

# ASCII THROUGH THE LOGIC GATE

=====

[An epic in 32K words]

Copyright (c) 1978, Richard Forsyth.

## Block 14 (Blocked Up)

[While Simula is left to the tender mercies of Inspector Extracode, Cleo is alone with Ascii confronting the wild apeman in the hills -- Hex, Lambda and Zap being out cold on the floor of their refuge.]

The beast's enormous fur-covered pot-belly filled the doorway. Cleo cowered back against the wall.

"Mi ne volas dolorigi vin," it bellowed.

"What's it saying?" she asked Ascii in the hope that a bionic dog might understand a talking ape; but Ascii, who lacked the gift of tongues but understood body language very well, had interpreted a body of such size as meaning danger and scampered further up the tunnel.

The creature stooped down and poked its head into the cave. For the first time she got a close-up view of its face. Its ears were very tiny and lay flush against the side of its head. Apart from a slightly protruberant jaw, containing some very big teeth, and a nose that was more like two holes above the mouth than a proper nose, its face had a distinctly human aspect. The tufted red hair that covered its head and chin did not extend across the cheeks or forehead, and its eyes looked too knowing for a mere brute.

She could have sworn it was attempting to smile. Bemused, she shrank further back. She was relieved to see that it was indeed too vast to squeeze inside; but her relief turned to horror when she realized that her three friends were within range of its long arms. She watched aghast as its hand moved out and prodded the 'Off' switch on the black box.

Lambda was the first to react. She yawned and rubbed her eyes as if wakening from a long dream, then pulled out the lead that connected her to the computer. When she opened her eyes and saw the creature she displayed little concern.

The apeman, who had made no attempt to molest her though she was within reach, spoke again: "ne sentu timon; mi manĝas nur vegetalojn."

"How about that?" exclaimed Lambda, "a talking apel"

"That's what he said before," said Cleo. "What does it mean?"

"He says: 'have no fear, I am a vegetarian'. It's Esperanto. I studied it at school."

By now Hex and Zap were stirring.

"Wake up boys," said Lambda enthusiastically, "we've got company."

Hex and Zap stared at the animal, now squatting on its haunches. "It's a Sasquatch!" cried Zap. "I thought they were extinct."

"That's not half of it," said Lambda. "It can talk too."

"Via amiko mi estas," intoned their visitor solemnly.

"I thought you said it spoke English," complained Hex.

"Not English," replied Lambda. "That's Esperanto for 'I am your friend'."

"Well, tell King Kong we want to be his friends too," said Hex, appreciating its size and proximity.

"Ni ankaŭ deziras esti viaj amikoj," said Lambda hesitantly; then she apologized to her friends: "I'm afraid I'm a bit rusty."

But it had understood. It clapped its hands in comprehension and was soon merrily prattling away to Lambda, happy to have found a fellow esperantist to confide in. The others listened in silence. Even Ascii crept closer again, curiosity getting the better of fear. Whenever it paused to draw breath Lambda turned to them and relayed the gist of what she had caught, then said a few halting words back to carry on their peculiar conversation.

It transpired that Zap had been right. It was a Sasquatch, or 'Piedego'. But he had also been right in thinking that Sasquatches were extinct. The story that unfolded as Lambda related its utterances was an extraordinary one.

Piltdown, as he called himself, was a laboratory animal -- in the strictest sense of that term. Far from being the wild creature they had taken him for, he was a manufactured artefact. He was one of a number of experimental prototypes built by a secret team of specialists working in a subterranean cavern deep within the bowels of the Sierra Nueva, unknown to all but a few high-ranking System officials. This team, the Advanced Systems Group, had one overriding objective -- to design the successor not just for mankind (which was already obsolete) but for the robots and androids man had created in his own image, in short, for the System as a whole.

They learned that Piltdown himself was a sideline, a diversion constructed for entertainment by one of the more brilliant scientists, but that because of his great strength he, unlike his fellow inmates in the menagerie, had been able to break free during a field trial of his dietary habits on the surface. As far as Piltdown was aware the Future System would not depend on individual agents such as robots or androids, still less on home-made Sasquatches. Nevertheless, to perfect the fundamental genetic technology necessary for its production, experiments with fabricated beings such as himself went ahead.

He finished by pointing out that he was sure that hue and cry had been raised when he escaped and that a search party might soon follow. Immediately Lambda was assailed by a barrage of questions which the others wanted to put to him. This quite overwhelmed her mastery of the language and left her dumb for a moment.

While they waited for her to translate, Ascii, ever alert, gave a plaintive whine. His sensitive ears had detected movement at the top of the entrance tunnel. He bolted out into the crater once more. Hex realized what was going on. The zookeepers had come to reclaim Piltdown.

"Everybody out!" he shouted, grabbing the precious black box as he ducked out into the open air. Cleo, Lambda and Zap followed rapidly. Without wasting any time, Piltdown, who had jumped to the same conclusion, ran down to the dead tree-trunk by the water. He wrapped his huge arms round it and uprooted it with one mighty heave; then, grunting, he

dragged it to the cave, where he let out a terrifying roar before plugging their exit once and for all.

They were safe for the moment; but, looking up at the cliffs that enclosed them, Cleo couldn't prevent herself asking "How are we ever going to get out?"

- How indeed?
- There must be some way out of here.