

**alchemy**  
journal of translation

**Issue Six/Summer 2014**

# **GLOBAL SCIENCE FICTION**



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# Letter from the editors

Science fiction explores the way we interact with technology and science, translating both the past and the future into different realities and offering us a distorted mirror view of our own present. Our hopes and fears have been passing through science fiction's filter for a long time, and the genre has developed strong traditions parallel to the English-speaking one, and their coincidences are as striking as their differences.

Our sixth issue is dedicated to the power one can find in contemporary science fiction. This issue seeks to explore—on a global scale—the relationship between science, technology, and imaginative speculation. And so we've included five projects from around the world (one from just the other side of the border) to illustrate this exploratory melding.

Our own Pepe Rojo, teaming up with Alchemy staff members Lilibeth Moreno and Bryan Constantino, tackle micro sci-fi bursts from Tijuana, while Sergey Lukyanenko and translation team Paulina Duda and Jodi Greig offer a closer glimpse into these alternate worlds (from Russian and Polish, respectively). Another translation team, Ignacio Azcueta and María Pape, alongside Maximiliano Frini, bring a South American perspective to this issue's mix, from Uruguay and Argentina.

Translation is about possibilities. The possibility to inhabit multiple worlds, tongues, and contexts. The possibility that a text can be embodied in different forms. This is what the work in this issue reminds us of: the mounting possibilities of language. And sometimes that language stems from other dimensions and alternate realities. We hope you find your own alternate worlds in this issue, new ways of embracing the unknown, the unsayable, the undeniable.

**Paola Capó-García and Pepe Rojo, Editors**



# MICRO(science)FICTION

## Micro(science)Fiction: You can see the future from here: Intro

The following mini-stories, written mainly by undergrads in Tijuana, Baja California, were “performed” and given away as postcards and book separators to passersby waiting to cross the border from Mexico to the USA. All of the stories depict near-future scenarios for the border zone, and they were the beginning of a 10-part, science fiction-based intervention made during the Spring of 2011 on the San Ysidro border crossing, Tijuana-side. The project was called “Desde aquí se ve el futuro” (You can see the future from here), and it was conceived as a collective imagination exercise of experiential fiction.



Photographs in this section by Cristina Gutiérrez-Espino, Gustavo García, and Gerardo Porcayo.

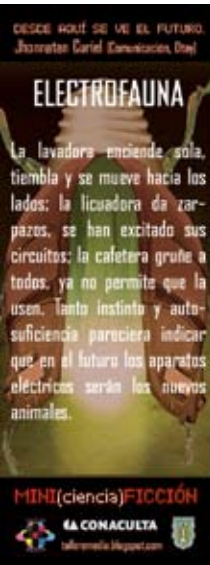
# Electrofauna

The washer turns on by itself, shakes and sways side to side; the blender lashes, its circuits have become excited; the coffee maker growls at everyone, and won't allow anyone to use it.

Overflowing instincts and self-reliance seem to indicate that in the future appliances will become our new animals.

**By Jhonnatan Curiel.**

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Bryan Constantino.**



Jhonnatan Curiel (Tijuana, México, 1986) is a poet, writer and researcher of social studies. Has published seven poetry books in Mexico and was part of Colectivo Intransigente, an artistic collective who promoted poetic events during 2010 & 2012. Writes on his blog [www.jhonnatancuriel.blogspot.com](http://www.jhonnatancuriel.blogspot.com).

Bryan Constantino attends UCSD and will obtain his degree in Mathematics this June. He lives in Barrio Logan and is working on his first Banda music composition.



# Scanner

Then, sir (in English), we pass through the last scan: a soul scan... Yes, you know that after the '34 Civil War in Tijuana, we don't allow any Mexican atheists, or a believer in any of those indigenous religions scattered throughout Mexico, to get into our country. Catholics and Jews are not a problem. The former, because their beliefs are like ours; the latter, well you know... (blinks an eye). The Soul-S300 is a scientific feat. Now we can truly say science and religion are merged into a common good: Homeland Security... (the translation fuses into Spanish at this moment).

**By Dragón Negro.**

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Pepe Rojo.**



Dragón Negro is a Hispanic Literature grad student from UABC, Tijuana..

Pepe Rojo has published five books and more than 200 texts (short stories, essays and articles dealing with fiction, media and contemporary culture). He cofounded Pellejo/Molleja (with Deyanira Torres and Bernardo Fernández), an indie publishing firm, and edited SUB (sub-genre literature), NUMERO X (media culture) and PULPO COMICS (mex-sf comics anthology) for them. He has produced several interactive stories for Alteration, and published two collections of Minibúks (Mexican SF and Counter-versions) at UABC, as well as the graphic intervention "Philosophical Dictionary of Tijuana".

# At Zacas 2046 (blog)

The funniest thing that happened to me today wasn't even supposed to be funny but I have to tell someone. A poor grrl with recently installed navelcoats felt so worked up —in between the constant heat, the synaesthesia, pepto flavor, and the getting-pricked-by- spiders-on-your-balls sensation— that she pushed her way through the fifth floor asking, "Can anybody recognize me?"

**By Carlos Matsuo.**

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Bryan Constantino.**



**Carlos Matsuo** (Mexico, 1988) studied communication in the Autonomous University of Baja California. In 2013 his political short film *Violentao* was part of the programming of the Morelia Film Festival. He recently presented his feature documentary *Basura*, about the mexican music revolution, at the Guadalajara Film Festival.

**Bryan Constantino** attends UCSD and will obtain his degree in Mathematics this June. He lives in Barrio Logan and is working on his first Banda music composition.

# Chrononautics

"I will die yesterday. I knew it the day after tomorrow," he will tell me, waiting for me to be surprised. After all, I will observe him, expressionless. "I will accidentally fall in the Cretaceous Period where a dinosaur crushed my cranium right when I step out of the machine," he will continue saying. Then, in one long draft, he will finish the beer he pissed last week. "I came to the last tomorrow, the one I no longer saw. I will never know what I thought at the time of my death. Is it inevitable?" And I will nod, knowing that it will mean nothing to him. "Anyway, yesterday everything will be worth shit, so best to get it over and done with," and having said that he will get up, climb to his machine and travel to yesterday, where he will set off to the Cretaceous. As it will not be easy being a crononaut, you will be able to find these anachronic stations where we, the travelers, can pit-stop for some drinks and remember the future. We would go crazy otherwise.

**By Bernardo Fernández, BEF.**

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Lilibeth Moreno.**



**Bernardo Fernández, BEF**, aka Bef, is a writer, story teller and graphic designer. He was born in Ciudad de México in 1972. He has published the novels *Tiempo de alacranes*, 2005, *Gel azul*, 2006, *Ladrón de sueños*, 2008, *Ojos de lagarto*, 2009, *Hielo Negro*, 2013 *And Bajo la Máscara*, 2014; the short-stories collections *¡¡Bzzzzzzt!! Ciudad interfase*, 1998 and *El llanto de los niños muertos*, 2008; the children's books *Error de programación*, 1997, *Cuento de hadas para conejos*, 2007, *Groar and Soy el robot*, 2010; and the graphic novels *Pulpo cómics*, 2004, *Monorama*, 2007 and *Monorama 2*, 2009. He is one of the best young Mexican writers of our times and he has won several prizes, such as the national novel prize *Otra Vuelta de Tuerca* (Mexico), the prize Memorial Silverio Cañada for best first crime novel (Spain), Ignotus prize of the Spanish Association of Fantasy, Science Fiction and horror. .

**Lilibeth Moreno** is a fourth-year Literature/Writing student at UCSD. She has studied translation methods at the University of Barcelona and is currently writing her honors thesis, a work exploring Jacques Derrida's under erasure method as applied to translations of contemporary Latin American poets such as Eduardo Milán, Flora Calderon, and José Eugenio Sánchez. Also, she likes grapefruit.

# Delicatessen

Come in! Get your pancreatic Fud juices! What can I get for you, güero? Enzymes, bacteria? Cold cut meat, instant chorizo, Bimbo Vitamins, Jumbo ham? Mmm, let me have the ones that fill you up quicker, I haven't had a chance to eat, and it will be a long time till I get another.

## 2050

I don't like this eye thing, it's just a fucking laser and open sesame, I need to pay, just look in here, piss and fuckin' look here. My father once told me that his grandpa told him that it used to be little fuckin' cards with numbers. I don't want to work at Zona Río anymore.

By **Oliver Gasparri**.

Translated, from the Spanish, by **Bryan Constantino**.



**Oliver Gasparri** is a communicator, schoolwise. Quotidian composer, mobile photographer and analyst of the social being. He has participated in several literary challenges trying to swindle form before content..

**Bryan Constantino** attends UCSD and will obtain his degree in Mathematics this June. He lives in Barrio Logan and is working on his first Banda music composition.

# Betel

My father named me Betelgeuse, just like the dying star. His may have been melancholic reasons; maybe it was just resignation. So my name is Betel, and like the star giving form to Orion, I'm about to undergo extinction. It's difficult to explain what a father is, at least to those who never had one, which, to my disgrace, means most of the population. I don't even try anymore. The only thing I could say is that it's even more than having a creator or provider. People can't understand. My father wanted me to bear this name as a reminder that we were once all like this. Purists, they call us now, whereas before, they simply called us humans. Nevertheless, I think he named me thus just so I could never forget the risks we run just by being different. As if it were possible to ignore them. Now I'm here, right in front of my feeding chamber. I was classified as a "Perversion". I go through the BDSM, She-male and Zoofiliac sections and finally find mine: Natural. I type in my password, accept the connection and start working.

By **Alex Sánchez**.

Translated, from the Spanish, by **Pepe Rojo**.



**Alex Sánchez** was born in the city of Tijuana in 1989. He was raised crossing borders, physical or otherwise, and continues to do so until this day. He studied Communication in the UABC, and is very fond of stumbling on the fields of psychoanalysis and literature.

**Pepe Rojo** has published five books and more than 200 texts (short stories, essays and articles dealing with fiction, media and contemporary culture). He cofounded Pellejo/Molleja (with Deyanira Torres and Bernardo Fernández), an indie publishing firm, and edited SUB (sub-genre literature), NUMERO X (media culture) and PULPO COMICS (mex-sf comics anthology) for them. He has produced several interactive stories for Alteration, and published two collections of Minibúks (Mexican SF and Counter-versions) at UABC, as well as the graphic intervention "Philosophical Dictionary of Tijuana".

# Cyber swap-meet

It all started at the maquila, where I got distracted checking out the girl I liked. Suddenly, there was a burning sensation in my arm and when I turned around, it was totally gone. Fucking mechanical press. My contractors assumed liability and payed for my prothesis, a new arm which looks and works as if it were the original.

I've been using it during the last four months, but it has been creaking and it just doesn't grip right. I tried to find a new one but couldn't afford it, not with my maquila paycheck.

I followed my friend's, El Miguelón, advice, and I visited the Mariano Matamoros cyber swap-meet. As soon as I stepped down from the calafia, I saw three vendors that displayed "human" parts upfront. The first two, neta, were way too expensive, semi-new, they said to me. The third one told me: "they are not new but they are really cheap". "Pirated", I thought, but I didn't care. I bought three different ones, just in case. They didn't look too fucked up.

At home, I try one. Fuck! It needs batteries.

**By Zuriel Herrera B.**

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Pepe Rojo.**



Zuriel Herrera B (Culiacán, Sinaloa; 1991) is a graduate in Communication. A video games, cci-fi and fantasy fan since he was a kid, he has tried to include these elements in his work, applying them to the environment that surrounds him. He lives in Tijuana, BC since 2005, due to economic and security situations in his hometown were aggravated, but thanks to this change, he has a broader view of what it means to live in the Tijuana-San Diego region, being inspired by all the cultural movement in these amazing cities

# Flying (cold) saucer

The ship landed in California.  
They started the fire.  
The incident at Roswell would not be forgotten.

# Pollero offers new touristic service

Crossing the border is easier now than ever, but after the San Diego bombing, nobody feels like working or shopping in a disaster zone, unless they are looking for collectibles or materials to build themselves a new home. The border has moved up some miles northward. San Ysidro, Chula Vista and San Diego are now huge fields of destruction. If you want to, get a Hazmat suit, or maybe a Demnor, and I'll guide you through the wasteland. You'll just have to wait until we get at least fifteen people, to make the risk worthwhile.

\*Pollero: Illegal migrants smuggler

**By Néstor Robles.**  
Translated, from the Spanish, by Pepe Rojo.



**Néstor Robles** was born in Guadalajara (1985) but lurks the Tijuana streets since he has memory. He always wanted to be an astronaut but he is a writer, editor and librarian. Bachelor in Hispanic American Language and Literature (UABC), he has taught short story and microfiction workshops, and published a bunch of horror and science fiction stories in mexican literary magazines and anthologies. He directs and edits Monomitos Press (formerly El Lobo y el Cordero), an independent publisher dedicated to the speculative fiction. Blogger: nestorobles.blogspot.com / Twitter: @nrobles.

# Tijuana: Independent

Select / cut / paste.

The Baja California peninsula detaching itself from America.

# Tijuana: Overcome

"So what's up, have you gotten over Adriana?"

"Simón, my memory was reformatted yesterday."

# Tijuana: Medicine

"Doctor, how is my son?"

"He is fine now. He had a bit of an anomaly in his mental structure: a bracket was missing."

**By Edgar Hernández.**

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Pepe Rojo and Bryan Constantino.**



**Edgar Hernández** is a Communications grad student from UABC, Tijuana.



# The Machine to Think of Gladys

## Mario Levrero

BEFORE GOING TO BED I made the daily round in the house, to control that everything was in order; the window in the small bathroom, down the hallway, was open – so that the polyester shirt I was going to wear tomorrow would dry overnight –; I closed the door (to avoid air currents); in the kitchen, the faucet was leaking and I tightened it, the window was open and I left it like that – closing the blinds –; the trashcan had already been emptied, the three knobs on the electric cooker were at zero, the control dial of the fridge was on 3 (soft cooling) and the bottle of mineral water already open had the patent stopper on; in the dining room, the big clock was winded to last a few more days and the table had been cleared; in the reading room, I had to turn off the amplifier, somebody had left it turned on, but the record player had automatically turned off; the ashtray of the armchair had been emptied; the machine to think of Gladys was plugged in and making its usual, soft purr; the high, little window facing the light well was open, and the smoke from that day's cigarettes escaped, slowly, through it; I closed the door; in the living room I found a cigarette butt on the floor; I put it in the standing ashtray that the maid sees to empty every morning; in my bedroom I wound up the alarm clock, checking that the time it showed matched the one on my wristwatch, I set it to ring half an hour later the next morning (because I had decided to cancel the shower; I felt like I was coming down with a cold); I went to bed and turned off the light.

At dawn I woke up restless, an unusual noise had startled me; I curled up in bed and covered myself with the pillows and I put my hands around the back of my neck and waited for the end of all that with the nerves on edge: the house was collapsing.

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Ignacio Azcueta and Maria Pape.**

**Jorge Mario Varlotta Levrero** (1940-2004) was a writer, comic-book scriptwriter, columnist and crossword puzzle creator from Uruguay. With over fifteen books published, Levrero cultivated a plastic style that resists any classification: his aesthetics verged from the asphyxiating Kafkaesque narrative of *París* (1980), a post-apocalyptic account of the French capital, to the limpid minimalism of *El discurso vacío* (1996), a project that juxtaposes the novel with the personal journal.

**Ignacio Azcueta** is a Licenciado en Letras from the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA). He has published a number of academic articles in different journals. Currently he participates in the investigation group coordinated by Román Setton, focused on critical theory and crime fiction.

**Maria Pape** is a master's student in Comparative Literature at the University of Copenhagen. She has done a significant part of her studies in Barcelona and Buenos Aires. She will be starting her PhD studies in Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania the coming academic year.

# The ability to pull the trigger

## Sergey Lukyanenko

The ceiling above the chair was mirrored; that is why throwing my head back I could see myself fastened by belts, enmeshed by sensors with undulatory emitter cones aimed at my temporal lobe. The cones looked very unpleasant. They were lengthy with folded input cables, like antique dueling pistols – pistols that, strangely enough were used not for defense but for the sole purpose of murder, legitimate or not.

I looked down, and, behind the safety glass of the reading machine, I saw rainbow information disks start whirling, indicators on computer screen blink, and power-consumption pointers go up.

Generators started whirring behind the wall, and the “pistols” at my temples let out a subtle and sharp sound. Trembling lights threw red glowing points on my face. I closed my eyes and felt how with the pungent powder dust, sticky with bloody sand, jagged steel of blades and poisoned sweetness of phosgene a forbidden skill ran to my brain.

The killing skill.

“We cannot yield to their demands” said the captain. “If only the ship lands on the planet, it will doubtlessly be captured and we will share the fate of our fellows. That’s why we have only two options. Either we leave Max and Elise, or...”

The captain surveyed all seven of us who remained on the ship and nodded with satisfaction.

“I thought so. We’ll need the help of an expert.”

We started. Even Boris stopped smiling, and Tanaki involuntary looked at the devices with a side glance, thinking the captain wouldn’t be able to do much without him, as he was a cyberneticist...

“Is there a volunteer to take the matrix?”

I compressed my lips in order not to utter a sound. Well, they need an expert. Let it be Boris, he’s a doctor, and then... or Ditmar, he and Max...

Seven pairs of eyes stared at me. All seven, the captain included, were waiting for my response. Two others were also waiting for it not even knowing the question existed, far away from the ship, from its safe walls and powerful machines, somewhere in the stone dungeons of the capital of the planet Tayk.

Why me? I looked around and saw... no, vice versa. I didn’t see a shadow of doubt. Why me?

“Let me, captain.”

This was my voice. And my words.

“Of course, Victor.”

Rainbow patterns on a transparent surface of disc, mosquito singing

of radiators. Right there, behind the glass, being pressed into plastic and transformed into sub molecular modification substances, the storage of all wars on Earth can be found. Right there, Cro-Magnon men fight near the fire and their stone axes flush above their shaggy heads. Right there, Suvorov marches through the Alps and Nelson leads the ships toward Trafalgar. Right there, American paratroopers throw Samurai into the sea and Leninograd raises the blockade.

The storage of all weapons on Earth is in those transparent disks. Right here, Chinese chucks break bones and battle lasers cut tank armors. And here an AK-47, covered with dust, thunders as the trigger clicks, and it emits a blue ray that paralyzes pistols.

With a drop of sulfur poison, the bleeding wound and hot fiery spit of a flame-thrower, millenniums of Earth's history started to flow into my brain. Millenniums of wars, millenniums of people capable only of responding an eye for an eye, a blow for a blow.

But we are different. We've lost this need and possibility, this curse and blessing, this strange and dreadful ability. But when a starship leaves for other worlds, the storage matrixes of Special Expert are kept as the biggest jewel and the most terrible danger in a captain's safe.

Tanaki checked the devices, while Boris was examining my body. On the cyberneticist's panel green lights flashed one by one, all my organs, every muscle, every square millimeter of my skin, everything's in order. Then the captain brought the soldered in control film information disks in and put them into the slots of the reading machine; they began to customize the system of hypnotransmission. Boris shot a glance at me and, to my surprise, I felt something unusual.

Fear.

The rainbow disks stopped one by one. I watched those still round objects with a calm and unwinking stare. The first disk to stop was the one containing the general strategy and tactics of attack. Then the one with the full course of hand-to-hand fighting. Then the basics of mass psychology...

I knew what information was on each disc and knew how to use the devices of hypnotransmission. The Matrix of Special Expert ensured the working knowledge of any equipment in the ship. And when the door opened in front of the captain I automatically remembered that the door's movement was controlled by a servomotor with an autonomous power source that could have been disabled by a bullet shot or a hard blow in the right corner of the coaming.

"How are you feeling, Victor?"

There was no fear in his eyes, he held the post for a reason. But from now on I noticed not only his cautious movements but also that he did not hurry to unfasten the bands that tied me down.

"I'm alright," I smiled pulling my hands out of nylon bands. "I don't have canines and have not turned into a monster."

The rest of the bands burst free. Stripping the scab of sensors off my

body I rose to my feet. The captain shook his head when he noticed the flocks of nylon. Then he asked:

"The matrix is on for twelve hours. Will it be enough for you?"

I grinned thinking of Tayk's level of military development. Artillery, jets, rockets, primitive nuclear weapons...

"Sure. Prepare the boat and the outfit."

I was falling on the capital of Tayk, almost sheer, against all laws of cosmic navigation. Only the uninterrupted working engine and the gravity compensation box turning deadly overloads into regular gravity made it possible for me to hide my boat from the planetary radars. Naturally I was getting visible with the naked eye; a scorching emery of air turned the boat into a fireball. But I had to deal with it...

The city was beautiful. To be accurate I remembered when the last flames of fire slipped off the dome of the boat and the green parks, mirror chains of canals and snow-white buildings of the capital spread under. My memory is the memory of an engineer and builder who has seen many cities on many planets. I stood still imbibing the wonderful view. My consciousness being captured by the matrix of Special Expert was tracking a three-edged pyramid of Ministry of Peace. When I found it, my hands ran over the control keys forcing the boat to rack. The vehicle rushed past the multi-colored summer clothes of Taykens Square. Too many people, that's no good. I pressed the button, and the floor started vibrating. The infrasound generators had been bringing panic and animal horror down over the maddened square for twenty seconds. When it emptied I started lowering the boat and turning the record in the loudspeakers on.

"Citizens of Tayk! We've never harbored resentment against you, nor do we harbor it now. We are ready to forget the past..."

The legs of the boat touched the trampled concrete of the square.

"You must show discretion and free our men. Otherwise there will be victims on your conscience..."

The hatch opened and let me out. The power defense on my belt clicked and my body was covered with the blue film of reflective field. Several steps later I turned around. On the back of the blue-ish metal hull the defense field was almost transparent. And it could have defended the vehicle better than a concrete wall...

"We're addressing the leaders of the planet directly..."

In one of the windows of the ministry I noticed a fiery fountain gleaming and a burst of machine-gun fire hit my chest with casual dotted lines. A heavy large-caliber machine gun with shell bullets. I shrugged my shoulders as I pointed the ribbed barrel of a disinter at the building. I took aim at the machine gun and pulled the trigger.

A shell exploded in front of me with a crash that echoed through the whole square. A five-meter ragged black hole appeared on the wall. I had to lower the power, since our men are still here... I swiftly headed for the building. Something was caught on my legs, and I had to turn around.

' doll.

Just like a terrestrial one. God, what a jam that was ten minutes ago... I picked the doll up, stepped to a babbling fountain and put it on parapet. Involuntarily I was reeled with splashing water, as a new burst hit the fountain. Now I was targeted from two or even three windows.

I picked up my weapon and looked around. And then I turned into a submachine gun methodically burning out every more-or-less suspicious window. When I stopped shooting the ministry pyramid lost its last remains of whiteness. With the last shot I broke in the huge wooden doors. There was metal under the wood, it melted on the granite steps with smoking black puddles.

I could not find my way in those countless corridors and rooms of the ministry even if I had a week. But the Special Expert needed only half an hour.

The electronic analyzer had calculated the point where all the fibers piercing the building signals crossed. And logic based on the experience of thousands of terrestrial saboteurs has made me go directly toward my aim. The room was packed with guards but no one dared to shoot. Soldiers in bright orange uniforms fell on the floor silently with their hands pushed back on their heads. I made a round also in silence trying not to tread on someone with my power armor covered feet. Silently I entered the hall of control headquarters after breaking the door with one stroke of a gravitational discharger. Several men whose heads were inclined over the maps on a huge round table turned to me at the same time.

"I'm already here," I said taking a seat in the nearest chair. "Where are the hostages?"

My voice, distorted by the machine translation, could be heard from the lingversor. This must have frightened more than the same phrases learnt by heart.

"I must...", the only man in civilian dress stumbled. "Give a command..."

I nodded and he very carefully, as if he were made of glass, took the loudspeaker of a telephone. I peered at his face as it whispered into the phone and nodded with satisfaction. I called the ship.

"Send a capsule for the guys."

"Ok. Victor... we're watching you. Have you... lost control?"

"I did what I had to do," I replied firmly.

"Good... The capsule has been sent."

"Over and out," I looked at the civilian and he smiled in haste.

"They'll be here in a moment... Do not call them hostages, we just wanted..."

"Calm down, we are not taking revenge. No one punishes a child who has been scratching by beating him till he bleeds."

Their stretched faces showed me that I've scored a hit. They didn't ex-

pect that. Let this day be remembered as a lost battle rather than a day of surrender. Let them feel themselves like naughty kids and remember my jeer under the obscure armor of mine forever.

"You've told us you do not fight and are not even capable of murder," one of the soldiers decided to ask. "Was it a lie?"

"It was a truth."

I didn't want to say anything else. Alas, on this level of development confessions are dangerous not only for us, but for them in particular. We've arrived in Tayk too early, although they build very beautiful cities...

Overstepping the broken door, my fellows entered the room. Seemed like Elise was alright. But Max was leaning on her arm. Our eyes met and we understood unsaid questions. "Are you holding on?" "I am, Vitya. You?" "Me too..."

"Did they hurt you, Elise?" I asked taking standby defense sets from my belt.

The girl hastily started to shake her head. She glanced at the disintegrator in my hands, at the blinking lights on the monitoring and protection devices, at the gravity discharger on my belt... Then she turned away.

"The capsule will be waiting for you at the square," I said helping my friends fix their field generators. "And I... I have to talk to them first..."

People in the room shrank at my nod and I automatically smiled. I saw how my smile cast a shadow on my face.

"The capsule is at the square" I repeated stubbornly.

The Special Expert who was leaving the ministry building could expect anything. The grey swamp of tank armor swaying at the square, diving jets in the cloudless sky... But the square was empty. It was an evening square of a quiet city paralyzed by fear and deprived of management. Seemed like I caught the ruling upper circles. Well, the four hour lecture I gave should do them good.

The wrist watch began to ring while I was making my way to the boat. The Special Expert matrix time given to my brain was running out. I should return to the ship as myself again.

It took me a long time to settle into my chair. At any moment one could actually faint as the matrix was being removed, so I didn't want to be dangling in the cabin of the boat. I looked at the lifeless Ministry pyramid once again and closed my eyes. How odd, what will I feel in a moment? Pain? The irrevocable loss of knowledge, acquired if only for a second? Dull anguish for the lost skills?

Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

Five minutes later I realized that something unforeseen has happened. The ship answered in a flash.

"Victor, why don't you start?"

"How are the guys?" I asked to gain more time.

"They're fine. Max is in the medical module... Anything happened?"

"I have a problem with the matrix. It won't come out."

The captain kept silent for a second.

"Wait. I have to consult Boris."

"There's no need to." I spoke slowly, very carefully choosing my words. "I am... the expert. The theory of hypogenous matrixes concedes these cases. In very rares cases the matrix could be more suitable to a man's consciousness than his own personality. In those cases rejection does not happen."

"Ever?" The captain asked with a very confused tone.

"Yes. I will have to live with this thing."

A silence fell. The dull, cosmic silence as if a kilometer wall of lead has risen between me and the ship.

"It's not that hard," I tried to encourage the captain. The consciousness of the Special Expert has analyzed the silence, sorted the amazed faces, squeezed till the whiteness fingers and bitten lips out.

"It does not bother me that much, trust me."

The silence has stretched and become lead heavy.

"What should I do? Can I return?"

The silence has cracked.

"Yes..."

The boat was surrounded by darkness. What are you thinking about, hiding in your apartments, switching off the lights, almost like us, citizens of Tayk? Are you afraid of revenge? For nothing. We do not take revenge. Surely we keep that big and heavy bludgeon somewhere in the back of our clean ships, just in case. But we always throw that awkward weapon away after using it.

Only one time that bludgeon has adhered to a hand...

Dozens of streets were stretched on all sides. Straight, absolutely empty, ideal runways. I touched the keys directing my boat toward the nearest one and speeded up. Gently and with no sounds the vehicle started sliding over the concrete, past the white castles and almost terrestrial trees...

I doubt that they will be able to remove the matrix even on Earth. But I could mingle with the crowd where people have never seen me with the disintegrator against the background of faces distorted by fear and burnt windows. It's just that it will take me three years to reach the Earth.

I looked at the screen and saw how from an unnoticed street in front of me a huge tank, decorated with green and brown stains of disguise, was coming out. It stopped across the street and Taykens in overalls were jumping out of open hatches. Fear gripped me. You want to stop me? Covered with the defense field, my boat will throw the tank off like an empty carton box. The boat is a very safe vehicle. Even if you try it will not be possible to disable it. If only Special Expert wants it... He can do much indeed. He even understands why I volunteered and why the averted stare of Elise will never allow me to return to the ship.

He also knows how to turn off the power field and uncover the fragile plastic hull of the boat.

When the rammed tank side spread all over the screens I took my hands off the keyboard and closed my eyes.

**Translated, from the Russian, by Dmitry Krizhanovsky.**

**Sergey Lukyanenko** is considered to be one of the most famous contemporary Russian sci-fi writers being best known for his Watch pentalogy with the first novel Night Watch published in 1998. Lukyanenko himself said that his work has been heavily influenced by that of Robert A. Heinlein, the Strugatsky brothers, and Vladislav Krapivin, and that he hopes to be remembered as a literary follower of the Strugatsky brothers. Currently Sergey is working on several projects and continuing to write short stories and participate in the life of fandom.

**Dmitry Krizhanovsky** studies Russian and American literature and currently holds a position of Russian TA at the University of New Haven.



# I'm always late everywhere

Daniel Frini

I have a problem: my time machine is always late.

I have wasted hours trying to make it work properly (it's not convenient to force the mechanism, as the tragic Chichilo Sartori incident showed), but nothing seems to work.

I tried to find some equation that allowed me to compensate the loose mechanism (my hypotheses was that the further you go in time, either forward or backwards, you get a higher delay as a result), but that was not the case. I have taken it to Laucha Micheli's repair shop — no better clockmaker than him—. I've consulted Manteca Acevedo, who knows a lot about quantic engines. I've corrected the tempions flow with an electromagnetic, long range bar, confined the electrostatic repulsion forces to limit the thermal velocity, inferred over the an/cat reaction in order to increase the passing energy; but it was useless.

And the problem isn't minor.

I became a traveler because it was the best way to join my two passions: on one side, I'm kind of a homemade scientist fascinated with building weird artifacts; on the other, I love history's anecdotic episodes; so, when I found the instructions, I didn't hesitate; I built the Machine and threw myself into space-time, but it was pointless.

Three or four times, I wanted to see how María Antonia Josepha Johanna von Habsburg-Lothringen lost her head, on Vendémiaire the twenty-fifth of the second year of the French Revolution, at eleven a.m., on Paris' Revolution Square; but I always got there when the last curious peasants were leaving away and Sanson, the executioner, cleaned his guillotine. Once, I even arrived the night from the twenty-fifth to the twenty-sixth, and only found a drunken pissing one of the gallows legs.

I wanted to see Martin Luther King and his I have a dream on August twenty-eight, nineteen sixty-three, in front of Lincoln's monument, in Washington; but only found the stairs strewn with dirty papers because of the thousands of people that had stepped on them; and a left-behind group talking, as they walked away, about how shocking the speech had been.

By the time I stepped the Curia of Pompeyo's Theatre, in Rome, on the

idus of March, in seven hundred and nine at urbe condita; Bruto and the conspirators had already killed Julius Caesar.

I didn't get to see Perón on the Rosada's balcony, October seventeenth, nineteen forty-five. The Fat Man bomb had already exploded in Nagasaki. There were no Americans in Saigón. The military wouldn't allow me to enter Roswell's Ground Zero. The Beatles crew were clearing away the rooftop at the Apple building. Mary Jane Kelly was already dead on her bed, and I couldn't find traces of Jack the Ripper. The corpses of Benito Mussolini and his lover, Clara Petacci, were already hung upside down at the service station on Piazza di Loreto. Lady Di's car was wrecked to pieces in the tunnel, near the Sena, and surrounded by ambulances and police cars. There was nothing but chips from the bridge over the Kwai River. I could only find Joan of Arch's ashes, and two or three embers aroused by a weak, north wind. Dempsey was going into the ring, after Firpo's terrible right uppercut. Tunguska's trees were already in flames and fallen. And, of course, the police had already circled Dalla's Dealey Square, and taken JFK, deadly wounded, to Parkland's Hospital.

There's nothing to do. I'm always late everywhere, because of this jealousy that cost me over ten years of work, a monstrous amount of money, my marriage, my children's hate, and my friends and family's condemnations.

Of course, I've tried to go back to nineteen ninety-eight a number of times, and prevent myself from this inconvenience, with the hope that, on those first steps, I'd find a proper solution, maybe obvious on the draft taken from Popular Mechanics Magazine, March edition; but, no matter what I do, I'm always there after I've closed my workshop while I am, certainly, taking a nap on the bus, on the long trip back to my home on that last hour of evening. I couldn't even force myself to hold tighter to the handrail, that time the one-ninety-eight bus hit the brakes at the Brandsen and Quirno Costa corner, because of a taxi driver that crossed a red light; making me fall and end up with an ache on my back that lasted for three weeks.

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Maximiliano Frini.**

**Daniel Frini** was born in Berrotarán, Argentina on 1963. He is a Mechanical Engineer, and writes in several newspapers, magazines and blogs in Argentina. His fiction has won several awards and has been translated into several languages. He founded the literary group "Heliconia" and leads the virtual workshop "Máquinas y Monos" for legendary Argentinian sf-magazine Axxón.

**Maximiliano Frini** (San Martín, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1989) is currently studying Industrial Engineering and completed the translation of several of his father Daniel Frini's short stories in order to get a translator's CPE degree.

# Theory of species extinction

Daniel Frini

It was the time when the Sun was at its highest point of its road, when Jafet came into the tent.

—Father.

—Yes, Jafet?

—We have a problem.

—What is it, my son?

—It turns out that...

—Old man! —Cam, who had entered five steps later than his brother, interrupted.

—What do you want, Cam? Can't you see I'm talking to Jafet?

—Who the fuck made these plans?

—More respect, they were delivered by Yahveh Elohim!

—Then, the idiot is you, oldster.

—Blasphemous! —The father threw himself, scuff in hand, to hit his son.

So, Jafet interrupted:

—Wait, Father. Though rash, Cam is right. I think there is a problem.

—Which one?

—What did Yahveh Elohim say, precisely, about the measures?

—“And you shall do it this way: three hundred elbows long, fifty elbows wide and thirty elbows high”.

—Elbows by the Babylonian or Assyrian system?

—Elbows are elbows, here and in Egypt!

Cam interjected saying.

—Will you tell me, silly old guy, how do we put all these animals in there?

—But...

—Yes Father, we checked.

—That's right, father. They don't all fit —Jafet added.

—It can't be...

—But, what do we do?

—Ask Yahveh Elohim.

—He's not answering! He ordered me not to call him anymore and to handle things on my own.

—Well... you bother him a lot...

In that moment, Naama came into the tent:

—What's going on here?

—Mother... —Jafet started, but Cam interrupted him.

—Old lady, the measures are all wrong.

—What? Sure?

—Yes, mother —Jafet insisted —We were just telling that to our Father. But then, Naama exploded:

—There you have it! You are a moron. I told you, I told you “Are you sure?” “yes”, you answered. See? You can’t be trusted with anything. I ask him for an ounce of bread, and the mister goes and brings me two mignons. I tell him to buy me a piece of flax fabric and he brings me cotton, which loses its color on the second wash. What are you going to do now?

—I don’t know. I...

—Don’t worry, Father... —Jafet said, trying to bring some optimism, but Naama wasn’t her anymore:

—And he wants to build such an artifact, when the closest he’s ever been to the water was that one time he took a bath!

Cam insisted:

—It is how I say. We’ll have to take them all swimming.

—What are you talking about? —Sem said, the youngest brother, as he entered into the tent.

Naama went on, furious:

—Your Father! The chosen one! The righteous! Two years spending all our savings on this wooden thing! Not even visiting our parents, much less holidays at the Urartu mountains. And what for? For the good man to mess it up with the measures. And he blames Yahveh Elohim!

—I don’t blame him...! —the Father defended himself. But Naama went on:

—Didn’t you think about the neighbors? I’m tired of hearing them say: “There goes the crazy man with his little boat”. “So it’s going to rain a lot, mister?” “Why doesn’t he invent the umbrella, instead?” And you go and feed those gossiping people, who laugh at our faces. I hear them, already, saying, “Do you have any room for rent?” “And a rubber boat? Why doesn’t he better take the hippo on a rubber boat?”

—And which is the problem? —Sem said, as pragmatic as always.

—What? —Naama Said.

—What? —Cam Said.

—What? —Jafet said.

—What? —the Father said.

—Get rid of some of them.

Even though Naama didn’t miss the fact that “get rid of them” meant “do it while I watch you doing it”, typical Sem, she immediately saw the advantage of the proposal. And decided to defend it, as a way to save something from the imminent derision she was about to suffer from the neighborhood gossip.

—Never! —the Father said.

—Shut up, oldster —Cam said.

—Could be... —Jafet said.

That night, a weak candle shone, as Sem danced outside, to a crotale

song; the family was making the list, under Naama's harsh gaze.

—Triceratops? —the Father asked.

—No. We said nothing that weights more than two hundred talents —Jafet said.

—The elephant, then?

—That one fits by this little.

—Mermaids? —he asked again.

—I see —Naama said —He wants to stare at her boobs.

—They come from the water —Cam said —they can handle it on their own.

—Unicorns? Centaurs? Pegasus?

—Horses are very similar, and they are already inside.

—Yetis?

—They will be very hot.

—Rheas?

—What are those?

—Kind of like the ostrich.

—And which is which?

—No idea.

—Leave them both.

—Dragons?

—They will burn the ship.

—Sphinxes?

—What do we want lions with wings for?

—Mammoths?

—The horns don't fit. Besides, we already have the elephant.

—Megatherium?

—We already have the other sloth, which is smaller.

And so they went on, all night.

A month later, the water started rising and the arch went away. On deck, without looking back, Noah smiled. Yahveh Elohim smiled with him.

The animals that were left behind on the isle that used to be the family's homeland, could only stare, without understanding. Some cried.

**Translated, from the Spanish, by Maximiliano Frini.**

**Daniel Frini** was born in Berrotarán, Argentina on 1963. He is a Mechanical Engineer, and writes in several newspapers, magazines and blogs in Argentina. His fiction has won several awards and has been translated into several languages. He founded the literary group "Heliconia" and leads the virtual workshop "Máquinas y Monos" for legendary Argentinian sf-magazine Axxón.

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# selections from **Two Ends of the World (1937)**

## **Antoni Slonimski**

In the first days of June 1950, newspapers from all over the world printed a brief report, which included comments varying in their degree of irony. A certain owner of a large landed estate in Denmark, Hans Retlich, German by birth, had sent the following message through his private radio station: "On the 30th of June of this year, I will destroy mankind. Things have deteriorated to such a degree that nothing remains to be done, other than start everything over from the beginning. A few years ago I acquired a device which will allow me to kill every animal possessing a nervous system within the span of a few seconds. My "Supernal Ray" will cleanse the world far more efficiently than that legendary flood, crudely carried out by the Jewish god. My creed is purpose and precision. Everything on Earth will die except for that which I consider suitable to preserve. There are no means of defense against this blue ray. Mankind is kindly asked to prepare a sufficient number of graves. There will be no more "Religion" or "Art." God and the creator of a new humanity, Hans Retlich."

The puzzling thing was that the radio station of the mysterious Mr. Retlich was more powerful than any other broadcasting station in the whole world. The communiqué was heard everywhere. It drowned out local radio programmes, but the majority of listeners thought it was only an advertisement for a movie or the announcement of a radio drama. The matter exclusively interested radio enthusiasts. The first reporter to fly towards Retlich's estate was the Englishman Browley. His goal was to visit and describe the largest private broadcasting station in the world. Browley's aeroplane succumbed to catastrophe a few kilometers from the town of Ruben, which was owned by Retlich. Magazines offered a short report about the crash and in later editions sneered at the "New Noah" who – apparently just like the biblical Noah – had a penchant for alcohol. Some claimed that Mr. Retlich was drunk when he proclaimed his death sentence upon humanity, others... that he was mentally ill. But after three days, when the powerful, deafening, hoarse voice of the "maker of the new humanity" sounded out once again, serious criticism of the international radio inspectorate began. Is it possible that a private citizen could illegally build a radio station of that strength and could fool around on air, disrupting the reception of serious programmes? Some of the public thought that it was the beginning of a radio broadcast of Karel apek's "War with the Newts" or a sensational drama by H.G Wells, who had just returned to Europe from Hollywood newly married. However,

the matter turned out to be more sinister.

Two Danish reporters venturing toward Ruben also met with catastrophe before they could reach Retlich's settlement. The Danish police took up the case, and the tone of the press fundamentally changed. "The Madman of Ruben" became a headline sensation. A certain village teacher from Ostapen published a letter, which claimed that over the past few years, strange things had been happening in Ruben. The town was surrounded by an unusual wire net. No one was allowed to enter without permission and a special inspection. There were vast fields and numerous buildings in Ruben. The press printed the revealing letter together with a report of the discovery of the two Danish journalists' bodies. The corpses were charred and resembled a blueish powdery lump.

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The architect of future mankind announced the first cataclysm in Europe: "On June 15th of this year, according to your idiotic calendar, the entire population of the city of Birmingham will die. I'm not some Jewish huckster; this won't be a silly flood, but clean, solid work. It will be a demonstration of how one wipes out humanity. I chose Birmingham because a certain swine by the name of Denbry lives there."

Later in the evening of that day magazines printed a sensational interview with Mr. Denbry, the owner of an old and well-known British printing press in Birmingham. It turned out that the head of the firm "Denbry, Fogg, and Son," Mr. Samuel Denbry, recognized the name of the madman from Ruben. In the firm's archives a copy of a correspondence between Retlich and Denbry's press was discovered. The correspondence concerned the publication of a small collection of satirical poems and narrative poetry by Hans Retlich. The satires were named "Pillory of Words," and a small tome of poetic prose was titled "Celadons." The letters referred to the publication of these two booklets in an English translation. The original copies, printed in German, were also found in the firm's possession. The morning dailies immediately printed excerpts from the oeuvre of "the creator." Most idiosyncratic was the prologue; the author states that once the world reads his work, all will come to him and demand that he renounce it, but the poet finishes his prologue with an answer addressed to humanity: "I shall not erase anything, nor strike out any line, because each Worde arises from my Soule." A journal by young conservatives sharply attacked Denbry's firm: "If in fact Mr. Retlich is in possession of a terrible device, and the charred bodies of our brave pilots manage to confirm this fact, Denbry's firm will be held entirely responsible for the complete destruction of mankind. Undoubtedly, the refusal to publish his poetry embittered the "titan of Ruben." What right did they have to reject the work of such a remarkable man? This is

not an isolated incident, as one of our closest co-workers met with similarly inexplicable resistance from "Denbry, Fogg, and Son" a few months ago. The matter concerned a poem entitled "Shawl" from the cycle "Souls."

"Only strong leadership can protect our country from publishers' lawlessness" – the organ of young national conservatives concluded. In response to these accusations, Mr. Samuel Denbry himself responded with a letter in the Times.

"Even if," Mr. Denbry wrote, "humanity indeed had to die at the hands of a madman (which Mr. Retlich undoubtedly is), and even if I knew that saving humanity depended on the publication of "Celadons," I would nevertheless refuse to publish it. The graphic arrangements of Mr. Retlich's poems, coupled with content that is difficult to grasp, as well as the complete lack of rhymes, are at great odds with the traditions of the "Denbry, Fogg and Son" publishing house. It is commonly known that "Denbry, Fogg and Son" published the first volume of Kipling's poetry for school-age youths."

In the same issue, the Times initiated an extensive survey on the danger threatening humanity at the hands of the Madman of Ruben. Bernard Shaw responded: "Nothing has actually happened. The vast majority of English citizens are believers. Therefore, they should be prepared for both the fact that their fate lies in the hands of the Lord and that Judgement Day must eventually come. For the first time in human history, believers are dealing with the real and vengeful god of the Old Testament. God has revealed himself in the town of Ruben. His methods are the ancient methods of Jehovah. Believers do have their ways, though; they should pray to Mr. Retlich. They should hastily build statues of him on squares and burn incense in front of them. As far as unbelievers are concerned, they certainly can occupy themselves with their own business, namely intelligent entertainment. For that purpose, I recommend my new play Merchant from Mars, which premiered in Warsaw. The play was also published as a book through Hamilton Publishing House, and it costs three shillings and two cents." Aldous Huxley responded, "The events that happened in Ruben remind me of the frames of El Greco's paintings located in a certain Spanish chapel burnt down during the last revolution. These frames faithfully stood guard over nonexistent works of art. Perhaps Mr. Retlich will exterminate humanity, but he won't destroy the whole universe. The frames, within which nature will rebuild all its mistakes and charms, will remain. The frames must be filled. This is the secret of all music, thus of our whole civilization." Huxley's statement was regarded by the sophisticated European public as a little joke and a stylistic pearl. The masses, however, were not swept away by the reasoning of the subtle writer. On the other hand Commissar Litwinow gave an interview that gained him many supporters. He said that the "Supernal Ray" made by the madman from Ruben is the invention of bourgeois culture, and we all know



that the laws governing both the capitalistic system and bourgeois culture do not exist in classless societies. That is why this blue ray means nothing to the Soviet Union. There was a certain discrepancy between the words of the aged diplomat and the resolution passed by the Komsomol in the city of Kagangrad: "Since the bourgeois scholar Retlich invented a blue ray that can destroy humanity in forty minutes, the Komsomol scholars from Kagangrad hereby enter into an arms race and will invent a red ray that will perform the same task in fourteen minutes." This resolution was reported by the Times separately because it reached England by a delay of a few days.

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British headquarters and artillerymen of both armies waited for an answer from Oxford and from Professor Sir John Cypkin, who on instructions from the government began feverish research on the nature of the Supernal Ray and potential means of defense against its effects. On the evening of the 14th of June, Professor Cypkin sent a reply straight to the chair of the Council of Ministers. The famous scholar was of the opinion that this "Supernal Ray," which could kill from afar, did not exist. And even if it did exist, the only way to study its properties would be to determine the mechanism of transmission. Therefore, in his message to the chair of the Council, Professor Cypkin inquired if it was possible to deliver to his Oxford laboratory the devices emitting the ray. As far as a certain Retlich was concerned, no one in the scientific world had heard of him, and it was out of the question that someone not in possession of an academic diploma could send such a ray, unknown to modern science as it was.

At more or less the same time the radio broadcast a message from Ghandi in India. The great prophet, who was in treatment in one of the British hospitals in Benares, where he was recovering after his last fast, declared to all his followers: "We should not resist the "Supernal Ray." Meanwhile, I am declaring a boycott against all goods imported from Denmark." The first part of the instructions from the prophet from Benares was significantly easier to carry out. However, the second part was rather baseless, as the British Indies didn't import any Danish goods, with the exception of an anti-insect powder "Retex," and, as everyone knows, Buddhism prohibits the use of such powders.

The answers of both the great scholar and the great teacher of humanity engendered bitterness in the British cabinet. The intellectual world and reclusive ascetics failed. Artillery was all that was left. On the evening of June 14th, Nationalist and Fascist Youth demonstrations took place in many European cities. Massive placards reading "Down with the International Jewry!" were hoisted. The crowd attacked Jewish passersby. All this resulted from information taken from a certain tabloid which claimed that a Jewish

family with the last name Rejbich lived in Hungary, which was certainly a slight variation of the name Retlich. The nationalist youth beat a certain Hungarian aristocrat visiting Warsaw on his way to Russia. The aristocrat was a brunet with a prominent aquiline nose and, having no command of Polish, could not explain to the youth that he was also an anti-Semite. In Bulgaria a reddish-blond Swedish insurance agent was beaten, taken for a Jew, because — as everyone knows — Bulgarians are brunets, and Bulgarian Jews mostly red-headed. Several dozen authentic Jews were also beaten.

On the evening of June 14th, the weather was quite clear and in practically all the European cities, the populace crowded the streets, waiting for news from Great Britain and Denmark. At twelve o'clock sharp the radio broadcast a speech from Il Duce. The great Italian statesman had set himself the goal of outshouting the madman from Ruben. Indeed, his voice reverberated with great strength. Mussolini reasoned that the Supernal Rays would fall, first and foremost, on Great Britain, as punishment for the sanctions imposed on Italy during the new colonial war in Transjordan. Il Duce shouted that it was Jupiter and other furious Roman gods who threw the rays. Mussolini proclaimed the ancient Roman religion, claiming that Christianity was a faith at odds with the empire and the fascist party. This return to ancient beliefs triggered certain misunderstandings between the Vatican and the Quirinal, soothed thanks to the extraordinary tact of the Holy Father and King Emmanuel. Only the Germans were silent. At this point, neither Chancellor Hitler nor Goering had released a statement addressing the destruction of the few dozen aeroplanes or the threat to level both the city of Birmingham and the rest of the world.

The silence of the Germans and the verified fact of the madman's German roots evoked numerous comments in the Leftist press. "Hitlerism Stands Behind the Madman of Ruben!", "The Germans Want to Destroy the World by Retlich's hand!" — typical headlines in the government-run French press.

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At 7 o'clock in the morning it was possible to reconstruct the events that occurred on the night of the 14th. All Danish citizens fell victim to the mysterious "Supernal Ray." On Swedish soil, the residents of Lund and Malmo perished too. The population of German cities such as Kiel, Altona, and Hamburg perished; the Helgoland island perished. The north-eastern part of Holland perished. All living creatures within a radius of two hundred kilometers from Ruben vanished on that first terrible night of the new world order. The "Supernal Ray" described a circle with a radius of two hundred kilometers. After that, at 5:40 in the morning, Retlich fired a massive beam of blue light that destroyed Harwich, Northampton, Cambridge, Coventry and Birmingham. Retlich had carried out his threat. When discussing the destruction of cities, one must note that those cities did not collapse into ruins,

nor did they fall victim to fire. Only living creatures perished. Flora survived, although the majority of trees lost their leaves and all remaining greenery acquired a bluish metallic tint. Many German cities fell prey to Retlich's death rays. The accusation of the leftist press was false. No government and no European city had backed the madman. It was necessary to come to terms with this utterly individual attack by an individual person armed with the most terrible instrument of death ever known.

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Eight million people lost their lives on the tragic night of June 14th. No one escaped alive from the area affected by the Supernal Ray. The residents of Cambridge survived; but only for the simple fact that there was nobody left in Cambridge because the whole population of that beautiful university city had departed to Oxford for the rugby game the evening before. Numerous sanitary and rescue commissions arrived at the area affected by destruction. A hasty examination of the dead revealed that no major organs were damaged. The blue ray left no trace on the bodies apart from a metallic tint. Their effect relied entirely on the paralyzation of both the nervous system and the heart. After a few hours the victims' bodies disintegrated into grey and odorless ash. [...] Endangered man's real hope, however, was a discovery by a student from Coventry who had returned to the dead city in order to fetch golf clubs. The student, Gerby, found the golf clubs and bodies of his immediate family, and while he was bustling around the deserted house, he noticed with utmost surprise that something was moving in the aquarium on the windowsill. It was a goldfish, nicknamed "Professor Cambell;" like his namesake, the fish had extremely bulgy eyes. On June the 15th, the afternoon papers printed long articles on the first page: "The Fish Live!", "Water – a Poor Conductor for the Ray!", "Waterproofing Will Save Humanity!" The Polish state-run press published an article entitled: "Flee to the Sea!". In Brussels, a certain Anglican pastor commenced his sermon with the words: "The Goldfish from Coventry Has Shown Us the Way." Indeed, it turned out that fish in ponds and rivers located in the area of the fatal waves' impact were not affected by the Supernal Ray. Would it be enough then, to simply take a dip for a few minutes in order to save oneself? People started rapidly buying glass tubes that allowed breathing underwater; the price of a diving suit reached the staggering sum of fifteen thousand British sterlings.

In this way, the five days following the annihilation of the German and English cities passed. The madman from Ruben showed no sign of life. Optimists began to believe that Retlich himself died from the effect of his own invention. In general, however, the opinion that only water could save humanity prevailed, and for that reason masses of townsfolk moved to the seaside. A few religious sects were created. A certain German scholar from

Wroclaw wrote a paper in which he demonstrated that mankind's biggest mistake was the migration from sea to land and the transformation of gills into lungs. Initially, organic life stuck to salt water. Prof. Bibrich from Wroclaw claimed that the propagation of living organisms on land was the first Jewish conspiracy. "Jews are the ones," cried Prof. Bibrich, "who lured us onto land. Credulous Aryan nations succumbed to the international Jewry's instigation and began to breathe with their lungs. But Jews have preserved their gills to this day, and when the final day comes, they will throw themselves into the water, sneering at the annihilation of the Nordic race." In order to demonstrate the validity of his thesis, and in front of a full auditorium, Prof. Bibrich performed an operation on a few Jews caught on the streets of Wrocław. After looking inside the Jews' chests, it turned out that their lungs were absolutely normal. However, this could not invalidate Prof. Bibrich's claim, as Minister Goering asserted, because no materialistic or empirical evidence is able to invalidate Bibrich's superior theory— a theory that is based on national mysticism rather than Jewish logic. In general, the Germans were relatively calm; it was believed that Chancellor Hitler would defend the country against the death ray. Such faith in the power of governmental leaders was not present in Poland, even though the population thought the Ray was hogwash.

Anarchy reigned in the majority of European countries and the authorities could not control the growing chaos. Numerous gangs formed and attacked passersby in broad daylight. The streets were full of fugitives rushing to the sea.

One of the heroes of our story, Henryk Szwalba, did not rush to the sea like a lemming. He remained in the city.

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In choosing the people who would constitute new mankind, and in his search for boys and girls to fill future cadres, Retlich was guided above all by racial criteria. The Nordic race didn't seem appropriate due to their considerable admixture of humor, and this type of humor was one of the most dangerous anarchistic powers of the old world. Retlich's personality was such that he went farther than his predecessors. If fascism was a regression to primitive forms of existence— a renunciation of a humanitarianism which erodes strength and the drive to conquer— Retlich more boldly strove towards an animalistic, biological human species. Having familiarized himself with the work of ethnologist Hugo Bernatzik, he decided to base his future race not on Nordic characteristics, but on something found still further to the north. He decided on the Laplanders, which Bernatzik had called "the saddest nation on Earth." The exceptionally harsh climate, in which barely two months a year resembled summer, together with a tribal, primitive way of life, had created a type of gloomy but unusually tough and hardy animal. The Laestadian sect, forbidding anything that could be regarded as

entertainment, toys, dances, and family celebrations, was somewhat of a preschool compared to the higher education Retlich planned to give them. The crisis and a bad seal-hunting season allowed him to easily buy young Laplander males and females for the price of three steel fishing hooks.

Retlich understood that if the happiness of humanity was going to rest on this retreat to primitive forms of life, it was necessary for man to be genetically similar to his closest relative in the animal kingdom... the monkey. It seems as if Retlich should have searched for his pupils among African Negroes or inhabitants of Guinea. However, as far as anthropological criteria is concerned, a Negro male is not closely related to an ape. A monkey lacks protruding lips, which is a "black" characteristic— Retlich came up with this brilliant thought entirely on his own. A monkey possesses lips corresponding more closely to those of an Eskimo than to a Negro. Additionally, if one takes hair into account, Retlich noticed (with his usual perceptiveness), that monkeys almost never exhibit curly hair. Retlich's most original discovery was another historical fact of immeasurable importance. Jews had mingled with all the nations of the world. Some Jews display remarkable negroidal features, and so— consistently reasoning— there must be, on the basis of mutuality of types, Negroes with semitic features. The Negro-Jew is a quite common phenomenon, although no one has ever seen a Laplander-Jew. Laplanders are also distinguished, as Professor Gubner claimed, by their absolute inability to recognize two-dimensional shapes. A Laplander does not know how to reconstruct the third dimension, and that's why photography is an unintelligible jumble of meaningless lines and blotches for him. The Laplanders from the Laestadian sect are characterized by a profound lack of musicality. A physical immunity, a strength of will, an instinct to fight, and courage— these are the characteristics, above all, on which future man must rest. All of these wonderful traits had not yet attained their full expression in those young Laplanders whom Retlich had chosen. For the time being, unaccustomed to the climate, they perspired and suffered in Ruben's barracks, resembling beached seals on a scorching hot summer day. Retlich consoled himself with the thought that after a few generations they would adapt to their new conditions of existence. A portion of them would return to the eternally snowy north. The rest, who would adapt, would be the healthy, powerful, new mankind, rescued from the morass of mysticism, art, humor and all other psychically-corruptive "miasmas."

Daydreaming in his Ruben villa, Retlich saw with his mind's eye the figures of great and powerful Rubenites populating the wildernesses of an Earth restored to its primal beauty. Cities, ports, and ships would disappear. The world would not head down the road of art, science, and convenience, depriving man of his natural, innate, marvelous bestiality. At first Retlich planned to preserve every trophy of modern engineering and medicine in his Rubenite ark. In recruiting mercenaries who would complete the destruction, he chose experts from fields which would grant the Rubenites the

strength and ability to rule the world. However, one night in the months before June 1950, during the last weapons tests, Retlich came to a conclusion. Preserving technical inventions would require a continuation of scientific research, because otherwise the future descendants of the Rubenites wouldn't know how to use their inherited instruments. This thought drove the sleep from Retlich's eyes. He recognized all of the dangers that lay in wait for the future masters of the earth.

Is there anything easier than to corrupt an innocent and righteous psyche through the miasmas of belief and desire, or to force this unclouded blood into the madness of art and communism? All of the crimes against human nature could again be repeated, imposed by the Jews of a depraved humanity. Retlich thought long and hard over the resurrection of a pastoral culture, but he was put off by the lack of an element of danger. No, humans will have to fight tooth and nail for their lives. It was then that Retlich's plan crystallized into its final form. The mercenaries would die after fulfilling their role. Explosives, tanks, and electricity would function only as long as Retlich remained alive. He had not shared his knowledge of the death ray with any Rubenite. When the now-useless mercenaries die, only he will remain, god and leader of the Rubenites. Legends of Retlich will be the only legends of humanity, his commandments will be the only commandments. Our reader might obviously think Retlich's fantasies are naive, but that doesn't change the fact that these dreams gave him much satisfaction and that his possession of a death ray allowed the neo-Noah to realize his ambitious plans. That's how it could have happened and that's how it did happen.

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On the 30th of June, a brigade of Rubenites was locked in a special pavilion in Ruben. Retlich himself worked in his laboratory with the help of Emerich and two Laplanders, Number 17 and Number 13. The dynamo which powered the main machine emitting the "Supernal Ray" ceased its booming. Silence reigned throughout Ruben. Retlich rose from the silent apparatus, opened the laboratory's window and, breathing heavily, stared at the wide open landscape stretching before him. There were familiar buildings and familiar trees. On the surface, nothing had changed. However, these were the only human settlements in the whole world. The human noises floating from the barracks were the only human voices on the desolate globe of the earth.

In that moment, Retlich did not feel as if he had committed a crime. It was murder similar to the murder of contemporary war. When killing an enemy, a Roman soldier saw the deathly-pale face of his dying foe. He saw eyes wide with fear and pain. He removed the sword from the wound and wiped the blood off it. The artilleryman of the twentieth century or the

aviator who drops a bomb on a city only performs a more or less precise technical operation, and the imagined outcome of such an act does not necessarily correspond with reality. Military orders do not appeal to the imagination.

"Position eight one third, fire!" is not the same as "Fracture eleven human skulls, slice open twenty-two stomachs of people with unknown names, kill forty young boys, mutilate fifteen of them, and blind two." In this moment Retlich saw neither the faces of murdered people nor eyes insane with fear. He did not think about the millions of young boys and girls who were in love with life and filled with innocence and desire. For Retlich, the world was wasted and senile. He had undertaken a great enterprise and the pleasure which he experienced was not the same as the bloody and almost sensual pleasure that he felt when he shot two Jews on a highway near Berlin. As he rested his hand on the windowsill and gazed into the distance, he experienced the pleasure of a deed accomplished. His desire for power was satisfied and a sense of his own strength was confirmed. Perhaps his feelings were quite similar to both the satisfaction of an industrial tycoon who signs a document ruining his biggest competitor, and the brutish satisfaction of a submarine who sends a huge passenger steamship to the bottom of the sea. Excited and feverish, Retlich stepped up to the microphone, turned on the electricity and shouted: "Hello, hello! It is me who speaks! No one on this enormous planet hears my voice! You are no more. Only I remain! I rule the whole world and it is up to me to decide what path man will follow. Do not forget to ground your antennas, you who have been grounded by me!"

And yet, things were different.

The death ray killed almost all the people on Earth apart from the residents of Ruben, a place that was secured by a special and quite complicated isolation system. The ray killed almost everyone, but not everyone. The number of random combinations in nature is so high that whatever Retlich consciously did in order to isolate Ruben occurred by accident in a few other places. The only insulation against the Supernal Ray was a certain combination of thallium and asbestos. Just like water spilled on a glass surface, the blue ray left small islands unflooded by the deadly light. This combination of thallium and asbestos, coupled with strong air ionization, accidentally occurred in a certain factory shed on the outskirts of Warsaw. In making its lightning-fast rounds, the Supernal Ray skipped over the factory premises. They created an island about 15 meters wide on the earth's surface, otherwise flooded by death. Water did not protect people because the blue ray lost its power only at a depth of two thousand meters. Armored shelters did not protect people either. But two sacks of asbestos and several sacks of thallium ore, abandoned in the deserted factory, saved those who, on June 30th, happened to be in the depths of the dark and stuffy building.

Szwalba, deady tired after hiding from the gunfire on the streets, entered the shed and heavily fell asleep like a troubled man who had not slept for two days. Szwalba woke up around eight o'clock. It was not sounds or noise from the street that woke him, nor human voices; there were no noises, no hubbub, and no human voices anymore. He remembered that he had to go to Ciechocinek. He longed to talk to Miss Szczypek, and he was worried that he wouldn't reach his beloved public library clerk before the deadline designated by Retlich. Like many people, Szwalba did not believe deep down that he would die. He had a small hope that the whole business with the Supernal Ray would turn out to be a bluff; and even if it turned out to be true, he alone, Henryk Szwalba, a unique individual, would resist the impact of the terrible ray. Young people never actually believe that death truly exists as far as their experience is concerned – it is precisely that experience which demonstrates that it is always somebody else who dies.

Szwalba looked at his watch and realised that it was few minutes past eight. The morning was beautiful and sunny. There was no doubt in his mind that either Retlich's ray had turned out to be hogwash or that the great madman from Ruben had moved the date of humanity's annihilation. Szwalba was hungry. He left the shed and went into the yard. It seemed to him that a shadow blinked somewhere behind the corner of the red brick building. It wasn't anything extraordinary and an incident that only a few hours later would have shaken him to the core now passed without making the smallest impression. He took Pulawska street and slowly walked toward Union Square. On the corner near Bagatela he saw two human bodies lying on a sidewalk. On mankind's last day, many people were killed by other people and this sight did not particularly surprise him. The only thing that made him stop and think was the fact that the faces and hands of both corpses were a metallic-blue color. In the abandoned garden of the confectionery on Bagatela also lay several corpses. All of them had that awful, blue, cyanotic tint. That is how the ray's victims, photographed and described in the papers after Retlich's first attack on Birmingham, had looked. Suddenly Szwalba felt incredible terror. He ran out of the confectionery's garden. A half-torn theatre poster waved in the wind, inexorably announcing Ordonka's farewell show before her departure to Hollywood. A sign reading "Ice Cream," nailed to the trunk of an old chestnut tree, fell to the ground. The rustle of the cardboard sign hitting the ground scared Szwalba. While running toward the main avenues, he started screaming:

"Hey, hey! Is anybody here?"

**Translated, from the Polish, by Paulina Duda and Jodi Greig.**



**Antoni Słonimski** (1895-1976) was a prominent interwar Polish poet, author, and critic. In addition to his numerous volumes of poetry, he also published two works of science fiction, of which *Two Ends of the World* is the most recent. In *Two Ends of the World*, Słonimski satirizes the personages and events of the mid-1930s, including fascist movements which were spreading throughout Europe. The antagonist of the tale, Retlich (an anagram of Hitler), is meant to be a gross caricature of fascist ideology. Sadly, Słonimski's fictional villain turned out as less of an exaggeration and more of an approximation of Hitler's ultimate intentions regarding European Jews. Retlich annihilates mankind with the help of his "Supernal Ray," but a few survive; among them, the hero of Słonimski's story, a Jewish Pole named Henryk Szwalba.

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# CREDITS

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