

## Issue 21 - March 1997

I am writing a science fiction novel at the moment, and it is turning me into a paranoiac wreck. I've hardly got past writing the plot outline, and already I've conditioned myself for failure. "Why do I want to live with this thing when there's no chance it will ever be published?" "Big I really think that up, or have I copied it from something I read?" "How long is this thing going to turn out to be?" "Don't we live a bit closer here?" I want brain parasites, time travel, a telekinetic goddess - really!

Luckily there are some fine science fiction writers out there who are made of sterner stuff, unflinched by the inevitable time-consuming rejection letters of the major commercial publishers. Such writers publish their books themselves, in print or on the Internet. This issue of *The Wire* contains the first part of a feature on how you can fail in their footsteps. There is also a review of a self-published science fiction novel by ex-trailer author Dennis Swine. In the course of compiling this issue, I've been encouraged to push ahead with my own frantic efforts - so watch your local bookstores!

By way of honouring fiction this issue we have a witty short-story story from Leann Arndt, who will return next issue with another vignette. Menden will send six returns with a chilling tale entitled *Landslide*. I hope you enjoy this issue and I encourage you to submit your own contributions for publication.

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### *Feature: Self-Publishing Science Fiction, part 1*

*For many of those who love reading science fiction, it is a great to see their own work in the shelves, alongside the likes of the wider eye and the world of today. It will also ensure that it destined to reach a readership far the vast majority of other authors, although there is some science*

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inevitable (and meaningless) rejection letters of the major commercial publishers, such writers publish their books themselves, in print or on the Internet. This issue of Ibn Qirtaiba contains the first part of a feature on how you can follow in their footsteps. There is also a review of a self-published science fiction novel by Australian author Maxine Komlos. In the course of compiling this issue, I've been encouraged to push onward with my own feeble effort - so watch your local bookstore!

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[Aaron Morgan Brown](#) is the feature artist for this issue of Ibn Qirtaiba. He was born on April 4, 1964 in Wichita, Kansas. Aaron studied drawing and painting at Wichita State University with Kathleen Shanahan and John

*Oehm, and art history with Mira Merriman. His technique is primarily self taught, taking cues from many sources. His published work includes many CD covers and magazine articles, including an extensive body of illustrations for rock guitarist Steve Vai. Click any of the thumbnail images in this issue to visit a gallery of his work.*

Feature: Self-Publishing Science Fiction,

# part 1

For many of those who love reading science fiction, it is a dream to see their own name on the shelves, alongside the legends of the Golden Age and the idols of today. As with most dreams, this is destined to remain a fantasy for the vast majority of amateur authors. Although there is more science fiction being published today than ever before, there is also more being rejected. As with any genre of fiction, most novels that are written are never accepted for publication by publishing houses, and even those that are accepted may never actually be published.

An increasingly attractive alternative

is self-publication. With the computerisation of both typography and printing, traditional paper publication is now inexpensive enough to enable many new authors to print and distribute their own books. Even cheaper is publication on the Internet - and this doesn't preclude you from charging for your work. For these reasons small presses and self-publishers are now responsible for a greater proportion of published books than has been the case for many years.

One of the most attractive features of self-publishing your science fiction novel is that you are your own boss. Nobody but yourself will dictate the title, length, manuscript layout, cover design, or print run of the book. Whilst

this freedom comes with obvious challenges and dangers, it can allow a successful self-publisher to recoup a greater return per book than if the above tasks were delegated to a professional publishing house.

Self-publishing also allows your novel to see print sooner after its completion than it would if professionally published, and makes smaller print runs more viable. The hard work involved is obviously considerable, but there are resources and organisations available to assist you, some of which will be investigated in this article.

Electronic publishing

Advertiser-supported publishing



Evidence that science fiction can be published on the Internet is before your eyes. But a fanzine is an entirely different undertaking from a novel; still more so if the latter is intended to be sold rather than given away.

One way in which to sell your novel on the Internet is in the same way that commercial SF magazines pay for their Internet sites: through advertising. [Blakslee Publishing](#) is one site that offers such opportunities. Its science fiction and fantasy action/adventure serials are updated every month, and are free to read on the Web. If obtaining a wide readership for your novel as important to you as making a living out of it, then this may be a better solution

than asking readers to pay for the novel.

Another site with similar potential, but which takes far better advantage of the multimedia capabilities of the Web is

[webmovie.com](http://webmovie.com). The debut ["webmovie" was a cyberpunk thriller](#)

entitled [Generation War](#). Each episode of the story - about 1000

words in length - was accompanied by twenty still images playing in a four frame strip above the text.

Writer/producer Phil Flora used actors on 3D sets created on a Pentium computer to illustrate Generation War, but he states that many kinds of graphics ranging from color storyboards to still photos could be used to illustrate future

webmovies.

While Generation War is in reruns, Flora is working on a followup webmovie about first contact, and is seeking other writers and artists interested in helping create "movie-like" science fiction stories for the web. WebMovie creators get 65%

of every advertising dollar collected for ads displayed with their story.

### Pay-to-read publishing

If you don't like the idea of your novel being cluttered up with advertisements, another way to publish on the Internet is to make your novel available to be viewed or - more commonly downloaded on the payment of a fee. One of the most popular formats for the

electronic publication of novels is [Adobe's](#) Acrobat (.pdf) format, which (unlike the Web's html format) reproduces formatting and illustrations exactly as the publisher intended.

As this kind of electronic publication can be a somewhat technical undertaking, there are numerous electronic publishers on the Internet who are available to assist you. One such publisher which specialises in science fiction is [Savanti Press](#)

. Its founder [Mike Sutton](#) told Ibn Qirtaiba, "My approach with Savanti Press is not so much on selling to the fans, but selling the concept to potential clients, such as writers and artists. We also wanted to explore the potential of

the various technologies. With Acrobat, there are a number of things we can do with the artwork, vector graphics for maps, colour and hypertext, that can't be done in paper."

Savanti Press's first series of electronic books has been the epic Prescott of Antares series by Henry Kenneth Bulmer. Reaction has been strong, with hundreds of copies having been sold so far. Sutton states, "I realize that folks' expectations are very high on e-publishing, expecting thousands to be sold for any work, but I'm happy with these numbers considering this series was last published over eight years ago. Over half the money goes to Ken and the artist, so they are making a decent

return."

New authors who wish to self-publish with Savanti Press are required to cover the press's preparation and editing costs, as well as bear any computer overhead. Sutton advises, "For new authors, I have not been trying to scare them off, but I'm also realistic to them. There has been much discussion in Usenet about charging authors to publish, versus not offering them a return. For a small company, it can be a strain to have to prep, or edit works for electronic publication. For us to take on a new author, the work has to be very close to its final electronic format. To be fair, if we had to charge, the amount would be far smaller than any paper Vanity Press."

He continues, "What I see is that the Internet can be the ultimate Vanity Press for new authors. Don't expect to sell, what you should look for is feedback, as well as distribution to a world-wide demographic. You can find out if your stuff is any good, as well as get the criticism you need to hone your craft. Sturgeon's Law still applies even on the Internet, even more so as everybody can self-publish if they wish."

"To that end, I hope to position Savanti Press to provide a site where new authors can come, and present their works to the fans, and get the proper feedback they need. It has been said that links are everything on the Web, so becoming a "Superslush Pile"-cum-New

Book Search Engine would be valuable to new authors, and we are willing to build the technology this year to encourage this. If we can do this without cost to writers and artists, we will."

In the future Savanti Press hopes to further computerise its purchasing systems, so that payments to authors and artists can be automatically calculated and the money transferred

electronically as soon as a book is sold.

Sutton concludes, "The Mass Market is probably where you want to be if you want to make a living as an author or artist. However, paper publishers have a huge investment in their infrastructure, so life can be cruel for those writers that



aren't writing best sellers all the time. My advice to any author out there that has published work is to sit on your e-rights, don't sign them away, as they will eventually make you a steady trickle of money."

Promotion and distribution on the Internet

Many writers may prefer a more tangible form for their novel than that available through electronic publication. For such writers, the Internet can still be used to promote and distribute their work. As with so many other products, the geographical market available to a self-publisher is greatly expanded by promotion on-line.

[Ralph D. Nybakken](#) has recently

written a speculative fiction novel entitled [Damien, The Man, and has created a Web site with](#)

plot information, quotes from reviews and a scan of the cover art. The novel and its Web site have been promoted through email and Usenet - both of which must always be used with discretion when advertising products commercially. Nybakken offers to autograph copies of the novel ordered from him - a nice way to add value to the book, at no cost to the self-publisher.

Author J. Alfred McCann has gone a step further with his Web site for his [Misc. Adventures Press](#); a publisher devoted to the publication of own work.

The site contains interviews with the author, information about his numerous science fiction novels, and the facility to order on-line. This site is an excellent model for those who have written, or plan to write, more than one self-published novel.

The ultimate World Wide Web site for the promotion and sale of books is the self-proclaimed Earth's Biggest Bookstore,

[Amazon.com. The good news for self-publishers is that](#)

Amazon.com will distribute and promote their books worldwide on certain conditions, of course, including a discount on the wholesale price.

Authors who distribute via

Amazon.com can still promote the book through their own Web site, and in addition can annotate Amazon's catalogue listing with plot information, review quotes and an interview with the author.

Amazon does not carry self published novels in its inventory. Rather, these are handled through its Special Orders

Department, whereby as orders arrive, Amazon contacts the publisher directly to order copies as required (payment is generally via invoice). Customers are advised that books ordered in this manner will be available in 4 to 6 weeks, with the proviso that they will be notified if the book cannot be obtained.

Savanti Press's Mike Sutton sees this distribution technology going further in the future. He states, "With such technologies as Print On Demand, books can be ordered over the Web, immediately printed, and mailed to the reader. Publishers will have no inventory, no returned covers. Older books become viable with very small print runs, but with a world-wide distribution. I'd like to see the authors and artists benefit from this, rather than just the publishing house." Next issue, Ibn Qirtaiba's feature on self-publishing science fiction will continue with a look at how to publish, distribute and promote your book by more traditional means. We will talk with representatives

of two small presses that specialize in assisting self-publishers, and will hear from Maxine Komlos on how she went about publishing TransMat.

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Review: TransMat by Maxine Komlos

TransMat is a self-published science fiction novel by

Australian author [Maxine Komlos](#). As the title suggests, its subject is the technology of matter transportation machines, and its setting is Earth's near future. The novel successfully evokes some dangers and suggests some previously unexplored possibilities of transmats ("TransMats", to distinguish between variants of the device). It is an

enjoyable and unpredictable read that buzzes with interest from start to finish.

The novel's main characters are two families involved in the technology of TransMat production; the Golby family of the Golby Transmat Company, and the Gylfe sisters of Bellatrix Gems. The families are brought together by a gemstone discovery which holds the key to new developments in TransMat technology. Other major characters are symphony conductor Steve Leone whose extended romance with Megan Gylfe serves largely to set the technological scene of the novel, and the eccentric crystallographer Elijah Mayberry, who builds TransMats at the Golby plant in Denmark, Western Australia.

Elijah needed to work with TransMats. At college his professor discovered he was a natural manipulator of the minute sapphire crystals which were the core of the TransMat tubes. He loved his work.

The novel begins as Elijah's puritanical pastor induces him to engineer a fault into some of the TransMats, causing disasters ranging from a crush of commuters at a TransMat booth in London to a flood at a gem mine in Tanzania. An early plot strand involves the two families organising a mercenary force to rescue hostages at the gem mine. Later hazards include a rogue meteor headed for a space station, anti-TransMat



demonstrations, and yes, even an alien invasion. The swift militaristic resolution of this final crisis didn't quite ring true to my ears, but it is difficult not to get caught up in the characters' excitement about the opportunities their success will bring: nothing less than a doorway to time and the stars.

The obvious question that arises with a self-published novel is: why wasn't it accepted for commercial publication? In the case of *TransMat*, to the extent that any particular reason can be identified, it may lie in part with the style in which the novel is written; the author seems uncertain whether to be serious or flippant. In several passages, she employs a style of absurd humour that

owes much to Douglas Adams (the influence is confirmed when the same author is referred to by name by one of the novel's characters):

"Hey what about us?" gasped the fish. But their pleas were not understood. "Tough luck," remarked Fanny the fish, as she died. Adams' style is a perennially popular one and much-imitated one. However where the balance of the novel is essentially

realistic, these excursions into absurdity tend to grate rather than to amuse, and to hinder the suspension of disbelief. I do not misunderstand that TransMat is intended as a light-weight read. However there is an important line between

tongue-in-cheek humour and absurdity. The author uses the former style when describing giant purple aliens, who come across as Mars Attacks-type parodies. This is unobjectionable because the humour operates on a different level to that on which the action occurs and the characters interact. Absurd humour on the other hand can only operate on one level, which is generally incompatible with the mechanistic universe on which the novel relies for its dramatic tension.

There are a few other places in which the novel's want of editorial guidance is apparent. These range from the notable (the year 2022 is too early for the technology described, including moon

and space stations) to the inconsequential (typographical anomalies, and the odd lapse in research - for instance, there are no koalas in Denmark as the novel

suggests.) Although science fiction authors have never been famous for their eloquence, there are also a few passages in need of serious rewriting ("The uppermost man suddenly pulled out a knife and plunged it into the chest of the other. Stab!

Stab! Stab!"). Less importantly, although TransMat is a novel written squarely around its technology, the author is not a scientist. For instance, the explanation towards the end of the book of how faster-than-light travel can

reverse the aging process is unconvincing. Rarely if ever does such scientific imprecision detract from the reader's appreciation of the story.

"Well, what is pure energy? Einstein defined it as  $E=MC^2$ . But maybe it should be  $E=MT^2$ , T being TransMat speed of course, not the speed of light as represented by C."

Overall, TransMat is an enjoyable and multi-faceted novel with an agreeably meandering plotline. Some readers may choose to nit-pick the writing style and others refuse to suspend their disbelief, but fewer allowances need be made on these accounts than for many inferior science fiction novels published commercially

every week. I have little doubt that had Maxine Komlos been a published author her book could have appeared on a major imprint. This novel is recommended to readers of all ages who enjoy character-based science fiction with a strong speculative footing. TransMat is not generally available in bookstores but may be purchased from the author at 270

Sportsmans Drive, West Lakes, South Australia 5021.

Short story: 2076 © 1997 [Leann Arndt](#)

"That New Year's Eve was hot. You know the one that I'm talking about? It was that New Year's Eve. It was the one where the alien ships came.

Well, like I've already said, it was hot. Now this was pretty gosh dang strange, being as I was living in Indiana at the time. I don't know about now, but back then, Indiana wasn't known to have a hot, or even warm, New Year's Eve." Grandmama LA stopped her yammering to sip from her diet soda.

"Grandmama, are you talking about the time when you were thirty-five or is this a different time?"

"Now you just up and shut your mouth boy;" Grandmama nagged.

"It don't matter how old I was. You let me tell this story." As I was saying," she went on, "it was hot. It'd been hot, nigh on since that Christmas Eve. The local t.v. stations were blaming it on some

new fangled weather machine. But, you know, I knew better. I watched them Sci-Fi shows. I knew it hadta be aliens.

Well, I'd just sent your Granddada to the store for more of my diet soda when I heard that strange noise coming from your Dada's bedroom. At first I thought Paddy, your Dada, was singing. He'd do that at times. It was then, hearing the singing, I thought, it can't be Paddy. He is sleeping on our couch.

I thought that perhaps one of your uncles had gotten into his room. I stormed up those steps and I was about as fired up as I ever got. I yelled to your uncles to get their behinds outta there. It wasn't that I didn't love them as much as your Dada, it was that their disabilities



caused them to do destructive and dangerous things. I didn't want them to get out the window and onto the roof. You see, the window in that bedroom did connect to the roof and I was worried much more than I was angry.

I flung that dang door open and that was all she wrote. That alien, the first one I saw outside of a t.v. show, was standing there and talking, I guess, to one of your Dada's stuffed teddies.

Next thing, I hadta have blacked out because the next thing I knew, I was downstairs, on the floor, and your Grandada was kneeling beside me asking if I'd seen the news. Apparently them critters had appeared in homes and apartments all over the world. The hot

weather was due to something atmospheric caused by the arrival of their mothership. Then there thingie ma-bobs have been around since. They never stopped popping in on me at the wrong times. They seemed to love startling your Grandada and me when we were, you know."

Finally, Grandmama was quiet long enough to let me speak.

"Grandmama, that was the time that you were thirty-five and that's how many times I've heard it. Let us enjoy this night in peace. I can't help it that I fell in love with an alien girl." [Back to Contents](#)  
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Short story: Lifelocked © 1997 [Will Sand](#)

Brid woke up in a make-shift prison. This shouldn't have surprised him since he had gone to sleep in a make-shift prison. But it did. Twelve hours wasn't long enough to become acclimatised to such a drastic change in circumstances. Not that it was unknown for drug duty collectors to be less than welcome on any planet. Brid was used to treatment that ranged from wary to rude, but never so overtly hostile. He wasn't alone. He saw on his fellow prisoners the same brooding expression that they wore last night, that he wore now. Unlike Brid, who had been travelling alone (who would willingly accompany a DDC?), the other prisoners were all from the same ship, an unnamed and unlicensed

miner/freighter. They were hauling a crude shipment of that super fertilizer, s-oil (pseudo-oil). A laconic bunch, they treated Brid with the same affection they showed each other. They ignored him.

The cavernous room was high-ceilinged with skylights palely illuminating a barren space, devoid of whatever alien furniture it had once held. From pockets of crisscrossing shadows came an occasional whimper or moan. With a gray crust pocking the walls and a fetid odor seeping from the pitted fibresand floor, the place was a microcosm of the ruined planet outside.

He had been sent to this weary planet only once before. With all the drugs consumed here, the duty collected was

enormous, though he knew he was being cheated out of half of it. These aliens had all but destroyed their planet and now seemingly made a full time job of numbing themselves to their past sins. Yet, it had its pleasure spots amongst the pain: spots of neon color amongst the pollution: resorts where one resorted to more profligate drug use. It was on one of these islands that Brid and the others found themselves imprisoned.

He self-diagnosed his depression as greater than even these dismal quarters warranted. He suspected that he, and the others, were being surreptitiously drugged. A prison within a prison. He made a supreme effort to shrug off this depression and approached his nearest

neighbor.

He was about Brid's size, broad and fit. Brid recognized his rank as mid-level, probably navigation support. He had to physically nudge him to get a response.

"Hi, my name's Brid."

The dazed look that introduction achieved encouraged Brid to continue. "They brought me here last night." When his companion actually nodded, Brid decided an outright question might be tolerated.

"Who are you?"

"Taorma." Simple question, simple answer.

"How long have you been here?"

Taorma merely shook his head. Brid

mentally translated that as

"too long."

"What are they going to do with us?"

Taorma's stricken look alarmed him.

Brid tried, however, to make light of it.

"That bad, eh?"

After a few moment's silence, Brid nudged Taorma again. "No, really, I want to know."

"They fight us." Taorma looked Brid in the eye for the first time. "Against each other." He looked down at the floor. "To the death."

During the next hour Brid learned what he could from Taorma's brief responses. He, and his remaining fifteen crew members and one passenger, were seized ten days ago. It was easy to keep

track of time. A person a day. Ten days, ten dead. Taorma himself had just killed one of the crew yesterday, ripping his throat out, and dragging the poor soul around by his eye sockets, like a festooned bowling ball.

"They drug us with 'gressors after we're thrown into this glassed-in arena. They wager and laugh as the drug takes hold and we go at each other, with our bare hands and teeth. And, you know, for that fifteen minutes or so, it feels good. You're strong - god! you're strong, and full of purpose, and you feel no pain. Till later, later..."

Taorma had started crying then. "Then you're so sick, in body and mind. The images... they won't stop. What you



did...." Brid perfunctorily tried to soothe Taorma, but his own mind was recoiling from the reductive fate he saw in front of him. To be torn apart, or to tear apart. That was the question.

And true to form, late that afternoon, two of their number were dragged off. In his stuporous state, Brid just barely realized that one of them was a woman. Then, in the last instant before she disappeared, he thought he recognized her. Loelle!

With that last glimpse burning in his retina, he again approached Taorma. What would Loelle be doing on a freighter?

Taorma showed a bare hint of curiosity at Brid's sudden enthusiasm.

"Yeah, that's Loelle," he told Brid. "She's our one passenger, a disgraced ambassador, or something."

"But she's no warrior!"

A spark of anger from Taorma. "None of us here are gladiators, buddy."

But he soon calmed down, seeing Brid's distress. "Where do you know her from?"

"From seven years ago." From another Brid ago. Those were the days when Brid had thought he was on the verge of a significant public service career. He had been

figuratively second string for years now, finally poised for the nod to move up to first string. Instead, now he was clutching onto third string, barely a

player at all.

At that time, Loelle was married to an entrepreneur with governmental connections, including a very profitable one to the official for whom Brid was an aide. Brid had been filling in for this official at a function when the three of them, the soon-to-be triangle, met.

Loelle, of course, was beautiful, and her husband, of course, was obnoxious. The one part of that evening that Brid remembered, that Loelle mentioned one week later, in bed, that had made her first take notice of him, was a simple exchange. Her husband had been bragging on his business acumen; i.e., ruthlessness. He had summed up, "There's a sucker born every minute."

Before he could self-edit, Brid calmly had asked him, "Oh, and how often is an asshole born?"

Loelle had laughed and her husband had remembered. And Brid's next posting had suffered.

But it was almost worth it, Brid thought, as those months reeled through his brain. By the end, they had fallen in love. But when she was severed from her husband's fortune and he from any real career, they had each chosen their drug of choice for refuge, rather than each other. They parted in small gradations that passed without notice, until what they didn't notice didn't make any difference.

But they had had their golden

moments. Here, in this prison, facing certain indignities before certain death, Brid actually chuckled, recalling one of their more outrageous scenes. Yes, they were outrageous together.

Her husband was out of town, calling up nightly for a little phone-sex. What he thought was simultaneous masturbation was a lot more than that. Loelle's moans were real - and for Brid. When she saucily said she felt him inside her, she was really looking at and feeling Brid. And when she laughed...

Well, that was then, and now - now was some macabre cosmic over-kill payback.

There was a commotion as a demented being was thrown in with

them: Loelle. A victorious and vicious Loelle.

Everyone kept their distance for the time it took for the last of the drug's residue to wear off. Brid cautiously approached her.

She didn't recognize him. She wouldn't have recognized herself in a mirror. She lay there in a bloody lump.

After ascertaining that most of the blood was not hers, Brid gathered her into his arms and rocked the both of them to sleep.

The next morning she was voracious and ate with relish the lumpy slop they were offered. She was somewhat wired yet from the 'gressors, and didn't need to be prodded for information. Brid felt

himself in the classic good news/bad news situation. The good news is you're reunited with the one truly exciting woman of your miserable life; the bad news is you're both in a virtual slaughterhouse. He soon learned there was also worse news.

She kissed him after breakfast, apparently as pleased to be with him as he was with her. But the information she had to impart was dreadful.

"They don't care, they have no secrets. They know we're not going anywhere, and our life-expectancy is rather limited. In fact, they enjoyed taunting us with their 'grand plan.'" That sounded ominous enough to Brid. It was worse than he thought.

"This 'baiting and fighting' is just a entertaining way to dispose of us. Unlicensed freighters, tax collectors - and unseated ambassadors - have always had a way of disappearing. Nobody's going to be much vexed. At least not until it's too late." She shrugged, before continuing.

"What they really wanted, and now have, is our bodies to examine - and catalog."

"Catalog?"

"Yeah, our genes." She gestured expansively. "All our genes. Our genome. What makes us, us."

"What the hell for?"

"To sell." She pursed her lips as she considered the irony. "To sell back to



us."

Brid looked blank. Distressed, but blank.

"They're going to cause a disaster back at our home planet." Loelle explained. "Destroy our ability to reproduce a reasonable semblance of ourselves. Damage our genome." She shook her head. "Oh, I don't know the science, but they'll do it in some innocuous way, some hyped-up high-energy particle emitters introduced in a meteorite shower. Something

Amalgamated Planets can ignore. A way to conquer without appearing to."

Stunned, Brid managed to croak, "Conquer?"

"When they sell our genome back to

us, 'saving' us, what they want in exchange is the ultimate in currency: the unspoiled portions of our planet. For vacation resorts," she snorted, before continuing.

"And they're not even stopping there. The genome we'll purchase, to avoid extinction, will have been subtly engineered. We'll be rendered more susceptible to manipulation. Spineless, if you will. Genetic subjugation. Eventually, they'll possess any part of our planet, any part of us, that they want. And no one will raise an alarm. You see, they'll have saved us from some terrible natural disaster."

"And I thought your husband was ruthless!"

"He was." She smiled ruefully. "Just not this clever. Not on this scale."

Brid's mind was scrambling for some hope. Not for them, but for their species, for their planet. He thought out loud. "But Amalgamated Planets. The Judgury can't be so easily fooled. Someone will raise suspicion."

"They control the Judgury, from behind the scenes. No one will buck them, not on something as contrived or convoluted as this. They're master manipulators, expert at sprinkling in just enough truth to avoid an outright challenge. Their pride lies not in honor but in cunning."

She took a deep breath. "Just like the stratagems required of a hunter led to

predators achieving a higher intelligence than herbivores, these aliens' habits of deception and cannibalism fueled the evolution of a superb mental agility. As their intrigues evolved, so did they. It's worth noting that a successful predator, much less a cannibal, cannot afford too enlightened a conscience."

"Cannibalism?" Brid muttered. If they treat themselves so poorly, what hope have we?

"Rumored, anyway." She abruptly shuddered. "God, I wonder if we're eating..."

Thinking back on their nondescript breakfast, Brid dourly finished for her. "...each other."

During the following days, their

number slowly dwindled. Brid had now survived his own grisly joust. Though he and Loelle desperately sought out each other's solace, neither could summon any physical desire in such ghastly conditions. They slept huddled together and spent the days pacing and talking. Seven years ago, languishing away a hot afternoon drinking mixed elixirs in the shade of her husband's jungle garden, couched in comforts neither had paid for, Brid had teased Loelle: "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

"Young," she had answered, with a wry smile. Well, ambassador was what she got, at least for a while. He never did ask about that 'disgraced' part. He knew it was either that she was caught

doing the right thing at the wrong time, or the wrong thing with the right person.

And she didn't inquire about the high and noble times of a drug duty collector. What they did do is live together for the first time.

After a meal, Loelle was always more talkative. But the conversation was never light. Now, she tilted her head thoughtfully as she spoke softly to Brid.

"As you know, my husband and I loved to use various alien idioms and aphorisms. Like 'Where there's a moon, there's a planet,' and 'On a waterless world, there is no desert.' One of my favorites was: 'You can't always ride what you can saddle.'" She sighed. "Well, I think we, as a species, are about

to be saddled. I sure hope we can buck."

Brid was silent for a minute, then wistfully quoted: "'A forest can grow many creatures, but no creature can grow a forest.'

That's the only one I know. I always liked the perspective it offered. I used to think it was an assertion of majesty. Now, it just seems a statement of resignation."

He shook his head. "...I don't know, maybe that's just the 'pressors talking..."

She nodded sardonically. "Better than the 'gressors acting..."

Although to plan for escape was ludicrous, not to do so was unthinkable. They couldn't so totally give up and yet

continue to face each other, care for each other.

The obstacles to a successful escape attempt remained

insurmountable. It wasn't merely the locks, the walls and the guards. No, it was mostly their anatomy that held them captive. It would be like an ape trying to pass amongst men without arousing notice. And any vehicle they might commandeer would be inoperable due to their structural differences. Their own ships were not on this grim island, nor were any stressed-space communication facilities.

So, their half-hearted planning was merely a charade to ward off the numbness that was their constant suitor.



They tried to keep a glimmer of hope alive in their eyes, to show each other. It was a week later. No one spoke. No one moved. They were all alone.

Brid just sat there, dazed, staring at the wall. Envyng it. He had had enough. Of life eating, cheating, beating life. He felt and didn't want to.

Life-locked. His genes within his cells, his cells within his body, his body within this cell. His being within life. Could he be without life? Without this predation, this pain, this this...

...This memory. Two hours ago, pumped with 'gressors, he had been thrown into a bout.

He had savagely mutilated his opponent. His own fur torn and

shredded, he had grinned triumphantly at the human crowd's jeers and taunts. He had held high, like an offering, the blue head of Loelle.

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