

The UnUsual Suspects

Just to keep the fun going I have kept the list of who wrote what until the end so that you guess for yourself who wrote what

Fit the First	Jim Mallory
Fit the Second	Seamus McKenna
Fit the Third	Colin Tate
Fit the Fourth	Michelle
Fit the Fifth	Joe Nolan
Fit the Sixth	Mark McCann
Fit the Seventh	Tommy Ferguson
Fit the Eighth	Eugene Doherty

Round Robins originated as a way of complaining about working conditions where the signees would put their names in a circle so that no one person could be singled out. Here though we point the finger at Jim, as the source of all this mayhem and unintentional insights into the viewpoints of various Monico denizens.

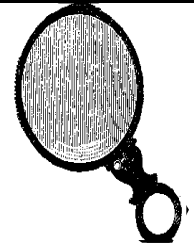
It was a long six months waiting for it but I think it was worth it Right so who's for another?

eugene
May 1997

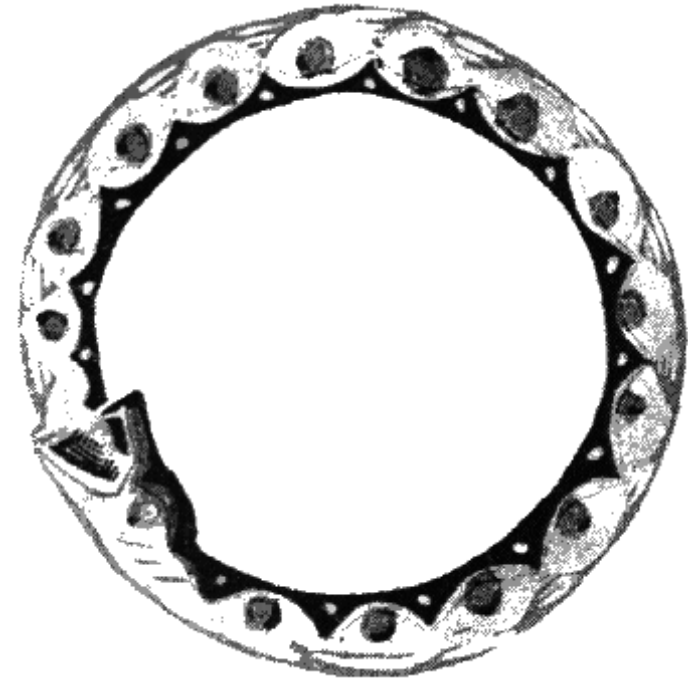
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The Monocle



First Special Collector's Edition



Naked Came The Alien

They said it couldn't happen, that some things were not meant to be, but here it is, the first Monico Round Robin, based on an idea by Jim "Never Again" Mallory

Naked Came the Alien

Fit The First

The hall light was out. 'The bloody light is nearly always out', cursed the tallish and slightly desperate looking man feeling his way along the walls with the palm of one hand, the other clutching a bag with a six-pack of Budweiser and a large sack of tortilla chips. He stepped cautiously from one step to another, not from fear of slipping but in a continual battle with his overactive imagination. There was absolutely no reason to believe that his hand would reach out for a slippery tentacle or prehensile jaw but an adolescence fed on a steady diet of juvenile horror films and monster mags had left him horribly vulnerable to his own masochistic desire to scare the shit out himself. 'O.K., Just one flight more and I will have passed the ghoulie barrier', he mused to himself.

Arriving at the door of his flat, he began the slow fumble through each key trying to find the one that fitted. Seven keys and what seemed like a hundred tries later, he finally got one to stay in and turn. The door slid open and he reached for the wall switch.

'Fuck'in shit!'. No light here either. 'Where's the emergency candle? Do I have an emergency

candle? Do I even have a match to light it with? OK, first things first: navigate to the kitchen, find some paper and light it from the stove and then see if there was anything that worked.'

He began moving toward the kitchen, eyes illogically shut (after all it was dark anyway), again sliding from one piece of furniture to another, when the glare of an electric torch suddenly played on his face and his eyes popped open, shaken in suprise.

'Stay still, Dr. Ferguson, and I promise you that absolutely no harm will come to you', spoke an obviously nervous voice coming from the direction of his easy chair.

'What the fuck!', the young man began to remark when he was quickly interrupted by the same voice, clearly more agitated.

'Shut up and listen and do exactly as I tell you. Everything I am saying is for your own good and you will just have to believe me. Now just sit right over there', and the light of the torch directed him to a chair.

Thomas Ferguson moved swiftly for the chair. After all , it had been one hell of a week. He had failed his tenure review, his social life was in free fall, and he was apparently going to spend his Friday evening with a pack of beer, tortilla chips, and some nutter with an electric torch. He settled down, still averting his eyes from the light of the torch and feeling mighty vulnerable and sorry for himself.

particles scatter in a twinkling shower of blue sparks and cheap special effects. There was a deathly silence broken only here and there by a choked back gulp. For one minute, then two there was no sound in the tiny room and then with a roar the crew erupted in a cacophony of laughter

"Blonde masseurs and barmaids!"

"Full grant and cheap beer!"

"Beer and totty!"

"Truly Mark, you are the prime Talespinner"

"You mean the prime Bull-shitter"

"Right lads, get the Guinness tap back on and lets get the pints pulled" They all looked one another with a growing fear.

"You did get it from him didn't you"

"I thought you did"

"Oh no, we are doomed"

Mark smiled and drew it from his pocket. "I told him it would interfere with the temporal chronoton flux balance of the TransMat™ when he transferred"

"And would it?"

"Buggered if I know"

Then the youngest member of the TASH crew piped up, "But won't Tommy be pissed off when he discovers what we've done?" "Well he might if we hadn't bought a dodgy secondhand TransMat™ from Joe Kavanagh's that wipes your memory when you use it. Now Mr Nolan did you get that tachyon particle out of the Bheer engines yet?"

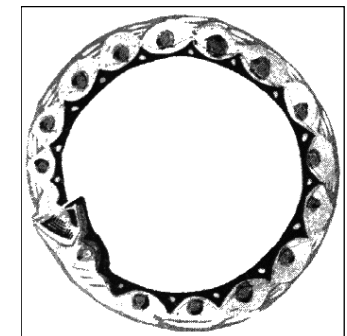
"No, but I have put the fuses back" And with that the crew all fell about

in paroxysms of laughter as Joe replaced the fuses he had earlier removed from the Bheer engines

Meanwhile down on the blue globe below Tommy awoke from his dis- and re-corporation with a pounding headache, dry raw throat and the realisation that he was confined within a coffin sized box. An icy sensation ran through his veins as it came to him that this must have been the ultimate hangover and now he was going to spend eternity suffering it. As the fear rose within him, he started to panic. He had to get out and he began pounding feebly on the wooden walls that surrounded him.

One of these suddenly gave way and he tumbled to the ground out of the cupboard that he'd been TransMatted to, and into a dark hallway.

"How the hell did I get in there, where the hell am I, why did I drink too much last night, why am I dressed like a dork, and why am I talking to myself? Well after this it should be a quiet night..."



destiny!"

At this moment Mark 1, the one they called the TaleSpinner stepped out of the throng and said "But Tommy a stray tachyon particle has damaged the main warp core plasma shunt containment vessel field and we've had to take the engines offline for a server upgrade"

"Then Earth is doomed"

"Well no. There is another way to defeat the KippleMeisters"

"We got a message on the subether, transcom, hyperspace, cybernet message thingy"

"A message from thingy what is it?"

"Intelligence reports suggest that they have infiltrated an advance party of agents onto Earth as blonde barmaids and masseurs. If we can neutralise them or better yet win them over to our side we could stop the invasion in its tracks without violence"

"Hmmm, make Love not War, I like it, but who could undertake this arduous mission?"

"Well the computer psych-profile suggests that there is only one man on the ship for the job, and that's you!"

He hesitated for only a moment , then set his jaw firm and said "I'll do it"

"There isn't time to lose" said Mark, "it will be necessary for you to go deep, deep cover and we must do some minor brain surgery"

"What!?"

"First we must remove your satorial taste lobes "

"Shit no"

"...and your inhibition centres"

"Haven't used those in years anyway"

"...and all your money"

"What the hell do you want me to be, a monk"

"no, a student"

"You have to be kidding, you're never getting me back into that gig"

"There'll be a full grant, housing benefit plus cheap beer and totty in it for you"

"Oh well, that's different, sign me up!"

Swiftly the crew stripped hm of his material possessions and forced into an ill-fitting anorak and bobble hat. There was something about the hat that made him look very familiar, that gave hm a resemblance to someone else, but the crew couldn't quite place it, all they knew was that it gave them a deep seated sense of unease.

Mallory handed him an emergency supply of Tortillas and beer and a small lead container with a biohazard flash on it. "Blue cheese dip, only use it if you really have to. Now hurry, there isn't time to lose" as he hurried him to the TransMat™ chamber.

"This beer and totty better be worth" said Tommy, as he was bathed in the eerie glow of the TransMat™ and spun by fantastical and quite unbelievable sciences to the spinning blue globe below

The crew watched his

'Just maybe, all of this isn't really happening', he considered hopefully.

The voice began again: 'Believe me, I have never done anything like this in my life. Until two weeks ago I would never have thought of doing anything like this. And I would feel just as pissed off as you must feel. I am not insane nor am I a criminal. But this is how it's gotta be. Now you've got to just sit there and listen to me for a few minutes and you'll understand. Or, at least, you'll understand as much as I do.'

'What in the hell are you talking about?' whined Ferguson.

'I'm talking about the biggest thing in your crummy little life, so just shut up for a minute. You've got to understand that for some reason you've been chosen.'

'Chosen? Chosen for what?'

'Not 'for what' but 'by what?'

Just move your eyes very, very slowly to your right and follow the light of my torch. '

The spot of light moved slowly along the wall in a circle, passed the chaotic bookcase, the blind television, a digital clock that told him the electricity was not entirely out. The light then slowed as it moved toward the window overlooking the street, and he heard the 'voice' holding its breath as the light began to rise steadily toward the ceiling.

'I think it's time for introductions, Dr Ferguson.'

Fit The Second

'You want to introduce me to the

street light?' Ferguson said not quite sure what he was meant to see. He could hear a sharp intake of breath from across the room.

'Beyond the light. There in the sky, can't you see it?' hissed the voice. There was enough impatience and frustration in that reply to frighten Ferguson into following the beam of the light. It played across the window, obviously trying to point to something. Ferguson strained his eyes. He was about to come back with a carefully thought out quip when a bead of sweat that had gathered on his temple became a drop that ran into his eye. He tried to blink the sting out of his eye. That's when he saw it. Not very clearly at first, just a suspicion of something in the corona of the orange glow of the light. He tried to look directly at it but it disappeared.

'Peripheral vision, Dr. That is the key. Look past the light and you'll see it much clearer.'

Ferguson stared at the advertising hording on the opposite side of the street. It was like one of those tacky 3-D pictures, just when he was about to give up it came into focus. It was hanging there suspended in midair, illuminated by the torchlight, a metallic hexagonal cylinder.

He moved to the window to get a better look. 'What is it?' he said over his shoulder. If there was a reply he didn't hear it as the cylinder drifted closer to the glass. It appeared to be about 10 inches long and maybe three in diameter.

I don't like to lower the diffusion shield for too long, but it was important that you see it for yourself. Then maybe you might believe what I am going to tell you' the voice told him. It had moved over to the door. The main room light came on momentarily blinding Ferguson. 'If you had turned on the light there was no way I could have shown you that probe'. He looked out the window for the probe but it had vanished. Ferguson turned to face the stranger who had invaded his home. He was a young man, 25 max, tall, lean and by the look of him on the verge of collapse through nervous exhaustion. There was a heavy growth of beard on his face and his clothes were badly crumpled. His face was a sickly pallid colour with two dark eyes underneath an untidy mop of lank brown hair. Ferguson became aware of the sweet smell of body odour.

'My name is Brian Clarke. I have been in this time band for six days now and I don't have much time left before I must return to my own time. Time has a way of forcing things back to the way they should be. I'm not due to be born for another sixty years so it wants to eliminate me from this time frame. That probe is my protection from the ravages of time. Even with its assistance I have less than a day at my disposal.' A hand waved away the beginnings of a question.

'It is vital that you listen very carefully. Do you have a passport?'

Six months later Ferguson stepped off a plane in Canada. His travel arrangements had been changed several times to prevent his adversaries from discovering his true intent. He walked through the arrivals lounge carrying his baggage. Outside he looked around for his contact. A small dark haired woman approached him, hand extended, 'Dr Ferguson?'

'Yes,' he smiled, 'call me Tom.'

Fit the Third

The sun shone down on the two of them as they made their way from the airport terminal to the car. The implant that had been inserted all those months ago began to heat up under his scalp. He could still remember the warning Brian gave him concerning temperature. He quickly put on his Guinness baseball cap.

The woman hadn't given her name, and from her silence had no intention. Tom cursed himself for his familiarity.

The car was an old Nissan Cherry, driven by a tall man in a bandanna wearing a pair of sunglasses. He smiled warmly at Tom, and helped him put his hold-all in the boot. The woman got in the front passenger seat, casually looking at the other people who had disembarked being picked off by the mauling taxis. As soon as he and the driver got in, they sped off.

"This is my first time in

sometimes I wondered about these guys, what did that man Mallory really think was going on with the he Tashers? Some light hearted games and tom foolery?
"Well the thrusters are down to 30%, that last hyper curve we took was a close one and the drives are just about working. Nolan says the hull's intact though there are doubts after the last plate metal overhaul he did. You know the Bass thing... But apart from that we are a disaster. Two weeks in dry dock and we'll be fine..."

Bass. What was that... Ha, Guinness, conspiracies and bad Canadian beer. "NO time for that Mallory, to the cockpit, battle stations and red alert and all hands to the gib, Mallory we have a Universe, or two, to save."

"Right oh captain." Men started to run everywhere, bumping into bulkheads as they went. Slowly but surely, through the awful din of Battle stations a low thrum could be felt from the floor as the engines got under away. And if you listened really carefully, you could just hear Nolan say:

"Oh no, not another Universe saving. This is not in my contract, I'm going to my Union rep. Who is my union rep, Mallory?"

"You don't want to know..."

"Onwards men, I have a cunning plan..."

Fit The Eighth

And cunning indeed was the plan he

laid before them, full of sound and fury. And as he told them all that had already happened and more besides, Tommy was like a man possessed, he gave the sort of performance that lead men to war, that topple governments, that start off SF conventions. When he had finished he looked around at the crew who had hung on his every word, open mouthed and goggle-eyed.

"Well, what do you think men?"

Finally Mallory spoke up

"There's just one tiny teeny, little detail that worries us" he drawled in his precise, clipped German accent "Yes?"

"You're out of your frigging mind!" "You want us to believe that there is a massive invisible war fleet of the KippleMeisters from Aldebaran IV parked at Pluto and waiting to swoop upon the Earth, and that in order to stop them we have to attack head on in a futile gesture of defiance."

"Yup that's about the size of it"

"I'm afraid we can't let you do that" said the crew advancing as one body.

Having anticipated trouble with the always grumbling, mutinous crew, Tommy opened his jacket and drew out his secret weapon

The crew recoiled in horror.

"He has the Guinness tap!!"

"Yes my beauties, I have the tap and without you will wither and sober up within hours. So let's have no more talk of mutiny. Now fire up the engines, we have a date with

part of it; as were the Illuminati, and the Orange Order, the Knights Templar, Eugene Doherty, Socrates, Kropotkin, Green Shield Stamps, the Rand Corporation, Astounding Stories magazine, and oh, not forgetting the ancient Sumar civilisation, the Guinness Brewing company and the Sendero Luminoso of Peru played their part too. As did the Arsenal back four. I could go on but we do have the Ultimate Reality to save in the next half hour."

She looked at her watch which, Tommy noticed with a shock, had a tiny figure of himself on its face telling the time. It wore a bobble hat and marked of the minutes with a walking stick.

"What do you want me to do?" Tommy felt somewhat burdened by this new responsibility that was being forced on him. After all, he had enough trouble keeping up with his mortgage repayments without this added stress.

"Well, we have a cunning plan for just this scenario and it involves travelling back in time with Jim Mallory and the Tashers. But first things first do you have an extra nipple we could borrow?"

Fit The Seventh

"As it happens, er, yes, I do...."

"Ah good, they weren't lying. sometimes these higher order beings like to joke about, y'know? Ronald Reagan, now there was a good one, although I particularly liked Black Friday myself. Anyway..." I felt a

sharp stabbing pain in my chest. Was I having a heart attack? "...I'll just take this and we can be on our way."

She now held my third nipple in my hand, and I felt a quickly healing scar form on my chest. "On our way where? And what happened to your voice, it's American again, and your hair..."

"Petty details, Tommy, though you're right, there does seem to be an awful lot jumbled up in there. Hmmm, probably something to do with the panology of interest theory. Anyway, here comes the gate, or is it door these days? I can never remember. That Can-D we put straight into your heart was modified, from information from your nipple, and you should see..."

I could see nothing as the images all around me faded. "And you should stop hearing..." Her voice trailed off, as the fuzziness grew to blackness and the distant echo of her voice was like wind blowing through the reality of mind. Far too easily, I thought, there should be more resistance to that wind.

"Tommy! Thank God you're back? Are you okay?" I was back on the ship, with my loyal crew, The Tashers. "Damage report, Mallory?"

"Well it looks like you finally lost your third nipple, but apart from that you just looked stoned as usual..."

"Not me you idiot, the ship! What is the damage to the ship?"

Canada", he ventured helpfully, "I - "

The windows of the car turned opaque, plunging them into darkness. Tom began panicking, stopping only when he realised that neither the woman or the man that he was travelling with seemed all that concerned.

Between the two front seats, a tiny panel the size of a fag packet glowed dimly, with ornate red symbols flickering briefly before disappearing one by one. He leaned over to get a better view. By the time there were five red symbols left, Tom had become suitably tense.

It was the woman who spoke. Stilted, somewhat bored.

"We are sorry for the inconvenience this may cause." As soon as the last red symbol disappeared, a small iris opening appeared in the middle of the panel. From within came a bright light that spilled out into the car interior, and onto Tom's face. A faint smell of rotten meat was in the air. After that, there was a faint scuttling noise and then it emerged.

Where normal creatures would have a shell, carapace or layer of hard skin to protect it from the environment, this had none. Roughly the size of a cockroach, it looked like a pulpy lump of flesh that had been torn out of some misfortunate's body and given life. It had a head from which a small shiny barb waved slowly from side to side, either by momentum from the car or under guidance of

whatever intelligence it held. Its legs were thin and jointed, like needles.

As it began to crawl out of its confines, it left a syrupy red trail behind.

"Aaaaaah!" Tom threw himself on the back seat. The thing turned to face him full on. The car began to pick up speed. Tom made a grab for the door handle.

There was a bright flash of light. His hand fell by his side. When he tried to move, he found he couldn't. He sat helplessly as it poised itself to jump, landing on his knee, its legs embedding themselves to gain traction.

Oh no oh no, please God no...

It began to climb rapidly. Cold needle-pricks on his chest, his neck. As the first leg lightly brushed his lips the car turned a corner, causing it to pause briefly before entering his mouth, the legs digging deep into his tounge as it made its way inside. There was pain. He wanted to cry, to scream out. Blood welled up and poured out of his mouth as it began cutting.

He could taste cherries.

The woman in front turned round to face him. His chest heaved involuntarily. The last thing he saw before the pain became too much to bear was a smile.

\\Warm dark\\

\\Protein\\

\\Link implant\\

\\Respond\\

[...]

\\Respond\\

[...]

\\Shunt energy\\

Link Established

\\Diagnostic\\

Blurred images, noise.

"He's coming round. How long until we leave?"

"We jumps in thirty minutes. Full mobility will be restored by then.

We need to find him some new clothes, the Tylliax ruined his own." A dining room. Three people... The woman in the car...

"Dr Ferguson, can you hear me?"

It was a man. Full beard, slightly red-faced. Mustard shirt.

"My name is Eugene Doherty. I must apologise for your rude introduction to my Tylliaxian colleague, but time is short. Would you like a glass of water?"

"Please, you - fuck!" Tom rasped. His head spun.

"Dear dear. All you try to

do is help someone... Biccie? I have some nice hazelnut crunches in the kitchen."

Tom sat up, instantly regretting that he had. He reached out for support. Hands held him.

"Tom, welcome to TASH Canada."

The TASH organization was a recently formed counter-insurgency, pro-revolution, third-faction outfit dedicated to "the word". This is where Brian wanted him to go. To this crack unit of free thinkers.

"That thing!" He spat, recalling in revulsion what had entered his body.

"Tickles a bit, doesn't it? I met the Tylliaxians at a dinner party. I've been told I'm an excellent host.

Here, drink your water." He tipped the glass to his lips. Tom savoured it. As he drank, Eugene continued his introductions.

"The man in the bandana is Mallory." Mallory gave a small wave.

"Pleased to meet you Tom."

Tom nodded in return. Call it racial stereotype, but he had assumed that all Germans would be blonde.

"We never call the woman by her real name, in case her spirit ninja's take offence. Call her Madame X." Madame X smiled and nodded to Tom. Eugene rolled his eyes while Madame X spun hers.

"What did you do to me?" It was Mallory who answered.

"The Tylliaxians are a rather unknown race of creatures. Parasitic in nature, they gather nutrients from within us, and allow us greater

another worthless earthling?"

She snapped her fingers and Tommy noticed that her appearance had changed subtly. Her voice took on a more soothing Scottish lilt. She was now wearing the jersey colours of an Italian football team. For the next few moments she crunched at her crackers apparently lost in thought.

"Right, now, where was I?... Oh, yes... natural order threatened... I suppose I'd be telling you nothing you didn't already suspect if I said to you that this whole thing is part of some horribly overwrought conspiracy?"

Tommy punched his fist into his hand. "I knew it! I always had a feeling that something was going on. That I was part of a vast eldritch scheme..."

"Yes, yes," she interrupted hurriedly. "Well, don't look quite so smug. We've been beaming gigahertz signals at your frontal lobes for quite a while now it was only a matter of time before you got the message. To tell the truth, we were a bit surprised it took you so long..."

"Basically, two groups of higher dimensional beings are fighting for control of reality. This spacetime continuum thingy that you humans are so attached to is nothing more than a smoke screen to throw the other lot off the scent." "I don't understand," Tommy said helplessly.

"No, I didn't think you would somehow. To put it in terms your

mammalian thought processes would comprehend, we are fooling our opponents into thinking we are playing draughts when in fact we are playing chess. It really is all rather clever."

"And you are winning?" The Alien looked pained for a moment. "Well, not quite. Things have got a little bit muddled. These conspiracies have a habit of getting out of control and generating their own conspiracies."

"What have the Daleks got to do with all of this?" asked Tommy, desperate to keep on top of the situation.

"Not much really. Just another piece in an overly complex puzzle..."

"...or chess game."

"...or chess game indeed. In fact one could say that all of human history has been constructed in such a way that this very meeting could take place. One could argue that you, Tommy, are the end product of all human evolution.... No, hold on, that's a bit of an understatement. Dont let this go to your head but you are in fact the final product of all of this universe's evolution."

It took a few seconds for the gravity of this statement to sink in but Tommy began to perceive the truthfulness behind what the Alien was saying. He always knew he was different from those about him. A God amongst mortal men.

The Alien was warming to her subject. "It's all connected you know. The Mason were of course

have prepared you for them. Really, you are most inconsiderate..."

A small American woman now stood in front of him. She pushed her a lock of long blond hair from her face and indicated to Tommy that she wanted him to sit down. Nervous but no longer surprised at anything that was happening to him, he slowly sat himself down on the bright green floral sofa which had appeared at the same moment as the woman.

"You look strangely familiar..." he said, his voice sluggish.

The woman waved her hand impatiently. "I'm pulling some images from your mind to help me communicate with you. Try to ignore it and everything will go along swimmingly."

She handed him a bowl of tasty looking Greek yoghurt and a plate of tortillas. "Care for a dip?"

Fighting a powerful primeval urge to eat, Tommy sat the tempting snack aside.

"No thanks. I now know you've put something in that yoghurt, haven't you?"

Looking bored the American alien shrugged her shoulders. "There's no reason now why I shouldn't tell you, I suppose. The gaff is, as we say, well and truly blown. Yes, we employed one of our many stooges, one Eugene Doherty, to impregnate your regular yoghurt supply with ketamin. We had to keep your reality awareness levels low until the time was right."

Tommy held up his hand. "Before you go on please tell me where the hell I am?"

The featureless landscape about him seemed to stretch on forever. The sheer blandness of it seemed to be causing his retinas to produce their own swirling patterns in a vain attempt to add something of interest to his visual field.

"Well, it's not Canada if that's what you're thinking," she told him, smiling politely. "I'm glad to say it's much more mundane than that."

Waving her arms about her she explained. "What your are now looking at is outside of the spacetime continuum. Think of it as the basement of the various universes."

Tommy balked. "Universes! you mean there is more than one?"

The Alien sighed. "It's a long story and I really don't want to get bogged down in the detail right now. Let's us just say that this place is the platonic building base for all of the higher realities. (Although why it had to be this ghastly beige colour, I really dont know...) All you really need to know at this point is that the natural order of reality is threatened from Without and you're the only person who can do anything about it."

Tommy digested this information with great difficulty. His brain spun feverishly as it was wont to do on such occasions.

"Me?"

"Well, do you think we would go to all this bother if you were just

tollarence to pain, alcohol and also provide us with advice."

"Wha-?"

//Hello Tom//

The glass fell, broke on the floor. Eugene tssked and began picking up the shards.

//No worry. Laxs help you. Aid jump. Control implant//

Madame X giggled.

"In ten years the last Tylliaxians will die out. They allow us to control the implants," Eugene tapped his head. There was a barely discernable change in tone where he rapped the section containing the time-travel machinery, "Without them, we would have to spend our lives living in fridges."

"Why didn't Brian travel back and collect Tylliaxians to allow him to-"

//Only interact with protein of own time//

This was way weird.

"It takes time to get used to it."

Mallory opened the door. "It can be a traumatic experience," he said as he headed out. Madame X giggled.

"We will get some fresh clothes from your bag, and then we will be ready to jump to -"

"Why, why me Eugene? Why did Brian want me?"

"Ah. You already know that. Brian told us all." Eugene paused,

index finger pointing up into the air. "We are the safest choices in this time-jump attempt. Our deaths will have the most neglible effect on our time-stream. If we fail in our mission, then the world will keep on track without serious alteration. If we succeed, well then..." he opened his hands to Tom.

It had been six months since Brian had visited him, the last member of the group that were about to jump. The future mechanincs that Brian injected into his skull were necessary - the Tylliaxian called Laxs was necessary to keep it under control. And Tom was necessary because he was neglible. Mallory entered carrying a bag with some of Tom's clothes.

Fate conspires against people. You make all the right choices, lead a life that allows you to sleep with a clear conscience, allows you to wake normally. Regardless of your future plans, your life is not your own. You are a mere ripple, not the wave you had anticipated. To be neglible and to know fate will not, will never single you out... Tom shook his head.

Brian had given him, had given all of them a chance. "Tom, in sixty years the Earth's warring factions have launched a major offensive against the Revel, our closest neighbours. The Revel landed on Earth and befriended us ten years beforehand after a chance encounter, and they allowed us access to their technology and free

use of their worlds as bases. "They will not survive the attack. They do not even understand the need for a war machine, and have trouble comprehending its use. Ten of our most powerful ships will enter their sector of space and subjugate the planets, allowing for "easier expansion". The Revel will die."

Brian had spoken to him, told him about how the Revel homeworld, the people that lived there, how Earth had feared what had seemed like a technologically superior race, but upon discovering that the Revels were unfamiliar with the basic human concepts of war or need, found the temptation to invade greatly increased. In the two hours that Brian sat with him, outlining a plan to stop the attack from ever occurring Tom had found a new purpose in his life.

Mallory gave him his bag. He left again, with Eugene and Madame X in tow. Tom put on fresh clothes, smartened himself up.

To travel into the future, to stop the Revel from making contact with Earth. To make a difference to both races.

He straightened his glasses. It was time to make waves.

Fit The Fourth

Doherty introduced Tom to other members of TASH, that would be assisting them in their quest to stop the interstellar war. The first person he introduced was a

wise-looking man, older than the other members of TASH, this man's face carried a benevolent smile and radiated experience.

"Tom...Meet our mentor.. His title is: No-Laahn. This man is one of our founder members and he is deeply committed to the cause of "the word". The power of "the word" is strong within him, and he leads us well by his faultless example." Doherty kicked Tom in the shins. "Make obeisance Tom."

Tom gave a wry self-conscious grin. "erm...Howya Great One" he managed.

Doherty introduced the next member of the group. It was a man who was carrying a clipboard; laptop and sports carry-all, with what looked like the handles of a cricket bat and a squash racquet sticking out of the top. The man was staring intently at Tom. The man held out his hand and engaged in a complicated hand-shaking ritual with Tom.

"Hiya. I'm Seamus. See ya don't know much about the hand-shake. Aye, that'd be cause you're not a full member of TASH. Don't worry Tom we'll get ya sorted out."

The man rubbed his hands together energetically and said: "Can't wait to start this trip - the bad guys haven't a mission against us: we'll pan them, right?" "erm...right .." Tom managed. Privately he despaired of ever learning to master this hand-shaking business.

shaking his head and saying "Shit! Shit! We're up to our necks in effing shit. What the hell do we do now?"

Fit The Sixth

"What indeed do we do now?" A strange unknown voice pierced Tommy's brain like a scalpel lancing a suppurating boil. He spun around to try and find the source of this inhuman whine but there was no one behind him. Instead the nearest bulkhead seemed briefly to fade before his eyes. Simultaneously, the motley dishevelled bunch who made up the once proud Tashers also seemed to shimmer and blur; their faces weirdly distorted. Tommy rubbed his eyes, momentarily assuming that his vision was failing him, but when he looked again the scene before him remained frighteningly uncertain - almost transparent. Were those stars he could see clearly through the previously solid deck floor? Even the burnt-out Dalek casing was becoming less distinct. His hearing too seemed to be affected the cries of his comrades had faded to a low wail, like the sound of crashing waves on a distant beach.

His disorientation now total, Tommy staggered blindly along the increasingly insubstantial deck. The comforting weight of his Prilon Blaster now felt like a plastic toy in his hand. He tossed it angrily aside.

"I thought this might happen," the disembodied voice

sighed. "Chew-Z yoghurt seems to be least efficient at times of stress. Is your nose bleeding?"

The intensity of the voice almost made Tommy vomit. He touched his hand to his nose and was not surprised to find blood on his finger tips. He wiped them on the sleeve of his uniform and in passing noticed that the gold braid of the Federation Star Corp. was now nothing more than cheap yellow paper.

When he looked up again every object in his field of view had gone- the Tashers, the Dalek, even the mighty vessel which until that moment had been hurtling him and his comrades at light speed through the black abyss of space. Instead he was now standing on a vast featureless Euclidean plane. There was no sun in the sky yet everywhere seemed cast in a warm uniform glow. His body created no shadow. The only other object apart from himself that he could make out was what seemed to be a piece of paper lying at the spot where the Dalek once stood.

He stooped to pick the paper up and found it had a sentence written on it in English - 'This is a Dalek' It was written in a neat childish hand. He put the paper in his pocket.

"It would all have been so much simpler if you had kept taking your regular supply of yoghurt these reality leakages wouldn't have occurred quite so soon and we could

as the dip goo evaporated. There was a lurid orange glare and a blue fireball zipped down the corridor to nova into a sunbright glare. There was the blast of an explosion, and glass and debris cascaded. There were several satellite sonic blasts, the crash of falling masonry, and an air wall lashed back towards Tom, showering the now slowly revolving Dalek with dust and fragments. "Gnur-emm-adr-ettog" it howled and fired its beam weapon in the direction from which it had first come. It was not a single snapshot, but a long roaring continuous beam. It was causing havoc. Screams came from some distance. Fireballs were erupting from several points along the beams's flight. Rubble was showering down. Tom, even protected by the metal door frame, gasped with at the heat of the beam as it passed him only an arm's length away.

The beam was dimming and guttering. It was the death knell for the Mandarin Dalek. There was the roar of earthing electric power. A white glow flared inside the the truncated cone that was the Dalek's casing, which flared orange, turned to slag and ran to the metal floor. There was a final ripping of metal and a minor blast which threw the Dalek remnant into the air to crash back to the floor. Tom gasped for air, mopped the sweat from his stinging face and ran out to see how the TASH One team was doing. Eugene, the Big Ed, was on his back on the floor, groaning as if his

Endoplasmic Reticulum had suffered a puncture. Others were struggling aloft as if they had survived a bad trip, and a couple were bleeding from various visible places, but not yet FUBAR. The place did resemble a gun and rifle club Tom thought, after a no warning bomb.

Even as Tom looked, there was a zinging in the air. His nape hair rose to an electrical tingling as a deep green shadow enveloped the wide circular metal room. There came gasps and yelps of pain as Madam X and the rest of TASH Two team literally dropped in. The girls were here! A bit travel sick, and slightly disheveled! Having been fallen upon, a few of Team One were somewhat the worse for wear.

Mark Lamki was either quoting from the Koran or cursing in Arabic. Neil Simpson was stroking his beard free of glass shards and muttering to himself. Seamus was using his clipboard as a fan and calling "Can you hear me, Mark, Wake up old chap! No-Laahn was struggling to his feet and brushing dust from his hair and coat. He. looking around, muttered "Dear, dear me", "It seems we have have had more than one force with us upon our journey" Mallory, hand on chin, was casting glances about him, "I don't dig this", he said, "It was not in our forward briefings- any of it!" Peter Dunn, shaking himself like a dog, face scraped and bleeding from flying glass shards was vehemently

Madame X insisted that the group commune on a spiritual level with her ninja guides to ask for their help and guidance. She asked the members of the group to join hands, which caused Tom no end of anxiety, and to think of the calming colour green.

"Think of green fields and of herds of gentle, content cattle roaming over these fields." Madame X chanted, with her eyes closed.

She opened one eye, looked at the other members of the group and said:

"Don't make the picture too clear in your mind's eye, cause it could offend the ninja spirit guides. We should never try to pin them down to any one astral location" She hastily re-closed her eyes "Shall I pop on some calming background music to help us get into the mood?" Inquired Doherty solicitously "NO! ! ! !" cried the members of the circle. "NO! ! ! !...ahemI meanah....don't bother" cried Madame X. "sometimes music can be enervating rather than helpful to meditation."

Following ten minutes of deep concentration the group broke the circle, Madame X remained some minutes further in personal conversation with the ethereal. Tom, who had felt nothing during this spiritual communion, inwardly doubting the depth of his psychic sensitivity, watched enviously as the members of TASH all winked and

smiled significantly to each other.

The TASH group members gathered together for one final meal together in their timeline, as Mallory put it: who knew when they would next get the chance to eat and they had to keep up their strength for the trying times ahead. Tom thought the choice of food rather peculiar, lots of peanuts, crisps, orange cordial and dips.

After the debris of their 'meal' had been cleared away the group assembled to the instructions of Seamus who decided they needed to perform a group embrace to build up morale and positive mental energy concerning the task ahead.

A rousing shout of "TASH - HOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!" they aerially clapped hands and that was it, Tom was on his way to complete his mission. Tom blanked out.

// implant engaged //

[z z z z z]

// time jumping //

Tom opened his eyes and groggily looked about him. From what he could discern he was in a room chiefly constructed from grey, serious-looking metal. Immediately, Tom felt intimidated, whoever had chosen to construct this room had meant business and severely naughty business at that.

He could hear the groans and

inquiries of the TASH people. He felt slightly better in knowing that he would not be alone in facing whatever shite lay ahead. He didn't think he had a realistic chance at stopping the travesty that Earth forces would commit against the Revel, but he felt committed to trying his ultimate best.

Tom saw that his fellow time jumpers had begun operations and were pulling various containers and other items out of their knapsacks. Tom conjectured that they must be setting up a base camp of some sorts from which to co-ordinate the mission. He decided to take another glance around the unfriendly room, to glean whatever information he could that might be of help to TASH's efforts.

When next he looked towards his travelling companions he was amazed to see them sitting in a circle eating what looked like packed lunches. Doherty had taken out a camera and was photographing the other members of the group while they affected funny faces. Tom couldn't quite grasp what was happening, didn't the situation call for immediate and drastic action? "What are you lot doing?" cried Tom in disbelief. "Eating, don't they do that where you come from Tom?" Mallory replied. "Just cause we have embarked on a galaxy-saving mission, doesn't mean we can't try and enjoy ourselves in the process. Loosen up."

Tom realised that these

people were either the coolest cucumbers he had ever met or they were the nuttiest fruit-cakes he had ever met. Either way he didn't care too much about that right at that moment, because what he saw coming through the doors at the other end of the gun-metal room blew what sanity and courage he had left right out of his ears.

Fit The Fifth

It was a Dalek! Not your usual type of soldier Dalek! Not the Imperial Dalek, but a Mandarin Dalek. Its dimpled outer casing displayed the Imperial Yellow Rosette with the blue dot centre. A second or third order Mandarin. Tom could not remember the rankings exactly, it was quite a while since his home place had driven out the first Dalek incursion, and he was only sixteen then, just old enough to be inducted into the homeguard on the local power station; and he had been very briefly part of the firefight which had disposed of the overstretched invasion forces' attempt to seize the power generator hall. He had fired just five clips, and had been able to claim a part kill. There had since been no word from any source of any renewed Dalek activity in any sector of this quadrant. Now it appeared the assault was being renewed, and here he was, and the TASHERs with him, right up at the sharp end, and totally without warning, and totally unprepared! Of that he was certain.

His mind was in hyperdrive. He now realised how clever they had been. How they had injected a sedative into the Terran culture via television. He had been so taken aback when Doherty, one night at his North Parade Pad had shown him an episode from a Doctor Who, represented as a Time Lord, and in reality a Bent Black Path Illuminati, who, somehow, had been able to manouver some scriptwriter into producing a course of such sedative material and getting it on the air to be a smoke screen, a whitewash, a palliative presentation designed to lull these poor chaps into a low reaction state at the sight of a Dalek shape. It had been a terrible shock at the time, but some psychic interference regarding a compromise of his mission prevented him from informing Eugene, at last for the time being.

Still thinking in hyperdrive he knew that this was now very, very different. Something needed doing - and fast - if they were to survive, and it was now beyond question that not only Eugene, but all the rest of them would have to learn he realities, and face up to them. Interstellar war was more dangerous than they thought, down there, scoffing sandwiches, beer and dip. Trouble was, he needed a usable weapon, and not much available was of use. The Mandarin Dalek was approaching slowly, but its antenna and beam weapon were tracking backwards at something beyond the corridor doors, and the blue dotted

thing was burbling electronically back down the dark shadowed corridor "Kaaay-patt-patt therg-slob-zoza gurr-rettog-tifn zumm-tifnzimm" It was not aware of him yet. One of its key defence screens was down. Only this chance existed, it had to be taken.

His subconscious, faced with imminent extinction, was also in hyperdrive, so with one hand picking up his anorak and the other jabbing the plastic dip pack from a sports bag he was not aware of unzipping, Tom charged the Dalek. He flung the anorak over the dome, leaped on top of it, crushing the antenna with his weight. Whipping the top off the dip pack he jammed the goo container over the beam weapon's nozzle and twisted it down hard until the container split and goo covered his fingers. The Dalek began to spin, uttering gurgling noises. He could hear the internal alternators and dynamotors begin to whirl. This Dalek was caught totally off guard and not expecting offensive action from any direction, but this would not last for more than a few microseconds more. Tom rolled back to the doors and leaped up to stand in the lee of the wide metal door frame, hoping he could make himself thin enough to be undetected!

The Dalek was furious! How else could you describe it? It did not know where its attackers were, it had been attacked from behind. Slobbering viciously it spun and the beam weapon flared. Steam hissed