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Ideas
Bank

Space 1999 Second Series

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Golden Apple Production 2002

1. The Thinking Mountain

The human brain is an electrical machine powered by a micro voltage. Tiny currents flow through the 10^{10} cells and the product is thought.

The individual cell is relatively simple in structure but the interconnections are so numerous that the final organisation is complex.

Suppose a vast number of metallic threads were produced by accident in a mountain range veined by the ore of a super conductor (called infrangom). Suppose a random flux of magnetic forces worked through this mountain. The model is much the same. A thinking agent of a non-biological nature might be created.

It would become conscious of itself as a living creature. I think therefore I am. It begins to influence its environment in such a way as to protect and perpetuate itself.

It would want to resist human encroachment-fearing that human operators would regard it as a convenient mine of metal to be exploited. It would use the immense energies at its disposal to play havoc with the electronic gear of the approaching humans. It would work by psychokinesis- mind acting at a distance- to alter their plans, set faction against faction, confuse and destroy.

At times there would be a digestive lull in the

in the activity of this super brain and analysis of a sample of the ore would give a clue to the nature of the problem.

Simple degaussing helmets would be devised to give some protection. It could be sidetracked by feeding it questions with no answer.

Final solution might be to break it down into smaller units- lobotomy- by bombing runs which would produce a fantastic Aurora Borealis.

Its death would cause the collapse of the many attractive scenic effects with which it had surrounded itself and the planet surface would be seen as desolate and totally uninhabitable.

The planet Pelorus would have been organised as an electrical machine in the service of the mountain.

Pools of acid. Cycads of felspar. The very atmosphere a dielectric.

2. The Invaders

Matter is a form of energy. Energy is matter.

To traverse immense distances, matter could be coded as energy, transmitted and reformed to its original specification on arrival.

Elite survivors of an advanced culture on a dying planet would have a plan on file to move themselves off to any suitable life raft if one should show up in the interstellar wastes.

An asteroid with a working base would be tailor made.

The metallic infra structure of a large complex would be seen as an aerial dish. Working at high speed to take advantage of the bonus, the alien creatures- golden, ant-like, send a volunteer (or a victim) along the prepared path.

It arrives dead, falling at the feet of the beautiful operator of the communications system in the operations centre of the approaching asteroid.

Adjustments are made. Another trial. Eventually they will get it right.

Altering the shape of the aerial dish by throwing out false corridors and positioning travel tubes would confuse the planners. When the nature of the threat was properly understood, it would be possible to arrange the 'receiver' so that it acted as a transmitter and sent the invaders off into space.

3. The Seeds of Time

Energy can neither be created nor destroyed.
 Events cause ripples like a stone thrown into a pond.
 The ripples flow out indefinitely into space.
 In a special area of deep space the Second Law of Thermodynamics
 is in abeyance. The attenuated ripples reassemble themselves
 as events. There is a Sargasso Sea of past History. Early
 periods are being reenacted.

Drifting into such an area, a traveller might become
 involved in a sequence and be threatened by a catastrophe that
 was coming up for a second time. Like the fall of Byzantium.

Last minute recognition of what was going on and memory
 of how some people avoided the holocaust could save some or all
 of the travellers.

The travelling platform would become the stage on which
 the events were acted. As it drifted clear, it would be
 revealed as unchanged in essentials, but proof that it had been
 there and that it was not a dream would be found when one of
 the characters who had died in the action was seen to be still
 wholly dead.

4. The Grove of Lorcal

A brain needs a blood supply or some comparable flow of nutrient material to nourish it and take away waste. It is not impossible to suppose that a severed head might be kept alive by a medico with enough equipment and knowhow.

It is even possible to imagine that the nutrient flow could be organised by grafting the head on some growing vegetable stock like a tree and feeding the roots with a measured supply of basic ingredients.

A copse or Grove of pollarded trunks each bearing a head could be set up. Donors of heads could be persuaded that they were entering on a kind of immortality and the ceremony of getting a head could be surrounded with mystic and religious observances.

Cynical manipulators would however see the sacred grove as a super biological computer. Leads from each trunk would connect to a remote console. The memory banks and the capabilities of each brain would be on tap.

Newcomers to Lorcal would be welcomed as material for inclusion in the computer bank. Anxious to find a home the arrivals would be ready to accept the urbane and civilised Lorcalians at face value. An advance party on a reconnaissance mission would be ready to recommend that all hands should prepare for a transfer to the hospitable planet.

Some, more sensitive to vibrations, would have doubts. They would believe that the Lorcalians were too smooth. They would make some independent investigations and stumble on the

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macabre grove. At the eleventh hour they would wish to abort the mission. How though- with communications blocked?

Although largely dehumanised by the situation, the components of the biological computer might have some residual traits. Compassion? Desire for revenge?

One of the visitors with special knowledge of group psychology would work on this- making a speech calculated to arouse the heads to awareness of themselves.

They would begin to act together independent of the control mechanism and finally controlling it. The idea of vengeance could materialise in the form of a symbolic sword and sweep through the control area. A power surge sent back through the system would cause havoc.

This suicidal act of charity would destroy the grove in a spectacular forest fire but the strangers would have their chance to escape and turn back the rest of their people.

5. The Age of Methuselah

Millions of years of slow development have established the pattern for the human psyche. The bio-grammar laid down over this immense period cannot be altered overnight. One of the fundamental aspects is the pattern of birth and death- the short life span- the periods of helpless infancy and age.

A very much extended life span- say to 500+ years- would throw up a different pattern of compulsions and drives.

On the planet Teutarus this has been accomplished. The people are bio-mechs. Starting from normal childhood each citizen progresses through stages of mechanisation until at age 30 they are all set for a super life span. Heart, lungs, eyes etc have all been mechanised.

This change is not apparent to the casual observer -who would be excused for thinking he had stumbled on a Golden World.

But the mental changes brought about by the expectation of almost unlimited life are unexpected. The ancients are totally selfish. They have no compassion. Moral values are no more. Some of the younger people, having an insight into what is happening want to opt out.

Opting out has its dangers, since the ancients are in control and like it the way it is.

The arrival of a group of spacefarers would precipitate a crisis.

Some of the newcomers would be enthusiastic for the system and see it in terms of an endless party.

More reflective members of the group would have reservations.

Coldly and deliberately, behind a facade of goodwill, the senior citizens would plan to destroy the newcomers and their wandering space base.

The underground might get a timely warning to the strangers . The leader of the underground group would have the opportunity of making a moving statement of faith that would draw attention to the importance of human values and how they depended on a life span of three score years and ten lest a man should get out of sync with his humanity.

6. The Moon of Tragasus

Basic drives of sex, hunger, aggro etc. need regular serviceing to keep them sweet and proportionate. When repressed by a society they tend to accumulate a head of steam and blow off in a spectacular catharsis.

Some societies have allowed for this by periodic festivals- the Lupercalia- Dionysian extravagances- Maenad frenzies- Inca human sacrifices- Hogmanay.

The planet Tragasus organises just such a safety valve orgy.

At first sight the people of Tragasus would appear to have achieved utter civilisation. Newcomers would be welcomed with lais and smiles and every hospitable gesture. The climate and the people together would seem to make Tragasus a paradise. Flowing toga like robes leaving the heart side bare to show there was no guile. Gentle, accommodating. Male chauvinist pigs among the visitors would find the charm irresistible.

Not so the senior professional women of the party. They would believe that the Tragasusians were too good to be true.

The women would be right in their suspicion.

One of the curious features of the solar system is the figure of eight orbit followed by the Moon of Tragasus. This Moon is shared with another planet and disappears from the night sky for long periods.

The movements of Tragasus and the distant planet Triopos round their sun are so complex that the mathematics of it have been elevated to a sacred mystery known only to a priesthood who have become the effective rulers of the planet. It is they who have also hit upon the practical psychological plan of keeping the populace docile by allowing them one fantastic orgy of violence whenever the Moon appears in the sky. They use the confusion to get rid of any political or social trouble makers thus saving the inconvenience of having a penal system.

The priests know that the newcomers would not approve and set them up to be chopped at the orgy.

They are warned by a girl who has come to feel genuine affection for their leader and who loses her life when this action is known.

The gravitational forces set up by the arrival of an asteroid in the gravisphere of Tragasus alter the run of the Moon of Tragasus and against all expectation the visitors are able to profit from the confusion and escape.

7. The Stranger within the Gate

The unconscious mind is a mystery area where each man is a stranger to himself. In a waking state, he has no access to it. It is a rag bag storehouse of all the junked debris of the individual's odyssey from the womb on- Or maybe, even, from pre natal time. It could hold race memories. Nobody is too clear about what it holds.

But concensus has it that it has to be kept under lock and key for the comfort and convenience of its conscious yoke-mate.

Between the conscious and the unconscious zones of the mind there is a watch dog to keep the ID in its cage. This is the Censor.

In deep space where there is the statistical liklihood of anything at all happening at least once, an area exists where a subtle interaction of force fields is such that the operation of the Censor is inhibited and human beings find that the primitive drives and emotions normally kept in check are out and about and likely to rock the social boat.

Behaviour is no longer predictable. The habits of discipline are abandoned. Social cohesion is less regarded than short term satisfaction for the individual.

Highly trained and sophisticated personnel, used to

following reason and logic and used to thinking first about the good of the community would fight a rearguard against their own atavistic impulses and try to work out what was o'clock.

More primitive crewmen would wish to pluck the flower of today and would want to destroy the afterguard whom they would come to see as an unwelcome freewheeling conscience.

Isolated in Main Mission, the top brass would be reduced to a last stand.

Computer, also susceptible to the influence would be no great help. But using parts of its circuitry it might be possible to analyse the wave forms causing the mental disturbances. By adding another component to the force field the particular effect could be overcome and a general return to normality would be produced.

The incident would illustrate the truism that civilisation is the product of repression and that the operation of complete 'natural' freedom is strictly for the birds.

8. Who will guard the guardians?

The death of a crewman in the hydroponics section would be doubly regretted if it was thought that suicide was involved. After a long duty stint, it might be looked on as the first crack in the dyke. It would be in everybody's interest to make a close examination of the corpse to establish cause of death.

Natural causes would be the favoured outcome. Unfortunately, the junior Medico working at it might find evidence that the cause was some carelessness on the part of the Director of the Medical Centre no less. A standard anti-flu vaccine or some such had been used with an additive which made it lethal.

A top security hand who had no affection for the leading Medico - thinking she was too privileged in relation to the overall commander of the enterprise- might make every effort to make a charge stick. Turning back the files he would find that the dead man had served in the past on the same ship as the suspect's late husband. There was a tenuous link then and it was strengthened by the discovery of a tape with some kind of blackmail request for the good Doctor to use her influence with the Commander to get the crewman a promotion.

Using voice prints, a scientist establishes that this tape is not a record of the voice of the dead man but a

close copy.

Working on human angles, the Commander looks into the reason for the victim being in hydroponics anyway.

He went to see a girl.

This one was also interested in a disturbed character in the Security Section.

The disturbed Security man harboured a grudge against the Medico because she had kept him off all top security installations. He planned to fix two problems at one go.

Confronted, he makes a break for out and takes an armed Eagle.

Only seconds behind him, the Commander follows in another Eagle and shoots him down before he is able to make a suicide dive into the dome of Main Mission.

9. A Question of Focus

An image in a mirror presents certain aspects of the real object. A more elaborate projection would copy more details.

It is not impossible to suppose that a very advanced culture might hit on a method of producing a reflection of such depth and complexity that the whole fabric of the object would be duplicated.

Subjecting human subjects to this process would be a ~~tempting~~ tempting development.

The scientists of the planet Urana conned by the fallacy that all scientific advance must be a good thing would try it out.

At any one time, a number of options are available to the human mind and it chooses one rather than another. At the moment of 'creation' as an image, a complete 'image' man might elect to follow a different course of action from the original man who was the source of the reflection.

He might walk off the set endowed with an independent life.

This doppelganger would not wish to surrender his new life.

If it was found that by a strange twist the image had taken all the worst traits of the individual and left his identical twin with every virtue, the method might gain

a place in the social organisation as an honoured custom at a coming-of-age ceremony.

The evil twin would be driven out to live a brutal and violent life in the suburbs.

Uranans would understand this very well . But visitors would be confused. They would see a man once and think he was A-Okay and meet him again and find he was unreliable and dangerous.

They would come to the conclusion that normal practice where a man works out his own salvation by the interaction of good and evil in his own head offers the best chance.

With difficulty, they would withdraw to their own base to try again elsewhere.