

Scratch Pad No. 38



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No. 38. A fanzine based on *The Great Cosmic Donut of Life*, for Acnestis (May 2000 mailing) by Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele Street, Collingwood, Victoria 3066, Australia. Phone & Fax: 61-3-9419-4797. Email: gandc@mira.net. Cover graphic: created and printed by Ditmar (Dick Jensen).

THE COVER

Editor's note

The next few pages provide a series of unexpected letters of comment to *Cosmic Donut*, No. 19, August 1999, in which I reprinted Ken Bailey's article about 'Xanadu and Yggdrasil'. For that issue, I featured Ditmar's (Dick Jensen's) special Xanadu cover. In turn, Ken provided a Mailing Comment in *A 3D Sundial* about the cover itself.

Dick was so amazed by the wealth of detailed exegesis?/eisegesis? that Ken wrote, that he decided to create a new cover *plus* the Notes on the Cover. This appeared first in Bill Wright's *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*, which is distrib-

uted mainly in ANZAPA, the Australia/New Zealand apa. Since members of Acnestis might like to see what is really a Cover of Comment on Acnestis contributions, I'm reprinting:

- The Ditmar cover
- The Ditmar explanation
- Notes by Bill Wright
- The correspondence with Ken Bailey.

Take it away, Bill . . .

A NOTE ON DICK JENSEN AND DITMAR

by Bill Wright

Due to a somewhat schizophrenic nature — and the attempt at whimsy by Bill Wright (editor of the Anzapazine *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*) — Dick Jensen finds himself saddled with an alter ego named Ditmar. Inasmuch as Ditmar *is* one of Dick's given names, but is used only to sign his computer graphics, the interplay between the two has become increasingly confusing to

both, and so is now of a mordantly antagonistic nature. Bear this in mind when reading Dick's analysis of Ditmar's cover graphic.

The analysis below first appeared, in a slightly different form, in *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*. An edited correspondence between Dick and Ken Bailey is appended.

NOTES ON THE COVER

by Ditmar

Ditmar has titled this month's front cover as 'Toward the New Millennium', which seems somewhat inadequate for a graphic whose meaning is far from clear. When he was asked if he could elaborate on its content, he merely said — as curtly as only he can — 'It feels clear to me . . .'. Which was really no help at all.

However Dick Jensen, always helpful (and eager to display his grasp of the esoteric) has offered the following gloss.

Ditmar's pictures are always replete with symbolic meanings — sometimes far divorced from the immediacy of the images — which is an aspect of his technique seldom mentioned. This current illustration contains, possibly,

more such meanings than usual, as befits millennial reference. The key word in his 'explanation' of the cover is 'feels'.

The graphic, although filled with concrete images, has as its theme highly abstract concepts. The objects in the picture function only in a *minor* sense as depictions of reality, and their primary function in this regard is to create a pleasing pattern which should firstly guide the eye from the foreground through to the celestial city in the far distance, and then, because of what is essentially the only patch of bright colour, to refocus the attention on the golden rose at the centre of the graphic. The *major* function of all the objects portrayed is as symbols — they are not depictions of things as they are, or might be, but

as representations of a deeper, abstract structure.

Before an exegesis of these symbolic aspects is given, the overarching substance of the picture must be stated. It attempts to depict the *'feelings'* generated by the onset of the new millennium: the hopes and apprehensions engendered, the sensibilities inspired by the immanence of apocalypse or salvation, the ideas involved in the movement toward degeneration or perfection, and the epiphany of revelation or Armageddon. In short, the image is about the *ambiguity* of the perception of millennial entelechy.

The symbols

The city

The city incorporates ideas of space and differing levels. The city of the graphic, by its towering, pointed aspect, clearly indicates a motion upwards — towards new levels of spirituality. Guenon points out that the vertical axis (of the cross) incorporates varying planes of existence: the lower, the more mundane, the higher, the more ethereal. The city here, by its shape, is indicative of a motion towards incorporeal perfection. Cirlot states that cities are a 'prefiguration of a heavenly Jerusalem'. Thus, here, the city is a positive symbol.

The stars

Stars, which illuminate the heavens at night, and sometime by day, are a powerful symbol of the divine: deific guidance or favour. Stars are divinities, so that their multitude in the graphic is indicative of a great spirituality. The entire heavenly background, therefore, is a strong affirmation of the positiveness of the forthcoming millennium. And yet stars have a malefic, negative aspect: their abundance is coupled with multiplicity, and hence with disintegration. In this sense, they imply a chiliadal collapse of some facets of reality.

The landscape

The twisted nature of the terrain indicates a symbolic abnormality, and so has a negative connotation. The depths of the landscape, however, are ambiguous, and may represent either baseness or a chthonian maternal aspect. Here they mirror the many emotional approaches to the millennium evinced by different individuals, groups, or societies. Landscape was sometimes employed, in the Renaissance, to exemplify a contrast between good and evil through the juxtaposition of foreground and sky. This clearly is a purpose of the terrain here, and is in contrast to the background celestial city and the stars (see above).

The chasms

The abyss is, as pointed out above, an ambiguous symbol — it signifies both profundity and/or abasement (or inferiority). In its spatial aspect it would indicate a motion toward ignorance (if the motion is downward) or toward enlightenment (if upward). Yet again, it represents the great unknown, a challenge which must be faced by a leap of faith in the Kierkegaardian sense. Interestingly, the skeletal figure in the immediate foreground is engaged in

an upward climb from the anfractuositities of the abyss to the placidness of the plain — from a lower to a higher plane — out of the mist (see below), while in the far background the skeleton is engaged in a contemplation of either the abyss itself, or in a leap into it (which, in turn, may be towards a true faith or towards self immolation). Note the horizontal contrast of near and far skeletal figures, and the vertical contrast of their upward and (possibly) downward motions.

Skeletons

An obviously negative symbol of death and mortality, and of the passage of time — a reminder of the transient briefness of life. However, being bereft of skin, they also have sloughed off the concerns of the flesh and of materiality — they are a transition between this world of illusion and the world of spiritual reality, a movement from gross corporeality to ambrosial being. Skeletons will emerge at the last trump, and commence their upward flight: as is exemplified by the foreground, climbing skeleton. In the graphic these discarnate cadavers may refer to the transience of all existence, or of human mortality, or of time itself — it is, after all, the millennium which is expiring. In this latter aspect, the skeletons symbolise the death of the old, and, therefore, the implication of the new. Further ambiguities reside in the bones of the skeletons, for bones signify life, as in the character of a seed. According to Judaic ideology, bones are 'symbolic of the belief in resurrection, and . . . of the chrysalis from which the butterfly emerges' (Cirlot).

The mist

Indeterminacy. It also represents 'the condition of error and confusion. The soul must pass out of the darkness and confusion of the mist to the clear light of illumination' (Cooper). Which, of course, is what is transpiring in the very near foreground: the groping, climbing skeleton is emerging from out the cloying miasma into the clearer, but still crepuscular, atmosphere: illumination can only be achieved by following the path toward insubstantiality, past the threatening wolf . . .

The wolf

The wolf stands for valour, and acts as a guardian according to Egyptian and Roman religions. Its threatening aspect signifies that great moral, physical and mental courage is necessary if the journey (so clearly limned by the motion of the skeletons) from the foreground of chaos, darkness and uncertainty toward the celestial apotheosis of the far background, is to be accomplished. In Nordic mythology, however, the wolf is a symbol of the principle of evil, and with the end of the world would devour the sun. The wolf is normally fettered, and so this hints that cosmic order is attainable only by the concomitant shackling of chaos. When freed, destruction reigns. Yet again, in Christian symbology, the wolf is an attribute of St Francis of Assisi, and has positive aspects, while in Scandinavian and Teutonic mythology it is a bringer of victory.

The toad or frog

Another ambiguous object, for toad and frog are oppositional images. A frog represents a transition from water to earth, and vice versa — a transition also depicted by the foreground skeleton emerging from mist onto the terrain. It symbolises fecundity, creation and fertility. For the Egyptians it is connected with the resurrection of Osiris, and so has particular relevance here in the ambulatory skeletons. Jung has commented that the frog anticipates Man. In Bosch's *Temptation of St. Anthony*, the frog, in the centre of the picture 'represents the highest stage of evolution' (Cirlot). On the other hand, according to some Christian exegetes, the frog has a devilish significance, conveying a repulsive aspect of sin, and — more generally — it refers to the materially-minded who 'snatch at life's fleeting pleasures' (Ferguson). However, when taken in conjunction with other commentators, it would seem that Ferguson is confusing the frog with the toad. The toad is a symbol of death, and frequently occurs in conjunction with a skeleton. It represents lust, and is sometimes depicted as eating 'the genitalia of a naked female' (Hall). Toads sometimes symbolise resurrection, but generally indicate evil and loathsomeness. In Celtic mythology toads are a maleficent power. For the Chinese, toads represent the unattainable, longevity, and wealth (that is, the material and the unsatisfactory, because unattainable). In Iranian mythology the toad's attributes are greed, envy, and evil as well as fertility.

The golden rose

The *key symbol*, because of its placement in the picture, and because it is the one vivid splash of colour in the twilight. The rose represents both heavenly perfection

and earthly passion — here it clearly signifies the human passion for sublime transcendence. The ambiguity of its representation is such that it expresses 'both time and eternity, life and death, fertility and virginity' (Cooper). It connotes love, life, creation, beauty, but also secrecy and voluptuousness. The heart of the rose is also the central point of the cross, where the plane of the current modality of existence meets the spiritual vertical. For Christians, its association with the Virgin Mary (who is the rose without thorns) indicates sinlessness. The rose was thornless until the Fall of Man according to St Ambrose. 'Roses sprout where the drops of blood of St Francis of Assisi fall to earth' (Hall). The *golden* rose is the entelechy of 'completion, of consummate achievement, and perfection' (Cirlot), so that the skeleton about to pick it up in Ditmar's graphic unites corruption with resurrection, death with life, fear with hope, the profane with the sacred. In short, it encapsulates in one image all the ambiguities and contradictions of the emotions, feelings and abstractions associated with the onset of a new millennium.

References

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BILL WRIGHT'S APOCRYPHAL NOTE

When I read Dick's explanation of Ditmar's cover, I was left floundering: was this exegesis or eisegesis? So I asked Dick if he was really serious. There was a pause while Dick struggled to remove his tongue from its firm embedment

in his cheek, and then he replied: 'Of course.'

I think he also muttered: 'It's time someone did this to Ditmar', but I can't be sure . . .

THE CORRESPONDENCE

Dick Jensen:

The 'notes' above are, of course, in the nature of a joke: for something as essentially as trivial as the cover illustration (which is merely a 'doodle' using a computer and Bryce software), any analysis is a trifle ludicrous, but enjoyable to construct. As with most of my written whimsy, however, I fear it is ponderously unfunny. Bruce Gillespie, though, thought that you might be interested in the magazine and in my 'explanation' of the covers, and so it is being sent to you. My explanation, by the way, is *everything* above (including the 'editorial' insertions).

Even if, as I suspect, my text is entirely risible, I hope you may derive some fleeting pleasure from the Ditmar

graphics.

Ken Bailey:

This is inspired by the Ditmar front cover of the December *Interstellar Ramjet Scoop*, which did afford me a deal of pleasure in contemplation and speculative deciphering. Of course, your own glosses were authoritative guides, but everyone contemplating a work of art (or of literature) inevitably uses his own hermeneutical lenses to bring to a focus those aspects which he believes to be of closest significance for whatever outlook on existence he may have acquired. For me, the shades and contrasts of light and dark, as I glanced alternately at the cover, made a great

impression, that dichotomy being something I've meditated on over the years. It is the interplay between that motif and your main theme that especially engages me. Your main theme, as I perceive it, is the stage by stage progress of your skeletally stripped-down human (his/her essence, soul, or archetypal self) through levels of consciousness towards higher potentialities. And, as the graphic plainly indicates, this is a climb from darkness towards light through mist, and by a path whose ascent is marked by the marsh-dwelling amphibian, the wilderness-wandering predator, and in mid-course, holding the brooding attention of the climber, the eclectically symbolic rose — *rosa mundi, rosa mystica, rosa alchemica*. At what appears to be the portal of a paradisaic ascent, the skeletal climber mysteriously looks downwards and back. Is he Mr Faintheart — Bunyanesque analogues crop up constantly? Or is he such a one as Sir Francis Bacon describes in his essay 'Of Truth'?

No pleasure is comparable to the standing upon the vantage ground of Truth (a Hill not to be commanded, and where the air is always clear and serene) and to see the errors and the wanderings, and mists and tempests, in the vale below.

Or could he be one not ascending, but descending and contemplating the vale (Keats's *vale of soul-making*) that lies below and before him?

Be that as it may, and as your gloss indicates, beyond and above those purgatorial windings, are levels culminating in a peak that seems to glow with a radiance brighter than that of the stars — in fact, it appears, like Jacob's Ladder in Blake's painting, to penetrate and transcend the starry sphere, which is subordinate to it. Just as, as your commentary states, there are ambiguities of representation in symbols of the lower plane, so the stars can be regarded in different ways. Gerard Manley Hopkins, in 'The Starlight Night', writes:

O look at all the fire-folk sitting in the air!
The bright boroughs, the circle-citadels there!

Nineteenth-century positivism viewed the stars to be as described by George Meredith ('Lucifer in Starlight'):

Around the ancient track marched rank on rank
The army of unalterable law.

So what creative dynamic underlies, or transcends, the existence of that deterministically ordered stellar army? Can its manifestation be something like the chaos of the Big Bang, the mythopoeic counterpart of which reads *And God said Let there be light?*

Thus, in my meanderings around the concepts implicit in your graphic (I say implicit, because an artist's imagery is born out of an apprehension of archetypal forms which may not necessarily have been in the forefront of his consciousness), I find that which is imaged by the rose, as

microcosmic reflector of the larger and cosmic founts of light, to be truly central.

Dick Jenssen:

Many thanks for your analysis of the cover. I am impressed by the meanings you've found in my graphics, and flattered by your scrutiny of those images.

The key lines, as far as I'm concerned, in your letter are: '... concepts implicit in your graphic (. . . implicit, because an artist's imagery is born out of an apprehension of archetypal forms which may not have necessarily have been in the forefront of his consciousness)'. They certainly were not! My brain generally idles in neutral when I generate an image.

But, as I said above, it is very flattering — and exceedingly gratifying — to have those concepts thought to be implicit in my creations. On the other hand, perhaps it might be that, on rare occasions, I am but a conduit (in a Cocteauesque sense) for ideas which have passed through the Zone and lodged in my subconscious. Or should that be unconscious? Really, though, my analysis is totally 'after the fact', and very, very consciously constructed. It was a rather desperate attempt to force some sort of cohesion on images almost randomly constructed. But, perhaps, there may be no truly random events in aesthetics — even trivial sketches like mine.

You ask '... what is the valley floor over which the skeletons progress?' My answer will expose my clay feet. I am not sure whether what you mean by 'the valley floor' is that which the skeletons are walking on, or what lies beneath the mists whose tops are glimpsed.

If the former: I was looking for a texture which, as a secondary concern, would suggest both growth and decay — and a green, splotchy surface, I felt, was apposite. As a primary concern, I wanted a texture whose colour would blend in with the starry background, but still provide a touch of contrast. So, as I said, the image is largely generated by functional considerations. (Which still leaves room for subconscious empiricism, I hope).

If the latter: I hadn't really thought about this, but it seems as if the answer was in my mind all the time, for your question generated the immediate automatic response 'nothing'. A void, yet one remarkably full. I have an image — impression — of the mists ever thickening with neither base nor eventual solidity, yet somehow acting as a foundation. Now why should I have such a strong sensation of what is not part of my original image?

Ken Bailey:

On the subject of what I called the valley rather than simply a plain: basically there as a path winding between low escarpments, a Pilgrim's route, a Keatsian vale of soul-making. You say that its substance should nurture both growth and decay, which accords perfectly. It signifies the route traversed by mortal skeletons, and is distinct from, though contiguous to and continuous with the primal abyss and the mountain ascent.