

Aborfoasbasof was not a particularly pleasant place to live. It wasn't even a particularly normal place to live¹. The main reason for this was its location. Many universes have elemental planes sort of semi-detached to them. The contents of these on the whole are determined by what the wizards accessing them are expecting². In Aborfoasbasof's universe it appeared likely that quite a lot of wizards somewhere were expecting fire and water, but not much else. In fact the name Aborfoasbasof came from the original name used by the ancients: A-ball-of-rock-floating-on-a-sea-beneath-a-sky-of-fire³. It was, as the name suggests, a perfectly normal looking planet that was in the unfortunate position of being sandwiched between the elemental planes of fire and water: with the natural result that days were almost unbearably hot, nights were full of torrential rain, and dusks and dawns were well lets just say you didn't need to use a kettle to get boiling water for your morning cup of tea.

Unbelievably, life hadn't just survived under such conditions, it had even thrown up the odd intelligent civilisation. However as our story starts, Gogromelgromoth The Dark Lord⁴ was beginning to wonder if he belonged to one of them. He was trying desperately to concentrate on his work. However, the priests down the road were holding one of their worshipping rituals down the road. One of the other peculiarities of Aborfoasbasof was that while its mortal inhabitants had got the hang of fire, wheels, ironwork and the like, its gods hadn't got past hitting things with rocks yet⁵. Thus worshippers of the gods usually just collected together a large pile of rocks and shouted their god's name, which had the twin uses of giving the god some more rocks to hit things with, and reminding it of its name. Gogromelgromoth had nothing against people worshipping gods in their own fashion⁶, but the continual chant of "Ug, Ug, Ug," had been going on for several hours now, and was ruining his concentration. He only needed to finish off the last verse of the spell and he would be safe.

Gogromelgromoth had never been much of a hard worker at university; until he had come across an ancient tome deep in the depths of the library. It was a study on Meta-geology, and he'd suddenly realised what kind of world he was in: a humorous fantasy! Rattling off a few quick spells in the book, he'd checked_ Yup, completely unworkable physics, footnotes taking up half the page, bad grammar⁷ and no doubt somewhere a Kirby-esque cover! After reading about the kind of things that can happen to entire cities in such worlds just for comic effect, he realised that he had to escape. He could die_ or turn into a monkey_ or just have something unprintably unpleasant happen to him. Since that fateful day, he had slaved away, desperate to try and discover a spell powerful enough to transport him to a nice safe world.

All those years of toil had now reached fruition, and with a final flourish he finished the spell. With one nostalgic look at the world around him, he uttered it and disappeared. Unfortunately, what Gogromelgromoth hadn't realised was that the priests had disturbed his concentration just a little more than he realised, and the magical NOT rune, has a rather unfortunate resemblance to the phrase "Ug". Thus instead of a spell to transport him to a nice, pleasant world, where he was guaranteed to have a long, happy life, he'd cast something to do the complete opposite. This shows the importance of always using a spell checker⁸.

Thus Gogromelgromoth found himself in a lovely lush garden, underneath a large, ancient tree. He turned round slowly breathing in the clean air, and found himself face to face with a beautiful, naked young woman.

"Hello," she said, "My name's Eve. What's yours?"

To be continued

¹¹ Unlike, for instance, Zool death planet where the intractable renegades of 10,000 worlds etc.

²² Which explains why you don't get many wizards who know anything about basic atomic theory: creating a wormhole to an infinite expanse of Plutonium has rather distressing effects on its surroundings. On the whole, most wizards are better off with the safer, if slightly more incorrect, view that the fundamental building blocks of matter are things like earth and fire.

³³ It can be safely assumed that the ancients were the type of people who would call a spade a spade.

⁴⁴ A name given to him by Mrs. Lord, a rather pleasant little woman, whose only flaw was a slightly unrealistic expectation of her son's future career, caused by reading too many fantasy trilogies. It was she who had bullied him into studying wizardry at school, and later university: where she had continually sent food parcels addressed to him, rather ruining his attempts to pretend his name was Fred.

⁵⁵ The only exception was Olaf: the leader of the gods, who had had grasped the basic concepts of the grand unified field theory within a few minutes of first calling himself into existence. He'd had a glorious future glittering in front of him: until he'd had a look in other sphere's

of existence. He'd seen the luxurious palaces, and beautiful gardens most gods in other worlds manifested in, looked at the grubby caves his pantheon lived in and had promptly decided to become the patron god of drunkards. He'd also discovered the trick of delaying the regrettable effects of overindulgence by drinking more alcohol. So when most gods fight things like ice-giants and undying snakes at the end of time, Olaf was fated to battle the mother of all hangovers.

66 Well nothing he was going to be let known in public, your average priest (usually a teenager with nothing better to do than gather rocks and shout a lot) tending to take a rather dim view of such opinions. Such a dim view that he was quite willing to come round to your house and discuss different belief systems. At night. With his mates.

77 Like the footnote above for instance.

88 Sorry, I couldn't resist it

Z00L III : The Conspectus
Episode 2 by Colin Wilkinson

"Well, what of you think of that? " asked Molin-Cax.

"Authors," announced Clute "ought to be aware of the canons of their genre."

"What?" Molin spat out a long stream of chewing tobacco.

"With the onset of the ontological millennium, these Genesis-ades1 should be limited to post-modern introductions, although there is of course scope for re-insertion of characters at a later date."

Clute was, as usual, being obscure. At least he had established that the future of Zool death planet where the intractable renegades of 10,000 worlds etc. was to be a hackneyed Space Opera and not a sub-Pratchettesque parody, Clute disappeared up his own thesaurus.

Molin lit one of his evil smelling cigars. The match briefly lit his gnarled features. The clientele of the Lie Berry Inn had changed over the years, but plots rarely did. The thought of having to interact with a Hobbit had filled him with disgust. Two familiar figures entered the room. It was The Beard and the Tall Lanky Penguin. They walked/waddled over to the bar.

"Where's the key?" asked The Beard.

" I don't have it." replied Molin.

"You must have. We gave it to you only an hour ago."

"Yes, but I gave it to The Brotherhood Of Man. Like you said."

"You fool! I told you to give it only to Brother Mann, you know that monkish fellow."

"Oh no, you don't mean_"

"Yes, you've given it to a crap seventies' band!!!!!!!"

"Oh my Giddy Aunt. There's only one person on the entire planet who can possibly save us!"

"Yes, we have to find Glamourous Galactic Agent Marina MacDonald."

At the table by the door there were two men, both clad entirely in black, deep in conversation:

"So, when's it due?"

"Who can say? Maybe this year, maybe next."

"If not when, then how many?"

"One. I don't think two is likely, and the thought of more is absurd."

"You're right of course. Listen I heard a rumour that one arrived last year. I know it's not true, after all_"

"Someone would have noticed. You can't hide something that big."

"There's no way we can make a profit with this amount of uncertainty, unless_ unless_"

"What?"

"Why don't we open a book on its arrival. We'll make a killing."

"Great idea. Can I get you another?"

The lights dimmed and a drum roll announced the arrival of that night's cabaret. The far end of the bar had a small stage and onto this, a tall, long legged blonde climbed. She was stark naked except for stockings and suspenders. And shoes, panties and bra. And a long skirt, tee-shirt, thick blouse, cardigan, duffle-coat, scarf , beret and mirrorshades. She began to sing. The audience fell silent. They listened in reverential silence as the act progressed. Suddenly, an unnoticed stranger stood up and walked towards the stage, reached into a pocket and produced a long slender object. In the darkness it was impossible to tell what it was. The singer looked at the stranger with a look of sheer terror.

What has the singer seen?
Who is the stranger? Could it be Marina?
Who are the Men in Black and what are they discussing?
Are the Brotherhood of Man sinister? Could they be GLAM operatives?

Why has the Penguin remained silent?
What is the significance of the key?
Why did Molin make such a dumb mistake?
Why are many of the characters non-gender specific??

11 See Tringham, Towlson et al. (2145) "Tropes, allotropes and homotropism in everyday usage."

Z00L3

Episode 3 by Tim Adye

Hobbit Without a Beard

by

His Omniscience, Her Omnipotence, Their Omnipresence,
Almighty God, the great grand aunt,
God the third cousin, once removed, and
God, the best-friend's pet poodle.

being the third episode (unless Frances has given up in disgust and written the next episode without waiting any longer) of
Z00L3, Grandson of Zool

We rejoin the plot, such as it is, in a shady joint, known only as the Lie Berry Inn.

Its clientele? Molin-Cax, a Beard, and a Penguin.

The rest: Unknown.

Its proprietor? Unknown.

Its floorshow? Fully clothed, but otherwise: Unknown.

Its purpose for the plot? Unknown.

Its location? Unknown.

Location unknown? Well not quite1. After all, this is an episode of Z00L which means that any unknown location can be none other than that Death Planet where the intractable criminals (much as they would like to pretend to be renegades, which you will agree, has a much more heroic _ but untrue _ ring to it) of 10,000 worlds etc. etc. etc.

The mysterious stranger mounted the stage and raised her, now gender-specific, microphone.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, your attention please. My name is Glamorous Galactic Agent Marina MacDonald, and I am a representative of Good Guys' Megadeath Incorporated. I would ask you all to leave the room quietly, as we are likely to have a teensy-weensy piece of, `ow you say, `unpleasantness`."

As the famous hero completed her words, the patrons of the Lie Berry Inn, as a body, seemed to have suddenly remembered a pressing engagement in Argentina. The room cleared rapidly, leaving Galactic Agent MacDonald (as she was known to her friends) alone with The Hobbit and The Beard.

"Hobbit, you cad," rasped our hero, "your evil scheme will be foiled. For not only am I armed with the most deadly weapon in the Universe, but I have backup_" From the shadows strode a tall gallant figure, hair streaming behind her, leather jacket, menacing for evildoers everywhere, over her shoulders. "Meet my sidekick," continued Glamorous (as she was known to her enemies), "`Sidekick`'."

"Hello everyone."

"Ahhhhh, what a cute little hobbit. What nice furry feet you have! But_ ummmm_ excuse the personal remark_ but_ don't hobbits have_ beards?"

"Arrrrrrrrrrggggggggggggg," shrieked The Hobbit. "For that you will die_ Later. After I have completed my plan, and rendered your insult meaningless."

With this, he grabbed The Beard and ran from the room.

"After him," yelled Galactic Agent MacDonald.

As they ran Sidekick panted, "Why don't you use your Ultimate Weapon?"

"Unfortunately it was all a bluff. I'm a pacifist, you know." And she grinned a grin that had to be seen to be believed.

"Haylp! Haylp!" cried The Beard2, and indeed she might. For she was being tied to a railway line3 by the villain of the piece4, none other than the evil Hobbit.

"Hah harrrrrrr," cackled The Hobbit. "Now I have you in my power. You will grow a beard!"

Hiding behind the bushes, the Galactic Agent chewed on her cigar5 and muttered to Sidekick, "So that's his dastardly plan! Ever since the operation he has been beardless. Now he is forcing that pore [sic] defenceless Beard to grow one for him."6

And as The Hobbit leapt back from the tightly-bound7 Beard, they heard the rising rumble of the (dead futuristic, honest!) train rapidly approaching_

WILL the evil Hobbit succeed in his plan?

WILL there be a horrible nasty mess all over the railway line?

HAS he appreciated that a squished beard won't look very nice on him8?

CAN Glorious Galactic Agent Marina MacDonald and Sidekick save the heroine?

WHAT has happened to the Tall Lanky Penguin, the Men in Black, the Singer, and Molin-Cax (apart from all being in Argentina)?

WILL someone be able to bring them back into the story before the poor dears are forgotten entirely?

WHERE will the Gigawatt Laser Canons come into the plot?

WILL the next Author be able to raise the tone and start discussing the works of James Tiptree Jr?

Find out in the next exciting instalment of Z00L3!

11 No, I'm sorry, it is NOT in orbit about Io at the Lagrange point with Jupiter, much as we all might like it to be. [Sorry, for the dreadful reference to you know what, but embarrassing as it is to admit, I am a fan].

22 I've always had a secret passion for Penelope Pitstop, and finally I get to cast a character in the role _ I'm sorry Lucy, but this turns out to be you.

33 The Trans-Zoolian railway for you train-spotters. Being a planet of intractable criminals and all that, the recently privatised line was not doing very well, what with the fact that it was considered the worst of faux pas to pay for a ticket. For this reason, trains only ran on the 23rd of Zark and the 42nd of Zog*. Unfortunately for The Beard, today was the 42nd of Zog.

4*Check out the cool alternative date-system! Isn't Science Fiction imaginative!

54 Lest you worry that we have swapped genres again, note that (a) it is a steampunk train, and (b) the Gigawatt Laser Canons are bound to pop up soon.

65 Unlike Molin-Cax, who had, since Conquerors of Zool*, been split into his component parts and thus was no longer interested in eternal life, the Galactic Agent did not actually light her cigar. She just chewed it and made an icky soggy bit at the end, just like those bastards who borrow your biro and then chew the end.

7*Available any day soon. Honest!

86 I'm sure this idea's been done before _ The Anubis Gates, wasn't it?

97 Ooooooooooooo!

108 I've always wondered about this (or at least I would have always wondered about this if I hadn't only just thought of it). Isn't the idea that even a villain would be interested in having his wicked way with what's left after a train runs over a heroine, however beautiful, just a little sick?

Zool III: The In-Joke

Episode 4 by Mark Charsley

Before we rejoin the plot, let's repeat some of the questions this plot has raised but not answered:

WHY has the Penguin remained silent?

WILL the evil Hobbit succeed in his plan?

WHAT has happened to the Tall Lanky Penguin, the Men in Black, the Singer, and Molin-Cax (apart from all being in Argentina)?

WHERE will the Gigawatt Laser Canons come into the plot?

WHAT can be inferred about the strong force? Oh sorry, got a little carried away.

Now, with no more ado, let us rejoin the plot, where the train is rapidly approaching our heroine (well, one of them at any rate):

Suddenly in mid-rant, the Hobbit disappeared with a large KERZAPPP.

"Ha ha!" cackled Molin Cax, "That'll teach him! I told you I hated hobbits, with their ridiculous furry feet, their squinty little faces, their thieving sneakiness, they're not natural. Where did you get this Gigawatt Laser Canon by the way?"

The penguin by his side shrugged, and finally swallowed the bit of steak he'd been chewing desperately for the last couple of hours, "I just found it lying around, they don't call this Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc. for nothing, you know. Anyway, hadn't you better save the Beard before the train hits her?"

"How am I going to do that? We're several miles away in the control room of this laser canon control room, where we ran to after we saw the Hobbit in that bar," pointed out Molin-Cax, rather neatly describing their recent actions in one sentence.

"Well, we've got a laser canon, right?"

"Yup isn't it brilliant, the way it vaporised that creepy little -"

"Yes alright, alright. We want to stop the Beard being run over by that train, right?"

"Yup."

"Well, we've got two choices, one, we destroy the train, or two, we destroy the Beard before she gets run over."

"Oh yeah, but which do we do?"

"I don't know, why not ask the Wise Woman, whom we haven't referred to until now?"

"Okay, but before you do that, there are three things you must know

about the wise woman: one, she's wise; two, she's a woman; three, she's dead, well not exactly: she was alive, then she died, but then she was alive again, and she got killed, but now she's alive_"

"Obviously worshipping a proper god, to survive that well, but anyway, we'd better ask her quickly, I've lost count of the number of paragraphs that train's been approaching the Beard for. So great Wise Woman, what should we do?"

"Aaah, well. Does the Beard's birthday lie on the thirty-first day of a month?"

"Don't think so."

"Well, she isn't a cultist then. Tell you what, blow up the train, and if you feel less sane afterwards then you probably shouldn't have done it."

"Sounds fair enough. Right here we go_"

[Insert several minutes of loud zapping and crashing sounds not available since Hitch-hikers finished]

An hour or so later our two heroes approached the molten mess a couple of yards away from the rather peeved Beard.

"Are you okay, it must have been a terrible experience."

"No. In addition to being tied up for over an hour, I've been exposed to the fringe effects of a gigawatt X-ray laser twice. I think I'm suffering from radiation poisoning. Are you two alright, you look even less sane than normal."

"Radiation poisoning eh? There's only one thing for it: we'll have to take you to a mad scientist to reverse the process."

"Well, you could untie me first_"

Back in the Lie Berry Inn, the two men in black had returned to their seat by the door.

"Well I hear she's under a bit of strain, but he seems to be showing it more than she is."

"He always has been a little strange. So what do you reckon, do we go for When, or Why."

"I reckon Why's less prone to bribery."

"Right: Why it is then. Your round."

Meanwhile our heroes had reached the yellow pages.

"Blimey! There's not many mad scientists left."

"I'm not surprised. There have been a few more if someone didn't blow them apart with his bloody gigawatt X-ray lasers."

"It's not my fault_ they just remind me of hobbits."

"Look, stop arguing you two and find one, I really don't feel well."

"It's your own fault for drinking that radioactive vodka: I'm really not sure hair of the dog works for radiation poisoning."

"How about this one?"

"No he's not really mad, he just builds wind-powered rail-guns, besides he's hiding from the secret police at the moment."

"Oh I wondered why I hadn't seen him recently."

"Your carrying around those lasers, shouting `come out little piggies`, may have had a little to do with that as well."

"Oh. How about her then."

"Well she's paranoid alright, but she's a wizard_ or is she the absurdly rich deputy high priest? I can never remember."

"That just leaves this one then. Let's phone him up."

"...Blimey I've phoned up a sex pervert. Not that I've got anything against heavy breathing down the phone, but if I'm paying for the call, it's only fair I do it_"

"No, no it's just my respirator I have to wear as a result of a bizarre and vague accident. Can I help you?"

"Er yes, are you `Lord Evil, mad megalomaniac scientist, giving away plots while gloating a speciality`?"

"Yes that's me, why?"

"Oh good, are you any good at curing radioactive beards."

"Shouldn't be that tricky. Why, have you got one?"

"Why yes, is it okay if we bring her round to your secret laboratory?"

"Yup it's on the High Street, you shouldn't have to much trouble finding it, it's by the Age Concern shop and it's got this bloody revolting Silver Dog above the window."

"Brilliant, we'll be right round_. Hang on you're not going to kidnap our beard and perform all manner of hideous experiments on her, while we fight for our lives in your piranha pit are you?"

"Oh no, no secret plans to take over the world, no. Ooh what a give away. No just a perfectly innocent mad scientist who's misunderstood. No piranhas, no, just crocodiles NO. No crocodiles: I meant shop yes, just a shop, all perfectly guil- innocent. Yes."

"Well, you sound like a genuine mad scientist to me. We'll see you in

half an hour or so."

IS the Beard going to recover from radiation poisoning?
SHOULD she have drunk that vodka?
ARE the heroes stupid enough to give Lord Evil the Beard?
IS the Beard stupid enough to let them do so?
WHAT has happened to Gogromelgromoth?
IS Frances ever going to write her episode?
ARE these questions ever going to stop?
HOW can one lay a bet with the men in black?
WHY does Molin-Cax hate hobbits so much?
WHAT has happened to the Wise Woman?
WHAT happened to Glamorous and Sidekick, for that matter?
WHY did the hobbit want a beard, when it would only make him look like
an ugly dwarf?

Find out in the next exciting episode of_ Z00L III

N.B. It implies that the strong force conserves parity, by the way.

Zool III - Just when you thought it was safe to cancel
your life membership....

There was a flickering jerk, and the screen went blank. Then in faded monochrome the word 'Interval' appeared, twitching sporadically like the death throes of a marionette.

Brak Yorems fumbled under his chair for the box of popcorn he'd stashed away for the interval. "Well, wadd'ya think so far?" asked the Space Invader {Ref : So named after his rather peculiar jumper}. "Waste of space" said Brak between mouthfuls of popcorn. "When you wanted to go and see Zool the death planet of the etc. etc.{Please make a bit longer! I can't remember any more!}, I thought it'd be some all-action futuristic Arnie film or something. I wasn't expecting some introspective 1930's B-movie. Even the music hall piano was out of tune!". Invader groaned, and started eyeing up the two usherettes with their cute 'his and hers' ice cream dispensers. "You're missing the point!" he said, "This is meant to be true to life. Maybe this kind of film isn't so popular at the moment, so it might even be a bit out of date, but it's a classic! This is one of the classics of the genre!". "OK", said Brak, handing Space Invader the popcorn, "So what's the central theme? Is it 'Social Flops'? 'Sad failures'? 'Severe facial-hair'? Seems to me that it's just a group of low budget entertainers trying to make themselves seem important".

"No, no, no!" said Invader, getting frustrated. Beside them on the balcony, the yogic flyer reached terminal velocity and leapt into the air, only to gain more height than expected, shooting over the safety rail and landing somewhere in the stalls {Ref : In his defense, his vision was obscured by a mass of hair in mid-leap}. "It's easy to get cynical, I mean, just look at the cast. But they're trying to make something new here, they're not afraid to drop standard cinematic convention if it suits them!". Brak stood up. "I'm not convinced. I'm off, before the second half starts". Despite Invaders protests, he struggled past the groping backs of the folded cinema seats and pushed his way out of the claustrophobic building and into the lobby. Behind him he heard the strains of a badly tuned piano break into classic 'Evita', presumably suggesting a plot shift to hotter climes. With a sneer of disdain he put on his jacket and headed for home.

That night he found sleeping difficult. Tossing and turning in the oppressive Oxford heat, his thoughts kept returning to that awful B-movie. Through half opened eyes he suddenly noticed someone at the foot of his bed and sat bolt upright. "Who're you?" he demanded. The gentleman was old beyond his years, stooped, with an uncontrolled mass of hair, once black but now greying. On his back rested a flourescent backpack, seeming to carry far more weight than its volume would suggest. He fixed Brak with a shifty stare and droned with a slight lisp. "I am the ghost of le Brarie past". He waved a Max O'Connor slip demanding return of the Illuminatus trilogy as proof. "Before this night is passed, you will realise the error of your ways, and will mock no more". Brak started to shiver uncontrollably at the thought of a night with people like this, but obediently put on his jeans when the ghost beckoned towards them. "Let us go" said the ghost somewhat unnecessarily, waving the library slip spookily.

The scene wavers and wobbles in a wavery, wobbly way, and as focus returns we see Brak and the ghost standing in the corner of a cramped room looking in. Looming unrealistically over them stand ancient tottering shelves, literally bursting at the cracks with musty books and old magazines. Folded into a chair that has long ago given up its springs, clutching armfulls of bright plastic cups, is a hairy figure, tall and lanky with defocussed eyes. "It's you!" says Brak in a moment of realisation, but the figure does not hear. "Why do they not

come, my pretties?" croons the figure unhappily to his family of cups. "Why do they not come?"

Sooo....

Will Brak be brainwashed into a totally new world view?
Will we ever get to see the second half of "Zool etc."?
Who is the mysterious librarian?
Has Invader actually got a magic golden ticket?
Where's all the footnotes?

All these questions and more, to be answered in the next episode of...
....[ta da da da] Zool III!

Zool 3.5 - A Change of Mind
Episode 5 by Jason Stevens

At the risk of boring any readers still fighting their way through this dross, let me re-examine the dangling questions:

CAN Molin-Cax and the Penguin cure the Beard's radiation poisoning?
WHERE are Glamorous and Sidekick?
WHO put the bomp in the bomp-de-bomp-de-bomp?
WHY can't a woman be more like a man?
HOW much is that doggy in the window?

(To which the answers are don't know, don't know, don't know, genetics, and about five years under British obscenity laws.) And now:-

The big silver dog squeaked derisively in the wind. Molin-Cax, pushing the shopping trolley containing the Beard, looked up at it, and then at the penguin, who was haggling with Lord Evil.

"What do you mean, a hundred creds1? A specimen like this in the prime of life? A measly hundred creds? Five hundred at least!"

"Shouldn't you be trying to get the price down?" asked the penguin, "You're paying." The Beard alerted by the prospect of money, stood up in the trolley.

"Oh yes, good point," said Lord Evil, "Well, urm_ Five hundred creds and that's my last offer."

"Done!" said the penguin, slapping a flipper against Lord Evil's outstretched hand.

"Don't I get a say in all this?" asked the Beard.

"No, don't be stupid, you're just a woman," said Molin-Cax2. He pushed the shopping trolley through Lord Evil's doorway, pausing only to smash the lock off and retrieve the one cred coin. "Lie Berry Inn?" he asked the penguin.

"Why not?" They took Lord Evil's money, and walked to the bar to drink it3.

In the lift up to his 30th floor laboratory4, Lord Evil turned to the Beard and asked "Now then, what seems to be the trouble?"

"You sound different over the phone," said the Beard.

"Oh that's Igor, my assistant," said Lord Evil. "One of my accidents. I was trying to create a superman, but something went horribly wrong. I keep him around to make me look good in comparison."

"So you don't gloat and give the plot away?"

"I don't know the plot, I only appeared in the last episode. You've been in since episode 2, don't you know what's happening?"

"No, I'm just a woman," said the Beard sulkily.

The lift shuddered to a stop like an electrocuted organist. "We're here," said Lord Evil. The door dilated. Lord Evil hit it until it started working properly and opened, like proper lift doors should.

The first thing the Beard saw in the lab (and indeed the last, as it was the only thing there) was a huge green steel device, something between a steam engine and a fan heater, bearing a plaque saying Ronco Plot Device on which the words Plot Device had been scribbled out and Personailty5 Exchanger scrawled in below in green crayon. Two headsets dangled ominously like flaccid gibbets.

"Gulp!" said the Beard.

In the Lie Berry Inn, the penguin tried to focus on what was left of the five hundred creds. 496 empty glasses and 5 coins swam before his eyes. "Your round," he said to a nearby hatstand which looked like Molin-Cax.

"I bet the penguin's first," said one of the Men In Black.

"You're on," said the other, and they watched as the penguin was6.

"Bollocks," said the second Man in Black.

Suddenly the door of the bar burst open and a figure stomped in. It was at least eight feet tall, and seemed to consist mostly of guns. It scanned the bar, and two of the guns scanned it in different directions. "All right," it shouted, "Which one of you bitches is my mother?"

"Gulp!" said the Beard (again). Igor had buckled the last strap and was drooling over the Beard's legs. In fact he was just drooling on general principle, having very little control over his salivary glands. The Beard's legs just happened to be under his mouth at the time.

"You see," said Lord Evil, soliloquising, "the radiation sickness is inoperable. But, here on Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc. 7I have perfected a way to transfer personalities between bodies. Your tumour-ridden body will cease to be a receptacle for your persona, which will be transferred into another body. After all," and he leaned down to whisper in her ear, "what's the point in being a mad scientist if you can't ignore a few fundamental tenets of neurobiology and philosophy of mind every now and again?" He lowered the first headset over the Beard's head. "Igor, open that window, would you? This thing makes a hell of a stink." Lord Evil put on his protective headgear, guaranteed proof against any accidental personality exchange (although, since he'd designed it himself and made it out of an old Persil box, the guarantee was not worth the paper it was scrawled on in green crayon).

Igor struggled with the window catch for a moment, then decided that the easiest way to open the window was brute force. He threw himself at it, just as (by the kind of coincidence that is the hallmark of really bad writing) Lord Evil threw the switch on the Personality Exchanger. The Beard's personality found the only available body, which unfortunately was Igor's, 30 floors up but unlikely to stay that way.

The Beard opened Igor's eyes, and saw the ground coming up fast. "Oh bugger!" she said.

WILL Igor/the Beard be splattered onto the pavement?

Will the questions regarding personal identity be considered?

WHICH one of those bitches is his/her mother?

WHERE are Glamorous and Sidekick (again)?

WHAT happens next?

Find out in yet another exciting episode of Zool III!

11 Gosh, new calenders and a new monetary system!

22 You'd never guess that this was hard SF, would you?

33 The money, not the bar.

44 Check that foreshadowing!

55 Sic.

66 Violently sic.

77 And you thought I'd forgotten_

Zool 3 - Frankly a Retrograde Step

Episode 6 by Penny Heal

So, where were we?

Beard was falling out of a 30th story window in Igor's body. Glamorous and Sidekick are still missing and meanwhile - in a seedy bar, this is happening:

"Well?" said both Men in Black, "Are you its mother?"

They stared at each other, each suddenly realising how voluminous, shadowy and all-concealing the other's clothing was, wondering why the knew each other only by monosyllabic surnames, re-evaluating the parameters of their profoundly masculine relationship.

A small be-cardiganed figure stepped from the shadows, "No I'm your mother and don't you forget it Gogromelgromoth."

The figure shrank form its apparent height of eight foot to its more usual five foot one, clanking slightly as it did so.

"Well you can have the Laser Cannons back," said the Dark Lord1, "I'm settling down with Abigail and starting work as a reinsurance technician on Monday_ and I'm changing my name to Tim."

He cast the host of hideous weaponry on the floor and stalked out.

"Strange," thought Mrs. Lord, "He's become so much butcher since he stopped being an evil necromancer king."

"Hang on," said Clute form behind the bar, where he'd passed out after reading the bit about the lift door in Zool 3.5, "The Dark Lord may have escaped his sub-Pratchett reality by a spell but what the hell are you doing in this level of the fictional confection which makes up this mille-feuille of self-reference?"

"Ye what?" replied Mrs. Lord, "I was just knitting a new cardigan and one of them new-fangled super-strings got tangled up in the wool and what

with that and the complex 5-dimensional rotations required by the cable design in my Cronos' Weekly pattern I suddenly finds myself here. Excuse me, I have a sudden urge to wreak a hideous vengeance."

She stopped to stuff the ghastly arsenal into her cardigan and clunked off.

Molin-Cax crawled from under the table to the Juke Box², and selected a track. "Woououou aaaaargh. Bahdyfahn. Bahdy faaaahnn for yooooouu!"³ squalled the jukebox.

"Kickin!" murmured Molin-Cax, and passed out again,

Meanwhile the Beard had fallen to the 29th floor⁴. She flailed around wildly, her movements somewhat curtailed by the massive hump which Igor had had transplanted when he took up his position as lab assistant to Lord Evil. She grabbed for anything to catch hold of that might possibly save her and caught a small piece of string. "Zoorg!"⁵ swore the Beard as the hump on her back opened to produce a huge pink parachute⁶. The Beard relaxed as she plummeted faster⁷ towards the fiendishly sharp revolving ears of the Silver Dog.

So. Glamorous and Sidekick are still missing. Mrs. Lord is armed to the teeth and looking for an indeterminate, yet horrific vengeance. Gogromelgromoth The Dark Lord - now Tim - is working as a reinsurance technician, but this really doesn't mean that his life is over and nothing interesting will ever happen to him again⁸. The Beard is still in mid-air facing certain death and Molin-Cax is lying drunk under a table with the Penguin humming "Get busy with the fizzy." to himself, but Colin has requested that he should spontaneously combust fairly soon, since it's something he's always wanted to do himself.

11 Grandson of Zool may have implied that Aborfoasbasof was a low-tech world with no laser cannons but it didn't say so directly; `cos I checked.

22 Space-Opera purists may wish to insert any of the adjectives holophonic/4-d/interactive/teledildonic before this word if they really want.

33 Normally sick and unpleasant worlds use pop-songs as advertising themes. Only somewhere as depraved as Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc. could use advertising jingles as pop-songs.

44 There is an explanantion to this, honest. The transport of Mrs. Lord and Gogromelgromoth The Dark Lord from Aborfoasbasof to Zool carried with it a subtle contamination from their original genre - namely the outrageous physics which allowed the force of unusally dramatic situations to provoke a quasi-relativistic time-dilation effect. This also accounts for the Beard's earlier escape from the train.

55 New units and silly hard SF swearwords: you lucky people.

66 Limz R Us, prosthetic surgeons, suppliers of attractive and practical additions to the idle rich who wanted to look like street samurai. Most famous for the collagen lip implants which doubled as air-bags in a car crash.

77 Since she now had a parachute, the dramatic time extension effect had failed - causing her to fall much faster.

88 For those who have been paying enough attention to wonder what happened to the lush garden and the girl named Eve, the explanation is that The Dark Lord found himself transported to a cinema* on Zool during the adverts! Eve's next words were "and I never travel without my high security lip implants from Limz R Us. Security when it counts, where it counts."

*holographic/4-d/teledildonic etc.

Zool III: The Next Episode

Episode 7 by Mark Charsley

So once more, as is becoming increasingly traditional, let us review some of the more unimportant questions realised by the narrative so far:

WHERE are Glamorous and Sidekick?

WHO is this Brother Mann we heard about once in episode two?

WHEN (if at all) is Molin Cax going to self-combust?

ARE the forces of GLAM involved?

WHEN is the plot going to bloody start again?

Fear no, faithful reader, all these questions shall be answered in but a few moments¹_

"That's odd," thought the Beard's consciousness in a rather lucid and calm frame of mind caused by adreanline overload, "I could have sworn the dog was only revolting on the way up, but now it's revolving as -" Her thought patterns were suddenly de-railed by a transmat beam ripping her new body up into a stream of molecules, and sucking them up into a large black spaceship with the words "Good Guys' Megadeath Inc" on the side that had

appeared from the middle of nowhere.

"-well. Blimey now what?" finished the rapidly reassembled molecules of the Beard's2 brain.

"Ah, excuse me, could you tell me where we might find a beard and a mad hobbit?" asked a voice without a trace of a crap french accent.

"Glamorous, is that you?"

"Well if I wasn't Glamorous, how could I answer, when the question was directed to someone else?"

"Look can we stop these irrelevant questions of identity for a bit, they're getting on my nerves. What happened to your crap french accent?"

"I dropped it before it got used in any unfunny Clueso rip-offs, and yes I am Glamorous, but who are you?"

"I'm the Beard! I've had my personality transferred into this body by a mad scientist."

"But why, and more to the point how? It breaks several significant scientific laws!"

"Ah, but this is Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc., people break laws here all the time."

"Hmmm, I'm not convinced.How do we know you're really the Beard, anyway?"

"Well, you could try asking me questions only the Beard could answer_"

"If only the Beard could answer them, how would I know they were right?"

"Ahhh, how about questions only the Beard and you could answer?"

"Yeah, that'll work. Let's do that_"

There was a pause.

"Can you think of any?"

Meanwhile, in a relatively pleasant bit of suburbia, a lone figure was meditating. He sat there and composed koans, he imagined the sound of one hand clapping, he contemplated his navel, he even recited the ten thousand names of God. Finally inspiration struck him like a divine light. "Sod it, they must have forgotten. I'll have to phone the bastards."

Thus in the Lie Berry Inn, Molin's sleep3 was disturbed by a loud phone bell, he muttered something and rolled over. It was disturbed a bit more violently a couple of minutes later by the barman's foot.

"Oi, wake up, there's a call for you."

Molin opened his eyes. A couple of seconds later his brain remembered what to do with them and stared at the barman. "Urghhh_" he said.

The barman droppped the receiver on the floor by Molin and stalked off. Molin grabbed the phone and went "Urghh" again at it.

"Molin, is that you? Where the bloody hell is the key. If I don't get it soon, the world's in severe danger of ending."

"Umm, what, hold on," said Molin patting frantically for his cigars and lighter, "Who is this?", he said, putting his customary cigar4 in his mouth.

"This is Brother Mann, I'm outside Tim's house, and I need that key to get in and protect it with the mystic charm of Khellessar!"

"Ahhh, I don't know how to tell you this, but erm," prevaricated Molin, as he lit his cigar, and the large quantities of alcohol vapour surrounding him_ the resulting explosion actually managed to penetrate the Penguin's skull enough to kickstart his brain. The telephone receiver also had a pretty good try, but bounced off.

"Oi! Stop that!" exclaimed the barman, "You're not allowed to self-combust in here. Do it outside."

The Penguin ignored him, and picked up the receiver5, from which a tinny voice was frantically calling out for Molin.

"Errm, Molin appears to have exploded. Who is this?"

"It's Brother Mann, the bloke you were meant to have given that key to_"

"Oh bollocks, you mean Molin didn't give it to you?"

"No, I've been sitting out here all night, where is the silly narweep6?"

"Well, right now, he's all over the pub. There's only one thing for it, we're going to have to hold a seance. You'd better come over here at once!"

Half an hour or so after Brother Mann had departed, a small heavily armed figure clanked up to the house he'd been waiting outside, and knocked on the door. The door opened, revealing an innocent looking woman.

"Sarah Conner?" asked the figure in a bad Austrian accent.

"Yes" came the puzzled reply.

"Bugger! Wrong house, sorry."

The figure went to the house over the road, and knocked on that door, which after a short pause was opened by a young woman, "Yes?" she asked

brightly.
"Are You Abigail Lord," asked the figure.
"Well yes."
"Good," came the reply, followed quickly by several thousand gigajoules of high frequency X-ray laser beam.
Abigail, unsurprisingly, was not a little shocked by this: instead she was reduced to her component quarks, along with her house, her car, and most of the street.
"Ha ha!", cried Mrs. Lord, for it was none other than she, "Let's see my son settle down to a nice quiet life now! I'll teach him to live in suburbia and settle down_ no, that's not right. Erm, I'll teach him to sell his soul to dark forces and become the greatest witch-king in the history of creation! Yes that's it! I'll teach him that. Now where is the poor lad, his tea will get cold."

WILL Gogromelgromoth's tea get cold?
WILL his mother cardigan get stretched by the weight of all that weaponry?
WHAT is reinsurance anyway?
HOW did Brother Mann know that the Lord's house was about to be attacked?
HAVE the forces of GLAM got anything to do with it?
WHAT are they going to do with the key for a lock that's been atomised by an impractically large laser beam?
WILL Glamorous think of a test for the Beard's Identity.
WHY did she and Sidekick take so long to get their ship, and has it got any good weapons in it?

Find out in another silly episode of the increasingly irrelevant Zool III, though not necessarily the next one_

11 Unless of course you stop reading and make a cup of tea or something, in which case they might take a little longer_
22 In an attempt to make the narrative more easy to read, this author is assuming, despite lage wads of neuroscience and philosophy of self, that the previously hunchbacked body is the Beard (there's a slight chance it can grow one now, after all_), and the tumour-ridden body up in the lab is now Igor.
33 for the ruthlessly pedantic, perhaps unconsciousness would be a better word.
44 which must be getting a bit old by now.
55 using his Limz R Us prehensile flippers.
66 Stupid words R Us proudly present their latest range: ridiculous insults, to accompany their swear-words, currency etc.

Zool III: The Intermission1
Zool III: The Second Coming
Episode 8 by Ralph Lovegove

A man must question himself2 many times upon the road to enlightenment. These are the questions one needn't other with.

WHAT does Gogromelgromoth (now Tim) eat?
HOW is his tea going to get cold, anyway? It was rather hot last episode.
WHEN is the New Romantic revival going to appear?
Will Abigail Lord's assassin `be back'?
IS this episode going to help continuity?

Read on.
"Excuse me sir, I was wondering, well you know, how seeing as you knew Tina Turner and all, well, if you could get her autograph for - "
The young lieutenant faltered as he felt the commander's hot breath down his neck3. He turned from the passenger and stared at him right in the nostrils. He tried to find the words, but failed.
"What's this about autographs? And you know my rule about 70's dance music." The commander despised bri-nylon and flared trousers. That was for the federation.
"It's just for my sister, I - "
"Look, you're a Klingon, and Klingons don't need autographs, got that? Now go outside and fix the antenna. The sub-space radio is on the blink," said the commander stiffly.4
"But sir, you made us ditch all the vacc-suits on Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc., because the sequins clashed with the - "
"Look, you're a Klingon, and Klingons don't need vacc suits. Afraid of a little hard vacuum are you? Just take a deep breath before you go outside."
When the lieutenant had gone, the commander turned to their passenger and wordlessly passed him a little black book. The stranger signed his name in the I section, just before J for `Jesus'.

Tim's typewriter was arguing with him.

"Apparently he doesn't realise that his word-processor was an enemy agent", thought the typewriter, "I had to destroy it."

The typewriter was about to speak again, but Tim had stormed out of the office. There was a little bar down at the waterfront and he felt like getting very drunk. It wasn't long before he was staring through the remains of his fourth hypodermic. The stranger turned to him and spoke.

"William Lee?" asked the oddly shaped man⁵.

It took five minutes to translate the words from the original English⁶ into something he understood. It took another ten to reply.

"No. Sorry."

"Oh." The protuberance on the man's forehead began to deflate. "Bugger."

"Commander, we appear to have picked up a pair of Hitch-Hikers while we were in Hyperspace."

"Take them to the theatre. I'll show them my new tap-dance routine."

"Look, I had to destroy her. She was an agent for GLAM Inc. And she was a centipede."

"Of course she was a bloody centipede, Mum. I'm a centipede, You're a centipede," Tim sighed, "She had the cutest little antennae - "

"That's beside the point. Did you really think you could settle down in suburbia with a wife and 2.4 larvae and deny your heritage? You are destined for great things_"

"Here we go," thought Tim, "She's going to rant on about the Force and the Empire and that." He settled back and enjoyed the drugs left in his system.

"And there's the film and book rights to consider. Have you ever thought of that? Create a little security before you start a family - "

"Yes, Mum."

"What do you mean, 'Yes Mum'? You're supposed to throw a fit and say that you'll never join me and that I'm not your mother. Then I cut your hand off."

"Now just a minute - "

Brother Mann's cassock billowed about him in that stylish post-holocaust way⁷ as he entered the Lie Berry Inn. He raised an eyebrow at the Penguin's new hairstyle which vaguely resembled a toilet brush.

"Okay, I'm here. Shall we get the seance going?"

Molin-Cax stepped out from behind a large stuffed elk, his naked tie-dyed flesh⁸ aglow in the light of the radioactive fires.

"What seance?"

"Hang on, I saw you explode_" the Penguin dribbled on the carpet⁹.

"This always happens when you get more than one person to write a book. There's always a stock of clones just in case the person who died needs to come back. You just need an implausible reason."

"So, what's the reason this time?" said Brother Man, assuming the lotus position.

"That would be telling¹⁰. But don't stop the seance just because I'm alive, it sounds like fun."

Glamorous tried to look interested as the Klingon commander pirouetted.

"Alright, I believe you. I can't imagine being in such an implausibly ridiculous situation with anyone else¹¹."

The two broke into polite applause as the commander finished.

"Don't give me that. I'm a Klingon, and Klingons don't need appraisal. I'm still going to execute you in a cruel and unnecessarily graphic way."

The commander motioned for the two to rise. They turned and were about to be led away by the young (and somewhat out of breath) Klingon lieutenant when they stopped at the sight of the stranger, dressed in turquoise.

"David Icke?" they said in unison.

HOW did Glamorous and the alleged Beard come to be in this situation?

WHY is David Icke travelling with Klingons?

IS turquoise a mistake for autumn?

HAS the sub-space radio reception improved?

DOES Tim have sufficient limbs to spare one for the sake of the plot?

HOW did Molin avoid spontaneous combustion?

ARE Klingons as hard as they say they are?

Find out in another genitally piercing episode of the increasingly misunderstood Zool III!

11 Get you Zool(TM) ice-creams, Zool(TM) T-shirts and Zool(TM) nipple rings from the foyer now!
22 Women usually don't need enlightenment - but then, who says they're women? In fact, who says they're human at all?
33 But that's another story.
44 The rumours about Klingons are true.
55 Recycled Ideaz-R-Us.
66 That's a coincidence, isn't it? Just like all the Star Trek episodes.
77 A plug for Armageddonz-R-Us(TM) would be appropriate here.
88 Don't ask.
99 Which didn't do it any good, I can tell you.
1010 Because he doesn't know, I bet.
1111 She'd better get used to it, there's plenty more where that came from.

Zool III : Oh No, Not Again
Some Plot Happens. No, Really. Honest.
Episode 9 by Matt Bishop

For those with short memories, or those who have managed to blot out the intricacies of the plot so far, we provide a brief summary of where all of our dramatis personae are at the moment:

In the Lie Berry Inn, we have the Penguin, Brother Mann, and Molin-Cax, the latter newly and somewhat implausibly reincarnated with tie-dyed flesh.

Chez Lord, we have Tim Lord (formerly Gogromelgromoth The Dark Lord) being harangued by his mother Mrs Lord. Tim, who has recently been revealed to be a centipede, sells insurance, though I have no idea how and his mother wears a cardigan (with a few more sleeves than usual, I presume) and goes round annihilating things with her gigawatt laser cannon.

On a Klingon ship, we have Glamorous Galactic Agent Marina MacDonald and her Sidekick, being tap-danced at by random Klingons in the presence of David Icke.

Vanished without trace are: Beard (last seen in the body of Igor, talking to MacDonald), Igor (last seen in the radiation-poisoned body of Beard, at Lord Evil's laboratory), Lord Evil (last seen with Igor), Clute, the Men in Black, the Wise Woman, and the Brotherhood of Man2 Atomised by laser cannon, we have: Abigail Lord and the Hobbit.

HOW the hell is the author ever going to tidy up this mess?

WILL the vanished characters reappear?

COME to that, will the atomised characters reappear?3

IF it takes a week to walk a fortnight, HOW many apples in a pound of pears?4

Now read on!

On board the Klingon ship, there was something amiss. One of the major outstanding questions was answered, for those that cared to know, by the words stencilled on a nearby bulkhead: IMPROBABILITY DRIVES. NO USER-SERVICEABLE PARTS WITHIN6. But there was still one nagging doubt... Glamorous Galactic Agent Marina MacDonald was the first to put her finger on it7.

"Are you good Next Generation Klingons or bad Old Series Klingons?" she enquired sweetly, without a trace of her former French accent.

"Neither!" snarled the Klingon captain, in an impressively bad display of stereotypic dialogue. He and the lieutenant both grabbed the sides of their heads and pulled, rending their Klingon disguises in two and revealing Lord Evil and Igor (still in Beard's body, for those of you who give a damn).

"Now, Miss MacDonald, you have a choice. You can either help us find the gigawatt laser cannon and annihilate the Earth, or..." (evil vicious leer - god this is badly written...), "we can cycle you and your sidekick out of the airlock."

MacDonald, who had always been amenable to reason, hesitated for all of several nanoseconds before shaking his hand.

"Good," said David Icke8, "another two recruits for the Forces of Turquoise. I reckon it's about two days journey to Earth from here. Lord Evil, plot us a course for Earth. Igor, fetch me the Prozac."

The bow wave of improbability from the ship had caused a large area of the surface of Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc. to instantly fling itself across the galaxy and land, rather neatly under the circumstances, on none other than the planet Earth, with fringe effects doing even less believable things in the process. A couple of the less subtle of these effects caught Mrs Lord in mid-harangue. A fly on the wall in that house would probably have turned into a fried egg or something, but assuming it hadn't, it would have seen both Mrs Lord and her son turn into human beings9. There was a stunned silence.

"Bugger," said Mrs Lord, "I spent months knitting that cardigan, and

it'll never fit now." Beard (now miraculously - or, more accurately, improbably - reinstated in her own body10) fell from the light fitting with an almighty crashing noise.

"Odd," she remarked groggily, "how only a short while ago I was talking to Glamorous Galactic Agent Marina MacDonald, and now here I am lying on the carpet in a house with two people I've never seen before. What's that?" She pointed to a spot where, until a few minutes ago, the gigawatt laser cannon had been lying. It had been replaced by a herring.

"Bugger again," said Mrs Lord, "I can hardly going round knocking the living daylight out of people with a herring, now can I?" She picked it up and stuffed it in her cardigan, just in case.

"Come, mother and interloper," said Tim, (and if you thought he was impressively butch as a centipede, you can't imagine how bad he's going to be as a man) "we must go to the pub. For some reason, my body feels as though it needs beer and peanuts."

They entered the Lie Berry Inn to find the Penguin, Molin-Cax and Brother Mann trying to work out what to do next, and on the verge of deciding that another drink wouldn't be a bad idea.

"You may perr'aps be wondering why I 'ave brrought you all togezzerr in zis public 'ouse," said Clute, stepping lightly from behind a column. "I 'ave... dammit, I've been talking to that MacDonald woman too much... I have an immensely important mission for you all to undertake. I happen to know that the evil Forces of Turquoise are in pursuit of the plans for the gigawatt laser cannon...."

"HOW do you happen to know," enquired Molin-Cax, "and what the hell is that thing you're carrying?"

The thing in question was a burnished aluminium cube, about eighteen inches on each side, festooned with dials, switches, flashing lights, gyroscopes and so onll.

"It's my Critical Apparatus; I overheard their subspace transmission on it. Are you going to help save the planet from Them or aren't you?"

All present agreed that they were, since it seemed the only option for getting the plot going again. "Good. Here's the plan. The Ministry of Defence are, as we know, useless. We have to smuggle the plans to America, into the hands of Starfleet Command..."

"Whoa!" This time, it was the Penguin talking. "You're completely barking. STARFLEET COMMAND? As in Captain Kirk, Lieutenant Uhuru, all them? They're fictional, you logorrheic buffoon."

"No, Starfleet Command are merely top secret. America has been in contact with extraterrestrials for years _- don't you read Weekly World News? Starfleet Headquarters were cunningly established in Altoona, Pennsylvania, so that nobody would ever notice they existed..."

"Except for people who went to Altoona, I suppose," muttered Brother Mann.

"Do you know ANYONE who has been, or who would voluntarily go, to Altoona? Well, then. Now be quiet and let me finish. I have already established a method for smuggling the plans. My friends the Men in Black, who have been over there behind that pillar all the time, have already completed all the necessary paperwork. Let me explain..."

Only two hours later, our brave heroes set off for America. It had been agreed that they would pose as the West Thurrock International Ballet and Double Glazing Company, about to tour the United States with their nine-hour-long smash hit musical Battlefield Earth _- On Ice!. Clute had written the script and had subtly embedded the plans for the laser into one of the more hermetic subtexts, under the assumption that nobody was going to be prepared to do close textual analysis of this monstrosity. The race to Altoona had begun!

WILL our heroes get to Starfleet before the evil Icke catches up with them?

IS Altoona the first stop, or will they have to inflict this musical on the general public?

WILL the Critical Apparatus ever serve any purpose again?

HAS the plot finally started moving?

HAS Glamorous Galactic Agent MacDonald really sold out?

WHAT became of the Wise Woman?

All these questions and many more will probably be ignored in the next instalment of Z00L III...

11 (FX knocking sound. pause. sound of door opening)

2Tim (for it is he): "Good afternoon, Madam. I wonder if I could interest you in..."

3Woman: "EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEK!"

4(FX slam. sound of furniture being pushed against door.)

52 They were given a set of keys by Molin-Cax. They haven't actually made an appearance yet, and as long as the present author's characters have access to that laser cannon, they're not going to.

63 Let's face it, continuity has not been a strong point of the story so

far.

74 As many steps as it takes a fly to walk backwards through a barrel of treacle. (Old Bray's Kentish Sayings, Inc.)

85 No, I didn't know that about Klingon ships either.

96 Not strictly true, since any reasonably competent user could probably replace the cup of tea without too much trouble. At least until the Intergalactic Allied Union of Drive Servicicers and Beverage Mechanics got to hear about it.

107 No surprises there, missus.

118 You thought I'd forgotten him, didn't you?

129 What a coincidence! Now I don't have to write bit parts for centipedes!

1310 Yes, this means that there are now two copies of this body. Can you say "plot device"?

1411 It folds up into his pocket when he's not using it. Don't ask awkward questions.

Zool III: The Crackly Bits

Episode 10 by Tim Martin

WHY?

Discuss...

It was a dull start to a dull day. Clouds frisked, the wind playfully blew old women in front of buses, and, at the Frog and Pantechnician, Nurg and Jitter were furnishing the bar with several of the patrons who hadn't had the courtesy to spill their drinks. The Celtic twins were dead, but Death didn't want the hassle.

On a Klingon ship thundering away from Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc. towards Earth, Glamorous blew a delicate fractal smoke-ring at the mirrored ceiling, then turned and exhaled a cloud of aconite smoke over David Icke.

"You may be hung like a mule but you're a fuck awful lover," she commented.

The turquoise stallion was unperturbed by the criticism.

"Oh David," moaned Sidekick, "Ohh David."

In the sleek, black, armed cruiser that shadowed the evil-intentioned craft, Jim diGriz was posing philosophical questions, "Can you imagine it - Cupid walking around in full relfec armour hefting a 30mm gauss rifle?"

"I can, " replied Dinalt, superglueing the legs back on spiders.

On the Earth peace and goodwill were having a lucky break and were making the most of it. Jew and Arab practised fellatio on each other and Salman Rushdie toured the world in a Trabant, signing copies of his Booker prize winning classic, Jesus built my Hot-Rod.

"Do we get to sing now?" asked the Brotherhood.

Pennsylvania, recently discovered by John Clute to be the focus of the world's ley-lines, gleamed like a cerussite. The entire surface area of the state had been flattened and covered in ice, ready to stage he coolest TV spectacular of that day - Battlefield Earth - on Ice. 10000 criminals from the state pen were limbering up and rehearsing the intricate patterns that would carve the potent occult squiggles on the glacial surface. The organisers hoped that the huskies wouldn't piss all over it first.

The mule just wanted his genitals back. Unpierced.

Molin stared down from the circling `copter. The Penguin had seen ice before and wasn't impressed.

"Awesome," gasped Molin, in awed tones. He inclined his head towards Clute, transfixing the lantern-jawed hunk with a look of adoring teenage love.

"Oh Clutey babes, you're a genius. But are you sure this pattern will really send a cataclysmic cold ray searing into space to vaporise the

Klingon ship, communicate with intelligent alien life-forms, discover the missing mass of the universe and flush God's celestial lavatory?"

The penguin thought the pattern would be a mother of all lawsuits trademark violation.

"_ I ain't cheap, but I'm thorough and I get the job done, with me you can expect a lot of gratuitous sex and violence, a trail of corpses and a final roof-top showdown, all strictly `first-person' only_"

The Man in Black looked at his darkly clad companion.
"Do you ever get fed up of being a one-dimensional, one adjective description stereotype?" he enquired.
His Nobel Peace Prize winning brother-in-sombre-cloth, who bore an uncanny resemblance to Rutgar Hauer in the Guinness ad's, was going through a complex emotional phase after an encounter with a dolphin and so didn't reply.

Mrs. Lord hefted the herring thoughtfully.
"Just stand there luv, I'm sure I remember seeing something on the telly about this."

The six year old twins idly watched their parents fighting over the TV remote control and arguing about the washing up.
"Tch, kids of yesterday!" they said to each other and jacked in.

At Hell's kitchen the gold lamé suited, well quiffed ad killer sideburned chef swivelled his pelvis and sang,
`You add a shake of this,
And you add a dash of that,
You cackle with insanity,
And go look for the cat.'

Behind that mild mannered exterior lies a screaming void across which car salesmen roam.

To be continued_

Jurassic Zool
Episode 11: by Mark Charsley

After the carnage left by the last few episodes, let us perform a post-mortem on the plot:
Our heroes the Penguin, the Beard (now back in an unpoisoned copy of her old body) and Molin-Cax have joined up with John Clute, the Men in Black and the previously villainous Tim/Gogromelgormoth and Mrs. Lord. They have been transplanted to Earth, and are now frantically trying to stop the villains (Lord Evil, Igor (still in the Beard's old radiation poisoned body) and David Icke), currently in their improbably driven Klingon ship, from finding the gigawatt laser cannon (now in the form of a herring) and using it to destroy the Earth. Unfortunately their plan to prevent this appears to revolve around the production of John Clute's 8 hour musical Battlefield Earth - On Ice. Meanwhile Glamorous and Sidekick appear to have thrown in their lot with the villains, and were last seen in a rather sordid bedroom scene with David Icke.

Now read on_

On board the Klingon ship, the occupants were woken (well; all those that were asleep were) by an excited shout.
"Eureka!"
David Icke ran to the source of the disturbance, to find Lord Evil dancing around his laboratory giggling with glee.
"What are you doing here? You're meant to be piloting this ship to Earth while I was, erm, interrogating those two galactic agents."
"Earth, ha! What is a mere planet compared to the power of God?"
"Oh god: he's been sniffing those chemicals again. What have you gone and done now?"
"I have discovered_ the secret of life itself! I have created life in this previously sterile laboratory!"
David looked around the laboratory: full of ancient slices of pizza, mouldy cups of coffee, and several indeterminate things dribbling out the

fridge, but decided not to comment. Instead he asked, "Where?"

"Over there."

"What, behind that pillar?"

"What pillar?"

"That bloody great big grey pillar you idiot."

"That's not a pillar," said a new, deep voice, "That's my leg."

"You see," continued Lord Evil, "where all those scientists have been going wrong is thinking that life starts as little germs. It doesn't: it starts from dinosaurs1."

"You mean to tell me instead of piloting this ship to Earth, you've been sitting in here creating a bloody brontosaurus?"

"Well not quite: I'm a conclavosaurus, but it is tricky to tell the difference. Pleased to meet you, by the way. My name's Barry," said the lizard in question, "no it's not, it's Andrew_ don't listen to any of that gibberish, my name is quite obviously George."

David didn't say anything, but just quizzically lifted an eyebrow, and stared at Lord Evil.

"Well, there's a small problem. I wanted him to be able to think and speak 'n' stuff, so I injected him with my serum X to boost the size of his brain: I just forgot he'd got three of them."

"Brilliant: and I don't suppose you know how far off schedule you've put us while you created this Jurassic Schizoid, do you?"

"By my calculations, it'll take you about a week to turn around and get back to Earth. That's, of course, assuming I let you, lover", said a voice from the doorway, "Now put your hands up, and turn round very slowly."

They turned to see Marina MacDonald pointing a rather large gun at them, "Good. Now David: we've got a mule back here who wants a word with you_"

The ticket agent put down the phone with a puzzled frown.

"Now that's odd. Why does the Church of Scientology2 want 20,000 tickets for the Brotherhood of Man concert?"

The Beard crept out the building, her sanity dangling by a thread. The things she'd seen inside had been so dreadful, she could only remember fragments: and those were so randomly scattered that they made no sense. But once more the forces of good were in possession of the McGuffin Key: robbed from the very hands of the GLAM cultists.

"Oil rig or not," she muttered, "next time Molin can do his own dirty work."

Back on the Klingon ship, Sidekick was comforting the mule.

"There, there: it's alright. They're back in place unharmed and I'm sure they'll work perfectly. In a couple of days -, " she broke off, staring intently out of the med-lab. "Excuse me a minute, she said to the mule, and then ran off down the corridor.

"Hello Earth, can you hear me? I need to get in touch with the being you know as John Clute, can you hear me?"

"I can hear you perfectly lizard. What the hell do you think you're doing?"

The conclavosaur looked away from the communicator to see Sidekick pointing a gun at him.

"Barry's trying to get in contact with John Clute, and tell him what's happening, the dirty little traitor_ No I'm not, Andrew was_ Ooooh lies, it was me, George_ no you tried earlier but that was in order to double-cross him_ Shut up Andrew you're giving away our plan_ Ha! Plan? I'm not on your side, I teamed up with Barry when you were asleep_ you what? but what about our agreement_"

"Tell you what, I'll just remove this communicator, and leave you to get on with it shall I?"

Meanwhile in Pennsylvania, Kirk stared at the ice-rink, where a rather put upon actor in a brown leather jacket was rehearsing his lines for the role of Johnny Goodboy Tyler.

"He must feel a right pillock doing that. How can he do it?"

"Sometimes Jim," said Spock, from behind him3, "the needs of the plot outweigh the needs of the few_ or the one."

Instead of the usual `slap', there was a quiet `nnnnnnnnnyop!', followed by a loud crack as the air five yards away suddenly rushed into the sudden vacuum created. A second or so later, there was a small damp thud as the herring fell to the ground.

"Are you sure I need to do this?" asked the penguin studying his part in the play.

"Look, all you 've got to do is dress up as a huge spaceship and jump out the window to represent it crashing. We'll be outside the window to catch you." said Molin.

"But you're all over the other side of the set conducting sensitive neurological experiments with a blunt stick at that point."

"Well, yeah, but I'm sure someone will catch you."

"Look the only person around to catch me is the person in the clawed glove playing a Psychlo. Can't we get that chap in the brown leather jacket to do it?"

"No, he's got the lead part in Battlefield Earth already, and he's also involved in virtually every play going around at the moment: he's too busy. Where's your sense of duty?"

Before the penguin could reply, Clute rushed in, "The Klingon ship hasn't slowed down, it's not heading for Earth after all."

"Brilliant! That means we no longer have to do this play!"

"No you don't understand. The entire play was part of a grand unified improbability field. The sheer improbability of anyone willing to perform Battlefield Earth for eight hours was to couple with the unlikelyhood of it being any use in saving the world from the Forces of Turquoise, producing a field I'd manipulate with this plot device," he said waving the key the Beard had obtained earlier, "But if the ship isn't attacking us anyway, the whole variable space is altered! Anything could happen! We could have Hibbert space leaking all over the place!"

WHAT will happen when the musical is performed?

IS there now any reason for it to go ahead?

WILL the narrative ever return to Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc.4?

WHY are the scientologists5 interested in the Brotherhood of Man?

ARE they a front for the forces of GLAM?

WHO'S side is/are Barry/Andrew/George the conclavosaurus really on?

WHAT happened with the herring just then?

IS it important?

WHO cares?

If the answer to the last question is `me' then don't miss the next thrilling episode of_ Zool III!

11 Hey, if he can ignore fundamental principles of neurology, he can ignore basic tenets of evolutionary biology as well.

22 Boo! Hiss!

33 And no, I'm not going to say what he was doing there: this is not Slash Zool.

44 Crikey, I left that a bit late, didn't I?

55 Boo! Hiss!

Zool III: Footnotes not included

Episode 12: by Ralph Lovegrove

AT what point does a gigawatt herring become a kipper?

IS there such a thing as centipede/human duality?

WHEN was the last public mule hanging in Britain?

SHOULDN'T I be doing some work instead of writing this?

PLOT? What plot?

And now_

"GM! We need a GM!" The conclavosaurus attempted to lock its frontal lobes together between its head and buttocks and failed miserably.

"Do not waste your time, foolish, slow, unlovely creature!" The voice came from a man-sized bipedal lizardine creature. "The GM's are arguing with each other over system mechanics. I can now take control - roll over conclavosaurus! Make way for the Psigeniraptor!"

It was true. The next generation of manic paranoid schizophrenics, in a streamlined, lean, mean, sexy package, it could carry on paranoid muttering for days without pause for breath. It could lie. It could cheat. And it plotted in packs unlike the slow conclavosaurus: which was having trouble agreeing between its personalities what it would have for breakfast.

It was also completely irrelevant to the plot, so Glamorous shot it.

"I've been waiting ages to shoot this off," she said brandishing the discharged Phall-o-matic(TM).

With a deafening row that sounded like Led Zeppelin's farewell concert, the huge yellow ships appeared over the ice-rink.

"This is the Ministry! Come out with your psyche levels down!"

"Holy irrelevant plot device from an alternate reality!" mused Molin-Cax. The penguin desperately searched his alcohol soaked brain to remember his last turnsheet. The claw-gloved psychlo smiled enigmatically as her tall companion garrotted a hamster.

"It's worse than I imagined: the author's psyche is leaking directly into the storyline -" Clute stopped in mid-sentence and tore off the latex mask, "For I am not John Clute at all - I am Mrs. Miggins!"
Somewhere in the distance pervaded the sound of many feet.

And on Zool death planet where the intractable criminals of 10,000 worlds etc. the old woman tore off the latex mask, crying "For I am none other than John Clute!"
"I suppose a cup of tea is out then," said the man in the pig-nose.

Glamorous picked her way through the four brawling figures, getting their attention with careful shots to the knee caps.
"Look you lot, aren't you supposed to be advancing the plot?"
"The plot doesn't need advancing! If we create enough tension between the characters we can slip out to the pub," said one of the figures.
"No, no, no. we need a firm logical basis for the environment so everything is consistent," said a second.
"Have you seen the dice and tiddlywinks?"
"I don't care about the bloody dice. I just want to cross-dress."
"This is all your fault. We were supposed to attack Earth and thus prevent 20,000 scientologists from going to the Brotherhood of Man concert causing a psychic death-surge that sends magenta power-waves coruscating into the ley-lines, which will, ultimately, cause the re-emergence of flared trousers and sideburns do you know how badly magenta clashes with turquoise?" David Icke pointed an accusing finger at Glamorous.
"I thought you were attacking Earth in order to advance some hideous, inhuman plot that defies definition. At least that's what my Good Guys Megadeath Inc. brief was," said the galactic special agent.
"Who do you think resurrected ABBA? It was so bizarrely improbable that they would be popular the second time around that it warped the whole space-time continuum into a complete fashion change. People simply forgot how crap it was the first time."
"It's true! Already the forces of RAVE have begun amassing, sweeping the northern hemisphere," said Lord Evil.
"Are you trying to tell me you're one of the good guys?" asked Glamorous, "Your name's Lord Evil, for goodness' sake!"
"You're not exactly Mother Theresa yourself. Why do you think I was publicly disgraced by Terry Wogan all those years ago? He was a RAVE agent!" said David Icke.
"If we don't turn around now we'll miss the rendezvous with those middle-eastern nutters," said Lord Evil.

Outside the concert, a group of shady characters dressed in leather armour with Def Leppard streaming out of the earphones of their walkmans conducted a heated argument.
"This is all your fault, you and your short-cuts. We've missed them completely."
"Don't talk to me like that. The memory moss incident was Lou's fault. I lost a perfectly good horse. It was ecru."
The third member said nothing, taking a heavy sniff from her hankerchief.

"If that's the four horsemen of the apocalypse, they're riding chickens," said Molin-Cax. Sure enough on the horizon loomed four figures mounted on giant and many-legged forms of poultry.
"Hah hah, now my master plan will be realised! Does anyone want a cup of tea before I start ranting?" asked Mrs. Miggins.

CAN the end of the world be averted?
CAN Glamorous take a hint?
CAN anyone remember the plot?
CAN anyone have ever enjoyed ABBA?
CAN Matt make a coherent mess out of this?

Read on...