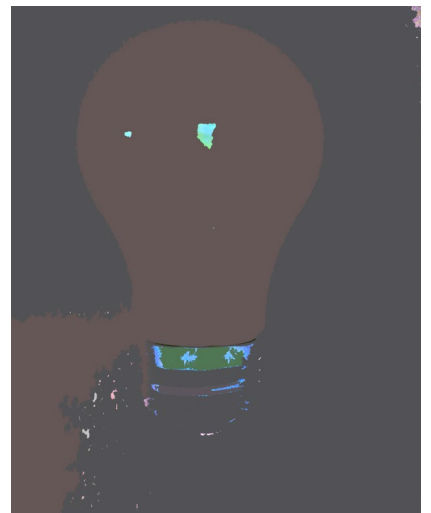
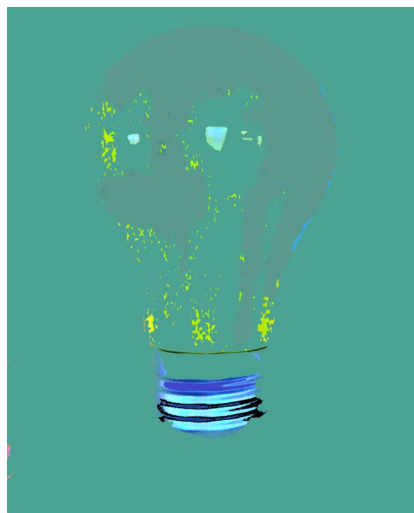
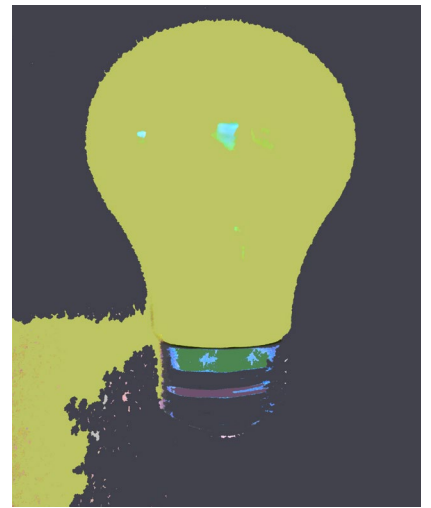
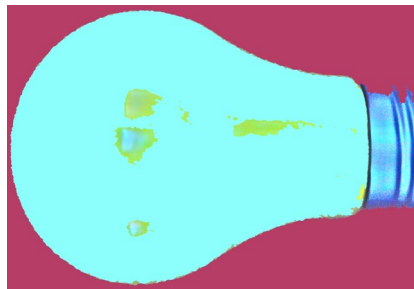
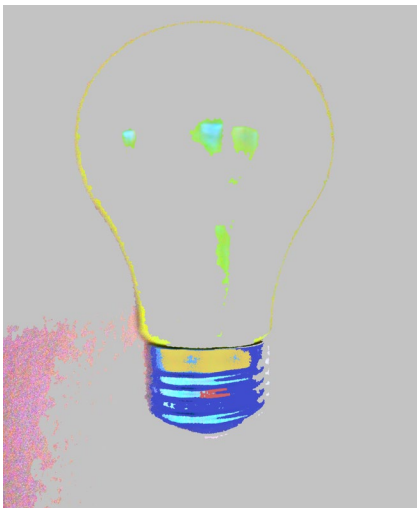
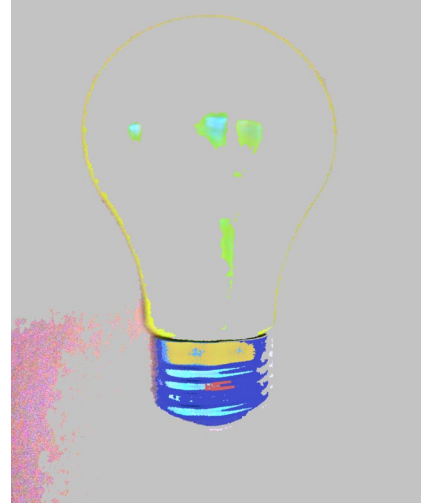
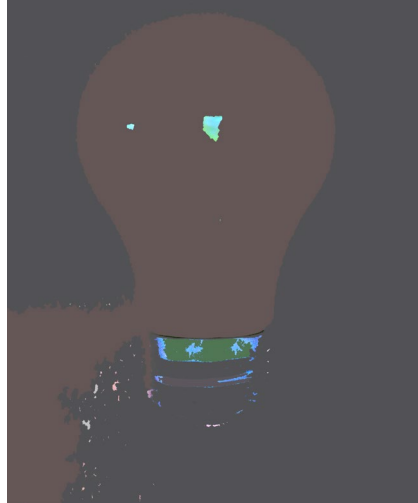


# BULB MAGAZINE

AUTUMN 2021 ISSUE # 2



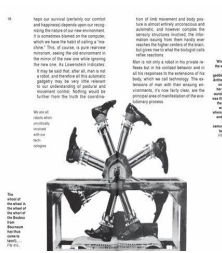
**ART, CULTURE, SCIENCE & MORE**

Welcome to issue # 2 of BULB Magazine. Following on from issue # 1 we are continuing to introduce thought provoking content on the subjects of art, culture and science. As well as the PLATFORM section, in which we encourage discussion and debate, we are pleased to include original writing and artwork. Many thanks to all our contributors. More at – [www.mylastboard.com](http://www.mylastboard.com) Contact us at – [mylastboard@outlook.com](mailto:mylastboard@outlook.com)

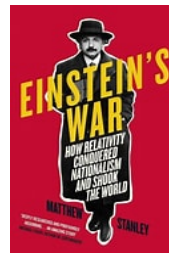
Cathy Bell (Editor)



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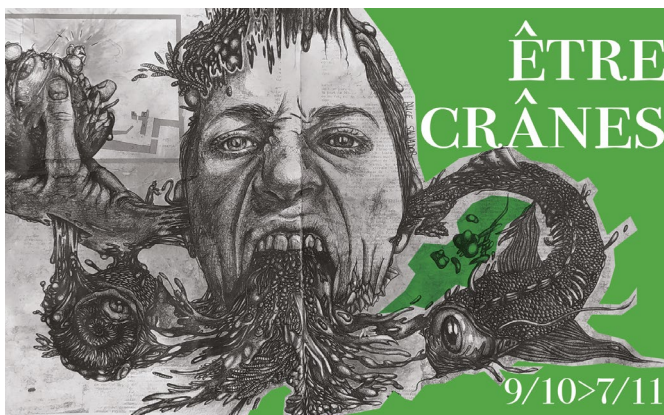
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## FEATURES

### ALICE SALVADOR, être crânes

Dear readers of Bulb Magazine, I am Matis Leggiadro and I was fortunate to be interviewed by Cathy Bell in the previous edition of the magazine. It is with great pleasure that I announce today the opening on October 9, and until November 7, of the exhibition "Alice Salvador, être crânes" of which I am the curator. This exhibition takes place at the La Cheminée gallery in Albi, in the South-West of France. La Cheminée is an old industry of hats of the nineteenth century. The interest of relaying this information in Scotland is to create a link between the different cultural events imagined around the world for the same thing: the flourishing of Humans in a world in perpetual change.

Even though Brexit suddenly propelled the United Kingdom out of Europe, I know how free Scotland was, remains free and will remain free of its choices. So let's share our ideas and cultivate our common interests for art!



Images: Top Left – Exhibition Poster; Bottom Left – Matis Leggiadro Double-portrait; Top Right – Alice Salvador Auto-portrait; Bottom Right – Alice Salvador



#### Presentation:

"Drawing on philosophical, cultural, artistic and historical references, the artist skilfully masters the tradition of Vanitas, which she highlights in portraits and self-portraits. Her frightened face and hilarious skulls are superimposed and combine between the drama of the living and the laughter of the dead. The exhibition is conceived as evolutionary. During the opening, in a performance, the artist will activate her works. They will then undergo a long process of alteration. To be observed throughout the exhibition... The artist also proposes the visit of her cabinet of curiosities, metaphor of the cranial box, where cohabit animal skulls and sacred relics. Exhibition curator Matis Leggiadro puts Alice Salvador's work in the context of the history of vanitas in art."

*I would like to acknowledge the joint work carried out with Sylviane Guérin and André-Pierre Olivier, the gallery owners of La Cheminée, who were formidable and with whom a real artistic and human adventure began.*





## WHERE NEXT FOR US?

Our latest estimate for the age of the universe, based on examining the distance away from us of the oldest stars and then extrapolating back based on the known expansion rate of the universe, is around 13.8 billion years. What we know as The Big Bang happened at this time; not so much an explosion in the conventional sense, where matter spreads out evenly from a central source, but instead an explosion everywhere at the same time. There then went on a long period of cooling during which, to begin with, electrons, positrons, neutrinos and photons (light particles) dominated along with smaller numbers of protons and neutrons. As the temperature dropped to around thirty thousand million degrees centigrade, the electrons and positrons began to annihilate each other at a faster rate than they could be created. As the universe cooled further atom nuclei of heavy hydrogen and helium formed and then later, after another period of cooling, hydrogen and helium atoms began to form by combining with the small number of electrons which had survived the earlier positron-electron annihilation. The resulting gas then began to clump together due to gravity, finally forming our stars and galaxies we see today. Our own solar system was formed in this way around 4.5 billion years ago with Jupiter being the first planet to form. Not long after the earth's own formation, around 100 million years later, water appeared (most likely following a strike by a water laden meteorite) and the oceans began to take shape, leading to, in another one to five hundred million years, the first signs of life. It was to be almost another 4 billion years later (five to seven million years ago) that our own first primitive ancestors began to appear in Africa.



So, what have we been doing since? Not surprisingly, all we need to do is to look at the world around us today to see the answer to this question. By simply looking, we in fact see the evolution of our world in that we only see the continued existence of our 'good ideas' much in the same way that only the fittest species have survived.

Much of what we see then, such as agriculture and our ability to make and use tools, has simply got better. Technology is now the main driver of where we go next, developing small digital devices with the power of a super computer from only a few years ago to developing an effective virus for a world pandemic in a matter of months. It is certainly the case that places such as CERN have helped to drive our technological advances as well as trying to uncover the mysteries of the universe and the quantum world. The discovery of the Higgs particle in July 2012 was the confirmation of a theory put forward almost half a century before and helped confirm the validity of the Standard Model; the theory describing all elementary particles and three of the four known forces. The fact is that we still know very little of how our world, and indeed universe, works. The quantum world is still baffling (beyond baffling to most of us!) and we only have an understanding of a small fraction (5%) of what makes up the universe. The rest is in the form of dark matter – around 27% - which holds our galaxies together and prevents them flying apart and dark energy – around 68% - whose effects can be seen in the way that the expansion of the universe is accelerating rather than, as previously, thought, slowing down.

And so, life will go on, continually advancing at an ever-quicker pace and discoveries will come about that will tell us about things we don't even know exist at the moment – at least that is what will happen for a while! The reality is that the Sun only has so much hydrogen fuel (when two hydrogen atoms fuse together to form a helium atom, excess mass is converted into energy and by Einstein's equation,  $E = mc^2$ , this means a lot of energy is released even from a relatively small amount of mass) with which to supply us, and the rest of our solar system, with its life giving light and heat. Eventually the Sun will become unstable (in around 4 to 5 billion years – so no need to worry yet!), as the density of its core can no longer resist its own crushing gravitational force. At this point the Sun will begin to shrink, until it is yet again dense enough to re-start nuclear fusion. This time nuclear fusion takes place nearer to the Sun's surface, resulting in an outward expansion which overcomes the Sun's weaker gravitational force. This is where we, or at least Earth, disappears forever, as the Sun expands outwards into the solar system, engulfing each planet in turn. The Sun's final act is to explode and as it does so, it leaves behind the building blocks (dust, debris, new heavy atoms) for the formation of a new star and new planets.

(continued)

So, what about us I hear you ask? Well at the moment our main problem is the distance to other potentially life-saving stars and planets. If it was possible to reach another star then common-sense dictates that you head for the nearest – Proxima Centauri. Proxima Centauri could be a good candidate as it is a red dwarf star. For the human race this means that the fate that befell the Sun will not happen to Proxima Centauri since its size (one seventh of the Sun) means its rate of fusion is much, much slower – the rule is, the bigger the star the shorter its life span. Although there doesn't seem to be any planets orbiting Proxima Centauri, there may be something similar nearby – red dwarfs are not as bright as other stars so are difficult to spot. The final requirement for our interstellar ancestors will be to find a planet with water. This means not too far or else not too close to a star, a zone known as the Goldilocks Zone.

So, what else is out there? The answer is countless galaxies like our own. In fact, if possible, we should be able to continue on through galaxy after galaxy in search of our new home and the odds are stacked heavily in our favour that somewhere out there, we find a replica of the Earth we left behind. But a note of caution! The universe doesn't go on forever: at least this is the case for light. As you reach 13.5 billion light years from Earth you now notice that there is a lot less light; you have now entered the Cosmic Dark Ages. Eventually you come to a point, a wall, where light can no longer penetrate. The wall is opaque and made from pure energy. This is as far as we can see, as far as light can travel, the end of the visible universe.

## “BUT I CAN'T DRAW A STRAIGHT LINE!” (and other fibs we tell ourselves)

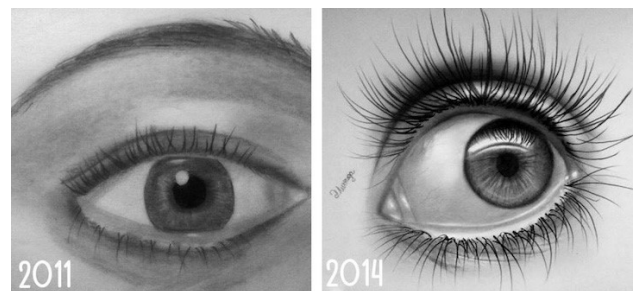
First of all. I know what you are thinking - “It's easy for you to say... you're an artist, bet you've been doing this all your life? Then you tell me you can't draw for toffee (I prefer cash, I'm rarely paid in toffee). You protest even further. “Have a look at this... I am NOT an artist. Look closely. It's apparent to everyone, I-can-not-draw-a-straight-line!”. Easy Tiger, I hear you.

Here's something to think about. Just look at that word you used, 'Apparent'. The

definition of apparent is '**as far as one can know or see**'. It does not mean **certain**, or **definite**. 'Apparently', nobody could run the 4-minute mile, then at some point in time, along came Roger Bannister. Then everyone was doing it. It was certain that my aging mum couldn't abseil (due to a fear of heights) but years later, something 'apparently' changed - She stopped believing her fears and in her mid-60's abseiled down the side of a tower block. She even surprised herself and gave me the heebie-jeebies!

So, '**As far as one can know or see**', seems to be as limited as the dodgy appraisal of our own artistic skills. The honest truth is you are mistaken. In all likelihood you have hoodwinked yourself.

Ok, ok you'll no doubt try and convince me of the litany of wonky efforts over the years. That drawing of your beloved pet, that wouldn't look out of place in an alien morgue. Funny, if it didn't feel so tragic.



*You could do this. No seriously. Neither drawing is bad and both we're fun to do. The right kind of belief and time is the only difference. But boy was the artist pleased with the progress.*

Most of us can trace things back to a parent, teacher, or when our peers either laughed, looked confused, or were non-plussed at the drawing you (at that point) were actually quite pleased with. When you're a nipper, it's quite a shock to the psychological system to get this kind of knock-back.

Let me be clear, I'm not talking to those who are relatively unmoved, or uninterested in general artistic pursuits. I'm talking to the sketchers, the doodlers, the cross-stitching stalwarts, card makers supremos, plasticine pounders and the like who (though in love with their pursuits) want to stretch themselves

(continued)

artistically, even if it's just a little. Most of us at some point want to go beyond our current abilities, to free ourselves from the creative mud into the wider world. AKA: "Oooo that's good. Did you do that?"

I am speaking to those who want to draw, paint or even sculpt something that garners a positive and interested response from yourself, as well as others. Something that is wrongly but understandably called 'Proper Art'. It's one thing not to care about what others think, it's quite another to realize and accept, that we all need validation and feedback, to show us our progress and possibility. In fact, it is a foundational human need, if we are to progress at all.



Ok, so it took 6 years to get to where she wanted. But the artist (previously a convinced artistic failure) was in her 30's when she started drawing again (she had stopped age 7).

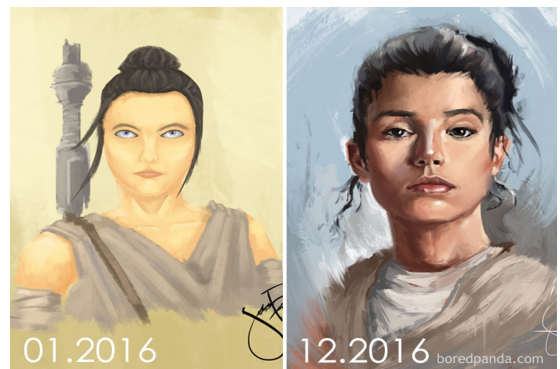
The good news for you 'straight line' avoiders, is that you can get there. You will. You must. But how (?) is always the next unavoidable question. I know, I know... You've heard it all before. You want solid advice, not platitudes. It always seems like the answers are as varied as they are obvious. Join an art group - Buy a good 'How To' book - Turn the picture you want to copy upside down before drawing (*actually really fun and rewarding*). All good advice, but they don't get to the core of your muddy problem.

The good news is the solution has a straight forward, one-word answer. And that word is simply... BELIEF.

NO, NO, no... not belief in yourself, or the 'artist within', or any of those New-Age affirmations you can think of (not dissing them, they can be helpful in keeping us

afloat and optimistic).

I'm talking about belief, as in, 'dropping your belief' Disbelieving your certainties, dropping all you might think you know, surrounding your artistic skills, worth or possibility. Once you do this, you return to the time before you 'learned' you **couldn't** draw. You create a space for possibility. And in my experience, once you feed and water this attitude, all you then need, is time to watch your skills develop by default. Change and progress is then a given. It definitely is as they say, 'the most fun you can have with your clothes on!'



*Sometimes when we stop believing we 'can't' we then 'can', with a little help and encouragement, make great progress.*

So, go on. It's a simple choice really. Continue to believe you can't draw a straight line, or realize the truth of the matter, nobody can draw a straight line and you're probably just a bit nervous to try and maybe fail, but let's face it, this is the way of all learning, the way of all success. What do they say, 'There's no such thing as failure, only temporary and unavoidable outcomes'?

So why not do what you really want to do. Gently nudge yourself towards a wee change of attitude, allow some much-needed self-compassion and who knows... you might get a ruler and just possibly, some nice toffee!

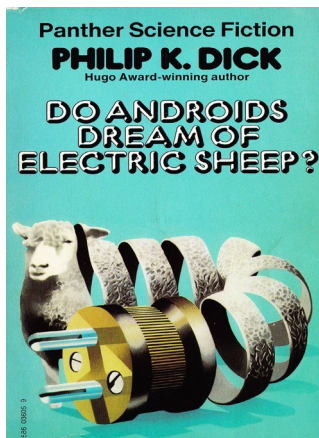
Pip Denham

<https://www.pipdenham.com/>



## BLADE RUNNER VERSUS DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?

The film Blade Runner starring Harrison Ford from 1982 is based on the novel Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K Dick which was published in 1968. Even although the film is later it seems less contemporary than the book which has a more timeless feel to it. This is partly due to the 1980's aesthetic of the film which is shot in a dark, moody environment which, for some reason not apparent, is set in San Francisco's downtown Chinatown. The film seems dated but its real problem is its failure to engage with the issues that Dick has placed central to the theme of the book – that is, nature versus Artificial Intelligence (AI). The film smacks of Hollywood and it would seem that its main premise is to follow the same old tried and tested method i.e., handsome hero hunts down baddie. Throw in some fast, furious and whacky scenes and some women (whether they be human or android it doesn't matter). There you have the recipe for a sci-fi blockbuster which exploits the bare bones of a good piece of literature while failing to engage with the pertinent ethical issues addressed in the book.



In Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, the hero Rick Deckard dreams of owning a live animal (the more exotic the better). He already has a mechanical sheep but it is not satisfactory, live animals, however, are hard to come by and expensive. Deckard is a bounty hunter who hunts down and retires/ kills

androids, with the bounty he receives for each destroyed android he hopes to buy a live animal. This aspect of the story is not explored in the film, there is an unsuccessful attempt to introduce the theme of animals by having a stripper android with a live snake wrapped around her neck perform amazing contortions while being chased by Harrison Ford who wants to destroy her. There is also a fleeting glimpse of an owl (an early exercise in CGI) at the Rosen Foundation (who build the new and advanced Nexus 6 model android). This omission of the animal dimension is disappointing since this is a central and important component of what the book is about. The ideas contained in the book are questioning what human beings are doing to the planet with their quest to advance AI to the detriment of nature and the natural world. The chapter in the book where the female android Pris cuts the legs off a live

spider is a strong metaphor, it suggests a clear link between AI and the slow erosion if not destruction of nature. This scene does not happen in the film, instead the character of Pris has no real purpose as she trots around looking like a spaced-out escapee from an 1980's indie band instead of the dangerous machine that she really is. Similarly, the character of John Isadore the lonely human who lives alone in an entire block of flats is badly portrayed in the film. It is important that he is lonely, that he has no friends as, because of this, the rogue androids can fill the void and enlist his help. So, what did the makers of Blade Runner do with this character? They renamed him Gaff and gave him a gang of crazy little robot companions thus spoiling the subtle character traits that are crucial to the situation. That is, it takes away the reasoning behind why he sides with the androids without hesitation.

Rick Deckard and his wife (yes, I did say wife) are desperate to own a live animal and not only is his wife absent in the film there is no sense at all that this is a major preoccupation of Deckard's. In fact, there is little attempt to engage with any of the philosophical issues raised in the book regarding the human condition. Deckard, in the film, comes across as a one-dimensional character whose main source of concern seems to be that the woman he has fallen for (Rachel Rosen) is an android. He doesn't even have to bear the burden of guilt that might come with an extra-marital affair since his wife has been banished from the narrative. And, even the leader android Roy Baty's wife Irmgard Baty is nowhere to be found – what did the makers of Blade Runner have against wives? Yet these two characters are important, Iran Deckard provides (albeit unsatisfactory) human companionship for Deckard in a desolate world. Whereas Irmgard Baty's character is a reasonable thinking android, a type of which does not figure in the film which prefers to take a more simplistic approach towards the androids i.e. although intelligent they are incapable of human empathy and reasoning. So, Irmgard is, therefore, an important character in the book, after all, this is what the book is hinting at – that is, Irmgard (in Philip K Dick's mind) is possibly the blueprint for the development of a machine/android/robot capable of compassion which could usher in the development of a comparatively reasonable co-existence between human and android? We will never know. Blade Runner comes across as a rather diluted version of Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, a book which displays lasting vision. A book whose message is more relevant today than ever. The film is what it is, a Hollywood sci-fi blockbuster, it achieved its goal of becoming a box-office hit and even today is considered a cult classic (an epithet it does not deserve). If a new film based on this novel were to be made today it would be much better if the essence of the book could be captured in a more meaningful way.

## THE MOUSE by Donald McKenzie

I was just sitting the other day. Quietly. Having a wee think. Remembering when I was wee. Well, trying to. Things are a bit blurred these days but there are some things you never forget, and one thought leads to another of special times and places that never lose their brilliance in your mind.

Benbecula is like that to me. When I think of what it used to be like all these years ago; when it seemed that the sun was always shining - and it was always warm.

Cula Bay was a favourite spot with its big white sand dunes, like castles, and the sound of waves crashing on the beach. Pure magic. I also loved walking around the coastline, exploring all the gullies and the pools where the rocks had been worn smooth by the waves. Some of them looked like surreal sculpture to me, like Henry Moore statues. And there, high above the tide line and the stagnant puddles, there was an old Second World War American landing craft that had gone overboard from a ship in a gale before it even had the chance to be used in action. Still brand new when it had been washed upside down onto the shingle, but you were able to play in it. It was already rusty when I first discovered it, paint weathered and gone and the metal plates on its side flaking with brown and red shards falling like autumn leaves that stained the pebbles below. You had to be careful of terns there during the nesting season – they were dive bombers that screamed like Stukas!

I would sit and look out across the sea. Just on the horizon you can see Heisker, and I used to wonder what life would have been like on that small island, but it must have been hard with no shelter from Atlantic storms. It had been a long time deserted, and all the houses in ruins - apart from one used each year during the time for shearing. Even its lighthouse was unmanned and automatic - but it still winked at you.

The ocean and the sky seemed endless; made me feel really insignificant in the scheme of things. But what a feeling it is when you're there looking out across the deep, and it's easy to imagine you're the only person on earth. Like the bomb's been dropped and you're the only one left. It's not a bad sensation, I think it's kind of spiritual, just you and nature. It's as if you're at one with it, like you have a real sense of belonging to the place.

And all around you is beauty. Yellow lichen on black rocks and bright red seaweed piled up in purple sided gullies, the silver shell sand, and the green, purple, and blue striated colours in the shallows. Mind you, if you stood on old seaweed and broke the crust it didn't half stink, but even so, I wasn't averse to the smell. There's a lot of grey and white shingle there too - spilling out into the fields where the machair flowers in spring sunshine are dazzling. And I've always liked the wee sea pinks on the rocks that dance in the wind.

It was also a great place for beachcombing. There's nothing between you and the Americas, so all kinds of bits and pieces are washed up. Rubbish mainly, dumped from boats when it shouldn't be, but also fishing gear – nets, ropes, floats, and suchlike. I used to like finding these old-fashioned floats made from glass, dark green or sometimes chocolate brown. Amazed at how you might find one wedged in the rocks and it would be completely intact!

I've even heard tell that you could find coconuts on the shore, but I never did.

There was the treasure contained in rock pools, the sea in miniature. I would spend an age lifting out every stone and observing all the wee animals that had been hidden scuttle, dart, or swim to another hidey-hole until I managed to remove every bit of their cover to study them. It was just so interesting. Kicking limpets off the rocks – wondering if they got a sensation of surprise, liked to touch their suckerry foot. Right rubbery so they were. And the feel of the top of a jellyfish or to watch one of these wee red sea anemones change into a bright red blob of jam when you poked it.

What a feeling it was just being by yourself. Even now I can just shut my eyes and when I think of being there again it all returns, the sounds, the aromas, and the touch of the wind on my face.

I wish I could go back – frozen in time.

\*

My folks used to take me to my grandparents at the beginning of the school holidays and after a fortnight they would leave and go back to the mainland, and I'd be left for the rest of the summer.

I remember once when I was sitting at the table drawing pictures on the wax-cloth with my finger in spilt milk. Grandpa was supping his porridge,



**(continued)**

chewing it like it was a chop. He didn't put the milk in the plate, kept it in a cup. He'd take one spoonful of porridge, dip it in the milk, and then sook it off the spoon. Tweed, the collie was always lying at his feet pretending he wasn't interested but you could tell he was when he raised his eyebrows and glanced upwards at him every now and again.

My grandmother told me, 'You should be out playing on a day like this.' She started clearing the table and wiped my drawing away.

'Can I take Tweed?' I asked.

'Of course,' she said.

Tweed glanced in my direction when he heard his name, but he wasn't for moving.

'Come on then, let's go.'

He still didn't move, and I was already halfway out the house, but I knew when my grandfather finished his porridge, wiped his moustache with the back of his hand and pushed his plate to the side, Tweed wouldn't be long in chasing after me. Sure enough, as I reached the front door, I could hear his paws scrabbling over the linoleum behind me.

'Race you,' I said as I ran out into the sun. My wellies slurped into the squelchy turf, and I almost got stuck in the mud. There had been heavy rain during the night and the sun would have its work cut out to dry the land in one day. And it became muddier in the field as I ran across to the byre and before I knew what was happening, I was on my Nellie. Head o'er heels when I tripped and one of my wellies left sticking out of the ground. I had to hop back to retrieve it. Anyway, when we got to the byre my Uncle John was still at the milking. I was standing in the door watching him when he turned around and suddenly squirted a jet of milk at me straight from the cow. Right down the front of my jersey as if I wasn't in enough of a mess already. Aye, it was a good laugh we had about that.

I hadn't gone into the byre as there were three cats in a line blocking the way, their tails twitching with expectation. They also wanted to be squirted at with milk – and Uncle John duly obliged

The cow was annoying my uncle because it kept flicking his head with its tail and he was swearing at it in Gaelic. Don't know what he was

saying but I knew he was swearing. I suggested he should tie a brick to its tail. 'Aye, that'll be right,' he said. 'Archie did that once and the cow knocked him out.'

Anyway, he managed to finish the milking, gave the cats a saucer each and half a bucket of milk to the calf. Then, as he was walking to the door, he surprised a mouse out of hiding and it made a bolt for it, but before you could say winkie Uncle John stamped on it. Crunched it.

It was over so quickly it gave me quite a fright. And I felt terribly sorry for it.

One minute alive and the next dead – made me kind of think about things.

\*

To be honest I didn't know exactly how old my grandparents were in those days. My grandmother was lovely though. Had loads of stories and knew about a lot of things. She was quite wee and bent and was always dressed in black, apart from her pinafore, well it was also black, but it had a pattern of small, coloured flowers across it. She wore round horn-rim glasses and her hair in a bun - but there were always a few strands of wispy grey that escaped - gave her a kind of dotty professor look. The veins on her hands stood out and she had red knuckles. There were liver spots on her skin like you see on some old folk; comes from working outside in the sun at the peats, the hay and suchlike I believe. I also remember her pulling out nettles in the garden with her bare hands. I didn't understand how she wasn't stung but she told me that if you gripped the nettles hard enough, they wouldn't sting. I believed her but I wouldn't take a chance on it myself, not even these days.

They say I look like her and I suppose I do.

\*

One morning I took tea and some bread and butter upstairs to the box room for my grandmother. The stairs were quite narrow, and the tray was really heavy, but I arrived safely. The tea was in a small silver pot with the milk in a separate jug, so it was posh-like. And when I entered, she was sitting at her dressing table brushing her hair. I had never seen it except in a bun and the length of it was a surprise, as silvery as the teapot, and I wondered what colour it would have been when she was younger. She was singing away to herself, and strange to see her dressed in a long white goonie. Just for an instant the

sun shone through the skylight and lit up her face, and she looked like a little girl having a dream. She turned, smiled at me, and that was like the sun coming out as well.

She slept in this tiny space on her own. My grandfather and Uncle John shared the north room, and the south room was for visitors. But it was a grand wee place. The ceiling had the same slope as the roof, with a single-pane window, and there was a small box bed at one end. There was hardly any space to move what with chests, bags and suitcases piled up on each other. The furniture she had was squeezed in between this accumulation and the room was musty with a whiff of camphor and chamber pot pee. The dressing table was covered with all her treasures. Buckram bound books full of old photos of people I never knew that were long dead. There were small dark-brown cardboard boxes full of bits and bobs, brooches, buttons, wee silver sixpences and the like and many jars and bottles, blue and green and clear, containing perfumes and creams. In the middle of the table sat a cherry-red lacquered Chinese box with a beautiful design on its lid of exotic birds that looked as if they had been created with butterfly wings. Framed photographs hung on the walls, yellowed with age, soldiers with curly moustaches, and young men with tight collars and bright staring eyes.

I watched while she drank from the green mug, my favourite, and ate her bread and butter. I was happy that she seemed to be enjoying it and that I had done something to please her. Her false teeth clacked on shrunken gums. I found that amusing but somehow it made her seem even older. I saw the laughter wrinkles she had at the corner of her sparkling eyes, eyes of the palest blue. Profiled against the light you could see she had downy fuzz above her thin lips and even though she looked so small and frail there was something about her that was strong. Can't explain it.

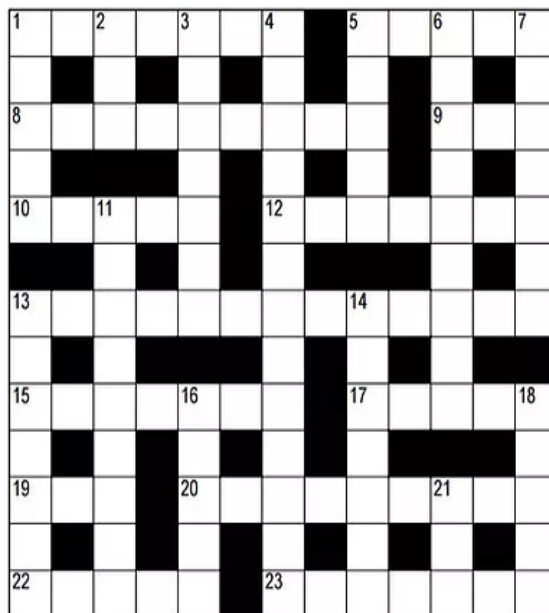
She was still chewing away and smiling, and I was smiling back – as I watched a crumb on her bottom lip moving up and down.

\*

She would always ask as summer drew to an end when would I be coming home again, but by the December of that year she was dead. Just like that. Sudden-like.

One minute in my life and the next minute she was gone.

## Science Crossword



### Clues Across

- 1. Substance (7)
- 5. Particular position, point or place (5)
- 8. Great white, tiger or crocodile (8)
- 9. See it at CERN (1.1.1)
- 10. Older audio and video connection (5)
- 12. James Clerk – Scottish Scientist (7)
- 13. E.g. silicon (13)
- 15. Pertaining to dendrite (7)
- 17. Fermented Mongolian horse Milk (5)
- 19. Explosive (1.1.1)
- 20. Atomic number 95 (Am) (9)
- 22. Quantities of drug taken (5)
- 23. Country element with atomic number 465 is named after (7)

### Clues Down

- 1. Saint \_\_\_\_\_ Fire (weather phenomena) (5)
- 2. Very long time (3)
- 3. Material that can be stretched and then return to its original shape (7)
- 4. Extremely destructive reaction (13)
- 5. Diuretic medication (5)
- 6. Bipolar transistor electrode (9)
- 7. Slow changes in planetary motion (7)
- 11. Fossils (9)
- 13. Calmed (7)
- 14. Radioactive element (7)
- 16. Highways (5)
- 18. Type of ray (5)
- 21. Electrically charged particle (3)

## SOLUTION

**Across:** 1. element 5. locus 8. maneters 9. LHC 10. SCART 12. Maxwell 13. semiconductor 15. dendric 17. airag 19. TNT 20. americium 22. doses 23. Romania **Down:** 1. Elmos 2. eon 3. elastic 4. thermonuclear 5. Lasix 6. collector 7. secular 11. ammonites 13. sedated 14. uranium 16. roads 18. gamma 21. ion

## GALLERY – DONALD MCKENZIE

One of the artists featured in this issue of Gallery is Inverness based artist and writer Donald McKenzie. The paintings shown are connected to his memories of childhood on the Hebridean island of Benbecula where his grandparents lived, as recounted in “The Mouse” (see pages 8,9 &10).



**Images: clockwise from top left –**

*Emigrant,  
Self-portrait 2015,  
Strome Cottages,  
Machair – Eriskay*



## GALLERY – ROBERT McCUBBIN

Based in Glenluce, near Stranraer, Robert McCubbin is an artist and sculptor whose work is mostly concerned with packaging and throw-away materials. Shown here are some examples of his 2-D collages.



Images: clockwise from top left –  
*accord* (2021), *'Historical Composition'* (2015),  
*UK* (2021), *FAIR TRADE* (2021), *Machine* (2021)



GALLERY – MATIS LEGGIADRO

The photographic series shown below by French student Matis Leggiadro are in the manner of American artist Nina Katchadourian. Her series ‘Seat Assignment’ was inspired by long periods spent in airports. Matis has similarly taken the opportunity to create these photo-montages while on a plane journey taken during the summer of 2021.



CONTEMPLATION



RETOUR AUX CHOSES ESSENTIELLES



THE BODY AND THE REST



THOMAS PESQUET EN VACANCES?



RUN



DIVINE LIGHT



## CLOCK-TOWER STREET



Walking along the 'Quai de la République', or 'Quai des Douanes' as it used to be called in Charles Rennie Mackintosh's time, you don't notice it. Instead, your eyes are drawn to the water's edge and the two large bluefin tuna boats that are moored there almost all the year round. In fact, it can only be found if in the sweltering summer heat, when unable to bear the smell of the heated asphalt and the biting rays of the sun, one seeks the shade of the customs buildings. There you see two large fig trees almost blocking a staircase similar to the many 'rampes' or flights of stairs that cross the streets of Port-Vendres at right angles. But this one is narrow, with only a few steps, and it seems to lead to a private property.

"Let's go, something is beckoning to me", I thought to myself as Alice would have done as she went down the rabbit hole at the base of the hedge. And sure enough, on that day too, she was indisposed by a stifling heat.

So now, once you've climbed a few steps you find yourself in a street or is it a dead end? It is narrow, slightly sloping, lined with old houses two storeys high and cramped like the local fishermen's houses. They are sand-coloured, fairly uniformly plastered and at first glance only distinguishable by their closed shutters whose colours cover the whole range of blues. The single-leaf doors are dark, made of oak, sometimes with mouldings. There is no sign of human activity. No cars or two-wheelers and yet an impression of inhabited emptiness. What is going on behind the closed doors in the sunlight? Is an old lady asleep in her armchair facing the window? Is an amateur painter looking for inspiration in the specks of dust that dance between the two shutters? Is there nearby a teenager, slumped on a couch, hypnotised by the blue glow of his mobile phone, chatting with the many friends he has never seen?

Where does this unassuming street lead, winding its way along the curve of the hillside which, two millennia ago, was probably covered with vines or pastures? Will it get lost at the end of a courtyard? Will we suddenly find ourselves in front of a wall at the end of a blind alley? There are few names on the letterboxes, no street names. It is difficult to walk on the uneven cobblestones that slope towards the centre into a sort of gutter. There are no trees in sight and no vegetation for the eye to rest on. It makes you want to turn back.

Still, a few details alert us. A skinny black cat, like the lost cats in the harbour, cautiously walks along the buildings, it seems to know where it is going. Upstairs, on the top floor of a house with a superb door knocker in the shape of a gloved hand, you can see a cage hanging from a window frame with a large multi-coloured bird perched inside: could it be a parrot? Hearing the footsteps of the walker, it exclaims: "It's overrr there! ". Over there, where? Should one rap with this fancy knocker and enter a dark staircase that leads to the cage? Or does the bird indicate a direction?

Ah, here is an open door! It leads onto a long dark corridor at the end of which cascades of geraniums, nasturtiums, lantanas and bougainvillea decorate a sun-drenched patio in a profusion of colours. This is tempting. Why is this door so wide open even though we can't see anyone? Ah, I wish I were Alice... But anyway, what is important now is to continue on our way without wandering too much to see if this street has an end and a name.



A few more steps and suddenly, after walking in the semi-darkness of the alley, you are dazzled by the bright light of the sun that assails you like a spotlight entering the stage. It takes a moment for your eyes to adjust. But the surprise is total. You find yourself at the entrance to a small square lined with a few houses. At the other end, a kind of vaulted semi-circular arch built



(continued)

in local schist is included in what looks like a piece of fortification to which the "Clock Tower" is attached. You know, the very same tower that was part of the 'Presqu'île Redoubt' and moved a little further inland when the Maritime Passenger Terminal was built. Another era... This tower, thanks to the four clocks on its four sides, gives the time to the whole city. A landmark for all inhabitants and walkers. You can only see it from a distance. It would seem totally inaccessible, draped in its ancestral dignity, at least until now... What a pleasure to stand at its foot! Suddenly the clues are there when you look up: the square is called "Place de l'Horloge" and of course, the alleyway leading to it is the "Rue de l'Horloge".

And as if one delightful discovery called for another, an oasis of coolness is now revealed near the door of the emblematic Tower. Under the shade of two enormous mulberry plane trees, a scattering of wrought iron tables and chairs with multi-coloured seat cushions. And, further on, in a recess of the ancient wall, there is the stall to which they belong and which serves, guess what? Cold or hot drinks, ice creams or cakes for tea, depending on the season. In short, at the end of this short epic, an invitation to a delicious break, in this setting full of the cachet of old stones. Out of time...

So it is time for you to know why this place has to exist somewhere, if only in my imagination. This clock tower is now inaccessible either by car or on foot. It stands right in the middle of barracks which are military ground. It was rebuilt there after the picturesque 'Redoute de la Presqu'île' in the harbour was demolished in 1929 to make room for the new (and ugly) passenger terminal. Charles Rennie Mackintosh who used to walk the quays of Port-Vendres in the last years of his life would not, thank God, have known this disgrace. And he would have been able to go round it, admire it, on his way to his favourite haunts along the coastal path, carrying his painting material under his arm. Lastly, tell you what, the clock mysteriously stopped striking the hours and its hands froze during the whole lockdown period. Out of time we were!

## SYLVIE PLAS

*Sylvie Plas is Secretary of The Charles Rennie Mackintosh Association in Roussillon –*

[www.crmackintoshroussillon.com](http://www.crmackintoshroussillon.com)

## REVIEWS

### SPIRAL – A FRENCH TV CRIME DRAMA



Spiral (Engrenages in French) is a long running French crime drama, first appearing on UK screens in 2006. The final, and eighth series, was aired in January 2020; a total of 86 episodes. Spiral tells the story of a Parisian CID team which operates in some of the more dubious parts of the city, dealing with everything from murder, drug dealing, money laundering, kidnap, prostitution, burglary, robbery and many other crimes driven by underworld activities.

Although the nature of the crimes are often fairly familiar, and you cannot miss the fact that behind many of the crimes are immigrant groups, perhaps what is most watchful is the behaviour of the CID team who often come close to the criminals themselves in their disregard for the law. The main character is Commander Laure Berthaud, played to perfection by the classically trained Caroline Proust. To say that she is a complex character is an understatement; a mixture of vulnerability, obsession and anger all played at 100mph. Although she has several affairs, these are all short lived, reflecting what is most important to her – her job. Even the unexpected birth of a baby daughter is, at first, a nuisance she could well have done without. Throughout the eight series, the order of importance of the supporting cast changes either with the story line or else due to actors leaving the show. Gilou Escoffier, played by Thierry Godard, gains in importance with each series, beginning as a cocaine addict (he is still a policeman at this point!), and only just avoiding dying of an overdose, to becoming Laure Berthaud's main support; professionally and emotionally. His career as a policeman seems almost completely at odds with his character and, at times, viewers may be left wondering how such a morally imperfect individual could ever pass any selection criteria in the first place. The answer perhaps is that

**(continued)**

he understands the people they deal with better than anyone else. 'Tintin' Fromentin, played by Fred Biancomi, is the person who has the unenviable job of keeping Laure and Gilou out of trouble. His part is more believable than the other two in that his behaviour is both considered, responsible and, most important, law abiding.

The other main characters belong to the legal professions; the meticulous, by the book but extremely determined Judge Roban (Philip Duclos) and Pierre Clement (Gregory Fitousi), an up-and-coming young public prosecutor whose downfall begins as a result of an old friendship. The third member of the legal profession is Josephine Karlsson (Audrey Fleuret). Ambitious, and with a love of money, she is willing to do almost anything to get ahead and as such puts herself in danger on more than one occasion as she becomes the legal representative for some very shady characters, however, as she eventually begins to bond more and more with Laure, she eventually re-evaluates what is truly important. Unlike Laure, of whom we know nothing of her background, Josephine's troubled background does tell us a little about why she is the way she is.



Relationships between the cast members are also an important part of *Spiral*. Laure's relationship with Judge Roban comes across as similar to that of a father and daughter as she runs off to Roban on several occasions in order to get her own way. Roban, who seems alone for most of the time, both in his quest for justice and emotionally, often welcomes Laure with fatherly affection but at times, when she ignores his advice and directives, he chastises her perhaps more severely than anyone else, as if hurt that she has let him, of all people, down. Laure is also the person that most looks after the well-being of her team. Guiding Gilou through his drug addiction and supporting Tin-tin when others turned against him and life at home was becoming too much due to a growing family. Even Josephine and Pierre benefited from her friendship; Pierre being one of Laure's brief affairs. The storylines, as mentioned above, do have regular

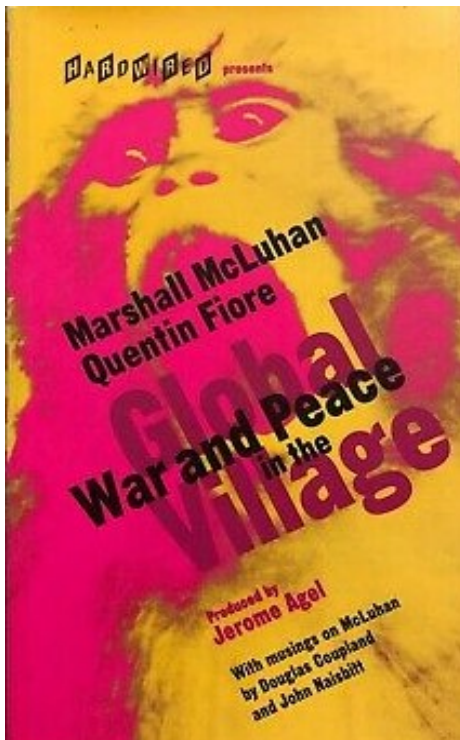
themes, mainly drugs and murder feature, as the criminals, a collection of unsavoury characters whose origins tend to be former French overseas territories or else Eastern Europe. This in a way makes it a bit like cowboys and Indians, where you simply have to look at someone in order to know on which side of the law they lie. But *Spiral* is never as simple as that and makes clear, on many occasions, the corruption that is present throughout the legal systems and within the police force, each believing it has to be this way to succeed; all that is except Judge Roban.

Episode 1 of series 1 sets down a marker for the goriness to follow, opening with a young woman lying dead in a skip with her face obliterated by the repeated pounding of a hammer. As things proceed, her sister is later found hanging dead on a meat hook in a meat store. This then, is how it proceeds from this point on and for the next 85 episodes and there is never any lack of imagination from the writers as to how to kill or maim someone and no one is excluded – even children. In a sense it is an autopsy of the worst of Paris (and you see lots of those as well), revealing those parts of the city that we never see as tourists and are never told about, revealing the socio-economic truth about the city as well as its systematic corruption and prejudices. In a strange way it is reassuring that the police and legal establishment are part of this; maybe they have to be. In fact, Laure and Pierre are both arrested along the way and Gilou and Josephine both end up in prison; Gilou for extortion, theft and kidnap (just some of the many things needed to keep a case alive) and Josephine for running over her boss after he drugged and raped her.

As for the main characters, Laure and Gilou become a couple and eventually bid farewell to the police force – Gilou has to and Laure has had enough. Judge Roban retires and Pierre is tragically killed outside Roban's office after being taken hostage. Josephine, after her release from prison, appears to mellow and has a new close friendship with her colleague Edelman. Tin-tin, having had enough of Laure and Gilou, transfers to another department. So although it seems that Caroline Proust has definitely played Laure for the last time, there have emerged new members of the cast who could lead the way for another series. It would though also be a shame to let Laure and Gilou go for good and never be seen again. *Spiral* has reached the pinnacle of this type of genre, programmes like *Wallander* started our viewing habit but along with *Beck* they now seem ponderous by comparison. I then thought that *The Bridge* and then *The Killing* were as good as it gets but for sheer pace, acting ability, excitement, enthrallment there is only one winner and that is *Spiral*.

## WAR AND PEACE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

Anyone reading War and Peace in the Global Village by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore could be forgiven for not realising that it was written over fifty years ago in 1968. Perhaps the younger generation of now who are hyper switched-on to the world of technology having grown up with it since birth would not view this book as innovative. However, I wonder how many of them could predict what the world will be like fifty plus years from now, not many I would guess. In reality, bearing in mind just how little the world had advanced technologically in 1968 compared to today, McLuhan seems like an alien intelligence with superior knowledge (a bit like Thomas Jerome Newton in The Man Who Fell to Earth). Even though one has to project back to the late 1960's and imagine a world without personal computers, the internet, mobile phones and social media for example, the ideas in the book still seem fresh and readable today.



McLuhan's main premise is that all social changes are caused by the introduction of new technologies. He goes deep into the psychology of what this may mean for humanity saying that technology has become a substitute for human activity and has in fact BECOME a human activity. A substantial amount of the book deals with this theory and sometimes McLuhan's explanations are difficult to follow. However, this does not interfere with the general flow of the book where ideas, facts, opinions and intellectual arguments abound at a breath-taking rate. There are was some paragraphs that literally make you gasp, you realise

that many of the things he says are so true but have never even occurred to you before. Truth was important to McLuhan, even his headstone has the words "The Truth Shall Make You Free" written on it.

The style of writing which does not adhere to a chronology or formal narrative is reinforced by the graphics designed by the co-author Quinten Fiore. He makes use of all manner of imagery making the aesthetic of the book akin to a photo-montage, sometimes surreal, sometimes pop-art, sometimes cartoon but always relevant. There is a sense of a counterculture at play, this might not be too far from the case as Fiore also worked with such people as the social activist and co-founder of The Youth International Party (YIP) Jerry Rubin. And, McLuhan seems also to be interested in the youth of the day when he suggests that many of them are influenced by Oriental culture. He states "the turned-on effect which penetrated the television generation (fifteen years and younger) inspires them to read books like Siddhartha by Herman Hesse". Albeit this was Eastern culture distilled through the European mind of the German Hesse. McLuhan also references the ancient Chinese manuscript The I Ching, Book of Changes. His take on the I Ching illustrates that McLuhan's thesis is not easy to follow. For example, he notes that in the philosophy of the I Ching "going and returning has no end". He then equates this to the technological age saying that electric technology speeds up this process, claiming "instant and total rehearsal of all pasts and all processes enable us to perceive the function of purgation and purification, translating the entire world into a work of art".

Early on in the book McLuhan declares his admiration for James Joyce and especially his book Finnigan's Wake. It might seem obvious, therefore, that the bolded text which appears in the margins of almost every page and which are credited to FW should be quotes from this book. However, never having read Finnigan's Wake, it took me till almost the end of the book (and on second reading) to figure this out. The words are akin to nonsense, for example, "since alls war that end war let sports be leisure and bring and buy fair". And so it goes on, yet, strangely, these passages compliment the main body of the text, perhaps as an antidote to the relentless logic that McLuhan delivers therein.

McLuhan assails the reader with the sharp instrument that is his brain. He appears to have vast knowledge, if you read the book you are certain to learn things. In order to give credence to his main argument he tackles subjects such as fashion, education and cultural, scientific and political history.



However, it is, in the main, always forward thinking and he often indicates a dislike of rear-window ideology, that is – looking backward instead of forward. This is a book that makes you think and go on thinking. It does direct your attention to the way people live in the present time and wonder what McLuhan would have made of it. It also begs the question of whether McLuhan (a lover of the truth) was predicting truthfully about the shape of things to come. The writer Douglas Coupland finishes his musings about McLuhan (on the book cover) by saying “Hey Marshall – guess what - you were right”!! This is probably true considering the way technology has become an integral part of everyday life. It has almost certainly become (as predicted by McLuhan) an extension of the human nervous system. You only need to look around for evidence of how actively technology and human beings increasingly interact with each other.

## EINSTEIN'S WAR

Einstein's War, by Matthew Stanley, charts the life of Albert Einstein from the years just before the first world war to 1919, when the first proof of his theory of General Relativity was achieved. Running almost parallel to Einstein's story is that of English astronomer Arthur Eddington. The link between the two, is that it was Eddington who persuaded the British scientific institutions, The Royal Society and The Royal Astronomical Society, to provide the funds and resources needed to mount an exhibition in 1919 to view a complete solar eclipse. This was an opportunity to see if the positions of stars close to the eclipse would remain the same or else change due to the bending of their light as it passes close to the sun. The latter, if by an amount calculated by Einstein, would be one of the first proofs of his new theory.

The first part of the book, looks at Einstein's life before the war, including his failure to graduate from high school, due in part to his desire to avoid compulsory military service, his renouncement of his German citizenship and his eventual enrolment to The Swiss Federal Polytechnic (ETH) in Zurich: where entry did not require high school graduation. Much is written about Einstein's struggles as a student, mainly due to a tendency to miss lectures, particularly in mathematics, which he would one day come to regret, however, the reality was that he was an accomplished mathematician and it was only with the complex mathematics needed for General Relativity that he struggled. After graduation from ETH, he tried to secure a position in the physics department there but without success, eventually having to rely on the father of a friend to secure a position at the Swiss patent Office in Bern. He was now

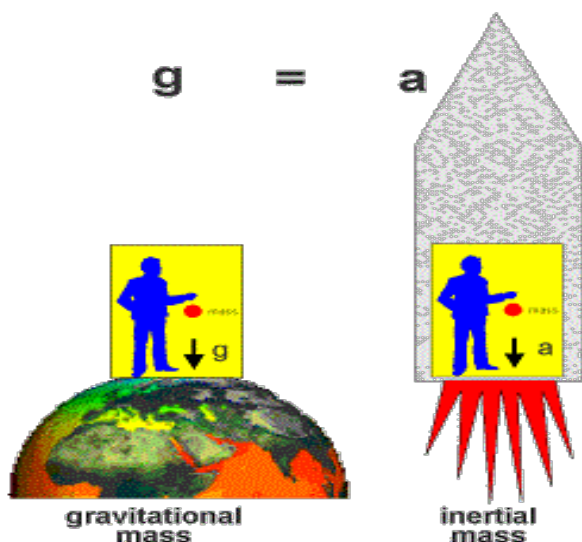
able to support himself and his new wife Mileva Matic, also a physicist, and, because the demands of his day job were not too much, he now had the time to spend on his own work, culminating in 1905 with the publication of six ground breaking papers. One paper, 'On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies' was to become the Theory of Relativity. From this point onwards, Einstein's name began to become more known throughout the scientific world; albeit slowly as many scientists thought the theory too abstract and stating that hitherto fixed measurements such as time, length and mass are in fact malleable, was too much for many. Time for example, Einstein declared, will pass at a different rate based on the relative speed that someone is travelling at so that a person in a space craft travelling close to the speed of light will experience a slowing of time (relative to someone back on Earth – for the astronaut all will seem normal) such that, even though their journey in space lasted a few days, when they return to Earth, they find that many years have passed. The problem with time going slower was that, at the time, it was impossible to prove. This, however, didn't stop Einstein reputation growing and, after holding academics positions in Prague and at ETH, he was lured to Berlin by Max Planck just before the onset of the Great War. By this time, he had already started his General Theory of Relativity.

Arthur Eddington had by this time built a well-respected reputation as an astronomer, becoming the Director of The Cambridge Observatory in March 1914. Perhaps what defined Eddington's character most before and certainly during the war, was that he was born a Quaker. Eddington's life then revolved around his work as an astronomer and what appears to be a healthy lifestyle of long walks, abstinence from alcohol and, unlike Einstein, no indication of the need for female companionship. An important principle of Eddington's belief was that he would not bear arms against another human. On this alone, Einstein and Eddington would always be in agreement, however, with war on the horizon, it would also cause them both great difficulties.

General Relativity had begun with a thought experiment. Einstein considered a person in a room without any windows. If the person in the room simply drops a weight, they notice that, due to gravity, it falls to the floor. Einstein then posed the question, 'What if the room is instead being propelled through space (far away from any gravitational sources) by a rocket attached to its base. Would the person still see the same thing happen when they dropped the weight?'

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This is the equivalence principle in that the person cannot distinguish between gravity and acceleration.



Einstein surmised that the two were the same. In other words, in both cases the weight falls to the floor of the room. Now consider what happens when a hole is cut into the room wall at the same place but on opposite walls. When the room is stationary, a beam of light shone from outside one hole will move across the room and through the other hole on the opposite wall and out. What happens when the room is being accelerated? Einstein claimed that the light would bend so that it no longer reached the second hole and if light bent due to acceleration, and if the equivalence principle was true, then light must also bend due to gravity. Einstein was desperate to prove this and two attempts were made to view the phenomena during a solar eclipse when the light from far off stars should be seen to bend as it passes close to the Sun's gravitational influence. Unfortunately, bad weather and the war got in the way.

The war for both Einstein and Eddington, when it came, Eddington in Cambridge and Einstein in Berlin, was unpleasant to say the least. Due to the British naval blockade of German ports, food shortages were present in Berlin within months of the start of the war. As the war progressed, Einstein found food harder to come by and had several long periods of poor health due to being mal-nourished but at least, by now a Swiss citizen, he was spared being called up to fight. His work suffered due to his poor health and that many colleagues and most students had gone off to fight at the front meant that the institute was all but deserted. Up to a point, he was still allowed to travel, to Switzerland for example, including to conclude his divorce to Mileva, and to other scientists in Belgium (occupied) and Holland (neutral). Food parcels from friends in Switzerland allowed him to survive.

Eddington's war was more comfortable, but as the war went on, and the need to replace the thousands killed or wounded at the front became more and more urgent, Eddington's position became less secure. Eventually he became under pressure to enlist. At first his university spoke up about his work and how it was needed to support the war effort. Eventually, however, in the final months of the war, Eddington had to go before conscription tribunals and put forward his case as to why he would not fight. It is a little unclear as to why Eddington avoided being called up but what is clear is that it was his beliefs as a Quaker that he most felt excluded him from the slaughter. In all of this, it is incredible that the British were prepared to finance an exhibition to prove the theory that belonged to a German born, Berlin based scientist. Eddington had remained a firm supporter of General Relativity, and despite war time restrictions, had managed to write his own account of the theory, thus spreading the word to the British scientific community.

Much of what is written above is in a way the build up to the most exciting part of this book – 'The Test.' Observing a solar eclipse was not only difficult but depended on a lot of good luck. Eddington received a grant for £1,000, equivalent to £75,000 today. This amount meant that he was able, as a bit of insurance, to mount two exhibitions, one to Brazil and the other to the island of Principe (Portuguese colony), off the West African coast – Eddington choosing to go to Principe. Another reason for two separate exhibitions was to confirm their results. The Brazil exhibition enjoyed clear skies and an excellent view of the eclipse, however, images from their main telescope turned out to be out of focus due to heat expansion of a mirror. Luckily, as a standby, they had also taken four-inch telescope which did provide clear photographs of the eclipse – showing the requisite number of stars in the Sun's vicinity. On Principe heavy rain and cloud had preceded the eclipse, which was to begin several hours after Brazil, and although it was still cloudy at the time of the eclipse, Eddington's team were able to capture useful images. After the eclipse came the processes of first developing the pictures and then making the minute measurements which would either confirm or refute Einstein's calculation of 1.75 arc seconds (an arc second is 1/3,600 of a degree). The out of focus measurement from Brazil gave a deflection of 0.93 arc seconds, however the results from the four-inch telescope gave a more promising 1.98 arc seconds. The result from

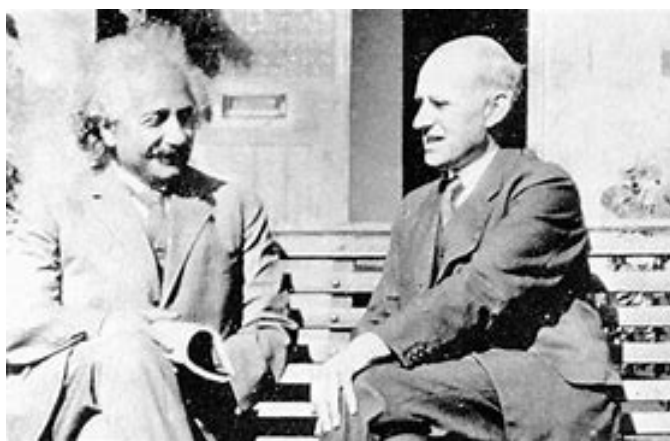
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Principle was 1.61 arc seconds. Disregarding the unreliable out of focus measurement, the average deflection was 1.795 arc seconds. Einstein was correct!

The outcome of the expeditions results was to make Einstein famous, as newspaper headlines all over the world proclaimed the new successor to Newton. Eddington and Einstein eventually met in 1921.

Einstein discovered that everything, including you, bends space and that just as a marble set off spinning around a fruit bowl will eventually fall into the middle of the bowl, assuming it is not going quick enough to continue spinning around forever, this is what happens with gravity and this is why the light from stars curves towards the Sun. This is what keeps us planted on the surface we are on – denser stuff (more gravity) beneath us and less dense stuff (e.g., air) above us. General Relativity, it should be said, pointed us towards lots more than the bending of light, including black holes, the expansion of the universe, gravitational waves and even the big bang theory.

The book then is eminently readable by anyone with an interest in science – you really don't need a degree in physics or maths. Instead, it is presented as more of a history of one of the most important times in science, charting the lives of the two protagonists as a means of building up the drama to the test, at which point the excitement builds as you need to know what happened next. It is also the case that, as well as the science, the reader will also get a sense of what life was like at this time both in Britain and in Germany. The book then, written in an easy to follow not too scientific way, is informative, interesting, exciting and very definitely though provoking. A great read for anyone with an interest in the history of science and who wants to know a little about Einstein's greatest achievement.



*Einstein and Eddington eventually met in 1921*

## PLATFORM

In PLATFORM we are introducing an arena where issues can be discussed and debated. These can be scientific, cultural, historical and/ or arts related among other ideas. We are looking at these issues from local, national and international perspectives alike.

### PLEASE DON'T PAINT ERCOL



In the world of "lifestyle" there exists a culture of what is known as "upcycling". This involves taking an old item (you probably know this) then employing various methods to turn it into a new, more desirable one. TV voices on programmes such as Money For Nothing repeatedly tell us that the poor old clapped-out table, chair or petrol can has become something wonderful after a makeover whereas, in actuality, quite often this is not the case. If you care to buy into the idea that an old petrol can (or anything but the kitchen sink, or EVEN the kitchen sink) can be transformed into a stylish table-lamp that's fine, it would be wrong of me to force my opinion on others by telling them what and what not to like. However, it has to be said that there is an apparent lack of attention paid to the design of the finished item in many of these projects. For example, how can a mid-twentieth-century chair look good covered in William Morris wallpaper? Why would anyone do that?

Similarly, why would anyone paint a piece of Ercol furniture? This is where I personally draw the line, everything else is forgivable but painting Ercol furniture does not improve it (indeed it spoils it) so please don't do it. A brief history shows that from the early twentieth-century Ercol has been producing beautifully designed furniture and this continues to the present day. Founded in 1920 by Lucien Ercoli who was from Tuscany in Italy, the Ercol name is synonymous with excellent quality and design. During the 1950's and 1960's Ercol furniture was admired for its clean-lined, simple elegance – a break-away from the heavy, ornate styles that went before. The finest designers in Britain have created



(continued)

classic furniture for Ercol which defies fashion trends, indeed it gets better with age. The current Ercol factory in Princes Risborough has won awards for its architecture, design and environmental features. One example of why Ercol furniture is more eco-friendly is the fact that they do not use solvent-based stains, instead they opt for water-based products. This is one reason why it seems like a bit of a travesty to cover these items in evil-smelling paint thereby covering up the beauty of the natural wood hidden beneath. However, even if water-based paint is used, painted Ercol just does not look good. I like colour but where it does not belong is on a piece of classic Ercol furniture.

## TRY SAYING 'WELL-DONE' ONCE IN A WHILE GRETA

Over 100 years ago John Muir, the Scottish naturalist and environmental philosopher, remarked to, the then American President, Theodore Roosevelt, that the glaciers in Yosemite national park were shrinking. Muir did not fully understand why this was so but what he did understand was the need to look after our planet. Today, people such as Greta Thunberg are forefront in the campaign to make people and politicians alike sit up and take notice of what is happening to our environment – well done Greta! Thunberg's style is to speak of an emergency and a crisis, whereas, politicians seem to be less inclined to go that far. Why is this? The reality is that change, at least on a global scale, takes time, not least of all because people don't like change. Another reason is, that to change at the rate that Thunberg wants, will cost a lot of money as, unfortunately, most economies still operate with resources and infrastructure that still rely heavily on older, environmentally damaging ways of working. So, although we may think of Scotland as doing fairly well in following Thunberg's advice, alas Thunberg herself doesn't think this is the case, instead, in her opinion, we are simply doing less worse than other countries. My advice to Greta is to give some countries, not all, a break and say to countries like Scotland, well-done for having 97% of your electricity from renewable sources, well-done on recycling around half your waste and well-done on banning older polluting cars from your capital city from spring next year. In other words, would it hurt, every now and then, to give a little praise in order to motivate people and countries to continue to work even harder to one day achieve those targets that Thunberg herself strives for?

## LIVING FOR THE CITY?

I have been a resident in Livingston for many years. Livingston has become a well-populated, bustling town, it has accomplished much over the almost sixty years since its inception in 1962. The main focus of the town is the massive indoor shopping complex - there is plenty of shopping in Livingston. There is a football club and grounds, Livingston FC are doing okay, this brings a buzz to the town especially when they are at home to big teams. There is heritage in the form of industry with the shale mining industry looming large in the history of the area, and later the location of a silicon valley. There are green spaces, it certainly is not a concrete jungle - the stock insult which is often thrown at new towns. In short, it has a lot going for it. Now for the bad news - there is hardly any CULTURE.

In the early days of planning Livingston, the first architect/town planner Peter Daniel wanted to bring Herriot Watt University to the town. This, of course, did not happen and the university was located midway between Livingston and central Edinburgh. This minor detail could have changed the environment, that is, the town would have possibly taken on a more cultural vibe familiar in university towns. However, there is no way to gloss over the fact that the town is sadly lacking in cultural facilities and those meagre ones that do exist are not sufficient. No amount of public sculpture on roundabouts etc can compensate for the absence of a lively, interactive cultural community such as experienced in other towns and cities.



And, on the subject of cities, this is one of the main reasons why Livingston might struggle with its bid for city status in 2022. The bid is part of a competition to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, Apparently, these occur at every royal jubilee celebration and Livingston has bid at least once before. The bid coincides with Livingston's 60th anniversary

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and it seems that those responsible think that the town has what it takes to become a city. Certainly, the town has witnessed a meteoric rise from three small villages with just sixty households to the metropolis it is today, but is that enough? A working group has been set up to prepare the application. A spokesperson for the group states that "Livingston is a vibrant community with a unique identity", they claim that the town is a hub for developing "economy and jobs, culture and leisure, retail administration and residential". Well, this is not strictly true since, as I said before, there is little or no cultural presence in Livingston, I know this because I am personally involved with the cultural sector.

A sorry statistic from the West Lothian News website will help to illustrate my point. You will find under the category of Education nine pages of news. Two pages for Health and Fitness, six pages on Environment and Outdoors, five pages on Development and Transport - and on Culture and Leisure - NOTHING. To sum up, yes, Livingston is growing but it is not all about size. Livingston is set to increase its population to 100,000 in the future which is more than some Scottish cities such as Stirling, Inverness and Perth. This fact is highlighted in a report by the areas Economic Development and Regeneration manager who seems to think that size matters. The report states that "from being a village to a new town and centre of regional development the next logical step would be to gain full city status". This is naive. I wish the town well with its bid but until it has more of a cultural identity it is not ready for this "next logical step".

## ISN'T TECHNOLOGY GREAT!

I read recently about two robots, working in a supermarket distribution centre, colliding with each other before bursting into flames. I may be wrong, but I have never heard of human workers doing this. But despite the huge cost to the company, accidents do happen and technology sometimes doesn't always do what it is supposed to do – probably a one off. That was until I read on. Turns out that the same thing happened before, only this time the blaze was too much to be contained and the entire facility burned down. Robots huh! So, if you notice that when you take your sausages out of their wrapper they appear to be already cooked, you know what's happened.

## SPECIAL FEATURE

### ART & WAR

With the imminent 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Armistice of 1918 on the horizon thoughts turn to war and the devastation it causes. Within art history, artist's engagement with war and conflict can be traced back as far as the first humans. Some cave paintings reveal images of combat with weaponry clearly indicated. Throughout history artistic depictions have, understandably, recorded how humans have created conflict and the residual effects of this unfortunate aspect of life.

Not only have artists depicted these events, they have often been participants. During the nineteenth-century the Artist's Rifles was formed as part of the widespread volunteer movement at the time. The group was organised by an art student named Edward Sterling in 1859 as a response to the possible French invasion after Felice Orsini's attack on Napoleon III was linked to Britain. The group was made up of painters, musicians, actors, architects and others involved in the arts. Of course, many of these young lives were lost. Artists on both sides have been killed in action, During WW1 the poet Wilfred Owen and the Austrian painter Franz Marc did not survive to see the end of the war. Sadly, Owen was killed in action one week before the signing of the Armistice, he was twenty-six years old. Marc, a key figure in the German Expressionist movement was killed during the Battle of Verdun in March 1916 at the age of thirty-six.

The twentieth-century, when the two major world wars occurred, witnessed the first truly technological warfare when the use of mechanical weaponry became employed. This did not go unnoticed by artists who often abandoned traditional, realist methods in favour of abstracted, geometric forms. Artists such as Percy Wyndham Lewis and Jacob Epstein in Britain and, in Europe, Italian Futurists such as Umberto Boccioni depicted humanoid forms that were reduced to robot-like machines – a reaction to the de-humanisation of such a merciless war. Prior to WW2 Pablo Picasso painted his famous work Guernica as a reaction to the Spanish Civil War. A compelling, yet horrific image, it is yet another example of an individual trying to process the unfathomable nature of war.

Undoubtedly, artists found (and still find) the need to express their emotions about war in visual form. At this point, I want to concentrate on two works of art that were created from this emotive process. The Merry-go-Round by Mark Gertler was painted in 1916, it depicts a fairground ride that the artist saw at a fair in Hampstead Heath while on leave from the army.



This, however is no ordinary fun fair ride. The figures sitting astride the wooden horses come across as machines (or perhaps “killing machines”), they are dressed in uniform (both male and female), their faces contorted with mouths wide open as if in mid-scream. The painting exudes a sense of manic movement as if the riders are being swept along against their will. Gertler was a Jewish, Russian emigrant, the sense of foreboding eerily predicts what was to follow two decades later. It is universal in its concept, that is, it is directed towards all humanity, it is a protest against man’s inhumanity to man.



Felt Suit by German artist Joseph Beuys on the other hand is personal, it is specific to the artist himself. The piece consists of a man’s suit of clothing made out of felt material which was modelled on the artist’s own suit. It was made as a multiple of one hundred felt suits and dates from 1970. However, even though it was created a quarter of a century after the end of WW2, it is said to represent a poignant response to his experience as a fighter pilot when he was shot down and nearly died. His life was saved by a tribe of Tartars who wrapped him in fat and felt – an experience that obviously had a profound effect on him for the rest of his life. Beuys used the materials of fat and felt in his artworks repeatedly throughout his career so strong was the association with them and the life-force – the thing that war so often cruelly takes away.

## REFLECTIONS ON REMEMBRANCE

Having served with the Royal Air Force for nine years I have found myself in situations which were not to say the least comfortable, but gave me a glimpse of how one could feel in conflict. The Great War poets, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke, Thomas Hardy, and one whom was regarded as the greatest writer of war poetry in the English language - Wilfred Owen, wrote from the trenches and brought alive the experiences on battle fields of Europe and gave a true insight to the action and what the serving members of the armed forces endured. The great poets work and my research encouraged me to write a poem in remembrance of the 100 year commemoration as I walked with those who served. I would like to share this with you in my moments of reflection.

### The battle not over

*Darkened clouds form overhead,  
the gas, the smoke, the fear the dead.  
all around the dirt and mire,  
freedom's aim our true desire.*

*Screaming pain then beat the drum,  
life and death become but one.  
Will we again be free to roam?  
across the land and fields called home.*

*Trenches deep, soldiers weary  
once more over the top, still cheery.  
Brave young men with all to lose  
who would go, if they could choose.*

*Three yards gained, three yards lost  
the tiresome journey at any cost.  
Marching to and marching fro  
seems we had nowhere to go.*

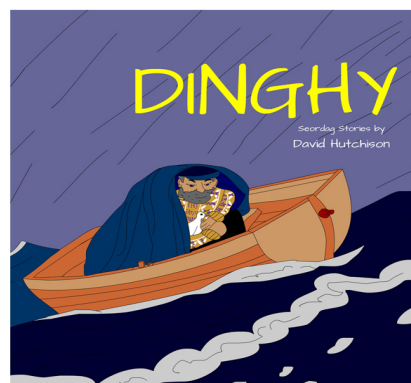
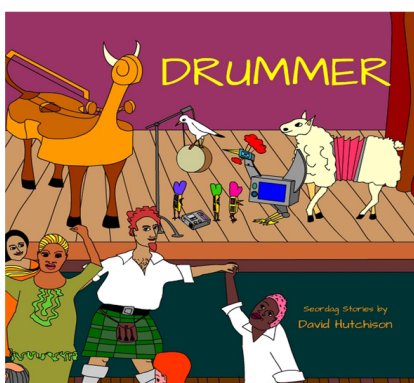
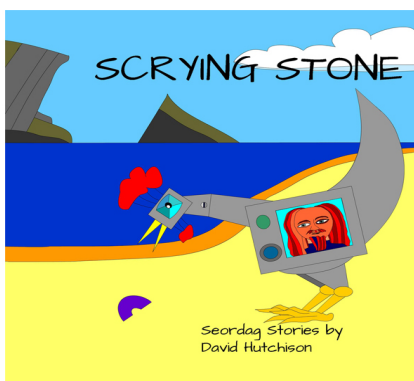
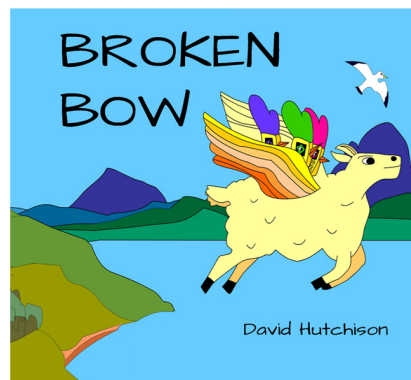
*Those who died, forever young  
with no more future, the suffering gone,  
for tiresome soldiers still the fight  
the morning noon, the day, the night.*

*The sun rises bright on a morning dew  
more friends gone, comrades few  
but then the bullets still they come  
and still we fight 'til we are none.*





# SEORDAG STORIES BY DAVID HUTCHISON



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