bravely to the alien figure: ‘My name’s Samuel. Who are you? Can you speak?’

“Then, to our amazement we could hear, right from within ourselves, this funny little voice for the first time — bypassing our ears but making good sense to us. This was our introduction to Merlin’s Spriggy.”

As she led Johnny to the path again and headed back the way they’d come, she knew he was still waiting for the promised reassurance and regretted her delay by teasingly withholding it. Looking worried and uneasy, he complained to her: “All very fascinating stuff, Gilly, but where is the comfort there for me?”

“Take heart,” she laughed. “All is not lost. I haven’t yet told you that our Jonathan was not with us on this momentous day, but he knew what to do about it with the help of his computer wizardry.”

“He was born more into the computer age than we were, wasn’t he?”

“Well, he can now come to your aid again, I’m almost sure.”

“I’m all ears,” said Johnny, slowing his step.

“There’s a Merlin Room Number Two, where the wizard sends us prior to entering Cyberspace

or starting on a new venture. The computer in our Circus Room is connected to this very special computer in Room Number Two. Jonathan can do all sorts of incredible things for us on these models. He could show you how—”

“I can’t even see this little green light, which you talk about, showing the presence of this ubiquitous sprite,” interrupted her listener.

“Hold on, man! That’s all covered. First of all you have to get equipped with a tiny oblong device which can be fitted very easily behind one ear. This will, of course, be supplied only by Jonathan! He gets them made up at our special little computer shop in town where they are dealt with by the elusive Claude, Merlin’s local helper. This will be activated whenever the green light appears.”

Johnny was intrigued. He stopped, turned to look at Gilly, and said: “Don’t tell me it could do the trick for me. I’m notoriously averse to fairytales, including pixies, sprites or leprechauns — ask my sister Mary!”

He was soon laughingly assured, though, by being told of the mysterious power of Merlin in the Cybersphere and those seemingly impossible new appearances, creatures and other helpers in his special procedures and ventures in space-time.

They walked on again in silence for a while, digesting their thoughts.

“So,” began Johnny, “this contraption is supposed to relay Spriggy’s voice while adjusting it to the special needs and vagaries of each recipient — a tall order, I must say. Has it been tried out yet?”

“Well,” admitted the embarrassed Merlinaut, “it works among us, but I’m not really convinced at the moment how it would react to someone like you! We will have to experiment, I’m afraid. Sorry for raising your hopes!”

“I’ll have to put my trust in your Merlin now, won’t I?” smiled Johnny.

“You’ll not be disappointed.”

Gilly began to tell her new partner the rest of the happenings on the day of Spriggy’s join-up with humanity — or at least a part of it.

“He looked so lonely,” she said, “asking despairingly where he should go and would anyone ‘let him in’, that on a sudden impulse I said YES! — he’s been with me ever since... that’s why time seems always to slow down when I’m near trees.”

“I’d noticed that!” teased Johnny as they reached their meeting point. Gilly’s mother was there in the car, and on the way back she asked

them what they'd made of it all and were they glad to have come.

“Of course,” answered her visitor, with conviction. “And we've learnt some very important things.”

Gilly felt her hand being gently squeezed.

Just before lunch on that same day they all had a nice surprise. Sam turned up on an unexpected visit home. He'd come specially to meet John and to keep in touch, but also to deliver some good news to the other Merlinauts.

Aunt Sophie had just told him that a new course had been started for young people in Bath — planned to make them familiar with the Arthurian mythology and its characters.”

Lucy reacted with her usual exuberant enthusiasm — with a squeal of delight. Gilly asked many questions. Over lunch they all enjoyed the enlarged company.

Sam really took to their new friend, welcoming a touch of maturity among the present Merlinauts and, although he adored his mother, thinking her the best in the world, today his attention was mostly on John and Gilly.

On the way back to town that afternoon — it was a slow ride, calling at many off-route stops

— the new partners had much to say to each other. Both had become conscious of things about themselves they had only vaguely dreamt about before.

“Do you know,” said Johnny, quietly musing aloud, “I’d never understood the living reality of great stories — the way one can get completely lost in them and the way they can sometimes control your life... but I’m beginning to.”

“I’ve been thinking the same way lately, to be honest.”

“After lunch,” he added, “while I was still chatting to Sam about my book and also stroking your dog sitting at my feet, I had a sudden surprise... a whole new paragraph of my writing just popped into my head, ready made and clear in every detail. I got up, made excuses to Sam and went into the garden. Then I realized that what I’d got was an addition to the end bit of my new story and it involved your Galahad.”

“How about a quick review of this new version?” she asked with a smile.

“Well — yes, if you like, but I’m still a bit confused. In my story I’ve told how the Swan Prince returns and is reconciled with his princess, there being no more secrets or cover-ups. Then I explain how her country eventually joins up with the Grail

Country that Percival shares with his true love, the Grail Maiden — they all seemed to share the same new vision from the grail itself.”

“In the first draft of the last manuscript which you showed me,” Gilly remembered, “you suggested there was a slight disagreement, to begin with, between father and son. Was Lohengrin more radical with certain ideas for the future, I wonder?”

“He was, of course, but all his aspirations grew out of his father’s. Obviously, neither of them understood many of the writings of your hero, Galahad. The same goes for me,” bemoaned Johnny.

“Why do you say that, just now?”

“Well, I’m afraid, Gilly, when I was given this last, uninvited bit of story, which is still stuck firmly in my mind, I was in the garden thinking about it when I saw the open door of your garden shed and wandered in. There I noticed this book opened up and left on top of a bench. I read some of it, seeing it was by Teilhard de Chardin, but found myself completely stumped, nonplussed and gob-smacked! I’m sure my Arthurian Lohengrin would have felt the same way.”

“Tell me, Johnny, what was that passage?”

Bringing out a paper from his pocket and handing it over, he told her that he had sat down in the shed to write it down.

In the new time there is no longer any distinction between physical or moral, natural or artificial... all things are seen to be supremely natural, supremely organic and supremely vital — according to how far they contribute to the structure... and closing of the time-space cone above us.

“A further such paragraph followed later...”

The universe is illuminated from within... and we must surmise the existence of a higher centre of consciousness ahead of us, at the apex of evolution... something that is ultra-conscious, ultra-personalized and ultra-present.

A long pause followed.

“Yes, I know it all,” said Gilly, with much feeling in her voice. “It comes from Teilhard’s essay called ‘The New Spirit’ and he’s trying to describe his Christ-Omega or Kristomega end-goal, I think, with the attraction and effort towards this future

which pulls us on from ahead and unites us more and more from within ourselves.”

“Very well put, Gilly. I’m quite awe-struck,” came the answering comment after a few seconds — then an admission... “As I listened to your words, it struck me forcibly that deep within myself is a yearning for this sort of dream to be tangibly true — to be able to keep our faith and hope in the goodness to come.”

“Dear Johnny, your new story to end the Arthurian cycle is nearly finished, isn’t it? Could the last part be changed a bit do you think?”

“I’ve already decided to rewrite it and give your Jonathan a revised edition.”

Gilly started to chuckle quite audibly.

“He’ll get a bit fed up with our changing habits,” she said. “I too need to alter my future proceedings as a Merlinaut.”

“He’ll adjust his computer, never fear. I could soon be quite a help to him, not that he needs much of that! I think I’ll call him ‘Jan’ for short... Jan, the ‘can-do’ man!”

Gilly laughed out loud, but didn’t object. “I’ve never really known myself, nor my young brother for that matter, as well as I do now — it makes everything different.”

“I too have discovered who I really am and where I want to go.”

The two were agreed. So there followed a while of silence between them, much to the relief of the elderly couple sitting behind them in the bus!

“I read somewhere, last Christmas,” Gilly started again, “that the whole figure of Jesus should be reborn again in peoples’ hearts, and it struck a chord in me.”

“Well, the name has certainly been abused, misused and even reinvented in some cases,” said John.

“Merlin believed,” continued Gilly, “that Jesus was born as a normal Jewish child, who then grew more and more exceptional — but never meaning to form another supernatural religion. He reminded us that before his early death on the cross, as a result of his anti-religious stance, Jesus told his disciples that afterwards he’d return to them and stay in contact — but they didn’t believe him.”

“He would never have recognised himself in the company of many of the Christian religious events and ceremonies we see today,” mused Johnny. “I’d say that much of the Christian church has passed its prime, and it’s many outgrowths

seem to be too specialized or exclusive to form the new spearhead of evolution. From my latest reading, its general trend is towards varied and open-ended directions and Teilhard's vision of a natural and organic outcome for our high aspirations fits the bill. It simply bypasses static or entrenched blockages."

After agreeing on this matter they went on to discuss the importance of stories in the lives of everyone. The most wonderful ones of all, thought Gilly, were the four gospel stories, telling the well-remembered life of Jesus of Nazareth, who first saw God as Father. With their abiding love for him, the writers were making meaning out of it all according to the beliefs and customs of their day, and these stories, being of a high artistic standard, should never be altered.

"Well, of course," Johnny went on. "The four gospels were the basic cause and gave rise to the great Western culture which is now fighting for its life."

"Yes, and millions of church buildings large and small will be threatened. None of these will be needed in cyberspace, where the Christ will be Superman. God is Love, and compassion is all we need to know," finished Gilly, pausing again.

“Quoting from the Bible, where it says that the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us,” she added, “I like to think that perhaps the Flesh became Word again in Cyberland!”

“Phew! That’s a bit over the top, but I think Tayar would have approved. We’ve got a lot more thinking to do and reading of other Teilhard books together — much work for the Merlinauts!”

“Everything will be different now. We’ll be in a collective Quest seeking out new ways forward.”

“Of course,” agreed John. “But surely the old Church could now begin to cast off its burden of rituals, creeds and traditional worship, along with all the petty grandeurs that go with its increasing worldly powers?”

“Yes, Johnny, but also we must remember that the same Church has kept the story of Jesus fresh and alive in our hearts for all those changing generations.”

“I’ll give you that, and actually I’ve been feeling more and more that with all the alternative systems, civil, psychic or philosophical, there always seems to be one thing missing — that figure of Jesus of Nazareth, a figure to look up to, emulate and offer our love. It seems to me there’s a great yearning for this, and Teilhard gives us

back our risen human being and shows him to us, not in the modern meaning of ‘supernatural’ but in his unique understanding of SUPER-Nature. Jesus, *the man*, at the peak of evolution’s progress towards greater human consciousness — perhaps unique throughout the universe! — together with extra natural powers and capabilities.”

After a pause, he admitted that he was getting out of his depth and finding it difficult to find the right words, but would try.

“I was fascinated,” he said, “with the exciting picture of a Super Christ — the same person only seen from the future as the enlarged and greater figure that now exists in our subconscious. He will be trans-human and ultra-humanised in accordance with the natural process of an evolving world — one of those periodic leaps ahead we read about — a new stage, maybe, of evolution.”

“Oh Johnny,” exclaimed the girl at his side. “Perhaps that’s why the two-way response we have with him is so real — he’s still richly linked with the Earthly life that formed him and it explains the many familiar appearances after his death... You’ve really had a kind of ‘epiphany’ experience and I’m with you all the way. I feel a sense of the inevitable outcome of our planet’s growth — that someone

can exist in cyberspace, beyond the death barrier, but still in contact. Goodness! You'll make a very special Merlinaut!"

This new idea of the natural reality of the post-death figure of the risen Jesus is no abstract metaphor but developed spontaneously in John's mind and would be welcomed by readers of Teilhard who believe in a Christ-like God.

Jesus told his disciples that others, to come after him, would do greater things than he had done. So, perhaps they would be endowed with the same extraordinary powers and abilities earned through their lives — they'd be a new sort of people changed by the great influx of consciousness.

But being 'future-natural phenomena,' they would be more immune to untenable desires, such as revenge and horror. The hopes and fears of all the years, though, are still with that special babe at Christmas!

A quote follows here from Teilhard's description of the universal power of LOVE.

Love is a secret reserve of energy — it is like the blood of spiritual evolution.

Love is the most universal, the most formidable and the most mysterious of

cosmic energies. Earth squanders prodigiously its most precious power.

From Teilhard's essay, "The Spirit of the Earth"

As the two left the bus Station, starting on their way towards the outskirts of the city, there was still time for John and Gilly to tackle the subject of Art and its effect on themselves...

"Merlin's William had a lot to say about the central position of Art in our world." Gilly began. "He pronounced that the practise of one's art was praise to God and that to study Art was prayer to God."

"I'd go along with that," came the reaction. "I always feel good when I've made the effort and am pleased with it. Any subject you deal with is changed for ever in your mind — you've lifted it into Cyberspace. Art *can* express the deepest thoughts and desires in the medium of form, painting, words or music."

"And expresses our love and imagined depictions of the figure of Jesus," added Johnny. "In the absence of photographs, we have free choices."

Continuing their tributes to the Arts in general, Gilly noted something else: "It's there, while working on our Art, that we feel and greet God; we

sense that the thought of death has been bypassed and we find ourselves through it and out on the other side. We can imagine becoming joined with new groups of talent and optimism in that special space in Cyberland called Logartia, the special word country where Art becomes divine.”

While still heading towards the place for the parting of their ways, they acknowledged to themselves the way that the legendary stories of King Arthur had inspired them to bring the whole thing up to date — and how the characters and events could relate to a modern time. They remembered the sense of mercy and compassion, good manners and courtesies shown by the knights of Camelot and the spirit of adventure. They resolved to set out on similar quests of discovery.

Aping the words of the Queen during an investiture, Johnny had joked: “Arise, Sir Knight, or Madam Dame, and continue your good works as knights of the realm.”

“You see, the ceremonies are the same!” Gilly had responded with a laugh, then went on to ask herself some on-going questions: “I wonder who will turn out to be the new King Arthur figure who brings all these things together in a modern version of Camelot, and who will sit at the next

Round Table? Though we know the identity of the three well-established Grail knights we can't yet guess who the others will be... except that we know already who our future Lohengrin is! It's *you!*"

Johnny smiled and before they parted suggested to her that their most important story was the bringing together of their own two selves.

"And learning that we will only find the Holy Grail within ourselves," added Gilly while releasing her hold on his hand, "and must learn to drink from it..."

So, as her partner set out to return to his unfinished writing and his determination to ask the questions his father never did — and now with help from his newly discovered Teilhard — Johnny turned and said:

"Before I go, I have to tell you, Gilly, that it was my growing love for you that started up and brought together, in my mind, all these new ideas. That's what Love does to people."

The spirit of Merlin was still with them all and was well-pleased with the outcome and, of course, with the progress of his other budding Merlinauts — he had seen how they were taking and making out of all they observed. They were highlighting the route to KristOmega.

Everyone can affect the shape of the world and they were, perhaps, a special part of Merlin's hopes for the future of Mankind. They've still got many more questions, though, to ask themselves: Who did Jesus think he was? What were the titles that occasionally he gave to himself? And what was he trying to tell his disciples? Could they have missed his true meaning?

Good luck, Merlinauts!

POSTSCRIPT

At one of the meetings during the following months the Merlinauts had a conversation which went something like this:

JOHNNY: "I'm still a bit confused about how we should treat the reality of Teilhard's new vision of the figure of Jesus as Super-Christ. How it affects our relationship with him, and could it be, in the words of Teilhard, "Christianity Squared"?"

JONATHAN: "Yes... and why was Tayar still loyal to his church when its leaders had treated him so badly?"

GILLY: "Well, he did at times indulge in severe criticism of its static outlook, and he dreamed of changing things. But his dreams were never listened to by an ailing Church. Merlin told me once that Tayar could not change the image of Jesus that had been instilled in him by his very religious and much-loved mother, but could only expand on it."

It was more difficult to answer Johnny's

question. Was it just for nostalgic comfort that people often returned in later life to a first-given faith in God? Or was it because of a deep-seated need in all the natural world, including themselves, to seek out and believe in a longed-for greater consciousness. In the end they decided in favour of Nature.

This helped them a bit but they realised that all their feelings of affection and togetherness with Jesus were born from an Earthly life they'd only read about in the Gospels.

From a recording of Merlin's voice which Jonathan had made and stored in the Merlin Room computer, these words I now repeat to you:

“So, from his death, *the man* Jesus enters a larger-than-life existence in the collective subconscious of your species — the age-old term for Cyberspace — and it is *here* that things will happen. Anyone giving love and thought to this Jesus will add a little to the continuing growth of the Christ-figure towards Teilhard's Omega point — KristOmega — and its ability to inspire and encourage such people to reach ahead.”

Bath / Valentine's Day 2008

*I know myself to be
Irremediably less a child
Of heaven than a son of earth.*

From "Hymn of the Universe",
by Teilhard de Chardin.