

## **Alnaschar's Basket**

**By FP**

The Aim of this article is to examine the subject of Utopias, and to stress the paramount importance of not only working towards such a perfect world by participation in such organisations as ICOM, but living *now* as if such a world existed.

The bulk of the material was compiled by using a mind mapper tool, one example of which can be found at <http://www.coco.co.uk>, and is based on the work of Tony Buzan<sup>1</sup>.

This article began last year by an attempt to find names of ideal worlds for a project I was designing for a Training and Enterprise Council. I needed names like "Paradise," "Nirvana" and so forth to call each computer on the new network I was designing, as the whole project had been called "The Promised Lands" as it promised so much! As I researched the subject of ideal societies, it struck me that as the primary aim of ICOM is "To work towards a new form of society based on mutual trust and support in attaining defined, shared, positive goals" we should evaluate those explorers from whatever realms before us who have worked to a similar goal.

Alnaschar's Basket is the result of that evaluation, and as I hope to conclude, it has vitally re-energised me to the work in hand, and of the importance that each individual works to the aims they have set themselves, and through networking with others, supports and gains support to achieve positive goals. We can change the world, and "in trying times, we're the ones who have to try".

This article follows a number of threads, but to begin we will look at some idealised fictional cities and the manner in which they were envisioned.

### **Floating Cities**

**"And now our dreams are true, We don't know what to do ..."** (Hawkwind, Utopia)

The word Utopia was created by the English philosopher Thomas More for his work of the same name, first published in 1576. It derives from the Greek, and means "the land of No-place", from Gr. *Ou*, not, and *topos*, a place. There is also a hidden pun in the word, depending on how it is split, which can mean "the good place." More's Utopia was a vision of a society set on an island, and was meant to be contrasted radically with the England of the time. The society pictured by More was not an "ideal" or "perfect" society, but rather a simple society with customs developed to point out Mores thoughts on his own social structure.

The establishment of a such a harmonious society is neither a modern aim nor is it a completed one. In 2350 BC, 4348 years ago, the Akkadian Empire was founded by Sargon I of Sumer, and for the following 200 years the City-State civilisation would reach its peak before declining in favour of following societies such as the Egyptians and Greeks. As this book is written, politicians from a variety of viewpoints struggle together to reach a single agreement on the society of Northern Ireland.

Throughout history and to this day, visionaries attempt to describe, work towards and live in a "utopia," a society which fits their ideology. One man's utopia may be another man's tyranny, though, and this essay will attempt at least to provide ideas for the structure of a positive society, where shared goals defined by the participants of that society can be met. Indeed, one writer has described utopia as a place where "everyone is free to give their gift<sup>2</sup>," and that will be the foundation for this writers approach.

The title, "Alnaschar's dream," is that of a story having a meaning similar to counting your chickens before they are hatched. Alnaschar, so it goes, was the barber's fifth brother, and invested all his money in a basket of glass-ware, on which he was to make a certain profit. The profit, being invested, was to make more, and this was to go on till he grew rich enough to marry the vizier's daughter. Lost in imaginings of the future life he would be leading, he came to grow angry with his imaginary wife and giving a kick, overturned his basket, breaking all his wares<sup>3</sup>.

This basket of glass-ware represents each persons vision of the future society, each piece of glass-ware reflecting their own views and aspirations. The danger is that in looking ahead in our imagination only we may well stumble and fall in the here and now, which is where all progress is made!

Coleridge (1772 -1834) has been called the “Alnaschar of Modern Literature” because he "dreamt" his *Kubla Khan*, and wrote it out next morning which is fitting as Kubla Khan is a utopian setting. Imaginative fiction is where we will start our trail to Utopia, by tracing its path in the imagination of writers and artists.

Here are some of the Utopian visionaries of the past<sup>4</sup>;

1619	Johann Valentin Andrea	Christianopolis
1627	Francis Bacon	The New Atlantis
1623	Tommaso Campanella	Civitas Solis
1656	James Harrington	The Commonwealth of Oceana
1872	Samuel Butler	Erewhon
1887	W. H. Hudson	A Crystal Age
1888	Edward Bellamy	Looking Backward
1962	Aldous Huxley	Island

The Utopian vision is often described as a perfect city, a self-enclosed community where all is well. Such idealised cities dominate our cultural references and often share similar traits. Jung sees the city as mother; the nurturer and provider, the protector and source. In wider terms, the city is a *Temenos*, a sacred place, and is often designed as a *Mandala*, a sacred shape. Indeed, Washington D.C. is constructed from the Pentagon outwards in pentagonal geometry. The floorplan for a utopian city is our ideals; in architectural symbolism, the decorations of a city represent the citizen’s aspirations, codes of conduct, and governance. The gargoyles of middle age churches represent the fear of god, and the unadorned glass towers of a modern city represent the triumph of new materialism. Such materialism finds its peak in the “millennium dome” currently being constructed; more has been said of the material from which the dome is being constructed and its sponsorship than the contents of the dome itself.

The term metropolis is derived from *metros*, mother, and *polis*, a city. Fritz Langs classic film of that name (1926) contrasts the stark mechanisation of the mass of society with the spiritual saintliness of Maria, the films female lead. The biblical archetypal city is described in the bible as the “new Jerusalem,” the place of peace where we will spend eternity after the end of days;

## Revelations 21

**1** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

**2** And I John saw **the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven**, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

**3** And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God.

**4** And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

**10** **And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,**

**11** Having the glory of God: and her light *was* like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

**15** And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

**18** And the building of the wall of it was *of* jasper: and the city *was* pure gold, like unto clear glass.

**22** And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

**23** And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb *is* the light thereof.

**24** And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it.

**25** And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

We will return to many of these themes again, but note that the descriptive prose of this vision may not be entirely symbolic; nowadays, a city composed of “transparent glass,” where there is “no night” is hardly a revelation. The bible may be one of the earliest references to a heavenly or floating dwelling, but there are many more. Not only can the city be taken as an image of the mother, but also as the self; many writers have depicted a city as the central *motif* of their imagination. A selection follows.

Everway is a fictional city in Jonathan Tweet’s visionary roleplaying game of the same name. The city exists in the centre of the “spheres,” a multiverse of worlds, each different from the next and connected by mystical gateways. Everway is set, archetypally, in the sphere of fourcorner, and acts as a central hub for “spherewalkers” to carry out their business. As a result, the city dwellers are remarkably tolerant of each other, and it is inconceivable to them that there should be any single belief system, mannerism or custom. Sigil is yet another fictional city set in a roleplaying universe. The “Manual of the Planes” describes Sigil, as host to denizens of the astral, ethereal, and other shadow realms.

Meshikan is the name given by Maggie Ingalls (Soror Nema) to the single city which “travels” in her vision of the future. This is examined in more detail later, but Nema sees “It [the future species] consists of a planetful of individuals who participate in a gestalt-consciousness which expresses a super-persona, whose name was given as N’Aton<sup>5</sup>”

Of Meshikan, she writes, “Individuals dwell in small enclaves, or Hives, whose populations range from a few hundred to about a thousand. There is but one true city on the planet, Meshikan. It is mounted upon a platform and travels from continent to continent. Its function is to serve as the administrative and archival centre of the Race. In our time, there is no desire to crowd together in cities. We are **en rapport** through individual participation in the **gestalt**.”

The Hive Temple functions as a centre for religious gathering, artistic display (as a museum/theatre of creative and performing arts), and other local administrative functions<sup>6</sup>.”

The name Meshikan may also have a biblical source; “The second half of the book of Exodus is devoted to a description of the Mishkan. The English translation of this word, 'tabernacle', is somewhat archaic and hardly serves to convey a clear meaning, so I will use the Hebrew. 'Mishkan' derives from a root meaning 'to dwell'. It was the focus of spiritual life which enabled God's presence to dwell amongst the children of Israel in the wilderness, and it became the pattern on which the Temple in Jerusalem was later built. The Mishkan was the transportable tent of meeting between God and the Children of Israel<sup>7</sup>.”

This vision is not unique, a member of ICOM wrote in a previous Meridian that in the early 1970’s, he had a series of vivid and related visions and dreams, one of which matches Nema’s description rather perfectly;

“In another vision I was a teenager living in France, in a small village, and one day something special happened...

There was a buzz of excitement in the village. The Floating City was coming! I knew this was my opportunity; I was stifled by the village atmosphere and, although I didn’t want to stay on the Floating City, I knew that, if I could get aboard, I would be able to find out about - whatever it was that I was looking for! I did get aboard - but I snapped out of the vision before anything else became clear.

There was a lot of other stuff, but it was more emotions and ‘background knowledge’ than events I can describe. While these things were happening to me, my ‘future self’ was taking stuff for granted that, after I ‘came to’ were incomprehensible. Anyway, I was left with a pile of stuff, that seemed to be clearly about the future, and was coherent in itself, but bore no clear relation to anything that I had read or had been thinking about. I had read a lot of Science Fiction, but even where similar things had happened in books, this had a different quality about it - less real than my ordinary life, but much more real than anything I had imagined while reading - and the whole didn’t fit into any single idea that I had read about. The ‘Floating City’ had no conceivable ancestors except in ‘Gulliver’s Travels’ - but it wasn’t like my mental image from that book. I didn’t know what to do with the impressions and images, but I couldn’t forget about them, so I just stored them in my head and got on with my life<sup>8</sup>”.

The “LSD Guru” Timothy Leary, just before his death, stated “The unit of life is the gene pool. In advanced species – social insects, “humants” – the genetic unit is the hive. The key factor in evolution is the formation of new hives by the fusion of self-actualised elite outcasts who migrate from the old hive into new ecological niches<sup>9</sup>.” Applying Leary’s eight circuit model to these niches, we are currently at the insectoid city stage.

So, what are the realities that underlie these futuristic visions of floating cities? What mechanisms might support such things?

Japanese Universities, as well as researching orbital Space Hotels, are also producing plans for floating cities, in this case floating on water. The “Waterworld” community of the future may be a viable response to depleting energy sources, and tidal rising due to global warming. Engineers have many reports on the Internet discussing the structure of floating “Aqua” cities, and their agriculture and energy requirements.

The futurist designer Buckminster Fuller was particularly interested in structures based around geodesic domes. He predicted cities would be based on their construction, and even be built within such domes. Indeed, Fuller<sup>10</sup> calculated that as geodesic tensegrity domes got larger than one half mile in diameter they would be able to float in the sky like clouds! Because the air inside the dome would be warmer and therefore lighter than the air outside, the whole dome would float like a hot air balloon! This would be an unexpected but perhaps possible method of generating a “floating city.”

The science fiction writer James Blish ( 1921-1975 ) in his Cities in Flight series described the future of mankind, which he pictured as a collection of self-contained cities abandoning an economically depressed Earth to become migrant workers on a Galactic scale. These “Okie Cities” were constructed on asteroids and sent into space on vast rockets, to then wander the solar system and beyond engaged in mining activities, and so forth.

In one of his recent “Eternal Champion” novels dealing with the hero Elric, Moorcock visualises a moving city, albeit this one is on a track encircling the globe, and propelled by a slave population who drive the mechanism forwards on wheels. His ‘eternal city,’ Tanelorn is also described as a city of which all others are mere reflections. In the Chronicles of Amber by Roger Zelazny, he says “Amber was the greatest city which had ever existed or ever would exist. Amber had always been and always would be, and every other city, everywhere, every other city that existed was but a reflection of a shadow of some phase of Amber. Amber, Amber, Amber...”<sup>11</sup>”

Greg Bear<sup>12</sup>, another SF writer, also speculates on the evolution of cities in his “Strength of Stones” novel, where moving cities are driven and controlled by Artificial Intelligences. His novel, set in 3451 A.D., deals with the tribes of humanity who dwell in the wildernesses in which the cities, now unpopulated, roam, automatically driven by the AI’s within them. The book begins with this description;

“The city that had occupied Mesa Canaan was now marching across the plain...It had disassembled just before dawn, walking on elephantine legs, tractor treads and wheels, with living bulkheads upright, dismantled buttresses given new instructions to crawl instead of support; floors and ceiling, transports and smaller city parts, factories and resource centres, all unrecognisable now, like a slime mold soon to gather itself in its new country.”

Many artists have perceived and drawn such floating cities, particularly popular fantasy and science fiction artists such as Roger Dean and Chris Foss (“Floating Cities,” pictured here).



A search on the Internet also found another artist independently generating similar visions. The illustration below, "East of the Sun" is kindly reproduced with the permission of Molly Barr whose Web Site is at DragonTree -- <http://www.dragon-tree.com/dragontree>



The City of the Sun, by Tommaso Campanella [1568-1639], was originally written in Italian in 1602, just after he was condemned to life imprisonment for sedition and heresy. His writings were of particular interest to me when I came across them as they described exactly a dream I had over a year prior, where I was looking down on a dwelling place in the far future. This had a temple annexed to one side of the building called the "World Church", and as I went inside it, I saw, as I later read in Campanella;

"The temple is built in the form of a circle; it is not girt with walls, but stands upon thick columns, beautifully grouped. A very large dome, built with great care in the centre or pole, contains another small vault as it were rising out of it, and in this is a spiracle, which is right over the altar. There is but one altar in the middle of the temple, and this is hedged round by columns. The temple itself is on a space of more than 350 paces. Without it, arches measuring about eight paces extend from the heads of the columns outward, whence other columns rise about three paces from the thick, strong, and erect wall. Between these and the former columns there are galleries for walking, with beautiful pavements, and in the recess of the wall, which is adorned with numerous large doors, there are immovable seats, placed as it were between the inside columns, supporting the temple. Portable chairs are not wanting, many and well adorned. Nothing is seen over the altar but a large globe, upon which the heavenly bodies are painted, and another globe upon which there is a representation of the earth. Furthermore, in the vault of the dome there can be discerned representations of all the stars of heaven from the first to the sixth magnitude, with their proper names and power to influence terrestrial things marked in three little verses for each. There are the poles and greater and lesser circles according to the right latitude of the place, but these are not perfect because there is no wall below. They seem, too, to be made in their relation to the globes on the altar."

I had also seen a strange courtyard with glistening squares and a pennant flying in a coastal breeze, which matched another part of his description;

“The pavement of the temple is bright with precious stones. Its seven golden lamps hang always burning, and these bear the names of the seven planets. At the top of the building several small and beautiful cells surround the small dome, and behind the level space above the bands or arches of the exterior and interior columns there are many cells, both small and large, where the priests and religious officers dwell to the number of forty-nine. A revolving flag projects from the smaller dome, and this shows in what quarter the wind is. The flag is marked with figures up to thirty-six, and the priests know what sort of year the different kinds of winds bring and what will be the changes of weather on land and sea. Furthermore, under the flag a book is always kept written with letters of gold.”

Campanella was also aware of the speed at which change was happening. He wrote;

“Oh, if you knew what our astrologers say of the coming age, and of our age, that has in it more history within 100 years than all the world had in 4,000 years before! Of the wonderful inventions of printing and guns, and the use of the magnet, and how it all comes of Mercury, Mars, the Moon, and the Scorpion!”

The illustration below is from the “Mirror of Wisdom of Thophilus Schweighardt<sup>13</sup>” published in 1618. The document is sometimes called the fourth Rosicrucian manifesto, as like the Fama Fraternitas, the Confessio and the Chymical Wedding (1614-1616) published before it, it deals with the mysterious brotherhood of the Rosicrucians in a similar, mystical, fashion. What concerns us here is the description of the Collegium. Although the full description hints at the true nature of the Collegium, being “a great building lacking windows and doors, a princely, aye imperial palace, everywhere visible, but hidden from the eyes of men, adorned with all kinds of divine and natural things, the contemplation of which in theory and practice is granted to every man free of charge and remuneration...” it is also written that “Thou seest that the Collegium hangs in the air, where God wills, he can direct it.” Another floating city?



Ultimately, as noted in “The Third Millenium<sup>14</sup>,” the death of the city as we know it may not come for at least another 500 years; “The spread of artificial photosynthesis ... the sophistication of building techniques, the maturation of the information networks and the constant quest for novelty combined to make an end of the huddling places where human herds had sheltered for thousands of years...”

In part two of this article we will look at the advent of networking and other visions of social structure that derive from the latest ideas of science and psychology.

<http://www.templum.com>

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<sup>1</sup> Buzan, T. The Mindmap Book, BBC 1995, ISBN 0 563 37101 3

<sup>2</sup> Hubbard, Barbara Marx.

<sup>3</sup> "To indulge in Alnaschar-like dreams of compound interest *ad infinitum* ." - *The Times* .

<sup>4</sup> Aldiss, Brian (with David Wingrove) Trillion Year Spree, Paladin 1988, ISBN 0-586-08684-6

<sup>5</sup> (Nema, Cincinnati Journal of Ceremonial Magick, Vol. 1, Issue 5).

<sup>6</sup> Feast of the Hive, Nema, published in the Cincinnati Journal of Ceremonial Magick

<sup>7</sup> Pg.33, The Elements of Judaism, Brian Lancaster. ISBN 1-85230-402-2

<sup>8</sup> ICOM and the Future Society, Daleth, Meridian, Summer 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Leary, T. Design for Dying, Thorsons 1997, ISBN 0-7225-3656-9

<sup>10</sup> 'Utopia or Oblivion' by R. Buckminster Fuller 1969 pages 356-7

<sup>11</sup> Nine Princes in Amber, Roger Zelzany

<sup>12</sup> Bear, Greg, Strength of Stones, Severn House, 1991 ISBN 0-7278-4193-9

<sup>13</sup> The Hermetic Journal, Issue 25 (Autumn 1984)

<sup>14</sup> Stableford, Brian & Langford, David, The Third Millennium, Paladin 1988, ISBN 0-586-08595-5