

Writing the Future

Wild Way

It was a radiantly clear morning on the Chemin and the waters of the Vallee as the first travellers emerged through the portal at Marsal into the guard hamlet of Fabas. The hamlet was quiet, apart from a flotilla of ducks, as yet unstrangled. On the other bank of the river, a peloton of Frogs (representatives of Vieux France) whizzed past on racing bikes dressed in the traditional colours of the Airbus/EDF League. They were allowed through as long as they kept moving; not difficult in their muscular group trance.

Xavier rowed over to accept the baguettes and the post. Bonjour, he said politely in old French to the postman with the characteristic beret and moustache worn by all males of voting age in La Vieux France. Foreigners coming, up the river, said the postman, sniffing disapprovingly. Lots of them. Better get the wine out, then, Xavier said. All welcome here. He could see in the distance Rodrigo pounding out of the tunnel entrance in his Caleche, drawn by a pony and a mule, his solar-powered headtorch blazing. Rodrigo, his accordion slung round his shoulder, shouted, panting and excited. Morning Froggy, he said to the postman before shouting Rugriders! Coming this way! On Carpets! Fast! Xavier frowned. Religious fundamentalists were not welcome in the Chemin, though all peaceful types were admitted.

It was going to be another interesting day for the Occitizens in the Chemin, where code was traded for fabbed goods, wine, fish and dead ducks, free of the anti-technology strictures of Vieux France and Little England. The Chemin, once a railway line that was never completed due to the metal for the rails needed for the first World War, but with all the tunnels, permanent way and station buildings completed, had become an Way or Path of imagination, with neocortical net circuits powered by pylons and antennae along a 60 kilometer stretch, which travellers had to pass, using the now expanded waterway and the former railway. As in times past the inhabitants lived on trading, a certain amount of barter-based taxation (or highway robbery as some travellers believed) and a very laissez-faire attitude to innovative tech, of a type now outlawed in Vieux France and Little England, in revolt against the domination of the invasive, censorious, preachy and maddeningly bland WorldCloud, which controlled all music, feelies, dating and gambling economies of the world now fragmented by terminal anthropogenic climate change.

Xaxier's sister, Nem, drew up in her skiff, wiping sweat from her home-fabbed T-shirt. "I've heard the rugriders are coders, trained in Meknes, actually." All the young denizens were coders, providing economic power for the community. Even the village mayors were an average age of 21, and all the key decision-makers were in their late teens. The adults over 35 had mainly retreated to their meditation towers, or left to join the LARP communities of Vieux France or Little England, in mourning for the planet, which had been given 50 years of storms and rising water levels before the humans and animals, at least, would be extinct.

"How about this Islamic girl gang? What are we going to do with them?" They would soon find out. Already a skin-crawling sensation began to overwhelm them as distant sounds of frenetic female ululation started echoing from the tunnel mouth.

They were a fearsome sight. Ululating, kohled eyes flashing behind veils and niquabs of varying lengths, some standing, some crouching on their flying carpets, they made an impressively screeching horde of invaders. One, skidded to a halt and levitating above the water in front of Xavier and Nem's house. "Bonjour Monsieur et Mademoiselle Grenouille. Salaam Aleikum. Qu'est-ce que ce passe quoi? Rachida ici. Vous avez du Gaillac? We're here to trade code for wine! Which we hear you have plenty of. And we like to dance, too." Gesturing to Rodrigo's accordion. "Come on! The world's going to end soon! Where's the party?!"

Rob La Frenais, 2019