

Futures

In response to your reader

Local issues. By Gareth D. Jones

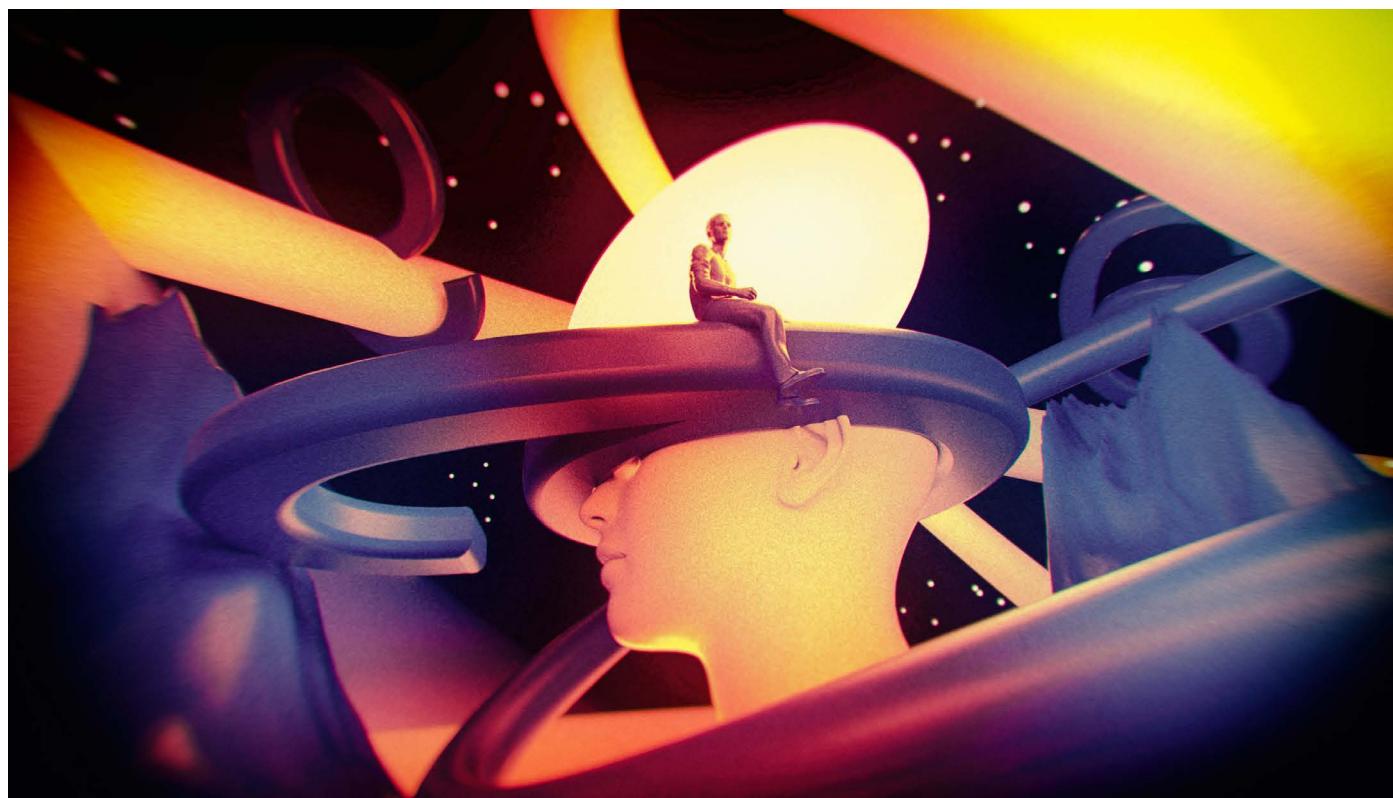


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader who claimed, in the 6 a.m. edition, that they have inexplicably grown overnight so that everything in their house seems smaller, I would contend that the reverse is true. I too have experienced this phenomenon and have concluded that it is my house, and everything in it, that is shrinking. I have not grown. I conclude this based on the fact that my copy of the *Proclaimer* that arrived this morning seemed to be the same size as normal in my hand, but seemed to take up a larger space than usual on the breakfast table.

Yours,
Puzzled

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader, Puzzled, who claimed in the 9 a.m. edition that his house was shrinking rather than that they themselves were growing, based on the relative size of their copy of the *Proclaimer*, have they considered that perhaps the size of the newspaper is,

in fact, what has changed. Perhaps the Editor can shed light on whether he routinely changes the size of various editions of this fine journal?

Yours,
Suspicious

Dear Editor,

In response to you reader, Suspicious, who, in the 12 noon edition, wondered whether the various editions of the *Proclaimer* were printed in different sizes, I say that he should perhaps pay attention to the font in which it is printed. It is well known that our local, six-issue-per-day paper has been printed using a mimeograph machine since the Isolation Event, and therefore cannot be scaled as was true on a word-processing software package. Comparing the various editions in my home from the past few days, I find the same number of lines per page in each edition. Therefore, as the text hasn't changed, neither has the paper size.

Yours,
QED

Dear Editor,

In response to your slightly smug reader, QED, who wrote of font sizes in the 3 p.m. edition, may I point out a fact he may have overlooked. If people, houses or furniture are randomly changing size, then maybe the mimeograph machine used to print this fine journal has changed size too?

Yours,
Speculative

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader, Speculative, who in the 6 p.m. edition postulated the changing size of the mimeograph machine, may I say, stop! Please! If we cannot rely on the *Proclaimer* to be the one constant in our lives, then what can we rely on? Plenty of strange things have happened in the Caer Valley since the Isolation Event, things that our very own *Caer Valley Proclaimer* has reported on faithfully. We don't know what is happening outside the valley, and we don't know if anyone

Futures

outside the valley knows what is happening herein, but let's not cause ourselves any more anxiety. Please!

Yours,
Pleading

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader, Pleading, who asked for calm in the 9 p.m. edition, I ask: why should we be calm? Items mysteriously changing size is the least of our worries. My neighbour has been digging a hole in her back garden for ten days straight. A suspicious squirrel has been stalking me. We only have electricity in the valley due to the solar panel farm and the wind turbines on the ridge, but I ask you: where does that wind blow from? There's nothing beyond the ridge! Cause ourselves anxiety? It's too late for that!

Yours,
Anxious!

Dear Editor,

In response to you reader, Anxious!, who asked in the 6 a.m. edition where the wind blows from, I further ask, where is the Sun shining from? If the sky above us is still our sky, which it seems to be, then why doesn't

the sunlight illuminate anything outside our valley? Where do the clouds go, and where does the rain come from? Why do the authorities not answer our questions? Admittedly, the mayor lost the ability to speak on the day of the Isolation Event, but surely somebody can tell us something?

Yours,
Inquisitive

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader, Inquisitive, who raised such profound questions in the 9 a.m. edition, I ask, why keep asking such questions? It seems to me that the act of questioning brings about yet more and more bizarre circumstances. This leads me to suspect that we are all the victims of a mass hallucination, or mass psychological experiment. Perhaps if we all act normal, things will go back to normal.

Regards,
Cautious

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader, Cautious, who suggested mass hallucinations in the 9 a.m. edition, I assume they did not live through the sixties. I was there and believe me, I can spot

a hallucination when I see one. The explanation for our circumstances lies very much in the realm of science; whether it be a quantum phenomenon, an alternative reality or something else, I couldn't yet say.

Yours,
Rational

Dear Editor,

In response to your reader, Rational, who suggested a scientific explanation in the 9 a.m. edition, I ask if he can also explain the time. The past three editions of the *Proclaimer* have all been the 9 a.m. edition. I have definitely been doing things between each edition arriving, yet it is still clearly 9 a.m.. The rest of the world outside of our valley has already disappeared. Is the rest of time disappearing too?

Yours,
Concerned

Gareth D. Jones is unofficially the second most widely translated science-fiction short-story author in the world, having been published in 31 languages. He lives in the United Kingdom where he writes stories and reviews, fuelled by copious amounts of tea.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

Gareth D. Jones reveals the inspiration behind *In response to your reader*.

My two eldest sons, Alex and Haydn, are also authors. They've each had a couple of their own stories published and we've written several collaborative stories between us. We started kicking around ideas for a shared setting in an isolated town where Weird Things Happen. We didn't come up with a reason why the town was isolated, but each idea one of us came up with, the other two would throw in references to their own ideas to tie them together. The town's newspaper ended up as a concept linking several stories together.

I've always enjoyed reading non-standard story formats and I've written several, taking the form of newspaper clippings, receipts, an instruction manual, diary entries and the like. I decided that letters to the editor would be a good way of highlighting several of the strange goings-on in the town. The background story developed as I wrote, but most of the strange things mentioned in the letters are references to other stories that, as yet, are still to be written...

