

And Future King...

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"And Future King..." was published in Postscripts, the new quarterly edited by Peter Crowther in the UK. It is an anti-Romantic political satire in the tradition of Norman Spinrad's The Iron Dream, composed of a series of media interviews with Herr Doktor-Professor Sir Allen Fergus. King Arthur, even revived in simulation, begins to seem altogether too much like Conan the Nazi.

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49-6-30. *MetaTab caught up with Herr-Doktor Professor Sir Allen Fergus late last month at his Orcadian workshop, to ask his opinion on the latest political developments, and find out about his latest research.*

[topic: politics] Stream: Fergus laboratory. RPSP Logo.

MetaTab: Professor, our readers would be most interested to learn your opinion on the latest political developments.

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: There have been riots, I understand?

MetaTab: Some recent disturbances in Manchester, although they were easily contained. More worrying, for the Designers of government, such as yourself, is a shift of public mood. A recent BBC 12 poll of "hundred worst developments in human history" voted the Replicant Public Servants first, a little way ahead of last year's decision to impose a levy on the money raised from web gaming.

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: There are, if you'll forgive me, *[laughs]* better ways of testing the effectiveness of the Androids than TV polls! All the social and economic indicators are that government by well-programmed android is three or four times better than government by humans. There's a chip in your car running it, isn't there? There's a chip regulating and cleaning your house? Of course there is. Would you prefer to take over management of all aspects of those chores yourself? Of course you would not. I had a heart attack in '44, and now I have a chip regulating my heartbeat. Does a perfect job. However-much superstitious humans transfer their own negativity onto them, Androids are merely machines programmed in the execution of good government.

MetaTab: You have no worries about RPSP at all?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Oh, I'm human, just as you are, and of course there's a part of my animal-brain that wouldn't like to see *all* government handed *entirely* over to machines. The president, the three senior ministers, they will *always* be human; that's a constitutional absolute. Nevertheless, if all the civil servants and other ministers are programmed to do their jobs flawlessly, 24-hours a day every day of the year—as is the case—it can only promote a more smoothly

functioning governmental machine. Can it not? This must be understood: *most* of the jobs of government do not need human input; they can be done better by computers programmed precisely to follow the law, and the codes of employment and public servants. These Replicants can never be bribed, will never allow personal considerations to interfere in the commission of their duty, will never make a mistake or act incompetently.

MetaTab: In your opinion—whence, then, the public disquiet?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: It is difficult to say. One theory prevalent among the Political Programming community at the moment questions whether the Modelled Personalities have actually made matters worse. They were designed, of course, to make the Androids more palatable to the general population. But perhaps by making Androids more human, by improving the modelling of physical features and so on, we are actually making them more threatening to the average citizen. I mean, to the National Wagers, those whose days are empty enough to fret over such matters.

MetaTab: Do you believe that is the case?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS:

I suppose we must concede: there is something uncanny in a machine that mimics humanity so precisely. In fact, I believe the future of the Replicant Public Servants Program lies in a more exaggerated set of Modelled Personalities. Make the RPSP agents *larger* than life, more cartoony, play up their artificiality. Social research suggests that the public will accept such creatures more readily.

MetaTab: Which leads us on to the question of your present research. Are you working upon such personality redesigns?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Indeed. [[LINK topic: future research](#)]

[topic: location] Stream: Fergus laboratory.

MetaTab: Professor, were you sorry to leave London?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: I was indeed. I'd been based at my former workshop in Reading for several years. But last year Reading was declared capital of west London, and the resulting brouhaha, the fuss, the new buildings works and so on, made it a much less pleasant place to live and work. Scotland is appreciably quieter: still mostly suburban, with some spectacular private parks. And up here in the Isles, the light-pollution counter-measures are much more effective than in the south. The He-bridean wavelength-inverter is a marvellous piece of work. You can really see the stars.

Slide: Purple-black sky, only palely orange at horizon. Meteor streaking down in midframe, like luminous dewdrop dribbling down dark glass.

[topic: future research] Stream: Fergus laboratory.

MetaTab: Professor, can you tell our readers a little about your plans for future research?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: We've been working with the corporation patent-copyright department to acquire the rights to a number of screen soap stars, to famous figures from Classic visual culture, and to a number of historical figures. I myself am working upon the personality of King Arthur.

MetaTab: The historical figure?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Yes, although it's a rather complicated matter. In fact, the material we have to hand (upon which to base our programming) is a composite of quasi-historical sources and literary or mythic adaptations; and the historical context stretches over several centuries. It's a challenge to reconcile it so as to construct an internally coherent personality. Chronicles, Malory, Tennyson, Zimmer Bradley, it's a varied spread. But I think I'm coming up with something true to the original force of the myth itself, something that captures the reason why so many people are still fascinated by the legends of King Arthur. My personality-fitted Replicant will be as close to a real "King Arthur" as can be imagined.

MetaTab: Herr-Doktor Professor, thank you very much.

.2.

50-5-21. *MetaTab caught up with Herr-Doktor Professor Sir Allen Fergus earlier this week at his Avebury apartment. We are lucky enough to have an exclusive interview with this key figure in the world of Political Design.*

[topic: election] Stream: Fergus (now pluckBald) in black sleeveless suit and white strand-shirt in lounge. ART Logo. Apartment: Purple/Orange decor.

MetaTab: Professor, it has been almost a year since you last spoke to MetaTab. Might we ask how things have progressed?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: It has been an extremely eventful year. My split with the RPSP has been well-publicized I suppose, and it was far from being a pleasant thing to go through. But I believe it better to part with one's colleagues openly than try to struggle on hypocritically when the differences between you are so marked. They think that Sportsman analogues for senior civil service positions, and Soap-Star analogues for junior Ministers, will restore public trust. But I firmly believe that the people will never truly trust actors and sportsmen in politics.

MetaTab: But isn't it true that the Replicant personalities constitute separate routines to their processing and intellectual powers?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Of course; a Replicant with a personality based on a famous sportsman has exactly the same administrative competence as a regular Replicant. That's not the issue. The issue is public perception.

MetaTab: Is this why you have appealed to the public through the voting system?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Voting had become a minority pastime. People have believed for years—and not without reason—that one company's Public Service Replicants were as good as another's for the job they are designed to do, and that therefore there's little point in going through the charade of voting for one or other. But introducing celebrity personalities provides a new reason to vote. The populace is excited at the coming election, in a way it hasn't been for decades. I believe my Mythic Politicians will appeal to the public more than RPSP's Sporting and Screen star line-up. It's as simple as that.

MetaTab: And yet you have often placed on the record your contempt for the public at large, and your disillusion with the voting process?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: "Contempt" is a strong word. Most working people in this country feel a certain condescension toward the National Wage layabouts. That's undeniable, I think.

MetaTab: And yet over two thirds of the population live on the National Wage.

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: True. Of course, not *all* of them are the loutish, hanging-around-on-street-corners, petty vandalism and substance-ingestion types. But many are, and I think all of us Political

Engineers and Programmers need to look that unpleasant fact clean in the face. As for the question of the validity or otherwise of the voting process: yes, for many years, with the service provided by the Replicants, it was an anachronism, and, yes, I was among its critics. But recent events have seen a new use for the otherwise antiquated principle.

MetaTab: Is your King Arthur here, in Avebury, now?

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: He is out canvassing at present. Election laws allow me three versions of any one candidate, and all three are out in the country at the moment.

MetaTab: Good luck, and thank you.

HERR-DOKTOR PROFESSOR SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Thank *you*.

.3.

50-7-11. *MetaTab spoke briefly to Sir Allen Fergus yesterday.*

[topic: Allegations] Stream: Fergus in silver. ART Logo. Walking rapidly along Fulham Walkway.

MetaTab: Sir Allen! Sir Allen! Might MetaTab ask you a few questions?

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: In a fearful hurry...

MetaTab: How do you respond to the allegations that your candidate, King Arthur, has raised a private army and committed terrorist actions against the state on a number of occasions?

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: I reject these allegations. King Arthur has been moving among the real, the real people in the *real* country, not the media bubble. The people have, have, they have taken him to their breast. It is true he has recruited a number of National Wagers to assist his election campaign.

MetaTab: Some authorities estimate that number at eighty thousand.

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: I cannot comment upon figures. What is important is that he has given these people back their hope, purpose, and self-respect.

MetaTab: And he has armed them?

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: These are dangerous times, riots, civil disturbance. In my opinion, Arthur is to be commended for taking a firm line with social malcontents and criminals. I think you'll find that polls place my candidate firmly in the lead. People respect his strong stance.

MetaTab: Isn't it against the law to recruit a private army?

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Desperate times require extreme solutions. You must remember that this is not some publicity stunt, this is the real King Arthur—as near as modern science can reconstruct him. He is true to himself: a warrior, not an equivocating and corrupt politician. *A dux bellorum*. And it is as such that the people want him.

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50-11-20. *MetaTab today attended a press briefing by Sir Allen Fergus.*

[topic: Battle] Stream: Fergus in black. ART Logo. Virtual environment.

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: I am here to confirm that a battle has recently been fought at Camden, between human troops loyal to King Arthur, and the largely android forces of the RPSP Government. Arthur was triumphant. The Presidential order declaring last week's election result void has been overturned, and King Arthur is once again the constitutional leader of our nation, in line with the result of that ballot. The President, and all employees of RPSP, are now public enemies, and should present themselves to the authorities within three days. Failure to do so will result in police seizure. People! I bring great news. A new dawn commences! King Arthur himself has returned to lead his country, a rebirth made possible by new developments in science! The old decadence will be burned away, and a golden age inaugurated!

[Applause. Cheers.]

KING ARTHUR: I would like to thank my trusted adviser, Sir Fergus, who is true and noble. I feel the force of destiny working through me. Britain, awake! The National Wage shall be abolished. All unemployed citizens will be given the choice of joining the army or supervising their own destinies without leeching upon the state. Web access will be curtailed. Roads will be built. A new moral code of purity and honor will be made law. Chivalry will govern all citizens' lives. The glorious return is now! To those Saxons among us, I say this: we do not intend to expel you from our country, and we invite you to serve the greater good of New Britain. We believe it is possible for Saxons to be patriotic, and the first year of our reign will be devoted to giving them the chance to prove their devotion. Naturally, for reasons of national security, all citizens racially Saxon must now report to new Citizenship Stations and register their addresses to receive citizenship-reallocation. This process will *not* result in stigmatization as second tier subjects, provided *all* Saxons collect their new work-permit-directives. Those who do not register are liable to imprisonment. Citizens who are racially Celt, and who can prove genuine Celtic blood on both sides for three generations, may apply to be admitted to the Order of the Round Table. My mandate is from the people! A great day is dawning!

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52-1-2. *Excalibur National Press Services are pleased to announce that they were permitted an interview with Sir Allen Fergus last week.*

ENPS: You have achieved so much, Sir Fergus. Are you planning the well-earned retirement of which you have sometimes talked, or can a grateful people persuade you to continue shouldering the burden of responsibility that goes with being the King's most trusted adviser?

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Ah, how tempting it would be—to retire to the country, to live out the rest of my days in peace! But I fear the enemies of the state, within and without, press us too closely to allow me to lay down my burden. Arthur's great mission, although it has achieved so much, is not yet complete. The shocking, riotous violence of the inmates of His Majesty's Prison Salisbury Plain show the dangers posed by Saxon criminals, even when under lock and key. This is a problem that may require a longer consultation period, more thought, and perhaps a more fundamental approach before we can reach a solution.

ENPS: Are you managing to keep up your scientific research, on top of the arduous duties of political high office? I understand a group of true citizens has presented a million-signature petition to the Nobel Committee on your behalf?

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: I can hardly comment on that, flattering though it is. No, I am still managing a little nonpo-litical work, a little bit of science. For the good of mankind, you see. A deputation of German citizens recently approached me, and I'm working with them on resurrecting a great hero of German history, in Programmed Replicant form, to help bring their country back from the political brink on which it, lamentably, sits. I am only happy to be of service.

ENPS: Sir Fergus, I speak on behalf of the whole nation when I say: thank you.

SIR ALLEN FERGUS: Don't mention it.