

# RISING STARS

## Thoughts of Gaea

As the last starship blasted off, I became horribly aware of my utter loneliness. For the first time since my creation, I was alone, abandoned by my beloved children, drifting silently in the void of space.

I wanted to scream in anguish, to let out the frustration of a million years. What had gone wrong? What blasphemy did I commit to deserve this punishment? It was mere torture to think of myself as an ugly, bare mass of rock stripped of its lush green beauty. Yes, Earth, the warm blue planet that was once loved so much was now nothing but a planet moaning in solitude.

My creation was probably the most glorious event in the history of time. The sensation of being alive was a feeling which I am incapable of describing. My whole being was engulfed in a multitude of vibrant emotions. Eventually, I calmed down and waited, silently observing, listening and feeling the rhythm of life around me. I knew that I had received a special gift from the Creator — the gift of life. To those of you who believe that life evolved from some random chemical configurations, or from a sudden whim of nature, I can only say that you are grossly in error. Life in the form of human beings was created for a definite purpose and I was given the job of rearing that precious life.

The years rolled by as I watched my children pass through the various stages of development. What intelligent creatures they were! In no time at all they learned to harness the forces of Nature and use them for various gainful purposes. But it pained me to see that base passions dominated a large part of most of their lives. They fought meaningless wars against each

Mehrin Masud (Twinkle) other, condemned fellow beings for the colour of their skins, trampled down the destitute in an attempt to acquire riches, the list goes on and on. But among them were brave men and women who spoke out against the atrocities, who dedicated their lives to serving others. I was so proud of them!

I was threatened with destruction many a time. When the threat of global warfare ended, there came the threat of global warming as a result of what the human beings termed 'THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT'. I had realised for quite some time that changes were taking place inside me, changes that were not meant to occur naturally. The smoke-belching factories, the toxic chemicals, the rapid deforestation and other such unthinkable acts of humans were slowly but surely spelling disaster. I was not so much concerned for myself as for my children, for I knew that if I died, they would be wiped out for ever.

As I mentioned earlier, human beings were truly ingenious. They did their very best to stop the deforestation and took drastic measures to cease the use of certain gases, chemicals and fuels. This was a very difficult task and when they found no replacement for the banned items, had to resort to their use again. They made futile attempts to duplicate the ozone layer which was rapidly being eaten away. I could only suffer silently as indignities were heaped upon me, one after the other.

Then, came a scientific breakthrough — a device which when powered with Trinitium (an extremely rare element) could generate a shimmering, translucent dome around a city and, in effect, act as an arti-

cial atmosphere. Gigantic air-purifying stations were put up to recycle the air within the domes. The population of those countries which could not afford such expensive measures were slowly wiped out. How I wept to see the deaths of so many innocent lives. I felt so helpless! Waiting and watching as the merciless ultraviolet rays scorched my body, was the only thing that I could do.

Human beings soon discovered that Trinitium, the rare element which was only obtained after a series of complicated transmutations was available in abundance in Armageddon — a distant cousin of mine a few light years away. The decision to emigrate to Armageddon came as little surprise to me. I had known from the very beginning that such maternal bliss could not last forever and that some day my children would have to leave me. I hated to acknowledge this horrible truth.

And so I watched as they left, one starship after another, bidding me farewell tearfully, bound for Armageddon which was a mere stone's throw away for their Hyperjets. Their new cities awaited them far away. Tears of anguish welled up in my bosom as I thought of remaining alone for all eternity.

One bleak, stormy day, my ruminations were interrupted as the clouds parted to reveal huge, crystalline spheres floating down from the heavens. They landed and opened with a surge of brilliant light. A strangely beautiful alien stepped out. Taking a deep breath, it uttered a single word, 'Trikaha!' Somehow, I knew that it meant 'perfect'. I was filled with exhilaration as I realised that I now had some new children to love and tend.



## Would You Believe It?

By Sanjida Shaheed Class - X

THE water from her long blonde tresses cascading down her silvery skin, a fabulous creature — half woman, half fish — sits on a rock, luring sailors to their doom with a sweet song.

Such a description could only belong to a mermaid, a creature that crops up in the records and journals of sailors and fables of Hans Christian Anderson all over the world. A veil of mystery surrounds these strange beings, who have stubbornly resisted the efforts of scientists to catch them. Despite the number of eyewitnesses who would swear to having seen a mermaid, their

existence is still very hard to believe. There is however, one explanation which might throw some light on these curious creatures. Could it be that the sailors saw the animal known as the manatee, or its close relative, the dugong?

Manatees and dugongs are large mammals — not fish — and they always live in the sea. Not only are they the same size as an average pig, but they also have blunt tails and two flippers resembling arms.

When you add to this the fact that they have remarkably human faces, and float upright

in the water while holding their young in the crook of their flippers, you can see why the sailors may have thought they were seeing some strange combination of a fish and a woman.

Such an explanation only becomes more plausible, when you consider that the dugongs and manatees prefer the warm waters of tropical seas such as the Indian Ocean, where most mermaid sightings have been made.

So, when you think, you're seeing a mermaid, care to take a closer look before you believe it!

## Getting Over The Blues

by Samira Abbasi Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, USA

Sometimes I feel that my life is so empty and meaningless. Not often, but sometimes. In those moments, my feelings and emotions are strong and I feel the urge to do something. I don't know what. Maybe destroy something, maybe be about at someone. Maybe not. Maybe I should write poetry or something constructive then, because I remember reading somewhere that anger and hatred can be sources of inspiration for something big, too. Maybe someone can dive in a sea of depression and come up with some pearls of infinite value.

Who knows? All of us have our moments, but if we pause and think for a while, if we breathe a little bit longer for a moment, maybe the world would not seem so bad at all. Maybe, just maybe, things would start making some sense. What do we want out of life anyway? Each of us has a different goal and expectation, but don't we all have some things in common? Some basic wants. Like having a good friend to share our laughter

and tears with. Having a plant or a dog you can talk to after a tiring day. Doing something once in a while (at least) that makes you feel good about yourself.

Sometimes I try to imagine what the life of a tree or a squirrel is like. As you walk through the campus, hundreds of those small creatures are running around. They seem so busy all the time. Last year when my mother was visiting me, she spent hours feeding them. When she left, she bought a big bag of almonds and asked me to give them a feast once in a while. Being a nice daughter as I am (!), I tried that once. It seemed I was not alone. Another serious looking student was feeding sunflower seeds to them with great compassion. He expressed concern that my almonds might be too big for the squirrels. The most interesting part of the feeding extravaganza was that the squirrels would just grab the almonds and run back near the trees to hide them. Then they would come back for more. Maybe they will never find most of the nuts. The nuts they hid with such love and care will blossom into a wonderful tree someday, maybe. Are we doing something everyday, every week, or even once a year, that will help the rest of our world somehow, someday? I am not talking about big scientific deeds or breakthroughs, but small things, little deeds. Are we running too fast? Let's pause for a moment and smile at a fellow friend or water a tree. Or maybe feed the squirrels. Nature has a wonderful way of soothing pangs, brightening gloomy days, but you have to have the keys. The magic keys to open the world of calm and comfort onto you. And only you can reach out for that key. Believe me, Word sworth's golden daffodils are always blooming and Keats's nightingales are singing sweet rhapsody. Only, you have to reach out.

Cottage aren't very friendly. They keep to themselves. Parking the car under some trees nearby, we walked towards Humphrey's Cottage. Cottage? It was larger — and grander — than Mandrake Mansion! The two were as different as chalk from cheese, on the outside, at least inside.

Humphrey's Cottage was situated in the outskirts of Woking. It was screened from the outside world by trees that had been planted all around it. A high fence enclosed its grounds. There was a twenty-metre gap between the fence and the trees. The gates were tall too, complete with 'sentries' at their posts!

The only way to enter the grounds, it seemed, was through the gates! Or by climbing those trees, the ones just outside the fence (and some task that would be, since there were no branches at the bottom)! But the problem was that trees were quite close to the gates. Although the guards not be able to see our faces clearly, they would be sure to spot us if we tried to climb the trees! So could we do? As though she had read my mind, Chris said.

**To be continued**

## QUIZ CLUB

- Answers to Friday 20th's Quiz Club
- Charlotte Bronte
  - Reggae Music
  - Queen Victoria
  - Polish born Arthur Rubinstein
  - The heaviest and largest brass musical instrument
  - New York
  - The Sahara Desert where the sun shines 97 per cent of the time.
  - A group of stars
  - Endeavour
  - Sri Lanka

- Here are this week's Quiz questions.
- Name the largest mammal in the world.
  - Who first discovered the existence of germs?
  - Who was Claude Monet?
  - Who wrote Treasure Island?
  - Who was the pioneer in animated film cartoons?
  - Who wrote Little Women?
  - Name the hottest spot in the world.
  - What is a seismologist?
  - Which is the highest city in the world?
  - Which is the world's longest and most famous river?

- Answers to April 3rds Quiz Club.
- Blue whale. It grows to a maximum length of 33 metres and weighs up to 190 tons.
  - Louis Pasteur
  - French Impressionist painter.
  - Robert Louis Stevenson.
  - Walt Disney
  - Louisa M Alcott
  - Dalol, Ethiopia has an average yearly temperature of 94°F.
  - Scientist who studies earthquakes.
  - Lhasa, Tibet, 12087 ft above sea level.
  - The Nile in Africa. It starts in the tributaries of Lake Victoria travels north for 4,145 miles, then empties into the Mediterranean Sea.

## Zagatoungzar

Zagatoungzar is the topper among several legendary characters in Burma, skilled in speaking and a wizard with words. As a youth he was entrusted to the care of a ministerial officer at the Huttaw, the building occupied by the king's Supreme Court and the Hall of the Council of Ministers. He lived with the family, learned courtly manners and customs from the sayaydawgyi (Royal Clerk), and also acted as an errand boy.

Another day, there was a fire in the neighbourhood. While hastily removing household things, the mistress of the house told Zagatoungzar to move away only light things. By light things she meant valuable things, of course. But our friend, the master of mischief, the practical joker, went under the house and lifted the bag of chaff. The mistress finally sent home to the Huttaw to fetch the sayaydawgyi.

The sayaydawgyi was at a meeting. Zagatoungzar sat at the top of the stairs and winked away the rest of the day. At long last, the meeting was over. The sayaydawgyi came to Zagatoungzar and asked him what he had been winking for. When the full story came out, the sayaydawgyi could not believe his ears. He could only shout, "What ..."

One day the sayaydawgyi's wife sent Zagatoungzar to the Huttaw to ask the sayaydawgyi to come home for a bite of biscuits which she had just baked.

The mischievous man, beginning from the top of the stairs until he was inside the chamber, kept shouting, "O. He could only shout, "What ..."



sayaydawgyi, the mistress wants you to come home quickly for bite of her freshly baked biscuits. All those assembled there burst out laughing. The sayaydawgyi took his ward to a corner where they could not be heard by others. He knocked on Zagatoungzar's head and said, "You have embarrassed me before all the officers. Look, next time you have a message for me, don't shout at the top to your voice. Remember, you must just gesture to me, or just wink at me."

What ...?"

"But Sir, you told me not to shout the message out, but only to wink ..."

The sayaydawgyi didn't waste any more time. He rushed towards his house. Luckily it had been only a small fire and had been put out long since.

Naturally both the master and the mistress of the house ordered Zagatoungzar out.

Tale from Laughing Together — a Unesco publication

## 'Nothing But Lower'

by Samia Israt Ronce Class-X-B

Last Sunday I went to the Zia International Airport to see off two of my friends. They were my penpals. One named Raisa, a Russian and the other Tanzi, a Japanese. Tanzi and Raisa both go to high school in New York. They came to Bangladesh to meet me and visit my beautiful country.

Their plane was late and so we started chatting. Tanzi and Raisa were very proud of the development of science and technology in their countries. They boasted about this very much. I was a little bit annoyed at this and so asked them to tell me about their countries' latest inventions. Tanzi instantly replied, "Oh! Don't you know? Our latest invention is a ship which flies above the water level." Raisa and I both gasped out, "ABOVE the WATER LEVEL?"

"Well, not actually above the water level; just a little below the water level." Saying this Tanzi laughed heartily. I understood her joke and smiled. But Raisa would never give up so easily. She quickly said, "Our scientists have invented an aeroplane which can fly through the Mesosphere (The



Ozone layer) with passengers in it." Tanzi couldn't speak and I was doubly surprised because I had read in my geography book that only some jet planes can fly through the stratosphere and not higher than it. I said, "Is it true, Raisa?"

Raisa said, "Aw! Not through the Mesosphere, a little lower, I mean the plane flies through the stratosphere. Ha, Ha!"

Now they attacked me, not with 'the acid' but with this question, —

"Now tell us about your country's invention."

I thought for a moment and said, "We, Bengalis, all of us, eat with our noses."

Raisa and Tanzi jumped out of their seats and cried out, "What? Did you say 'NOSES'? You must be kidding!"

I smiled and said, "Well, not exactly with the nose but a little lower from it, ..... we eat through our mouths."

## Bet You Didn't Know

**BEWARE**

Recently in Nicaragua twenty heavily armed policemen in battle fatigues and combat boots patrol the Pacific Coast to protect pregnant turtles. No, they are not going to lay golden eggs. But because, each year guided by moonlight, thousands of sea turtles crawl out of the surf to lay their eggs on the beach. And the Nicaraguans who, defying a government ban, scoop the small white eggs as they are laid. The poachers sell these eggs on the spot to the middlemen, who load the sacks on trucks and drive off to sell the eggs — which are considered a delicacy to local restaurants.

**GREEN DESERTS**

You might have seen and used artificial plastic flowers to decorate your surroundings. But have you heard about artificial plastic trees that cool the surrounding air? Well, there are such trees and they do not need much water to grow and help their natural counterparts in greening deserts. This tree has been developed by Spanish inventor ANTONIO IBANEZ ALBA who says if it is used in sufficient numbers along with natural trees, the deserts will turn green in ten years by changing the climate patterns in the desired zone, principally through rain. Isn't this a good news?



Many of our Rising Star members make their own Eid cards, like this one by Masha.

## Mystery at Mandrake

by Munazah Alam

Mandrake, our hero's story continues .....

Here's what it said:

- Twinkle (twinkle little star)
- TO market, to market.
- HUMPTY dumpty sat on a wall, humpty dumpty had a great fall.
- mary mary quite Contrary how does your Garden grow?
- Old KING cole Was a merry old sole.
- Jack And jill weNT up the hill.

"Look at this, Chris," I beckoned, "somebody's been writing nursery rhymes here!" and began to giggle despite the seriousness of the situation.

Chris came over and looked at the piece of paper in my hand. "Hey! she exclaimed.

"What is it?" I asked puzzled.

"This is Jean's handwriting!"

"Then this must be a message!"

"I hope so; yes, I'm sure it is!" Chris looked at her watch. "Oh my gosh! It's nearly seven! We'll have to go now!"

The first thing we did when we reached Chris' home was to phone the police. But in vain. Chief Kinnane just wouldn't believe us, however hard we tried to persuade him! So, in the end, we gave up and sat down to a subdued supper.

However, our spirits rose when we got out Jean's code. We puzzled over it, trying to think of a way to decode it.

"I think," I said at length, "king in number five means something since I heard that man saying the same thing — might be his boss he was referring to."

"Yes, you might have something there. But why did she write h, u, m and p in capitals? If she means a camel's hump it certainly doesn't ring any bells."

We puzzled on for another

hour, first trying one track and then another. Then Chris exclaimed:

"I think I've got it! That 'king' in number five doesn't mean boss; w and o are also in capitals. It means Woking! And a, j, n, e in number six spell Jean!"

After another fifteen minutes or so we had the whole message decoded. It read:

**Taken to Humphrey's Cottage, Woking, Jean.**

We were absolutely thrilled by our discovery.

"No wonder there was no sign of them in the mansion!" Chris mused. "They'd probably been taken away after the police left, or may be even before!"

"I wonder how Jean managed to get her hands on the paper."

"Oh, that's easy. Diane's a bit of a poet, and she always carries a pencil and a note-pad with her in case a line pops into her head. So I guess it was her idea to hide the message in nursery rhymes."

"So when do we start tomorrow? Woking isn't very far from here, is it?"

"No, it's about twenty miles south of Marlow. We'll start around nine."

"I got a cable from Dad today. He may be able to return within the next few days. But he didn't give me his address."

That evening the two of us went to bed early with high hopes and in high spirits. As I hadn't had much sleep the previous night, I slept soundly till seven the next morning.

After breakfast we drove to Woking and soon, by asking around, we found our destination.

It seemed as though the general opinion of Humphrey's Cottage was that it was a mysterious place. "There are foreign men coming and going all the time," a boy told us, "and they've even got a helipad in there. But the people from the

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**To be continued**

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