

ARCHIVE FRAGMENTS



FRANCIS FISH

Archive Fragments

Francis Fish

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Fragment 1: Blood and sand

No when: Angel: Dream Time

I lay down by the tree and it slowly rooted in me. The ultimate in penetration, blending, breaking. I broke through into *Clown Time*, the jagged place of pain and hunger, and forgot who I was.

Mother had taken me to the place of the tree people. Folded into the hearts of onetime oak, now slow-moving, vast repositories of all things known and remembered. Feeding then into once-animal brains and perceptions filters and then even faster machines of light and heat. Printing density onto the quantum ephemera and beyond. A place of new synthesis, wise enough to know it knew nothing without the seed. Today, skinny, naked and shivering, it was me.

‘Ha!’ The treeswife had spoken kindly. ‘Seed. Lie and be folded seed. We will take you to a warm place where all things pulse.’

Warm damp mornings on the friendly river bank. We play, we swim, we learn. In the evenings we talk and weave the magic that tell us of things we need to know to learn. The things from *Clown Time* when the world was younger, but it is not old even now. How bright the colours are here,

how sharp everything is. We no longer have to take that darkness and pain with us everywhere we go.

Earlier that day Mother sought me out. 'Angel. Little one ... it is time for you to see more. It is time for you to embrace the fragments. Time for you to begin your study of the tragedy and the victory that led us here. It will hurt, little one. But,' we spoke the words together, '*without pain there is no growth.*' She spoke alone again, a smile in her voice. 'Just so. Come with me.'

Here I am.

2008: Carole: Only I lived to tale

Nobody knew why the bomb didn't go off. Maybe except me, but I kept quiet. I've learned to keep quiet. Life's easier that way. I have always been able to see through the outer skin into what people really think and mean. I was born different from others, a deeper eye that can see right through the self-deception and scheming that most people aren't even aware of as they stumble through life. I did what I always do; listen. There's no mystery. I listen and I watch how people move, what their eyes tell me. I made a friend - became a person, that's all it was.

Huddling in the playground waiting for the bell, we were cold. I remember Billy's scarf looking like some stiff landing area for small helicopters sticking out from under his frozen chin.

We gathered in the same old dreary hall we'd been in for years, never redecorated as far as I can remember. Subject to the same old serried ranks - straitjacketed into our nasty chairs by the weight of our chains. School is about that, conformity and limits for your mind and dreams. Anything damaging the placid conformity they need to control large numbers of children is ruthlessly stamped on. Oh, and every year you are told that you are older than the year before so you should behave better. I sat with Billy and Sarah Z (lots of Sarah's then). I was having trouble with the giggles as usual.

The masks burst through the doors and started shouting about half way through some whining from the head about something that we hadn't done and didn't know anything about. Someone else in the school probably did. At least the whining stopped, a good thing. I was glad they were wearing masks because it meant they thought they'd get away with whatever they were planning and weren't going to start out killing us all right then and there. Most of the girls started squealing, until a mask started shouting 'shut up!' and fired his machine gun into the ceiling. This fused the lights - I wanted very much to laugh but controlled myself. I became very still and started reading them as best as I could with their faces hidden. They herded the teachers to one end of the hall and sat them down. The rest of us were left sitting where we had been.

Nothing happened for a while.

Billy whispered: 'What d'you recon this is?'

‘I dunno, but we must have done something really naughty in a past life.’

Our captives shouted:

‘Angela Mooney! We want Angela Mooney!’

So that was it. Idiots. I stood up to great consternation and hissing whispers - ‘It’s not you!’

‘I know. I didn’t manage a look in the mirror this morning, not being fond of painting myself orange.’

I waved and raised my voice.

‘Hello!’

The mask checked a photo:

‘Not her.’ It wasn’t a question

‘I know, but you need to talk to me.’

‘Where is she?’ I couldn’t place the accent but it wasn’t a British one. Big deal.

‘Her mother took her away to a school closer to the constituency a few weeks ago. The family moved a while back. So, whatever you’re planning has just gone really bad. We’re just ordinary kids and they won’t care if some of us get killed when they storm the place. They wouldn’t have been that bothered about Angela either, you know.’

They took this in silence and waved me back down. I was wondering why the teachers hadn’t told them this already. Maybe they had and the masks were checking.

There was a commotion at the far end of the room. The big double doors to the outside were opened at the far end of the hall and a van was gingerly driven in. They picked me to sit in the back with a woman who did not wear a mask.

The leader raised his voice:

‘Ladies and gentlemen!’ Again the slight slurring of European accents. ‘Do you know what a dead man’s switch is?’ He waved at the woman. ‘This is my friend Mire and she is holding the switch - if she lets go for longer than five second, then,’ he shouted, ‘boom! We all die! If they gas us or start shooting at us - we all die! Now, who can get me into the office?’

He went off with the head, ever ineffectual, her face a mask of fear. Eye whites showing and tension radiating outwards in a walk that was even more like an egg had been stuck up her backside than usual. Not having a good day, I’d have thought.

‘Mire,’ I said, ‘why are you doing this?’

She couldn’t quite look at me in the distracted way people sometimes have when they are thinking deeply about something far away and don’t want to be reminded about the here and now. Her face was sad, not angry. Not aggressive at all. ‘I have little choice, I need to tell the world what happened to me, to my family, and no-one cares.’

‘So this is going to make them care?’

‘Jarek says the personal is political. We are making our pain, our personal, your personal. Your government’s

personal.'

‘Angela isn’t here. I’m not her. I’m just someone who cares about your heartache. I’m just someone who knows what you feel.’

Poor Mire was surprised and didn’t believe me at first. Then, even sadder, her shoulders dropped.

‘So we have failed, then? Already? No government minister’s daughter to use, to make it *personal?*’

‘Oh, it’s personal sweetheart, trust me.’

I got what I call *the look*, then, when I’m talking like a grown up instead of a naïve fourteen year old. I sometimes assume an authority that doesn’t appear to be mine. I never let it bother me, to be honest. What the hell had broken these people so much that making war on children in a far away country seemed a reasonable thing to do?

The leader came back and led the head to a chair. He pulled out a mobile phone. Angela’s records were still at the office, the emergency numbers for the bodyguards and whatnot. At least this way he could avoid bimbling along with the local police. I found out later that he rang the red-top rags to get them to send reporters out before ringing the minister’s office direct on a private line.

So, Angela managed to help us after all. Snooty cow. She was always thinking herself a bit *better* than the rest of us. Me, I thought, more likely lonely. At least her awful mother hadn’t insisted that we all get into some group

photograph. The *point*, I suppose, was that our school was a very ordinary place with ordinary people in it and that's what politicians crave, even though they don't understand it. Until they move somewhere more up market anyway.

‘Mire, what happened to you? Why are you doing this?’

‘To me? A cluster bomb. Your government were 1-1-liberating us from something but we didn't know what. Father taken by militia and never came back. Then brother. Mother tried to leave the valley to get to friend's house and never came back. Me and my sister, we stay in the house. The house was near a - ‘ she looked for the word ‘ - a bridge. My sister was playing outside when the bomb fell. Now there is only me.

‘No help for us. Just worse.’

I let it lie for a while and then said: ‘So why now? It's a long time ago, people have forgotten, I only know about it from books.’ I was trying guess which glorious war our government had prosecuted on this poor woman in the last twenty years or so, but this list was very long.

‘I don't forget.’

‘No, you don't, do you? What was your country like?’

‘Quiet. Peaceful. All we had was the land, nothing else. Not perfect, but ours.’

‘And the other people that were being driven away from what they had by *your* countrymen? What about them? The reason my so-called countrymen used to drop their

bombs on you? Those people have no home now, either.' I was guessing again, but it hit home. Everyone has been wronged at some point. Depending upon how far back your tribal memory goes.

'I never drove anyone away from anything,' Mire was becoming quite animated now; 'I paid price of you interfering with my life.'

'Me? I was a baby.' I guessed so anyway.

'Where I come from, whatever your country does is everyone's thing.'

'So you are responsible for others then? Like I am responsible for you? Mire, it all goes back in a big circle to when the first man killed his brother over a pomegranate or something thousands of years ago. You need to learn to forgive. Not forget. But forgive.'

Mire didn't like this from a kid like me and was quiet. I closed my eyes for a while and leaned back on the van. All around us the machinery of the state was helplessly chasing its own tail, once they had realised that it wasn't a hoax. Worried parents were gathering after surreptitious text messages sent by their children. I was beginning to wonder when the first hysterical phalanx was going to try and storm the place and get themselves shot.

I stood up and moved out. One of the masks brandished his gun at me. I just smiled and said: 'Please can I talk to Jarek?' After some more posturing and grunting, during which I did my best not to laugh, they took me

to the anteroom at the back where the masks had herded the teachers. It was a small lecture theatre with some amphitheatre-like steps that could sit around thirty people. Past this was a stock room, where an unmasked man sat with a phone stuck in his ear. I stood and waited patiently, perhaps projecting a certain insouciance. I was not afraid, which is a consequence I suppose of knowing deep in my heart that everything has an end. This doesn't make pain great or suffering a good thing, but it all has an end. Even the bad bits.

‘What do you want?’ Ah, the gentle voice of a seducer rather than the vicious tones of the madman. But you’d have to be a seducer, at least in part, to get people to follow you.

‘I want to know what you are doing here.’

‘We want to make you people see what was done to us - we want them to know what happened.’ He was very quiet, very patient for an armed man talking to a fourteen-year-old girl. Maybe we had a chance, depending upon how angry he was.

‘So, how do you escape? How do you make your point? Angela isn’t here. Me and my friends - they’ll just kill a few of us when they storm the place and say how sorry they are. They’d kill Angela anyway if they felt they had to. They took everything from you - do you think they will even blink taking it from me and my friends?’

‘They will - *blink*? They will listen to us. There are too many people watching, we are putting this out on the

Internet. Everybody will know what happened here. We have all these things but we are peaceful. We have just been forgotten.' He raised his voice - 'We will be forgotten no more!'

Ah, I thought, here we have the Slogan of the Day, which my mum informed me has gone out with Chairman Mao, if anyone remembers who the mass-murdering bastard is these days. People are so predictable, so *simple*, they need slogans and simple sayings in order to get by. That's the point of clichÃ©s and the like. They mean you don't have to *think*. They work when there is nothing new to deal with, some of the time. Thinking is *hard*, which is why most people don't, and why the dear Chairman has so many imitators.

'Instead you'd rather be hated all around the world? Instead you'd rather be murdered now by marksmen? You must be a little mad, my friend.'

'Go away little girl, go away.'

'First, release some people to show how clever and generous you are. Some of the teachers are quite elderly. I bet a lot of people need to use the toilets. Have you thought of any of this?'

'I will think about it now. Go away.'

He let about a third of us go and some of the more enterprising kids managed to climb out of the windows in the toilet block. After another hour or so of this kind of attrition there was a hard core of about 35 of us left. We

were sent some sandwiches and soft drinks. They were guarding us very closely after my bright ideas had lost them so many hostages. I thought it was probably not a bad thing that some people had been released or escaped because it would make the SAS storming the place less likely, or they could think they'd lose less if they did it now – hard to say. Billy and Sarah stayed with me, although they both swore that they could have escaped. I couldn't go anywhere; I felt a moral responsibility to make this a bloodless triumph for nobody.

Jarek wasn't angry with me. Maybe he was sincere in saying that all he wanted was for the world to listen and understand what had happened to him. I did wonder about some of the other masks though. They were very angry and still had no faces. Maybe Jarek was going to find out about only being able to lead people to somewhere they wanted to go.

It got dark. It would have got cold but they managed to override the school's heating system. It got very boring with nothing to do. They had confiscated the mobile phones after realising what was going on, so no games. I think they were also being careful about pictures being taken. I gathered up my friends and shoved my way past the reluctant guards to talk to Mire again.

‘What happens now? How long do we stay here? Do you know?’

‘No idea.’ She was resting while another, masked, held the dead man's switch for a while. Drinking cold instant

coffee, which is a habit of Mediterranean people. ‘We just want to be heard.’

‘And then?’

‘We go peacefully.’

‘You have no set of demands? No programme?’

‘No. Just angry. Just sad.’

‘So - are you just going to let the bomb go off or what?’

‘Maybe. Maybe we go peacefully.’ She seemed very calm. I don’t like it when people holding bombs seem resigned to things. It worries me a lot. She took the switch back from her comrade, who looked at me and shrugged.

‘Why maybe?’

‘It depends on how we are heard. We want someone to tell us *why* they took so much from us. No-one of us wants to live. We don’t care any more.’

Shit, this can only end badly if they think like that. ‘So you take us with you? That makes it better?’

‘Tell me, it make it worse?’

I could not answer. I sat and calmed myself, watching my breathing like I had been taught. I moved into a deep tranquil place, I even felt a smile start on my lips when I reached there, like it always does. This time I kept it from showing, the circumstances were not right. I do not know how long it was - sometimes you just have to wait. This

is a lesson children find hard to learn, but I hadn't been a child for years.

I emerged swimming up from a pool of stillness hearing shouting coming from the stock room. Jarek's sheep were growing the teeth of frustration, not sheep now. Someone was trying to make some kind of point. I didn't know what language they were speaking. I made out a couple of words - maybe *hostage*, and, it sounded like *tunnel*. The language was a distance from the languages I've ever heard or learned, broken and full of consonants. Jarek's voice was calm. This only seemed to make the other guy even angrier.

Then I heard the gun and there was no more argument. Everyone, hostages and not, ran towards the room, apart from Mire who remembered her switch in time. We were confronted by Jarek weeping with his head in his hands, saying something which I later found out was *my brother, my brother*. Not good. He gathered himself together and looked at the figure in front of him. The back of the head was making a bloody mess over the well-swept floor. He looked right at me, his English breaking down, he said: 'You - he died - he *killed* - himself. Nowhere to go now. Nowhere!'

He gathered himself and called his people together with a gesture. The tears streamed down his face. He did not sniff or wipe his nose. The snot trickled down a mask of grief. 'You!' He pointed at me. 'You come now!'

So I was the one who ended up holding the dead man's switch. Billy told me later that they picked up everything,

including the dead body, and disappeared into the basement. There was a small explosion that shook plaster and dust down from the ceiling. Then another about twenty minutes later. I sat on my bomb and cried - there wasn't much else to do. Then the SAS came in and shouted a lot. A nice man took my bomb from me. To this day, I almost feel nostalgia for its comforting presence.

The masks had broken into a tunnel underneath the school, war time shelter that led out somewhere completely unexpected.

Then they disappeared.

2231: Jay: Blood and Sand

We arrived at the Merseyside transport nexus in accordance with our instructions from WorldNet. I am an adjuster/investigator in the Brave New World. I look into problems and differences between people and try to resolve them. Generally, I catch thieves, sometimes murderers and sick individuals. You might think that it is hard to steal in a world where nobody owns anything but their own lives and labour but there are things that can still go missing. I digress, maybe you already know this.

It was raining. The streets were slick with the late summer greasiness this gives. I felt perverse, as indeed I always do after a long journey, and did not use my weather protector to keep the rain off, enjoying the smell of the ions as the

electric buses moved past where we stood. Perhaps the future echo of my hangover started then; I became aware that my temper was far shorter than usual, never a good sign. The buses had turned this corner at the gyratory forever, as long as buses had existed.

‘I don’t know why Net sent us here,’ said my assistant, ‘it seems like an open and shut case. Usually it closes stuff like this itself.’

‘I trust Net.’ I replied in high tone, ‘Maybe it smells a fish somewhere in its cybernetic cortex. Maybe a small bone got caught in one of its neural simulators. It is also quite possible that it has solved the problem but wants to check itself against human beings, which we all know it does from time to time to keep itself within operational parameters.

‘Let’s get on and find some accommodation.’

The pedway took us out through the old town. The direction indicator advised us to go up Brownlow Hill. We got off at a place called the Manx Hotel. It was oldbuild, probably pre-20th, but of course had been Automated. Places that still have human beings serving are very difficult to get into. There are long waiting lists. This was adequate transient stuff and very comfortable. Human service is a hobby these days, a calling.

We ate our micro meals in the dining area and reviewed the case. It *was* open and shut, which I was worried about. The Net doesn’t usually bother us with such low grade stuff. Some time ago a grouping was set up around a charismatic leader based on the Old Bible’s teachings.

They were given an old building with grounds to set up a communal living area where they could pursue their rituals in privacy. This was all in accordance with the One Law of Non-interference.

But now the leader, Tomas, was dead. Drowned in his font, possibly by one of his followers. At this point in the investigation I thought that finding who was responsible relatively easy, there is WorldNet monitoring of persons' whereabouts and in theory we knew who was there when he was drowned. We did not know how or why but those are not the kind of questions that we usually ask. Our sole function is to adjudicate, but not punish. Under the right conditions the individual punishes themselves perfectly adequately except when beyond remorse. Then we have to call the surgeon to implant it for us, which can be an unpleasant business.

I had itchy feet after the journey and wanted to taste this city again, for it was where part of me had been born many years ago before the Revolution. You see, I am legion, more precisely I am amalgam. This will become clearer later.

My assistant did not want to come with me to the rock clubs and old stamping grounds. The lights were still bright and the music still derived from the same roots but now there was far less playing recordings at high volume. In an age where we can persuade machines to do just about anything the buzz from human beings playing music is still here. The volume has not changed.

The club was in some ways as I remembered it but mostly

different. In particular the desperate teenagers trying to find some boon companion in the darkness were gone and had been replaced by a far happier crew. This is one of the many things I am glad for.

I became quite drunk in a happy way, my morose mood receding into the distance. I talked at length with several people about the city and its environs but most were too young to follow much of what I said. It was all too long ago. The band came on and did their thing with consummate ease, I enjoyed it immensely.

I staggered back out onto the street. The club had become too full for me and I had not wanted to stay there any longer. Already I could feel the hangover starting at the front of my head where it seems the blood wants to flow and is restricted at moments like these. There was group waiting outside, which did not worry me because I have protection from violence and intimidation, at least close up.

The largest of the group came over to me as I looked up at the starry sky, unworried and uninterested in him. He really needed to have a word with his barber, unless he was wearing a bad wig.

‘Do you have any recreational drugs with you?’

‘No, but I haven’t used up my allocation for some time, why do you want to know? If I had some with me you could share them but I don’t.’

‘We have no allocation left. Could you get some from the Fac and give them to us?’

‘And risk your health? Why would I do that?’

‘If you want to live.’

I laughed, ‘we all have to die my Sad Friend, are you threatening me?’ He didn’t catch the reference to Odine’s talk on *love your enemy as yourself*, where she talks of avoiding having enemies in the first place by treating everyone with compassion and equanimity. An enemy is a Sad Friend in need of sympathy.

With that he pulled out a gun and waved it in my face. I shrugged, ‘OK,’ I said, ‘it’s *your* health after all.’

We walked down to the Fac on the corner of Bold Street. I was not worried because I still had my protection and a gun was not a problem for me. I was curious because a gun was not a problem for anyone these days, so why would he pull it on me? Maybe if he had shot me straight away and taken me by surprise. First I dialled some alcohol blockers first to clear my head while the group looked on impatiently. I took them slowly and said:

‘Well, what do you want?’

‘Midnight Glove.’

‘Who is it that you want to enjoy the wetness of their own giggling?’

‘You.’

‘Oh, that’s really rather sad, what have I done to wake up crying and smelling of piss?’

‘We want to know what you know about Tomas. We want to know why you’re here.’

‘So the gun’s not a threat then, because I can’t talk if you shoot my face off. The Midnight Glove isn’t either, because I won’t be able to tell you anything you could understand. You could just try asking me, I am an adjuster, not an old-style policeman. You have all kinds of legal protections and so on. I like to talk anyway.’

He lowered the gun. I understood now why he had thought it such a threat, being one of the ignorant cult members he did not know what the mainstream of us were protected from intentional violence, at least up close. I looked him in the eye and waited. Retro clothing, leather and dark glasses. Dark glasses at night, what a tit. The others were nondescript figures in the background, mainly jeans, although I did see the newer bubblewrap weather protection over naked flesh.

‘Why have you come here,’ he said ‘when there is nothing to investigate?’

‘Why are you bothered if there is not?’

‘We are private people and do not like strangers. We prefer to be left alone.’

‘I come for a murder. A man was deprived of his life. Privacy is a foolish luxury that you and I cannot afford. How can a death not be worth investigating?’

‘He was going to die anyway. He chose to leave this life the way he did. We found him and tried to help him. It made

no difference.'

I shrugged, 'Tell it to WorldNet, it sent me here. It does not see suicide in the facts. I must add that I have yet to see where though. I am leaving now; please tell the others in your little community that I will call tomorrow with my assistant. We're all going to die anyway. It's whether he was volunteered a little earlier than he would have liked.'

I turned and started to leave. The Net had said nothing about Tomas' impending death. I would have to review all material and look for keys to any private files he held, although I suspected that they would be held on old fashioned paper and inaccessible to me.

My new found friend tried to block my way out of the Fac. I kept going and kicked the Aura in to hold him while I walked past. I had incapacitated the poor boy with a huge orgasmic cascade and he would be unable to move for quite a while. His friends ran away when he fell down grinning and screaming in ecstasy. I decided not to call for the Keepers of the Peace because I couldn't be bothered with their endless questioning.

After a simple operation adding the appropriate biochips system one could set up feedback in the nervous system of anyone in close proximity that would hold them still while you got away or obtained help from the Keepers. In general no-one could hurt you any more unless you wanted them to, the only kind of hurting permitted under the One Law. When the technology was introduced the psychologists decided that other kinds of feedback, to do

with sexual feelings and positive emotions, would not be inducible because of the danger to the emotional Centre. Despite this some of us have enhanced Aura because of our jobs. Some of us are too unstable to have it fitted at all. I have been in both categories at various stages in my life. I did stop short of making the boy worship me unquestioningly, that would have been a crass invasion of his life.

To be static is to be dead.

2040: Odine: Autobiographical Notes

Time passes. It is a mystery to us all but still it passes like the bus of the dead that it is.

The Absolute is unreachable. All there is are us frail chickens, thinking ourselves in the freest of ranges. The grain is ominously plentiful but we are afraid to look up, in case it is taken away. We live in the lightless abyss of Chicken Town.

I wander and question things. I have known the most exquisite pleasure that could burn me up forever, smiled when I wanted to die. Nothing justifies the agony of existence but more existence, which is the drug of choice.

I feel at times like I hang from a gibbet at a crossroads. A dire warning to others not to transgress and give up

whatever it is they really want to do or become in case they fail like I did.

I have not failed. The warning is not to stop trying.

Fragment 2: The first cut

No when: Angel: Mother's Arms

Mother's arms held me close as I howled and wept, coming down from the acid fix of Clown Time, pain twisting me and turning me around. I was shaking in fight or flight mode with nowhere to run. I sobbed to her:

‘How ... how did they live like that? All that – everything? All ... that hiding and deception? How did it work?’ I shivered uncontrollably for a while.

‘You think they had a choice? They had only just stopped being animals.’

‘Clown Time. Why do we call it that?’

‘You’ll find out, little one, Angel. Maybe.’

I returned to the house by the pool where I lived with my friends. We sat in the hot tub, indolent and tired. I felt like I had run a thousand miles. Still the rawness of Clown Time came back at me. The goose bumps got me again and I was cold inside.

‘What’s it like, going back to Clown Time?’ It was my sib-sister and sometime lover Annie. ‘What’s it like?’

‘It’s a much bigger-seeming place than here because of the buildings and the open space but much smaller inside.

Inside they are confused and don't understand what makes them do things – they trap themselves all the time in golden cages and call it freedom.'

'And the trees? When they catch your mind and throw it?'

'Just pray you never have to be a seed, my love. Just pray that no new synthesis is needed and they call for you.'

'I've been into the quantum area and knew a lot of things at once. No distances, and our friends talking over to us from many places in the universe. It's so *marvellous*, so beautiful. When you get back here, it's hard to remember. Our brains only give us what they can.'

'Don't forget the brain is a quantum machine.'

'Doesn't mean it understands it though, does it? A ball flying through the air describes a perfect arc, but it doesn't do any thinking on the way.'

I sank deeper into the warm pool. 'Good point, sweetheart, good point. Can we just *be* for a while now?'

So she hugged me and sat quietly and let the breeze blow without touching our minds. That evening the trees sent some dreams to me.

1994: Kervas: A Life in vitro

We keep things under wraps in our little project. I mean, who would want to admit that they did something illegal? I don't believe that it is immoral. After all, who invented

morality? Did it fall from the sky one day? That's what *they* would have you believe, whoever *they* are.

I was brought up to believe in progress, which is another religion in disguise. In my early twenties I became involved with left wing politics and ended up believing Stalin was a good guy who had done a lot for the people of the world. That makes me cringe inside with embarrassment. It's much harder to work out what you stand for than follow some other fool. I follow no tradition now but the Marxian motto *doubt everything*. Tricky. Don't get me started on Trotsky – just don't – I think you'll find the sound of vomiting quite off-putting. If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything. As the sage once said.

What do we do then? We make people in our laboratory using tax payers' money. Identified the genes for the extremely bright and blend them to make frozen embryos. When a mother wants a donated egg a dishonest and shoddy subterfuge means that she carries one of our little creations instead of her sister's or friend's egg fertilised with her husband's sperm. I insist we never use the same couple twice, which would be even more wrong, robbing the poor souls of their last hope.

It's the only way that we can bring them into the world. About 95% don't make it and the remaining 5% can be odd and *wrong*. It's hard to articulate but you'd know if you'd met one. Despite this we have had some startling successes. Usually the parents are only too glad to let us help them bring the genius or just plain odd child up with grants and

special tuition. We call ourselves the Janus Foundation, when we are forced to call ourselves anything. I like to say it's because we're two faced bastards, but I was told that it was more a homage to the Roman god of boundaries – as in overcoming them.

Why are we doing this? It's an arms race, only this time we are looking for people who can see through the pain of the human condition and lead us out of the destructive mess that's coming. Teach us how to stop being dumb animals moving in herds over cliffs. It's an arms race but not with anything as trivial as another nation but Nature, armed with some insurmountable problem we don't even know is coming.

I don't see anything wrong with creating a few individuals with special abilities if it means that people in general will survive. Not believing in god means that you have to do this kind of thing for yourself, you see, because there are no miracles. Just the blind watchmaker and human tinkering. Maybe prayer, if you pray, but that just passes the responsibility onto someone else.

We do not want *intelligence*. That isn't easy in the first place. What we want is *wisdom*. You need some intelligence to be wise but we all know that some very intelligent people wander around with their head in the clouds and their feet in the shit. We want people who can *see*, and *love*. I never mention love to my colleagues. I'd be certified. But I know what we need or we're all dead, and those happy dreams of near utopia will end in mass death and religious

bigotry.

The next prophet or the next charlatan? The next visionary who puts things in what turns out to be the obvious order and they start working again?

I wait for them with a hunger I cannot express.

2042: Carole: Latency

I have decided to call myself Odine and stop being Carole any more; never liked the trailing 'e' anyway. I took it from anodyne, but didn't want the pretension of the Y, no idea why that may be. Anodyne in the sense of a medicine that relieves pain – but you can call me bland if you like. Not likely to explain this anywhere else other than in my private diary. Doubtless it isn't private at all, or won't be some time in the future. There's also the perverse amusement of any followers being calling themselves odinists, after the Norse gallows god. Who would follow a fool like me?

I always knew what I was but didn't want to acknowledge it. My heart is full of passion but I cannot argue that passion through when I start. I know things that other people just can't see, because I have empathy, I put myself in the mind of the person I am trying to communicate with and make what I have to say belong to them, some of the time, when the juices are flowing.

I struggle with some people, for clarity. I just can't see

where they are coming from. I realised after a while that some of them are the spoiled child types. Their mother and father loved them and gave them everything they *wanted* but the balance and healthy criticism they *needed*. So they do not understand that sometimes you have to come second, or even last. They act as if they bask in their parents' eyes forever. Some of them live in a self-fulfilling fantasy making them the constant hero in a bizarre world that only connects at the necessary things you need to keep living.

But most people are rabbits like me and do not feel comfortable with anything. Feeling scared of others and not knowing what to do or say is a young thing. When you are old you realise how little it matters, and that everyone else is even more uncomfortable than you are.

The more I see of people and read of the casual scandals of others in the media I realise that there is no need for me to feel like an outsider. Everybody is an outsider and a stranger. Everybody has painful things they don't want to talk about unless they were really lucky and probably quite boring.

I still think that thought, *one day I'll show them all*. The problem is that the *them* I want to show are all dead by now or not the people who hurt me because of changes in their own lives. What can you do in those circumstances? Some kind of futile revenge on a figment of your own mind? Which triggers another chain of events that will *get you back*? Life is like hammering a nail into a wall, it works

when you pay attention to it but if you blindfold yourself with hatred or bias that old hammer, boy does it hurt!

I don't have an answer, unfortunately. Just potter along and try not to piss people off, I suppose.

Some fool will try and make that into an answer, something deep, there's nothing deep in the affairs of the heart. All you need is a heart of your own and to stay true to it. That's what's hard. The rest is window dressing

2031: Odine: Impossible Cyclopaedia – on the definition of Human

It is completely beyond me what we are doing on this planet. I think that we are because we are. Wherever you are is the sum total of whatever came before, all the blind chance that pushed the rocks together four and a half billion years ago. All of it, even the boring bits.

Alternatively if there is a god and some kind of Plan, and all of the suffering one sees in this world is part of it, then this god is no friend of mine. But if it is what it appears, the movement of particles which, while the laws are understood to some extent, is too chaotic because of its sheer complexity to be tied down in some dreadful pre-determined path then there is hope. There is hope because we can try, rationally and humanely, to make sense of life and each other.

To do this we must realise that human conflict has solutions and is no more or less than these movements of particles. Differences are reasonable. All of human society is built around abstract things which hide the real relationships between people. Love is an abstract thing, money is an abstract thing, the Nation is an abstract thing. It scares me too – no-one ever laid their life down for want of abstract things.

When you see a fundamentalist, a nationalist or a racist you must remember that at the back of such feelings is a cheap politician of some sort. This person who wants to make strange and silly abstract ideas into real forces that can kill as well as give power is very dangerous, but not stupid. If he or she were stupid or mad then all that would be left is prayer, and I do not believe in god. The motor of the mayhem is thinking there is a threat or some inequality. The thoughts may even be objectively true – but can you use them to go to war on your brother or sister?

*When one of these little people has triumphed and won the minds of others, when there is no room for doubt or discussion, it is time to leave. If you believe in something like a god then it is impossible to discuss. Faith cannot be discussed, it must be endured. There is no **proof**.*

If you don't have insanity or madness and are then not left with prayer then all you have is reason and commonality. This comforts me more than prayer ever could.