

Winkler Three

Douglas R. Mason

This is the hand written pre-amble to the short story '**Free Fishers**' later to become the novel '**Last Shuttle to Planet Earth**'

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Sector One / Executive

Two / Admin / Clerical

Three / Technical & Transit.

on switching to earth
Ellman is also wondering
where B has got to ...

Worksheet 3.

Preamble

Alger Maynell, feudal overlord of WIRAK CITY, that ageing & decrepit satellite of Earth planet, looked out of a direct vision port over the ^{warm} rounded shoulder of ~~his~~ ~~neck~~ Janie Gordon. He could see an arc of the blue whorled Mother Earth & wondered, not for the first time, how his daughter Barbara was faring there below. He had never come to terms with her loss. When Harry Elliman, a Sector Three engineer had taken her off the satellite as a hostage and used the only remaining shuttle for a one-way trip to the planet surface, he had realised that most of the pleasure in his

life had gone with her. He had not known how fond he had always been of her. How much he had liked to see her moving about, neat and elegant and full of life. He had marvelled that he & his wife Felicity could have produced between them such a creature. Like Lear he came late to an understanding of love.

He rolled carefully out of the ~~chair~~ ^{four posters}, leaving Janice asleep. She had a habit of nodding off at the close of their afternoon sessions, in the dusty boudoir ~~for~~ ^{the} a semi-deserted reception suite. It was a lucky ^{as a} break. She was all-systems-go ^{on the} ^{lover} ~~main~~ ^{lover} ~~count~~, but a trying conversationalist, with a lisp and a line in banality which hit home like a wet

river mud.

sock full of ~~powder~~ ~~sock~~
 Dressing slowly, he paddled over
 to a large version port. Earth
 was a blue veined marble on
 a black show pad. Barbara
 was somewhere down there. Maybe
 it would work out. Elliman was
 no fool. He had proved that
 by energising the old shuttle
 & blasting clear. If was a
 question of what they would find
 down there. Information was short
 short? It was non-existent.

The ground link had not operated
 in living memory & the satellite
 had been holding station on
 its rod for three generations
 without a whisper from the ground
 installations that had once
 supported it with a supply chain.

The isolation showed. He
 could look along an area of

grey cladding which was pock
 marked by meteorite penetration.
 They were holding on by a thread.
 Cannibalisation of outer comers
 had already started. Give it
 another fifty years & they would be
 in a last ditch scenario. By
 then it would be somebody else's
 problem. Barbara would be
 better off where she was.

He shrugged into his fancy
 tabard with the Mission Director badges,
 turned back the sheet for an
 appreciative look at the rosy sleeper,
 a dead ring for a pink Renoir nude *
 with the addition of a scrap of pink tissue ^{padding & full of}
~~and~~ let himself out into the
 circulation space of the Reception area.
 It was not like abandoning a girl
~~sleeper~~ in a forest. She was
 barely a hundred metres from her
 home pad in the Sector Seven
 Female Dormitory Wing.

It was close on tea break time, a custom honoured in all sectors of the condominium. Everything stopped at 1600 hrs on the rise for a ceremony of tea and crumpet. Alger Stagnell moved ~~to~~ through a little known sliding panel into the Executive Grade Sector and on to the control deck with its panoramic vision ports.

Reception was out at the end of a tubular ~~structure~~ to make for easy docking of ~~the~~ service shuttles. As he walked ~~the~~ fifty metres to the ~~sector~~ ~~to~~, which was the trunk route to all parts of the executive sector, he realised that an unfamiliar noise was pushing for attention. Thinking about Barbara had

cut him off from the here & now, but once aware of the new sounds, he was all attention. The image he was getting was that of cables being ripped along a beam & there was a small shudder underfoot. He made the last five metres at a jog trot & heaved away the first ~~heavy~~ collision bulkhead.

When he was through, it closed behind him with a soft clunk & he spun the wheel valve for an atmosphere seal. ~~The~~ He was in an air lock. Not used as such, but a lifetime on the satellite made the procedures second nature. Through the inner seal he repeated the drill, set his gold-branded cap at a deedy angle and marched off for the control ^{deck} ~~deck~~ to see what was afoot.

Auto gear with naked lights was
 carrying on with its 24 hour stint
 of monitoring the systems. There
 was a duty officer ~~with~~ from the
 Executive Grader with a full set
 of Technicians and ~~officers~~ ~~grades~~,
 all putting in a duty stint at
 the silent desks. It had been
 realised that it was important to
 find occupations for as many of the
 castaways as possible to ~~keep~~ ^{forestall} the
 illusion of purpose ~~which~~. Though
 indeed, there was a certain purpose in
 keeping the fabric serviced and the
 damage control section was the only
 one with an ongoing programme.

As Alger Maynell crossed the
 sill of the hatch, an urgent
 bleep started up from the long
 display panel that showed every
 sector of the satellite in schematic
 diagram form — A rash of red tell

Verley had broken out, highlighting the sector he had just left. It was a major structural breaking down and the robot fault finders were taking automatic action. The area had long been ~~at~~^{listed} as derelict and not in use. The computers had come to the logical decision that it was a waste of resources to service it.

A third ^{command} and a tremor communicated to the ~~control~~ decks and Alger Haynell reached ~~the~~ his desk in time to see the lights wink out. Major surgery had been carried out. Explosive bolts had sheared, and ~~blown~~ the severed the limb and blown it into ^{private} a free wheeling orbit on its own journey to oblivion.

Some residual attitudes of the first Haynells, who carried the Mission Director's stick when the title meant something in terms of responsibility, were still

Swirling about in Alger Maynell's head. He recognised that they were one stage nearer the end of the road. It would have been all the same if the sector had been inhabited. It was high time that the robot gear was taken out of circuit and command decisions were taken by ~~the~~ human management. He needed a high level conference to make a decision. He called to Fred Honeybone, the ~~the~~ Deputy Mission Director to get it up and watched moodily through a direct vision port as the amputated arm wheeled away.

It was only then that he remembered the sleeping beauty in the thicket. Janice Burden was due for a strange awakening. There was air + food enough for one person for a lifetime. There were books + videos enough. But then she was more for action

than passive culture