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## A VISION OF LIFE IN 100 YEARS ... IN THE CITY OF 'ACORN FALLS'

... earth... air... water... fire... She was floating north through mist and fog. Only the trees and bushes next to the road were visible; everything beyond was shifting haze and shadow. The line where earth met sky obscured, all distinction lost in suspended water vapour. Her T-pod<sup>1</sup> had run out of friends to play road games with – like pearls dropping from a necklace, ten thousand T-pods heading out of Copenhagen in the evening rush flung apart to the east and west until only she was still floating north in twilight to Acorn Falls. Not far to go, and even in the overcast dark the road<sup>2</sup> still fed back the day's sun to the pod. The LED fire of its lights glimmered softly against the trees... bushes...grass...bushes...fields fading out of sight.

Morning. The Inn's kitchen offers tea and a buffet of dishes both local and exotic, the chef combining her garden's seasonal produce with supplies from local farmers – and more distantly sourced foods contributed by the guests themselves.<sup>3</sup> Last night's fog has lifted, leaving only silver mists of the dawn, rising from the grass.

Walking through Acorn Falls is walking through a dream where nothing is what it seems at first and everything offers a second face, a third meaning. Is it a town? Is it a forest? Are those cliffs? Is this a meadow or a community garden or a piazza? Are those birches merely wind-sculpted into bizarre forms – or are they the children's playground, the park's benches, a tiny cabin – an exercise in artful pooktre<sup>4</sup>? Looking up into the tree canopy, she can see elevated houses and restaurants and inns.<sup>5</sup>

But today she cannot linger; this visit is not for pleasure: she has a cloud of biosensors to tutor. Her business meeting lies beyond the Canopy District. She continues down the path, and finds herself briefly amid children chasing AR dinosaurs through the underbrush as part of experiential paleo-biology lessons.<sup>6</sup> Her route takes her through the city orchard with its bustling market<sup>7</sup>, and beyond to the Cliff District. The Cliff District also eludes distinct perception. Is that a cloud tethered to a garden,<sup>8</sup> or glass curtain walls revealing the mist cycle of an aeroponic vertical farm<sup>9</sup>? Through the glass she can see a teacher and students elbow-deep in rows upon rows of plants – no

doubt a class in applied biochemistry. Beyond the multi-story farm, leaves flutter across a cliff-face – or is that her destination, an office and conference center coated in anti-pollutant living surfaces<sup>10</sup> and kinetic solar ivy<sup>11</sup>?

Her business today will give every part of Acorn Falls a voice. Scientists, artists, and community members are collaborating to redesign the interface between the Acorn Falls' biosensor swarm<sup>12</sup>, the community computing cloud, and the environmental, epidemiological, and educational datanets. The ambient intelligence of Acorn Falls has evolved over the last fifty or so years and the community wanted to refresh and update the graphics and the vocal characterisations. Trees, rivers, the soil, the air, houses, buildings, medical biosensorware – if you're going to converse with everything, you might as well enjoy the conversations. She laughed, remembering her children complaining that the refrigerator and their healthware<sup>13</sup> 'ganged up' and denied them snacks.

Challenge and design, addressed collaboratively – she could have accomplished it all without the visit. But tele-presence<sup>14</sup> doesn't let her smell the air, see her own footprints in the dew-laden grass, or clasp hands with her colleagues. Visiting Acorn Falls even for work is like walking zen: mindful appreciation of each moment, each detail.

Not all communities managed the transition so well. It took early awareness of the severity of challenges facing the world's climate, environment, and people. Nor was building the vision merely about reacting to those challenges, or even creating a new model for human communities based on the innovations of the day. The ongoing creation of Acorn Falls required something more. It required acknowledging the emergent nature of living systems, including humans themselves. It required, and still requires, an open-ended design, leaving spaces within which the creativity and insights of future generations can continuously emerge to nurture new communities of human spirit evolving in a thriving biosphere.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Future of individual transport: transport pods - atnmb, Mike and Maïke: [http://www.mikeandmaïke.com/#p\\_atnmb](http://www.mikeandmaïke.com/#p_atnmb); driverless smart cars – Google: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/d3613984-d45c-11df-b230-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1pYq12Lrh>; consumer acceptance - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-11513316>.
- 2 Roads as electricity generators / re-chargers: Solar Roadways - <http://solarroadways.com/intro.shtml>; induction charging - <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/february/wireless-vehicle-charge-020112.html>.
- 3 Forge – an LA restaurant whose dishes are made from the contributions of its guests: <http://www.dailycandy.com/los-angeles/article/80005/Forge-Restaurant-Opens>; and <http://www.foragela.com/?view=foragers>.
- 4 Arborsculpture and pooktre: pooktre chair: <http://inhabitat.com/pooktre%E2%80%99s-living-growing-tree-chair/>; pooktre playground: <http://www.popsci.com/jaya-jiwatram/article/2008-08/were-going-live-trees>; houses – Mitchell Joachim: [http://blog.ted.com/2010/07/02/dont\\_build\\_your/](http://blog.ted.com/2010/07/02/dont_build_your/).
- 5 For treehouses, offices, hotels and a stunning restaurant: <http://www.thecoolist.com/treehouse-designs-10-treehouse-masterworks/> and [http://www.cnbc.com/id/44610148/Treehouse\\_Homes?slide=6](http://www.cnbc.com/id/44610148/Treehouse_Homes?slide=6).
- 6 See a vision of immersive, experiential education via augmented reality presented in this Corning Glass image of the future: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZkHpNnXLB0&feature=youtu.be>.
- 7 Orchards don't need countryside – see the Union Street Urban Orchard Project: <http://www.unionstreetorchard.org.uk/>.
- 8 Designer clouds – the Blur Building by Diller and Scofidio: <http://www.designboom.com/eng/funclub/dillerscofidio.html>; and the cloud art of Berndnaut Smilde: <http://io9.com/5892356/artist-suspends-real-clouds-in-the-middle-of-the-room>.
- 9 Aeroponics – Aerogreen Farm in Singapore: [http://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/global\\_programme/studentwork/sungei/aero.htm](http://www.usp.nus.edu.sg/global_programme/studentwork/sungei/aero.htm); and Plantagon vertical farm in Sweden: <http://inhabitat.com/plantagon-breaks-ground-on-its-first-plantscraper-vertical-farm-in-sweden/>.
- 10 Living architecture – Rachel Armstrong: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/14/tech/innovation/living-buildings-carbon/index.html>; and <http://www.speakerscorner.co.uk/file/b35e497cc1908cba-6b6420339e5667a4/rachel-armstrong-talks-living-buildings.html>.
- 11 Solar Ivy and Grow, by Sustainably Minded Interactive Technology (SMIT): <http://www.dwell.com/articles/the-future-of-solar.html>; and [http://www.s-m-i-t.com/#grow\\_target](http://www.s-m-i-t.com/#grow_target).
- 12 Biosensors and smartdust: [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-05-03/tech/smart.dust.sensors\\_1\\_smart-dust-sensors-kris-pister?s=PM:TECH](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-05-03/tech/smart.dust.sensors_1_smart-dust-sensors-kris-pister?s=PM:TECH); and <http://www.nanotech-now.com/smartdust.htm>.
- 13 See Nike's 'Fuelband': <http://www.nike.com/fuelband/>.
- 14 For existing telepresence robotics: see Willow Garage: <http://singularityhub.com/2010/02/04/willow-garage-creates-awesome-open-source-telepresence-robots-video/>; Anybots: <http://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/industrial-robots/051810-anybots-qb-new-telepresence-robot>; and Mantarobot: <http://www.mantarobot.com/>.