

## And So The Wheel Turns

By Bill Wolfe

“Heresy! Char-Less. That’s what they’ll call it!”

“But you don’t call it that, do you Pater? You’ve seen the trees buried in the ice. You’ve seen them!”

The old man looked away. Ashamed? “Yes, I have. But the ICE-Goddess is all I’ve ever known, son. Perhaps some will say that this is a trick of the Sun-Demon. He put those trees in place to test our faith. To make us doubt.”

There was a sharp jolt as the huge, wind-driven ice skimmer hit a rough patch, though neither of the men seemed to notice. They’d been on this ship for over a year, exploring the equator. The sailors and the Captain of the vessel had never failed in their duty to take them where they needed to go. And now they were heading home. To The Dome.

“And if we find more? What then?”

“What do you mean?”

“Pater, the whole reason we are on this voyage is because over the last thousand cycles, the temperatures outside The Dome have been rising. The ICE-Goddess Herself instructed us to track temperatures, and to explore our world once it was safe. Once more ice has melted, we may uncover vast tracks of land where it is obvious that this world has not always been frozen, that it once supported life without the assistance of the ICE-Goddess.”

“I am aware of the Heresy, young man. But I also know my Book. And in Genesis. . .”

“And lo, the World was Ice, and Ice was the World. And the ICE-Goddess spake into being, both man and woman. And She gave to them The Dome, so they may thrive. And in The Dome was warmth, and light and many trees, plants and fishes that they may eat.” The naturalist would have continued with his quoting, but for the impatient scowl on the good Pater’s face.

“The Book says quite clearly that this is not a so called, ‘Ice Age.’ You know that, Char-less. Our world is Ice, has always been Ice, and we were made by the ICE-Goddess to populate it, when we have been deemed fit, and may leave The Dome.”

“Pater, you have spoken to the ICE-Goddess, I have not. But I’ve read the manuals she prints for us to maintain The Dome. Surely you’ve heard her call herself the Integrated Computer Entity. The Book, for all its wisdom, was not written by Her. It was written by people like ourselves during the Dark Times, when Her Holy Interface was not functioning. It was the great Leonardi himself, who repaired it. She’s been accessible to us for over five thousand cycles, and yet my understanding is that She, Herself, denies The Book, in its entirety.”

“Her ways are not our ways, my child. We must have faith. And you would be well advised not to repeat idle gossip as to the nature of the pronouncements that the Church receives from the Holy Interface.”

“Yes Pater.”

There was an uncomfortable silence as the two men sipped hot tea. The wind howled outside and the sounds of sailors scurrying over the topdeck could be heard. The skimmer was the largest, most complex of its kind ever built. All by the direct instructions and plans printed off by the ICE-Goddess, Herself.

Finally, the younger man ventured the question that both men had been pondering since the first sign of trees beneath the ice was discovered.

“But Pater, what if we find evidence of prehistoric people living outside The Dome, once the ice recedes? How would such news be received? It may not be in our lifetimes, of course, but what if?”

“You come dangerously close to the Heretics’ point of view, boy. You should be careful. Careers have been shattered, for less.”

“Pater, the Heretics have been driven into hiding, but we both know they still exist. My fear is that they would seize upon our findings for their own purposes. Just because there were trees beneath the ice, doesn’t mean that the ICE-Goddess is merely a sophisticated machine, built by our ancestors who came to this world from a mythical paradise, called Earth. But they could use our findings to cast doubt. And if we—Goddess forbid—were to find old human settlements beneath the ice, I don’t know how we could counter their arguments.”

“The ICE-Goddess will provide, my child. She always has. She gives us warmth through the geothermals, regulates our temperature, the rain that falls from Her spouts, and even allows us the gift of marriage in order that enough children of the right mix are born to us, each generation. She molds our lives and determines what work we do for the good of our society. All life within The Dome comes from The ICE-Goddess. This question will not be beyond her.”

“But know that I share your fears, and I will discuss them with the Church Elders, when we return.”

“Thank you, Pater. May I ask you a question about this ship?”

“I know almost nothing about its construction, Char-less. I only know that The ICE-Goddess commanded us, directly, to build it and to send this expedition to the equator. It was begun in my father’s time.”

“Of course, Pater. But did The ICE-Goddess also name this ship in her detailed instructions?”

“The ICE-Goddess names us all, son. You know that. Her ways are mysterious, indeed. I don’t know why She named this good ship the HMS Beagle, nor you Char-less Dahrween, for that matter.”

The End