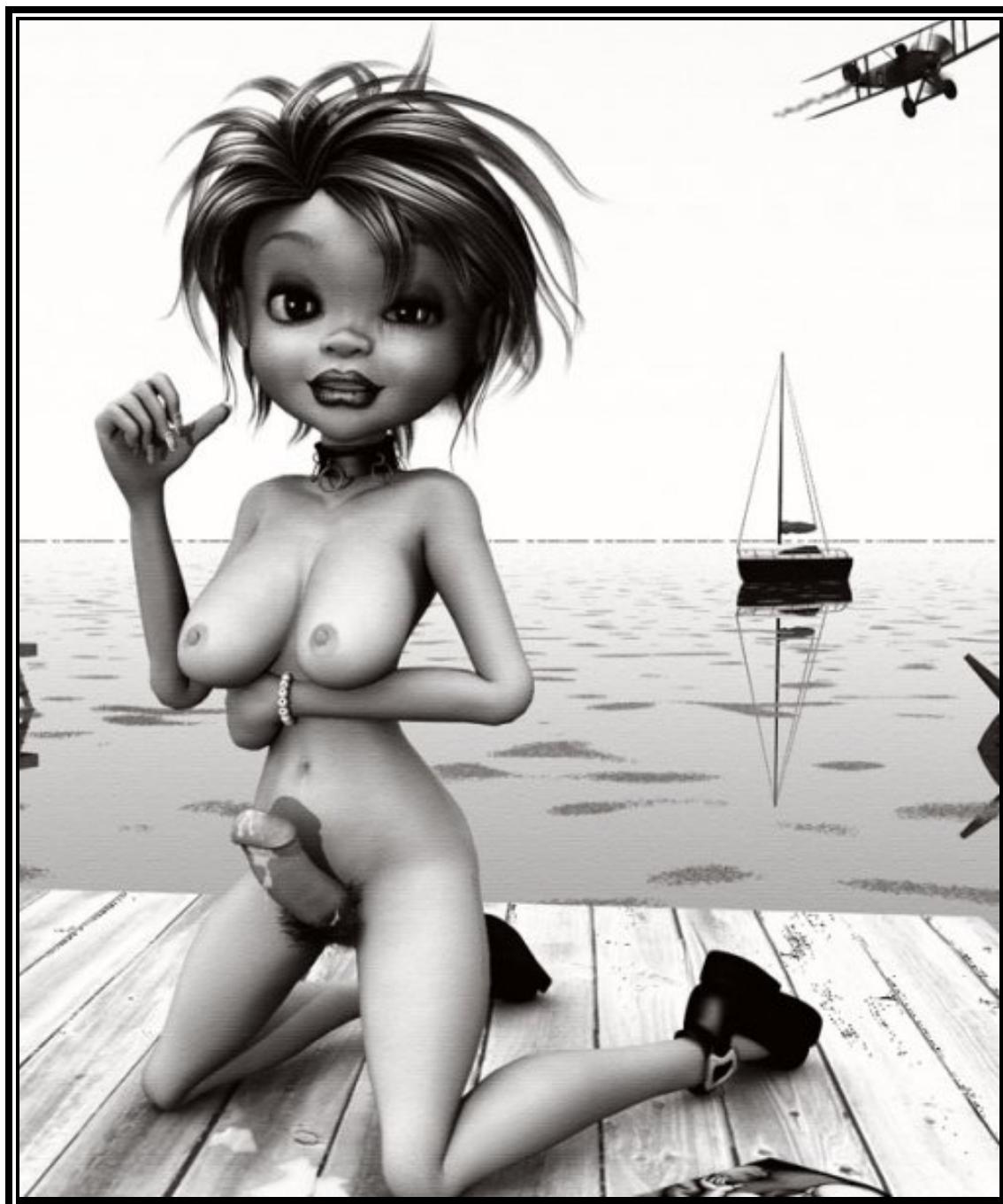


Reality

Bradley Stoke



Guinevere's penis throbbed and pulsed in her fist as she furiously pumped it up and down, the hardness and warmth of it as wholly tangible as the straining in her testicles as her semen readied itself for its ultimate release.

If this wasn't real, what was?

It certainly felt real to Guinevere, as it always did when she masturbated, something she did as often as she could and something for which, like all hermaphrodites in the world, she had a remarkable facility. The semen when it came spurting out, hot and creamy, had a viscous tangibility that surely could only be real.

Except, as Guinevere reflected, an arc of semen spurting free and ascending into the air to fall silently onto the grass lawn ahead of her, this wasn't real at all. None of it was. Everything she knew, in the whole of the world, from the Republic of Excalibur to the Kingdom of Charm, from the great mountain of Everhard to the wide River Charon, from the city of Delight to her own small town of Emerald, none of it, not one atomic particle of it, not one scintilla, was real.

But it felt real, Guinevere agonised, her huge penis flopping deflated between her thighs, a finger worrying a nipple which remained aroused even after her penis had given forth. Surely everything she had known from when she had been born to now, all the people she had met, her memories, her thoughts, surely they were real.

Guinevere sighed. Her existentialist woes never left her for long. Why couldn't she accept it? Okay! There was a sense she wasn't real. That nothing was real. That the universe that she knew was just a virtual reality that existed inside some huge computer housed in some external universe she had come to know as the *Real World*. That she and everything else were avatars, no more real than those on her computer.

And she was herself no more real than the characters in the computer games she played.

But, on the other hand, as she, and all the others in her world were reassured, there was a sense that everything is real. Although it had been established, indubitably and conclusively, that everything was the creation of another world, that didn't invalidate the reality of what was in the universe.

But Guinevere was dissatisfied.

She knew well enough that no other explanation was possible. Hermaphrodites could not possibly have *evolved* to be in the numbers they existed. There was no imperative that explained the presence of centaurs, unicorns, fauns, dragons, trolls and all the other exotic inhabitants of the world, a classification to which she, by virtue of being a woman in all but one crucial feature, also belonged. But the inexplicableness of the lack of evolutionary purpose, let alone the bizarre details of biology which permitted not only herself to exist, but also such equally strange phenomena as fairies, sprites and cockatrices, wasn't all.

Guinevere stood up and surveyed the lawns ahead of her in the town park where she had been masturbating, not far from a family of picnickers, who not once expressed disapproval of her behaviour (and why might they do that?) and in the shadow of the statue of a prominent ex-citizen who had slain the Dragon of Gorgaroth before it was established that the dynamics of the world meant that as soon as one dragon was slain a new one would automatically take its place.

She pulled a tee-shirt over her bare breasts and tugged her shorts up over her thighs, covering her penis but not able to wholly disguise its presence.

But there was no other explanation. Years of technological progress and exploration, banishing to the past those distant days of kings, queens, quests and knightly valour that had once distinguished the world, had brought with it the absolute certainty of an alarming and only recently explicable truth of the world. Nothing was real. And once you understood that, then the bizarreness of the world at last made sense.

Why was it that when you travelled as far North as you could, you found yourself proceeding from the South towards where you came from? And so too as you travelled East? Why was the sky as flat as the world itself? And the moon and stars nothing but bright lights suspended in revolving hemispheres? Why did all historical research reveal only a distant past of kingdoms and realms, governed by arcane principles that were universally held as if dictated from above?

And most of all, why did no one ever grow old? People were born. Or rather babies appeared, with no apparent cause, usually delivered by storks in baskets. And then grew up. And they lived until they died, either by misfortune or just by mysteriously vanishing. And as soon as one person expired, a new person was born. What peculiar law of nature could possibly explain such a divinely regulated ecology unless it were not nature at all? But what was real? And where was it?

“You worry far too much!” Guinevere’s best friend, Eleanor, exclaimed when later that day the two of them met up at the café on the corner of King Arthur Esplanade.

Guinevere nodded. She ran a finger around the mouth of her beer bottle and looked out over the sea whose waves crashed onto the rocks by the shore. Above the

water was the sun, slowly dipping into the sea but still above the horizon, while a flock of seagulls noisily flew over the green waves towards them. She could smell the rich scent of seaweed. On the other side of the road, just beyond the steady stream of traffic, there was a group of young men, one of them a faun with hooves inside his trainers, who were trying to impress one of the local girls.

Guinevere was accustomed to the strange reaction some men had towards her, so it was fortunate for her that her own preference, unlike many hermaphrodites, was so utterly towards girls. And Eleanor was a real girl. No penis hidden under her skirt. No hairy legs and hooves. No mermaid's tail, like her other best friend, Dorothy. And who could ask for a better lover than Eleanor? Even if she had to share her with Lancelot, Percival and Agamemnon, the centaur who worked as a systems analyst. But not (and for this she was grateful) all at the same time.

"I know! I know!" said Guinevere, gripping the bottle in her hand and tilting it so that the liquid could sink down her throat, past the slice of lime that had been pushed into its mouth. "I just can't help wondering what the point of it all is."

"Well, don't we all!" laughed Eleanor, placing her hand on Guinevere's lap and gently squeezing her recumbent penis. "But as long as we can drink, smoke cigarettes and, best of all, *fuck*, why should we care?"

"I know! I know!" repeated Guinevere sadly, bending her head forward to kiss Eleanor on the lips.

Of all her lovers, Eleanor was her favourite.

At first, she'd thought that she might be best suited to a relationship with another hermaphrodite, but although she was still friends with Gloriana, it had never

really worked out. It mightn't have bothered Gloriana where she was supposed to put her penis when it was fully aroused given that the anus was such an uncomfortable, if not painful, fit, but it somehow didn't seem right to Guinevere.

But she had two or three other regular lovers. Not only Marina, the mermaid, but also Andromeda and Emmeline, both biologically normal women and both just as energetic and satisfying sexual partners as Eleanor. But somehow Eleanor was all that Guinevere really desired. And if she lived in a world where relationships were less complicated and restricted to just the one partner (although Guinevere couldn't imagine that such a world could ever exist) she'd have been quite content just to have Eleanor by her side.

The two of them eventually left the café and wandered together, hand-in-hand, along the beach, the sun's rays spread across the sea and reddening sky while seagulls swooped overhead. Every now and then, Eleanor would bend over to kiss Guinevere affectionately on the cheek and occasionally stroke the huge bulge inside the shorts, the glans of which was very nearly visible at its hem.

“It *must* be real,” mused Guinevere. “The sand feels real on my toes. The sea feels damp and tastes salty. The sun feels so warm against my face.”

Eleanor sighed. She put an arm around her lover’s waist and swivelled round to face her, crotch hard against the bulge between Guinevere’s legs.

“*This* feels real enough to me!” she announced gripping the penis through the blue cotton of Guinevere’s shorts. “And that’s *all* I need to know.”

“But yesterday,” Guinevere persisted unhappily, “when we had that rip across the sky, like torn fabric, wasn’t that real as well?”

“That didn’t last long though, did it?”

“And that time when I was walking down the high street and it suddenly caved apart like an earthquake, but with no noise and no rumbling. That occasion, you were with me, when we were in the shopping arcade and it crackled like static and my hand disintegrated for ten seconds. It’s not right!”

“Well, these weird things *have* been happening more often recently,” Eleanor admitted. “I must admit I really freaked when I saw that unicorn split down the middle and then zip up again.”

“Not as much as the unicorn did, I bet!” laughed Guinevere.

“No. He was really shaken. He didn’t know what to say! And when have you *ever* seen a unicorn at a loss for words?”

The two lovers reached a romantic stretch of beach, the sand fine and the waves crashing leisurely in front of them. Other people were sitting around as well. A couple of satyrs were strenuously fucking a centauress. Three men and two women were bundled together in a single mass of copulating flesh.

And now, positioned apart from the rest of the evening coupling, Eleanor and Guinevere disrobed and the two once again became a hot, sweaty mass of grappling limbs. Guinevere’s penis easily slipped into Eleanor’s vagina, which like all vaginas in this world was able to stretch with tremendous elasticity to accommodate almost any penis there was.

Guinevere’s penis was not a small model, although not of the monstrous proportions of a centaur or a satyr. Eleanor’s anus was less obliging, but Guinevere was unconcerned. It was inside her vagina that she felt most at home. Even more so

than inside those of Andromeda or Emmeline. Her penis was swollen to its full width and length, more than a third of a metre from base to tip. Emmeline's grip was hot, moist and squelchy.

The two made love passionately and energetically as the last of the sun's rays disappeared beneath the horizon, so they were lit only by the brilliant full moon and the many twinkling stars, their gasps and yells of passion louder even than the centauress's and alarming the occasional low-flying bat. Guinevere more than once ejaculated: her sperm either inside Eleanor's vagina where it overflowed onto their sweaty thighs or straight into Eleanor's mouth held open to relish the apparently inexhaustible taste.

But soon it was over and the two lovers parted. Sand stuck to the perspiration that drenched them from the toes to the forehead. Guinevere knew that it would take ages to rake the fine granules free from her hair. They lay on their backs panting, while the trail of an aeroplane crossed over the sky, no doubt taking business executives and holiday makers to exotic destinations like the Republic of the Glistening Robe and the United States of Mordor.

Eleanor leaned over to her pile of clothes and lifted up the watch. The roman numerals glistened in the moonlight.

“Shit! Is that the time? I said I was gonna meet Lancelot at the pub. I'm gonna be late.”

Lancelot! Guinevere felt that spasm of jealousy that always bedevilled her when Eleanor talked about her husband. He was a handsome man, that was sure, and she enjoyed the numerous occasions when they'd made love together, sometimes with Eleanor and sometimes not. But although there was nothing that might prevent her

accompanying her lover to the Jolly Dragon, for a reason she couldn't explain she just wanted to be alone with her thoughts.

She watched Eleanor leave after the two of them bathed in the sea to wash off the sand and sweat. She sighed. And sighed so very deeply. Guinevere was truly in love. She wished sometimes she was Eleanor's husband, but it wasn't to be.

When Eleanor was just a dot in the distance, Guinevere stood up and walked along the beach carrying her clothes over her arm as she relished the slight chill of the evening air on her skin and flopping penis.

While she ambled, on one side the sea crashing on the shore and on the other the tall white cliffs, Guinevere contemplated, as she so often did, just what it was that might be in the real world beyond the virtual reality that was all she knew.

What kinds of beings were there who could create a world so beautiful, so complete and as coherent as the one she lived in? What world was there beyond? Was it one like the world in which she lived, with aeroplanes, cars and televisions? Were the people in the real world like her, or more likely like Lancelot and Eleanor? If there were no satyrs, unicorns or goblins in their world, as the scientists asserted, just what did live there? Did they have seagulls, horses, lions and manticores?

She climbed up the steps off the beach up the cliff side, intending to sit at the top and look over the sea at the oil platforms and ships. She worried also that a kraken or other sea monster might burst out of the sea, as sometimes happened, to gobble up innocent sunbathers. And in the dark, how could she be sure that any shadowy figure approaching her might not be an ogre?

She was fatigued when she reached the top of the cliff and, despite remaining

naked, somewhat hot from her exertions. She sat down on the grass in the field that reached to the cliff edge. Behind her some cows were grazing, their long shadows stretched behind them in the moonlight. She relished the brush of grass on her bare buttocks and testicles, her limp penis tickled by the sensation of small insects attracted by the smell of recent sex.

She gazed ahead of her, wondering whether she could somehow see a glimpse of the real world in the distance, even though she knew it was impossible. Indeed, she knew that were she able to see as far as the most powerful telescope, if she looked far enough ahead what she would eventually see would be her own back. Proof, as the scientists explained, of the basic unreality of her universe.

And then Guinevere sensed someone sit beside her.

She turned her head around to see a woman wearing a long white gown that reached to her toes, though pulled up by her arching knees. And this woman was the strangest thing that Guinevere had ever seen. And this was because her skin colour was black, her black hair was frizzled and curled, and her lips much fuller than she'd ever seen anyone's lips before.

What was this strange sight?

“Hello, Guinevere,” the woman announced. “My name’s K’an Tui, but call me Candy.”

“How do you know my name?”

“I know everyone’s name,” Candy smiled.

“Everyone?”

“Of course! I know who Eleanor is. I know of your profound love for her and

also of your concerns about the reality of the world.”

Guinevere shivered. This wasn’t real. People just didn’t appear announced and say things like that. What was happening? She felt peculiarly light-headed.

“Who are you?”

“I told you. I’m Candy.”

Guinevere was disconcerted.

“How do you know...?”

“Relax. I’m an avatar. I am a partial representation of the real me, the real K’an Tui, who lives in what you know as the ‘real world’, though believe you me it’s no less unreal than the world you live in. I am, or my avatars are, at this moment conversing with every single person in this world.”

“How can that be?”

“Have you noticed how very still the air is?”

“Yes, but...”

“Time has stopped in your universe. I have come from the world beyond to speak to everyone personally. I have taken the form of a black woman because you live in a Caucasian fantasy world where no other racial type is represented and partly because my ancestors were also black.”

“And you’re not like this in reality?”

“None of the people in the real world any longer resemble what you call ‘human’. It is many millennia since we discarded our biological shells.”

“But why are you here?”

“To make an announcement. To reveal ourselves to you.”

“Is that because we’ve found out about the truth of our world.”

“No. You aren’t the only one of many such virtual worlds, in fact of many millions of such worlds created, devised and finally abandoned, scattered amongst the millions of computers in the known universe. Your world, for instance, is housed in a computer many kilometres wide and long, circling around a small planetoid in the Canopus system. And of these millions of worlds, there are many, but still a tiny minority of the whole, that have gained the degree of self-knowledge you have attained.”

“But why are you here? Why are you telling us this?”

“Over time, systems fail. It’s something called entropy. Your world will soon collapse into nothing. Already there are rents in your artificial reality. Soon, and not too long, your world will disappear. And to prevent that happening, we have taken the decision to intervene more actively in your world. You may not be ‘real’ in a corporeal sense, but you are ‘real’ in the senses that matter. But our intervention cannot remain mysterious and hidden any longer. And so, we have come to save you.”

“To save us?” wondered Guinevere, who was always suspicious of those people who promised rewards in an afterlife and the existence of a God.

Guinevere and Candy chatted under the moonlight for what seemed hours. And in that time, there was no breeze, the moon didn’t move and the cows in the field remained frozen exactly as they had been before.

The world beyond seemed stranger and more mysterious than she’d ever imagined: a huge federation of planets and solar systems and artificial constructs scattered over many light years of space, inhabited by beings who by all accounts were

actually less like the humans from which they were descended than Guinevere herself, despite her splendid penis.

All this was very strange. And very disconcerting.

“After all those thousands of years since this world was created, everything has changed so much!” Guinevere exclaimed.

“But we have lost so much as well,” Candy assured her.

“What have you lost?”

“Well, most of all, sex.”

“Sex?”

“There is no need for sex anymore, so we are all virgins. I have never had sex in the real world. And indeed one thing I was especially looking forward to when I decided to come here was the opportunity to find out what it is like.”

Candy put an arm around Guinevere’s waist and gazed into her eyes.

“Please be gentle with me. But what I would like to do, what I would really like to do, is for you to make love to me, to have you fuck me.”

Guinevere blanched. This was not what she expected.

“You want me to fuck you?”

“Only if you want to.”

However, Guinevere was so programmed that this was an offer she really could not refuse. She leaned forward and put her lips on Candy’s and placed her hand on her crotch underneath the white gown.

“Shall I first disrobe?” Candy asked.

“Well, yes. But it’s not necessary.”

“I’d like to. I’d like to feel what it’s like to have a naked body.”

Guinevere reluctantly removed her hands from Candy’s body and watched as she stood and pulled off her gown revealing a perfectly formed black body underneath. In some ways it was as exaggerated as Candy’s lips: large breasts and prominent buttocks, her skin dark in every particular, although slightly less black on the palms of her hands and on the soles of her feet.

It was strange making love to Candy. In fact, Guinevere wasn’t sure whether, in all the many hundreds, if not thousands, of men and women she’d made love with in her long life, she had ever before relished the body of a virgin. But she could tell from Candy’s awkwardness and even clumsiness that Candy was truly a virgin.

Like all women, Candy had the facility to accommodate Guinevere’s massive penis as she thrust it repeatedly into her vagina. But it was a curious struggle to penetrate, taking several long slow thrusts until it was fully buried inside her, a couple of times slipping out and plopping on Candy’s black thighs. And soon it was fully embedded, as Guinevere crouched on her knees and supported Candy’s weight in her arms, and thrust and thrust again and again into a vagina that was overflowing with juice. And every now and then she pulled Candy’s face close to hers, and ran her tongue through the strong white teeth lined by the unusually thick lips.

After releasing some, but not all, of her semen inside Candy’s vagina, her lover bent down on her knees in front of Guinevere and took the penis in her mouth, relishing the taste of her semen and the thick warmth of her still erect penis. And when Guinevere’s penis subsided after releasing what was left of her semen into Guinevere’s mouth and over her cheeks and chin, she stroked the penis as it shrivelled to its limp

but still impressive state.

But Guinevere was not one for whom a single fuck was enough. In not too many more minutes, the penis regained its full splendour under Candy's ministrations and she was once more back inside Candy's vagina, thrusting in the now less resisting orifice with vigour, the two bodies burning off each other and a sheer film of sweat coating both bodies.

Eventually, but not before several hours had passed, the two bodies separated: breathless, hot and sticky. And then, for the first time for a long time, Guinevere felt the coolness of the evening breeze on her naked skin.

And where was Candy?

Guinevere hadn't seen her leave. In fact, she was sure she'd only taken her eyes off the black avatar for barely any time at all, and now she was nowhere in sight. As mysterious and silent in her leaving as she was in her arriving.

Guinevere wasn't ready to leave her station in the early evening moonlight high up above the sea crashing below. She had so much to think about. So much new and strange to take in and comprehend.

But despite the scale of her revelation and her new knowledge of the reality beyond the virtual world that was all she'd hitherto known, there was a sense in which Guinevere now felt truly at peace with the world. Despite her now knowing that it was many times larger and many times more complex than she'd ever imagined.

She smiled as a cow in the field raised its head from the grass.

Although she may not be real in the sense that Candy was, at least she could still enjoy sex.