

present dilemma comes from the television programme, 'Jim'll fix it'. This is because many people, the US president in particular perhaps, hang on to a misguided confidence that somehow, somewhere, someone is going to come up with a magic solution: something that will allow everyone to continue burning oil profligately, tearing around the world in high emission aircraft and driving their own private climate-destroying capsules on wheels. Surely something will come up? What are we paying all these clever scientists for if they can't save the day?

Human ingenuity and the wonders of science have, indeed, rescued us from many ills. In general most of us have a good dose of optimism, and would, quite naturally, like to believe that someone is going to come along to solve our problem. Surely Jim'll fix it?

No he won't. Not this time. It is highly unlikely that there are any quick fixes to get us out of this trouble. The best we can hope for is lots of small, insignificant actions that together might just save the day. And every gesture anyone makes towards that combined effort has some value, is better than nothing.

There are other stories that describe aspects of our present dilemma: Rip van Winkle, the Ice Maiden, doubting Thomas. Some of them might inspire or encourage us, while others are likely to



tempt us to despair of our present situation. However, it is vital that we do not despair, for only if we believe that catastrophe can be averted will we have the will to act appropriately. Change is coming, and there is a growing awareness and determination to act. Even in the United States, a number of states have now committed to their own version of the Kyoto Agreement; and along with the thawing of the ice cap there is evidence that George Bush's frozen attitude is softening around the edges.

In another popular story, a handsome prince arrives after a hundred years to awaken the sleeping princess with a kiss. If we remain in the realm of story-telling, perhaps we can hang on to the fragile hope that someone who can appreciate the beauty of this planet is going to arrive in time to administer the loving kiss that will wake humanity into a new, sustainable attitude to life on earth? But it is a fond hope.

Al Gore is a man with a mission, and his film, 'An Inconvenient Truth', is addressed, above all, to Americans. He may not be a serious contender for the part of handsome prince, but there are plenty of other stories to encourage him in the Herculean task he has set himself, from St George setting out to slay the dragon, to Theseus pursuing the Minotaur at the heart of the labyrinth.

In ending, it would be tempting to refer to Gore's task as 'Mission Impossible'. But since the *Guardian*, in recognition of Tom Cruise's appalling record with regard to his private aeroplanes, has now dubbed him 'Emission Impossible', that would, perhaps, be a rather inappropriate choice of title.