



The apocryphal archive (XII)

Description

There's a difference between writing a novel and writing an academic book. A novel has a plot and characters. It can get complicated. The author has to keep track of the characters and what they know, especially what they know about each other, who they were with, and when.

Here's episode 12. I'm writing ahead and working on episode 48. With a wordprocessor it's simple enough to search back, review and keep notes. But now it's even easier to upload the entire draft to ChatGPT and interrogate the text prior to the part I am working on.

Q: Had Scase ever told Maralina about the code to restore his cognition?

A: No—not explicitly, as far as I can establish from your Novel compilation file. There is an important distinction between what Maralina knows about Scase's cognitive impairment and what she knows about his means of recovery. In Episode 12, Apocryphal archive, Maralina tells Archura that Scase seems confused about his former occupation and has discussed the counterfactual training texts with her. But there is no indication that he has told her about the restoration code.

Here's the episode it's referring to.

Episode XII: The apocryphal archive

Maralina moved into a pod at level one. It was basic, lacking luxury fitments such as an adjustable window display screen. As a squatter she would have no access to resident extras. The pod seemed private and safe. She hoped that her friend Archura was right about the pod's stability.

Maralina was staying for free. There was no one to collect rent. The arrangement would help soften her fall when her employment prospects fell through the trapdoor, forcing early retirement. It gave her more opportunities to revive her circle of friends. She retained her proxy role part time. She also wanted to investigate some of the strange things she heard and read about in the AI conversation channel.

The night after helping her friend with her move, Archura's communicator emitted an alarm. Maralina's face appeared, her arms gripping the table.

"The pod is moving!" The video image quivered. The pneumatic clamps hissed as they uncoupled. She had to repeat her message, though Archura knew what was happening.

The pod was slowly rising along its vertical rails. It would soon appear above the bank of vegetation that had obscured her window from outside. The exposure heightened the risk of discovery. That was more serious right now than the pod's mobility.

"That part of the mechanism works then." She didn't need to offer reassurance, comfort or apology. Maralina's constitution was strong from a lifetime of stress and change. But Archura stayed online for the few minutes it took for the pod to settle into its new position one level higher.

She offered to call round. Maralina declined. But they would meet in the pod many times after that. It moved its position each week, and predictably. The numbers on the lift panel would change position accordingly. Once, Archura timed her visit for the move.

"This must be the end of its journey," Archura said as the pod settled again. She didn't mean it to sound so final. "There are no pod stations above this one."

"There's nowhere else to go," echoed Maralina feigning grief.

"Except down." Archura knew the geometry of the building. "The rails on this side have a clear run up and down."

"This is the only pod facing East." Maralina had mastered the geometry of the structure.

"You've managed to go out to the shops, for a walk, a jog, whatever?"

Maralina had been undetected for 22 weeks.

"Until I saw a v-drone staring through my window." She delivered that observation unperturbed. She was keen to tell Archura about her recent encounter with the resident who lived on the 25th level. "He moved in last week. His pod was at the top on level 25."

Archura apologised. "I checked before you moved in that no one lived here. There were two from the CogLab when we did the inspection! An older guy. Very businesslike, and an admin guy, who had trouble with the lift."

"Were they moving in?"

"The more managerial one said he might move in to one of the pods to continue his review. I thought that would be next year. I didn't catch his name." She stood by the window, but the other pod's window wasn't visible from this viewpoint.

"It's not the same person," Maralina said. "My neighbour was mature in years, but basically ignorant. He introduced himself as Scase. He thinks my pod started to ascend because my mood improved."

“The pods do have sensors.” She didn’t take this seriously either. “The demonstration software may be stuck on a weekly test sequence.”

“He is obsessed with emots. I saw him wrestling with one on the top level.” Marlina was developing a profile. They were a couple of neighbourhood gossips now.

“Did he ask why you were in the tower?”

“I felt I had to explain myself. We spoke a few times. He seemed to understand why I was worried about my job. He was sympathetic and had a theory about the proxy farms.”

“He seems to have a lot of theories. Did he have a job?”

“He said he didn’t know what he did. | That could be a sign of his age, or maybe he was just concealing something.”

“He could be a crook.”

“I’m the one who should be under suspicion. He’s not hiding. He showed me into his pod. It’s well appointed. Lots of gadgets, and an EMO window screen.”

“Maybe he’s got mental health issues.”

“He thought that proxy farms were dumping grounds for workers made redundant by droids.”

“That’s partly true.”

“But he thinks no proxy worker ever talks to an actual user.”

“Then who do you talk with?”

“AI simulations of users.” Marlina could relate to this theory. She thought her job was useless. “He thinks the whole proxy business is an AI loop, with human proxies doing nothing but filling time.”

“Or generating training data.” Archura added to the imaginative theory. “You broke through the AI channel when you spoke with me. We disproved that theory. | I am not an AI.” She walked across the room like a robot of old.

“We disproved it once.”

She stopped her mime. “Does he have a theory about the glitching droids as well?”

“Like your Sumitom.”

“I heard that all the instructor droids were modified to improve them. But it went wrong. There are upgrades all the time. Profiles change; glitches are corrected.” Archura said.

“He thinks this was bigger.” Marlina tried to mimic her neighbour’s grave demeanour. “He said some modules in the new generation of neural models were trained on counterfeit texts. He

referred to this rogue data as "counterfactual".

"A dodgy database".

"An apocryphal archive".

"He said some people think there's a store somewhere of printed texts that state the opposite of what you expect conventionally."

"Does he believe it?"

"He didn't say."

"He sounds like a prof past his prime."

"I thought of him as an addled academician."

"What is in these mystery texts? Did he have examples?"

"A treatise showing how the English won the Battle of Bannockburn." That drew a blank from Archura. "It's even more pernicious when you don't know the official account."

Archura suggested another. "Or a manual demonstrating that buildings become more stable as their foundations are removed." Texts covering basic logic or geometry.

"Scafe used the example of beads on a necklace. To change the order you just have to shake it about a bit."

"That misinformation would mess you up if you were trying to move pods up and down a tower."

"I think that was the point. A module trained on counterfactual history, logic, mathematics, physics, mechanics, injected confusion into what he called "the base neural model." But it's not just isolated untruths. Whole documents with proper syntax and grammar."

Maralina considered his motivations. "Apart from fighting emots, his current obsession is proving these rogue texts don't exist or finding them."

"Does he believe any of it?"

"He was told by a droid in a bar."

"There's nothing more to be said then. Does he have a theory about us?"

"He saw us walking towards the quarries."

"You didn't tell him about the people in the quarry?"

"Nor what they were doing."

"Did you tell him about the manuscript?"

•I didn't dare. But he said we were followed.

Note

I'm reviewing earlier entries, in order. The following are from 2015. As ever, the reading and thinking behind them inform the narrative fiction above. #256 [Blood lines](#), #257 [How geometry aids recollection](#), #258 [Best intentions](#), #259 [The enormous fly wheel](#).

Banner image is by ChatGPT, prompted by the text and a request for a detail of the pneumatic pod clamps.

Category

1. Architecture
2. Artificial Intelligence
3. Podcast

Tags

1. creative writing
2. living pods
3. satire
4. science fiction

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